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The rugged Sawtooth Mountains surround the tiny town of Stanley, Idaho, gateway to the Salmon River Scenic Byway (see page 68).



A roundup of eight diesel pushers that won't break the bank. Pg. 96

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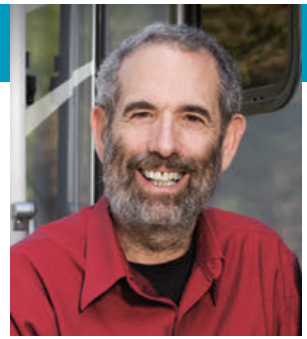
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## ON THE COVER

Cruising the backroads of Southern California in Winnebago's new triple-slide Itasca Sunova 35G (see test on page 83). Photo by Scott Hirko.







By Bob Livingston

# The Diesel Debate

I often get asked my opinion on whether to buy a diesel pusher or a gasser. It's certainly a contemporary topic that can spark a lively debate. Cost and affordability are key drivers when making a decision. At one time, the cost differential was larger; today it's possible for an entry-level diesel pusher and upper scale gasser to have similar sticker prices. It's hard to believe that there are a few gas-powered motorhomes on the market with prices approaching \$200,000, a figure that can get one into an entry-level diesel pusher. That makes the decision even more difficult and the amortization justifications more complicated.

As Chris Hemer explains in his evaluation of the Sunova (page 83), a coach that has a number of higher-end niceties, the Itasca is one of many motorhomes on the market that should be considered by those on the fence whether to buy a diesel or gas motorhome. Since the price differential is shrinking, there are other driving factors during the buying process that enter into the picture, including length and weight.

For me, a diesel pusher is the preferred choice when seeking a coach in the 38- to 40-foot range. When equipped with the features and amenities expected of a coach in this category, and loaded heavily, the weight can easily exceed the capacity of the Ford chassis. And frankly, diesel chassis suspensions tuned for heavy motorhomes will provide a better ride,

which is always a factor when choosing any coach. And, it's not uncommon for the handling dynamics to change dramatically when the motorhome is loaded to capacity. In this arena, the pushers do a better job.

So what can you expect of a diesel pusher with an entry-level price? The article on page 96 showcases eight entry-level diesel-pusher coaches that are loaded with features desired by enthusiasts looking for a touch of luxury. With only a couple of exceptions, the lengths of these coaches are in the 38- to 39-foot range, which plays right into my personal preference for a diesel pusher in this category.

The decision-making process gets

a little murky when looking for a 34- to 36-foot coach, which could easily work on a gas- or diesel-powered chassis. By the time the smoke clears from the sales office, there may only be a \$20,000 difference between a diesel pusher and gasser. Typically, there will be a number of higher-end appointments and equipment features in the interior of the gasser in the same price range as the diesel, but livability will be comparable. At this point, maintenance and repair — especially for those who don't put on a lot of miles to realize the benefit of diesel engine longevity — come into play. Servicing a diesel chassis is more expensive and there are high-cost components to deal with. Maintenance costs can be controlled by doing some of the service work yourself, like the radiator flush described in the how-to project on page 107. Regular contributor E. Don Smith takes some of the mystery out of working on diesel pushers, which can be intimidating to some folks.

Hopefully, after doing your homework and being honest about your needs, there will be no bad choice. **M**

**“For me, a diesel pusher is the preferred choice when seeking a coach in the 38- to 40-foot range.”**

## Contributors | May



**Jaimie Hall Bruzenak** is an RVer, author and speaker. She has written several books on RVing. After 8 years of full-time RV travel, she now travels part-time with her husband, George.



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



**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.



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



**Rosanne Wagstaff** and her husband, Greg, an award-winning photographer, are living their dream of full-time RVing in their Monaco Diplomat motorhome and enjoy sharing their adventures.



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



# MotorHome

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

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

**Contributors** Jaimie Hall Bruzenak, Kristopher Bunker, Bill and Jenn Gehr, Bobbie Hasselbring, Scott Hirko, Rhonda Ostertag, Alan Rider, E. Don Smith, Rosanne Wagstaff, Pam Windsor, Mary Zalmanek

**Vice President National Sales** Terry Thompson

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Customer Service

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

**Website** www.motorhome.com

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



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



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## How much of the time do you use the oven in your motorhome? Do you consider it a necessary appliance for traveling or a waste of space?

That's the question we asked in our February issue and it generated a record number of responses. Here are just some of the replies.



### The Most Important Meal of the Day

We use our oven about 25 percent of the mornings when we travel. I fry up sausage links and make scrambled eggs just in time for hot biscuits to come out of the oven. There's nothing like a good breakfast to get things started when you are camped in a state park. My dad always said, "Breakfast is the most important meal of the day," and he went on to say, "If you're not home by then, you're in real trouble!"

**Lloyd Kurtz | Ellinwood, Kansas**

### Soup's On!

For me, the oven is essential for full-time RVing. There is nothing like fresh biscuits with dinner, fresh cinnamon buns early in the morning, mouth-watering pies baked with fresh

fruit from a farmers market, baked fish just caught at the river beside the campground, a pot roast cooked in a slow oven ... are you hungry yet?

**Diana Turner | Via email**

### Not for Everybody

We have been full-timers for the past 10 years and may have used our oven for cooking a total of six times! We would have preferred a convection oven. We rely on our crockpot, large countertop oven and stove.

**Ray and Helen Zihala  
Shelton, Connecticut**

### Culinary Convection

When we purchased our new motorhome it didn't have a traditional oven, and I didn't know what

I'd do without one! However, the new motorhome had a microwave convection oven and, after taking a few lessons at RV rallies and from the chef at Lazydays (his seminar was fantastic), I would never go back to a regular oven. I love the extra space.

**Juanita Capellani | Via email**

### One of the Joys of Motorhoming

We are on our third motorhome. Our first had an oven and we enjoyed using it. When it came time for our second coach, we found a motorhome we liked but it had a microwave convection oven and we thought that would do. We ended up really missing the oven, so when it came time for us to look for our "dream machine" for retirement, an oven was a must. One of the joys of

## Featured Letter

### Yea for Ovens!

I consider the oven a necessity and I use it often. While in camp, I have the time to bake cookies and prepare good oven-cooked meals because we are not experiencing our usual hectic life. There's nothing like warming up the motorhome with the aroma of oatmeal cookies baking. It's also a great way to meet your RVing neighbors by taking a full plate of cookies to them. Our last motorhome didn't have an oven, so my husband installed a range with an oven. Yea ovens!

**Marilyn McAfee | Fort Pierce, Florida**





motorhoming, to us, is being “at home” on the road, and how many homes don’t have an oven? Thankfully, our new Winnebago has an oven and we were happy to use it many times on our three-month journey across the U.S.

**Bob Cook | Chino Hills, California**

**Full Kitchen Facilities a Necessity**

I regularly cook meals, and my husband and I eat about 90 percent of them in our motorhome rather than eating out in a restaurant when we are traveling. I have specific dietary needs, so eating out is often very restrictive for me and can be less than satisfying. Having full kitchen facilities in our motorhome for me is a necessity!

**Stacey Fehr | Alberta, Canada**

**Community Cooker**

I love my oven, and so do several of our RVing friends; they ask me if they can use my “real” oven about once a week. All of us have microwave convection ovens, but I have the only real oven. I

bake the group’s pizza, cornbread, pie from scratch, and yeast bread; none of which are the same when done in a convection oven. When we look at newer and bigger Class A rigs, the first necessity is an oven and the second is a place for my sewing machine.

**Leroy and Jessie Gramstrup | Via email**

**The Simple Gourmet**

I love to cook, so when we went shopping for a used motorhome last year, an oven was essential. Some 10,000 miles later, I am the queen of one-pot dinners, which generally start by browning meat, onion and veggies on the cooktop using a #8 cast-iron skillet. The sauce/topping gets added and everything finishes off in the oven. Casseroles, chili with cornbread, stews with biscuits, chicken and dumplings, cheeseburgers, tacos or shepherd’s pies ... plus pie when neighbors in an Ontario campground shared fresh-picked blueberries last summer. Stock a box of Bisquick and you can

bake delicious cobblers from all those great local fruits. I love my oven. It’s versatile, with easier cleanup than a grill and I can still store stuff in it.

**Mary Hoff | Via email**

**What Oven?**

Our 1997 Fleetwood Discovery does not have an oven, only a microwave convection oven. I find it difficult to use and can’t seem to bake anything. All I use it for is to microwave. I would definitely use an oven if I had one.

**Marsha Wells | Russellville, Arkansas**

**It’s a No-Brainer**

I love my oven! I use it with my microwave convection oven to prepare healthy, beautiful meals wherever we travel. I bake, roast and prepare the same food I would at home. It is smaller, but adequate for our needs. We prefer to eat in rather than go out, unless there is a local “specialty” restaurant we want to experience.

The oven was a huge selling point

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for me. I noticed that many newer motorhomes don't include ovens. We took out the washer/dryer and added a huge storage closet. I have not been to one RV park that has not had a well-kept laundry facility. For me, oven versus no oven is a no-brainer. Happy cooking!

**Shirley Rubino | Lake Placid, Florida**

**Deal-Breaker**

My wife and I wouldn't even consider a motorhome without an oven. We consider baking one of our recreational activities.

**Jerry Crisp | Bozeman, Montana**

**I Love My Oven**

We own a 2010 Newmar Mountain Aire. (Fortunately, we have been blessed with owning three Mountain Aires.) Guess I am one of the few women who still cook in their motorhome using the oven. We love eating out at restaurants when we travel, but sometimes that gets old for us. I use the oven to

prepare roasts, lasagna and a lot of other frozen prepared dishes that I made at home. Eating out is great, but a good home-cooked meal in our coach is awesome. We all agree that preparing food away from home tastes better. I, for one, will never own a motorhome that does not have an oven.

**Carol Gaines | Rogers, Arkansas**

**Just Don't Use it as a Heater**

We recently traded in our 22-foot motorhome and had several items that were a must for our next RV. An oven was at the top of the list. We alternate between national forest campgrounds with limited amenities and full-service campgrounds. Biscuits with gravy, broiled steak or salmon and fresh-baked chocolate chip cookies are some of our favorite camping meals. These items are a little hard to prepare in a microwave and impossible if you are boondocking.

Also, the heat from the oven is

a great way to combat the morning/evening chill when you're camping in the mountains at elevations above 8,000 feet. Plus, on multiple occasions the oven was a great place to store a dirty breakfast frying pan and morning dishes so I can wash dishes just once a day.

**John and Linda Lowitz  
Cedaredge, Colorado**

*Editor's Note: Although the heat provided while using an oven is a nice bonus, RVers should NEVER use the oven for heating the motorhome's interior. Doing so could lead to excessive amounts of CO in the air ... not to mention an open flame.*

**Oven Olympics**

I love my oven. In fact, we specifically requested that one be installed when we purchased our 2013 Coachmen Frelander. I love the way it cooks, but there is one drawback to all gas ovens — you have to get on your knees

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or stand on your head to light it. When I can, I cook over a campfire, but having a regular oven makes it more like home.

**Elizabeth Finchum**  
**Strawberry Plains, Tennessee**

**New-Wave Cooking**

We have a 40-foot Newmar Dutch Star without an oven. The microwave convection is OK for reheating and

cooking some things, but other things just come out “not so good.”

I bought a NuWave Infrared Oven and it is great! It can broil, bake and roast. I have made a roast for eight people in it, and it came out perfect. The big bonus is that it does not heat up the coach cabin like a regular oven does. The NuWave can only handle four or five single-serve meats (steaks, chops, burgers), but that is fine, as

most of the time that type of thing goes out on the grill. When not in use, I store it under the sink, and it is lightweight and super easy to wash. It is a great alternative to the normal ovens you find in the coach, and a much better alternative to no oven at all!

**Margaret Stinson | Port Charlotte, Florida**

**Please Don't Take My Oven Away!**

I will always consider an oven a must. We spend about six months a year in our motorhome traveling from one end of the country to the other. I never know when I'll need to whip up a cobbler from fresh fruit or a pan of biscuits.

I grew up camping. For years, my mom depended on a Coleman oven placed over a burner on the stove. Our campsite was always a favorite of the park rangers, who were grateful for a home-cooked meal!

**Kathy Fredrickson | Roswell, Georgia**

**Sunday Traditions**

When we travel, we always have meals planned that use the oven. There is nothing like fresh biscuits hot out of the oven for breakfast. Frequently, on a Sunday (which we use for relaxation and going to church), it is nice to put in a small roast or casserole while we relax and enjoy ourselves. We have baked cakes, cookies and many other tasty things in the oven while camping.

Before we switched to an RV and were tent campers, we had an oven to sit on top of the Coleman stove and used it almost every camping trip.

**Jim and Claudia Nice | Sandy, Oregon**

**Put it on the Barbie**

We have been RVing for more than 40 years. When we first purchased a motorhome in the early 1970s we thought an oven was a necessity. But now, even though our “retirement” RV has an oven, I use it mostly to store my cast-iron pans, which are too large and heavy to put in the cabinets. (Note: Wrap them in a dishtowel so they don't make noise while you're traveling.) I've used the oven only once in the past three years and that's because it was raining heavily outside.

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We much prefer to cook over wood on an open fire pit. We use a round lid from a Weber barbecue and the Weber rack — placing it over the wood pit. It makes for a great outdoor oven and a better taste on the food, as well as a much more enjoyable cooking event. We cook Cornish game hens, steak, ribs, chicken, shrimp and baked potatoes — basically anything you would cook in an oven — in the outdoors.

I'm glad we have an oven, just in case we run out of firewood and for the storage, but wouldn't trade cooking over an open fire for anything.

**Dennis and Sue Wright**  
Menifee, California

**Yee-Haw!**

I use our oven every time we go RVing. I make large batches of buttermilk biscuits to go with sausage gravy, cinnamon rolls and large desserts for the cowboys. I would be lost without it.

**Judith Clossley** | Beloit, Wisconsin

**It's Big Enough to Cook a Turkey**

Back in 2005, while I was staying at a long-term snowbird park, my neighbors and I decided to have a potluck holiday party. I said I would provide a turkey. I'm sure they assumed I would buy a cooked turkey at a chain store and pick it up the day of the party. Instead, I purchased a real broiling pan with a lid that would fit in my RV oven and cooked the turkey myself. That 18-pound bird came out perfect! This cannot be done in the other two oven types. While this type of event is rare, I like that I have the choice to do it if I want to. That pan is also perfect for pot roast or baking a picnic ham.

**Robert and Janet Mills** | Hurst, Texas

**Even Cooking**

I like our oven and use it at least a couple of times on each camping trip. It makes terrific-tasting open-faced toasted cheese sandwiches and heats frozen dinners evenly. When we aren't using it, it's a place to store big frying pans and a splatter screen. By the way, we (like many RVers) have a microwave

convection oven combo as well. In six years, we've only used the convection feature once.

**Drew Mueller** | Martinez, California

**Best Option**

For several reasons, my wife and I have been delighted that our 2011 Itasca Sunova motorhome came equipped with a three-burner LP-gas range with oven in addition to an

overhead microwave convection oven. We enjoy making yeast-rising cloverleaf rolls and fresh biscuits, neither of which cook properly in a convection oven. While dry camping, we can enjoy hot oven-fresh meals, such as a roasted chicken or a Yankee pot roast from our gas oven without having to run our generator.

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I can understand why they might deem a regular oven to be a waste of space, but we cannot think of anything that we could pack into the space that our gas range occupies that would give us more pleasure than our conventional oven.

**Lewis A. Edge Jr. and Nancy Angus-Edge**  
Princeton, New Jersey

#### Storage Drawers

On our last three motorhomes we had the oven removed and replaced with drawers. It's great to have more room for kitchen items. Most RVs today come with microwave convection ovens, which is all that's needed unless you dry camp. Think of it ... no more heat in the kitchen that takes hours to get rid of.

**Jackie Ramseyer** | Oceanside, California

#### Other Suspect Designs

We just started full-timing in a 42-foot motorhome with our two kids, ages 6 and 8. We cook a lot of meals in

the kitchen. We use the microwave convection oven just about daily and pack a small outside oven with a rotisserie for extra-large meals and special dinners. I would be lost without an oven.

The dishwasher, on the other hand, is wasted space. We have never used it and have it packed with glasses and food storage containers. We would have more than tripled the space had the factory installed cabinets there instead. Even a square foot of storage space wasted is noticed.

In my opinion, motorhome manufacturers would do well to have an engineering staff live on the road for a year in their product. They could see firsthand the difficulty with the ideas they came up with in their bubbles. Things like outdated satellite dishes that work "in motion" but not in HD, Internet antennas for picking up signals at RV parks and utilizing wasted space throughout the cabin. If that doesn't bring about change to

industry designs, nothing would.

**Bill Schmitz and family** | Via email

#### Don't Need it, Don't Want it

My answer to how often I use my oven is never. It's only used for storage. I would never purchase another RV with an oven. The best package for me would be a two-burner range top with a microwave convection oven.

**Herb Brumbach** | Livingston, Texas

#### RVers are Not All the Same

We have lived in a motorhome for 24 years. This is my home and I enjoy the conveniences of a home. That includes an oven. I like to cook and use my oven at least once a week. I just wish I could find a four-burner stove top. I also would not want to do without my washer/dryer combo or the double refrigerator. These things are well worth the space.

RVers are not all the same and do not all want the same things. The folks who manufacture RVs need to have

# NAVIGATE THE EXTRAORDINARY



options for different types of use.

**Carol and Lewis Popelka | Via email**

### **We Gotta Eat!**

We use our oven all the time, as our RV is our second home and we do not eat out. We like to camp at national and state parks as well as Bureau of Land Management sites. We love our oven and three-burner stove.

**The Charter Family | Truckee, California**

### **The Less Glamorous Side of RVing**

In many of your motorhome reviews you cover driving, the interior and your impressions of the coach. That's good, but what about when you get to an RV park? What about hooking up the utilities such as electric, water and sewer? How close to the ground are the hookups? Are they difficult to reach and operate? From my experience working in campgrounds I've come across many newbies who had no clue what to do. A lot of new RVers don't want to ask and dealers don't always

mention such things.

I'm getting to the age where I would like a Class B or C motorhome, but the hookups are nearly hidden.

**John Spear | Austin, Texas**

### **Florida Full-Timer Wannabes**

We have owned two Rialtas, an Airstream diesel and now an Allegro Open Road gasser, and we have loved every minute of the experience. My wife will retire in October and we are wondering if your readers could suggest places in Florida where we could buy or rent an RV site that has a cover, storage unit, pad and utilities. We are thinking about selling our home, downsizing and being able to pick up and go if we had such a place.

**Frank and Marty Hill**

**Port Charlotte, Florida**

### **Tire-Blowout Query**

I have a suggestion for your question of the month: Have you ever experienced a tire blowout in a motorhome

in either a front or rear tire, and what exactly happened? How did it feel, how did you react and were you able to get the vehicle under control without an accident? If so, how did you do it? If not, what happened? And what were you driving? I watched the Michelin/RVIA helpful video on the subject (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPbG2W0AwBM>), but I'd like to hear some firsthand experiences.

**Chris Klein | Manhattan Beach, California**

## **Question of the Month**

**Have you experienced a tire blowout while driving your motorhome, and if so, how did you handle it?**

**Send your comments to:**

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

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## It's a Circus out There ... and a Whole Lot More!

Step right up and experience the history and magic of life under the big top in Sarasota, Florida

By Morey Edelman

**L**ocated on 66 acres in Sarasota, Florida, The Ringling campus is home to an art museum, an 18th-century Italian theater, a Venetian gothic mansion and a circus museum. Enter through the visitor center and plan to have a full day of fun here.

Begin at The Ringling Circus Museum, which features an incredible miniature circus model created by Howard Tibbals over a 40-year span. It contains more than 15,000 characters including people, animals and "trimmings." Then continue on through the circus exhibits of the great performers and performances, the calliopes and vehicles,

the promotional posters and even John Ringling's personal Pullman coach. Learn how the logistics of setting up for a one-day circus for 15,000 spectators was accomplished in less than 48 hours.

Continue on to the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art — a wonderful display of Ringling's private art collection — and finally, stop and take a tour of their winter residence, Ca' d'Zan.

Free parking is available for large motorhomes in the main parking lot in the designated RV area. For more information, call 941-359-5700, or go to [www.ringling.org](http://www.ringling.org).



By Bobbie Hasselbring

# My-O-Pizza-Pie, Omaha



From above top: The meatball pizza is a customer favorite at Frank's Pizzeria. Don't miss out on Dante Ristorante Pizzeria's other offerings like these super-rich chicken liver crostini with duck-fat-fried bread.

**G**ooey, cheesy goodness on a chewy crust. Who doesn't love pizza? New York, Chicago, even San Francisco offer deliciously authentic pizza. But Omaha, Nebraska? On a recent trip, I was amazed to find that Omaha, home of the University of Nebraska's Cornhuskers, also bakes up some of the best pizza in America.

Italian immigrants have made Omaha the pizza capital of the Midwest. Around the turn of the 20th century, thousands of immigrants came from Sicily and the Calabrese region of northern Italy in search of work. Many found jobs with Omaha's rail industry. By 1920, 2,500 Italian immigrants called Omaha home. They even formed a Little Italy neighborhood near the Union Pacific rail yards and Italian restaurants flourished.

Today, you can find classic, thin-crust Neapolitan pizza (aka New York pizza), thick Sicilian pizza and artisan pizza featuring local ingredients. A fun and relatively inexpensive way to explore the city is to create your own Omaha pizza crawl. Here are some of my favorites:

**Frank's Pizzeria** In the Linden Market shopping center, Frank's Pizzeria is an old-time neighborhood pizzeria serving thin-crust New York-style pizza. In this casual place, walls are festooned with sports memorabilia and cooks shout out numbers for the next ready pie.

Owner Joe D'Elia uses family recipes to create classic pies with crust that has just the right crunch and chewiness. The meatball/onion/mushroom pie features al dente onions, spicy meatballs and plenty of stringy cheese. The Margherita, made with mozzarella fior di latte (cow's milk mozzarella), fresh basil, olive oil and a simple sauce of crushed tomatoes, yields fresh, classic flavors. Giant 16-inch pizzas sell for less than \$20.



**That's Italian!**  
Dante Ristorante Pizzeria's chef/owner, Nick Strawhecker (center), redefines pizza with creative toppings like crispy chicken livers.

**Pitch Pizzeria** In a restored brick building in the historic Dundee neighborhood, Willy Theisen, the original creator of Godfather's pizza chain, cooks up artisan Neapolitan pizzas in 1,000-degree, coal-fired ovens. Theisen says the super-hot ovens have a "sweet spot" that gives the crust a satisfying char. They use Italian San Marzano tomatoes and imported '00' Italian flour and plenty of local ingredients. They also grind their own sausage and make all their own sauces, which gives their pies fresh, vibrant flavors.

**Dante Ristorante Pizzeria** On the west side of Omaha, chef/owner Nick Strawhecker serves truly gourmet, artisan pizza that will make you rethink what pizza should be. Strawhecker is a master chef who has cooked all over the world and his Naples-inspired creations like pizza topped with crispy chicken livers, lemon and Calabrian chilies will make you weep for joy (really, I was skeptical too!). Be sure to check out his other dishes like rabbit roulade, chicken tortellini soup and fall-off-the-bone tender beef cheek.

**What's your favorite place for pizza?**

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



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**Dante Ristorante Pizzeria**, 168th and Center, 402-932-3078, [www.dantepizzeria.com](http://www.dantepizzeria.com)

**Frank's Pizzeria**, 711 North 132nd Street, 402-493-0404, <http://franksnewyorkpizza.com>

**Pitch Pizzeria**, 5021 Underwood Avenue, 402-590-2625, [www.pitchpizzeria.com](http://www.pitchpizzeria.com)



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





## The Force is With You

A brake system for your towed vehicle should be considered a necessity, but not all of them are created equal. According to the dinghy brake experts at SMI, the new Delta Force is the first and only dual-signal, proportional portable braking system on the market. Featuring a patent-pending ball-and-socket actuator that is self-adjusting, nonbinding and folds neatly to the side for storage, the Delta Force mounts with a simple floor tether system and the Set-It-Once pedal clamp. The wireless CoachLink system monitors connectivity to the towed vehicle, displays braking effort and features a visual/audible alert for fault codes and breakaway circuit. Compact size and an intuitive user interface make the Delta Force easy to install and operate. MSRP: \$1,199.95.

**SMI Manufacturing Inc., 800-893-3763, [www.smirake.com](http://www.smirake.com)**



## Able Cable

Fifty-amp service is common on today's motorhomes, and the heavy cable can be hard to handle. Conntek's new 50-amp RV cord is designed to be easier to grab, lock and remove at both ends. The connector's 45-degree angle not only allows the inlet hatch to close more completely, it also offers a measure of strain relief, reducing the chance of damage to the cord or inlet. Meanwhile, the plug side features Conntek's Ergo Grip, with the handle and prongs positioned at a right angle to the cord, increasing leverage and reducing hand fatigue. Finally, two blue LEDs illuminate to let you know when the power is on. This new cord, part number 15455-LA1, has an MSRP of \$194.99.

**Conntek, 414-482-0800, [www.conntek.com](http://www.conntek.com)**

## Spare Me

Flat tires can be an unfortunate part of life on the road, and many coaches make accessing the spare tire a real challenge. Roadmaster's new spare tire carrier (part No. 195225) puts the motorhome's spare within easy reach, and makes handling it a whole lot easier. Its patented design allows the carrier to pivot to the ground to deploy the spare, or just to move it out of the way for access to the engine compartment or rear storage. Designed for 16- to 24-inch wheels, the carrier mounts in a standard 2-inch hitch receiver, and incorporates its own receiver for a tow bar or other hitch-mounted accessory. It's powder-coated for durability and corrosion resistance and has a 10,000-pound maximum capacity, 400-pound maximum hitch weight. MSRP: \$695.

**Roadmaster, 800-669-9690, [www.roadmasterinc.com](http://www.roadmasterinc.com)**



## The Wheel Deal

Motorhome wheels and tires are like your shoes — when they look good, you look good. Trouble is, it's difficult to find a product that makes it easy to care for your rolling stock. The car care professionals at Eagle One solved this problem with A2Z Wheel and Tire Cleaner, now available in a 64-ounce size perfect for motorhome use. Incorporating a detachable hose for hard-to-reach places, A2Z utilizes an acid-free formula that the manufacturer recommends for use on any wheel or tire. The thick foam easily removes grease, grime and brake dust from the wheels, and leaves tires shiny black. MSRP: \$15 from a variety of retailers.

**Eagle One, 800-832-6825, [www.eagleone.com](http://www.eagleone.com)**



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## Pet-Friendly Campgrounds

The editors and consultants of the “Good Sam RV Travel & Savings Guide” have chosen their list of the Top Pet-friendly Parks from the annual publication’s database of more than 7,000 private RV parks. According to the guide, “These select RV parks stand out from the pack when it comes to RVers traveling with animal passengers.”

Pet-friendly parks boast amenities from fenced-in dog parks to pet washing areas. Many offer trails for pet walking, and some dispense pet treats to newcomers traveling with four-legged passengers.

### The top parks are:

**Arizona:** Desert’s Edge RV-The Purple Park, Phoenix

**California:** Bakersfield River Run RV Park, Bakersfield; Chula Vista RV Resort, Chula Vista; Sands RV & Golf Resort, Desert Hot Springs

**Kansas:** Deer Creek Valley RV Park, Topeka

**Missouri:** America’s Best Campground, Branson

**New Mexico:** American RV Park, Albuquerque

**New York:** Lake George RV Park, Lake George

**Texas:** Austin Lone Star-Carefree RV Resort, Austin; Stone Creek RV Park, San Antonio

**Utah:** Shady Acres RV Park, Green River



## National Parks Draw Record-Breaking Crowds

Visitation at America’s national parks broke all-time records in 2014, as the National Park Service prepares to celebrate its centennial in 2016 with a major push to encourage more visitors to experience their national parks in 2016. In 2014, there were 292.8 million visits to national parks, breaking the previous record set in 1999 when parks saw just over 287.1 million visits. Several national parks saw record-breaking visitation in 2014, including Joshua Tree, Rocky Mountain, Grand Teton and Glacier national parks.



### The top 10 most-visited places in the National Park System are:

Golden Gate National Recreation Area.....	15,004,420
Blue Ridge Parkway.....	13,941,749
Great Smoky Mountains National Park.....	10,099,276
George Washington Memorial Parkway ....	7,472,150
Lincoln Memorial.....	7,139,072
Lake Mead National Recreation Area .....	6,942,873
Gateway National Recreation Area.....	6,021,713
Natchez Trace Parkway.....	5,846,474
Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park.....	5,066,219
Grand Canyon National Park.....	4,756,771

### The top 10 most-visited national parks are:

Great Smoky Mountains National Park.....	10,099,276
Grand Canyon National Park.....	4,756,771
Yosemite National Park.....	3,882,642
Yellowstone National Park .....	3,513,484
Rocky Mountain National Park .....	3,434,751
Olympic National Park.....	3,243,872
Zion National Park .....	3,189,696
Grand Teton National Park.....	2,791,392
Acadia National Park.....	2,563,129
Glacier National Park .....	2,338,528

## NEWS BRIEFS

### Touring Coach Lineup Grows Volume for 2014

► Winnebago Industries has achieved the No. 1 model status for the company’s Touring Coach line. According to the latest report from Statistical Surveys Inc., the Winnebago Touring Coach line, which includes the Era and Travato Class B motorhomes, garnered 83.7 percent growth in volume in 2014. According to Statistical Surveys, the Class B market grew more than any other segment in the U.S. in ‘14, increasing 22.8 percent over retail sales in 2013.

### Camping World Ups Minimum Wage

► In March, Camping World Inc. increased the minimum wage in all of its existing U.S. stores and divisions to \$12.25 for its nearly 7,000 associates, including part-time and seasonal associates. “The culture and health of our company is measured by one thing for me, our people,” said Marcus Lemonis, chairman and CEO of Camping World and Good Sam Enterprises LLC.

### Shade Repair Videos

► United Shade, an affiliate of Dacor Corp., has introduced new videos for RV owners on the following topics: accurately measuring for new shades, repairing strings for pleated shades and programming motorized windshield shades. The videos are available at [www.unitedshade.com](http://www.unitedshade.com) and provide step-by-step instructions for RVers.

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Hebgen, Montana

## Earthquake Lake Visitor Center

On a moonlit midnight, Aug. 17, 1959, the most powerful earthquake ever recorded in the Rocky Mountains triggered an 80 million-ton landslide that roared down the south flank of Sheep Mountain in Montana at 100 mph. Lives and landscapes in Madison River Canyon below Hebgen Lake changed in seconds. Behind the slide, the Madison River formed a body of water later named Earthquake Lake.

At the newly remodeled Earthquake Lake Visitor Center, exhibits tell of the devastating night and its impact on the Madison River and the surrounding Custer Gallatin National Forest. An observation room overlooks the river of rock the earthquake left behind in the landslide. Trails lead to the Memorial Boulder and a plaque listing the names of those who drowned or were buried by debris in the earthquake. Earthquake Lake Visitor Center is located approximately 28 miles from West Yellowstone, Montana.

**For more information,** visit [www.fs.usda.gov/gallatin](http://www.fs.usda.gov/gallatin) — *Arline Chandler*



Photo: Lee Smith

Blowing Rock, North Carolina



Photos: Neala McCarten

## Moses H. Cone Memorial Park

The Blue Ridge Parkway offers multiple opportunities for stunning views, but getting off at Milepost 294 offers far more than panoramic moments. There's history in the white Georgian Revival mansion perched on a hill, and a craft center featuring some of the finest Southern Appalachian artisans.

Born in 1857, Moses H. Cone made his money in denim. He started as a salesman for his father's innovative dry goods company that sold ready-made clothes expanding to include a new and very durable fabric known as denim. Cone ultimately went into production of blue and even brown denim amassing a sizable fortune and even supplying the fabric to Levi Strauss.

In 1901, Cone built a country estate in what is now the Blue Ridge Mountains. You can stroll the grounds, hike, even watch demonstrations of a profusion of country crafts. Tours are available of the family's quarters on the upper level while the Parkway Craft Center meanders through the rooms of the first floor. Jewelry, pottery, weavings, stunning woodcrafts and more tumble down racks, fill display cases and grace the walls.

Moses H. Cone Memorial Park is located about 2 miles from the charming town of Blowing Rock, North Carolina, and is open March 15 through Nov. 30.

**For more information,** visit [www.blueridgeheritage.com/attractions-destinations/moses-cone-manor](http://www.blueridgeheritage.com/attractions-destinations/moses-cone-manor) — *Neala McCarten*

Kearney, Nebraska

## Kearney Classic Car Collection




Photo: James Richardson

In 2013, the Lincoln Highway celebrated 100 years. At its midpoint in Kearney, Nebraska, is the Classic Car Collection, where about 200 automobiles are housed, many of which could have traveled on the original Lincoln Highway.

The amazing collection ranges from a 1907 International Auto Buggy to a 1991 Ferrari Testarossa ... and just about everything in between. Of the 200-plus cars, 131 were donated by the Taulborg Family; the rest were donated or loaned to the museum by others.

There is a complete list of autos in the collection, history and directions on the Classic Car Collection's website.

**For more information,** call 308-234-1964, or go to [www.ccckearney.com](http://www.ccckearney.com). — *James Richardson* 





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# Spelunking in Southwest Montana

An underground adventure at Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park

By Rosanne Wagstaff

“Is anyone afraid of the dark? Afraid of heights? Or claustrophobic?” We peered at each other through the darkness, just a sliver of light streaming through the rocky ceiling of the Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park in southwest Montana. Situated along the well-traveled route between iconic Yellowstone and Glacier national parks, tucked deep in a mountain, is one of the most decorative caverns in the Northwest. “Does anyone want to leave before the gate is locked behind us?” A few brave souls

confessed their fears but gallantly committed to move forward as the gate clunked closed. Our trusty guide, the only one with a flashlight, continued, “Some areas are lighted, but not all. Stooping, bending, descending 600 steps and duck-walking or sliding down the Beaver Slide are required. And please keep your voices down; we don’t want to arouse the bats. Lastly, not all areas have handrails, so please don’t touch the cavern walls unless you think you will fall. Your safety is most important.” Beaver Slide? Duck-walking? This, after a three-quarter-mile trek up

**Getting Here** ➔ Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park is located on Montana state Highway 2 and is easily accessible from the east and west off Interstate 90. Cavern signs are noticeably posted on the interstate. From the east, take Exit 274 and from the west, take Exit 256. From the south, take U.S. Highway 287 to Montana state Highway 2.

LEWIS AND CLARK  
CAVERNS STATE PARK







to the cave entrance gaining 300 feet in elevation in the 85-degree heat? At least the caverns were a refreshing 50 degrees!

Despite the seemingly daunting instructions, the two-hour, 2-mile guided cavern tour is a fun adventure for all ages. Our group of 18 explorers included an infant in a babyback up to seniors. Plan on 20 minutes for the 30-minute hike up to the cave entrance. The cave portion of the tour begins when everyone reaches the entrance, so walk at your own pace, enjoy panoramic bird's-eye views of the Jefferson River Valley and rest

momentarily on benches along the way. Wheelchair access is provided along the lower, more level, cave exit trail. Entering from there, the last two cavern rooms can be viewed.

"Shall we proceed?" With smiles and nods, our group shuffled forward. Within moments, a slight fluttering revealed a large bat cluster huddled high on a wall. The caverns are home to several species of bats, and in dim light these esteemed residents seemed more neighborly than scary. The park hosts an annual Bat Week in August to educate visitors about these exotic mammals. Programs include

Above from left: Created over time, the caverns continue to evolve as seeping water carves new formations. Grand finale "Paradise Room" in all its splendor can be viewed from the wheelchair-accessible cave exit. Below: Plan on 20 to 30 minutes for the three-quarter-mile trek up to the cave entrance.





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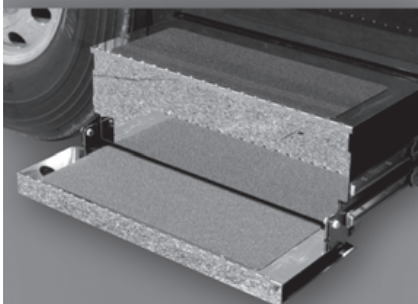
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## GETAWAY

### LEWIS AND CLARK CAVERNS

guided Bat Walks, Bat Cavern Tours, and ranger presentations describing the lifestyle and preservation of bats. After tiptoeing past the bats, we began our descent. Feeling like early explorers, we made our way down a narrow staircase, ducking under hobbit-height ceilings as cool, damp air engulfed us.

Tunnel-like passageways opened into large chambers decorated with colorful, water-carved formations. It didn't take long before our imaginations escaped and roamed around the magical underground gallery. Icicle spears hung from ceilings (stalactites), sculpted columns stretched from top to bottom, and curiously shaped pillars rose from floors (stalagmites). We saw tiered wedding cakes dripping icing and waterfalls frozen in time. Just when we thought our visions were getting the best of us, our guide shined a flashlight on "popcorn" and "ribbon" formations and sculptures endearingly named "Romeo and Juliet," "Empire State Building" and "North Pole." Apparently, we weren't the

only ones seeing apparitions in the living limestone grotto!

When we reached the much-anticipated Beaver Slide we wondered how anyone could possibly duck-walk it! Plopping down, we slid to the bottom like kids on a playground.

The tour wound through the caverns for about an hour while our guide entertained us with cave folklore and tidbits of geology and history. Interestingly, the park is named after Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, but they never actually visited the caverns. In 1805, their expedition journeyed 1,400 feet below the cave entrance through the Jefferson River Valley, leaving the mountain's secret undiscovered. In 1892, two hunters spotted steam venting from a hole high on the mountain and an exploration team rappelled into the caves six years later. The first cave tours were by candlelight. To help us "modern-day explorers" experience tours of old, our guide turned off the lights — with ample warning, of







The big-rig-friendly campground, located across from the Main Visitor Center, features 40 sites — nine with electric hookups — a dump station, showers and restrooms.

course. Inky darkness swallowed his flashlight beam transporting us back to the past. Straining our eyes to see any shape or shadow proved hopeless. After a few nervous giggles, foot shuffling and whispers, the lights flickered back on, giving us a new appreciation for those early spelunkers. Exiting the caverns into the bright sunlight, we felt adventured, learned and entertained.

The cave tour is the park's biggest draw but it also offers visitors a variety of other activities. Spend a day viewing interpretive exhibits, strolling through the gift

shop, picnicking, grabbing lunch or a snack at the deli, bird-watching, fishing, hiking or mountain biking. Ten miles of trails wind through the park's 3,000-plus acres. Hikers and mountain bikers share the trail system and it is advisable to pick up a trail guide at the visitors centers for trail protocol and access. Paths vary from easy, leisurely walks to strenuous treks. The steepest, Cave Gulch Trail, climbs 1,000 feet in almost 2 miles stretching from the campground up to the Cave Visitor Center. Pack your own water, as there is none along the trails. Black

The Main Visitor Center is easily accessible from Montana state Highway 2 and offers parking for motorhomes.



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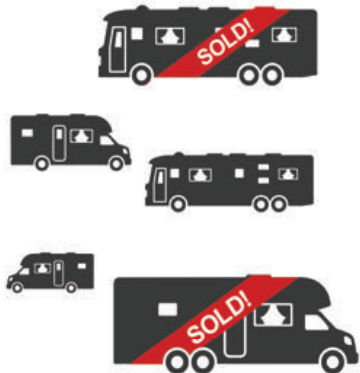
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## GETAWAY

### LEWIS AND CLARK CAVERNS



Above: Stooping and bending under low limestone ceilings adds to the adventure. Right: The path leading to the cave entrance is a great way to sample the terrain and vistas the park's hiking and biking trail system offers.



bears, mountain lions and mule deer frequent the area but the park boasts birding as the top wildlife-viewing opportunity.

Camp for a few days and experience the park to its fullest. Attend ranger programs in the amphitheater, take a guided wildflower walk and share tales of the mysterious mountain caverns over a toasty campfire.

### Planning Your Visit

Guided cavern tours are provided daily from May 1 through September 30. All visitors must check in at the Main Visitor Center at the base of the mountain to obtain a parking pass before proceeding to the Cave Visitor Center. Day-use parking fees are \$5 per vehicle and RV parking is available at both centers. The drive to Cave Visitor Center is up a 3-mile, two-lane, winding road, which can be challenging in a big rig depending on a driver's comfort level. At the top, RV parking is located on the left before the main parking lot.

Cavern tour fees are a great value at \$10 for those 12 years or older, \$5 for explorers 6 to 11 years and free for children 5 years or younger.

The park's big-rig-friendly

campground, located across from the Main Visitor Center, features 40 sites (nine with electrical hookups), showers, restrooms and a dump station. Freshwater tank fill-ups are included in the site fee. Although the campground is open year-round, many amenities including water-related services are only available from May 1 through September 30. Peak-season RV site fees with hookups are \$24 per night for Montana residents and \$34 per night for nonresidents, and \$18 (resident) and \$28 (nonresident) per night without hookups.

Whether you plan to stay and camp at Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park, or visit for a day, be prepared for a unique and fun adventure. **M**

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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# SMOKY MOUNTAIN

## Exploring the Tennessee side of one of America's

**M**any RVers who visit the Smoky Mountains tend to return again and again. Whether it's the majestic mountain views, the dense forests and sweeping meadows, or the many creeks and waterfalls ... something draws them back here.

"It's a wonderful year-round park where people can come and experience all four seasons," said Park Ranger Caitlin Worth. "It's a wonderful place to be during early spring and summertime for wildflowers and wildlife viewing, and a fabulous place to view the fall colors, typically in mid-to late October."

It also offers a rare opportunity to see wildlife in their natural habitat, up close. More than 1,500 black bears live in Great Smoky Mountains National Park and you'll see numerous signs throughout the park warning of an "active bear area." You may see one of those bears off in the distance, or – on occasion – even crossing the road in front of you.

"It's not uncommon for visitors to see bears in the wild here," added Worth. "They also commonly see white-tailed deer and wild turkeys, especially in the Cades Cove area. You might also see elk, coyotes, groundhogs and more."

Equally divided between Tennessee and North Carolina, Great Smoky Mountains National Park attracts almost 9.5 million visitors a year, more than any other national park in the country. (The most-visited service unit in the Park Service is Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the second most-visited unit is the Blue Ridge Parkway, and Great Smoky Mountains comes in third.) It's also one

of the few parks that doesn't charge an admission fee; that's because the land used to be privately owned. The states of Tennessee and North Carolina originally paid to construct a new road (Newfound Gap Road — U.S. 441), but when Tennessee transferred ownership of the road to the federal government, it stipulated that "no toll or license fee shall ever be imposed" to travel the road. If Great Smoky Mountains National Park ever wants to charge an entrance fee, action by the Tennessee Legislature would be required to lift the deed restriction.

Outdoor activities in the park are endless, from hiking to horseback riding, tubing to fishing, and of course, camping. Georgia native Randy Jones has been making an annual trip to the Tennessee side of Great Smoky Mountains for most of his life. "I've

### GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK



### Getting Here

To reach the park entrance near Gatlinburg, Tennessee, from Interstate 40, take Exit 407 to state Highway 66 south. At Sevierville, go straight on U.S. Highway 441 south. Follow Highway 441 through Pigeon Forge to the park.



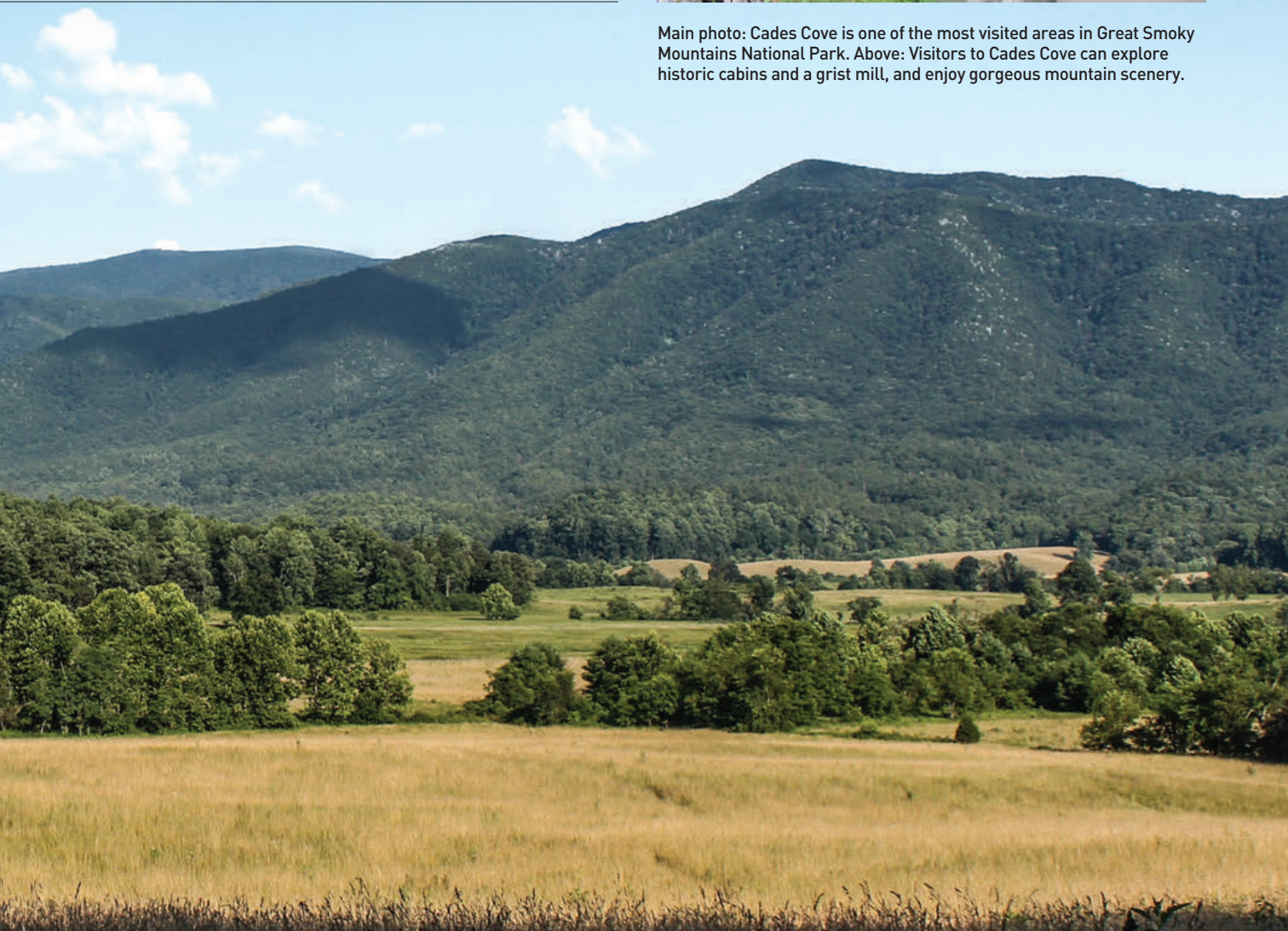


# SPLENDOR

greatest national parks



Main photo: Cades Cove is one of the most visited areas in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Above: Visitors to Cades Cove can explore historic cabins and a grist mill, and enjoy gorgeous mountain scenery.



been camping here for about 44 years. It's been a family tradition for many years, Elkmont in particular."

Elkmont is the park's largest and busiest campground and offers a true mountain camping experience. There are 167 dry-camping sites here with various restrictions on RV length. A dump station is located 6 miles away at the Sugarlands Visitor Center. The

camp has restrooms with flush toilets and cold running water.

Even though the campground doesn't have hookups, Jones believes that giving up some of the comforts of home is worth the trade-off for what you get in return. "It's the cool streams, the shade, the beauty of the trees and the flowers ... and cellphones don't work here, so you get to really

enjoy the quiet. Plus, there's no texting. That's the draw – the serenity."

There are six other campgrounds (sans hookups) inside the park that accommodate RVs, but for visitors who want a less rustic experience, there are numerous private campgrounds in the region that offer full amenities. Cove Creek RV Resort & Rentals on Wears Valley Road in Sevierville, is





one, offering full hookups, spacious sites, Wi-Fi, cable, a large swimming pool, fishing hole and more. Other area campgrounds include Cove Mountain Resorts RV Park, Ripplin' Waters Campground, Riverside RV Park & Resort, and Two Rivers Landing RV Resort.

Park rangers on the Tennessee side will tell you there are few major road restrictions for RVers. Jones, who owns a 2004 Holiday Rambler, says so far, he's been able to get his 40-foot motorhome anywhere he needs to go.

"You really need to know where you're going, especially in an RV this size. I wouldn't recommend going from here to Cherokee [North Carolina]. That would be a little time-consuming and scary, but as long as you come in from the Pigeon Forge side to the Smokies, I think any RV is easily travelable to here and to Smokemont campground, and to Cades Cove."

Cades Cove ranks as one of the

most popular destinations in the Smokies. European settlers lived here in the early 1800s and you'll see some of the buildings they left behind. This 11-mile loop, which can sometimes take two to four hours, depending on traffic, takes motorists on a relaxed sightseeing trip featuring panoramic views, some of those historic homes and churches, and wildlife.

While there are no specified RV restrictions on the main loop in Cades Cove, narrow roads and tight turns make some areas challenging for larger rigs. [Two other roads leading out of Cades Cove are restricted to RVs. See the "Special Information for RVers" section below.] Automobiles tend to move slowly at times as motorists stop to photograph the wildlife or scenery. Also, some of the historic cabins are on side roads that are difficult to maneuver for larger vehicles. Between May and September, the Cove closes on Wednesday and

Above: Cove Creek RV Resort offers full hookups and gorgeous views of the Smoky Mountains. Below: Traffic often moves slowly as motorists stop to photograph the wildlife.

Saturday mornings until 10 a.m. to allow cyclists to ride through for a tour.

Outside the park, you'll find other popular attractions at nearby Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge. There's Dollywood and Dollywood's Splash Country, and the Titanic Museum, just to name a few. The Titanic



## ➔ Special Information for RVers

RVs longer than 25 feet are prohibited on the following roads and bridges:

- Balsam Mountain Road
- Greenbrier Road past the ranger station
- Heintooga Ridge Road
- Little Greenbrier Road
- Metcalf Bottoms Bridge
- Parson Branch Road in Cades Cove
- Rich Mountain Road in Cades Cove
- Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail

Within the park, the grade of the road is less than 5 percent with the minimal tunnel clearance of 17 feet.

In the Cataloochie area, the road into the campground is very narrow with steep drop-offs. In some sections two vehicles cannot pass through at the same time.

If you're traveling from Cades Cove to the Gatlinburg area, there's a section on the Little River Road where a rock overhang extends over the road into the lane. RVs with a higher clearance, particularly Class A's, will need to swing wide to go around it.

There are no fuel stops within Great Smoky Mountains National Park, but there are some available outside the park near the entrances in Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg.



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Museum, housed in a building structured to resemble the ship, offers visitors the chance to get a unique look at what happened on the night of April 15, 1912, when that ill-fated and highly touted “unsinkable” ship went down in 28-degree water in the north Atlantic Ocean. More than 1,500 people died.

As you enter the museum, employees dressed as they would have been on the Titanic greet you, giving you a “boarding pass” with the name of a real person who took that maiden voyage. Some were passengers, others were crew, and as you move through the museum – seeing what living conditions were like as a first-, second-, or third-class passenger or crew member – you begin to track the name on your card, getting a more personal feel for the Titanic experience. You won’t find out until the end of the tour whether the person listed on your card lived or died.

“A lot of people come aboard not knowing what to expect, but when they leave, they’re in awe,” explained John Bell with the museum. “The history of what happened is

---

Right from top: The Laurel Falls Trail — one of the most popular in Great Smoky Mountains National Park — offers sweeping views of the Smoky Mountains. From mid-March through late November, guided horseback rides are available at four concession horseback riding stables in the park. Cades Cove Riding Stables is the only authorized riding stables in the Cades Cove area.



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Titanic interior photo: Courtesy Titanic Museum

Above from left: The Titanic Museum is a popular attraction in Pigeon Forge. Inside, the Discovery Room is one of several exhibits about life on the Titanic. Beech Branch Crafts is just one of the 120 craft shops in Gatlinburg.

told through the stories, through the lives of the people aboard the Titanic. We've got the photographs, we've got the letters, artifacts, all those things that were there. And it makes all those stories come to life. It makes it real."

Nearby Gatlinburg has become a craft center for the region with more than 120 shops, many of them offering

visitors the chance to watch craftsmen demonstrate their skills at painting, pottery making, weaving or woodworking. Many of the shops are set up in individual homes, offering a warmth and hospitality people say reflects the true flavor of the Smoky Mountains.

For the many who are annual visitors to the Tennessee side of the Smokies, to the park and all it has to offer, there's absolutely nothing like it.

"It's priceless," said Jones. "It's been a memory of mine since I was a kid and it's already a memory in my two boys. Making memories, that's

what it's all about, the simple things. And getting back to family, that's what's important." **M**

**For More Information**

**Cove Creek RV Resort & Rentals**  
877-570-2683, [www.covecreekrvresort.com](http://www.covecreekrvresort.com)

**Great Smoky Arts & Craft Community**  
[www.gatlinburgcrafts.com](http://www.gatlinburgcrafts.com)

**Great Smoky Mountains National Park**  
865-436-1200, [www.nps.gov/grsm](http://www.nps.gov/grsm)

**The Titanic Museum**  
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# ASPEN: A ROCKY MOUNTAIN PLAYGROUND

More than just a top ski spot, this Colorado town is a year-round destination for lovers of the great outdoors

**O**riginally settled as a mining town in the 1870s, Aspen, Colorado, is best known today as a ski resort. It's a playground for the rich and famous who arrive in private jets and stay in multimillion-dollar second homes. On our recent visit to Aspen, our group arrived in RVs and stayed in a campground. No matter what the transportation or accommodations, everyone enjoys the great outdoors, arts and culture. Friends invited us to join them for the Jazz Aspen Snowmass (JAS) June festival.

JAS hosts two annual three-day festivals — one June 26-28, and the other during Labor Day weekend (Sept. 4-6) — as well as musical and educational programs throughout the year. A limited number of discounted general admission tickets go on sale in November prior to the event. These are called Blind Faith Passes because they are sold before the acts are announced. Our friends had faith and got their passes. By the time my husband, Jim, and I decided to go, those passes were sold out, so I bought tickets for the Friday and Saturday night entertainers, Diana Krall and



The Maroon Bells are the most photographed peaks in North America.





Aspen's charming downtown area appeals to shoppers and diners, pedestrians and cyclists, and children and dogs.

Steve Winwood.

Much to my surprise, buying a ticket isn't the only way to enjoy the entertainment. Music lovers on a budget bring chairs and blankets and sit on the lawn outside Benedict Music Tent, the open-air venue for the June concerts. On Thursday night we sat on a blanket in the garden surrounded by lupines and irises, and found we were close enough to hear the music.

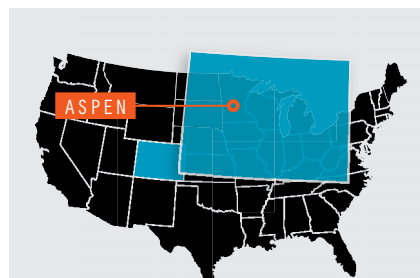
The next two nights we enjoyed the entertainment from our seats inside the tent. We have been Diana Krall fans ever since we heard *The Look of Love* album in 2001. Playing a grand piano and singing in her sultry, smooth voice, Krall wowed the crowd with jazz standards such as "Let's Fall in Love" and "Fly Me to the Moon."

Before his successful solo career, Steve Winwood was a member of The Spencer Davis Group, Traffic and Blind Faith. On Saturday night he rocked the tent with songs he made popular in the '60s, '70s and '80s, like "Gimme Some Lovin'" and "Higher Love." These classics seemed to appeal equally to the younger set as well as those of us who grew up with his music.

We stayed at Difficult Campground in the White River National Forest 5 miles southeast of town. The campground sits above the Roaring

Fork River. Dense forest of aspen, cottonwood and pine provide privacy for each campsite. There are no hookups for any of the 48 sites. Eight sites can accommodate a 35-foot RV, and one can hold a 40-footer. It's a lovely campground, but if you have a big rig or can't do without hookups and cellphone service, opt for RV parks "down valley," as the locals say, toward Basalt and Glenwood Springs. Difficult Campground is open mid-May to late September.

While we filled our nights with music, our days were free for exploration. On Friday morning, we took a bike



### Getting There

There are two ways to get to Aspen on Highway 82 — heading southeast from Glenwood Springs, or heading west over Independence Pass. Vehicles longer than 35 feet are prohibited on Independence Pass, and for good reason. The winding two-lane road has narrow and steep sections. Independence Pass is open from Memorial Day to late October or early November.



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ride to Maroon Bells. A bike trail follows Highway 82 from the campground into Aspen. From there, an 11-mile paved road leads to the most photographed peaks in North America. On our return, we found our way through Aspen, but had to stop a few times to ask directions to Maroon Creek Road, which is a popular route for cyclists for two reasons. First, the scenery is spectacular. Second, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. the road is closed to motorized vehicles except for buses and registered campers staying in designated campsites. This paved ride is ideally suited to skinny-tire road bikes, although it's doable on fat-tire mountain bikes. It just took us a bit longer on our heavier, slower bikes. From the parking lot at Maroon Bells, we took the short walk to Maroon Lake. Both of the "Bells," Maroon Peak and North Maroon Peak, are 14ers, which means they are more than 14,000 feet high. The clear blue skies, snow-covered peaks, green valley and picturesque lake rival the Swiss Alps. On the way down the mountain, we spotted moose and deer feeding in Maroon Creek.

Since we'd worked up appetites on our ride, we met some friends at Justice Snow's Restaurant in downtown Aspen. Devils on Horseback, an appetizer of bacon, dates and goat cheese, was so good that I've ordered



Above: Sophia Clark and Nicole Robertson pause by Difficult Creek during a hike in the Collegiate Peaks Wilderness near Difficult Campground. Below: A bike trail with sections of boardwalk, pavement and gravel runs along Highway 82 from Difficult Campground into Aspen.

them at several restaurants since then. I loved my beets and kale salad, and others were happy with their burgers. From our sidewalk table we watched children play in the world's first computerized dancing fountain, which was built in 1979. Afterward, we browsed the shops in the charming downtown.

On Saturday, eight of us hiked



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a trail from the campground in the Collegiate Peaks Wilderness. It was a 6-mile round-trip hike with almost 2,000 feet of elevation gain. The trail was often steep and rocky. About halfway up the mountain, our friend's daughter, Nicole Robertson, could tell by the look on my face that I was dreading the next climb. She offered to push me up the hill. I couldn't imagine how this would work. She bent over slightly, put her hands below my waist,

and started walking. It was magic, like I was being carried. I went from wondering if it was wise to keep up with this younger group, to thinking I should include 20-somethings in all my vacation plans.

On this musically inspired weekend, a visit to the John Denver Sanctuary was a must. John Denver, a well-known performer, songwriter and environmentalist, made Aspen his home until his untimely death in a 1997 airplane crash.

Above from left: Mallory Cecil was part of a group of horseback riders from the T-Lazy-7 Ranch, which is located near the base of the Maroon Bells. The ghost town of Ashcroft, a former silver mining town in the 1880s, is preserved by the Aspen Historical Society.

His love for Colorado and the Rocky Mountains inspired many of his songs. Fans and friends honored him with this memorial. Set on the banks of the Roaring Fork River, its gardens are lush

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with flowers. The lyrics of his popular songs are etched into the large rocks artfully arranged in John's Song Garden. As I strolled the sanctuary, I found two of our friends standing in front of one such boulder singing a lovely a cappella rendition of "Rocky Mountain High." The beauty of this spontaneous act brought tears to my eyes.

On Sunday afternoon we drove down valley to Glenwood Springs for the 117th Annual Strawberry Days Festival. While there was plenty to attract visitors, including an arts and crafts fair, food vendors and rides for kids, it was the music — once again — that enticed us. Let Them Roar, a popular local band described as "an American musical melting pot," took the stage at 2:30 p.m. This six-member band collaborates to write most of their music, which is a fusion of bluegrass, jazz, and country-western. We didn't want to miss a minute of their performance since our friend's daughter, Sophia Clark, is one of the singers.

While the rest of our group returned to work on Monday, Jim and I explored more attractions. The Aspen Center for Environmental Studies (ACES) is a nonprofit environmental science education organization with four sites in the Roaring Fork Valley, including the Catto Center at Toklat. Eleven



Above: Our group stayed at Difficult Campground in the White River National Forest 5 miles southeast of town. Below: Set on the banks of the Roaring Fork River, the John Denver Sanctuary is lush with flowers.

miles from Aspen on Castle Creek Road, Toklat is a gathering place for cultural and ecological discourse. It was once the family home of one of ACES' founders, Stuart Mace. He met Elena Gonzalez Ruiz in 1987 in Oaxaca, Mexico, when he went there looking for an alternative to Navajo rugs. Elena



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Photo: Steve Murnighan



Above from left: Steve Winwood rocked the house with songs he made popular in the '60s, '70s and '80s, like "Gimme Some Lovin'" and "Higher Love." Popular local band, Let Them Roar, entertained the crowd at the 117th Annual Strawberry Days Festival in Glenwood Springs.

is one of 3,000 Zapotec weavers in her village. For the past 25 years, she has been spending four months a year as the Artist in Residence at Toklat. In her demonstrations, Elena explains how the wool is sorted, cleaned, and spun into yarn, dyed with natural pigments and woven on looms into colorful rugs. This tradition of weaving has been passed from generation to generation in her village of Teotitlan del Valle since 1465.

The ghost town of Ashcroft sits

across from Toklat. In 1880, two prospectors found silver in Castle Creek Valley. By 1883, the mining town boomed to a population of 2,000, with two newspapers, six hotels and 20 saloons. It quickly went bust, with the population dwindling to 100 by 1885. The land was deeded to the U.S. Forest Service in 1953. Today, the Aspen Historical Society preserves nine original buildings.

Our visit to Aspen proved that you

don't have to be a member of the jet set to appreciate the best of what this area has to offer. Our "RV set" enjoyed the beautiful scenery, sounds of music and nature, delicious foods and lush gardens. **M**

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# KIWIS, PENGUINS AND TUATARAS — OH MY!

Motorhome adventures in New Zealand's South Island

**A** yellow-eyed penguin posed on a rock at Curio Bay. After picking our way over petrified logs embedded in the rocky beach, we were able to take photos without disturbing it. It was molting and would be confined to land for several weeks. We were in our second week of a monthlong campervan trip around the South Island of New Zealand.

New Zealand is a magical place. The South Island, about the size of Illinois, is the larger of the two islands but has only 25 percent of the population and is mostly rural. One month may seem like a long time, but the South Island has so much to see, you could easily spend much more time here. Eleven years prior, I had done a similar three-week trip with my 14-year-old granddaughter and we did not have enough time to see the whole island.

A campervan is the ideal way to see the South Island. You set your own schedule, plus, with a self-contained motorhome, you can freedom camp or boondock where allowed rather than rushing on. With miles and miles of scenic roads, following sandy beaches, rocky coastlines, forests and acres of pastureland for sheep, you'll stop often for postcard views.

## Planning

We began researching flights and campervan rentals in October for our February trip. We identified a medium-price campervan that would accommodate my husband,

A 20-minute walk leads to a platform at the Nugget Point Lighthouse, overlooking the "nuggets" below on the Otago coast.







SOUTH ISLAND

## Money Matters

- Currency is the New Zealand dollar; as of presstime, \$1NZ=\$0.75US.
- A 15 percent tax is applied to the cost of goods and services, and is usually included in the price.
- Gratuities are not expected.

George's, 6-foot height. Large, newer units were very pricey; budget campers were too small.

After a 12-hour flight on Air New Zealand from Los Angeles, California, to Auckland, New Zealand, a shorter flight took us to Christchurch to pick up our 2001 Path Seeker from Freedom Campers. The camper was furnished with linens and cookware. A trip to the grocery store for food and toilet paper was first on the agenda.

## Heading out

After a night in Christchurch, we headed south on Highway 1, chanting, "Stay left, stay left." The five-speed stick shift on the left took a little getting used to and at first



A sunny day for a boat tour on Milford Sound with iconic Mitre Peak shrouded in clouds.

George hit the windshield wiper switch instead of the turn signal indicator.

Using our marked Lonely Planet guidebook, plus maps, directories and brochures from Freedom Campers, we had a general route planned out. February here is similar to late summer in the Northern Hemisphere so we decided to do a clockwise circuit, sticking mostly to the perimeter. We would follow a similar route to the one that my granddaughter, Gabrielle, and I did, but also add in new places and do more hiking. Our campervan came equipped with Tourism Radio, a device that works with GPS technology and plugs into your radio to tell you about nearby attractions, landmarks, history and places to stay.

The city soon dropped away to fields and pastures on the Canterbury Plains. We saw the first of many farms raising deer and elk for meat. We decided to go inland first to see Mount Cook, New Zealand's tallest peak, and then resume our coastal circuit. We spent night two at Pioneer Park, a Department of Conservation (DOC) park. At \$6NZ a piece per night, DOC parks were a bargain. We camped under huge trees with other rental campervans scattered around the

perimeter of a grassy field. The two DOC parks we stayed in had pit toilets, one water faucet and trash receptacles.

We mostly stayed at holiday parks, averaging about \$40NZ/night, which are commercial parks that have powered sites as well as tent sites and rooms, plus a central kitchen and large restrooms. Showers were usually free.

The South Island is long and skinny. With only 25 percent of the population, it is mostly rural, with seven sheep to each person. The Southern Alps where Mount Cook is located runs along the western edge of the island. On the east side of the mountains, we hiked to a viewpoint of the Tasman Glacier and at a planetarium show learned how to pick out the Southern Cross in the night sky.



This signpost at Bluff just might be the one that started the fad!



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## Penguins

Back to the coast to see penguins! Oamaru is home to a blue penguin colony. Blue penguins are the tiniest species of penguins, and in Oamaru each evening several groups of 10 to 15 penguins scramble up the rocks after dark to their nesting boxes. Rare yellow-eyed penguins nest in the area, but it wouldn't be until we reached Curio Bay that we got a good look at one.

We stopped at the Moeraki Boulders because of a Pinterest photo. After a coastal loop out of Oamaru where we saw many lovely freedom camping spots right on the ocean, we returned to Highway 1 South. From the parking lot at Koekohe Beach, it's a short walk at low tide to the most unusual round boulders. These concretions, some nearly 10 feet in diameter, were formed in ancient sea sediments.



A yellow-eyed penguin poses at Curio Bay in the Catlins.

## TRAVEL TIPS

- Diesel fuel is considerably less than petrol. With your supermarket purchase, you can get discount fuel coupons. We spent \$488US.
- Our campervan rental was close to \$4,700 for 28 days including extra insurance and credit card surcharge.
- Believe the caution signs with lowered speed limits on curves and be prepared for one-way bridges. Signs indicate who has the right of way.
- A SIM card at the Vodafone booth at the airport with 2MB data, 200 texts and 100 minutes for local calls and calls to the U.S. was \$57US. Your cellphone must be unlocked.
- Most holiday parks had Wi-Fi, usually for a charge. A 30-day card from IAC, the Internet provider at many holiday parks, would have been more economical.
- Cell service is virtually nonexistent outside of towns.
- At holiday parks, water and dump are in a central location.
- A Top 10 Holiday Park membership offered discounts. They consistently had nice facilities.
- Except for hiking, most attractions charged a fee. We spent about \$2,100US for the month.

A hike through the rain forest and along the beach takes you to a pair of connected sea caves, more than 100 feet tall inside.

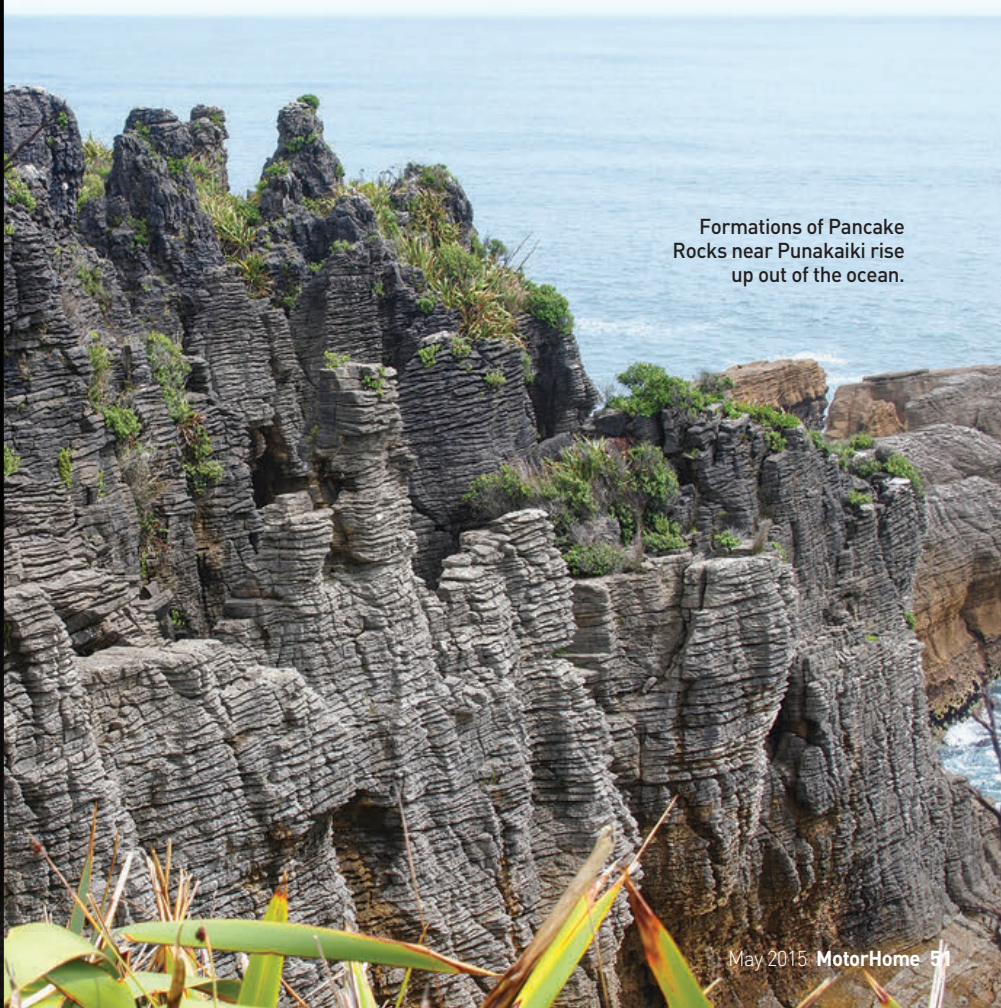
## Chocolate!

Dunedin's Otago Peninsula offers opportunities to see more bird life, including nesting royal albatross. However, I remembered Cadbury World from my prior visit. Playful guides show how their chocolate products are made and give samples. Giant candy bars from the store make excellent souvenirs.

## Catlins

The Catlins was my favorite part of the South Island. The Southern

Scenic Route takes you along the coast, through rainforest and access to several short hikes. Photos on Pinterest convinced us to stop at several places. First was Nugget Point Lighthouse perched on a steep headland. Another was Purakaunui Bay, where we parked in our campervan right on the ocean at a DOC campground with turquoise waters rolling into a curving sandy beach



Formations of Pancake Rocks near Punakaiki rise up out of the ocean.



hugged by bluffs on either side.

We spent the night near Cathedral Caves on Waipati Beach, another Pinterest find. The caves, with 100-foot-high ceilings, are accessible through private land at low tide. We also hiked to waterfalls, Jack's Blowhole and Slope — the southern-most point on the South Island.

Curio Bay along the southern coast is where we saw several yellow-eyed penguins, a species found only in New Zealand. Other stops included Bluff — the southern-most city — and Invercargill to see Henry, the tuatara, at the Southland Museum. Tuataras are reptiles that have survived from the age of dinosaurs; Henry is more than 100 years old!

### **Fiordlands**

A trip to either Milford or Doubtful sound should be on your itinerary. These fiords reach out to the Tasman Sea with sheer cliffs and myriad waterfalls when it's raining. Part of the draw of a trip to Milford Sound is the scenic drive. The excursion to Doubtful Sound is longer, with more to see on the water and fewer tourists. Starting with a boat trip across Lake Manapouri, then a tour of the underground power plant, you then board a vessel at Deep Cove. We did both, but choose according to your allotted time and budget.

Heading up the West Coast, we skipped Queenstown (too crowded) and stopped in Wanaka to see Puzzling World. At



Above: A tour boat gets up close to a waterfall in Milford Sound. Below: Kayaking is a fun way to explore the shoreline along Abel Tasman National Park.

“February here is similar to late summer in the Northern Hemisphere.”







Caution is needed if you encounter a herd of sheep being moved from one pasture to another.

Fox Glacier, one of two glaciers easily accessible from Highway 6, we hiked to a viewpoint of its immense tongue.

### Kiwis

The iconic bird of New Zealand is the kiwi. In Franz Josef we visited the West Coast Wildlife Center. After your eyes adjust to the darkened room, you can pick out kiwis foraging through the duff. A behind-the-scenes tour includes information about the rescue program for endangered kiwis and a glimpse at chicks in incubators before being released to a predator-free environment.

Another memorable stop before heading to the North Coast was Pancake Rocks at Dolomite Point, near the little settlement of Punakaiki. These unusual formations are made up of compressed marine and plant life.

### Tracks along the ocean

The north is a close second to the Catlins for beauty. From the west, we came down through the rugged Buller Gorge, through forested hills, vineyards and pastureland with sheep and cows. On my previous trip, we had not traveled this far north. Two tracks or hikes are must-do's: the Abel Tasman Coast Track in Abel Tasman National Park and the Queen Charlotte Track along the Queen Charlotte Sound. Water taxis take hikers out, drop them off, then pick them up at prearranged locations and times. Other ways to explore both areas include scenic cruises and kayaking.

Leaving Picton at the head of Queen Charlotte Sound, we again followed coastal Highway 1 south. Fur seals, found all along the coasts, were



Above from left: An aerial view of a holiday park at Lake Tekapo on the way to Mount Cook. The author, Jaimie, relaxes in one of the mineral pools at Hanmer Springs Thermal Pools and Spa.

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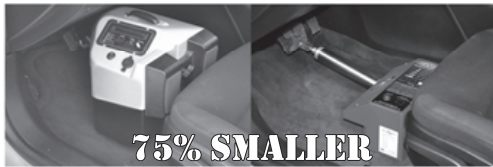


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## KIWIS, PENGUINS AND TUATARAS — OH MY!

especially visible at rocky coves along the highway.

Kaikoura, a small town with a gorgeous beach backed by tall peaks, offered whale watches. Male sperm whales, the largest of the toothed whales, feed year-round in the 1½-mile-deep undersea Kaikoura Canyon lying just offshore, leaving only to mate. We saw three of the giants along with dusky dolphins and an albatross.

Our last stop was Hanmer Springs Thermal Pools and Spa, inland but only 90 minutes from Christchurch. With more than a dozen pools and a variety of mineral waters plus a giant play area for children and spa services, Hanmer Springs is a delightful place to relax at any point during your trip.

Christchurch, our beginning and ending point, was devastated by an earthquake in 2011. The city's lovely cathedral was badly damaged. Reconstruction is widespread in the downtown area. It was much changed since my last visit.

On the outskirts of town, Willowbank Wildlife Reserve was a delightful treat. Our last evening, we attended a Maori cultural experience with demonstrations of the haka war dance followed by dinner. The preserve has an assortment of animals and birds and children delight in feeding the eels and other creatures. **M**

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[www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation](http://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation)  
Information on parks and recreation and Department of Conservation campgrounds.

**Freedom Campers**  
[www.freedomcampers.co.nz](http://www.freedomcampers.co.nz)  
Search online for other providers.

**IAC card**  
[www.internetaccesscompany.co.nz](http://www.internetaccesscompany.co.nz)

**New Zealand Motor Caravan Association**  
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**Tourism New Zealand**  
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# TAPPING ROUTES TO NATURE'S FLOWER BOX

A tour of wildflower hot spots across the country

**W**hen nature's wand sweeps over the barren-sleep of winter, the transformation is celebratory and a signal to travel. Given the diversity of this great land, the wildflower theater is varied and the timing accommodating — even for procrastinators. Blooms burst forth February through September.

The South conjures fragrant-sweet memories and charm with blossoms of honeysuckle, dogwood and magnolia. Rhododendron and mountain laurel reign as you migrate north through the Blue Ridge and Smoky mountains and continue north through the mid-Atlantic and New England states. The Great Smoky Mountains arguably

contain the greatest botanical diversity in the nation.

Black-eyed Susan, prairie aster, blazing star and butterfly-weed strut color across the Midwest prairies, while Texas two-steps in with its signature bluebonnet. Look for showers of rhododendron and azalea to again take hold under the towering

California redwoods.

A pointed array of cacti, agave and yucca join a rainbow of annuals adorning the desert southwest, and the high country Sierra, Cascade and Rocky mountains roll out carpets of alpine flora in the few choice weeks between snowmelt and first frost (or snowfall). Swamps, forests, chaparral, dunes and coastal shores, all have their decoration.

Strolling in fields of color, photographing or capturing the fleeting moment on canvas recommend wildflower travel. But, a floral backdrop enhances most recreational



A daisy meadow in Willamette Mission State Park, located north of Salem, Oregon.



endeavors.

Blooms also attract birds, bees, butterflies and wildlife. One afternoon in Alberta, Canada, from the safe embrace of our vehicle, we watched a sunning radio-tagged grizzly top dandelions one by one. The color vanished but the memory stayed.

A flip through most any calendar yields travel possibilities. Native plant societies can offer suggestions. Naturalist-led walks can acquaint you with local species. A good wildflower field guidebook adds to appreciation. Popular areas may have wildflower hotlines or tracking reports.

Winter rains followed by warm sunny days can herald a floral bonanza. Too much or no rain, sparse displays. It's a delightful crapshoot.

Because many displays occur in our state and national parks, motorhome travelers will find convenient access and overnight accommodation on the spot. Private facilities fill in with added comforts, services and often better size accommodation.

The only rule for wildflowers: Don't pick. It's a good one, ensuring even better shows in future years. Only a hayfever sufferer could find fault — fortunately for me, there's medicine.

## Desert bloom, California Mojave

Desert reaches, whether Mojave, Sonoran, Chihuahuan or Great Basin, are vast, harsh and complicated, as well as delicate and beautiful when the elements collide in a perfect spring.

In the California Mojave, Mother Nature ties on her many-colored hostess apron late February through May, serving up purple mat, sand verbena, lily, primrose, lupine and desert dandelion. The red and yellow blossoms of barrel, beavertail, prickly pear and hedgehog cacti arrive March to June.

Joshua Tree National Park (cupped by Interstate 10 south of Twentynine Palms) combines the best of the Mojave and Great Basin deserts. Its namesake Dr. Seuss-esque tree is an irregular bloomer of the agave family, flowering February through April. Mojave National Preserve, stretched between interstates 15 and 40, salutes the core Mojave offering. Each place has trails, historical sites, rock climbing and plenty of flowering trees, shrubs, cacti and annuals.

State park and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) sites broaden viewing opportunities. Mid-March to June, at Desert Tortoise Natural Area (a BLM day-use area off dirt Randsburg-Mojave Road, 5 miles north of California City), tortoises feed on the desert annuals, storing up water and fat. Early risers may see the sensible, but threatened, cool-of-the-day feeders. Grant them space and heed rules to protect them.

Desert admiration requires attention to the spiny plant defenses, and travelers should carry water, wear hats and keep fuel tanks topped.

## Mountain laurel, Connecticut and Pennsylvania

Because the Mississippi River signals the end of the laurel's westward march, this deprived Westerner must travel for its admiring.

Celebrating this shared state flower, Connecticut and Pennsylvania roll out quite a welcome. The evergreen shrub favors ridges and supports clusters of pink-and-white cupped stars in June.

In Connecticut, a passenger vehicle eases travel and parking. State parks offer trails and viewing: Sleeping Giant (Hamden), Bigelow Hollow (south of Massachusetts, east off Interstate 84), Burr Pond (Torrington), Chatfield Hollow (Killingworth) and Great Pond State Forest (west of



From top right: Blooming Joshua trees are a common sight in Arthur B. Ripley Desert Woodland State Park, 7 miles west of the Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve. In Joshua Tree National Park, California, hedgehog cactus flowers May through June. At Desert Tortoise Natural Area, in California's eastern Kern County, desert candle is one of more than 160 different plants.



Simsbury, passenger vehicle only) are good choices. Other destinations are Tarrywile Park and Mansion (Danbury) and the White Memorial Nature Center in Litchfield Hills.

But the laurel is prolific, seen most everywhere in the state. Mashamoquet Brook (near Abington), Kettletown (near Southbury, 28-foot maximum size) and Devil's Hopyard (East Haddam) combine state park camping and laurel, with trails, overlooks and waters to explore.

Pennsylvania's Laurel Highlands, in the southwest corner, offers another logical start. For area access and windshield viewing, PA 381 runs north-south between Ligonier and the National Road (U.S. 40) at Farmington, linking Fort Ligonier and Fort Necessity National Battlefield. Roadside parks and reserves allow floral stops. Heritage encounters may include General George Washington, Frank Lloyd Wright (Fallingwater), Andrew Carnegie and R.K. Mellon.

Ohiopyle and Laurel Hills state parks both have campgrounds and trails. Ohiopyle offers whitewater sport

Stands of mountain laurel dot the trails in Allegheny National Forest, Pennsylvania.

and rail-trail cycling along the Youghiogheny River. The Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail runs 70 miles through five highland counties — most trail samplings feature laurel.

Overlooks, byways and trails along Pennsylvania's Allegheny Reservoir (at the New York border, near Warren) and in the surrounding Allegheny National Forest likewise have admirable mountain laurel showings.

### Bluebonnets, central Texas Hill Country

The home state of Lady Bird Johnson, responsible for the beautify America campaign, is a must on any wildflower list. The Hill Country blooms April through June.



Despite my imagined fields being bigger, brighter and far more accessible, the region welcomes with lovely drives. What it lacks are turnouts. Parks, wildlife areas (if you have access to a passenger vehicle) and other public sites meet that need.

Fields painted in lavender verbena

Right: Mountain laurel in bloom and the stone observation tower at Sleeping Giant State Park in Hamden, Connecticut. Below: A verbena field in South Llano River State Park, Texas.





complemented our travel from San Antonio into the Hill Country. We also glimpsed bluebonnets and Indian paintbrush seeded along the private ranch roads and property fronts. The best natural displays were at Kerr Wildlife Area and Inks Lake.

Fort McKavett State Historic Site paired white adobe and stone ruins from a Texas-Indian wars fort with a smattering of bluebonnets and a claret-cup cactus bloom. At Enchanted Rock State Natural Area (a day-use area with limited parking), the wildflowers coupled up with pink granite domes and jumbles, popular with hikers and climbers.

Texas state parks offer camping and activities. Garner, Lost Maples, South Llano River and Inks Lake all served our needs. South Llano combined river access, spreading oaks, green fields and attractive paths. An afternoon thunderstorm blackened the sky, fully drenching us, before lending a rainbow to the field of verbena we admired.

At Inks Lake we were lured by color before ever entering the park. Photographers already in place targeted instead the absence of color, finding a handful of albino bluebonnets. The park's open rock, meadow and woodland terrain shaped a cascading banner for bluebonnet, Indian



From top right: Ruins of barracks with claret-cup cactus growing around the rocks at Fort McKavett State Historic Site, Texas. Lost Maples State Natural Area in Vanderpool, Texas, has 30 partial-hookup sites.

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paintbrush, Indian blanket, yellow daisy, yellow coreopsis, white prickly poppy and winecup. Claret cup and prickly pear cactus dotted surprise. Yucca, fern, phlox and spiderwort were other adornments. Color-coded trails guided the way.

At Austin's Lady Bird Johnson

Wildflower Center, paths wend through organized gardens, greenhouses, ponds and water features. At Fredericksburg, the Wildseed Farms gift shop overflowed with wildflower-themed cards, shirts and cups, but seeds were the biggest seller. Hardly anyone left without buying a packet.

### High-country bloom, Glacier National Park, Montana

As summer fades into fall in the low country, the high country is just dipping its toe into spring. August through September distills the spring, summer and fall bloom into a whirlwind of color.

The Highline Trail was our chosen



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From far left: At Glacier National Park in Montana, yellow glacier lilies push up through the snow near Mount Reynolds. Visitors to the Logan Pass area in Glacier National Park can hike a 1.5-mile boardwalk to Hidden Lake Overlook. Keep an eye out for yellow columbine on the Cliff Lake Trail in Lolo National Forest, Montana.

wild onion, Indian blanket, red-and-pink Indian paintbrush, golden daisies, harebells, bluebells and yellow glacier lilies. Elsewhere, the creamy floral stalks of beargrass (a member of the false hellebore family, which achieves mass bloom every five to 10 years in Glacier) drew note.

The alpine spectacle is hard to beat, delicacy yet such resilience and fight. A must for all future visits. Others on the trail shared the conviction; one couple were on their fifth return.

We later ascended the stair walk behind Logan Pass Visitor Center, continuing toward Hidden Lake, through Hanging Gardens meadows.

Not even the crowds could dilute the wonder of magnificent mountain slopes, lush greenery and vibrant wildflowers: white, yellow, pink, red, purple and blue. We saw a ptarmigan and chicks in summer coloration and listened to their soft clucking. We watched marmots and Columbian ground squirrels gather seeds and flower heads to cache in rock jumbles. Mountain goats observed us all. Wind parted the grasses and swept up slope, and life couldn't be better.

## Floral smorgasbord, backyard America

When seeking out wildflowers, don't forget your home-state backyard. For me that's Oregon. Proximity gives me an insider's track to weather and bloom conditions.

Oregon has great diversity with coastal, valley, mountain and high desert discovery. The bluffs and slopes of the Columbia Gorge parade out 1,250 of the 4,000 plants native

ground. As the black, jagged skyline met the wakening day, we were dazzled by myriad lupine, columbine, fleabane, alpine lousewort, blue gentian, pink monkeyflower, violet selfheal, white yarrow and pearly everlasting, yellowish-green western anemone (the beatniks of the slope), purple-headed

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From above: Photographing Oregon iris in William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon. From late February through June, Tom McCall Preserve, also in Oregon, is home to an impressive display of wildflowers, including this balsamroot.



to Oregon, blooming mid-March to June. But I can chase Oregon blooms through September.

In March and April, the Willamette Valley displays iris, camas, avalanche lily and trillium, with wild rose not far behind. The coast offers blooms of rhododendron and azalea, and the mountains bring stunning shows of rho-

dadendron and beargrass in advance of the alpine bloom of late summer. The high desert rolls out texture and variety with bitterroot, balsamroot, scarlet gilia, and its flowering shrubs and trees. The forests hold vanilla leaf, false Solomon's seal, salal, Oregon grape,

bunchberry and more.

Scenic byways, trails, bike paths and state waters conduct travel. With a rich state park system, camping is never far from hand.

Isn't it time you tapped a route to nature's flower box? **M**

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## **Park Power Problems**

Not all electrical mishaps are the result of lightning strikes. In addition to the potential damage by voltage surges, there are also other hidden dangers damaging your RV at the pedestal. Low voltage conditions force some appliances to draw more current, resulting in overheating of appliances. This overheating can shorten appliance lifespans and lead to premature failures. High voltage will reduce the life of resistive loads and damage electronic control circuits. Miswired pedestals can result in reversed polarity or an open neutral condition on the coach. Both are safety/fire hazards and will cause severe damage. With Surge Guard® RV Power Protection, you can plug in and rest assured that your RV is protected against faulty power.





*Don't let this happen to you! Using a surge protector, especially a model that offers multi-mode surge suppression and additional safety features, will help protect against the risk of electrical fire, which can quickly consume an RV and leave you, your family and pets little time to escape.*

### Peace of Mind Protection

The Surge Guard RV Power Protection family provides a full line of electrical safety products for the RV industry. Several models in both 30A and 50A, hardwire and portable units are offered with protection against power surges, overheating plug/receptacles, high and low voltage conditions, open neutral and ground conditions, or mis-wired pedestals – all of which lead to serious damage to your coach.

Perfect for pop-ups and travel trailers, the Surge Guard Model 44750 30A portable unit provides ground fault circuit interruption technology with basic protection against surges. With the 30A Surge Guard Model 44260 and 50A Model 44270, added intelligence that analyzes circuits to identify faulty park power before plugging in compliments the surge protection.

### Portables with LCD Display

Surge Guard's Full Protection models 34830 (30A) and 34850 (50A), feature an LCD display that provides the user with important alert data in easy-to-read English readout. These models offer higher joules of power surge protection

than the previous models. The 30 amp models now protect up to 2,450 joules and the 50 amp models to 3,850 joules.

In addition, these full protection devices continuously monitor conditions at the pedestal, and will automatically shut off power when faulty power is detected to protect your coach. Patent-Pending thermal technology will shut down whenever temperatures at the plug/receptacle exceed 200°F, protecting against fire/safety hazards and melted connectors. Shut off for open ground/neutral protection, low (<102V) and high (>132V) voltage, and reverse polarity (50A unit) is present. Continuous monitoring for voltage and amp draw (RMS), as well as elevated ground voltage is included in both units, and alerts for surge events indicate when the unit has experienced a significant surge that has sacrificially exhausted the Surge Guard to protect your RV. Each device resets automatically once acceptable power conditions have been restored after a 128-second time delay for AC startup protection.

### Easy to Use

Surge Guard portable protection devices are compact and easy to use, plugging in between the pedestal and the

line cord to provide protection. They are designed for all travel trailers, 5th wheel and motor coaches with 30 and 50 amp service. The entire Surge Guard line is equipped with Easy-T-Pull™ handles on both line and load sides. No more difficulty plugging/unplugging power cord connections.

### Theft Protection

To ease possibility of theft of the portable Surge Guard devices and voltage regulators, a Surge Guard lock hasp is designed to attach to the standard 30A and 50A plugs, using a customer-supplied padlock attached to the hasp to deter theft.

### Convenient Hardwired Models

The Surge Guard hardwire models 34520 (30A) and 34560 (50A) provide all of the same full-featured protection of the portable units, compact for ease of installation into the coach's power compartment. Optional remote LCD display model 40298 plugs into the remote port on the hardwire units, providing easy readout and plug and play joystick convenience for on-screen navigation of options. Sixteen detailed fault screen keep you informed of your RV's power status.

Surge Guard's Automatic Transfer Switch Model 40250-RVC is RVC compatible full Surge protection with automatic transfer ability from shore power to generator power when energized after a 30-second delay in generator mode.

### Low Power Solutions

Voltage regulators, 30 amp model 10176 and 50 amp model 10175 provide reliable source of power when experiencing fluctuations resulting in low RV park input voltage. They do not protect against faults or surges, but monitor and boost line voltage conditions, helping prevent low voltage damage to the RV's appliances and electronic devices.

Protect your investment and what you value most! From basic monitoring and surge protection to bumper-to-bumper full featured security, Surge Guard RV Power Protection is here to provide peace of mind on your way to trouble-free roads!



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# SALMON RIVER BYWAY: **THE RIVER OF NO RETURN**

Travelers on this Idaho scenic route will pass through the Salmon-Challis National Forest and enjoy views of the Salmon River, the White Cloud, Lemhi and Bitterroot mountain ranges

---



Explorers Lewis and Clark declared the section of the Salmon River that runs along River Road toward Shoup, "the River of No Return."



**S**agebrush deserts, soaring, snow-custed mountains, clear rushing rivers and streams — whatever your taste, Idaho has a scenic byway perfect for an RV adventure. We've chosen the Salmon River Scenic Byway, 162 miles of two-lane road between the Salmon-Challis National Forest and the Sawtooth National Recreation Area that runs along the wild Salmon River and through the second-deepest gorge on the continent. It's a place renowned for historic sites, spectacular scenery and some of the best fishing in the world. We start our tour at the southern terminus of this scenic byway.



## The Route

Plan to spend three to four hours (or longer) exploring the byway, which begins in the south at Stanley, Idaho, and follows the Salmon River through the town of Salmon before ending at the Montana state line.

We begin our exploration of Salmon River country on State Highway 75 at the Bethine and Frank Church Overlook high in Idaho's Boulder Mountains. All around us are the craggy Sawtooth Mountains, their snow-custed spires reaching to the sky. Down below in the Sawtooth Valley is the birthplace of the Salmon River. This impressive waterway wends its way 425 miles and drains 14,000 square miles while dropping 7,000 feet in elevation. In 1805, explorers Lewis and Clark found this river so wild and unnavigable, they called it the River of No Return.

Highway 75 angles sharply downhill, plunging from an 8,000-plus-foot elevation into the wide, aspen-filled Sawtooth Valley (elevation 7,150 feet). We immediately begin to see the black horns of pronghorn antelope — first a couple, a half dozen, then two dozen. The valley's lush green grasses make the perfect habitat for these fleet-footed ungulates.

The valley narrows and we pull off at a kiosk where we learn this is the gateway to the Sawtooth Wilderness — more than 200,000 acres of protected land that encompasses the Rocky Mountain's Sawtooth Range and the backbone of the Rocky Mountains.

## Hot Springs, Mining, Swimming Eagles

The village of Stanley (population 69), the first town on the southern end of the Salmon River Scenic Byway, is a gaggle of log cabins and a few commercial buildings with the feel of the wild West. While it's early evening, there's plenty of summer light left, so we grab a couple of hot sub sandwiches at Papa Brune's and

head out. We're following the narrow canyon along the Salmon River, which is running fast, rocking and rolling with frothy whitecaps. Along the way, we pass plenty of primitive campsites, some paved, where fishermen-RVers try their luck on this world-class fishing river.

The sun has popped out, illuminating this winding 40-MPH road that cuts through steep roadside mountains dotted with sage, evergreens and dramatic rock outcroppings. The forests are a mix of green and gray, the result of trees killed by the pine bark beetle. Yellow and black songbirds flit among the brush. This is big, wild country and it's easy to see why Lewis and Clark found it difficult to explore.

We pause at a little stone building along the river. This is Sunbeam Hot Springs, the site of a former bathhouse built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in 1937 that diverted water from a nearby hot spring to mix with the cool river waters. The bathhouse is long gone, but the pipe still fills pools along the river's edge with warm water. As we meander down the paved pathway, we meet a couple of young men in bathing trunks. They're wet and

shivering and tell us the high water has washed out the pools. No hot springs for us today.

We also check out the kiosk that tells us the Yankee Fork of the Salmon River is a 28-mile-long stretch of the river with a rich mining history. Gold was discovered in Stanley Basin in 1863 and, if you have a dinghy vehicle (RVs not recommended), you can take the Yankee Fork Road cutoff to explore the ghost towns of Bonanza and Custer along with the Yankee Fork Dredge and Boot Hill cemetery. Since we don't have a dinghy, we continue on, crossing over the Yankee Fork and passing shady riverside picnic spots.

We're now driving high above the river and road construction stops us where a steep cliff has cascaded onto the roadbed. After a few minutes' wait, we drive out of the canyon and past a scatter of isolated ranches. There are a few RV parks along this lovely stretch, including Torrey's Burnt Creek Inn right on the river and, at milepost 218, Old Sawmill Station.

We're at 5,733 elevation and the

Below from left: Trout fishing on Williams Lake means fresh fish for dinner for some lucky anglers. The Salmon River's scenery delights kayakers and rafters.





mineral-rich mountains around us are impressive — painted with rust, white, orange, yellow and black, and dotted with yellow wildflowers. We stop at the many wide turnouts to snap photos of the beauty.

At the junction of highway 75 and U.S. Highway 93, we stop at Land of the Yankee Fork State Park Interpretive Center and Bison Jump. Dedicated to telling the rich history of mining and native peoples in the area, there's a self-guided walking trail with interpretive signs and weathered buckboards, ore sleds and carts, and other mining equipment. There's also a short trail that tells about native peoples using the surrounding steep cliffs to drive bison to their deaths. Inside the Interpretive Center are mineral samples and more mining artifacts.

We learn that the discovery of gold led to a 40-year boom that birthed flourishing mining towns like Custer City. By 1911, the mines had played out and only ghosts whispered through the abandoned buildings. One town that survived is Challis (population 1,085) just down the road. Founded in 1878, a few original buildings still stand, including the log cabin built in 1894 as the First Congregational Church.

We continue north on highway 93 toward the town of Salmon. The mountains look like folded velvet right out of a Maxfield Parrish painting. Across the valley to the east, nearly vertical mountains display sheer gray and gold rock faces sculpted, weathered and eroded by time. In the meadows, white-tailed deer graze in the evening twilight. Occasionally, we spot abandoned cabins and tumbledown homesteads and wonder who lived there. The isolation and wildness of the land makes us grateful we've got a full tank of fuel.

The canyon narrows again and we drop into Royal Gorge, where the river flows on one side of the roadway and massive red rock walls rise up on the other. At milepost 267, the canyon opens up, giving us a bit of breathing room. As

### WHEN TO SEE IT

Best weather for travel is April to November, although access to the backcountry is best from July to October.



Mining gear lines a self-guided tour at the Land of the Yankee Fork State Park near Challis, Idaho.

we round a tight corner, we spot iridescent swallows diving into the water. There's also a huge snag with a stately bald eagle on the top ogling the rapids.

We pull into a convenient, wide spot and watch the eagle spread its wings and swoop low over the water, talons outstretched. It grasps a fish, but its catch is heavy and it's pulled into the water. For a moment, the waves completely cover the bird. Then it emerges and begins to "swim" the backstroke using its wings. We watch in amazement as the bird maneuvers itself and the fish to the bank. With dinner firmly clutched in one talon, the bird hops up the steep slope. At the top, it looks around warily and helps itself to a few bites of fresh fish. Then, with great effort, it launches with its prize, just barely clearing the rushing water. The eagle catches an updraft and rises, finally disappearing over a stand of trees.

It's late when we finally pull into Century 2 Campground & RV Park in the town of Salmon. Located on 3 acres along the river, this quiet park offers 18 full-hookup gravel-topped sites, grass and shade, free Wi-Fi, and free showers with no time limit. Listening to the rush of water, we tumble wearily into bed to dream about swimming eagles.

Rugged mountains surround the tiny town of Stanley, Idaho, gateway to the Salmon River Scenic Byway.







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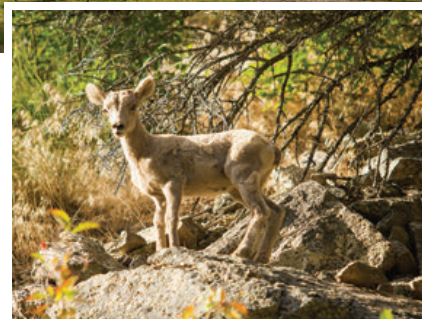
## Support it!



- Adjusts to nearly any slope
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- Pivots hose around obstructions
- Extends up to 10 feet
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### Fishing, History, Big Horns

The Salmon River boasts world-class fishing, but the water is running high — too high to fish. So we join fishing guide Steve Freestone from Rawhide Outfitters and bounce along a gravel track to Williams Lake. Located at an elevation of 5,252 feet and surrounded by craggy mountains, the lake is renowned for rainbow trout up to 2 pounds. We navigate the lake with Freestone paddling the drift boat for a few hours. While some fly fishermen are successful, including one whose dogs bark every time he lands a fish, we're skunked and return to our motorhome empty-handed.

We're more successful at the Sacajawea Interpretive, Cultural and Educational Center. The 71-acre park features a visitor center with interpretive exhibits and artifacts about Sacajawea, the Lemhi Shoshone woman who accompanied the Lewis and Clark Expedition, acting as an interpreter and guide, in their exploration of the West. We also walk along The Eagles Nest Interpretive Trail that explains both the area's history and ecology.

We head north on highway 93 past cattle ranches. The magnificent Bitterroot Mountains, their peaks permanently frosted with snow, shadow us. The Salmon River Byway is part of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, and we pass by Tower Rock, stately ramparts that resemble giant rock soldiers, where Lewis and Clark camped during their expedition.

We stop at River Rock Access, an

Above from top: Riverside spaces at the Wagonhammer RV Park afford views and soothing gurgling water sounds to RVers. During early summer months, bighorn sheep and their young crisscross River Road.

easy pullout with restrooms, to take photos of the surrounding red cliffs. The banks of the river here are lined with cottonwoods shedding cotton so thick it looks like it's snowing. These big trees are a keystone species that helps moderate water flows, stabilizes the river bank, reduces erosion, improves water quality and provides shade, which lowers the water temperature for salmon and steelhead. They also offer habitat for bald eagles, orioles, tanagers, Lewis's woodpeckers and more.

This is a great place to spot bighorn sheep prancing along the precipices and we use the scope provided, but find none. Just a few minutes down the road, we see them — first one herd, then another and another. In fact, bighorn sheep are so abundant here, this stretch is known as the Bighorn Highway. We scramble out to take pictures of the agile, dun-colored sheep.

It's nearly 6 p.m. when we pull into Wagonhammer RV Park and



Campground just outside North Fork. This neat-as-a-pin Good Sam Park, located right on the Salmon River, offers 52 generous sites, many with river views, 30- and 50-amp service, and full or partial hookups. There's also a small store, a cozy gathering spot where guests, many who return year after year, enjoy wine and shared appetizers, and a top-drawer gift shop/boutique.

Owners Shirley and Abner Schultz insist we join them for a tour of River Road. This gravel track, which is accessible via RV, takes us along the river and we spot several abandoned cabins and pieces of mining equipment tucked into the trees. At mile 17, we stop at Shoup, a mining town that was the first capital of the state. In the 1920s, Shoup boasted a population of 1,500 to 2,000. Today, just a handful of people call the place home, including the owner of the Shoup Store. A former trading post, the store boasts the oldest working gravity-fed gas pump in

the state and delicious hamburgers.

After a peaceful night at Wagonhammer, we climb highway 93 back to 5,400 feet where summer green aspen glow in the sunlight and the forest floor is a carpet of bear grass, their pompomlike heads shimmering in the breeze. We ascend higher and higher into the mountains and, at Jerry Fahey's Cutoff, pause just below the summit to admire sweeping vistas and bid adieu to the beautiful Salmon River Scenic Byway. **M**

### For More Information

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**Idaho RV Campgrounds Association**  
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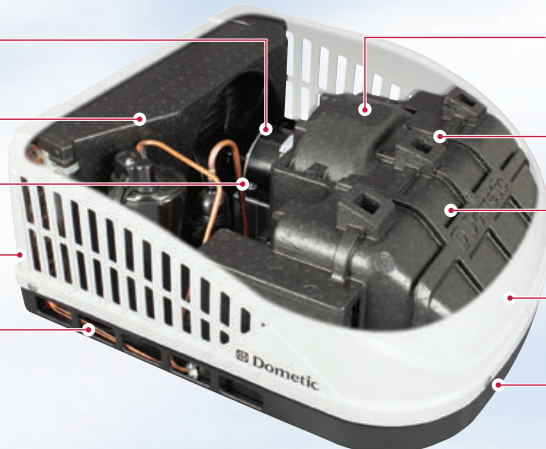
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By Bill and Jenn Gehr

# ONE HOT ITALIAN

The classy stainless-steel SMEV oven and range cooks even better than it looks

**D**uring the last 15 years or so, the general style and overall function of the RV stove and oven have remained the same. Minute improvements and a few safety features have been added, especially regarding the oven pilot function. While durability as a whole has been very good, cooking on these ranges, and especially baking in the oven, has been less than desirable for the serious chef in the family.

For those looking to upgrade their cooking experience, there's an entry from Italy that hasn't had much exposure in the United States thus far, but under the wing of Dometic, that could change. Dometic's imported SMEV stove-and-oven combination is a finely crafted appliance made of premium 304L grade (18/10) stainless steel, and, the good news is, it can be retrofitted relatively painlessly.

SMEV created its premium stove-and-oven range to set the standard for high-quality RV



[1] The original stove-and-oven combination was a basic model that did not include a burner cover. [2] Locating all of the mounting screws that hold the original range in place can be a challenge. [3] Always use extra caution whenever you are installing, removing or replacing an LP-gas line. [4] Take care not to scratch yourself or the cabinetry on the sharp metal edges when removing the existing range.



cooking appliances in European-made RVs. Not only does the 304 stainless provide a highly corrosion-resistant foundation, it matches nicely in RVs with stainless-steel microwave ovens and/or residential-style refrigerators.

The sleek SMEV design allows for accurate, home-quality broiling, cooking and baking — modern advantages usually not found in an RV unless it's equipped with a high-quality microwave/convection oven.

Due to the compact size of most RV stove-and-oven combinations, 17-inch ranges are the norm, placing the oven burner so close to the baking pan or sheet that the temperatures within the oven are difficult to control. Even lighting the oven burner can be a difficult task and requires one to kneel on the floor with a flashlight and a long igniter — many times needing the help of a second person to push the reset button while lighting the pilot. Open up the oven door two or three times, and the set temperature will quickly be lost. With temperatures this hard to control and no way to see what you are cooking without a flashlight, even the best chefs are left wondering if their baked goods and prepared dishes will be cooked properly.

SMEV's patented jet-flow-sealed burners not only are designed to consume 33 percent less LP-gas but they allow for more efficient cooking, especially when using the high-output front burner. The ingenious design of the SMEV oven burner helps prevent the burned-on-the-bottom-and-not-baked-in-the-middle problem



5



6



7



8

[5] Rubber gas lines are susceptible to damage caused from protruding staples and screws, so be sure to keep them out of harm's way. [6] When working with wood, exercise patience. Cabinet modifications will need to be made, and there is not much room for error. [7] The SMEV is roughly 1½ inches narrower than the original range, thus requiring a spacer board to be installed on both sides of the cabinet to fill the gaps. [8] Both spacer boards required sanding for a precise fit.

commonly experienced with RV gas ovens. And lighting the oven burner (as well as the stovetop burners) is as simple as holding in the temperature knob and pushing the switch for the built-in igniter.

Safety is a concern for many RVers due to the volatility of LP-gas and the fact that the stove is the only place in an RV where there's an open flame and source of propane. If a burner is accidentally turned on without a flame, the inside of the RV can be filled with explosive gases. The SMEV stove-and-oven combination has a thermocouple safety shutoff for the cooktop and oven burners. If any of the burner knobs are accidentally turned on (while serving food or if Fido jumps up to take a look), the flow of propane is prevented. Propane can flow only if the burner is lit and the thermocouple sends a message to the control valve. The oven door also utilizes a safety micro switch for added peace of mind.

The SMEV features a multiple-layer glass oven door that greatly reduces surface temperatures; a 12-volt DC interior light allows a clear view of cooking



9



10



11



12

[9] Always measure twice before cutting. [10 and 11] Predrill all of the woodwork before reinstalling the mounting screws. [12] Proper installation of the new SMEV required a bit of patient manipulation, as the new configuration of space was rather snug.



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1 Fuel savings estimate of up to 18% according to FTP75 testing of engine OM651 (4-Cylinder) versus OM642 (V6). Individual mileage will vary, based on factors including vehicle load, driving style, road conditions and fuel quality. 2 Driver is responsible for monitoring fluid levels and tire pressure between service visits. See Maintenance Booklet for details. Options shown. Not all options available in the U.S.



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food. Continuing the high-end Italian look is the chic tempered-black-glass burner cover that provides a welcome extra work surface when the stove is not in use.

Installation time will vary depending on the range size and style to be replaced. Our project SMEV stove-and-oven combo was slated for use in a rig with the aforementioned 17-inch standard three-burner cooktop and oven. Because of the European sizing, we knew that the cabinetry would have to be modified. Fortunately, wood is a relatively easy material to work with. The cutout in the countertop was not a problem, as the SMEV's top flange fit snugly into the original space.

However, the SMEV was higher than the original stove-and-oven combo, requiring that the support shelf be lowered and the slide-out drawer under the shelf be modified. It only took the removal of a few screws to dislodge the shelf, which provided access to lower the front cross member by almost 2 inches (held in by four countersunk screws).

We carefully measured before drilling new holes to accommodate the new location of the front cross member. The lower-slide-drawer configuration was a little more of a challenge. The depth of the drawer was low enough to clear the front cross member, but the faceplate of the drawer needed to be cut down almost 2 inches to clear the bottom of the SMEV.

We removed and cut off the bottom of the drawer face to avoid modifying and staining the top edge, then re-installed the drawer face 2 inches lower than originally set. Since the cut drawer face ended up only an inch above the floor, restaining and rerouting the edge was not necessary because it was out of sight.

The next step was to run positive and negative wires from a nearby source to the SMEV. Fortunately, the refrigerator was the adjoining appliance, so a hole was drilled through the separating wall and the wires attached to the incoming 12-volt



**[13]** When attaching the 12-volt DC wiring, be certain to use high-quality butt connectors for trouble-free operation. **[14]** The SMEV's superior construction is evident throughout its design. **[15]** Switches for the oven light and igniter are found in the left side of the front panel. **[16]** The stainless-steel sealed burners make cleaning fast and simple.

DC source that powers the refrigerator.

Before we were done, the wires running through the wall were sealed to prevent any possibility of carbon-monoxide intrusion. There was no problem attaching the original gas line to the new stove and oven since it was long enough to reach the connection on the back of the stove. Before permanently installing the SMEV, the LP-gas was turned on to check for leaks.

A modification was made to the back section of the countertop, and after securing with screws, the range was set to go — except for a miscalculation in the clearance of the cooktop cover under the existing range hood. The test trailer was fitted with an extra-large range hood, and the cooktop cover would not open all the way. Although there are slimmer range hoods on the market, we chose to build a new one using some of the components from the old range hood. This added time to the project but in the long run was worth the effort.

Cooking on and in the SMEV is a pleasure. While the burners are nicely spaced for accommodating all sizes of pots and pans, and the surface is sealed and easy to clean, the best benefit comes from cooking in the oven. It's big enough to handle large pans required to cook for at least six people. Temperature is accurate, and food is baked evenly — and there's no risk when baking cakes and breads.

Once the SMEV was installed, standing back and admiring the beauty and craftsmanship of the new range was a big part of the reward for making the switch. Simply put, after cooking many meals with the SMEV, it easily outperforms our highest expectations.

The SMEV CU43410730000US has an MSRP of \$975. **M**

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# Itasca Sunova 35G

Great livability both on and off the road makes this triple-slide coach a good choice for entertaining family and friends **By Chris Hemer**

**A**t some point when shopping for a Class A motorhome, the inevitable question will be raised: Gas or diesel? From a financial standpoint, it used to be a pretty cut-and-dried answer, as a diesel pusher could easily cost twice that of a gas motorhome. Today the line continues to blur as gas coaches offer more luxurious features, and manufacturers find more creative ways to keep diesel pushers affordable. With a price disparity that may now

be as little as \$20,000, it's almost just a question of which fuel source you prefer.

Winnebago Industries' Itasca Sunova 35G makes a pretty good argument for going with gas. Positioned just underneath the Winnebago Adventurer/Itasca Suncruiser, the 35G is a triple-slide coach with a focus on entertaining both on the road and at the campsite, with a roomy living area that can accommodate extra guests with aplomb. And while a base price of

\$159,179 isn't cheap, this coach offers most of the features you're likely to want standard, including full-body paint in your choice of Black Mist, Cloud, Denim, or Black Garnet, the color of the test unit.

During the winter months, we ordinarily head south on our tests, but with unseasonably warm weather, we decided to head north, venturing into central California. Like most full-size Class A's, the Sunova offers an abundance of exterior storage, and

**ABOVE:** The Sunova is available in four full-body paint schemes, including the deeply hued Black Garnet, shown.





only two of the large storage compartments were required to stow everything for our trip. We soon learned, however, that packing the inside was going to be a different story. While the kitchen and bath areas are easily accessible in the travel position, the bedroom is not; the foot of the bed is up against the wardrobe, meaning the slideout must be deployed before stowing folded or hanging clothes. Since our clothes were already in bags, we decided the easiest solution was to place everything on the bed until we arrived at our destination.

Climbing into the cockpit, we found that the Sunova was neither sparse nor luxurious, but it was comfortable and the controls were all within easy reach. A single screen in the middle functions as a display for the rearview camera, sideview cameras and radio, which, while space-saving, isn't really ideal for travel. It's not easy to use while driving, and angled toward the driver, it's not convenient for the co-pilot to use, either — but we suppose over time it would become easier. We did like that the leveling controls are just to the right of the steering column, making it easy to get leveled once you reach your destination. We also really liked Winnebago's "coach heat" feature, a heat exchanger system that utilizes the engine's coolant. Those of you who have traveled in cold weather know that the dash heater does little to keep you comfortable while driving, as most of that heat dissipates in the expanse of the coach. Flip on coach heat, and the heat



Coffee Glazed Honey Cherry cabinetry, Corian countertops and stainless-steel create upscale functionality in the galley. The entertainment center with fireplace can be enjoyed from almost every seat in the living area.

not only comes out of the dash, but the heat registers in the living area. It keeps the whole coach toasty warm when you're driving in cool weather.

The Ford chassis is the only gas Class A chassis available right now, and unfortunately, it shows. We really wish Ford would do more to improve the driving experience, as the last few coaches we've tested on this chassis offer spongy brakes, numb steering and excessive engine noise, especially when driving up hills. While Ford has improved the ride quality of its chassis in recent years with the addition of Bilstein shocks, it needs to do more

to make this chassis work for RVers, who expect more than delivery truck ride and handling. That being said, Winnebago has done a good job making the drive as comfortable as possible, with plush Ultraleather seats and a power MCD windshield shade that blocks out the sun.

The living area features an interesting layout with an extendable U-shaped sofa in a curbside slideout, and an opposing slideout with a movable table, a recliner and an entertainment center featuring a 48-inch flat-screen TV and fireplace. Many coaches we've tested offer great livability once at camp, but

From below left: Pull the sofa extensions out and deploy the convertible table, and there's room for the whole family to dine in front of the 48-inch flat-screen TV. The bedroom area is on the tight side, but is comfortable.





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- Works on hydraulic or air braking systems
- Works with ABS brakes
- Brake line pressure in your motorhome controls brakes in towed vehicle
- Air cylinder detaches easily and stores almost anywhere

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travel leaves something to be desired as the living area becomes a narrow hall once the slides are in. The 35G floorplan, however, makes the journey part of the fun; there are three belted positions on the sofa and the aisle is clear from the living area to the rear bathroom. If you had a motion satellite system, your passengers would be in ideal location to watch TV and go back

movies and such. And the recliner, while not really situated for watching TV, serves as a nice spot to sit and read by the fireplace. The only problems we had with this area were with the U-shaped sofa itself; the side nearest the cockpit was very stubborn to pull out, and neither the seating position nor the upholstery were conducive to long-term comfort. The seat backs felt upright, and the upholstery is slick, causing involuntary slouching after only a few minutes. A cushier seat and back, combined with a textured upholstery surface, would probably solve this problem.

Adjacent to the entertainment center in the same slideout is the galley, which features Corian countertops with plenty of space, plus a double-bowl stainless-steel sink with residential-style fixtures. There is no standard oven beneath the three-burner stove, but the upside of this is lots of drawer space — there are seven large drawers below the counter, along with a small but handy pullout pantry, and a large space underneath the sink that can easily house a kitchen trash can. Above is a residential-sized High Pointe microwave convection oven, three more cabinets, and a pullout spice rack.

The wood-front, double-door refrigerator is located directly across from the sink, and there is plenty of LED living area/task lighting. Overall, the living/galley areas are well executed,

WHAT'S HOT

Standard full-body paint, room for entertaining, functional during travel.

WHAT'S NOT

Bland interior styling, tight bedroom, slippery couch.



but we did find them a bit plain. Most of the interiors offered in the Sunova décor palette are comprised of neutral colors, namely beige and light brown, which is probably a safe choice for most people. However, we felt like the area could use more contrast to enhance visual interest.

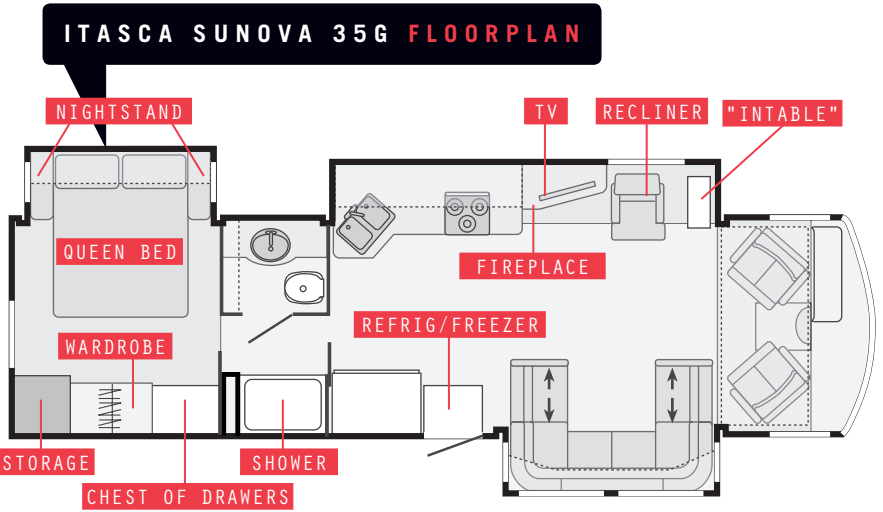
Just behind the refrigerator is a sliding door that separates the galley/living area from the bedroom. Here, there is a good-sized bathroom on the streetside with decent countertop space, porcelain toilet with sprayer, drawers, cabinet storage and a large mirror. Across the hall is a plain white plastic shower that seemed out of place in a coach like this. It was adequate for the job at hand, but had a flimsy



The test unit was equipped with an exterior entertainment center featuring a 32-inch TV on an adjustable bracket, AM/FM stereo, CD/DVD player and two speakers, a \$1,540 option.

and grab a drink or snack whenever they desired. At the same time, the cockpit passengers are not too far away or isolated so that they couldn't chime in on the conversation.

Once at camp, we appreciated the living room layout as well. The table is equipped with wheels on the rear so it is easy to pull into place at the sofa, where it can function as a snack table or dining table once the leaves are deployed. Every spot on the couch has a perfect view of the television, and the optional home theater sound system (\$476) seemed to offer good sound, although we only watched cable TV from the RV park connection. We liked the built-in "eye" for the TV remote control in the upper left side of the fireplace cabinet, which is located above a deep cabinet door that has plenty of storage for







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# Specifications

## Chassis

Model	Ford F53
Engine	V-10
SAE Hp	362 hp @ 4,750 rpm
Torque	457 lb-ft @ 3,250 rpm
Transmission	5-speed automatic
Axle Ratio	5.38:1
Tires	235/80R22.5 G
Wheelbase	228"
Brakes	Disc with ABS
Suspension, Front/Rear	Leaf/leaf
Fuel Capacity	80 gal
Fuel Economy	8.49 mpg
Warranty	3 years, 36,000 miles

## Coach

Exterior Length	36' 6"
Exterior Width	8' 5.5"
Exterior Height	12' 4"
Interior Width	8' 0.5"
Interior Height	6' 8"
Construction	Steel cab structure, aluminum framing, polystyrene foam insulation
Freshwater Capacity	80 gal
Black-Water Capacity	38 gal
Gray-Water Capacity	50 gal
Water-Heater Capacity	6 gal
LP-Gas Capacity	18 gal
Air Conditioner	(2) 13,500 Btu
Furnace	40,000 Btu
Refrigerator	12 cubic foot
Converter/Charger	45 amp
Battery	(2) Group 31
AC Generator	5.5 kW
MSRP	\$159,179
MSRP as Tested	\$162,217
Warranty	1 year/15,000 miles

## Wet Weight

(Water & Heater, Fuel, No Supplies or Passengers)	
Front Axle	5,820 lbs
Rear Axle	13,440 lbs
Total	19,260 lbs

## Chassis Ratings

GAWR, F/R	8,000/15,000 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	22,000/26,000
ROCCC	2,740 lbs
GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combination Weight Rating
ROCCC	Realistic Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity



The cockpit offers comfortable seating and controls within easy reach. A power MCD blackout shade is a useful feature both day and night.

glass door and didn't make us feel like we were in an upscale motorhome. A textured enclosure with faux tiles and a better door would make a big difference.

The bedroom area is on the small side but comfortable. The 35G comes standard with a powered queen bed topped by an Ideal Rest Nouveau digital comfort control mattress. Like other air mattresses you may be familiar with, this one offers dual remotes that allow each sleeper to adjust firmness to his/her liking. The powered platform is a nice feature for sitting up in bed and watching the 28-inch TV, but we learned that it is as much a necessity as it is a luxury. The space isn't wide enough to accommodate the length of a queen bed when the slideout is in the travel position, and in fact, the bed must be set to its reclined position before the slideout can be brought in. Other than this oddity, the room works well enough with its mirrored wardrobe, chest of drawers and storage with washer-dryer prep.

Of course, the difference between an entry-level and upscale coach is often in the details, and the same is true with the Sunova. We appreciated that all of the switches throughout the coach are logically placed, and that MCD blackout shades come standard.

And like other Winnebago products, this one features the OnePlace command center, which includes the slideout controls (with power lock), tank monitors, PowerLine energy management system and Xantrex inverter panel. The only thing we thought could be improved was the heat distribution from the furnace. The bedroom and rear bathroom stayed nice and warm during the night, but in the morning, we found it necessary to turn on the fireplace to heat up the living area.

Another area we thought could use improvement was the utility center. The dump valves are located inside a rear compartment, but the cutout in the floor isn't big enough for the sewer hose or even the 50-amp power cord to pass through, so the door had to be kept open. And, both the compartment door and the slideout are directly above, so head-knocking opportunities are numerous and ever present.

Like most motorhomes, the Itasca Sunova isn't without its flaws, but for the most part, is a comfortable, livable motorhome that should serve family and friends well for many memorable journeys to come. **M**

**Winnebago Industries Inc.**

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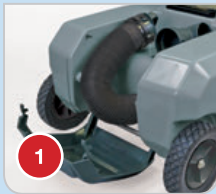


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By Chris Hemer

# ALL WASHED UP

Cleaning every part of your motorhome this spring is easy with these specialty products



Photos: courtesy of the manufacturers

**E**veryone knows how to wash a car. It's paint, plastic and glass for the most part, and caring for it can be as simple as running it through the carwash. Motorhomes, on the other hand, are a different story; depending on the style and manufacturing method, they can be made of metal, gel-coated fiberglass, painted fiberglass or all of the above, and have a roof made of fiberglass, thermoplastic polyolefin (TPO) or rubber. Properly caring for your coach not only keeps it looking good, but prevents oxidation and other damage that can lead to expensive repairs later on. In this article, we'll touch on the products designed specifically for RV exterior cleaning and care,

along with tips on how to do it right. Several companies were sourced throughout this article, with one or more products used as an example. But most of these companies offer a complete line of RV care products, so don't forget to check their websites for more information.

## Top Down

No matter who you talk to, the experts agree that the best way to clean your coach is from top to bottom, which makes perfect sense. Sweep the roof of any heavy debris like pine needles or leaves, then hose it down, and follow up with the awnings, walls, and finally, the glass.





If you've got a rubber roof, which most motorhomes do, you'll want to use a cleaner designed specifically for this surface, like Thetford's Rubber Roof Cleaner and Conditioner, which uses nonpetroleum cleaning agents and a UV inhibitor that protects the rubber membrane and helps prevent the chalking that can occur over time.

How often you tend to your rubber roof depends on the environment and/or conditions in which you live, but generally speaking, it's a good idea to clean/condition the roof at the beginning and end of each season, minimum. If you live in an area with strong sunshine, the UV-inhibiting aspect of a rubber roof treatment is particularly important, and if it's parked outdoors, dirt can accumulate quickly. Under these circumstances, it may be necessary to clean/protect the roof several times a year.

While dirt can indeed harm a motorhome's roof over time, UV light is

actually its biggest enemy. The polymer that the membrane is made of degrades or "chalks" after being exposed to UV light for long periods of time. The most obvious signs that the rubber is breaking down are the grayish-white streaks that may run down the side of the coach. As the roof ages, it can also lose some of the chemicals that keep the membrane flexible and waterproof.

Besides keeping the roof in good condition, another very compelling reason to clean your roof are those dreaded black streaks. Regardless of whether you've got a rubber, TPO or fiberglass roof, you're likely to experience them at one time or another — but what are they? Essentially, black streaks are a combination of soils, oxidation and nonwater-soluble oils used in the manufacture of rubber roofs, rubberized sealers and plastic parts on the RV's roof. They can be darn near impossible to remove with common soap and water, but

Protect All was one of the originators of RV detailing products, and its popular Rubber Roof Cleaner and Rubber Roof Treatment products are available in 32-ounce spray and 1-gallon containers.

Camco, Protect All and Thetford offer products that can easily remove them — provided they're not too far gone. As fiberglass ages, it develops hairline cracks which can absorb the black gook running down the sides, making it much harder to remove.

Although all RV exterior detailing product manufacturers offer different formulations to address the same issues, they can all agree on one thing: A rubber roof treatment system can only protect a rubber roof that is in good shape — it can't bring a neglected roof back to life. So at minimum, make sure you treat the roof twice a year and wash it off whenever you clean the rest of the coach.

Cleaning the awning shouldn't pose much of a problem, because it spends most of its time rolled up or protected by an aluminum wrap, away from the elements. But during long stays or full-timing, it's only a matter of time before the awning gets dirty or worse



Dometic's Ultra Red Cleaner is a concentrated, heavy-duty cleaner formulated to remove dirt and grime as well as black streaks. Once you've removed the worst of the rig's exterior stains, Dometic also offers its Wash 'N Wax product that safely cleans the surface and dries without annoying spots. RV awning cleaners, like Dometic's Premium RV Awning Cleaner, are designed to remove stubborn stains from both fabric and vinyl awnings.

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\*Base price for the 31L and 31V floorplans starts at \$79,995 USD.

  
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yet, covered with bird droppings, sap and other debris. Thetford, Camco and Dometic offer products designed specifically for cleaning awnings, and removing the stains that affect them most. Like the roof, the first step should be to hose the worst of the dirt and debris from the awning, then spray the product onto the surface and allow it to sit for a few minutes. Finally, scrub the surface gently with a brush and rinse it off with a hose and allow to dry completely before retracting.

## Exterior Walls

With the roof and awning cleaned, the next step is the exterior walls. While it is common practice to use household dish detergent for this purpose, RV and car care product manufacturers advise against this for one simple reason: It strips the surface of any waxes that you may have applied earlier. Specialized washing soaps offered by a variety of companies like Camco, Dometic, Thetford, Protect All and others are all designed to clean away dirt and grime while leaving the thin film of wax intact. In between washes, there are also a variety of “waterless car wash” products designed to rid the surface of the light dirt film that can accumulate over a few days, and spray-on “touch-up” wax products to



As its name implies, Thetford's Premium Rubber Roof Cleaner and Conditioner cleans and conditions the roof, and also protects it with a UV blocker. The product is designed to remove common grime as well as tough leaf and mildew stains — even bird droppings. The nontoxic, biodegradable formula contains no petroleum distillates.



Camco offers a variety of products that will help you get started cleaning the most common problem areas on your coach, including the rubber roof and awning. Its mildew stain remover works on awnings, headliners, chair cushions and more.

keep a layer of wax on the surface in between waxing.

It's no secret that reaching the upper half of any RV can be a challenge, and constantly moving a ladder down the side of the coach just won't do. The easiest and safest way to get to hard-to-reach areas is with an extension pole system. Adjust-a-Brush, Shurhold and others offer such systems to make washing easier.

Like any automotive finish, an RV's surface, whether painted or gel-coated, should be waxed on a regular basis to prevent surface oxidation. How often depends, again, on the severity of your environment, but figure it should be waxed whenever the rubber roof is treated, or at the beginning/end of every travel season, minimum. One of the easiest ways to apply a wax product over a large surface is with an orbital buffer, *not* a rotary buffer. In the wrong hands, a rotary buffer can quickly

burn through paint/gelcoat, causing more harm than good. Apply a small amount of wax to the pad, then begin applying the product. Remember, less is more when it comes to wax; if you apply too much, it will splatter and dry elsewhere, requiring more work to remove it. Let the wax form a light haze, then use a clean bonnet on the buffer to remove the wax and polish the surface. It's quicker and a lot easier. If you notice wax in some nooks and crannies, you can use a detailing brush specifically made for the purpose, or even a common soft-bristle toothbrush will do the trick.

Your motorhome was a big investment. Caring for it now will keep it looking good for many years to come. **M**

## Sources

**Camco Manufacturing Inc.**  
800-334-2004, [www.camco.net](http://www.camco.net)

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

**Protect All Inc.**  
800-322-4491, [www.protectall.com](http://www.protectall.com)

**Thetford Corp.**  
800-543-1219, [www.thetford.com](http://www.thetford.com)

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**M**ention “diesel pusher” to a fellow RVer and you’re likely to get a predictable, old-fashioned response: He/she will laud the diesel’s muscle, long-term durability, relatively quiet ride and improved fuel economy, while at the same time lamenting the extra cost and lack of comparable standard features to a typical gasser. And though some of these sentiments may be true — diesels are more expensive — the gap between gas-engine-driven coaches and affordable pushers is closing fast. True, a comparably equipped pusher may in some cases double your cost up front, but in the long run, purchasing a diesel pusher may save you some dough due to improved longevity, and may even save your marriage by allowing your in-cab conversations to resume

at a reasonable, shout-free level that’s so hard to attain in a noisy gas-driver.

And you’ll be surprised when you do a bit of research: Entry-level (and we use the term loosely) diesels aren’t what they used to be. In fact, we know you’ll be pleased to see that many of the affordable pushers out there not only exceed their gas-driven counterparts in ride quality and durability, but the livability and amenities can match those of the higher-end gas-driven Class A’s as well.

To prove our theory, we offer Exhibit A: The following pages list some diesel-pusher bargains that are available today. We tried to keep the prices near the \$220,000 mark, though a bit of exploring the Internet can likely yield even more affordable results.





## FLEETWOOD

Like all new Fleetwood RVs, the Excursion 35E features what the manufacturer calls F-21 construction, a designation that means Fleetwood utilizes the latest in manufacturing methods and materials. Welded-aluminum interlocking frames replace the standard bolts and screws, bus-style doors replace standard entries and aluminum slideout room ramps replace wood slideout room ramps, to name a few. Inside, a centralized control panel, crown molding, an impressive 7-foot ceiling height and raised-panel hardwood cabinet doors and drawers are sure to please at this price point. The dual-slide 35E also offers plenty of storage in the master, with three wardrobes and a bench seat with a compartment below. There are also options for an exterior entertainment center, washer-dryer, drop-down queen bed and a residential refrigerator.



CHASSIS	FREIGHTLINER XC-S
ENGINE	CUMMINS ISB 6.7-LITER
FUEL CAPACITY	90 GAL
GVWR	26,000 LBS
EXTERIOR LENGTH	36' 9"
EXTERIOR WIDTH	8' 6"
EXTERIOR HEIGHT WITH A/C	11' 10"
WHEELBASE	242"
FRESHWATER CAPACITY	77 GAL
BLACK-WATER CAPACITY	32 GAL
GRAY-WATER CAPACITY	60 GAL
LP-GAS CAPACITY	28.2 GAL
BASE MSRP	\$193,193

**Fleetwood RV**, 800-854-1344, [www.fleetwoodrv.com](http://www.fleetwoodrv.com)



## FOREST RIVER

The Legacy SR 340 is Forest River's pusher line, available in three floorplans: the 340BH, 340KP and the all-new 360RB. Although the names may be a bit confusing (Legacy SR 340 360RB doesn't exactly roll off the tongue), the list of appointments isn't: All Legacy coaches boast a Cummins ISB 340-horsepower diesel and 2500MH Allison transmission on a Freightliner chassis. The 340BH is a bunkhouse model and also offers a power cockpit bunk option that ups the sleeping capacity to nine svelte RVers. And, if you don't need the bunks, the 340KP replaces them with a pantry, stackable washer-dryer prep and additional wardrobe space. The 360RB shown here is a bath-and-a-half model that changes the regular bathroom into a powder room, and adds a master bathroom suite with dual sinks along the rear wall, offering the ultimate in privacy for mom and dad.



CHASSIS	FREIGHTLINER XC-S
ENGINE	CUMMINS ISB 6.7-LITER
FUEL CAPACITY	90 GAL
GVWR	28,000 LBS
EXTERIOR LENGTH	39' 4"
EXTERIOR WIDTH	8' 4"
EXTERIOR HEIGHT WITH A/C	12' 2"
WHEELBASE	208"
FRESHWATER CAPACITY	84 GAL
BLACK-WATER CAPACITY	44 GAL
GRAY-WATER CAPACITY	44 GAL
LP-GAS CAPACITY	24.5 GAL
BASE MSRP	\$216,000

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





## HOLIDAY RAMBLER

Available in three eye-catching color schemes (Gateway Gray, Downtown Brown and the Cappuccino seen here) and standard with 22.5-inch aluminum wheels, the Ambassador 38DBT pusher is an impressive sight on the road and in camp. LED lighting, four-point hydraulic leveling jacks, seamless side walls and a one-piece panoramic windshield are all nice additions to the platform, which is powered by a 6.7-liter Cummins diesel. The triple-slide, bath-and-a-half 38DBT offers distinct living zones and the opportunity for occupants to get away from each other while getting away from it all, which can be a great option after a long day of adventure. The half-bath is located amidships for easy access from the living area (aft of the well-appointed galley), while the rear bathroom is accessible only through the master and features plenty of storage and a large shower.

CHASSIS	ROADMASTER B340
ENGINE	CUMMINS ISB 6.7-LITER
FUEL CAPACITY	90 GAL
GVWR	28,000 LBS
EXTERIOR LENGTH	38' 11"
EXTERIOR WIDTH	8' 6"
EXTERIOR HEIGHT WITH A/C	11' 10"
WHEELBASE	266"
FRESHWATER CAPACITY	77 GAL
BLACK-WATER CAPACITY	32 GAL
GRAY-WATER CAPACITY	60 GAL
LP-GAS CAPACITY	28 GAL
BASE MSRP	\$219,015

**Holiday Rambler**, 800-648-6582, [www.holidayrambler.com](http://www.holidayrambler.com)



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## ITASCA

Winnebago's Itasca Solei diesel pusher is a luxury-oriented coach that offers an impressive amount of living space and posh residential comfort that belies the strength of the 340-horsepower Cummins diesel that powers it. Outside, a fiberglass roof, thermopanel side walls, aluminum framing and interlocking joints help with vehicle longevity. Inside, the dual-slide 38R shown here features a residential refrigerator, convertible dinette and sofa bed, plus an available fireplace. The Multi-Purpose room located amidships can be converted from a dual-bunk sleeping area to a kid-friendly dinette during the day. Plus it's situated across from a half bathroom, minimizing traffic into the main, rear bathroom. That bath spans the entire rear of the coach and features a large shower, washer, dryer, sink and toilet, all in a roomy area. It's connected to the private rear bedroom with a wardrobe slide, dual nightstands and a location for the available flip-down TV.



CHASSIS	FREIGHTLINER XC-S
ENGINE	CUMMINS ISB 6.7-LITER
FUEL CAPACITY	90 GAL
GVWR	27,910 LBS
EXTERIOR LENGTH	39' 10"
EXTERIOR WIDTH	8' 5.5"
EXTERIOR HEIGHT WITH A/C	11' 11"
WHEELBASE	260"
FRESHWATER CAPACITY	84 GAL
BLACK-WATER CAPACITY	44 GAL
GRAY-WATER CAPACITY	54 GAL
LP-GAS CAPACITY	23 GAL
BASE MSRP	\$223,405

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



## NEWMAR

The new Ventana LE 3812 is a bath-and-a-half pusher with an impressive array of residential features. Among the home-like appointments are a roomy bedroom suite that houses a king bed and full master bathroom at the rear of the coach. Exterior enhancements for 2015 include new graphics, colors and chrome logos; frameless windows; a power side awning, power entry-door awning and slideout awnings; and an entry door with a longer hinge for added strength. Inside, changes from previous models include upgraded laminate material and carpeting, 12-by-24-inch vinyl tile, newly styled furniture and additional solid-surface countertops. The half-bath features a vessel sink to provide more useable counterspace. LED lights are standard and more plentiful than ever. The 3812 shown here offers opposing sofas for entertaining in the living area, a large pantry in the fully equipped galley and a comfy king bed in the spacious master suite.



CHASSIS	FREIGHTLINER XC-R
ENGINE	CUMMINS ISB 6.7-LITER
FUEL CAPACITY	100 GAL
GVWR	31,000 LBS
EXTERIOR LENGTH	38' 8"
EXTERIOR WIDTH	8' 5.5"
EXTERIOR HEIGHT WITH A/C	12' 8"
WHEELBASE	252"
FRESHWATER CAPACITY	105 GAL
BLACK-WATER CAPACITY	45 GAL
GRAY-WATER CAPACITY	65 GAL
LP-GAS CAPACITY	32 GAL
BASE MSRP	\$222,848

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## NEXUS RV

In the automotive world, the name Bentley is synonymous with opulence. Nexus has done its best to continue that tradition in the RV industry minus the exorbitant price tag. The Bentley pusher (available factory direct only) is built utilizing all steel-cage framing throughout, which Nexus claims improves the overall strength of the motorhome by 72 percent. The manufacturer only uses Azdel substrate, thus eliminating any wood products in the side walls and roof, which is meant to improve R-factor insulation and reduce the weight. Livability features include a multiplex electric system — a feature usually found exclusively in upscale coaches — that gives owners dimming and other electric control over the lighting. The 34B coach features four slideouts, a number of sleeping positions and plenty of storage. An available chrome package including mirrors, handles, exhaust pipe for the engine and generator and front applique, offers the touch of class a vehicle with the Bentley name calls for.



CHASSIS:	FREIGHTLINER XC-R
ENGINE:	CUMMINS ISB 6.7-LITER
FUEL CAPACITY:	100 GAL
GVWR:	28,000 LBS
EXTERIOR LENGTH:	35' 7"
EXTERIOR WIDTH:	8' 5"
EXTERIOR HEIGHT WITH A/C:	12' 10"
WHEELBASE:	222"
FRESHWATER CAPACITY:	85 GAL
BLACK-WATER CAPACITY:	50 GAL
GRAY-WATER CAPACITY:	50 GAL
LP-GAS CAPACITY:	16 GAL
FACTORY-DIRECT PRICE:	\$179,999

**Nexus RV**, 855-786-3987, [www.nexusrv.com](http://www.nexusrv.com)



## THOR MOTOR COACH

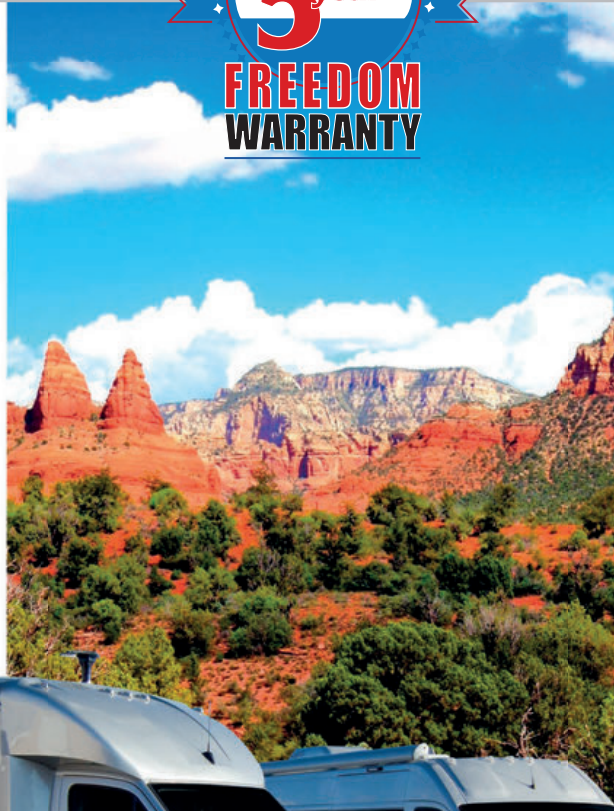
Available in four head-turning full-body paint colors, the Thor Palazzo offers a host of amenities generally reserved for much more expensive diesels. Large pass-through storage, side-vision cameras, frameless windows and a power patio awning with integrated LED lighting adorn the exterior and complement each of the head-turning paint jobs (Black Canyon, Boardwalk, Park Avenue and Ridgewood), while handy conveniences like a step-up mid entry with mudroom section, a second slideout in the bedroom and a residential laundry suite with included washer and dryer inside. The galley features a residential fridge and cooktop, while the bedroom offers a king-size bed, integrated headboard and wall-mounted sconce lighting for a true residential feel. Add to that a massive streetside slideout to open up the living area, an oversize Dream dinette booth and a dash-mounted PC workstation with 120-volt AC and 12-volt DC outlets, and it's clear the Palazzo 36.2 is a smartly appointed motorhome that has it all; in fact, everything is standard, no options are available.



CHASSIS:	FREIGHTLINER XC-S
ENGINE:	CUMMINS ISB 6.7-LITER
FUEL CAPACITY:	90 GAL
GVWR:	28,000 LBS
EXTERIOR LENGTH:	37' 6"
EXTERIOR WIDTH:	8' 5"
EXTERIOR HEIGHT WITH A/C:	12'
WHEELBASE:	242"
FRESHWATER CAPACITY:	95 GAL
BLACK-WATER CAPACITY:	43 GAL
GRAY-WATER CAPACITY:	43 GAL
LP-GAS CAPACITY:	24.5 GAL
BASE MSRP:	\$207,450

**Thor Motor Coach**, 800-860-5658, [www.thormotorcoach.com](http://www.thormotorcoach.com)


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## WINNEBAGO

The dual-slide Forza diesel pusher features a forward galley, two separate bathroom areas and a nifty flexible bunk-bed system, making it one of the more luxurious kid-friendly coaches available. With a coach full of kids, you'll need a great area for meal prep, so the Forza offers a large pantry, dual-basin sink, three-burner stove and residential refrigerator, in addition to a good amount of space on the solid-surface countertops. When the sun goes down, the 38R shown here offers plenty of sleeping options, from the aforementioned

bunks (which fold up to make a dinette area by day) to a sleeper sofa to the convertible dinette, the latter two of which offer great views of the living-area LED TV and optional fireplace. Mom and dad are treated to a master retreat toward the rear, where a plush queen mattress is across from a large wardrobe and between dual nightstands. But perhaps the most appreciated feature for the grown-ups is the rear bathroom; it offers a large shower, sink, separate washer and dryer, and plenty of bath-toy-free real estate.



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BLACK-WATER CAPACITY	44 GAL
GRAY-WATER CAPACITY	54 GAL
LP-GAS CAPACITY	23 GAL
BASE MSRP	\$223,405

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 EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

By E. Don Smith

# COOL RUNNINGS

A DIY diesel radiator flush is an easy-to-do preventive maintenance project

**K**eeping the engine on a diesel pusher cool while on the road is no easy task. It requires a large, rear-mounted radiator or two smaller side-mounted ones as well as a water pump, cooling fan, lots of hoses and many gallons of coolant/antifreeze. Flushing the cooling system isn't a terribly difficult job to perform at home as a DIY project, but if you wait until the engine overheats it's not nearly as fun or convenient on the side of the road in the middle of the summer to discover that your cooling system capacity has been reduced due to poor maintenance. So it's important to handle the task while your coach is in the driveway.

Like many systems in a motorhome, the cooling system requires regular service and fluid changes. If your particular diesel is a wet-block design, such as a Cummins ISC, ISM, ISL or ISX; or the Cat C9, C11, C13; or even the MaxxFORCE 10, it likely came prefilled with either an extended life coolant (ELC) or a fully formulated coolant with supplemental coolant additives (SCAs), as was the case with the 36-foot Tiffin Phaeton coach featured here. The disadvantage of fully formulated coolants is that they need to be tested every six months for proper levels of key additives, which at first doesn't seem like a challenge but as time wears on the testing routine gets old and is really easy to forget. If your coach has a smaller Cummins ISB or a Cat C7, it has a dry-block engine and the coolant could be different. Before you decide to change to a different type of coolant or to even perform a flush and refill, it's best to check your motorhome's owner's manual and use the exact product specified for your particular engine.

Since all coolants have a service life, once the coolant on this coach required a change we decided it would be easier in the long run to convert it from a fully formulated coolant with SCAs to an ELC. Not only do ELCs have a longer change interval, they don't require periodic testing for additives. The only regular check that needs to be performed is to ensure the freeze point is acceptable.



1



2

[1] After locating the radiator cap (surge tank) of the cool engine, remove it to allow the radiator to easily drain. Never open a hot radiator cap. [2] There are several different ways to drain a radiator. Since this one didn't have a large drain at the bottom, we simply loosened the hose clamp on the bottom radiator hose. As soon as the clamp is loosened the coolant will drain quickly, so have a catch pan in place and be prepared for a fast dump when you pull the hose off. Usually there are several low hoses here to choose from depending on the layout. Just pick the one that has the lowest drain point in order to drain the most coolant. We removed two different hoses each time to maximize the volume of water removed.



We decided to use a product from Peak called Final Charge Global. It is approved for use in Cat, Mercedes-Benz, Cummins and many other engines and has a guaranteed life of 1 million miles or 8 years per the manufacturer. In the past this product required adding an extender at 3 years or 300,000 miles to achieve that long life, but it was recently reformulated and the newest specs no longer require the extender. Some other benefits of this product are that it is silicate- and nitrate-free, which means long seal and water-pump life, and it offers better heat transfer.

Although several chassis manufacturers use this same coolant in their motorhome chassis, they usually opt for a more conservative six-year change interval as opposed to eight years. As always, make sure you are following the chassis manufacturer's requirements on maintenance as well as the type of coolant you are using.

After making sure the Final Charge was approved for our engine (meeting Cummins CES 14603 standards), we went to a local truck supply parts store and bought 6 gallons of 100 percent concentrated coolant. A 50/50 blend with water already added is also available, but it is much more economical to buy the concentrated version. And, since there are always several gallons of coolant remaining in the heater hoses and engine block after draining the system, the only way to achieve the proper 50/50 ratio is to begin with a 100 percent concentration of coolant. That way you can add half the total system capacity of pure coolant and top it off with distilled water to ensure the 50 percent dilution needed for proper antifreeze protection.

Next we bought a lot of distilled water (you will have to determine how many gallons based on your cooling system size and the number of rinses you intend to perform) for the flushing process. The reason for using distilled water is to help prevent the introduction of harmful minerals into the cooling system that can lead to scale forming inside the radiator core. Three complete flushes should ensure most of the old SCA-type coolant is removed from the cooling system if you follow the correct procedure.



[3] After draining the coolant you will need to reinstall the radiator hose and tighten the hose clamp. [4] Next, we refilled the radiator through the surge tank until it showed full. This required 7 gallons of distilled water each time. [5] If your chassis manufacturer called for closing the heater core lines, reopen them now, as this allows the warm coolant to flow through the heater core and flush it as well. Note there is also a drain petcock here that can be used on some coaches to drain additional coolant from the system and to bleed air bubbles after refilling. [6] Another step to speed the process is to turn the coach heater to full hot before starting the engine. First, allow it to run at slow idle and then raise it to high idle for several minutes. This allows the heater system to pull the warm coolant through the heater core and flush it as well. As soon as the air from the heater starts to warm, shut down the engine. Remember, you must wait for the engine to cool before draining the flush water to prevent burns.

Freightliner specs on this coach show a cooling capacity of 10 gallons, but that doesn't include the hoses and heater core for the coach heater, which likely adds another 2 gallons for a total of 12 gallons. At each drain we recovered about 7 gallons, or 58 percent of the total capacity. So we needed 3 times 7 gallons of distilled water (21 gallons) for flushing and then 2 to 3 more for the final fill (a total of 24 gallons).

The goal of the flush is to completely drain the cooling system as much as possible, then refill it with distilled water. Then slightly warm the engine (120 degrees to 140 degrees Fahrenheit) at fast idle to circulate the water through the heater core and block. When changing coolant types it usually takes three complete fill-and-drain cycles to ensure the old coolant is gone. After each warming cycle of the engine make sure you do not drain the old coolant until it has cooled off enough not to burn you, and also never open a hot radiator cap or else the coolant will overflow as the pressurized cap is removed.

As you complete each flush and drain you can collect the drained coolant as it gradually changes color (from pink in our case to light pink, which was the color of a fully formulated coolant originally in this engine). The Final Charge coolant (which is red) we used for the refill states that it can accept up to 25 percent concentration of other coolants without affecting its performance, but if you perform three complete flushes you will likely end up with less than 10 percent of

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the old coolant remaining.

When draining it is important to capture the old coolant and dispose of it properly; it should not be poured on the ground or in a storm drain. It should be recycled at a local designated center that accepts antifreeze. Also, you need to be careful not to leave open containers of the old coolant lying around, as animals will be drawn to it and it will be fatal if they are allowed to drink it. One easy way to capture everything is to use large 10-gallon catch pans and then refill the empty distilled water jugs with the drained coolant.

If your coach is currently using an SCA coolant and it has a coolant filter, that filter is often precharged with SCAs. If you change over to an ELC it is important that you remove that filter and replace it with a blank filter that has no SCAs. When using ELC products you do not want to contaminate them with SCAs, so keep that in mind if your coach has coolant filters. Also, make sure the service facility doesn't test for SCAs and add them when having the motorhome serviced.

Every chassis manufacturer has a different network of

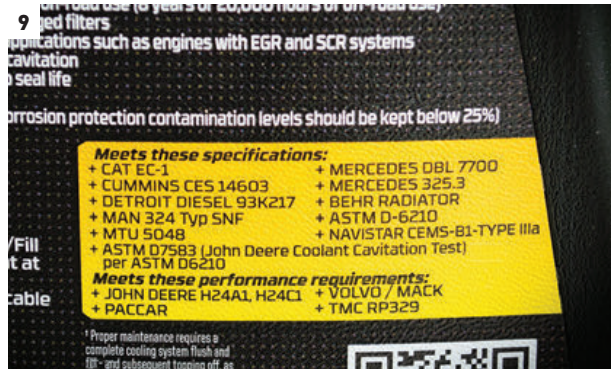


7



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[7] On some coaches it may be possible to locate the drain petcock at the water pump and open it slightly to allow air and water to escape while the engine is idling. This helps purge any air from the system. It can only be done before the engine is warm, otherwise the coolant is too hot. Though there are no moving parts near the water pump area of this coach, be careful as you reach up to open and close this drain valve with the engine running. Turn off the drain petcock once a steady stream of coolant is released. [8] If you watch closely while draining after each flush, the color of the coolant will change from bright pink to a much lighter pink (when draining a fully formulated coolant). Don't fret, however, if it never returns completely clear as you may expect. The sample on the right only contains 5 percent SCA coolant yet still shows a lot of color. If you flush properly three times, the level will be well below the acceptable 25 percent limit before refilling with new coolant. [9] The Final Charge Global Coolant we used is approved for a wide range of engines and is rated to last an incredible eight years or 1 million miles without the use of additional additives or extenders.



9



10



11



12

[10] When flushing the coolant, it is a great time to inspect the hoses as well. As you see, the lower radiator hose on this coach was starting to show signs of cracking so we replaced all three bottom radiator hoses at a total parts cost of about \$130. The top radiator hose showed no sign of cracking so it was not replaced. [11] When changing the hoses it's always a good idea to replace the hose clamps as well. Instead of the standard narrow band clamps that were originally used, we took the opportunity to upgrade ours to a wider stainless-steel, T-bolt hose clamp. Not only are these types wider for more clamping surface, they use a bolt, which is a much stronger way of clamping the hose securely. [12] After three complete flushes with distilled water we then added 6 gallons of 100 percent concentrated coolant (not 50/50 premixed) to the empty radiator surge tank. In this coach, 6 gallons is half the total capacity of the system, which will yield a perfect 50/50 ratio after adding enough distilled water to top it off. Then it took an additional two gallons of distilled water to show full in the surge tank. The amount of water you add to reach full is not critical as long as you fill it to the proper level. Remember, there is residual water in various hoses, the heater core and engine block to reach the proper mixture. After filling the radiator for the final time, you will once again need to bleed the air from the lines if your coach is equipped with drain petcocks, and run the engine on high idle long enough to bring it up to full temperature. Then recheck the surge tank level to ensure it is at the proper level. If the coolant level is below the full mark wait until the engine is cool and top off the tank as needed. Your only other service going forward will be to test the coolant for the proper freeze point.



[13] After converting the coach to a different type of coolant it's a good idea to label it properly to prevent any confusion if you take it in for service. Most supply houses that sell coolant keep these stickers in stock. [14] After everything is topped off and the engine has been run to full operating temperature and cooled down, you can use a test strip (make sure you get the right one for your type of coolant) to ensure the mixture comes out at 50 percent.

hoses, heater-valve cutoffs, drain petcocks and water-pump drain petcocks and therefore can require a slightly different method of draining and refilling the radiator. The steps described here are what we used on this coach and its configuration. However, your motorhome may be different enough to make a significant change in the process, so check the owner's manual to see if it contains any special instructions for avoiding an air bubble in your engine's cooling system. If you experience an air bubble, the most likely symptom will be that the dash display/temperature gauge will not show an increase in temperature during one of the idle cycles. If that happens, shut off the engine and follow the correct procedure to purge the air from the cooling system.

Another likely issue is that after you start the engine after a flush-and-refill cycle the low-coolant alarm can sound. This occurs as the air is released from the system into the surge tank, which may have shown full before. The cure is to shut down the engine and add more flush water into the surge tank (location of the low-coolant sensor) until at the proper level. Then you can resume the warming of the engine and the low-coolant alarm will cease after a few minutes.

Now that you are armed with a basic understanding of the task, you're ready to get started. **M**



13



14



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# SILENT POWER



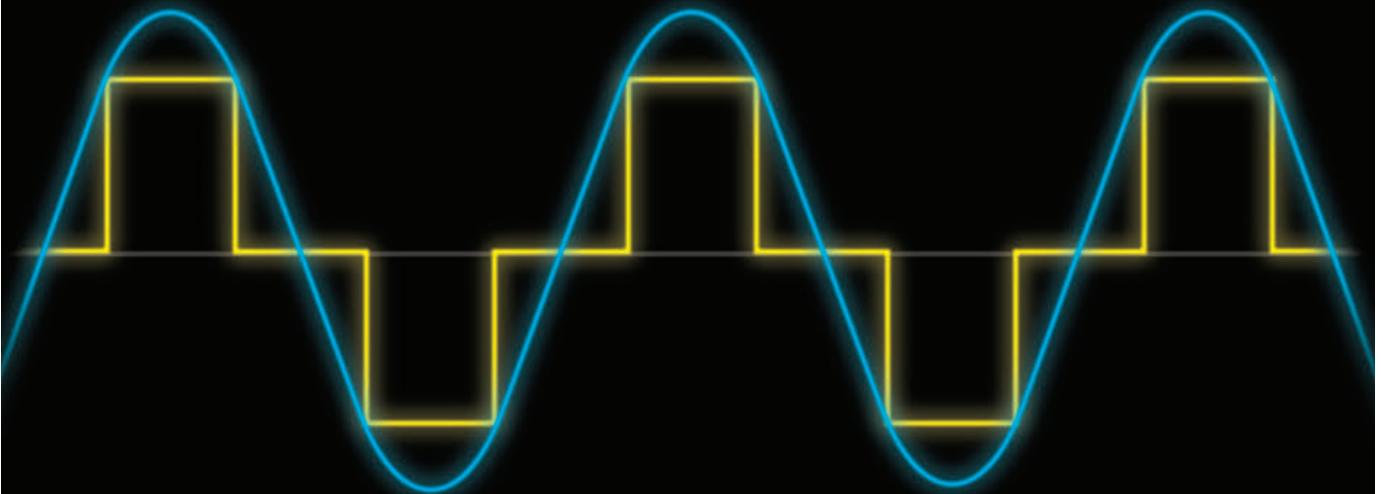
The latest crop of efficient inverters makes living off the grid practical without giving up favorite accessories and appliances

**T**here is no denying that motorhome owners love their creature comforts. However, without the convenience of shorepower, an alternate source of energy is needed to adequately power the large array of electronic appliances and accessories while RVing off the grid. AC generators can supply temporary power needs but some are a noisy distraction when trying to enjoy the solitude of natural surroundings — and don't forget about the fuel they burn. By relying on a power inverter rather than a generator, you can effectively run the most necessary electronic devices such as a cellphone charger, laptop computer, tablet, TV, satellite receiver, DVD player or even larger items on an individual basis such as a microwave oven, toaster, hair dryer or a coffee maker. It may sound like we're a bit spoiled and not willing to give

up conveniences, even when off the grid, but we're not apologizing.

Power inverters provide whisper-quiet AC power at the flip of a switch. They change direct current (DC) to alternating current (AC), or 12-volt DC to 120-volt AC. Output voltage and frequency depends on the design and the wattage of an individual inverter. In order to realize the best efficiency of a power inverter, it must be paired to an adequate battery bank, based on the calculated needs of individual owners. Simply put: Larger inverters require larger battery banks.

Power inverters have evolved during the last few years moving from heavy mechanical devices to sophisticated models that use advanced electronics packaged in much lighter housings. The biggest advance in technology has



**On a Curve** A true sine wave (blue) curves smoothly, compared to a modified sine wave (yellow). True sine wave inverters are recommended for sensitive electronics like computers and many appliances.



been the transition from the cruder modified sine wave output to a pure sine wave capable of powering sensitive electronic devices. Pure sine wave is what we all have in our stationary homes, but there may be situations where a pure sine wave inverter is not necessary for your particular needs.

Power inverters range anywhere from a simple 150-watt plug-and-play model to a more complicated 3,000-watt model with all the bells and whistles. The more advanced models have multistage charging capabilities, which are designed to maintain batteries properly by conditioning them to battery-builder specifications. This is an important factor since battery banks will never realize their designed service life without proper conditioning, something most common so-called converter/chargers are not able to accomplish. Many of the more sophisticated inverters also have charge equalization modes, which use higher voltage to help break up battery sulfation, again prolonging the life of a battery bank.

Selecting an inverter that will fit your needs will require a little bit of homework. The first study will be to determine the wattage required to operate the electronic appliances that are normally used during typical trips. The conversion chart found on this page can help users determine their approximate power requirements. It's important to confirm the exact power output of all electrical appliances and accessories. Don't underestimate normal usage; doing so will only lead to disappointment — and the need for an expensive upgrade — later on. Keep in mind that although it may seem convenient to purchase an inverter large enough to

## Average Power Consumption

DEVICE	WATTS	12-VOLT DC DRAW IN AMPS
MICROWAVE OVEN	900 TO 1,500	80 TO 125
COFFEEMAKER	1,200 TO 1,500	100 TO 125
LCD TV	180	15
DVD PLAYER	85 TO 100	7 TO 8
SATELLITE RECEIVER	75	6
CELLPHONE, LAPTOP	20	2

run all desired appliances and accessories, the drawback will be the added cost of the inverter, labor and a more expensive battery bank. So a bit of advance planning is advised.

Every appliance will have a data label that provides the power requirements. Simply add up the wattage for all the appliances that may be running at the same time and compare that figure with the continuous output rating of the inverter. All inverters have a surge, or peak, rating, which should not be added into the formula used to calculate normal power requirements. For example, a 900-watt inverter may have a continuous output of 840 watts. Microwave ovens require a tremendous amount of surge before leveling out. LCD televisions and cellphone chargers do not require a surge allowance.

Determine whether you need a modified sine wave or a pure sine wave, also known as a true sine wave inverter. The pure sine wave inverter is more efficient than the modified sine wave inverter and almost twice as efficient when used to power certain appliances.

A modified sine wave inverter can damage sensitive devices over a period of time. Microwave electronic control panels often will not function

on a modified sine wave inverter, as the electronics will not recognize that type of power. The more sensitive the device, the less likely it will function on a modified sine wave. When updating an older RV with new televisions and electronics, it's best to upgrade the inverter to a pure sine wave model.

With so many makes, models and features to choose from, it will take some diligent research to find the one that meets your specific needs. Remember, inverters make 120-volt AC power, and using adequate wiring, fuses or circuit breakers as appropriate and specified in the installation procedures are all critical to safe usage. In many cases there are specific mounting requirements that must be considered when planning the installation.

Hire a professional to perform the installation according to the state, local and RV electrical codes if you are not qualified to perform electrical procedures.

Power inverters perform extremely well when the batteries are linked to a solar-panel system designed to efficiently charge the designated number of batteries that are onboard. When using an inverter, the batteries must be kept charged adequately to provide the necessary service to make silent 120-volt AC power without being tethered to a hookup pole.

There are many inverter options on the market. Listed below are some of the popular brands and models.

## Handy conversions for calculating missing values

### AMPS TO WATTS

watts = amps × volts

### WATTS TO AMPS

amps = watts ÷ by volts

### WATTS TO VOLTS

volts = watts ÷ by amps



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## SILENT POWER



PROSINE 2.0

### Xantrex Pro Watt SW Pure Sine Series

These models are equipped with a double GFCI outlet, built-in display, USB port and an optional in-line 15-amp transfer relay. A remote on/off switch is offered, which allows the user to control the inverter from inside the motorhome. The transfer relay simply plugs into the front of the inverter and allows you to pull one circuit from the breaker box to supply power to an appliance from shorepower or the inverter. Perfect for TV, satellite receivers and DVD players.

Available in models rated at 540, 900 and 1,800 watts with pricing at \$270, \$392 and \$587, respectively. Protected by a two-year warranty.

Xantrex's flagship PROsine 2.0 2,000-watt inverter/charger is a pure sine wave unit with a three-stage battery charging circuit. It has a built-in 30-amp transfer switch and a remote panel. This PROsine 2.0 sells for \$2,098 and has a two-year warranty.

The Freedom 2,000-watt inverter/charger, model 458, features a three-stage battery

conditioning circuit, filtered modified sine wave output, built-in transfer switch and an optional remote panel. The 2,000-watt unit is priced at \$1,495, while the 2,500-watt version goes for \$2,083. Both are covered by a two-year warranty.

For those who want the benefits of a higher pure sine wave output, the Xantrex Freedom SW series is available. It has a built-in transfer switch, three-stage battery charging, an optional remote panel with auto generator start, and sequence power manager. The SW is available in 2,000- and 3,000-watt sizes, sells for \$2,090 and \$2,378 respectively, and is protected by a 30-month warranty.

FREEDOM 458



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## SILENT POWER



**MAGNUM  
ME-RC REMOTE**

## Magnum Inverters

The Magnum line of inverters is available in several watt ratings and offers some interesting features. At the top end of the scale, Magnum has introduced its Hybrid MSH3012M pure sine wave inverter. The Hybrid is designed to run concurrently with small AC generators to provide higher wattage power. Most inverters rely on a transfer switch that allows the motorhome's appliances and accessories to run on 120-volt AC power from the campground utility hookup or from the onboard generator. Using hybrid technology, the Magnum allows the inverter to recharge the batteries when there's surplus power available or to work with 120-volt AC power from the hookup or generator and combine the energy for higher loads. The Hybrid has a 3,000-watt rating and offers five-stage charging, including equalization and a proprietary Battery Saver mode. An optional remote panel is available. The Hybrid is protected by a three-year warranty and has a \$2,779 price tag.

The company's MMS 1012 series pure sine wave inverter/charger is rated at 1,000 watts, has a built-in transfer switch and can be ordered with a remote panel. It sells for \$1,199 and carries a two-year warranty.

The MS 2000-20B, also a pure sine wave unit, is rated at 2,000 watts and features a 100-amp charger. The use of two optional circuit breakers eliminates the need for a sub panel. Optional remote on/off switch with display is available. Price is \$2,099



**HYBRID  
MSH3012M**

and there's a 2,800-watt model (MS 2812) that goes for \$2,479. The MS 2812 includes a three-year warranty.

For those looking to run smaller accessories that can handle a modified sine wave, the MM 612 is good for 600 watts. An optional remote panel is available and the unit sells for \$529 with a two-year warranty.



**NATURE POWER  
1,000-WATT**

## Nature Power Inverters

Camping World offers a number of Nature Power modified and pure sine wave inverters at value pricing.

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Models that offer a modified sine wave have a front panel with LED readouts, a double AC outlet and an optional remote on/off switch. The top modified sine wave model is rated at 3,000 watts and sells for \$599.99. Right below that model is a 1,000-watt inverter that carries a \$149.99 price tag and the smaller, 400-watt model is \$69.99. All of these inverters feature a one-year warranty.

Nature Power's Basic pure sine wave inverters have 400-, 1,000- and 2,000-watt ratings and are priced at \$199.99, \$399.99, and \$499.99, respectively. The company's higher end, pure sine wave 2,000-watt inverter is equipped with a 50-amp, three-stage charging system and an automatic transfer switch; it sells for \$1,299.99. For those needing up to 3,000 watts of power, the top model (\$2,499.99) has a 150-amp, three-stage battery charger, an automatic transfer switch and a remote panel.

## OutBack Power Inverters

The FX series inverters are available in 2,000- or 2,500-watt configurations. A pure sine wave RV/Marine model features a 30-amp transfer switch, an intelligent battery-charging system and a five-year warranty. Prices start at \$1,633.

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## Go Power! (GP)

GP pure sine wave inverters include a remote panel, a dual GFCI outlet, front LED display and a one-year warranty. The 300-watt model is priced at \$244, the 600-watt model is \$436 and a 1,500-watt version goes for \$728. The bigger counterparts, at 2,000 or 3,000 watts, are priced at \$1,048 and \$1,553, respectively. **M**

### Sources

**Go Power!/Carmanah Technologies Corp.**  
866-247-6527, <http://gpelectric.com>

**Magnum Energy Inc./  
Sensata Technologies**  
425-353-8833, [www.magnumenergy.com](http://www.magnumenergy.com)

**Nature Power Products**  
800-588-0590,  
[www.naturepowerproducts.com](http://www.naturepowerproducts.com)

**OutBack Power**  
360-435-6030, [www.outbackpower.com](http://www.outbackpower.com)

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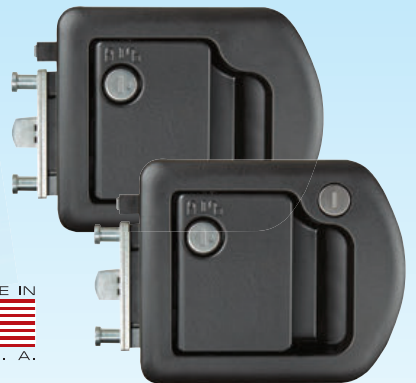


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Fold N Go Grill



By Bob Livingston

# Rayzar Sharp

Winegard's new automatic amplified broadcast dome looks like a mini satellite dish but brings in crystal-clear local HDTV signals



The dome is 15½ inches in diameter and weighs only 4½ pounds. Made of UV-protected plastic, the dome is designed to withstand years of outdoor exposure.

**“Free TV”** has a nice ring to it. The idea of receiving local programming via over-the-air broadcasting is appealing to those who prefer not to incur a monthly service charge for watching TV. Many RV parks offer cable TV hookups, but the signal could be coming from a far-off location and be void of local programming, which is useful when in unfamiliar places. Once the feds mandated that all TV broadcasters convert to a digital signal in 2009, the paradigm changed for the better — a lot better.

High-definition programming is now the norm, and most owners rely on batwing antennas to pull in the signals. While that works OK, and a few other suppliers offer more sophisticated antennas, Winegard has taken this segment to the next level with its new Rayzar Automatic Amplified Broadcast HDTV Antenna.

The Rayzar Automatic looks like

a mini satellite dish, and works using similar principles. It employs state-of-the-art electronics to bring in the most channels. For example, it's easy to find a signal or two using just about any antenna, but the Rayzar computes the best antenna position to bring in highest number of signals, automatically. And it's designed to bring in signals that are more distant. It has an ultra-low noise amplifier to boost signal strength resulting in minimal picture pixelation.

When a search is initiated, the antenna rotates automatically in a direction that allows for the most channel availability. It typically takes around two to three minutes to go through the search process, and when the optimum number of TV frequencies is found, a figure will show up on the display screen. From here, a scan is initiated in the TV, which will

determine how many stations can actually be viewed. The sub channels affect this process and the frequency figure on the display screen will likely be different from channels that are watchable.

During our test, we positioned the RV in a location where we knew it was difficult to receive broadcast signals. The readout showed 20 frequencies, but only six channels were watchable. Those channels were crystal clear and the picture was HD-quality. One of the channels was pixelating a little, so the manual control was used to move the antenna slightly and fine-tune the signal. Pushing the Search button again returns the antenna to the Automatic Search Mode.



Winegard's Rayzar broadcast antenna sits smartly on the roof of any motorhome. Its low profile helps blend in to the exterior lines, and the dome can be ordered in black or white.



Once we relocated to a more populated area, the frequencies were vast, with dozens of channels to watch.

The control panel, which replaces an existing batwing antenna counterpart, is loaded with features to keep the user informed of available frequencies and antenna positioning. Red and green LEDs indicate antenna position and will blink when the antenna is rotating. The on/off button has the same function found on batwing antenna controls, activating the amplifier, which will lock out the cable signal when on.

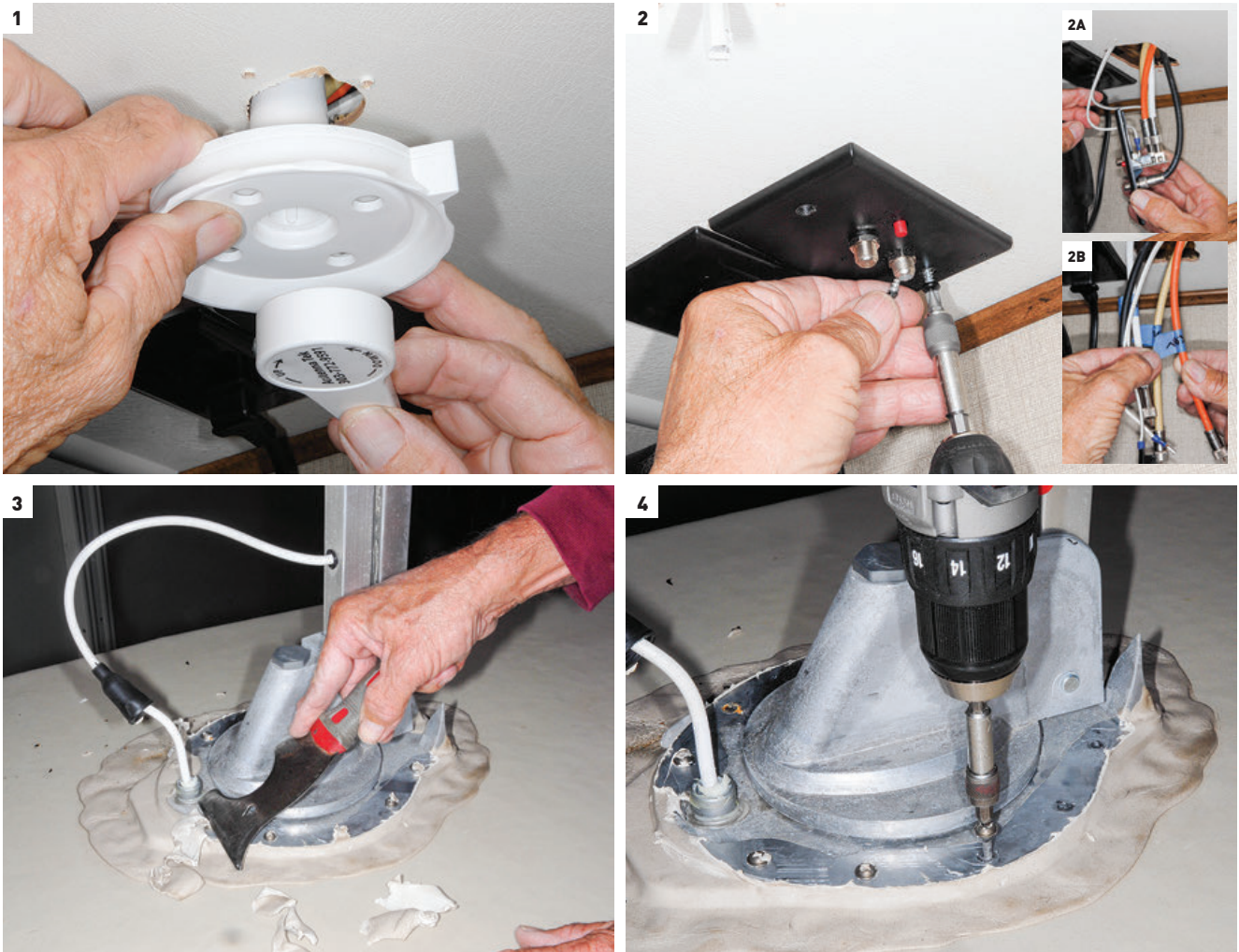
Winegard specifically designed the aftermarket kit to retrofit existing

batwing antennas. Included in the box is all the necessary hardware to plug any holes left by the batwing antenna; there's even a ceiling plate to cover the hole vacated by the old antenna crank-up mechanism. The intention of the installation design is to remove the existing antenna and place the new dome in the same location. A roof plate handles the modifications up top. But that may not be possible, as we found out. There are very specific instructions for locating the dome and it must not be farther than 30 feet from the control panel (a 20-foot coaxial cable is included and recommended for optimum performance) and have

the necessary clearance from the front and side of the motorhome roof. In our case, we needed to move the dome away from the original location to meet these requirements, which was easily accomplished, but left the roof plate exposed — not a big deal.

In the end, the dome sits nicely on the roof and has a low enough profile so it looks integrated into the design of the RV. Performance and ease of use are exceptional, and there's no risk of leaving a batwing antenna up when on the road. The Rayzar is available at Camping World for \$399 and comes in black or white.

Here's how the installation went:



**[1]** The original crank mechanism in the ceiling is removed, exposing a rod, which will pull out with the batwing antenna body. **[2]** The existing control panel is removed from the ceiling or wall, **[2A]** exposing the coaxial cables and power wires. **[2B]** To make life easier,

painter's tape can be used to mark the coaxial cables and power wires after identifying and removing from the existing control panel. **[3]** Sealant must be peeled off the batwing antenna base before removal. A sharp putty knife makes the job a little easier, but use

caution not to cut into the roof, especially if it's rubber. **[4]** Once the old putty is cleared from the base of the batwing antenna, the screws are removed. Using a screw gun facilitates this process.

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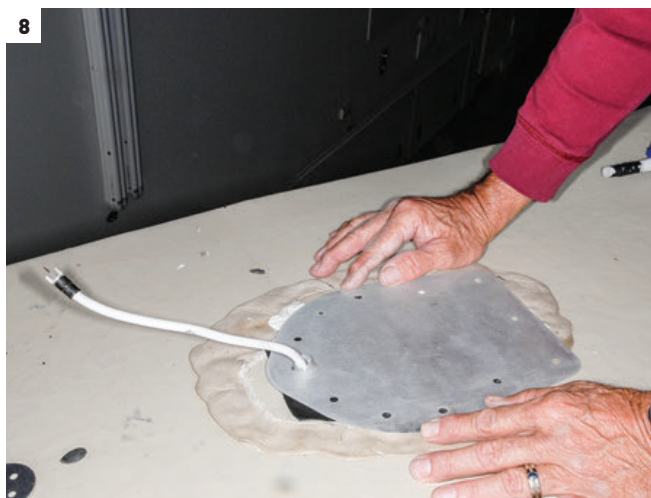
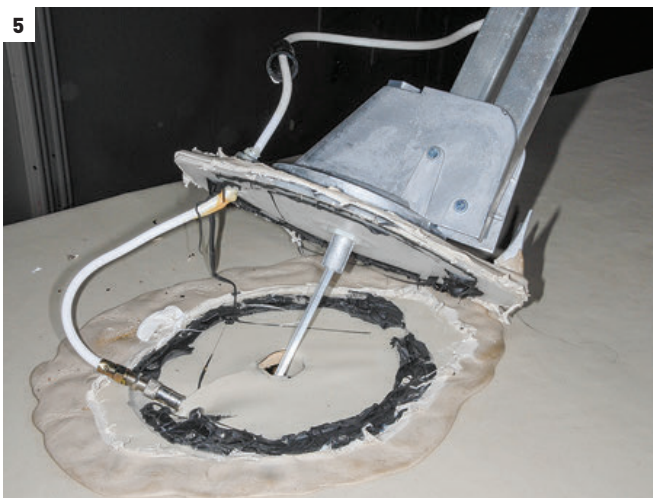
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[5] The batwing antenna should peel off the roof easily, but use caution not to lift the rubber membrane, if so equipped. Pull up the base to clear the inner rod from the hole in the roof. [6] The existing coaxial cable is disconnected from the batwing antenna, which is removed from the roof at this point. [7] Choosing a location for the dome requires a few measurements. The dome needs a

minimum of 18½ by 18¾ inches of space for the installation. It needs to be 12 inches from the edge of the RV and at least 24 inches from the front of vehicle, and clear of nearby obstructions. When installing on a Class C, take the dimensions of the engine hood into consideration. [8] The roof plate is positioned over the hole used to mount the batwing antenna. In a perfect world, the new dome can be placed

over this plate, but in our case, the required clearances would not allow for that positioning. [9] Rubber-roof lap sealer is applied to the back of the roof plate. Make sure to use the proper sealant for the type of roof material. [10] The roof plate is screwed down onto the roof after routing the connecting coaxial cable from the control box. In this case, the original cable was long enough.



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[11] Once the roof plate is screwed down, a line of lap sealer is applied to the edges and over the screw heads. Lap sealer will fill in openings and surfaces that are not level. Control the bead and don't over-apply the sealant. [12] After locating the dome to its permanent home, make sure the coaxial-cable connection is facing the back of the motorhome. In this case the dome was placed next to the roof plate. [13] Mounting the dome to the roof is a simple process. Mark the

location of the feet and [13A] move the dome to the side to apply lap sealer on the area. [13B] Carefully place the dome's feet over the sealant and attach to the roof using the provided screws; apply sealant around the edges on the screw heads. [14] The ceiling plate does a nice job of covering the hole left by the batwing antenna crank mechanism. [15] Previously marked coaxial cables and power wires are connected to the Rayzar control box. In this case, the original batwing antenna

was not a Winegard brand unit, but the wiring is similar. [16] The final step is installing the Rayzar control box in the same location as the original panel. The new box will easily cover the hole in the wall or ceiling. **M**

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## Parking Pipes

Although I lost my wife, co-pilot and navigator a few years ago, I still travel in my motorhome and continue to enjoy the lifestyle. Since I no longer have someone to guide my 36-foot coach into RV sites in a position that allows room for the slideouts, I came up with a great solution that cost me only a few dollars: I made two guides out of scrap wood and PVC sprinkler pipe.

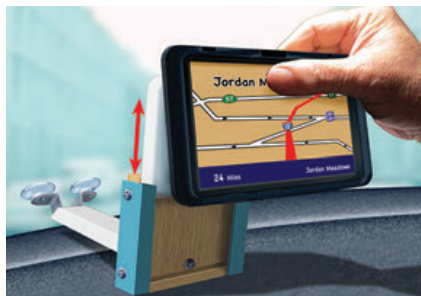
The front guide is a couple inches longer than the distance the slideout protrudes from the coach. I hold the base of the guide horizontally on the side of the coach so it allows me to see the distance I will need for the slideout. (This works great with older, narrow sites.) I then place the guide on the ground at the point I want the front of the coach to be when parked.

The rear guide has a horizontal pipe attached to the vertical pipe and is placed where the rear of the coach should be. When backing, I look into the rearview mirror and when the coach touches the horizontal pipe, and moves it a bit, I know I am in the correct parking position.

In addition, I attached reflective tape on the tip of each vertical pipe. If arriving after dark, I attach a small LED flashlight to the side of the coach (with hook-and-loop fastener) so I can see the movement of the rear guide on the reflective tape as I back in. Once done, I store the flashlight on the dashboard of the coach using hook and loop so it is always available and within easy reach.

Because no PVC glue was used, the guides come apart for easy storage. I attached the pipe to a wood base using an epoxy that was compatible with both wood and plastic.

**Jerry Rosen | Hacienda Heights, California**



## GPS Grabber

I love the convenience a GPS offers for routing my trips. However, my GPS unit's suction cup will not stick to my motorhome's textured dashboard, and mounting it on the windshield puts it out of reach, so I built a mount to hold it upright. My co-pilot can remove the unit (which is stuck to the white mounting plate) with one hand to change the settings, and then slide the mounting plate back into the bracket without having to mess with the suction cup.

**Robert Falk | Sequim, Washington**



## Coffee Cabinet

Our Roadtrek motorhome came with a built-in coffeemaker that took up too much space. Add that to the fact that we prefer French-press coffee, and you can see that the drip coffeemaker had to go. The original built-in coffeemaker slid out of its housing easily enough; we then built a small cupboard to fill the space left behind. As a bonus, we found a magnetic dry-erase board that was the correct size to fit the new cupboard's door. Now we have a place for photos, notes and our grocery list.

**Rhonda van Heyst | Edmonton, Alberta, Canada**



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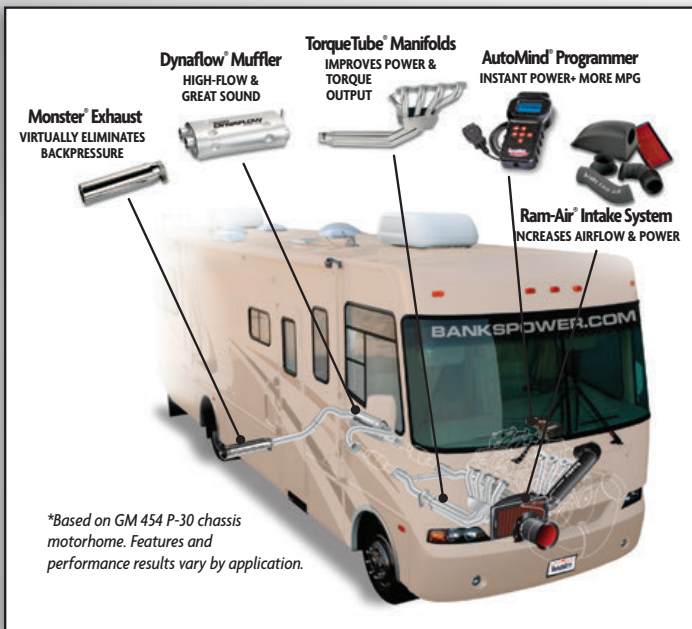
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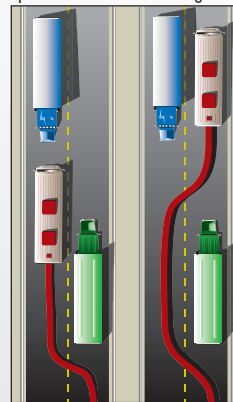
\*Requires additional software and/or hardware sold separately



\*Based on GM 454 P-30 chassis motorhome. Features and performance results vary by application.

### Passing Safety\*

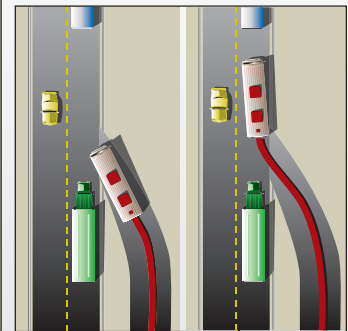
(40-60 mph TIME)  
Spend less time on the "wrong" side



BEFORE (STOCK) 12.73 SEC  
AFTER (BANKS) 9.42 SEC

### Merging Safety\*

(0-60 mph DISTANCE)  
Cut over 300 feet off the distance needed to reach 60 mph



BEFORE (STOCK) 1,325 FT  
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# Adjusting Hot Water

Replacement thermostat for Atwood water heaters allows users to dial in a comfortable temperature

By Bob Livingston

## PLUMBING

Cost: \$32.00

Time: 20 minutes

Difficulty: 2/10

At one time, hot-water tanks were fitted with adjustable thermostats. Current models are preset and for many people the temperature is just too hot for comfort. For those motorhomes equipped with an Atwood hot-water tank, there's an adjustable thermostat kit offered by the company that doesn't get much advertising fanfare and sells for only \$32 online.

The Atwood conversion kit is a pretty simple deal, taking only 20 minutes or so to swap out the existing thermostat. Fortunately, the stock thermostat is right in front of the hot-water tank, accessible by opening the access door on the side wall. It lives under a thin protective foam cover that must be cut with a razor knife after removing the existing two brown wires (identified accordingly on the foam cover). Once cut, the foam material can be lifted out of the way and saved for reinstallation after the new thermostat is in place.

While it's not difficult, removing

the existing thermostat can be a bit tricky since it's held in place by a spring-loaded bayonet mount. Turning the old thermostat should free it from the mounting tabs. Once out, it can be put in your toolbox to use as a spare, if necessary — or offered to a neighbor experiencing a thermostat failure.

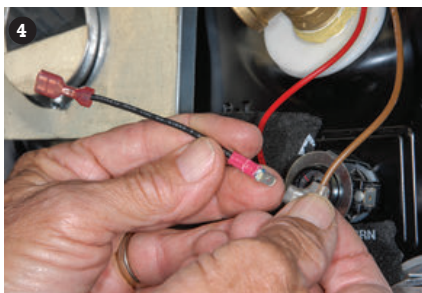
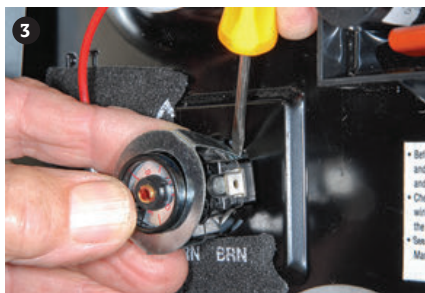
We experienced no difficulty locking in the new adjustable thermostat since we've done this job many times, but it does take some coordination to keep the spring, cage-type bracket and thermostat together. While it's possible the tabs can be seated by squeezing and

pushing the bracket, we used a small screwdriver to nudge it into place. Those doing it for the first time may stumble during the first attempts to seat the thermostat. The most important part of the installation is making sure the flat side of the thermostat is snug up against the tank.

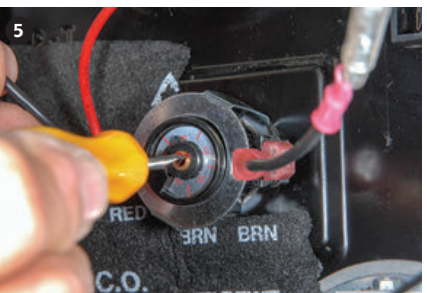
Once the thermostat is in place, pigtails are connected to the brown wires and the connectors slid onto the terminals. The pigtails are necessary because the terminals on the stock thermostat are wider. After putting the protected foam back in place (there should be enough adhesive to stick), the install is done.

Adjusting the thermostat takes some trial and error because the reference marks on the outer ring are only red lines and letters. A small screwdriver is used to adjust temperature and it's best to place the indicator at the halfway mark as a starting point. From here, it's just a matter of using the hot water and making adjustments to suit personal tastes — and enjoying the newfound comfort. **M**

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[1] The location of the stock thermostat is clearly marked. [2] Once the protective foam is cut and peeled off, the thermostat is twisted and removed from the panel. [3] A cage-type bracket holds the adjustable thermostat and spring in place while the tabs are seated and backside positioned against the tank. [4] Pigtails reduce the size of the terminals used to connect the new thermostat. [5] A small screwdriver is used to adjust the temperature.



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By Ken Freund

## Transmission Position While Towing

**Q** I have just read that a 2010 Jeep Wrangler must be placed in PARK while being flat towed. I own a 2006 four-wheel-drive Jeep Liberty, and in the past, I have flat-towed it with the four-wheel transfer case in NEUTRAL and also the transmission in NEUTRAL. By doing this am I harming the transmission? Should I be putting the transmission in PARK instead? Thanks for any help.

**Russell Armstrong | Henderson, Nevada**

**A** Russell, always refer to the owner's manual for towing recommendations. The transmission should be in PARK if it is an automatic and in gear if it is a manual gearbox. When a transfer case like yours is being towed, a small lubrication pump inside is spun by the driveshaft. However, due to the viscosity of the oil in it, even in NEUTRAL the back of the transmission may be driven (turned) somewhat. (Often it is not enough to cause damage, but you're taking a chance.) The reason this is not good is that many automatic transmissions generally

don't receive sufficient lubrication if they are towed, as opposed to being driven. A manual gearbox in NEUTRAL doesn't spin the cluster gear, which circulates oil on its teeth up onto the other gears and parts.

Most automatic transmissions rely on the front pump, which is engine-driven, to circulate cooling and lubricating fluid. The automatic won't spin internally if it is placed in PARK. I recommend using HIGH gear instead of FIRST on manual gearboxes, because if the transfer case ever gets bumped out of NEUTRAL, it won't over-rev the engine while being towed. I have seen this happen a number of times, which is why I suggest using HIGH gear instead of FIRST to keep the transmission from spinning.



## Tire Failure

**Q** While driving, the left inside dual tire came apart on my 27-foot Lazy Daze motorhome just south of Susanville, California. The tire was original equipment on the motorhome, which was about 5 years old. The motorhome is parked for about six months of the year, and I park the tires on 2-by-6 wood planks nailed to ¾-inch plywood so they don't sit on the wet ground (in case of rain). I keep the tires covered and inflated to 80 PSI, as indicated on the door placard. I thought they would last longer than this. Am I doing something wrong? Would the tires last longer if I jacked the motorhome up? I would appreciate any advice you can offer, as the new Michelins cost about \$292 each out the door at my tire dealer.

**Kent Williams | Hesperia, California**

**A** I know that parking the tires on top of boards is recommended by many folks as a way to protect tires and to keep them from sitting in water for an extended period. However, sitting in one spot for six months every year can be really tough on tires. Parking in one spot causes flat spots on the tires and they often form cracks in the rubber at the point of contact. I recommend moving it at least a few feet every couple months. I've seen many vehicles that sat still for a long time during storage and repairs, restoration, etc., suffer a series of tire failures after sitting for extended periods.

Although your coach may have been only around 5 years old, the tires could have been a year or two older from sitting in a warehouse, etc., before installation. Tire manufacturers

generally recommend replacement after about seven years. It would be necessary to read the DOT date codes stamped on the tire sidewalls, which are a four-digit number. The first two numbers are the week; the second pair of numbers are the last two digits of the year. (For example, 3008 would be the 30th week of 2008.)

The pictures you sent me show that the tread peeled partly off the carcass. This can happen due to heat, and this process is accelerated if a tire ever is run with pressure that is too low. This might occur if inflation was overlooked sometime, or pressure was lost due to a slow leak, etc. The tire may be weakened and the failure may occur later on. It's also best to weigh each corner and inflate the tires according to the load-inflation tables provided by the tire manufacturer for that specific



tire, based on the actual weight it is carrying fully loaded.

**Diesel Won't Start When Hot**


**Q** We have a 1999 Georgie Boy Cruise Master motorhome. It has a 5.9-liter Cummins diesel engine. For the last three years I have been fighting a starting problem. The engine

starts great when it's cold, but when it gets up to operating temperature and I shut it off, wait a little and try to start it again, it won't start until after it has cooled down. My diesel mechanic said the electronics on the main pump were breaking down when it is at running temperature. I changed the pump, but that didn't help. I then changed the lift pump, but it still won't start when it

is at operating temperature. I took it to a Cummins shop to scan and they said it looks like a bad main pump. A solid \$250 later they changed the main pump again! It still won't start when it's at operating temperature. The crankshaft position sensor was changed, and also the starter, but nothing has helped. I'm going broke on this Cummins, can you help please?

**Walt Johnson | Bayview, Idaho**

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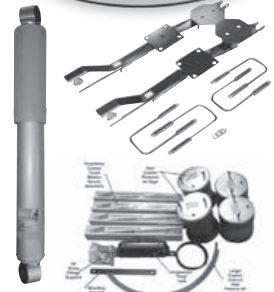
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**A** It makes sense that the electronics fail when hot and start working when they cool down, but if the engine cranks over at a normal speed at operating temperature but won't start, the starter should not have been changed. Whoever sold you on that should refund your money. When a diesel engine is warm and has good compression and cranks over normally, but won't start, it pretty much has to be a fuel delivery problem.

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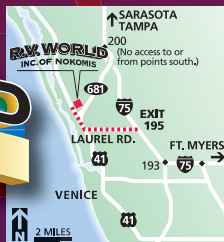
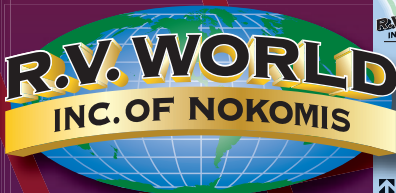
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the Cummins dealer didn't stick with the problem and fix it. They should be looking for fuel delivery at the injectors when the engine is being cranked when it is warm. There is a module which provides an OK-to-start signal, which can be affected by a blown or corroded fuse, so check all the fuses.

A starting problem can also be caused by a leak in either the inlet or

the return side of the fuel system. This type of leak can allow air to enter the injection pump resulting in starting issues. A rubber hose connecting the pump to the steel hard line can be the source of this kind of leak. Also, follow the lines from the tank to the engine.

I'd like to hear from readers who have experienced this problem and solved it.

## Mold Concerns

**Q** We have encountered a bit of mold in our 2007 32-foot Class A motorhome. Mold is present on the ceiling in the kitchen, and the bottom of a cabinet is black with mold under the vinyl cover. All the wood is overlaid with a white vinyl product instead of being painted, stained, etc. What should we do to stop the mold?

**Thomas Jackson | Gainesville, Florida**

**A** First, you need to determine where the moisture that is causing the mold is coming from. A humid climate, especially a warm one, can allow mold to grow inside a motorhome quite easily. During storage, it is helpful to use a dehumidifier or desiccant product to keep the air inside the coach dry, and you may also consider opening the roof vents and using a roof vent cover to allow air to circulate. Beyond that, make sure there are no points of entry for

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moisture inside the motorhome, such as a roof or appliance leak. Mold on surfaces can often be removed with cleaning products that include bleach—but remember, mold can be hazardous to your health. If you are not comfortable removing it, there are many companies that offer mold and mildew removal services. You should be able to find one in your area.

### Cab Heater Comment

I'm responding to "Motorhome Cab Heater Issue" in the February issue. I own a 1999 Damon Ultrasport DP. The coolant circulates from the rear diesel engine, in a supply line and a return line, to the cabin heat exchanger. In each line (underneath the coach) there is a shut-off valve. If these valves are closed (normal summertime travel) no heated coolant will reach the heater core. This is worth checking.

**Richard Davis | Houston, Texas**

**A** Even if a valve was partly closed this could cause a lack of heat. Conversely, this is also a good thing to check in the hot weather too; make sure the valves are closed so the air conditioner doesn't have to fight against the heater in the cab.

### Sprinter Towing

**Q** I own a 2010 Itasca Reyo on a Sprinter chassis. I've been considering towing a two-door Jeep Wrangler, but am unable to find sufficient information on the Reyo's tow rating. I've found contradicting information and am hoping you could clarify this for me. What is the maximum tow rating for the Reyo? The Jeep weighs about 4,000 pounds.

**Jim Bartuska | Orland Park, Illinois**

**A** Your coach has a gross combination weight rating (GCWR) of 15,250 pounds, which is the maximum amount that the motorhome and any vehicle you tow behind it can weigh together. The gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of your coach, which is the maximum it can weigh fully loaded by itself, is

11,030 pounds. These numbers are available on the [www.winnebagoind.com](http://www.winnebagoind.com) website.

You should weigh the motorhome on a truck scale when it is fully loaded, fueled up and with passengers, then subtract that scale weight from the GCWR. This would give you the amount you can tow.

There is one more caveat. The hitch receiver is rated for a maximum of 5,000 pounds. So even if you have a higher capacity according to the GCWR calculation, you must not exceed the receiver rating.

You should also have an auxiliary braking device in the Jeep.


### Diesel Oil Loss

**Q** I have a Cummins 1998 ISB in a Winnebago pusher with 84,000 miles. I would like information about a diesel engine that wastes oil by running it out the vent tube. Recently, while traveling from Michigan to Florida, I lost half a load of oil. There must be a way to recover the oil, or redirect it back to the oil pan. The pros tell me that starting in 2004 Cummins added a recovery unit, but mine is the way it is. The Allison six-speed transmission works well.

**Donald Gault | Saginaw, Michigan**

**A** Your engine has a crankcase ventilation road draft tube that is open to the atmosphere, which was common practice when this was built. Recent models have been required to switch to closed systems due to federal air pollution regulations. A few years ago there were a lot of complaints from owners due to oil loss and the oily residue coating the radiators and charge-air cooler assemblies, which resulted in insulating the heat exchangers and engine overheating due to the accumulated crud, dust, etc. Some owners put an extension hose on the end of the tube and mounted a catch can to collect the drips. The amount of oil you lost is more than is typical, so you may have a problem with excessive crankcase blow-by, which is a condition where combustion

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## COACH & POWERTRAIN

pressure gets past the piston rings, pressurizes the crankcase and blows out the vent. The engine can be tested by a Cummins dealer for this. It's also possible that your engine is being overfilled with oil. Call Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp. (800-385-4357) and Cummins (800-343-7357) to verify oil capacity and determine if you have the right dipstick in the engine. Too much oil causes excessive consumption including out the vent. You will need your VIN and engine numbers before calling. They may be able to tell you what parts are needed to convert to a later vent system, if it is possible.

### Ignition Switch Position

**Q** I am dinghy towing a car and using a BrakeBuddy auxiliary braking system. What position should the ignition key be in? I am on my way to Arizona, so I need to know ASAP.

**Jodi Moretz | Via email**

**A** Jodi, you didn't mention what kind of vehicle you are towing, and different manufacturers have various recommendations as to what position to use. Generally, you must unlock the steering so the front wheels can turn from side to side, but you don't want to turn on the ignition, as this will quickly discharge the battery. However, some recent Jeeps, for example, don't have a locking steering column. Many vehicles also call for certain fuses to be removed during towing. It's important from a safety and durability standpoint to work these things out well before you set out on a trip. In most cases this is covered in the owner's manual.

### Auxiliary Cooling Fan

**Q** I have a 1991 Fleetwood Searcher Class C on a Chevrolet G30 chassis. The electric cooling fan in front of the radiator does not power up when the A/C is on. My regular repair shop used my factory GM electrical manual only to realize that it's useless in regard to the fan. They applied power to it externally and the fan works. It has a factory connector, but

there's no power going to the fan from anyplace they can find. Is it supposed to come on when the A/C is engaged, or does it only come on when the engine/coolant temperature reaches a point way above normal and where does it get power from? I took it to an electrical shop to no avail.

**Jeff Simmons | Albuquerque, New Mexico**

**A** As I recall, the auxiliary fan on these models is controlled by a relay that's triggered by a high coolant temperature and/or when the A/C is on (this helps cool the condenser, which is in front of the radiator, to help improve air-conditioning performance). If you can't find a wiring diagram, follow the wiring back and try to find the relay and test it. Then test its inputs from the coolant sensor and A/C circuits. Alternatively, you could wire in your own continuous-duty 30-amp relay to power the fan. The wire that powers the compressor clutch can be used to trigger the relay when the A/C is on. You could also install a toggle switch under the dash and run wiring to operate the fan if the engine gets hot (the overheat circuit may still be working, but you don't know). Put a diode in the wire so that power from the toggle switch won't feed back and apply the compressor clutch.

### Refrigerator Goes Off

**Q** My coach has a Norcold N842IM refrigerator that works fine on LP-gas and electricity when parked, but when moving it doesn't cool on either LP-gas or electricity. The refrigerator's interior temperature reading starts out between 35 and 40 degrees Fahrenheit, and when I check it a few hours later it's 55 to 60 degrees. How do I remedy this problem?

**Charles Travers | Margate, Florida**

**A** Your refrigerator is designed to run on 120 volts AC and/or on LP-gas. However, when you are driving down the road, it is not supplied with 120-volt AC power, so it automatically switches over **(continued on page 145)**

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**COACH & POWERTRAIN**

(continued from page 142) to LP-gas. It's possible the auto changeover part of the controls isn't functioning. You can test this by manually switching it to LP-gas to see if that works and continues cooling. Do you get any trouble codes? It is likely that the flame is being blown out when you are driving. After reaching highway speeds, pull over in a safe place and check for a flame from the burner. If it is out, check LP-gas supply and its pressure, which should be 11 inches water column. Also, try adjusting the igniter gap from 1/8 inch to 3/16 inch (when the unit is off). Some owners also install shields to block the wind from the burner area.

**Fuel Pump Advice**

**Q** Hot weather is just around the corner. We should be reminded that in-tank fuel pumps are cooled by the gasoline they are sitting in. Keep in mind the fuel pump is an electric motor that creates a certain amount of heat, and without a lot of fuel to absorb the heat, a low fuel tank gets rather warm. Fuel pumps are expensive; I had to buy one. Now when I am traveling in really hot weather, I try to keep the tank above half full. It doesn't cost more to run on the top half of the tank and it's better than buying a fuel pump.

Lloyd Kurtz | Ellinwood, Kansas

**A** You are correct that the electric in-tank fuel pumps are cooled and lubricated by gasoline; however, I don't know of any studies having been done to compare longevity of pumps in relation to fuel level. Some pumps are still going to fail, but I tend to agree that doing this can't hurt. **M**

**Have a Tech Question?**

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# Don't Be Cruel!

Be cool and try not to drool as we give you the scoop on three tasty destinations for ice cream lovers.

By Alan Rider

In T.S. Eliot's famous poem "The Waste Land," he wrote, "April is the cruellest month." I'm not so sure I'd agree (January gets my vote), but I can say without hesitation that the month of May is by far the kindest.

Think about it: All that is right with the world happens in May. Shorts and flip-flops come out of winter hibernation, barbecue grills get fired up, and motorhomers start spreading out maps and planning their travels. Best of all, May is the beginning of ice cream season, which is, as near as I can figure, the entire reason warm weather was invented.

If you can relate, allow me to suggest you waste no time setting off on your own quest for the perfect scoop with these three motorhome-friendly ice cream destinations.

## Feeling Full?

It was May 12, 1777, when confectioner Philip Lenzi ran the first newspaper ad promising his shop offered ice cream "almost every day."

Things have changed, thanks to individual ice cream purveyors who have been trying to outdo each other ever since. Which explains how you and I have been blessed with desserts like the Kitchen Sink, from the folks at Jaxson's in Dania Beach, Florida (954-923-4445, [www.jaxsonsiccream.com](http://www.jaxsonsiccream.com)).

Between the name and the fact that it's only served to parties of four or more, I can tell you this is no ordinary

sundae. Each person gets their choice of three scoops of any of the shop's 38 flavors, liberally garnished with chocolate syrup, whipped cream and toppings galore. All served up in, yep, you guessed it, an actual stainless-steel sink.

## Feeling Envious?

When my best friend, Mike — who is the only other person I know who considers a pint of ice cream a single-serving container — called me to gloat about having just taken the tour at Ben & Jerry's Waterbury, Vermont, factory last fall, I believe I actually growled at him (ice cream withdrawal is not pretty).

When I finally came to my senses, with the help of a pint of Chubby Hubby (and yes, I do see the irony in that), I immediately vowed to add the Ben & Jerry's plant tour (866-258-6877, [www.benjerry.com](http://www.benjerry.com)) to my summer itinerary. I'm told the 30-minute experience involves a short video presentation

before the actual walking tour that gives visitors a peek into a scaled-down flavor-concocting lab and look at the actual production operation.

The best part of the tour — sampling the final product — they save for the end. Which makes me wonder how many times I can take the tour in one day?

## Feeling Festive?

While watching how your favorite flavor is made is intellectually satisfying, there's something about sharing my favorite frozen dairy desserts with thousands of people that makes it seem all the more delicious.

Enter festivals like the Ice Cream Days celebration (712-546-8821, [www.lemarsiowa.com](http://www.lemarsiowa.com)) in Le Mars, Iowa, a small town I just have to visit as it's been dubbed the Ice Cream Capital of the World. That's because this otherwise unassuming burgh is home to Wells Enterprises, whose two plants here produce more ice cream than any other single location on the planet.

The four-day festival runs June 17-20 and features a competition for the best new ice cream flavor, free ice cream socials, a parade and more.

## Feeling Hungry?

No matter where your travels this summer take you, here's hoping they'll all be sweet. Which shouldn't be a problem because there's always something cool waiting for us just around the next bend in The Road Ahead. **M**

“All that is right with the world happens in May.”

## We all Scream for Ice Cream ☺

Children at the Blue Bunny Ice Cream Parlor in Le Mars, Iowa, known as the Ice Cream Capital of the World. Jaxson's Ice Cream serves a one-of-a-kind sundae — the Kitchen Sink.



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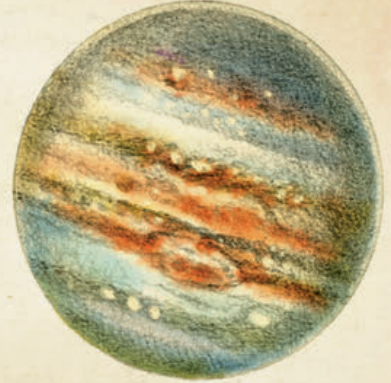
*Fig. 1 Saturn*



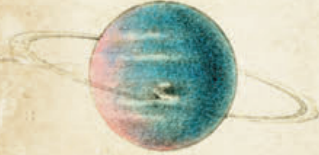
*Fig. 3 Asteroid Gaspia*



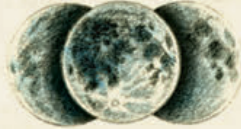
*Fig. 5 Mercury*



*Fig. 7 Jupiter*



*Fig. 2 Neptune*



*Fig. 4 Phases of the Moon*



*Fig. 6 Mars*

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