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The small boat harbor in Seward, Alaska, is situated on the northern edge of Resurrection Bay (see page 30).



Newmar has launched three new London Aire floorplans for 2015. Pg. 77

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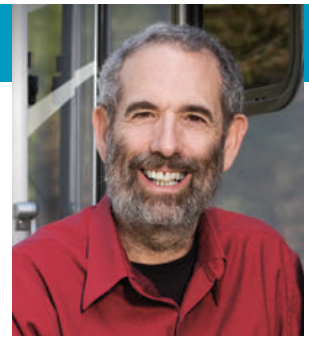
Remotely control 120-volt AC circuits, lights and appliances in a coach using Z-Wave technologies

ON THE COVER

The Unity U24MB from Leisure Travel Vans sports full-body paint, contoured body panels and frameless windows, which give the motorhome a modern, upscale appearance (see test on page 52). Photo by Scott Hirko.



By Bob Livingston



Planning and Preparation for the Season Ahead

With the spring equinox right around the corner, March is a month of transition. Old Man Winter may be leaving town or in some places in the country, late-season snowstorms may still be lurking. The lush landscapes will soon be dotted with brilliant wildflowers and the human snowbirds will say their “goodbyes” and make their way back to the north. For those who stayed home for the winter, it’s time to make plans to take the motorhomes out of mothballs.

Frequent contributor, E. Don Smith, has the de-winterization process down pat and shares his routine with you this month in the article, “Spring at Last,” on page 59. Obviously, the plumbing system takes the brunt of the winter weather, and hopefully it was properly protected in your coach before the cold set in. I love to tell the story of a guy I knew who lived in cold country, where consecutive days of freezing temperatures were common throughout winter. He forgot to dump his full holding tanks before he put his motorhome in storage. The expansion of the frozen contents created a big rip in the black tank. Then spring came. I’ll leave the rest of the story to your imagination.

Not everyone sits out the winter, but for those who do, Smith’s step-by-step procedures for getting the motorhome ready for the upcoming travel season will help ensure trouble-

free experiences — and would have helped the guy with the frozen tank.

March, being a shoulder month with fewer people traveling on the road, is a good time to stay busy. My wife, Lynne, and I usually book a couple of trips during the month, including a ritual trip to Wine Country RV Resort in Paso Robles, California, with a number of RV buddies.

It’s also a great time to make travel plans for the summer. This month’s issue is jam-packed with destinations that are popular with motorhome enthusiasts. Death Valley (page 21) is fabulous in the spring and so is southern Utah (page 39). Our trips to Zion National Park and the surrounding region in the spring were fantastic.

“March, being a shoulder month with fewer people traveling on the road, is a good time to stay busy.”

Warm days filled with hiking and exploring always lead to chilly evenings sitting around the campfire reminiscing about the sheer beauty of the area.

For a change of pace, consider visiting more populated places; check out the suggestions in “Bright Lights, Big Cities,” page 26. And on the opposite end of the spectrum, if you want to take the ultimate adventure trip in a motorhome, you can read about traveling to Alaska (Part III) starting on page 30. A trip to Alaska should be on everyone’s bucket list.

If you’re considering a new motorhome for the upcoming travel season, there will be more to choose from than ever, evidenced by the entries at last fall’s RV trade show in Louisville, Kentucky. Some new motorhomes are previewed on page 77.

New products, like the Truma AquaGo instant water heater (page 85), are also making life on the road more comfortable. The AquaGo can easily be retrofitted as we discovered firsthand. Endless hot water makes showering heavenly, but it might cut down on your sightseeing time. **M**

Contributors | March



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



Dennis C. Brewer and his wife, Penny, have spent four years full-timing and three years snowbirding across the 45th parallel in their motorhome. Dennis is a technology author and consultant.



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



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



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TIFFIN
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When it comes to diesel-pusher motorhomes, do you prefer a front- or mid-entry floorplan?

That's the question we asked in our December 2014 issue, and here are some of the replies we received.



Sticky Steps

There are nice floorplans for both mid- and front-entry motorhomes, so which is best is a personal choice. My experience with a mid entry has not been positive because the location of the steps was close behind the front tire, which allowed road grime to collect on the steps.

I had to lubricate the moving parts of the steps weekly, which meant crawling under the coach. Twice, following storage, I had to take the motorhome to the dealer for a complete rebuild, as the steps had rusted in place. I found that even after a short storage of a week or two, I had to really work the steps to get them to operate correctly.

Our new motorhome is a front-entry model and I'm hoping this will not be something I have to deal with in the future.

Iggy Konrad | Big Rapids, Michigan

Pros and Cons to Each

The issue of which entry is best is, like so many things in motorhoming, a personal preference. We have had both, and there are pros and cons to each. Front-entry doors utilize existing space without consuming valuable real estate, but a front-entry door does not deal particularly well with wind, as it has no real lockdown and is prone to slamming shut or blowing open. Our experience with a mid entry is that the stairwell seems steeper (perhaps to limit the intrusion into floor space) and my wife had knee pain during a two-week trip after climbing up and down the steps.

**Mark and Kathy Hufstедler
Rochester, Minnesota**

Front-Entry Regrets

We strongly prefer a mid entry, and don't understand the manufacturing bias to front entry. When we bought our 40-foot pusher, we knew it would

be a compromise to settle for a front entry. It is so much more difficult to load supplies through the front, threading through the seats. Also, when eating outside, it gets really old passing food and supplies from the kitchen through the living area and then outside and back to the center of the coach. We end up passing things through a window. When it rains, there is no place to put a coat or sit down to take off boots, except in the cramped and carpeted entryway, or on the nice leather captain's chairs. When you have a tailgate party in and around the motorhome, the front entry is a huge bottleneck area. No matter what convoluted extra awning is placed over the door, it does a lousy job of protecting the doorway. If you use the main awning to create a screened-in porch, access to the coach is excluded from the outside living area. Using the step cover every time we travel

Featured Letter

How About Both?

I don't have a diesel pusher, and I don't think it really matters if you have one or not. I have a gas motorhome with a mid-entry floorplan. As the sole driver of my coach, I have to walk across it to get out of my rig. I'd like to pose a related question: Why aren't there any driver's-side doors, so that when I stop for fuel or a quick break, I can just pop open a door next to my seat? I've always been perplexed about this since there doesn't seem to be

anything on the outside that would prevent building in a driver's door. I think all motorhomes should have more than one entry door just for safety if nothing else. And it certainly would be convenient. Why not have both front- and mid-entry doors in the same rig? We have front and back doors to our brick homes, don't we? I think it would be easy enough for manufacturers to do.

Lynelle N. Phillips | Via email

is tedious, and the stairs require the copilot seat to be placed farther from the dash than needed.

In 28 years of motorhome ownership, I have never regretted anything more than my front entrance!

Bruce Crane | Chicago, Illinois

Larger Passenger Windows

An amidships door is more desirable on a diesel pusher. Unless the passenger

is the type who sits there like a bump on a log, it would be much better to have a large window to look out and take photos through. We had a large diesel pusher with a front door. What a loser. My wife missed a lot of beautiful photos because of the small windows and the blind spot between the door and the miniscule side window, to say nothing about the screen on the door window.

Bob Clough | Esperance, New York

More Livable Space

We have owned mid- and front-entry-door coaches, and much prefer our current Itasca Meridian's front-door entry. It provides more flexible, usable living space as there is no need to keep a "virtual" entry aisle open in the middle of the coach. The trade-off is that the copilot seat is farther away from the dash, so no workspace is available, but we solved that cheaply with a lap desk.

**Steve and Becky Marcereau
Silas, Alabama**

Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder

I prefer a coach with a mid-entry door. It offers more space, as front-entrance doors usually take up 7 or 8 feet on the passenger's side, and the coach can be outfitted with a "front office" area separate from the rest of the living space. This configuration also creates a symmetrical-looking exterior for a more pleasing look. Of course, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Guido Martinez | Via email

Front Entry for a Lift Chair

After having both types of floorplans, I vote for a front entry. Having a mid-entry door will cause a loss of approximately 5 square feet of floor space. In our coach, that allows use of an electric recliner, plus as a handicapped senior traveler, it affords me more legroom while on the road. With the front entry, we have a lift chair for handicapped passengers, which we never considered that we would need when we bought our coach, but more than six years ago it became a reality.

Louise Davey | Via email

Mid-Entry Easy Access

We have a gas coach but are shopping diesel pushers, and a mid-entry coach is an absolute must. We spend a lot of time on the patio and we want easy access to the center of the motorhome.


Mike Drudge | Via email

Good for Guests

We just ordered our third Class A. Our first two gassers had a forward mid-entry floorplan — the entry door was a few feet rear of the front axle.


COMFORT ZONE | 06

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Our new triple-slide 2015 Holiday Rambler Ambassador is a diesel pusher with a rearward mid entry. I say rearward as the entry door is rear of the front slide but forward of the rear axle. We prefer this setup for a few reasons. The half-bath is across from the entry door, which means that our guests do not have to walk through the living area to use the bathroom. It also turns the front two-thirds of the coach into a large U-shaped living space. The copilot sits up front, parallel to the driver, with an unobstructed view out the one-piece windshield. And when parked, the cockpit seats become part of the living-area without guests walking past to enter or exit the coach.

I think more and more diesel-pusher manufacturers will be offering mid-entry floorplans in the future.

Dick Kashdin and Sandy Donovan
Near Buffalo, New York

More Secure Door

My first coach was a 1989 Holiday Rambler gas with mid entry. I bought it used to see if my wife and I would like motorhome traveling. What I found was that the coach had some frame flex that affected the entry door. Depending on how the rig was parked, and/or jacked, the door would frequently stick or not stay closed. Luckily, this coach also had a driver's door, so we were never stuck. Once, during a windstorm, the door popped open when a particularly energetic gust hit the rig broadside.

When we decided to upgrade to a diesel pusher, we bought a used Riata Tierra 37 with a front entry. The structure around the door is much stronger and I've never had any issues with the door sticking or popping open. Plus, it locks much more securely.

Galen Flinn | McMinnville, Oregon

Risky Business?

I have been a part-time RVer for about 10 years. My wife and I generally take a couple of weeks at a time and cover as many states as we can. I tend to be quite organized and have always reserved our stays in advance.

My question is, how difficult is it to find a campsite when you take a

last-minute chance at availability? Sometimes we would like to be less rigid with our plans but don't want to be left without a place to stay and hook up. I'd like to know how well the more adventurous of our brethren have fared in finding unreserved availability for their coaches? Spontaneity is nice, but it seems as though it could be risky.

Douglas Flannery
Westminster, California 

Question of the Month

How much success have you had being spontaneous with last-minute reservations or finding on-the-fly campsites during your motorhome travels?

Send your comments to:
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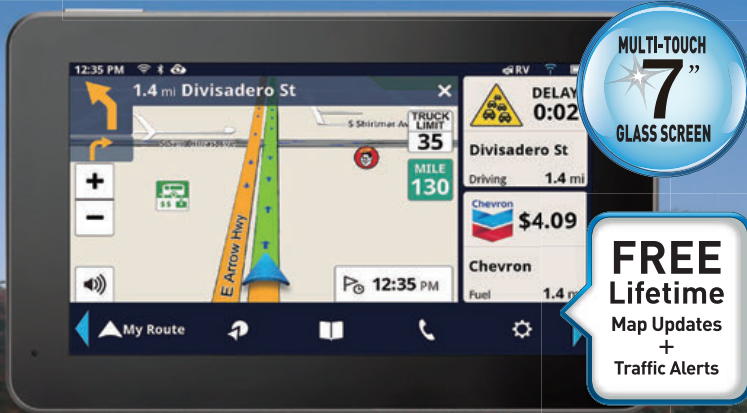
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ESCAPES

Thor's RUV 
The Axis and Vegas
lineups get a new
floorplan — the rear
bedroom 25.2. **pg. 14**



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Great Fishing, Boating and Camping

Lake Ouachita Lake State Park is just a short drive from Hot Springs, Arkansas

By James Richardson

Lake Ouachita is one of five in the Arkansas Diamond Lakes Region around Hot Springs. At more than 40,000 acres, it is the largest man-made lake lying entirely within the state, and it contains more than 200 islands. Located in the Ouachita National Forest and the Ouachita Mountains, no homes are allowed on the rustic shoreline of more than 600 miles. But there are nine

resorts, a state park and several boat ramps. One resort, Mountain Harbor, located on the southern shore of Lake Ouachita, has excellent campground facilities, along with a full-service marina, boat and houseboat rentals, and a lodge with a restaurant.

For more information, go to www.arkansasstateparks.com/lakeouachita or www.mountainharborresort.com.

By Bobbie Hasselbring

Maple-licious: Naturally Sweet

I met a friend recently for breakfast and the waitress brought Mrs. Butterworth's maple-flavored syrup for my pancakes. While I have nothing against this particular brand of syrup, I object to imitation maple syrup. Real maple syrup is so delicious, why indulge in something that doesn't taste like the real thing?

OK, I hear you saying, "Real maple syrup is so expensive!"

It's true. Real maple syrup costs a lot more. You can buy a 24-ounce bottle of imitation maple syrup for about \$3 at a discount store; real maple syrup costs around \$14 for the same amount. That's a big difference.

What's Inside?

Compare the labels. Imitation maple syrup generally contains high fructose corn syrup, water, salt, preservatives and artificial flavors, but no real maple syrup. Maple syrup contains just maple syrup, no additives or preservatives, which is why it needs to be stored in a refrigerator after opening.

Maple syrup is made by "tapping" sugar maple trees, gathering the tree's natural maple water and boiling it into syrup (continue reducing for maple sugar). On average, it takes 50 gallons of maple water to make 1 gallon of maple syrup. It's a time- and labor-intensive process often produced by small, family-owned farms.

Sugar Shacking

Buying maple syrup from real sugar shacks is a fun way to learn about the maple sugaring process. Many sugar shacks have year-round exhibits explaining the process. Others allow you to visit



Maple Treats

From far left: A tradition during sugaring time is making maple ice, maple syrup poured onto snow and wound onto a stick. If you continue to reduce maple water, you get maple sugar.



On Orleans Island in Quebec, L'en-Tailleur Sugar Shack is a family-owned maple business that features a maple museum and maple demonstrations. Maple water is traditionally gathered in buckets by placing taps into sugar maples. Increasingly, buckets are being replaced by plastic tubing.

during the spring "sugaring" season.

In the U.S., New England (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont) is maple syrup central. In Canada, Quebec is where you'll find plenty of sugar shacks producing and selling maple products.

Whether you buy online, at a grocery or big-box store, or at a sugar shack, next time buy real maple syrup. It's a naturally delicious choice.

March Maple Events

There's no better way to immerse yourself in maple delights than at one of these maple events.

On March 14-15, the town of Hebron, Connecticut, will host its 25th annual maple festival (www.hebronmaplefest.com) with demonstrations at local sugarhouses.

The fourth Sunday in March brings Maine Maple Sunday (www.mainemapleproducers.com) and more than 100 participating sugarhouses.

New Hampshire goes all-out with Maple Sugaring Month (March 14-April 5) and the 20th Annual Maple Weekend (March 28-29).

In Vermont, 80 maple farms open to the public during the Pure Vermont Maple Open House Weekend (March 28-29).



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Fuller's Sugarhouse, Lancaster, New Hampshire. Judged "Best Maple Syrup in North America" by the North American Maple Syrup Council, Fuller's offers maple syrup, candy, maple cream and sugar, 877-788-2719, www.fullerssugarhouse.com

L'en-Tailleur Sugar Shack, Orleans Island, Quebec, Canada. Maple museum, maple harvesting/processing, maple products and a restaurant serving dishes with maple, www.entailleur.com/English/Home.htm

Smith Maple Crest Farm, Shrewsbury, Vermont. Nestled in the Green Mountains, this historic maple farm was once visited by American poet Robert Frost, 802-492-2151, www.smithmaplecrestfarm.com



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Progressive Power Protection

Progressive Dynamics introduces two new automatic transfer switches with silent surge protection. The PD52DCS and PD52ACS automatic transfer switches can now protect electronics from damaging power surges, open neutral and reverse polarity. The PD52DCS offers a DC coil that eliminates buzzing during operation and the PD52ACS uses a standard AC coil. Both units incorporate over-voltage surge protection of 3,300 joules at 103,000 amps. These automatic transfer switches also feature two green LED indicators to display AC power from a generator or when hooked up. Two separate red LED indicators are used to display the need for service required for the shorepower section, indicating a destructive power surge. MSRP is around \$340.

Progressive Dynamics, 269-781-4241, www.progressivedyn.com



RV TV

The trouble with RV TVs is that they're not always made for RVs, but the new Jensen JTV2815DC 28-inch LED DC TV is. Featuring a modern aesthetic and a more robust chassis than traditional RV TVs, according to the company, this model includes a market-first industrial-grade metal cabinet that's reinforced for vibration. With true native 12-volt DC operation, a slim profile, convenient front controls and coated circuit boards that resist humidity and fight corrosion, the JTV2815DC addresses a multitude of application challenges faced by the RV owner. In addition, JCOM, the proprietary communication protocol for Jensen, allows for direct communication between the TV and other Jensen JCOM-enabled HDMI DVD players for a drama-free installation.

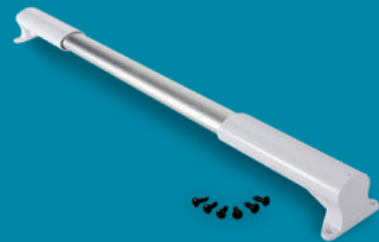
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Axis Vegas

Thor Motor Coach's "Recreational Utility Vehicle," referred to as the RUV, continues to grow with the addition of the 25.2, available in Axis and Vegas brands. The RUV is sized like a large SUV, and drives like one, but offers all the conveniences and amenities of a motorhome. The 25.2 is the first in the lineup to feature a rear bedroom slide that houses a walk-around queen-size bed with a Denver Mattress. The innovative L-shaped leatherette sofa with a removable pedestal table provides a place to eat, watch TV or sleep. Built on the Ford E-350 chassis, the Axis/Vegas can hold 39 gallons of freshwater, 30 gallons of black water and 40 gallons of gray water, and has a gross vehicle weight rating of 12,500 pounds.

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



Get a Handle On It

There are some things that are common to all RVs, and a flimsy screen door is one of them. They can be cumbersome to open and close, and years of slamming to keep them latched can warp the frame. Camco Manufacturing offers a simple and very effective solution to these problems with its new screen door cross bar. It provides a sturdy feel to the door, and helps protect the screen to boot. The silver push bar extends from 21-1/4 to 28-5/8 inches to fit all RV doorways, and the product is easily installed with the included hardware. Available for around \$12 at Camping World.

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

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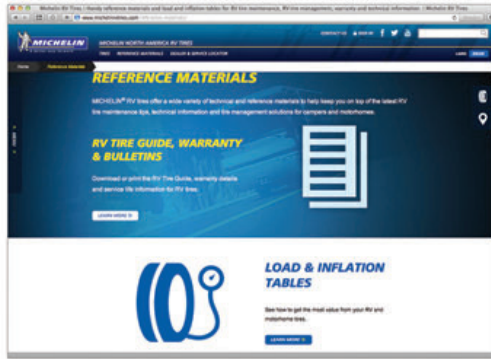
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New RV Tire Website

Michelin North America RV Tires has launched a new website (www.michelinrvtires.com) with information on tire selection and maintenance for motorhomes. The site, which is accessible on mobile devices, offers online tools and a new RV tire selector to assist RVers with size, tread design and application selection. The tire selector also provides information on tire basics, maintenance and safety. The reference section of the website contains warranty information, bulletins, load and inflation tables, RV tire maintenance tips, technical specifications and videos. There's also a dealer and service tab that can be searched by address, city, state and ZIP code. Information from the site can be printed or shared via social channels or email. Customers can also create a personal account so they can save their tire and dealer searches, as well as reference materials and videos.



Top Group-Camping Parks

The "Good Sam RV Travel Guide and Campground Directory" has announced its list of Top Group-Camping RV Parks for 2014. The parks on the list, compiled by the travel guide's editors and consultants, provide facilities and space for large groups of RVers who camp together and conduct meetings, social gatherings and events.

- Arizona** — Casa Grande RV Resort & Cottages, Casa Grande
- Florida** — Blueberry Hill RV Resort, Bushnell; Pecan Park RV Resort, Jacksonville; Red Oaks RV Resort, Bushnell
- Georgia** — Coastal Georgia RV Resort, Brunswick
- Idaho** — McCall RV Resort, McCall
- Mississippi** — EZ Daze RV Park, Southaven
- North Carolina** — Raleigh Oaks RV Resort & Cottages, Four Oaks
- Oregon** — Seven Feathers RV Resort, Canyonville
- South Carolina** — Barnyard RV Park, Lexington
- Tennessee** — River Plantation RV Park, Sevierville
- Wisconsin** — Sherwood Forest Camping & RV Park, Wisconsin Dells



NEWS BRIEFS

Roadtrek's New Class B

▶ Roadtrek Motorhomes, a manufacturer of Class B's, has launched its newest model, the Zion. Built on the Ram ProMaster chassis, the Zion features an open-concept floorplan, a permanent bathroom with shower, a 5-cubic-foot refrigerator in the galley, external access to galley storage and an outside shower. "This is likely to be our biggest product launch in 10 years," said Roadtrek president Jim Hammill. An MSRP was not available at press time.

ADCO to Produce Licensed RV Covers

▶ ADCO has partnered with Winnebago Industries to produce a line of high-end licensed RV covers. The Winnebago-branded covers will include RV storage covers, wheel covers and windshield covers, manufactured to fit a range of Winnebago models. "We are excited to be expanding the Winnebago offering into product categories that RV owners will use day in and day out," said Chad Reece, director of marketing at Winnebago.

Sun-N-Fun Named Mega Park of the Year

▶ Last December, the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds named Sun-N-Fun RV Resort and Campground in Sarasota, Florida, the Mega Park of the Year. The award is presented annually to parks with more than 500 sites and is based on customer service, employee training, operational excellence, national directory ratings and community service.



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ESCAPES CROSSROADS

Corning, New York

Watch the Glass Grow at the Corning Museum



Photo: The Corning Museum of Glass

You'll never hear Corning and think "casserole dish" again after visiting the Corning Museum of Glass in New York's Finger Lakes region. Housing the world's most comprehensive glass collection, this spectacular museum is scheduled to open a new, 100,000-square-foot wing in March.

Take a self-guided tour through 35 centuries of glass, attend a hot-glass show in the theater and learn about optical fiber technology in the Glass Innovation Center. Afterward, you can linger in the huge GlassMarket gift shop or, better yet, make your own glass project.

But don't expect to see casserole dishes being made; the museum is not part of Corning Inc., which sold the CorningWare consumer products division in 1998. **For more information**, call 800-732-6845, or go to www.cmog.org — *Christine Goodier*

Lake Buena Vista, Florida

Magical Camping at Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground



At what other campground can you roast s'mores with Chip 'N' Dale, cruise to the Magic Kingdom in less than 15 minutes, enjoy the nighttime electric light pageant by the lakeshore and relax by a resort-size pool with water slides for excitement?

Fort Wilderness, in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, is the only campground on Disney property, and with Disney transportation right at your doorstep, you can visit any of the Disney theme parks, including EPCOT, Animal Kingdom, Hollywood Studios and the Magic Kingdom. Downtown Disney — with shopping and entertainment — is also just a short bus ride away. No need to deal with driving and parking with this efficient system.

The campground boasts full hookups, a couple of general stores for fill-in groceries and souvenirs, and activities including horseback riding, swimming, canoeing and fishing. On the grounds there are also a number of dining and entertainment choices. These include the Hoop-Dee-Do Musical Revue, Mickey's Backyard BBQ and the Trail's End restaurant.

Advanced campsite reservations are suggested. Choose from the full-hookup campsites, or upgrade to "preferred" campsites (loops 100-300), which are only a five-minute walk to the boat shuttle to the Magic Kingdom, or "premium" campsites, which will accommodate RVs up to 50 feet long and are located close to the pool area.

For more information, call 407-824-2900, or visit www.disneyworldcamping.com — *Morey Edelman*

Photo: Courtesy of Walt Disney World

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Death Valley National Park

A land of extremes on the California/
Nevada border

By Dennis and Cheryl DeNoi

“**H**ottest, driest and lowest.” That pretty much sums up Death Valley National Park, but this enchanted land is so much more. The beautiful, and somewhat out-of-this-world valley, is also known as The Valley of Life to the Timbisha Shoshone tribe, its Native American inhabitants for centuries.

As annual visitors to Death Valley, my wife, Cheryl, and I receive a lot of questions from family members, friends and fellow RVers when planning our trip: Why Death Valley? What’s there to do? Why would you want to go to Death Valley? Our response is, “Death Valley National Park is a beautiful place with lots of activities to suit most any adventure-minded RVer.”

Located in the California/Nevada desert, Death Valley became a national monument in 1933; it received its upgraded national park status in 1994. The park has the unique distinction of being the

hottest, driest and lowest place in North America and also holds the undisputed title as the Hottest Place on Earth. On July 10, 1913, the Furnace Creek Ranch weather station reached the record-breaking temperature of 134 degrees in the shade!

However, that is just part of the park’s story. The valley has mild temperatures and pleasant weather October through April, with daily averages in the low 30s and 40s and highs in the low 60s to upper 80s. The valley actually has a longer season of pleasant weather than it does the more infamous summer months. It’s during these seven more temperate months that Death Valley is a pleasant place to visit.

Death Valley National Park has 3.4 million breathtaking acres and six primary entry points. Once inside the park, you will be impressed with the ever-changing geological formations, vivid



Don't Rely on a GPS  There is no street address for Death Valley National Park or the Furnace Creek Visitor Center. Travelers have been directed to the wrong location or even dead-end or closed roads by using a GPS. Carry up-to-date road maps as cellphone reception in the park is spotty.

GETAWAY

DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

colors and extremely smooth roads that snake throughout its wilderness valleys and mountain ranges. These well-maintained roads will make you think your motorhome is riding on rails and make each day's exploratory journeys a real driving pleasure.

There are two major activity hubs that offer all of the benefits and services found at any other national park. The largest, Furnace Creek, is located near the center of the park and houses the visitors center, borax museum, Furnace Creek Ranch and Furnace Creek Inn. Located at the ranch, Furnace Creek RV Resort has 26 full-hookup sites that can accommodate RVs up to 50 feet. Adjacent to the RV park is the new Fiddler's Campground with 35 RV sites.

Although slightly smaller, Stovepipe Wells Village offers many of the same amenities as Furnace Creek; some visitors like to split their stay between the two locations. Stovepipe Wells Village has 14 full-hookup RV sites for \$32.75 per night, adjacent to the general store.

First-time visitors to Death Valley's Furnace Creek Ranch and Inn are amazed at the abundance of lush, green trees, bushes and grass throughout its grounds. The ranch's amenities include a large general store, saloon, two restaurants, campgrounds with dry and full-hookup campsites, swimming pool, golf course, horseback riding, a fuel station



Above from left: Worldwide travelers visit the ever-changing Mesquite Sand Dunes. Alien-like rock formations and valley floor surfaces that look more like a moonscape are just a few of the many out-of-this-world sights visitors to Death Valley National Park may encounter.

with limited mechanical services, a post office, bike rental, Jeep rentals and more. This is a remote desert location and the prices of all goods and services bear this out, so plan wisely and pack in as much of what you think you will need and be prepared to spend a little extra for goods and services. The inn has an array of high-end resort accommodations and welcomes visitors to explore its historic buildings and grounds.

The National Park Service (NPS) also has three campgrounds located in this area: Furnace Creek, Sunset and

Texas Spring. Most of the sites are first come, first served dry camping with the exception of Furnace Creek. There are dump stations and basic bathroom facilities at all three NPS campgrounds. Daily shower and pool passes can be purchased at Furnace Creek Ranch for \$5. It is noteworthy that all of the water in the park comes from underground springs and the swimming pools are constantly replenished with warm spring water. You'll feel like you're basking in the fabled fountain of youth as you swim and play. No visit is complete without a dip in the pool and



Visitors to the Racetrack Playa marvel over the famous and mysterious moving boulders that have puzzled geologists for decades.

some quiet relaxation poolside after a long day of exploring.

If golf is your game, the ranch has an 18-hole oasis course, surrounded by spectacular desert and mountain vistas, and claims the title “World’s Lowest Golf Course,” at 214 feet below sea level. Even if you are not a golfer, a visit to the course is recommended for the views and lunch at the 19th Hole veranda-style bar and grill. Whether you sit next to the gas-log fireplace or at the counter overlooking the course, you will see golfers driving their carts up to the unique drive-thru bar to order food and drinks to go.

We could go on about the ranch and its facilities and we haven’t even touched on the other major guest support centers — Stovepipe Wells Village and Panamint Springs Resort, but just like being there, you have to remind yourself that you came to Death Valley to explore the many natural and historic sites the valley and surrounding mountains have to offer, not to spend all of your time “resorting it.”

Death Valley has countless things to do: auto touring, biking, hiking, backpacking and exploring. Some of the activities in the Furnace Creek Area include hiking the easy



From above right: At Wildrose Charcoal Kilns there are 10 well-preserved 30-foot-tall beehive-shaped charcoal-producing kilns that date back to 1877. Scotty’s Castle is undoubtedly the most famous and misunderstood man-made attraction in Death Valley National Park.

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trail at Badwater Basin (the lowest point in North America), visiting Harmony Borax Works, taking a scenic drive through multihued volcanic sedimentary hills on Artist's Drive, shooting photos from Dante's View (one of the great photographic spots in the park) at more than 5,000 feet above the valley's floor, playing a round at Devil's Golf Course (a vast rock-salt bed so rough that only the devil himself

could play golf there), watching the sun rise or set at Zabriskie Point, and driving the Twenty Mule Team Canyon 2.7-mile route through otherworldly badlands.

Some of the highlights in the Stovepipe Wells area include Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes (ever-changing 100-foot-high dunes), Salt Creek (the only home to the rare Death Valley pupfish), Titus Canyon (at 27 miles long, it is

the park's largest and most diverse canyon), and Rhyolite (the best-preserved ghost town in the area).

In the Panamint Springs area, popular sights are Father Crowley Vista (a lava-flow viewpoint that overlooks the colorful Rainbow Canyon), Wildrose Charcoal Kilns (10 well-preserved large, beehive-shaped structures constructed in 1876 to support the silver and lead ore mining

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From far left: Golfers enjoy breathtaking views and pleasant weather at the Furnace Creek Ranch's 18-hole golf course. An overview of Sunset Campground with Furnace Creek Ranch's date grove and valley floor in the background. The ever-elusive big horn sheep graze alongside one of the many roads that crisscross Death Valley National Park.

Johnson. Also in the area is Ubehebe Crater, a 600-foot-deep volcanic crater that is only a few hundred years old, and The Racetrack — home to the mysterious sliding rocks that leave long trails in their path!

We have just scratched the surface on everything there is to see and do in Death Valley. To learn more, visit the park's website and plan your visit. Then, maybe soon you will be one of the people who say, "I'm going to Death Valley and let me tell you why!"

➔ FOR MORE INFORMATION
Death Valley National Park
 760-786-3200, www.nps.gov/deva

in the valley), and Aguerberry Point (the highest overlook in the park at more than 6,000 feet).

Our last must-see area is Scotty's Castle. Take a ranger-guided tour of the impressive 1920s castle that was thought to be built from the hidden gold mine of Walter Scott, the infamous Death Valley Scotty, but in reality was the vacation home of one of Scott's friends, Albert Mussey



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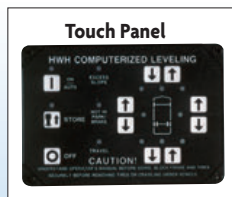


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For most of us, however, there comes a time when we feel the urge to heed the siren call of the city — perhaps to visit a museum, savor a fancy dinner out or take in some nightlife. It also could just be the simple need for goods or services that necessitate a drive into a busy metropolis — and lest you have a dinghy in tow, you'll have no choice but to motor on.

Taking the motorhome into the congested maze of a

major metro area can be daunting, but with a bit of extra caution it's not all that difficult. Just think about those 18-wheelers that routinely roll through urban centers.

If, for whatever reason, there's an urban adventure on your agenda, don't overlook the possibility of finding an RV park in a downtown location handy to your desired destination. There are a number of such parks that offer big-city camping in lieu of parking on the perimeter, where you'd have to deal with the hassle of hooking up with public transportation — or paying a hefty price for a taxi.

Here, for example, are nine RV parks positioned well within the bounds of major metropolitan areas across the country.

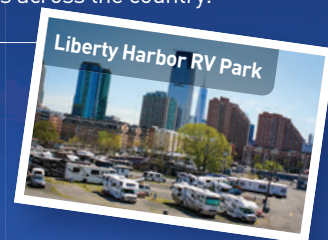
Chicago, Illinois — McCormick Place Marshalling Yard isn't exactly an RV park. As its name implies, it's a huge parking lot and staging area for trucks servicing McCormick Place, one of the nation's largest and busiest exhibition halls and conference centers. For some inexplicable reason, RVs of any size and description are invited to park here, too — at a 24-hour rate that is far

less than what you would pay to park an automobile anywhere in the Windy City. It is not a pretty scene, and there are no hookups or even restrooms, but it's a gated facility with around-the-clock security and excellent connections to public transportation right outside the gate.

Call ahead for more information and current rates, 312-808-3138.

Jersey City, New Jersey — Liberty Harbor RV Park is

a one-of-a-kind campground where you can tie up at the very doorstep of the nation's largest city. In fact, you can see the New York skyline, Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island from your



campsite — and within 15 minutes you can be in Manhattan, by way of bus, ferry or subway. This is a no-frills RV park, devoid of any greenery or deluxe amenities, but you do get a concrete slab with water and electricity and there are restrooms/showers and a laundry room. A bonus for summer visitors is the lively al fresco Surf City Megabar and Restaurant.

The campground is situated just off Interstate 78 on the Jersey side of Upper New York Bay, which makes it easy to reach Liberty Harbor — and the Big Apple, once you've settled in to the RV park. You can take a tour bus into Manhattan right from the park, or hop onboard a NY Waterway Ferry at Liberty Harbor Marina for a quick cruise over to Pier 11 at the foot of Wall Street.

Another option for easy access to the city is to walk five blocks to the Grove Street PATH subway station and catch a ride to 33rd Street and 6th Avenue or to the World Trade Center site in lower Manhattan for a look at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum.

Liberty Harbor Marina & RV Park, 201-516-7500, www.libertyharborrv.com

Las Vegas, Nevada — Oasis Las Vegas RV Resort is positioned just off the Las Vegas Strip (Las Vegas Boulevard), and a mere 3 miles south of its intersection with Tropicana Boulevard — the setting for MGM Grand and other resort casinos. With the recent closing of the KOA

Golden Shore RV Resort



Photo: Long Beach CVB

campground that was adjacent to Circus Circus (now relocated to Sam's Town on distant Boulder Highway), Oasis is as close to the Sin City action as you can get. With more than 700 sites, you'll find space for motorhomes of any size and all of the mega-park amenities you could hope for, including family and adult pools, a spa and fitness center, an 18-hole putting course with natural grass greens, a restaurant and convenience store.

Oasis Las Vegas RV Resort, 800-566-4707, www.oasislasvegarvresort.com



Long Beach, California — Golden Shore RV Resort is a cinch to reach, right at the end of the 710 freeway in downtown Long Beach. It's literally within sight of such popular Long Beach attractions as the Pike at Rainbow Harbor (a spectacular dining, retail and entertainment center), Aquarium of the Pacific, the Queen Mary and Long Beach Museum of Art. The campground offers all of the niceties necessary for comfort and convenience, including free Internet, a clubroom and kitchen, picnic area with barbecue, convenience store, pool and spa, horseshoe pits and shuffleboard. Be sure to make reservations early if you want a campsite during the annual Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach, scheduled for April 17-19, 2015.

Golden Shore RV Resort, 800-668-3581, www.goldenshorerv.com

New Orleans, Louisiana — French Quarter RV Resort is an urban park extraordinaire, nestled like a luxury hotel in the heart of the French

If you want to overnight in the Windy City, McCormick Place Marshalling Yard offers dry camping for RVs.



Quarter. You can walk from the RV resort to Brennan's for breakfast, a creole feast at Antoine's Restaurant or to Preservation Hall for a traditional jazz performance.

Each of the French Quarter RV Resort's 52 oversized paved sites features Wi-Fi access and 62 channels of cable TV. A posh clubhouse provides recreation, fitness and laundry rooms, plus a business office with computers, copier/fax/printer and an ATM — and there's a pool/spa and a gazebo with bar facilities. It's all très bon.

French Quarter RV Resort, 504-586-3000, www.fqrv.com



Playa del Rey, California — Dockweiler Beach RV Park is the only beachfront RV campground in Los Angeles County. Easily accessible off the 105 freeway at the Imperial Highway exit, it's located close to the upscale shops and restaurants of Marina del Rey and Santa Monica — and Venice with its outrageous beach scene and 16 miles of canals.

The park is maintained and operated by the Los Angeles County Department of Beaches & Harbors. While it may lack some of the deluxe amenities of a privately owned campground, it has all the necessary hookups — and what the heck — you're camping right on the sand at a fraction of the cost of a hotel.

Dockweiler RV Park, 800-950-7275, www.beaches.lacounty.gov/wps/portal/dbh/beaches



San Antonio, Texas — Travelers World RV Resort posits its guests closer than any other park to San Antonio's landmarks and attractions. Step out of your coach and it's only a three-minute stroll to River Walk, or hop a city bus right out in front of the RV park and in five minutes you'll be admiring the historic Alamo or circulating among the shops, galleries and restaurants of La Villita. Trees shade most of the campground's 165 sites, all with full

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hookups, including complimentary cable TV and Internet. It's a people-friendly campground with a clubhouse, recreation center (the scene of potlucks, dances and exercise classes), a pool and playground — and it is pet-friendly, too, with a dog-walking area.

Travelers World, 210-532-8310, www.travelersworldrvresort.com



San Diego, California — Campland on the Bay boasts a scenic setting on the sandy shores of Mission Bay where it has served as a family vacation favorite since 1969. Campland is so close to Sea World that you can watch the theme park's fireworks display

from your site. It's within easy striking distance of other top San Diego attractions as well, including the Gaslamp Quarter, Balboa Park and the incomparable San Diego Zoo. The campground is loaded with amenities, including a marina where you can rent an assortment of watercraft, a restaurant, a market featuring everything from food and beverages to housewares and RV supplies, swimming pools and Jacuzzis, and the recently opened Huff N' Buff Gym with an impressive lineup of state-of-the-art exercise equipment.

Campland on the Bay, 800-422-9386, www.campland.com

St. Louis, Missouri — St. Louis RV Park is a bare-bones little campground that probably won't excite you with its amenities, but what it does have in spades is an enviable location, right in the middle of one of the country's most vibrant and visitor-friendly cities. Camp here and you're close to myriad attractions, including the landmark 630-foot-



high Gateway Arch, where you can ride to the top for a stunning view of the city's Mississippi River waterfront. Or you can stroll through nearby Forest Park, site of the 1904 World's Fair and one of the country's largest and most beautiful urban parks. City Museum is a must if you have youngsters in tow. It's an architectural marvel, brimming with interactive exhibits sure to excite kids of all ages. And, if your timing is right, you could catch a game at Busch Stadium, the downtown home of the baseball Cardinals. Night owls will find plenty of action too, dining and dancing the evening away on Washington Avenue or at Laclede's Landing.

St. Louis RV Park, 314-241-3330, www.stlouisrvpark.com **M**

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Day 26: Homer to Seward (170 miles)

Today we head for Seward. Leaving Oceanview RV Park, we're back on Sterling Highway, the only road in and out of Homer. Retracing our journey up to Mile 131, where we turn right at the junction of Route 9 and Sterling Highway (Alaska Route 1), we keep going on Route 9 south toward Seward for the remaining 39 miles.

As we drive through the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, clouds cloak the mountaintops and mist floats through the forest, adding an aura of mystery. Streams, silvery lakes and splendid valley scenery punctuate the rest of the distance to Seward.

At Mile 161 we arrive at Stoney Creek Avenue, and follow the signs to Stoney Creek RV Park (877-437-6366, www.stoneycreekrvpark.com) with

full hookups. Beautifully located, it's spacious and surrounded by tall trees.

About 125 miles south of Anchorage, Seward sprang up on the shores of Resurrection Bay. Established by surveyors of the Alaska Railroad in 1902, it's flanked by majestic snowcapped mountains and is Alaska's northernmost ice-free port, as well as the southern terminus of the Alaska Railroad. This made Seward a vital cargo port and strategic military post during World War II. Today, tourism (especially from cruise ships) and fishing drive Seward's economy.

Day 27: Seward

Today we visit the Alaska SeaLife Center. Located on Resurrection Bay, at Mile 0 of the Seward Highway, this world-class 115,000-square-foot facility

was constructed mostly from Exxon/Valdez oil spill fines. Committed to preserving Alaska's marine ecosystem, it's one of the state's main attractions. Especially popular is the Discovery Touch Pool where visitors experience the underwater world, touching sea cucumbers, sea urchins and more.

While here, we learned that the octopus, an exceptionally intelligent creature, responds to touch. They are hand fed by staffers, who say the octopus' suckers are gentle, soft and spongy, feeling much "like a baby sucking your thumb." The sea lion training sessions are particularly entertaining. Anticipating human contact, the animals become noisy and frantic, pushing and climbing over each other, struggling to get close to the trainers. Peering into huge glass tanks, we see harbor seals and sea lions swimming past each other at lightning speed without colliding. The viewing sessions are a great opportunity to observe these animals, but space is limited, so reservations are recommended.



Seward Harbor at midnight in Resurrection Bay, Alaska.

A large aviary on the second level is constructed with rocky grottos, cliffs and a pool. It's a noisy habitat for many of the bird species that inhabit the Gulf of Alaska. Ducks, puffins, common murre, pigeon guillemot and others all hang out here, loudly claiming their piece of nesting real estate.

Affiliated with the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, the nonprofit SeaLife Center is Alaska's only public aquarium and ocean wildlife rescue center, helping scientists examine reasons for ecological changes and declining marine populations. Injured animals are rescued and treated before being released into their natural habitat. When they cannot be released, they live here permanently.

Nearby, on Fourth Avenue, is Seward's main street, with an assortment of restaurants and shops. We stop at Alaska Nellie's Roadhouse for some tasty Alaskan seafood chowder, and after lunch we indulge in a couple of ice cream cones.

Next to the SeaLife Center, the city park is a nice place to stroll, relax and have a sandwich. There's also a statue commemorating the start of the Iditarod trail. Summer brings thousands of visitors here. Stretching along the waterfront, there's a magnificent view of the snow-covered mountains and glaciers across the bay.

Overnight RV and tent parking is permitted in the city park along the bay front. Popular and very crowded, these are tight parking spaces. There's also a dump station nearby.



Glacier Viewing

Alaska's most accessible glaciers include Worthington Glacier near Valdez, Matanuska Glacier near Palmer, Exit Glacier near Seward and Portage Glacier near Girdwood.



The toe of Exit Glacier can be reached by a moderately strenuous trail. Worthington Glacier, one of the most accessible of all glaciers in Alaska, is 28 miles north of Valdez.



Day 28: Seward

Today we embark on a 5 1/2-hour ferry trip through the world-famous Kenai Fjords National Park in Resurrection Bay. The park ranger on board explains the delicate balance of climate, geology and wildlife here. This enormous bay has some of Alaska's most dramatic coastal scenery, surrounded by majestic mountains plunging into the deep-blue waters. Ocean waves lap the shores as we exit the harbor and head southeast.

Shrouded in mist, peace and tranquility abound in these ancient hills and islands. Stretching along the waterfront, towering snow-covered mountains, glaciers and a vast expanse of ancient old-growth forests dominate the scenery. We watch eagles soar high above the trees and sea otters float past on their backs munching seaweed. A pod of Dall's porpoise suddenly appears, slicing through the water and shoot past the boat as we pass through the Eldorado Narrows.

A rocky outcrop is inhabited by gulls, horned and tufted puffins, all raucously screeching, staking their claim among the nooks and ledges, as their eggs lie precariously near the edge. A little farther on, a colony of seals occupy a rocky ledge lazily sunning themselves.

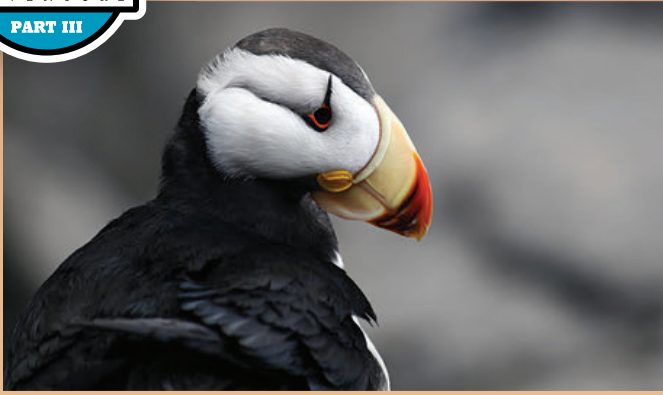
Suddenly, the skipper's excited voice announces "humpback whales!" There's a frantic rush to the outside decks as we all clamor to get photos. This is only the beginning. Later, we see more humpback whales and orcas.

Around 8:40 p.m., we head back to port. Because we are so far up north, sunset comes later and it's still about two hours away. We enter the harbor and pass several motorhomes parked overnight along the shore at the city park. What a scenic, wildlife-viewing day it's been!

Day 29: Seward

Today, our last day in Seward, we head for Exit Glacier. A 15-minute drive from Stoney Creek RV Park, we turn right onto Herman Leirer/Exit Glacier Road. Another 8.5 miles takes us to the paved parking area and Nature Center. Entrance to the park is free, and ranger-led walks to the glacier are available. The marked trail through the cottonwood forest leads to Glacier View for a breathtaking panoramic vista of the glacier spilling down from the Harding Icefield.

The toe of the glacier is reached by a moderately strenuous trail, and brings us face to face with an unforget-



table, massive, brilliant-blue wall of ice soaring 200 feet into the sky. If you're quiet, you can hear the ice crackle and snap. From here, a 1-mile trail loops back to the parking area.

This is an experience not to be missed. Wear layered clothing (it's cold near the glacier) and comfortable walking shoes. Take drinking water, and your camera.

Day 30: Seward to Palmer (167.7 miles)

Shortly after leaving Stoney Creek RV Park, we turn right at the Chugach National Forest sign onto Seward Highway 9, heading inland through the dense forest. It's cool and for the next 10 miles, heavy fog blankets the area, settling on the road, hugging the thickly wooded mountainside and creating a surreal, serene beauty. We turn on the heat in the motorhome and continue climbing. At Tern Lake Junction, we continue straight on Seward Highway, which now becomes Alaska Route 1.

Fifty miles later we're at Portage, the apex of the Turnagain Arm. We're here at low tide; the shallow mud flats and quick sands are clearly visible,

and though they look innocent, are extremely dangerous. Heed the warning signs and under no circumstances walk out there. People and animals can get sucked in and drown when the rapidly rising high tide returns. Several fatal accidents have occurred here.

The road along Turnagain Arm is a designated scenic byway and rated as one of the world's most beautiful drives. Snowcapped mountains line the shore, and the fragile beauty is a feast for the eyes. Multiple pullouts provide great photo opportunities.

At Mile 100, Potter Marsh is a bird viewer's delight. The boardwalk leads from the parking area across the marsh. It's the perfect habitat for numerous birds. From early May through September, Canada geese, trumpeter swans, and others make this wetland home, especially during the spring and fall migration. Visitors should not disturb nesting waterfowl.

Spawning salmon are seen here between May and August in Rabbit Creek, which flows under the boardwalk, but fishing is not allowed.

We turn toward Palmer at Mile 155, exit onto Old Glenn Highway and

Puffins are one of the most popular Alaska seabirds and can be seen at the Alaska Sealife Center. A buoy is occupied by sea lions that watch as our boat cruises by in Unakwik Inlet.

continue about 15 miles before turning left onto East Smith Road and follow the signs to Mountain View RV Park (907-745-5747 www.mtviewrvpark.com). There's ample parking, full hookups and an impressive view of Matanuska Peak.

Day 31: Palmer

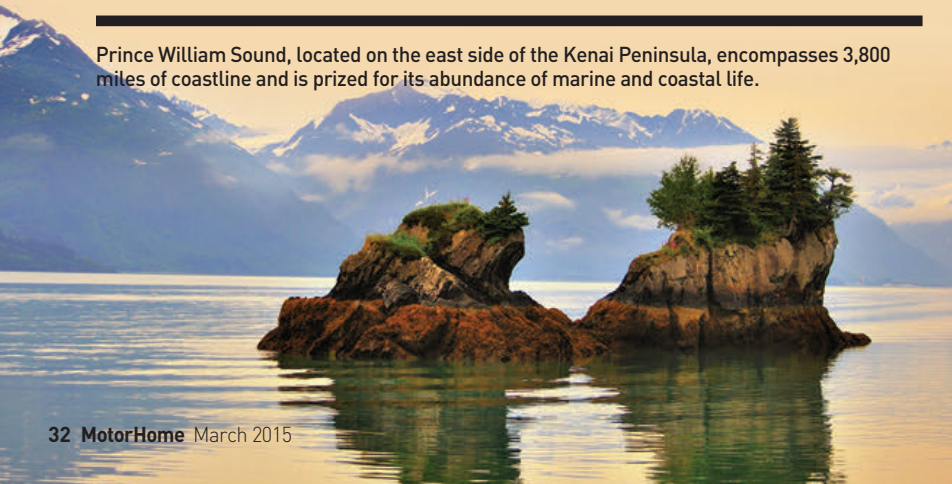
Approximately 45 miles north of Anchorage, Palmer rests in the deep, glacial valley of the Matanuska River nestled between the Matanuska and Knik glaciers.

Palmer began as part of FDR's New Deal, a federal program to help stimulate the national economy after the Depression. In 1935, 203 families, mainly from Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, journeyed here to begin new lives. Each family was given 40 acres of land for farming and raising cattle.

At 11 a.m. we arrive at the Palmer Colony House Museum, run by the Palmer Historical Society. Barb Thomas and Mary Ann Anderson (both originally from Wisconsin) welcome us and tell us about their early life in Palmer. Barb came here in 1935 with her parents, and their original homestead is now the Musk Ox Farm. Mary Ann arrived with her family in 1945.

Life wasn't easy back then. The local hospital was a tent before the residents appealed to Eleanor Roosevelt, who went to the president and insisted they get a proper hospital. World War II and the military presence helped the colony

Prince William Sound, located on the east side of the Kenai Peninsula, encompasses 3,800 miles of coastline and is prized for its abundance of marine and coastal life.



prosper, and some GIs decided to make this their permanent home.

After the Historical Society visit, we sit down for a traditional lunch served at the elegant Inn Café across the street. The Inn was once the old school administration building and dormitory.

Farming is the main occupation here. The growing season is short, but during the long summer days, nearly 20 hours of daylight seems to put vegetables on steroids. Palmer has earned the nickname "land of giants" and can boast of producing a colossal 18.9-pound carrot and a 42.75-pound beet. Each year in August and September, Palmer hosts one of Alaska's major events, the State Fair, where these gigantic, award-winning vegetables are a major attraction. A monster pumpkin once weighed in at 1,287 pounds. The world-record cabbage, grown in Palmer in 2012, tipped the scales at 138.25 pounds.

Later that day we visit the Musk Ox Farm. Our guide, Shannon, tells us about these ancient animals that once roamed alongside woolly mammoths and saber-toothed tigers in Beringia, the land bridge that joined Alaska and Siberia about 600,000 years ago. Sadly, the oxen were almost hunted to extinction in the 19th century to supply meat to Russian whaling ships.

To rescue these Ice Age survivors, Congress paid \$40,000 to move 34 animals from Greenland to Alaska. They were transported by rail to New York, then to Seattle. After the boat trip to Seward, they were transported by rail to Fairbanks, before finally arriving at this farm in Palmer. Incredibly, all the animals survived the journey, and today their descendents are the only domesticated musk oxen herd in the world.

The musk oxen are called "oomingmak" or "bearded one" by the Native Alaskans. Their fur, qiviut, is eight times warmer than sheep's wool. Collected by nonprofit cooperatives, the ultra-soft wool is distributed to Native Alaskan women, who knit the qiviut into fine garments using traditional patterns that tell stories about their village and Alaskan life. This nonprofit farm is open

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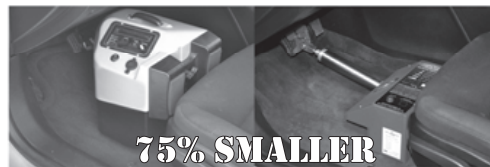


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The Maxine & Jesse Whitney Museum in Valdez has one of the largest collections of Native Alaskan art and artifacts in the world. Near Valdez, a fishing boat pulls in its catch.

Day 32: Palmer to Valdez (260 miles)

Leaving Palmer on the Glenn Highway (also Alaska Highway 1), we drive along the Matanuska Valley. At the Matanuska Glacier State Recreational Site, we soak in an awesome view. It's the largest glacier in Alaska that can be reached by vehicle. Approximately 26 miles long and 4 miles wide, Matanuska Glacier is classified as a valley glacier, a body of solid ice that flows like a river under its own weight through an existing valley.

At Lion's Head Mountain, an ancient volcano, we pause for an expansive view of the Chugach Mountains and surrounding valleys. Not far from here, Sheep Mountain stops us immediately. This resplendent orange, red, gold and purple mountain is an astonishing sight. Occasionally mistaken for copper and gold deposits, they are actually

to the public and well worth a visit (907-745-4151, www.muskoxfarm.org).

We then drive to Wasilla and the Iditarod Museum, which is dedicated to the history of the great race. The Athabascans call their traditional hunting grounds "Haiditarod," or "a far, distant place," so in 1910 the trail between Seward and Nome on the Bering Sea was named "Iditarod." In the winter of 1925, the children of Nome were stricken with diphtheria. The life-saving serum needed was run by a relay of 20 mushers and their dog sled teams, 674 miles across the Alaskan wilderness,

in 5 1/2 days. The dog Togo and his musher ran the relay's longest and most arduous stretch, while dog Balto and his musher completed the final leg through a blizzard, delivering the serum in time to save the children of Nome.

This amazing journey gave birth in 1973 to the famous race, now run through the Alaskan wilderness between Anchorage and Nome, a distance of more than 1,000 miles. Held in March with a ceremonial start in Anchorage, it's usually completed in nine days and has earned the title "The Last Great Race on Earth."

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At Eureka Summit, elevation 3,322 feet — the highest point on the Glenn Highway, we soak in the views of the Wrangell Mountain Range and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. This virtually untouched wilderness has the distinction of being America's largest national park. At 13.2 million acres, it's six times larger than Yellowstone National Park.

Mount Wrangell is a massive shield volcano and glacier. Sometimes, on a clear day, an unmistakable plume, like a faint sliver of smoke, can be seen escaping from its summit, reminding us that it's still active!

At Glenallen, we turn right on the Richardson Highway 4, and stop at the Wrangell-St. Elias visitor center to collect information and buy a DVD.

This drive can't be rushed. The scenery gets better, glacier after glacier, and just when we think we've seen it all, there's more!

The Trans-Alaska Pipeline runs parallel to the road as we head toward Valdez. We're approaching canyon country, and switch to low gear as we descend steeply on an 8 percent grade. This is the Thompson Pass, a 2,805-foot-high gap in the Chugach Mountains northeast of Valdez.

According to the National Climatic Center, this area holds the highest snowfall record in Alaska, averaging more than 500 inches per year, and the record for the most snow in a single day — 62 inches on Dec. 29, 1955. The world-famous extreme downhill skiing contest takes place here.

Valdez is the southern terminus of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline and Thompson Pass is the only overland link, so the state keeps the highway plowed and ice-free year-round.

Farther downhill we pass Mount Billy Mitchell, a 7,217-foot peak in the Chugach Mountains. With 23 miles to go, we pull over for a view of Worthington Glacier, one of the most accessible

of all glaciers — you can walk almost up to the foot of the glacier.

After Blueberry Lake State Recreation Site, another 7-mile-long, 8 percent grade takes us into the heart of Keystone Canyon and two spectacular waterfalls. At Valdez, we check in at Bear Paw RV Park (907-835-2530, www.bearpawrvpark.com) on the shores of Prince William Sound.

Day 33: Valdez

Today we gather at the boat dock for a nine-hour wildlife cruise to Mearns Glacier. Leaving Port Valdez harbor we pass through the Prince William Sound, famous for the Exxon/Valdez oil spill on March 24, 1989. Since then, specially equipped Escort Response Vessels escort tankers through Prince William Sound. We watch one tanker leave the harbor, while others wait their turn.

Cruising the bay, we scan the rugged shore looking for wildlife as the captain shares stories and local lore. Eagles make lazy circles in the sky,

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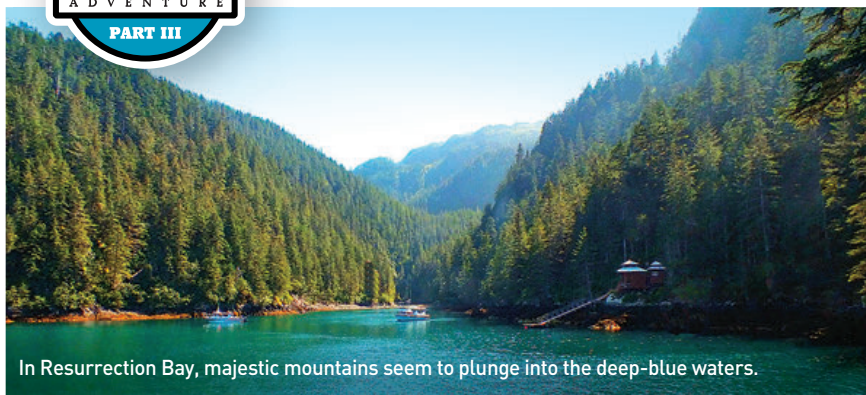
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In Resurrection Bay, majestic mountains seem to plunge into the deep-blue waters.

their keen eyes scanning the water, and occasionally swoop down, expertly snatching a fish out of the water.

After lunch we head for the main attraction of the day, Meares Glacier, located at the head of the Unakwik Inlet.

Stopping within a quarter mile of the glacier, we're face to face with a 1-mile-wide jagged wall of ice. Suddenly, a sound like distant thunder alerts us. Turning around, we see the glacier calving, as several sections of the ice wall break off and tumble into to sea.

The captain skillfully maneuvers our boat cautiously amid the ice floes, getting in closer to an ice cave. It's the toe of the glacier. Between our boat and the glacier, seals rest on the ice floes, watching our boat rock gently on the waves. As we head back, we pass various shaped blue icebergs drift by, some quite large. Entering Valdez harbor, we see the 800-mile-long Trans-Alaska Pipeline terminal and port. In its heyday in the 1980s, the pipeline delivered almost 2 million barrels of oil every day.

Day 34: Valdez

It's our last day in Valdez and we drive a few miles to the Solomon Gulch Hatchery. The hatchery is permitted to incubate 230 million pink salmon eggs and 2 million Coho salmon eggs annually. It releases about 10 million adult pink salmon, while the Coho return is between 150,000-250,000.

This is a rare opportunity to see thousands of salmon, caught in a frantic struggle to return to the hatchery where they were born. We walk along a long weir and watch the fish thrash about as they're directed toward the hatchery.

The smell of blood in the air, from injured fish, attracts wild animals. Bears, fattening up before their six-month hibernation, are a common sight here, so heed the warning signs and keep a safe distance.

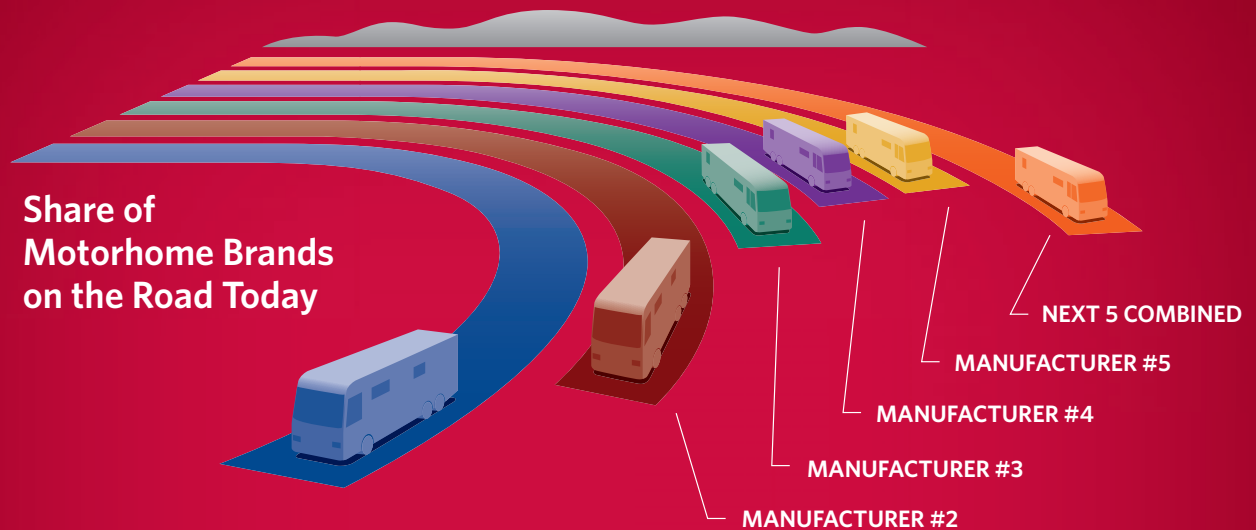
Driving back on Dayville Road to the Richardson Highway, we stop at a bridge where a mama grizzly and her cub are busy catching salmon. Along with dozens of other spectators, we snap some good shots from the bridge.

Heading back to town, we take a diversion and drive through the land where the original Valdez was located. Because of its strategic location, Valdez became a prosperous city, but disaster struck at 5:36 p.m. on March 27, 1964. A devastating 9.2 earthquake, the most powerful recorded in the U.S., set off an underwater landslide, and a colossal tsunami washed away buildings; more than 120 people were killed by the earthquake and subsequent tsunami across Alaska, Oregon and California. Valdez was relocated 4 miles west to its present location. Now a deserted area, a few historical signs are posted along the rough, abandoned roads.

We return to town to visit the Valdez Museum and then head to the Maxine & Jesse Whitney Museum, which is located on Prince William Sound Community College campus and holds rare collections of Alaskan artifacts.

This marks the end of the third leg of our trip. Part IV will include historic Skagway (and the White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad), as well as a high-speed catamaran trip via the storied Inside Passage to Juneau, before completing our journey in Prince George, British Columbia. **M**

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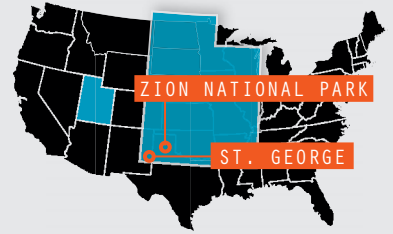
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By Ken Reid

DIXIE OF THE SOUTHWEST

Discover why the area around St. George, Zion National Park and Washington County are known as Utah's Dixie



Getting Around

St. George, located in the southwestern corner of Utah, is easily accessible from Interstate 15 and Zion National Park is just an hour's drive from the city.

Many people don't realize that in addition to the area known as Dixie in the Southern United States, there is a large part of southwestern Utah that is also known by that name. After a visit there in our motorhome, my wife, Gayle, and I think of Zion National Park as the heart of this other Dixie, and the historic city of St. George as the soul. Whether or not everyone agrees with our metaphoric assessment, we are convinced that anyone who visits here will forever remember the experience in a positive way. The wide variety of places to see and things to do are only part of the story, but should be sufficient to attract the interest of pretty much anyone. What impressed us most though, are the history, natural beauty and geographic wonders of Zion.

Zion National Park is located about 43 miles west of St. George in southwestern Utah. It is the state's oldest and most-visited park. For millions of years, wind-blown sand piled up into massive dunes. Rain and

the tremendous weight of the dunes eventually created colorful layers of sandstone. Over time, volcanic activity pushed upward, causing huge mountains and canyons. Eventually the Virgin River was created, and

over time, it carved the amazing Zion Canyon. Wonderfully sculpted monoliths of layered sandstone were exposed. Sheer cliffs in shades of red, beige and white, hundreds of feet tall (now referred to as Navajo Sandstone), are further textured by plants and trees exhibiting multiple shades of green. Many of these natural wonders have been given names — like the Great White Throne, Court of the Patriarchs, Angels Landing, Weeping Rock, Knob Arch and the Watchman (which guards the south entrance). This park is one of the most spectacular places we've ever seen.

The first humans known to have settled in the region that now includes Zion, St. George, and a host of smaller

Snow Canyon State Park is located 10 minutes north of St. George.



Photo: Visit St. George - David West

communities like Springdale, Grafton, Hurricane and Paradise, arrived as early as 6000 B.C. The Virgin Anasazi and the Parowan Fremont made more permanent settlements, from around A.D. 500-1300. Rock art and dwelling ruins can still be viewed there. Paiute tribes arrived between A.D. 1100 and 1200, hunting and growing crops along the rivers for subsistence. In 1776, the first recorded European-Americans visited the area, traveling with the Dominguez-Escalante expedition. Trappers and surveyors followed them. In 1863, Issac Behunin built the first log cabin in what later became Zion National Park.

In 1854, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) established a mission where the city of St. George is now located. In 1861, after the outbreak of the Civil War, Church President Brigham Young believed growing cotton would be a practical and financially beneficial endeavor. He and church elders called upon 309 Mormon families to establish what became known as the Cotton Mission. Many of those families brought their requisite skills when they moved up to Utah from the South of the United States. Those settlers called the region "Utah's Dixie." The developing community of St. George was later named in honor of Mormon apostle George Smith, affectionately known as the "Potato Saint." He acquired that moniker after urging early settlers to eat raw, unpeeled potatoes, which contain a substantial amount of vitamin C, to cure scurvy.

Cotton turned out not to be a successful venture after all. As early as 1874, the area began to produce silk instead. But that didn't contribute much to the economic stability either. They also experimented with molasses, dried fruit and even wine. By 1863, St. George became the county seat. Construction began the same year on the huge St. George LDS Tabernacle, which was completed in 1875. Work began on the St. George LDS Temple in 1871, with the building dedicated in 1877, making it the first temple constructed west of the

The hike to Angels Landing is quite strenuous (and not recommended for anyone who is afraid of heights), but the view from the top is spectacular.



The Zion Visitor Center is a sustainable building that incorporates the area's natural beauty with green, energy-efficient building practices.

Mississippi. The cooperative effort united many southern Utah communities. During the 1930s and 1970s, significant renovations were completed. It is now known as the longest continuously operated Mormon temple in the world.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the St. George community, the Dixie Academy was constructed and operated by the LDS church. In 1933 it became a two-year college. The new Dixie College campus was created in the 1960s. As it grew in size and importance, it was renamed the Dixie State College. Now it is Dixie State University, has a student body of thousands and hosts several four-year degree programs.

St. George is the largest city in Washington County, and the eighth largest in Utah. Consistently ranked as one of the fastest-growing areas in the nation during the past two decades, it surpasses Las Vegas in per capita growth. Key routes pass through the Dixie area of southern Utah that lead to important locations like Salt Lake City. It has also become one of the most popular retirement destinations in the United States, according to lists published by Rand McNally, Money magazine and the American Association of Retired Persons. Young working families joined the migration too, helping to establish one of the most stable and reliable workforces in the nation. Climate, scenic beauty, job opportunities and low crime rate, contributed further to growth.

St. George, in particular, has attracted a large and diverse population, which in turn attracted a wide variety of businesses and, of course, created more cultural changes. The city has a fantastic center for the performing arts, known as the Tuacahn, which is a wonderfully equipped amphitheater set among huge red-rock formations. We have never seen anything like it during our travels.

We recommend taking the time to visit one or more of the museums located in St. George. Also, whether or not

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It all goes back to the freedom of the open road – being able to choose your destination, stopping whenever and wherever you want, sharing stories and making new ones along the way. Those opportunities seem to be dwindling these days, as America's highways and campgrounds become ever more crowded. But that's not true in the North, where vast expanses of highway unwind to the horizon, surrounded by wilderness.

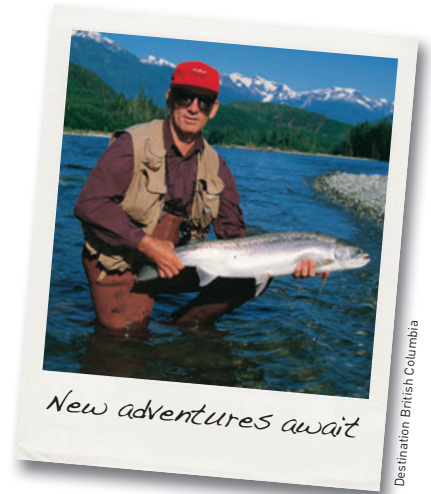
Your biggest decision will be the route you take to the far North. In one journey, you can experience some of the most dramatic national, state and

provincial parks in the United States and Canada. Travel by ferry past hundreds of miles of rain forest, track the westward migration through the Great Plains, or follow in the footsteps of the hardy prospectors lured north by the Klondike Gold Rush. And amidst the millions of acres of wilderness, you'll find colorful towns and villages populated by friendly people whose artistic endeavors, indigenous cultures and pioneer stories will add depth to the experience.

The roads are paved and well maintained and facilities and services are ample. Whether you travel by RV, stop for the night at rustic lodges, hotels, motels or bed-and-breakfast inns, pitch a tent in a campground or some combination of the above, you'll find plenty of options to meet your needs.

After all, the lure of the North is as strong today as it was when gold was first discovered, and there are still plenty of riches left to enjoy.

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motivated by religious interest, take the time to visit the very impressive St. George Utah Temple, which can be seen from miles around. Anyone can access the visitors center, and its many exhibits provide substantial historical and cultural perspective that may not otherwise be encountered.

We have some suggestions for those who may be visiting the St. George/Zion area by motorhome. Unless traveling in a small motorhome, choose a place to set up camp, and then use your dinghy or public transportation to visit points of interest. Both the metropolitan area of St. George and Zion National Park have safe, reliable and conveniently scheduled public transportation. Shuttle service inside Zion National Park is free. The Zion Canyon Shuttle stops at nine locations in the park and visits each stop about every seven minutes. There is a narrated presenta-

tion along the way. Except for the bus stops, there are very few places for vehicles — especially larger ones — to pull over and park.

Another note of some importance is that there are significant restrictions on bringing pets into Zion. While leashed pets are allowed on the Pa'rus Trail, pets are not permitted on other trails, on shuttles, in public buildings, or in the wilderness. If planning to stay at a campground inside the park, read the rules posted on the NPS website beforehand. Also, if full hookups are important, check for destinations outside the park.

Since our motorhome is 35 feet long, and we flat-tow our dinghy, we generally choose an RV resort for a home base that is centrally located to the points of interest we are going to visit. On this trip, we selected St. George KOA, located near the town of Hurricane. This RV resort put us about



Court of the Patriarchs, a set of sandstone cliffs in Zion National Park, is named for the biblical figures Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Photo: Utah Office of Tourism - Tom Till

30 minutes away from Zion and about the same amount of time from St. George. It also put us within a two-hour drive of Bryce Canyon National Park and the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. The campground can accommodate virtually any size motorhome and is

Photo: Ken Reid



The East Rim Trail (seen on the far left of the photo) leads to Observation Point. The 8-mile-long hike has steep drop offs and is challenging.

open year-round.

There are many other RV parks in the area, inside and just outside of Zion. The Zion River Resort RV Park and Campground is a very nice resort adjacent to the Virgin River and located a few miles outside of the park. It is open year-round and has a large selection of sites, including pull-through spaces with 50-amp service, and many amenities. It also has a private shuttle to and from Zion that leaves at 9 a.m. and costs \$7 per person.

When you're planning your time in Zion, allow at least one full day at the very least! Hiking, biking and photography are among the most frequently observed activities there. But just taking the shuttle to the many stops inside the park takes most of a full day — if you disembark, and explore even a little bit. For instance, there are a lot of interesting exhibits at the large Zion Canyon Visitor Center. Next stop is the impressive Zion Human History Museum. After that, there is Canyon Junction, then the viewing point for Court of the Patriarchs, Grotto Trail, Weeping Rock, Big Bend and Temple of Sinawava. If you can, leave time for lunch at the Zion Lodge.

For the most adventurous and physically able, there are many challenges to be experienced while hiking The Narrows of the Virgin River. In some places, you can almost touch both sides of the canyon at once. But it is a very strenuous hike and there is a serious risk of flash floods part of the year. Another very challenging hike is to Angels



A hike through The Narrows in Zion National Park requires walking in the Virgin River, which means getting your feet wet.

Photo: Utah Office of Tourism - Tom Till

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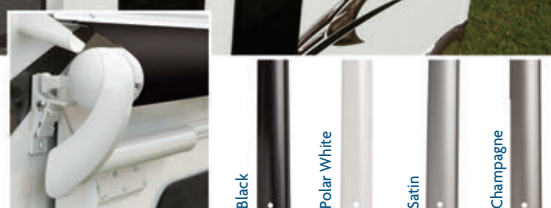
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Landing, which stands up above pretty much everything else in the canyon along Zion Canyon's west rim. This spectacular formation got its name from a Methodist minister named Frederick Fisher, who was gazing up its face in 1916 when he exclaimed: "Only an angel could land on it!" A trail was completed to the summit a decade later. The word dangerous can also be added to the description of this trail. Six people have plunged to their deaths from the Angels Landing Trail since 2004. During the last half mile of the 1,488-foot ascent, the hiker must traverse a narrow spine of rock with a steep drop on either side. A life-saving measure has been installed there in the form of heavy-gauge chain anchored to the rocks with steel poles.

There are plenty of other hiking options, too, on miles and miles of well-maintained trails. One example is the 8-mile round trip to Observation Point, which I took. The trail zigzags up very steep terrain, but the view is

St. George has a picturesque historic district. A walking-tour brochure is available at the St. George Chamber of Commerce.

spectacular. The degree of difficulty for each trail is posted, from easy to strenuous. Several of them, including those that afford stunning views of Weeping Rock and Emerald Pools, are paved, relatively smooth and accessible by wheelchair.

Park elevation ranges between 3,800 and 8,800 feet, so there are a variety of ecosystems, including grasslands, high desert, wetlands, riparian and forest. There are 67 species of mammals, 13 of snakes, 291 of birds, and 900 species of plants in Zion.

Visiting the Dixie area of southern Utah could easily qualify as a bucket list item for most motorhome travelers; it is outstanding in so many ways. For us, it was the highlight of a wonderful two-month-long trip through six states. **M**

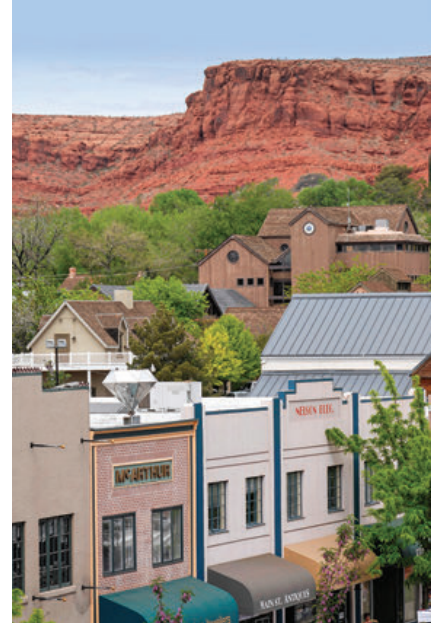


Photo: Visit St. George - Dave Becker

For More Information

St. George RV Resort

800-562-8607
www.rvonthego.com/utah/st-george-koa-campground

Zion National Park

435-772-3256
www.nps.gov/zion

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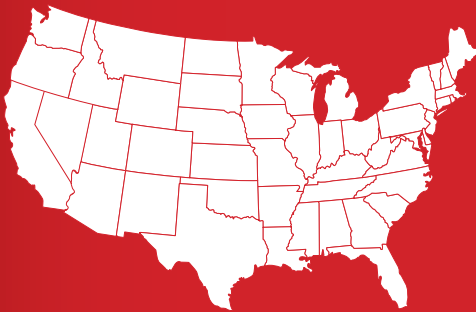
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Visitors hike along the lip of the cliffs high above the Palouse River at Palouse Falls State Park.

WASHINGTON'S PALOUSE SCENIC BYWAY

Welcome to where history, small-town charm and spectacular scenic vistas make this out-of-the-way part of the state a must-drive for RVers

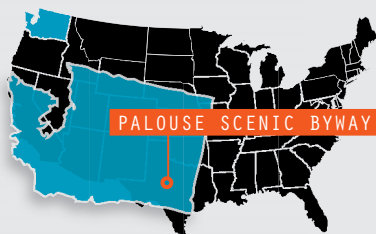
Picture undulating hills blanketed with a patchwork of crops in vibrant greens, yellows, and golds and dotted with small farm villages and pioneer homesteads as far as the eye can see. Combine this painterly landscape with nearly constant warm breezes that shape and sculpt the land and a quiet so deep we feel as though we might fall into it and never return. This is The Palouse, a very special and little-known corner of eastern Washington that's home to the Palouse Scenic Byway, 208 miles of gently curving roadway that we've come to explore in our motorhome.

Hood River and the landscape changes from lush, green western Oregon forest to drier, brown and golden eastern terrain. As we pass out of the Columbia River Gorge Natural Scenic Area, the tops of the hills sprout sleek white wind farm turbines, the natural and manmade landscapes combining in an interesting fusion.

By the time we reach Boardman Marina Park, our home for the night, the sun is dipping over the mountains and turning now-wispy clouds cotton-candy pink. Boardman's 63-site, full-hookup RV park is a veritable oasis in the desert landscape. Road weary, we gratefully pull our rig into a huge, flat, river-view site surrounded by tall trees and luxurious grass — all for the bargain price of \$31.80. We're glad we called ahead because the reserved

We leave Portland, Oregon, on a Friday around 6 p.m. under threatening rain clouds and, as we turn onto Interstate 84 toward the Columbia River Gorge, we leave workaday traffic behind. We drive along the mighty Columbia River and pass beneath the gorge's 4,000-foot basalt cliffs graced with waterfalls, some lacy and delicate; others, like spectacular Multnomah Falls, are muscular torrents.

An hour later, we pass the town of



The Byway's Highways

This route actually follows seven different highways. The byway begins on SR 26 near Hooper and then crisscrosses its way east, south and north.



spaces are full (the campground also has overflow parking with water and electricity on a first-come basis).

Boardman's center is dominated by a grassy kids' play structure and where they show movies on warm summer nights. The RV park also has a protected swimming area, mini-golf and a marina for those who want to boat the Columbia River. We spend a restful evening listening to the wind blow through the trees.

The next morning we head west on I-82 toward Umatilla, crossing the Columbia River just west of McNary Dam; then north on U.S. Highway 395, passing the wine country towns of Kennewick and Pasco, their irrigated emerald vineyards standing in sharp contrast to the surrounding brown landscape. I spot a sign for cherries and turn into the parking lot of a large metal building. I'm expecting a simple fruit stand, but Country Mercantile in Pasco is a huge space with a chocolate factory, a gift shop, a market selling local fruits and veggies, an ice cream counter with 48 house-made flavors and a deli. We buy peach-cinnamon jam, gourmet Walla Walla mustard, a box of chocolates and 2 pounds of Rainier cherries for our journey.



Water Falls and Stone Huts

Back on the road, we turn onto Washington state Route 260, passing a couple of tiny towns and then follow the signs to Palouse Falls State Park. For 8 miles, the road climbs past undulating hills green with wheat rippling like waves in the wind. We've arrived in The Palouse.

Two miles on oiled gravel Palouse Falls Road brings us to a small park where a ranger directs our motorhome to an upper parking lot. We walk a few hundred yards to a fenced overlook to an impressive deluge that drops nearly 200 feet over a basalt cliff into a large circular plunge pool. This dramatic canyon and the surrounding desert landscape were carved during the Ice Age when glacial Lake Missoula flooded the area with billions of gallons of water. Across the chasm, we spot people walking on narrow dirt trails to the top of the falls, but we stay on our perch snapping photos of Washington's official state waterfall.

Back on state Route 26 (Route 260 ends at the junction with Route 26), we follow the Palouse River, and spot the first Palouse Scenic Byway sign. We take a small farm road to La Crosse, a town famous for lava stone buildings. At the end of town we spot them — a couple of tumbledown stone cabins, two smaller stone buildings and a whitewashed auto garage made of lava rock. These were constructed between 1934 and 1936 by a local businessman



From above left: Modern farm machinery works the fields during spring in the Palouse Hills. The historic Dahmen Barn is surrounded by an impressive wagon-wheel fence in Uniontown.

and rented to farmhands for housing. Despite their disrepair, they're for sale. As we snap photos, my friend quips, "We could probably buy these cheap."

Continuing along the highway, we round a corner and a sea of brilliant yellow flowers makes us suck in our collective breath. This is what The Palouse is about — light, shadow, a dozen shades of green, yellow, gold, and deep brown. It's a place made for wandering with a camera, a sketchbook, a box of paints and an open heart. Hundreds of artists and photographers come here, especially in early spring and summer when wheat sprouts vibrant green and fields of canola blaze like yellow sulfur.

Armed with the brochure "Photography Hot Spots on the Palouse" (from the Chamber of Commerce; www.pullmanchamber.com/visit-pullman/brochure-library), we take any backroad that looks interesting — and they all do. The two-lane roads amble up and around gently curving fields accented by century-old farmhouses and historic barns, some rusty red, others brilliant white. Some historians say farmers added ferrous oxide (rust) or animal blood to oil mixtures to

Spacious RV sites at Boardman Marina Park in Boardman, Oregon, offer views of the Columbia River.

retard rot on their wooden barns and the orange-red color became fashionable. Dairy barns were painted a whitewash of lime, whiting and water that had antimicrobial properties believed to be good for farm animals.

Between the farms are pint-sized towns with wide streets with two- and three-story brick or wood buildings built in the late 1800s to early 1900s. Some boast large grain elevators or old flourmills, long since abandoned. In Rosalia, we take photos of a 1923 Texaco gas station that's now the visitors center. We also visit tiny Steptoe Battlefield State Park, site of a battle fought in 1858 between U.S. Army soldiers and warriors from the Spokane, Palouse and Coeur d'Alene tribes. We stop frequently alongside fields and farms to take more pictures.

In Colfax, a town built in 1870, we head to the Perkins House Museum, a Victorian constructed in 1886 by J.A. Perkins, the town's founder. In the National Register of Historic Places,

the Perkins House has been brought back to life by the Whitman County Historical Society. Out back is an old one-room cabin made of hand-hewn logs built in 1870. It's the oldest building in Whitman County. We peer into dusty windows and see an antique bed, an old sewing machine, and wooden table with ancient utensils and antique pots and pans.

A Bird's-Eye View and Great Cheese

To get a better perspective on The Palouse's amazing landscape, we head to Steptoe Butte State Park, the region's highest point. While other roads in The Palouse are well-maintained, the butte road is pocked with cracks and potholes. It's also quite narrow with no turnouts and it angles up steeply. We climb higher and higher, our ears popping as we ascend.

The last few hundred feet of Steptoe Butte Road are breathtaking, but there's no guardrail and the butte



From above top: Retired farm trucks catch the evening light. These old stone buildings in La Crosse were built between 1934 and 1936.

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falls away sharply. Finally, we reach the top, an elevation of 3,612, and the land spreads out before us — gently undulating hills painted in greens and golds to the horizon that looks like some giant's crazy golf course. We stand on the edge and breathe in the scenery with a half-dozen others wielding cameras. It's worth the stomach-churning climb.

Our berth for the night is Boyer Park and Marina, a shady respite in Colfax beside the Snake River. While the park is a little out of our way, the large, full-hookup RV sites, river views and terrific Snake River Bar & Grill make the few extra miles a small price to pay.

The next morning under robin's-egg-blue skies, we head to Palouse, a little town with wide streets and plenty of historic brick buildings. One of the houses is the Roy M. Chatters Newspaper and Printing Museum, a unique collection that showcases the machinery and artistry of early

presses. The former bank building is now The Bank Left Gallery, an eclectic collection of fine art. We spend hours browsing the town's antique stores and end at Mimi's Bakery for a great cup of coffee and a pastry.

Late in the afternoon, we churn to Pullman, the area's largest town and cultural and business hub. It's also home to Washington State University (WSU). Being a college town, craft beer is popular and we spend time enjoying Paradise Creek Brewery, a restaurant and brew house located in the old post office. They've kept many of the post office's original trappings including postal worker cages, old light fixtures and unique skylights that rotate open.

After a night in Pullman RV Park, a modest site next to a city park that's conveniently located near the university, we head over to WSU's campus. Our real destination is Ferdinand's, the college's creamery renowned for ice cream and Cougar Gold Cheese. Back in the 1930s, re-

searchers developed a unique process to preserve their sharp, tangy white cheddar in cans. Decades later, they're still making this tasty canned cheese in several flavors and ultra-creamy ice cream. We drop \$100 on cheese and two big cones of chocolate peanut butter ice cream.

As we drive south of Pullman, enjoying our cones, we pass the Dahmen Barn, an artists' collective with an amazing fence made from hundreds of iron wheels. Just past the barn, we spot the "Thanks for Visiting The Palouse" sign and we smile, knowing we'll be back. **M**

For More Information

Boardman Marina Park

888-481-7217, www.boardmanmarinapark.com

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509-397-3208, <http://bpark.biz>

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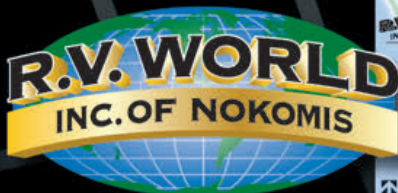
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Unity U24MB

Leisure Travel Vans' flagship motorhome gets it right in all the right places

By Chris Hemer

Good things come in small packages.

We've all heard this expression, which, of course, relates to tiny crushed-velvet boxes with sparkling contents. But when it comes to motorhomes, usually the opposite is true — we've come to associate big coaches with unfettered opulence, and smaller ones with compromise. However, as the demand for maneuverable, fuel-efficient motorhomes continues to grow, manufacturers have become more adept at building

high-quality products, and equipping them with the luxury features we would expect to find in a much larger coach. Leisure Travel Vans (LTV) of Manitoba, Canada, is one of them.

As a brand of Triple E RV, which built its first product almost 50 years ago, Leisure Travel Vans has steadily raised the bar for its Sprinter-based Class B and C motorhomes in the face of increasingly stiff competition from manufacturers in the U.S. and Canada. Its top contender is the Unity, a luxury Class C available in four cleverly

designed floorplans that include the Twin Bed, Island Bed, Corner Bed and the unit we tested, Murphy Bed — a single slideout design that makes the most of the motorhome's available living space.

Typically, the term "Murphy bed" doesn't so much remind one of luxury as it does a crowded apartment or European hotel room, but in the Unity it works to great effect. Walk inside, and the unit feels open and airy — and the combination of the test unit's solid-wood Espresso Brown cabinetry and white upholstery evoke the feel of a high-rise Manhattan apartment,

ABOVE: Full-body paint, contoured body panels and frameless windows give the Unity a modern appearance. Note large rear storage compartment.



BELOW: Unity's Leisure Lounge offers up to six configurations; lower the table and stow the cushions, and the Murphy bed can be pulled down. L-shaped galley with countertop extension is small but efficient. Driver's compartment offers modern conveniences and outstanding visibility.



or perhaps a private jet. And, without having to allocate space for a bed, LTV's designers were able to fit this floorplan with a luxurious rear bath area that rivals many Class A's in size and style.

Motorhomes of this ilk are often billed as "touring coaches," but offer little in the way of storage to put your things while on the road. As we prepared the Unity for our road trip to an RV resort in Palm Springs, California, we found that it offered an impressive amount of storage for its size. In addition to a small compartment on the lower rear curbside, there are two underneath the slideout, and the compartments are built into the room so they extend with it. Anyone who has crawled underneath a slideout to retrieve their belongings will certainly

appreciate this thoughtful feature. For larger items, a wardrobe-sized rear compartment, complete with shelving and a small pass-through into the bath area, is perfect for folding chairs, a patio rug or other large/bulky items.

The Unity's exterior is one of the best looking we've seen in this class. Contoured exterior walls, full-body paint and frameless windows create an elegant, cohesive appearance, and we particularly liked how the graphic treatment flows from the sides to the rear taillights, where the paint shifts to red in order to mimic automotive-style lenses. It's a small detail, but if you've seen other motorhomes with a flat rear cap broken up only by a few colorless LED lights, you can certainly appreciate the extra effort taken here. The Unity

is a high-end motorhome, and it looks like one.

Taking to the road, we settled into the Unity's cockpit, which features the usual Sprinter seats, which aren't terribly comfortable or supportive, but they are covered in white Ultraleather for an upscale appearance. For a driving stint of a few hours, they'll do just fine, but we didn't relish the idea of spending a whole day in them. In fairness to LTV, these are the seats that are supplied with the cutaway chassis, and every Sprinter-based product we've tested uses them. On the upside, the cockpit features a telescoping wheel, cruise control and an in-dash AM/FM radio that incorporates Bluetooth functionality as well as navigation and a backup camera. The dash is well laid out and



functional, and visibility is outstanding.

Powered by a 3-liter Mercedes-Benz turbodiesel V-6 producing 188 horsepower and 325 lb-ft of torque, the 10,000-pound Unity is no rocket ship, but merging into highway traffic was no problem and we were able to crest a 6 percent grade at nearly 60 mph, which isn't bad. Driving on smooth pavement, the Unity's ride was very quiet, with

commendable job with the utility center, which organizes everything neatly within the two rear streetside baggage doors. The galvanized steel-lined compartments house the winterizing/water selector valves, exterior shower, cable TV hookup, propane fill/shut-off, black tank flush and gray/black dump handles. A nice surprise was that this unit was also equipped with the optional RV Sani-Con macerator system, which is not only clean and convenient to use, but contributes to the motorhome's tidy exterior appearance — no low-hanging sewer outlet here.

Livability in the Unity is among the best we've experienced in a motorhome of this size. The unit's "Leisure Lounge" system allows for six completely different living and seating arrangements while the Murphy bed is stowed in the streetside slideout. Most of the time, we left it in the theater seating configuration, where one can enjoy two roomy seats and a center armrest with cup holders. But move a few cushions and panels around, and the area can be converted into a dinette with opposing or forward-facing seats, a small bed and more. The table, with its offset base, slides for easy accessibility and its post stores in a corner cabinet just inside the entry door. We found that the arrangement works well for the most part, but the table was a bit wobbly. It will work for snacks and such, but we would be hesitant to serve a large meal on it.

The Leisure Lounge is placed

WHAT'S HOT

Multiconfigurable Leisure Lounge, huge rear bath, great looks inside and out

WHAT'S NOT

Sprinter seats, spongy brakes, wobbly table



directly across from a large window, which admits plenty of light. Push a button inside the entryway, and a 32-inch flat-screen TV emerges from the surface, ideally positioned for viewing from the upright or supine position. The television deploys mechanically with spring/hydraulic assist, and stows simply by pushing down firmly on the top of the TV. The entertainment unit is located just above the cockpit on the passenger's side, and the sound from the speakers, placed directly above the lounge, was very impressive. In fact, the speakers can be heard quite clearly while lounging under the power patio awning.

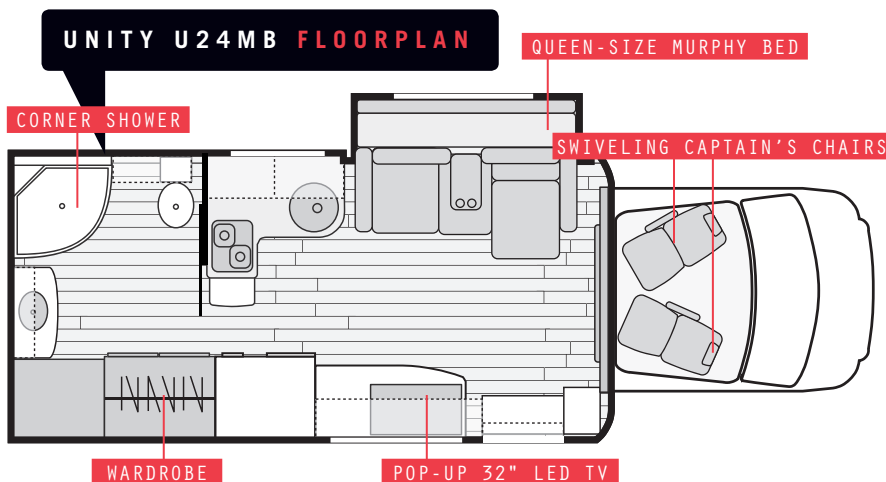
A few steps back is the streetside galley, which is small but thoughtfully laid out. The solid-surface countertop is arranged in an L-shape, with a two-burner stove with glass top to your



The rear bath is bigger and more nicely equipped than many Class A's we've tested.

no squeaks or rattles emanating from the cabinets or appliances. Overall, the ride is smooth, although the Sprinter's commercial roots reveal themselves over harsh pavement transitions that have a tendency to boom through the interior. Steering and handling is adequate for highway work, although we found the brakes to be a bit more spongy than we'd like.

As noted, part of the appeal of a small motorhome is its maneuverability, and we enjoyed the freedom to stop at roadside attractions and shopping centers along our route without any parking fears. Once at our destination, we found the Unity took minutes to set up; we deployed the streetside slideout, hooked up, and were able to enjoy our surroundings in minutes. LTV did a





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No. 1 in specialty RV insurance from 2013 Millward Brown national survey data.

Specifications

Chassis

Model	Mercedes Benz Sprinter
Engine	3.0-liter V-6 turbodiesel
SAE Hp	188 hp @ 3,800 rpm
Torque	325 lb-ft @ 1,200 rpm
Transmission	Five-speed automatic
Axle Ratio	3.92:1
Tires	LT215/85R16E
Wheelbase	170"
Brakes	Hydraulic disc with ABS
Suspension, Front/Rear	McPherson Strut/ Leaf Spring
Fuel Capacity	26.4 gal
Fuel Economy	19.7 mpg
Warranty	Three years, 36,000 miles

Coach

Exterior Length	25'1"
Exterior Width	7'10"
Exterior Height	10'6"
Interior Width	7'5"
Interior Height	6'5"
Construction	Vacuum bonded and insulated floor; contoured vacuum bonded side walls with aluminum framing; domed, vacuum-bonded aluminum framed and insulated roof
Fresh Water Capacity	30 gal
Black-Water Capacity	29 gal
Gray-Water Capacity	37 gal
Water-Heater Capacity	6 gal
LP-Gas Capacity	15 gal
Air Conditioner	15,000 Btu with heat pump
Furnace	16,000 Btu, ducted
Refrigerator	6.7 cubic foot 3-way
Converter/Charger	55 amp
Battery	(2) 6-volt
AC Generator	3.6 kW LP-gas
MSRP	\$126,165
MSRP as Tested	\$134,200
Warranty	Two years/24,000 miles limited

Wet Weight

(Water & Heater, Fuel, No Supplies or Passengers)	
Front Axle	3,700 lbs
Rear Axle	6,340 lbs
Total	10,040 lbs

Chassis Ratings

GAWR, F/R	4,410/7,720 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	11,030/15,250 lbs
ROCCC	990 lbs
GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combination Weight Rating
ROCCC	Realistic Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity



Push a button inside the entryway and the TV rises from the counter directly across from the Leisure Lounge. Overhead Euro-style cabinetry is elegant and well made.

left, and round stainless-steel sink with cover to the right. We liked the design of the sink cover, which has a small half-moon relief in it so you can use it as a prep space, yet still scoop vegetable trimmings and the like into the sink. There's a countertop extension for more space, and even a small trash chute in the back corner — we wish more motorhomes had this handy feature. There is plenty of drawer and cabinet space here, and on the curbside is a 6.7-cubic-foot refrigerator, a small microwave and a pullout pantry/spice rack.

When it's time to turn in for the evening, simply move some cushions, unlatch the bed and pull it down; there are no legs to deploy or any other steps to complete before lying down. We found the queen-size bed to be firm but comfortable, and we particularly appreciated the thoughtful entry stairwell cover that LTV supplies to prevent you from falling down the steps when walking around the foot of the bed. It's a thoughtful detail that shows this manufacturer has thought this floorplan through thoroughly. Also of note are the MCD blackout shades and cover over the large skylight above, which kept the interior reasonably dark in the early morning hours.

As mentioned earlier, the rear bath

is expansive and nicely furnished. A large wardrobe on the curbside had plenty of room for our hanging items, and two drawers beneath accommodated folding clothes. Adjacent to this a roomy linen closet, the bottom shelf of which mysteriously passes through to the exterior compartment — perhaps so you can retrieve towels from outside? On the rear wall is the sink vanity, which has a surprising amount of countertop space and a nice-sized medicine cabinet with mirror and overhead lights. The corner shower with glass doors and residential-style fixtures was light and bright and had more than enough elbowroom. Just inside and to the right is a porcelain toilet, and above is a towel bar, another cabinet, and a Fan-Tastic Vent. The bath area can be separated from the living quarters with a pocket door that felt substantial and had a mirror on the inside for primping.

Unity is a good name for this motorhome, as it successfully unites maneuverability and fuel economy with luxury features and good build quality. In this case, good things do come in a small package. **M**

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SPRING AT LAST

Preparing your coach for another travel season

After a long, hard winter, one of the things that signals spring for RV owners is the de-winterizing of the motorhome. Once you know that freezing weather is over, it's time for the annual spring freshen-up to get ready for the fun and travel that lies ahead. Of course, if you are a full-timer or live in an area that is not subject to freezing weather, you may not store your coach, so not all of these tips will apply to you.

For many of us, our motorhome gets stored during the winter and therefore we have to undo all the steps we used to prepare the motorhome for the winter. After uncovering the coach or removing it from a storage location, the first thing we suggest is to unplug the 120-volt AC power. Then, after

checking the oil and coolant levels in the generator, start it up. The generator needs a good run of 60 minutes or longer under load; your time spent preparing the motorhome will serve this role perfectly.

While the power is flowing from the generator, it is a great time to check all the 120-volt AC appliances, such as the refrigerator (if applicable), microwave, and TVs, as well as the HVAC systems. In addition to all the AC-powered devices, you also need to make sure all the 12-volt DC circuits such as the lights, awnings, exhaust fans, etc., are working.

Hopefully, you removed all the

dry-cell batteries from your remote controls, clocks and smoke detectors last fall. Before you head out on your first trip, install new batteries into all of those devices and test them for proper operation. If you use an outdoor thermometer, don't forget to install new batteries in it as well, unless it's an old-fashioned model with a tube of mercury or today's environmentally conscious equivalent.

If the water heater was properly drained last year, now is the time to get it ready for use. If you have a Suburban water heater and didn't already check the anode rod last year, you should remove it and see if it needs replacement. If all is

Below from left: Replace the dry-cell batteries in all devices such as smoke alarms, TV remote controls, flashlights, etc., and test them fully. If you use insect traps, replace them in spring before you head out on your first trip. This step can dramatically reduce the chance of bugs moving in with you during your travels.



Photos: E. Don Smith

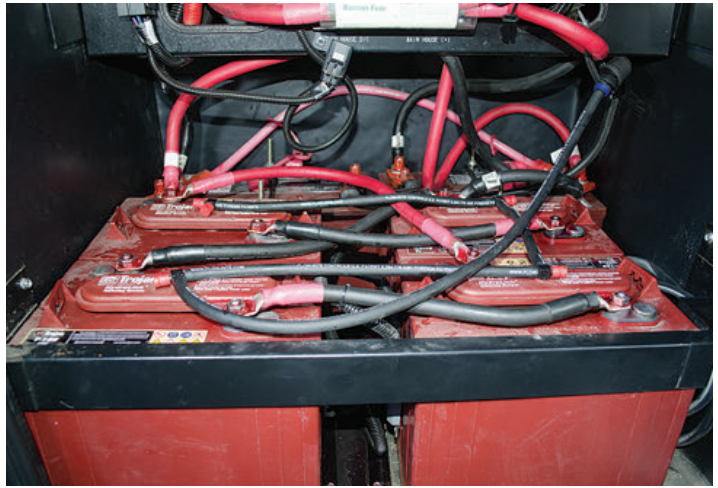
A full spring cleanup can be accomplished in a few hours and is definitely worth the small investment in time now . . .

well, then you can refill the tank normally. On most motorhomes, that means accessing the hot-water control valve in the plumbing bay and turning it back to normal flow instead of the bypass setting that is used to winterize. Since a typical water heater is 5-10 gallons, this may take a bit to refill, so with the water hose still connected, turn on a hot-water faucet or shower. Within a few minutes, the tank will fill and water should start to flow normally.

One of the biggest aspects of de-winterizing is to flush all the water lines of the nontoxic pink antifreeze that you added last fall. If you have access to a water hose, the easiest way to get this handled is to hook up the hose and add some fresh, clean water to the water tank. On most motorhomes, the antifreeze is added through the same pump that runs from the water tank. This is the reason we suggest you use the water tank filled with clean water to purge the lines.

With the water tank partially full, switch on the water pump and simply go to each faucet and run it until all signs of pink are gone. Proceed to the next sink, toilet, shower, etc. Don't forget the outside faucet if your motorhome is equipped with one. The icemaker is a little more difficult to access, so one simple way to flush it is to turn on the refrigerator and allow the icemaker to cycle through several trays of ice. After two or three cycles, the ice should be clear and not pink. For added assurance, you can also switch the system back to city water and continue running more fresh, clean water through all the faucets. This procedure will ensure every possible water line is flushed.

Now that the water system is purged of antifreeze, the next step is to sanitize the water lines. A normal 60-gallon water tank requires approximately 1 cup



Inspect the terminals on the coach and chassis batteries for corrosion. As you can see, these were already protected with corrosion barrier and they are OK. Also check the electrolyte level in all flooded cell batteries. These Trojan batteries are connected to an easy-to-use central fill system called Hydrolink, which allows you to equally fill all batteries in one simple operation. Carefully inspect the burner tube and the flue of all gas-operated appliances such as the water heater and refrigerator. These are common areas for insects and bees to build nests that need to be removed before lighting the burners. Inspect the anode rod in the water heater (if so equipped). This one is in near-perfect condition and will be reused.

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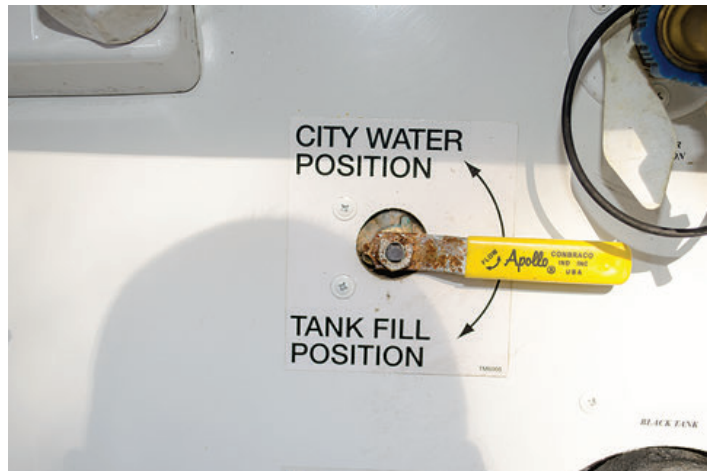


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of chlorine bleach added to the full freshwater tank. Next, switch the water flow valve to pull water from your tank instead of using the city water. Then, go to each faucet and run the water for a few minutes to ensure you are getting the bleach solution into the lines. Do this at each fixture, and then allow the system to sit a minimum of four hours. This gives the bleach time to kill most anything that is in the lines. After four hours, dump the freshwater tank and go back to city water and flush the lines again with clean city water from the connected water hose. Don't forget to change out your in-line water filter that connects between the water hose and the coach. Usually this is a cartridge filter that is accessed in the plumbing bay and it is this filter that helps keep the drinking water clean and free of debris. You can further eliminate any remaining bleach taste or odor by adding a small quantity of baking soda to the fresh tank and circulating that water through the system.

The water-control valve is usually found in the wet bay and it controls the freshwater flow into or around the water heater. When flushing, make sure you rotate the valve to the correct position for either filling up the on-board tank, or to run the coach from city water as indicated here.

Next, you will need to drain and flush the gray- and black-water tanks to remove the bleach-and-water mixture; otherwise the tank deodorizer chemicals may have difficulty working properly with the bleach water still lingering in the tanks.

Another common problem in motorhomes during storage is bugs and rodents. While you are in the coach, inspect it top to bottom and front to back for any signs of an unwanted occupancy. Many owners (including myself) use bug bait traps (small plastic bait stations) that help prevent infestation. Each spring, these need to be replaced to help get ahead of any bug problem that may be coming your way. You should also completely inspect all the under-dash wiring as well as closets and drawers to make sure that rats or mice are not

setting up shop in your motorhome.

Bugs like to take shelter in the water-heater burner tube as well as the exhaust area of propane-powered refrigerators and furnace combustion air intakes because the critters seem especially attracted to the lingering smell of propane. Be sure to inspect these areas before using the appliances.

If your coach uses propane for the water heater and/or stovetop burners, you should take time to check their operation as well. After a long time in storage it usually takes several attempts for the burners and water heater to light, so be prepared for it to cycle several times before lighting. Of course the hot-water tank needs to be full of water before you turn on the water heater and this is true if you are using electricity or propane. After you finish testing all the propane-

In addition to checking the tires for proper cold inflation pressure, completely inspect the sidewalls for cracking as well.



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SPRING AT LAST

fueled devices, you should also check your fire extinguishers. Most of them have an on-board gauge or a printed expiration date. If in doubt, buy a new one before you go on your first trip. If all you have is the tiny little baby-size extinguisher that came in a recessed wall mount, do yourself a favor and buy a serious-size larger model as well.

After sitting all winter, the entire inside of the motorhome is likely in need of a full cleaning as well. This means all the floors, fixtures and cabinet faces, as well as the dash, closets and bathroom(s). This part of the cleanup is a lot easier if you previously did a thorough fall winterizing cleanup by removing all stray cooking oil splatters, grease on surfaces near the kitchen and the like. We prefer to use a disinfecting cleaner followed by a liberal use of a good air sanitizer. After that, you might also open all the exhaust vents and turn on the fans to pull in some fresh springtime air and get rid of that old, musty smell.

Speaking of air, don't forget to check the air pressure in all of the tires. Using a good quality tire pressure gauge, check each tire and bring it to the correct cold inflation pressure according to your axle weights. Usually, there is a chart inside your owner's manual that you can reference after you know the exact weight of your loaded motorhome. When in doubt, just inflate the tires to the recommended pressure on the vehicle's tire information placard. You should also carefully inspect the sidewalls of each tire and verify that the tires are still serviceable according to the Department of Transportation (DOT) date code. Most manufacturers suggest replacing tires every seven to 10 years, even if they are not showing signs of cracking.

The battery bay is another area that is prone to problems after extended storage. Inspect all the terminals for signs of corrosion and, if you are using flooded cell lead acid batteries, make sure you check the electrolyte level and add distilled water if needed. If you can't remember the last time you



Installation of a new water filter is always a good idea. This helps keep your drinking and cooking water fresh and clean. One easy way to make sure your water lines are purged of antifreeze is to fill up a white cup with the water from each faucet. The pink color can easily be seen this way and prevents you from not flushing the lines completely. Ice made from the icemaker can be placed in a white cup and inspected as well.

equalized the house batteries, it may be a good idea to refer to the owner's manual for your charger and equalize them now (gel cell batteries do not require equalization).

Even though many owners completely service their coach before storing it in the fall each year, it is always a good idea to check the engine oil, coolant level and transmission fluid levels. These are all routine things most people check often anyway, but it's been a long time since last fall and this ensures the engine is ready to go when you are. After you finish this basic check, start the engine and allow it to idle for 5-10 minutes. This gives you and a helper just enough time to check the brakelights and headlights as well as the turn signals.

A full spring cleanup can be accomplished in a few hours and is definitely worth the small investment in time now as opposed to waiting until you are off on a trip. Nothing spoils a trip faster than getting to a great new place and spending the first two days trying to get your coach operating properly or finding someone to do the repairs for you. It is so much easier and more convenient to follow these simple steps and then your vacation can be used for fun. **M**



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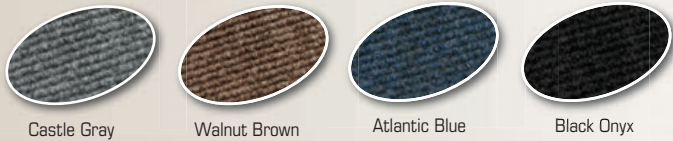
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By Bill and Jenn Gehr

Dish Aiming Made Easy

TV4RV tripod system takes the frustration out of finding a direct view to multiple satellites

It's not uncommon for a motorhome to be fitted with multiple TVs that have high-definition capability. In order to maximize the viewing experience, satellite companies have developed high-definition receivers with digital video recorders (DVRs) that are designed to save your favorite shows. To successfully record these programs, a more complicated satellite antenna is necessary in order to capture multiple satellite signals at the same time. For those who prefer using a freestanding dish, a stand is needed that allows for more intricate aiming at the satellites. One that has all the bells and whistles — and is fairly easy to use — is the TV4RV Heavy-Duty Satellite Dish Tripod Stand featuring the eZEE-AIM system.

After years of hands-on experimentation, H&G Enterprises created the TV4RV, a heavy-duty satellite dish tripod designed to provide a solid foundation for any satellite antenna. The tripod's aluminum legs are infinitely adjustable and adapt to the most challenging terrain. Each leg can be adjusted for height and spread in almost unlimited increments. And



Heavy-duty tripod made by H&G Enterprises is designed to support any style dish.

H&G's well-thought-out accessories make all the difference when setting up a dish.

High winds can create a serious problem with all portable dishes. If not weighted or tied down properly, satellite stands subjected to stronger than usual wind can sometimes crash to the ground and quite possibly bend or damage the long Low Noise Block

(LNB) arm just enough to render the dish inoperable. H&G has designed a high-wind kit that works with its tripod that will withstand some of the worst wind events you'll likely encounter and are tested to 50-plus mph.

The optional satellite aiming scope



The combo package comes with a heavy-duty nylon bag for easy storage.

will enable users to look for a clear path to the satellites in the sky, over or between trees and bushes. This cleverly designed option ensures that the signal will not be missed when rotating for the optimal azimuth setting by eliminating the four- to five-second delay before the signal reaches the receiver. In addition, using the aiming scope eliminates the need for someone to stand in front of the TV inside the motorhome, wait for the signal and relay that information to the person aiming the dish. Can you say, "marriage saver"?

Why are portable HD satellite dishes sometimes cumbersome and challenging to use? HD antennas utilize a triple LNB and a large, oval dish to find the multiple satellites needed to produce a top-quality picture. Nailing down three or more satellites is tougher than aiming a small round dish with a single LNB that only needs to find a single satellite.

Unfortunately, dome-type automatic satellite dishes and automatic portable dishes that are easier to use will not support a high-definition DVR. Winegard's roof-mounted TRAV'LER Series TV antenna is fully capable of supporting an HD DVR as well as multiple TVs, but it takes up quite a bit of real estate. And, while these automatic dishes work very efficiently, they still have to combat a common nemesis: trees. It



Above from left: H&G's cleverly designed high-wind kit will help the tripod withstand a 65-mph wind even when set up on hard surfaces. The compass is custom-made to fit into the head assembly of the heavy-duty tripod for easy azimuth settings.



may be possible to drive around and find a space that has a clear view of the satellites, but this task would not work well in a full campground.

This is where the TV4RV tripod really shines. It can be easily moved to a remote location beyond obstructions that block the view to the satellites. It's almost impossible to aim large oval dishes with triple LNBs with a basic tripod with no markings for coordinates. Thankfully, the TV4RV directions are well thought out and easy to follow, especially for the critical initial setup. Optimal signal strength during this process will ensure quicker setup in the future.

To test the TV4RV tripod, we found a suitable location through a thick stand of trees using the compass set at 135 degrees (the azimuth coordinate for the area where we were parked). The tripod was set on the dirt and grass terrain and adjusted using the bubble level supplied

in the kit. Next, the optional satellite aiming scope was set at the required 35 degrees of elevation. Checking for obstructions, the scope was rotated 10 degrees left or right on the eZEE-AIM scale mounted on the top of the tripod. Satisfied that the line of sight for satellite signal was clear, the tripod was leveled while spreading the legs to the required 30- to 36-inch diameter. After rechecking the compass for azimuth (making sure there were no metal objects nearby that could affect the reading), the metal tripod leg spikes were driven into the ground using the foot pedal.

The next step — tying down the tripod — can be done using several methods depending on the terrain or surface. For this application, the ground screw stake and the supplied chain or a bungee cord can be used to tie down the mast assembly. H&G has a kit for concrete as well. The index



Below from left: Set the degrees of elevation and this custom aiming scope will enable you to check for obstructions in the line of sight. A solid aluminum machined mast is designed to fit a 2- or 1-5/8-inch bracket as well as supporting up to 35 pounds. The heavy-duty tripod has an infinite amount of adjustment for each leg, thus making the leveling process fast and easy.



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Above from left: The heavy-duty bungee and tie-down stake secure the tripod in even the softest of dirt. Carefully set the dish onto the mast for the initial setup and follow the directions carefully. H&G's custom signal finder eliminates the need for the help of another person during the aiming process.

line on the mast was then aligned to the centerline of the eZEE-AIM scale. Lastly, the dish assembly was placed on the mast.

After setting the skew/tilt at 90 degrees and rotating the center of the LNB arm over the index mark line on the mast, the elevation is set for the

location. This process allows for signal fine-tuning from the main satellite (101 for DirecTV or 119 for DISH) by rotating the dish left or right on the mast assembly. Once the maximum signal is indicated on the signal finder, the bolts can be tightened to secure the dish to the mast assembly. The dish and

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most assemblies will remain clamped together as one unit when removed from the tripod.

The signal finder is then disconnected and the skew set. This will allow you to read the signal strength of all satellites on the receiver. We easily dialed in a signal strength of 94, which provided fantastic HD picture quality — in an area that would have been problematic for a rooftop dish.

The portability of this system is certainly convenient but that also means it's portable for the bad guys. Consider using a locking cable of some type that you can attach to a tree, water pipe, chain-link fence hardware or some other secure object. It's good to be able to move the unit to a spot with a great satellite view but that may also be a distance from your RV so security is a consideration.

There is no question that the TV4RV satellite dish tripod system and accessories will make finding a signal easy and efficient, whether you have a basic dish



with a single LNB or a large oval dish with multiple LNBs. TV4RV's website includes a newsletter link that contains many helpful suggestions and modifications to aid in setting up a satellite dish. With a little practice, it's easy to become proficient using this high-quality

portable system. It retails for \$159.95 and comes with a carrying bag. **M**

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2015 AND BEYOND

The annual Recreation Vehicle Industry Association Show highlighted motorhomes both big and small, plus a host of exciting technologies

Elkhart, Indiana, and its surrounding suburbs are to RVs what Detroit is to automobiles, with more than 80 percent of the market coming from this essentially rural area. But every November, just after Thanksgiving, Louisville, Kentucky, becomes an RV mecca unto itself, as thousands of RVs and dozens of manufacturers roll into town for the annual Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) trade show. Everything from small Class B's to \$1 million-plus luxury coaches are on display, and every year we're amazed at the creativity and ingenuity demonstrated by the manufacturers. The RV industry is enjoying great success and the result is a dizzying array of products and floorplans to choose from. Here are just a few:



High-gloss hardwood cabinetry creates a warm, rich atmosphere throughout the Allegiance. A porcelain tile floor and Aqua-Hot hydronic heating are standard.

American Allegiance

Allied Recreation Group (ARG), unveiled the American Coach American Allegiance diesel pusher as a 2016 model. "We really felt this was the absolute right time for the relaunch of the American Allegiance," commented Lenny Razo, director. "We've been watching over the last year and what we wanted to do was bring out a brand that offers more features than competitive products at a lower price point."

Key to that goal was making the Allegiance a "standard" coach, with almost everything included. "We're talking about a full Aqua-Hot 450 hydronic heating system, integrated Girard awnings, all new front caps and LED lighting. This thing is just packed with features." The Allegiance will be available in floorplans from 39 to 42 feet, with a price range of \$410,000 to \$430,000.

Coachmen RV Orion P24RB

Add Coachmen RV to the growing number of RV manufacturers building a Class B+ motorhome on the front-wheel drive Ram ProMaster chassis. The Middlebury, Indiana-based division of Forest River debuted the Orion P24RB, powered by a V-6 Pentastar 3.6-liter gas engine. The Orion features a rear bath and a drop-down queen bed over the living area — and is expected to be used more as a touring coach than an RV. “Orion buyers aren’t necessarily going to be RVers or weekenders, but it’s more of a situation where they’re going to be driving from their house in Michigan to their house in Arizona and they want to be able to have a restroom and cook and pull over and sleep if they want to,” said Mike Bear, Coachmen RV’s president of Class B and C motorhomes. The mostly standard Orion starts at \$86,000, and its fuel economy is estimated at 16-18 mpg.

The Coachmen Orion was designed for economical, comfortable touring with most of the floorplan dedicated to living space. A queen-size bed drops down over the living area for overnight stops.



Dynamax DX3

Featuring a completely re-engineered Freightliner M2 chassis exclusive to Dynamax, the all-new DX3 Class A motorhome made its debut in Louisville.

The new chassis is “much lighter, much less costly, and it’s still a better frame than what we had,” said Jim Jacobs, president of Dynamax, a division of Forest River. The weight and cost savings allowed Dynamax to add a number of features to the unit with a modest price increase of about \$5,000. A handful of those features include an Aqua-Hot hydronic heating system, dual 18,000-Btu ducted A/C units with heat pumps, porcelain tile flooring, quartz solid-surface countertops, an 8,000-watt Onan diesel generator and a 3,000-watt inverter. In addition, the DX3 now boasts Carefree Mirage roof-mounted integrated awnings with LED lighting. A total of five 2016 floorplans will be available with an MSRP of around \$289,000.



Tiffin Allegro Bus 450 OP

Tiffin displayed its Allegro Bus with a new chassis and a new floorplan. Previously built on its own PowerGlide chassis, the new Allegro Bus is on the 600-horsepower Freightliner chassis, which expedited Tiffin’s efforts to bring this new coach to market. The bath-and-a-half OP floorplan is open from front to rear, and offers LusterSheen cabinetry, an L-shaped sofa, a two-cushion sofa, dinette and computer workstation. The large master suite offers an elongated ottoman for a comfy

seating area, and the rear bath is level with the main floor. In addition to its cabinets, Tiffin fabricates all the countertops, sinks and even the shower in its Bus models for a precision fit and unique appearance.

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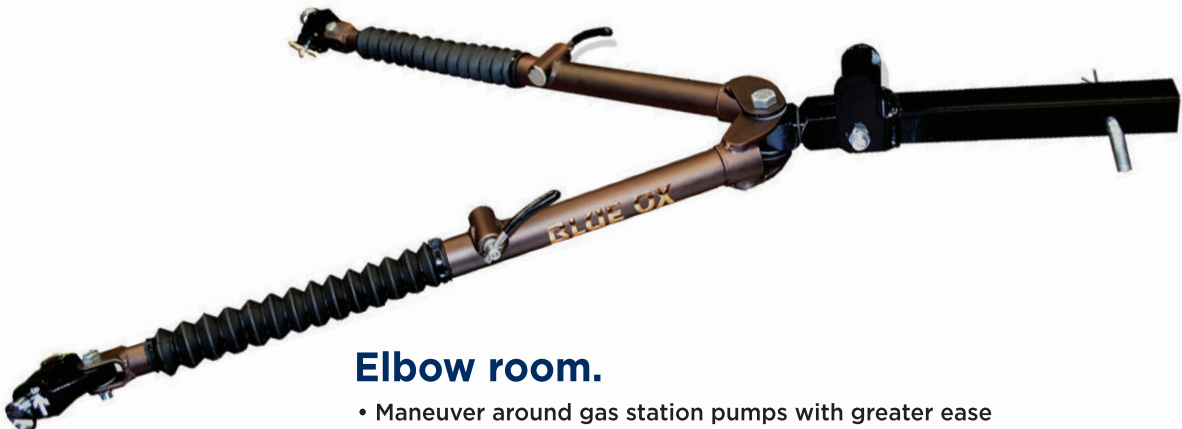


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Holiday Rambler TREK

The original TREK Class A motorhome had an almost cultlike following of fans who appreciated its compact dimensions and generous living area. Now it's back. "What we've done with the 2016 TREK is focus on the outdoor enthusiast — that younger demographic that really wants to get outdoors, go to national parks and doesn't want a 35- or 40-foot rig," said Steven Hileman, director of marketing for Allied Recreation Group. "They want a 26-footer that they can take just about anywhere, but that gives them more space than you'd typically

get in 26 feet." The TREK features a "TREK Room," a queen-size, walk-around bed in the rear that can disappear into the ceiling to reveal a seating area. It also features a "TREK Trunk," a 3-by-4½-foot luggage door on the back that lifts up just like the trunk on an SUV or an automobile and enables you to put large items in the back of the motorhome.

Built on a Ford chassis with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 16,000 pounds, the TREK offers features like solid-surface countertops, full-body paint, a side-view camera package and more. Initially



offered in one floorplan at around \$100,000, the company says more floorplans will be offered if there is sufficient demand.

Newmar Dutch Star 3736

Newmar's Dutch Star lineup has been revised for the 2015 model year, with upgrades such as a Girard awning integrated into the roofline, new front and rear caps, and other details. But the big news is the new 3736 floorplan, which is designed to feel a lot larger than it is. "Basically

what we have to offer the consumer is a luxurious diesel that's under 40 feet, but still offers a full-wall slide on the street side, plus an opposing slide and a bedroom slide," said John Monterusso, product trainer for Newmar Corp. "When you walk in, it's not uncommon to feel like you're in



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a 40-42 foot, and you're getting the luxuries that people are accustomed to in a big tag-axle unit." The bath-and-a-half floorplan offers a sofa bed on the street side, opposing love seat, residential refrigerator, standard queen bed, washer/dryer and more. Built on the Freightliner SLR 450 chassis with Newmar Comfort Drive, the new floorplan carries an MSRP of \$384,000.

NEWGLE IT!

Anyone who owns a motorhome, particularly one that's several years old, knows how hard it can be to find replacement parts, or to get help finding the source of an aggravating problem. Newmar's Newgle attempts to solve this problem, at least for Newmar owners. "Newgle is Newmar's knowledge base with the power of Google search," explained Tim Bergman, service technical communications coordinator and applications administrator for Newmar Corp. "We've taken the knowledge and information about our coaches, and their systems and components, and we've put that in the knowledge base." Right now, says Bergman, Newgle features more than 3,500 pages and is manned by a full-time team of people who are dedicated to constantly adding information to it. The company is also working with its suppliers and component manufacturers to get them involved in helping to maintain and add information. "So far, all of them that we've spoken with, have said, 'We're 100 percent behind you guys, how can we be involved, how can we help?' The response has been overwhelming." Initially rolled out for techs within Newmar, Newgle has since been opened up to dealers and Newmar service centers everywhere. So far, 2014 and 2015 are complete, with more to come. "It's a living organism," said Bergman. "And we have the ability to constantly add and update it."

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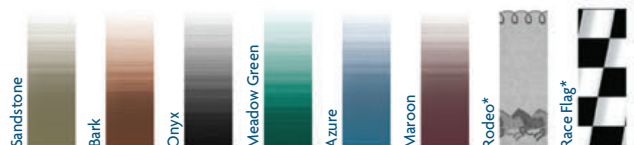
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Newmar London Aire 4503

After a seven-year hiatus, Newmar's London Aire tag-axle diesel-pusher motorhome makes its return for 2015 with three 45-foot floorplans, each powered by a 600-horsepower Cummins ISX engine on a Freightliner chassis. "When we last built the London Aire, it was at the top end of our lineup," explained Monterusso. "Now it's the starting point of our luxury lineup." With a base MSRP of \$570,732, the London Aire sure doesn't look less expensive than the more upscale Essex or King Aire, offering the beautiful handmade cabinetry and overall workmanship the company is known for. "If you go through all three (of the models) and compare, you'll see that this is a totally different look — much more contemporary than a traditional Newmar product," Monterusso added.

Roadtrek CS Adventurous XL

There are a lot of Sprinter-based Class B motorhomes on the market, but this particular one has an interesting twist. "The big thing on this unit is the lithium battery package, which offers 20,000 watts of power," explained Jeff Stride, director of operations and engineering at Kichener, Ontario, Canada-based Roadtrek. "It uses an undermount air conditioner, which gave us the ability to install 650 watts of solar panels on the roof." With an underhood generator, Stride says the CS Adventurous is for those who want to boondock for days on end and be totally self-sufficient. "People want quiet operation, all the amenities and lots of power. That's what we've achieved with this unit." The CS Adventurous XL with the Lithium package and power supply will carry an MSRP of about \$180,000 USD. **M**

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By Bob Livingston

ENDLESS HOT WATER

German manufacturer, Truma, has introduced the AquaGo, an instant water heater specifically designed for American RVs



It's another beautiful morning in your favorite campground. The sun's rays are shining through the edges of the pull-down shades, birds are chirping and the aroma from the first cup of coffee permeates the interior. Time to hop in the shower to get the day going. Water is spraying at a comfy temperature, air guitar humming away and the lyrics of your favorite song fill the bathroom acoustics. And then the song is suddenly interrupted by an agonizing screech, "The water's cold!"

Sound familiar? Most RVers have learned to deal with the limited quantity of hot water, especially those with 6-gallon water heaters, and no matter how judiciously the occupants practice conservation, there are times when there's just not enough hot water. Case in point: When showering back to back with the lady of the house, er ... coach, and she wants to wash her long, thick hair.

The solution, of course, would be an appliance that provides unlimited hot water on demand — and Truma, Europe's leading provider of heating and water systems for RVs, has introduced one. The AquaGo is a new product designed and listed (certified) specifically for use in the U.S.

What makes the AquaGo so unique is its ability to be retrofitted, without body modifications, into any motorhome with an existing 6-, 10- or 12-gallon water heater. Fit and finish are precise and the water heater has gone through countless hours of engineering and manufacturing scrutiny

by highly trained experts. It's made in Germany, where precision is as much a pastime as it is a passion. And it shows. The AquaGo is a very sophisticated device that's assembled with high-tech and finely crafted componentry. Each step of the manufacturing process is monitored carefully; the major components are bar coded and logged into a computer program that tracks the individual unit via a unique serial number. At the end of the line, every water heater is tested and receives the final labeling only if it passes rigorous protocol.

Water is heated by an LP-gas-fired

burner, which is activated via a volume-flow sensor that detects an open faucet. The electronics, gas valve and flue fan operate on 12-volt DC power and temperature is regulated not to exceed 120 degrees Fahrenheit, a level that is hot, but won't scald skin unless the body is exposed to the water for more than five minutes. Since the hot water is mixed with cold, there should never be an issue with skin scalding.

A specially designed exterior cover with a ventilation grid allows fresh air to flow into the burner and exhaust gas to exit the water heater. A number of safety devices have been built into the AquaGo, including flame monitoring, low-voltage shutdown, over-current protection, flue fan monitoring and the aforementioned temperature stabilization. There's even freeze protection built into some models.

Truma offers three AquaGo models. The Basic unit is just that; it has an on/off switch and provides water on demand. Hot water will likely flow behind some cold water, depending on the distance from the water heater to the open faucet. With a step up to the Comfort model, users have a choice of

an “Eco” or “Comfort” mode. The “Eco” mode functions like the Basic model but when the switch is in the “Comfort” position, water is automatically held at 102 F, which makes hot water available more rapidly. This model has freeze protection so water is always held higher than 41 F, regardless of the mode.

A comfort-plus model will only be offered as an OEM product, since it requires specialized plumbing where the hot water is constantly circulated throughout the system. For this model, hot water at full operating temperature will be available instantaneously at all the faucets and showerhead.

When operating in the “Comfort” mode, boondockers need to be aware that the water heater will draw 2.5 amps to keep the water at constant 102 F and will continue to use propane, although in small amounts. Nevertheless, it’s best to keep the switch in the “Eco” position when 12-volt DC power is being conserved.

Serviceability really got our attention. To drain the water from the tank, a clever snout (Easy Drain Lever) is simply released and folded down so the water, which will flow automatically, can be directed into a bucket. No muss, no fuss. And to make things even more practical, a reusable filter can be pulled out from the open Easy Drain Lever and cleaned when necessary.

Troubleshooting is done with the aid of a computer and dealers will have a special device that connects to the water heater and reads out potential issues on the screen. Dealers who have been thoroughly trained by Truma and have mastered the installation and service procedures will be authorized to sell the AquaGo. The Basic model retails for \$1,099 and the Comfort model sells for \$1,199.

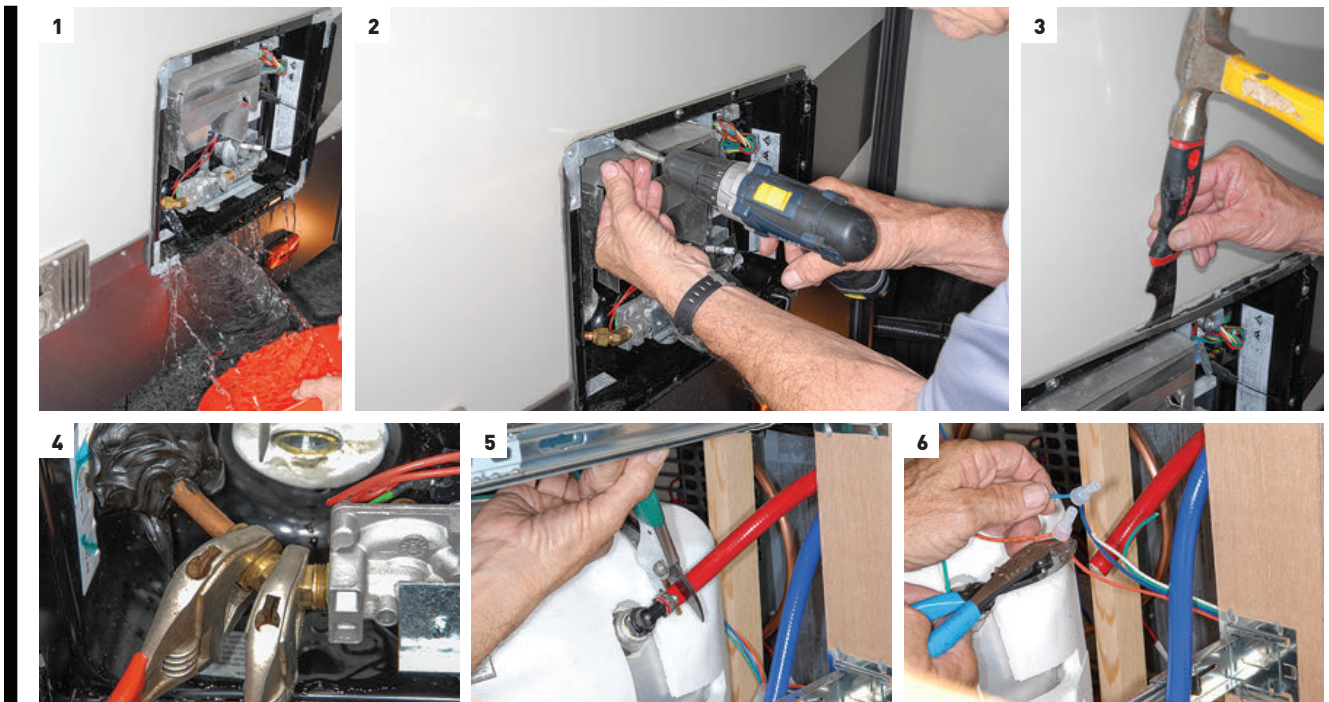
After attending training sessions at the Truma campus outside of Munich, Germany, and field testing the

AquaGo in a motorhome at a popular campground near the Austrian border, we installed a Comfort model in a rig at home that was originally fitted with a 6-gallon water heater.

Having endless hot water (as long as the RV is hooked up to city water and sewer, of course) was heavenly. It was actually hard to break the habit of shutting off the water flow to the showerhead while soaping down because we’ve been indoctrinated to conserve hot water for so long. When hooked up, we leave the switch on “Comfort” to get hot water faster, but in reality, the wait time in the “Eco” mode is not a big deal.

While we were impressed with the German engineering and the high-quality components, we loved the fact that the AquaGo is very quiet when operating and that the neighbors no longer have to endure the roar of the burner in our previous hot-water tank.

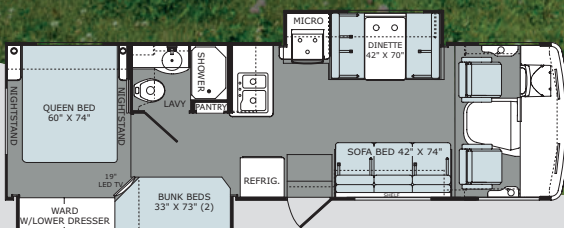
The swap took less than two hours; here’s how the process went:



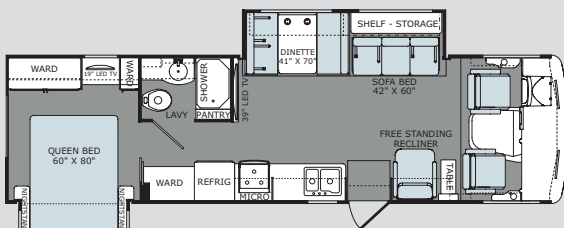
[1] Nylon plug is removed from the original 6-gallon water heater to drain the tank. Opening pressure relief valve facilitates the draining process, which can be a messy affair. [2] Mounting screws are removed to release original water-heater housing from the side wall of the RV. [3] Scraping tool and hammer make it easier to break the putty seal between the original water heater and RV side wall. [4] The LP-gas line is disconnected from the original water heater. Notice big blob of sealer, which is required to close hole around LP-gas line. This prevents gas from entering the inside of the coach, but can be difficult to remove. [5] Hot- and cold-water lines are disconnected before removing the original water heater. In this case flexible hose and barbed fittings were used instead of Pex lines and screw-on fittings. It was easier to cut the hose rather than pry it off stubborn barbs. [6] Power wires are also cut before the original water heater can be removed from the RV.



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ON-DEMAND WATER HEATER INSTALLATION



[7] Once all hoses and wires are free, the water heater is pulled out. This was a relatively new water heater so the sealer was still pretty gooey. [8] Scraping tool is used to remove old sealing material. The tool can easily scratch surrounding gelcoat, so go slow and use light pressure.



[9] The access-door assembly comes in white, but can be painted if desired. We chose semigloss black paint to match the other exterior accessories. [10] A multimeter is used to confirm wire polarity before connecting to the AquaGo.



[11] A special installation frame takes up the gap left by the larger, original water-heater housing. Butyl tape is applied to outer and inner edges. [12] Installation frame is screwed into the wall using provided stainless-steel screws.



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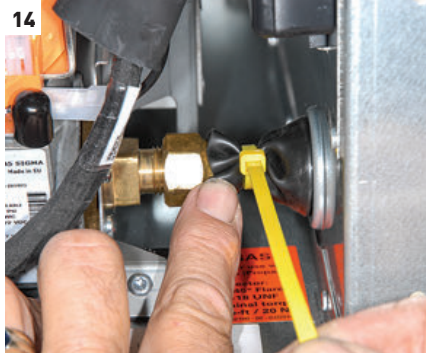
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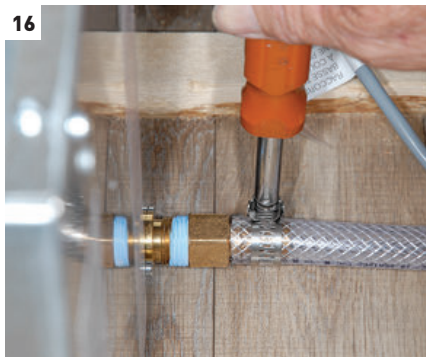
Detmers Manufacturing, Circle 113 on Reader Service Card



[13] Butyl tape is used to seal the AquaGo to the installation frame. [14] Rather than use another blob of silicone to seal the gap around the propane line, Truma has devised a unique grommet that's compressed with a yellow cable tie (provided).



[15] For this particular installation, a brass elbow and barb fitting were needed to accommodate the existing hot-water hose routing. [16] An extension hose (reinforced) was used to hook up the cold-water line to a straight barb fitting. Fittings are not provided with the kit.



[17] Once the AquaGo is securely in place, the LP-gas supply is opened and the connection at the new water heater is tested for leaks using a soapy water solution. [18] Cover assembly is screwed into installation frame; fit is very good so additional putty tape or sealer is not needed.





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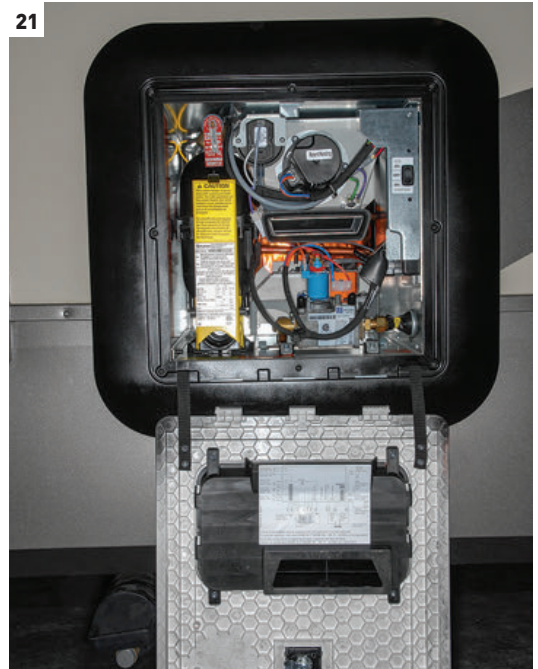
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ON-DEMAND WATER HEATER INSTALLATION



19



21



20

[19, 20, 21] Finished cover assembly has a modern look; vented door opens easily and provides complete access to serviceable components.



22



23



24

[22] Switches that control “Eco” and “Comfort” modes are located behind the access panel. [23] Easy Drain Lever is released and pulled down to drain the AquaGo, directing water into bucket — without a mess. [24] Water-inlet filter pulls out when drain is open. Reusable filter can be rinsed with water to remove debris. **M**

By Dennis Brewer



AUTOMATED INTELLIGENCE

How to remotely control 120-volt AC circuits, lights and appliances in a motorhome using Z-Wave technologies

One of the features of today's custom homes and high-end bus conversions is automation, or the ability to control just about anything from one place, even when you're not actually present. These convenient home automation features are available to anyone, not just technology geeks or the wealthy. Any experienced DIYer with a few hundred dollars for controllers, control modules and some time can begin to automate some of the 120-volt AC lighting and appliance circuits, and many other electronic features in any motorhome. This article will cover an example of one of the home automation technologies available — Z-Wave. Alternative technologies that can be easily integrated into a motorhome include traditional X-10, versatile UPB and the flexible Insteon product line.

Z-Wave does not require any control wiring and can operate 120-volt AC devices using a convenient hand-held portable remote control such as the Intermatic model HA09

shown in Photo 1. This remote can separately control any six control modules, one per button such as the HA05 lamp control module shown in Photo 2, or up to 16 modules can be included and turned on and off by a single button. This flexibility makes Z-Wave a good choice for a motorhome, as there are typically far less than 96 circuits or devices to control.

Z-Wave does not require the addition of control wires because it uses digitally encoded radio waves to control modules that end-use devices are plugged into. These are specifically "joined" into the controller's Z-Wave network. Z-Wave control modules can be found in a generous number of device types that include these popular categories: duplex receptacles, appliance modules, plug-in outdoor lighting control modules, relay switch modules, wall switches, programmable thermostats, lamp dimmer modules, door locks, home security control kits, screw-in lamp controls and a controlled power strip. There are about

1,000 products that can be controlled by Z-Wave signals.

Regardless of the technology chosen, there are three popular options for automated control of household circuits. The first is a touch remote control like the one already shown. The next is time-based controls that use a time reference for switching circuits on and off using a product like the Intermatic controller Model HA07 shown in Photo 3.

Time-based controllers are very useful, as you can set an on and off time and forget it while leaving the control to operate the circuits at predetermined times.

The third option is using home control software loaded on a computer and connecting a controller adapter interface to the computer's serial or USB port. This third option can facilitate voice control and using if-then action control based on sensors that communicate with the computer to execute command scripts to the device controllers. Time-based commands are also facilitated by computer software control. Additionally, a computer can be set up as a web host to interface with Wi-Fi pad devices to extend control via the Wi-Fi pad device, notebook computer, or Apple, Droid, or Windows smartphones. Computer-control interface adapters are available for UPB, X-10, Z-Wave and Insteon.

One popular item for a motorhome owner to control remotely or automatically is outdoor lighting, such as rope

lights surrounding an outdoor carpet or novelty lights draped on the awning rails. Here's another useful example: Often, we stay in locations over the winter where temperatures occasionally drop below 32 degrees Fahrenheit. In order to counter these temperatures, I use a heat-taped water supply hose and have installed two 750-watt space heaters in the "basement" of my motorhome. One heater is located near the on-board 12-volt DC water pump and filter, and another in the street water and sewer connection compartment. I can control all three of these circuits remotely with Z-Wave. I can connect a remote control or the Z-Wave control adapter to my home automation computer using Home Automated Living software product called HAL. You do not need a computer to enjoy the benefits of home automation controls, but it does add a cool factor.

To show how easy it is to set up Z-Wave technology to control appliance circuits and lights in your motorhome, the rest of the article will run through the main steps to set up a lamp control. Z-Wave appliance or outlet modules can be set up in the same manner.

To get started, you must first set up a small Z-Wave network. You will need to have one controller and a device control module for each of the appliances or lights you would like to control. You can use any type of device control module, such as duplex outlet module installed in an outlet box, or a screw-in lamp or plug-in appliance module. The lamp controllers are different from the appliance control modules in that the lamp modules are dimmable, while the appliance modules have only on or off capability. Be sure to select a control module of sufficient wattage to handle the bulbs or appliance you intend to control and do not use dimmable lamp modules to control appliances or fluorescent lighting.

Follow the manufacturer's specific instructions included with the device to create a Z-Wave control network; the instructions could vary based on the equipment you use. The process is fairly simple and generally tracks the



[1] This Z-Wave remote controller can turn lights and appliances on or off when they are networked with Z-Wave control modules. [2] Incandescent lamp control modules such as this one can include a dimming feature. [3] This control can relate action events to time or the on/off buttons can be used. [4] The include button on the control is pressed and held while the control module is set to program mode.

pattern that follows next using the Intermatic remote and a lamp control module shown earlier.

First, the remote control requires batteries for power, so install those and press any button on the remote and watch for any of the indicator lights to light up demonstrating that the remote control is working.

To prevent chaos and provide some security to your control devices, Z-Wave requires that a controller and each control module be "joined" to a home network. This helps prevent a nearby controller from turning off your lights. Creating a network sounds complicated, but the process is fairly simple. The control module needs to be plugged into an outlet, or in the case of a lamp module, screwed into a socket so that the module is powered and can function.

The target device control module is required to be placed in "join"

mode. Usually, you just press a button on the module causing it to flash a light indicating "join" mode [be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions specifically for the device]. The controller, such as the remote, needs to be close to the control module so it can "see" that the control module is ready to join the network — usually less than 6 feet as the signal is very low power. Later on, the separation can be greater since each device repeats the commands carrying the signal to the last device and the actual control signals are stronger. As mentioned earlier, the control module is powered by plugging into a wall outlet, or in the case of a lamp module, screwed into a lamp socket. The appliance or lamp is then plugged into the module to provide a load and an indication that the control module is operating correctly.

Select a numbered button from

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one to six on the remote to set a channel for controlling the device by pressing the on and off buttons at the same time. Both the red and green buttons for that number (1) will flash for ten seconds. During that 10 seconds, you'll have to press the "include" button and hold it down on the remote controller shown in Photo 4 while the "program button" on the lamp module is pressed to set it in "join" mode. A green light will flash both on the remote and the modules, indicating that the process of joining the network was a success. If the device did not attach, the process is repeated once or twice until success is achieved. It may take a few attempts to get all your control modules included because of the limited time the remotes stay in the include mode. With a little practice, it becomes easier and loading a remote with a half dozen control modules, one on each channel button, can be done in less than a half-hour.

Photo 7 shows the remote being held close to the lamp module during the join process. Also, the proximity facilitates an easy view of the indicator lights so you can receive feedback on the process and device state.

Repeat this process for each control module you want to include in that network. Once the control modules are joined to the network, the controller can remotely control the modules by pressing the on or off button associated with that device or



[5] The HA02 module plugs into a grounded power outlet and can control 1,000 watts of lighting or a 1,500-watt resistive load such as a heater, coffeemaker or toaster. [6] On the top of the module is an indicator light and a control switch, which can be used to override and force on or off status.

group of devices.

Z-Wave also supports the use of a secondary controller brought into the network after the primary controller has joined all of the modules. A button sequence is pressed on each controller as directed by the manufacturers' instructions. This button sequence, when performed properly, transmits all the primary control information to a secondary controller. The secondary controller can only control; do not attempt to use it to add or delete modules. Always make changes, includes, or deletes on the primary and transfer the data to the secondary.

Many other single technology and proprietary implementations are readily available for providing automation in a coach. The key that unlocks future flexibility involves using a computer and software platform that provides the ability for controlling

devices that are either open standards or are consortium-based with many manufacturers providing products and devices. One award-winning software that makes it possible to use UPB, Insteon, X-10, Z-Wave and other technologies from a single computer platform and user interface is HAL from www.automatedliving.com. The starting level software is HALbasic, which can be downloaded for \$89 at the Automated Living website.

To use HAL software, you will need a Windows computer, preferably with Windows 7 or 8 (32 bit), with at least one available serial port or one free USB port for connecting your choices of controller types (X-10, UPB, Insteon, or Z-Wave) to a 120-volt AC outlet. To use a Wi-Fi device to remotely execute the command via computer, a Wi-Fi network card needs to be built in or installed.

For more information about home automation check out the informative videos at www.automatedliving.com. To begin your product search, log on to www.smarthome.com. To learn more about Z-Wave, visit www.z-wave.com.

Consider installing automation features to eliminate manually controlling those things you might consider inconvenient as mentioned earlier, such as outdoor lighting or appliances. Then, move on to add control of other devices and circuits that fit your preferences and save time and/or energy. It is amazing what can be done for just a few hundred dollars per project. **M**



[7] A successful join is noted when the green light blinks twice on this model of remote control.

Source

Z-Wave, www.z-wave.com

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Multiuse Prop

All of the doors to the outside storage compartments on my motorhome are hinged at the top and swing up, except for the one with the water heater vent. That door doesn't have a built-in pneumatic prop rod (the door is hinged at the top and swings up, but there is no mechanism to keep it in the open position) so I made a prop stick to hold it open in order to access the water heater for burner service and tank draining.

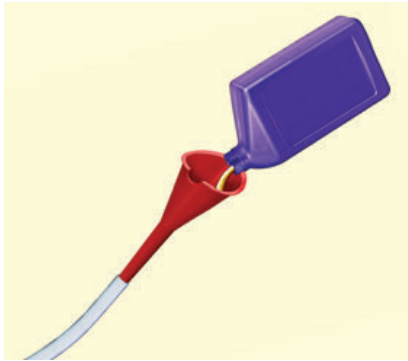
I made the prop stick from 2-by-2-inch wood. It looks somewhat like a large letter "T" and only took about 30 minutes to fabricate. I cut the top piece slightly shorter than the door width and the lower piece long enough to keep the door open at a 90-degree angle. It functions well, but you have to avoid bumping into it while working on the water heater. This device could also be made using 2-inch PVC piping with a T-fitting.

I have found two other uses for the prop. My other



outside compartment doors have struts; I use the prop stick to take the load off them when they need service or replacement. And, I use it to support my queen bed to service the internal slideout mechanism underneath it.

Edward Phillips | Greers Ferry, Arkansas

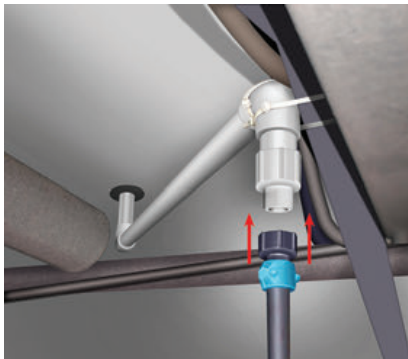


Oil-Filler Helper

Many owners of Class A motorhomes find it difficult to replace, or even add, a quart or two of oil during a trip. Engine platforms are generally built for trucks with hoods so the oil filler tubes are hard to access in many coaches. The oil filler tube in my 2011 Fleetwood Southwind is about 4 inches from the top of the engine compartment, and the space limitation makes it almost impossible for me to add oil.

I found that an inexpensive way to resolve the problem is to buy a 3-foot length of clear plastic tubing and a funnel. Attach the funnel to one end and insert the other into the oil filler tube. The two insert plugs are used to stop oil leakage from the tube while in storage. Total cost was less than \$8.

Thomas Michalski | St. Petersburg, Florida



Waste Not, Want Not

After we return home from a trip and drain/clean the black- and gray-water tanks, I have a plan for the remaining fresh water. I added a couple of sections of PVC pipe to the drain and installed a hose fitting to the end. Then I hook up a garden hose and drain the remaining fresh water on my wife's garden or trees. Don't just dump; make use of what's carried home.

David Corrasa | Payson, Arizona 



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By Bob Livingston

PLUMBING

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Difficulty: 1/10

Taking a shower in a motorhome can be a less-than-invigorating experience. Most of the showerheads supplied by motorhome builders struggle to provide a stream of water strong enough to wash the soap off our bodies, without letting the water run for what seems like an eternity. Throw in the limited amount of hot water in most motorhomes, and showering can be a real challenge, especially while washing long hair. Ecocamel's Jetstorm shower wand can liven things up and conserve water at the same time.

The Jetstorm was developed in Australia after thousands of hours of testing, and it uses a pretty simple principle to make it function as advertised: It forces air into the water stream. Air enters the handle through small holes and turbulence is created as the air and water mix. The spinning process increases the pressure inside the wand. And water flow is restricted to a maximum of 2.1 gallons per minute, a specification that, as you'll see later, is more significant when hooked up to city water.

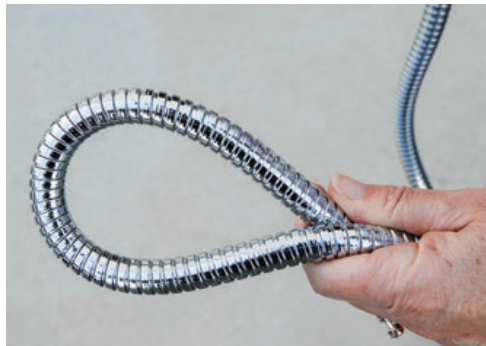
Admittedly, my first impression of a "water-saving" showerhead was met with a little skepticism. I've seen these devices come and go over the years and only a few pass muster. This one works really well, but you can't get hung up on flow rate or the amount of water that passes through the showerhead. Let me explain.

Before I installed the wand in a motorhome shower, I swapped the showerhead in my house for the Jetstorm

Fixed showerhead is designed to work in showers where a wand is not used.

fixed-head version. The house shower was originally fitted with a high-end German-made showerhead that provided a good stream of water. The difference was dramatic, with the Jetstorm head outperforming the original by leaps and bounds. What used to require "full throttle" on the flow valve was reduced to less than a quarter turn.

We then tested the wand in real-world RV conditions, without hookups, comparing the flow rate of the standard showerhead with the Jetstorm. After adjusting the hot and cold valves for personal comfort, the numbers revealed that the Jetstorm actually used more water: The generic showerhead flowed at 98 ounces per minute and the Jetstorm used 144 ounces per minute, via the demand water pump. But the stream of water from the stock showerhead was anemic when compared to the Jetstorm. It took less than half the time to take a good shower — and the difference was even greater when washing long hair. From a practical standpoint, even though the flow rate was technically higher with the Jetstorm wand, it's safe to assume that the new showerhead, in fact, will ultimately save water. Of course, all bets are off if the improved spray of water lures users into lingering in the shower. Using a quality single-lever mixing valve — rather than the cheesy two-handle plastic one that comes in most RVs — will impact water consumption because flow can be adjusted (reduced) more effectively without wasting water to control



From far left: The shut-off valve, attached to the end of the showerhead wand, can be used to conserve water. Air that mixes with water enters through two holes above the shut-off valve. The stainless-steel hose is extra flexible so the showerhead wand can be moved freely.



The stream of water is wide and full. As a side benefit, the use of the Jetstorm eliminated the hot-water jolt experienced previously when using a shut-off valve.

temperature. The Jetstorm spray is so efficient it's not necessary to run at near or full pressure, which was required during the test due to the rudimentary two-handle mixer valve.

The stream of water was not only stronger and wider, but the feeling on our bodies was soothing with just enough force to wake up our pores; unlike some water-saving showerheads, there was no stinging. Ecocamel claims the experience is better because the water droplets are lighter and softer so they burst on our skin easily and the water soaks in rather than splashing on the shower stall walls. Not being a scientist in the field, I'll acquiesce to its technical description, supported by the reduced overspray on the glass shower enclosure.

Installation is a no-brainer; simply unscrew the old showerhead and hook up the new one. Each hand-held wand comes with a nice stainless-steel hose that, unlike the cumbersome plastic

counterparts typically supplied by the coachbuilder, is flexible and easy to handle. The fixed-head version can be used in showers that are so equipped.

Build quality is very good and the faceplate has rubber nodules that can be wiped clean to prevent lime scale buildup. We used the showerhead at home every day for months and normal scale buildup due to horrendously hard water was not evident. Our only concern when it came to using the showerhead in the motorhome was the lack of a shut-off valve to further conserve water. After a conversation with the company rep, a shut-off valve (\$4.95), which works very smoothly, is now offered.

The Jetstorm wand or fixed-head model sells for \$39.95 and can be purchased from the company's online store. The showerhead swap was an eye-opening experience, literally. **M**

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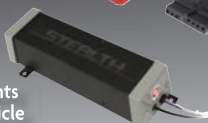


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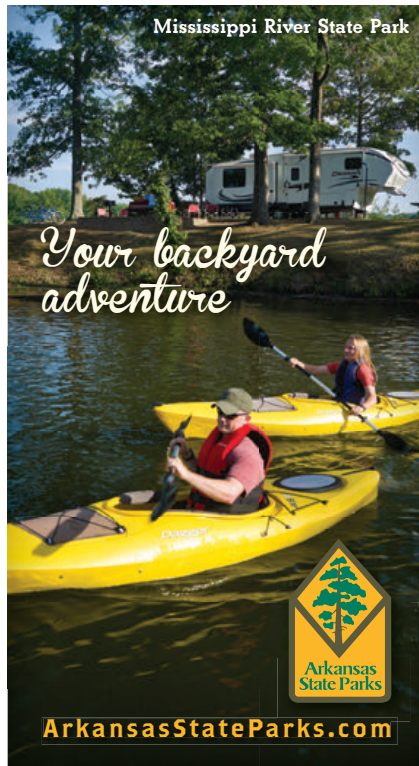
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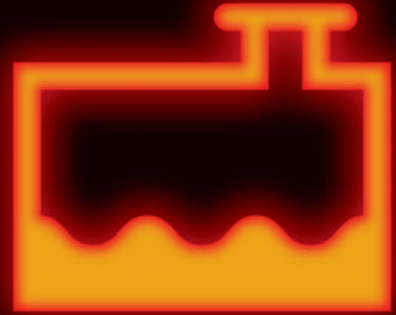
By Ken Freund

Diesel Loses Power

Q We have a 40-foot 2010 Itasca Meridian with the 360-horsepower Cummins ISC 8.3-liter turbocharged diesel engine. A couple of times this past year, while driving and nearing the top of a grade, the “low coolant” indicator has come on. Upon inspection, the coolant level was normal. Recently, while going up the long Interstate 15 westbound grade by the Nevada-California state line, the low coolant indicator came on again, but this time after several miles of going uphill and nearing the top of the grade, the engine went into “safe mode.” While I had power for steering and braking, there was no response to the accelerator. Is there an interconnection with the low coolant sensor, which seems to be defective, and the shutting down of the power in the engine?

Jim Swinford | Carpinteria, California

A Yes, and many diesel engines have protection circuits that reduce power or shut down the engine if the coolant level is too low or coolant temperature is too high. In addition, low oil pressure will trigger the same response. If coolant level is actually correct, then the coolant-level sensor is probably faulty and needs to be replaced. Your coach is on a Freightliner chassis and its dealers should be able to take care of that for you.



Loses Power Intermittently

Q We own a 2006 Fleetwood Southwind motorhome with a GM Vortec engine and a Banks PowerPack system. It starts like a charm, runs great and then suddenly loses power, with no warning. It backfires, but the engine doesn't stall, it just has no power. I turn off the ignition for a few seconds, turn the key and away it goes. It can run great for eight to 10 hours, or just five minutes before it happens again. Once, it did this 20 times in 10 miles and another day it ran all day long and it didn't happen once.

It is frightening when we're traveling in heavy traffic and it loses power and there's no place to pull over. We have taken it to different mechanics in Canada and the U.S. for diagnostic tests and nothing shows up. No one seems to have a clue as to what the problem could be. One mechanic insisted we should bring it in when it happens, which is idiotic, because you can't drive it when it loses power.

We have replaced the camshaft position sensor, fuel filters, had the fuel pump tested, etc., and still no change. We are seniors on a fixed income and swapping parts is not practical or affordable, which is what most garages want to do.

**Walter Sanclemente
Beausejour, New Brunswick, Canada**

A Intermittent problems are the most frustrating type for technicians and owners. You didn't mention a check engine light coming on, so I assume it hasn't. Did the technicians check for stored trouble codes? Even if the light is not on there could be some codes in memory, which would give a hint toward the cause of the problem. Basically, malfunctions in the fuel or ignition system components can cause this type of problem. It's also possible that there's an intermittent electrical connection, including loose or corroded battery cables and grounds. This should be checked because it is inexpensive and part of good maintenance anyway. Fuel

filters fall under that category too. I recommend cutting them open to look inside for traces of sediment, etc., which might be causing a problem. The fact that it backfires typically indicates there's a fuel starvation issue. I suspect the fuel pump or its relay is quitting intermittently and starts working when you try to restart. Although a shop may have tested fuel pressure when it was working fine, that wouldn't rule it out if it were intermittent. A way to prove or disprove this is to have them temporarily connect a fuel-pressure gauge, which can be run from the engine under the edge of the doghouse cover, so it can be checked while driving. If the engine loses power and fuel pressure drops, you have your culprit. If fuel pressure remains normal (unlikely), then the problem is elsewhere. GM dealers and other shops have portable test equipment that can be left connected while the coach is driven to detect and record system readings and operation at the time of the problem. In this case, ask for this to be done.

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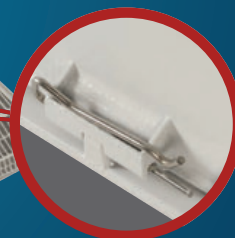
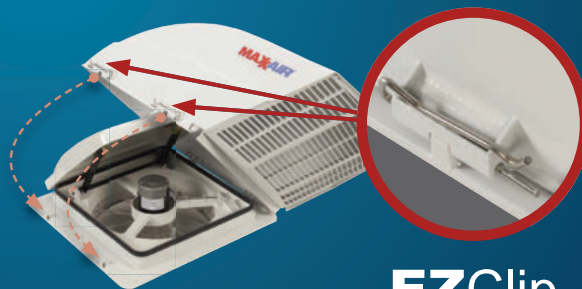
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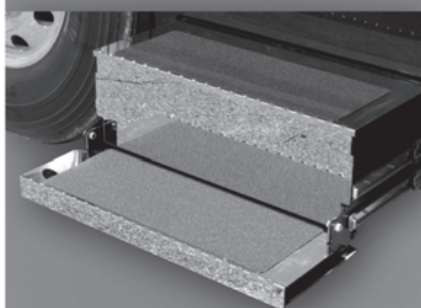
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Solar Trickle Chargers

Q I have a 2005 Monaco Cayman with four house batteries linked together; it also has an inverter. During winter I want to hook up a solar trickle charger because my storage site doesn't have electricity. What type of solar panel should I get? I've seen a multitude of power outputs. Does the fact that I have four batteries make a difference? And, can I simply clip the charger to the battery terminals?

Frank Smith | Wheaton, Illinois

A The fact that you have four large coach batteries does make a difference. Batteries slowly lose their charge due to internal losses, as well as external draws such as keep-alive memories in onboard electronic devices, alarms, circuit boards, etc. Therefore I recommend using a solar panel rated somewhere between 10 and 18 watts. Figure around 2.5 to 5 watts per battery. Don't forget your engine-starting battery. That needs to be maintained as well. Camping World has a variety of solar panels and controllers. Here's a URL for one that's reasonably priced www.campingworld.com/shopping/item/nature-power-solar-battery-charger-kit-18-watt/56006. You could also contact the technicians at AM Solar (541-726-1091, www.amsolar.com) for advice on putting a charging setup together.

If the system you choose comes with a controller, you could simply attach it with the included battery clamps. However, chances are you will need to run longer wires, and if you include your engine-starting battery, you'll need a way to connect this in too. Many users place the solar panel inside the windshield on the dash and face the coach to the south. You might consider a product such as Trik-L-Start (www.lslproducts.net/TLSPage.html) to connect the engine-starting and coach batteries together.

Fogged Glass

Q We have a 1998 Holiday Rambler Endeavor motorhome. The

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problem I have is with the driver's window. Moisture in between the layers of glass fogs up. I used a blow dryer and spent several hours and it got somewhat better, but it did not last. I read previously in *MotorHome* about a solution, but the magazine has been long gone. I would appreciate any help.

**Jennings Litchfield
Bonneau, South Carolina**

A This is a fairly common problem with the double-layer side glass as it gets older, and yes, we've addressed it before. If you Google "fogged RV windows," you will find a slew of solutions, including drilling between

the layers to vent the interior, removing the inner glass layer and YouTube videos showing how to reseal them. There are a number of companies that specialize in repairing the dual-pane glass and I prefer that solution over some of the quick and dirty backyard fixes. Three of the more well-known companies are RV Fog Doctor (501-278-3015, www.rvfogdr.com), RV Glass Solutions (888-777-6778, www.rvglassexperts.com/side_windows.html) and Sun Coast Designers (727-868-2773, www.suncoastdesigners.com/rv-services/defog).

New Toad Consideration

Q We have a 2013 Navion IQ 24G and currently tow a 2010 VW Golf (2,000 pounds). In an effort to reduce the overall number of vehicles that we own, I am considering buying a 2015 Jeep Cherokee 4WD (4,100 pounds) to replace the VW and our family car. Our Navion tows the VW like it's not even there. How do you think it would handle the Jeep? Towing capacity for the Navion is 5,000 pounds.

Bobby Howard | Del Norte, Colorado

A Your Golf actually weighs just less than 3,000 pounds, and since the base curb weight of the Jeep Cherokee you're considering is 4,100 pounds, there's a significant difference in weight between the two vehicles, which you will likely notice while towing, especially in Colorado with many steep grades and high altitudes. The Jeep is still within the towing capacity of the motorhome, but you should always use a good auxiliary braking system to control downhill speeds.

Starter Failures Tip

Q This is regarding the "Starter Failures" letter in the January issue. I owned a 2005 Georgetown 325SE with the Ford Triton V-10. By experience, in cold Rawlins, Wyoming, I learned that the weak link in the wiring for these engines is the temperamental starter motor relay switch located inside the passenger-side front

wheel well. It can be "jumped" in order to start the engine to get to a parts/service company to get a replacement. I carry a spare with me now.

Al Freeman | Rawlins, Wyoming

A Thanks for writing, Al. This is a good suggestion for people who operate similar motorhomes.

Brake Failure Comment

Q This letter is in response to Roy Beatty's problem in the January issue with a GM P-Chassis brake failure. I had a similar problem with a 2005 Chevy Kodiak chassis, but I was fortunate enough to find it prior to a trip in hilly southwest Pennsylvania. Departure day from an RV park found the warning light on in the instrument panel and no service brakes — even after several pumps. I located a pinhole in a steel line, where it crosses to the front brake on the passenger side of the

coach due to corrosion on the outside of the tubing. The undercarriage is pretty clean, there's hardly any rust, however the wimpy plating probably contributed to the demise of the brake line. I fixed it with some line available at Advance Auto Parts and a quart of fluid.

An inspection of every inch of brake line is not difficult, just a little tedious for us old guys with bad backs or arthritis. Get a creeper, or a piece of carpet, and spend some time underneath your coach. Run your fingers over every inch of brake line, not just the rubber parts. If you feel rough spots in the steel, or cracked places in the rubber, replace the part! It's not rocket science, and it's not expensive; all you need is someone to help bleed the line after you replace that section. You owe it to yourself and your passengers to at least have a competent mechanic check it over. While under there, take a look at hydraulic and electrical lines, wipers on



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the jacks, rack/pinion or cylinders on the slideouts and any other mechanicals that are pertinent to your coach.
J.T. Barber | Crestview, Florida

A I couldn't have said it better. Regular periodic inspections are critical for safety and reliability of all vehicles, including motorhomes. Just because they may not be used every day does not mean things can't go wrong. Rust never sleeps!

Boiling Battery

Q We have a 1995 Class B. The auxiliary (coach) battery boils the water out. What could cause this?
Helene Hoglund | Via email

A This is typically a result of over-charging due to excessive voltage going to the battery. Charging voltage should not exceed about 14.4 volts DC, and should taper off down to about 13.6-13.8 volts DC if you have a "smart" multistage charger/converter; most standard-type converters are designed to limit float charge to 13.6 volts DC. Batteries that are at the end of their service life also use an excessive amount of water. Does this only occur when it's hooked up to shorepower, or does it occur when the battery is charged from the engine's alternator? The power converter battery charging voltage may be too high and not adjustable, or the alternator voltage may be too high (this is not normally adjustable, and the regulator, which is inside the alternator, would need to be replaced). Whichever source is creating excessive voltage is the culprit. **M**

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The Road Goes On Forever

How one man gave me the skills — and more importantly, the confidence — to keep right on going after the pavement ends

By Alan Rider

Confession time: I am not a big fan of country music. Which isn't to say there aren't country songs that I love, like "The Road Goes On Forever" by singer-songwriter Robert Earl Keen.

Now, given my passion for the road in general and motorhome travel in particular, it should come as no surprise that this song had me hooked long before I even heard Keen belt out the first few bars. Because in my experience, the highway really is never-ending; always there waiting to take us someplace we've never been before and, in many cases, may never be again.

It's a reality that my friends, full-time motorhome travelers Bill and Rachel Burke, know well. In their 42-footer built on a Freightliner Columbia chassis and towing a 24-foot trailer, the pair spends their time crisscrossing the country to help ordinary folks like us understand that the journey isn't necessarily over just because the pavement has come to an end.

At least it doesn't if you know a few of the secrets Bill teaches in his highly respected off-road classes, individualized four-wheel-drive instruction and backcountry tours. Suffice it to say that spending a few hours with Bill, Rachel and their 4-Wheeling America (970-858-3468, www.bb4wa.com) friends will open up a wide range of new possibilities as you learn the skills to navigate even the gnarliest terrain.

For those of you who tow a four-wheel-drive vehicle behind your coach, you may have learned the hard way on previous off-pavement excursions

that having the hardware isn't enough if you don't know how to use it in a way that's likely to get you back to your campsite in one piece. This emphasis on safety, just coincidentally, has been the foundation of Bill's training for more than three decades.

Equally important is Bill's "tread lightly" philosophy of teaching people that it's possible to explore some of the country's most wild and spectacular landscapes without laying waste to them. Because it does none of us any good to travel to these off-the-beaten-path places if it means they won't be there for our grandchildren to enjoy.

How do I know? Well, within an

hour of meeting Bill in Moab, Utah, a few years back, he had me gritting my teeth as I navigated my shiny new four-wheel-drive Sportsmobile motorhome over some of the toughest Jeep trails in and around Canyonlands National Park. After a few days with him guiding me through one challenging off-road situation after another, I can honestly say there's nowhere I wouldn't go with Bill by my side. Best of all, even years later, his tutelage has given me the skills to tackle just about any "road" I encounter with no worries.

Even if you don't own a four-wheel-drive vehicle, the skills Bill can teach you using his own heavily modified Land Rover SUVs will give you the confidence to rent a Jeep and do a little off-road exploration on your own.

My point here is this: If you've ever stared at the dashed lines that represent off-road trails running through all those blank spaces on the map, or wondered just how many stars you can actually see if you get far enough away from civilization, Bill is the guy who can get you there and back safely.

Ultimately though, here's my hope for you: That you'll come to understand that, with a few basic skills, The Road Ahead really does go on forever, regardless of whether it's paved or not. **M**

“ In my experience, the highway really is never-ending; always there waiting to take us someplace we've never been before ”

Off-Road Adventure ↪

Bill and Rachel Burke travel full time in their 42-footer. Bill guides the author through some pretty challenging off-road sections near Canyonlands National Park.





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