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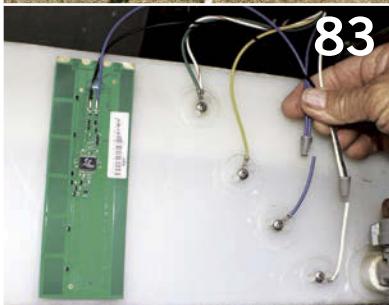
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On The Cover: Photographed in Ojai, Calif., Winnebago's Trend Class C motorhome is built on the Ram ProMaster chassis with a V-6 Pentastar gasoline engine and a gross vehicle weight rating of 9,350 pounds (see test on page 56). Photo by Scott Hirko.

GETTING SPOILED

As I sit outside a test coach overlooking the perfectly manicured golf course that meanders throughout the sites at Outdoor Resort Indio motor coach park near Palm Springs, Calif., I'm reminded how spoiled we're getting. No, it's not just because I'm staring at beautiful, palm-tree-studded scenery on a bright sunny winter morning donning shorts and a T-shirt, it's because we travel in motorhomes that provide so much exceptional comfort and convenience — maybe too much convenience. Let me explain. Obviously, budgets will dictate just how far we can go in electing amenities, but I sometimes have to believe that we've gone too far in pushing the industry into building coaches that more closely resemble a stationary residence than an RV.

For years I've poked fun at creature comforts that seem obsessive — or even a little silly. For example, two bathrooms. While a guest bath has been a highline bus staple, in the last couple of years a number of manufacturers have adopted this feature, even in gassers. At first, I was an outspoken critic of devoting valuable space to an additional bathroom (sans shower, for now); today, I'm a big fan, especially when the lone bathroom is in use and the public facilities are too far away in stressful situations. Nevertheless, we managed to "cope" with one bathroom.

Everyone needs a refrigerator, and my wife, Lynne, and I always stuff the shelves, regardless of its capacity. So the idea of a 22-cubic-foot residential refrigerator seems to be appealing. In most cases, choosing a residential refrigerator will reduce the purchase price, even with the additional batteries and power inverter. But forget about staying in primitive locations, unless you have a massive solar system or don't mind running the generator most of the day. This is a deal breaker for me. Although I spend the majority of my "camp" days in nice RV parks, an RV refrigerator that runs on LP-gas makes staying in favor-



ite state and national primitive facilities feasible. Call me a legacy thinker, but RVs are supposed to be fully self-contained, with the option of running a generator only when necessary.

For me, the jury is still out when it comes to the washer/dryer and dishwasher. Admittedly, a washer/dryer has come in handy many times. While I like a stacker, the all-in-one units work better than they did in the past and can hold more clothes. I guess I'm a believer if space is available, but social time in the RV park laundry room will be sorely missed.

I hate washing dishes, so the dishwasher is an environmentally sound way to refrain from using paper plates. Still, hand-washing dishes for two people is no big deal.

At the risk of being lambasted by those who love TV, having four LED TVs seems like overkill. A big TV in the living room, positioned so viewers don't have to cock their heads in an uncomfortable direction, is always welcome; a second screen in the bedroom makes sense. But another big TV over the dashboard that's only a few feet from the main set in the living room seems redundant. I get the concept, but rearranging the floorplan to make one TV work in the living area makes more sense to me. I'm waffling whether an outside TV is a good thing, being sensitive to my neighbor's feelings — and recognizing the picture is marginal in bright ambient light.

Portable electronic control centers (think iPad) allow us to open and close powered window shades, turn on entertainment equipment, extend the slides, open the awnings and level the coach without moving from the reclining easy chair.

Maybe I'm just feeling a little guilty. ♦

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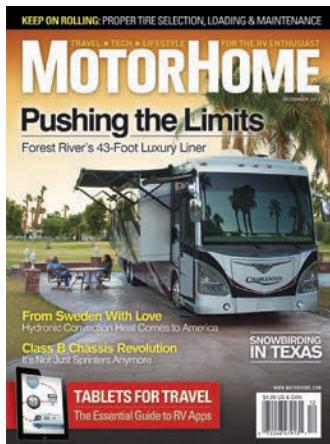
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DO YOU ATTEND RV SHOWS? IF SO, DO YOU GO TO LOOK, LEARN OR BUY, AND WHICH SHOWS WOULD YOU RECOMMEND TO FELLOW RVERS?

That's the question we asked in our December 2013 issue, and here are some of the replies we received.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE BUYING

I read with great interest Craig Shopneck's thoughts on looking for his first RV (P.O. Box, December 2013). I have been to the Oklahoma City RV and the Tulsa, Oklahoma Boat and Travel Show. I love the Tulsa event; it has a good representation of Class C and Class A rigs. Shows provide an opportunity to view what you might find in a particular rig, but before you go, ask yourself the following questions.

Will you be full timers in your rig? If so, don't rush.

What is your budget? Don't let emotions get the best of you when you buy. I promise you will regret it.

What is your age? I really don't want to know, but that should be considered when buying. If you finance a 20-year loan and you are 80 years old, you might reconsider.

If you plan on paying cash for the rig, then discard the first two questions and move to the next one.

Where will you be traveling? Flat land? Hills/mountains? And will you be towing a car? If you are doing the mountains, you might consider a diesel.

How many grandchildren do you have? Make sure your rig has appropriate seat belts. In many states, only the driver and front passenger are required to wear seat belts. However, with grandchildren, you will want to have them buckled in for safety, and to keep them out of the refrigerator!

Whatever you get, make sure it has slides. If you don't, you won't get much for a trade and it could be hard to sell.

Finally, new ones are nice, but our first coach was a used 2006 32-foot Allegro Open Road with two slides.

JAMES WILHITE | OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLA.

THREE CHEERS FOR TAMPA SHOW

My wife and I attend many RV shows — mostly to look and get new ideas. The last coach we purchased was bought at an RV show — we upgraded from a Class C to a Class A. The show we most enjoy is the Tampa RV SuperShow in January. It's the best show that we have traveled to, and now that we live in Florida it's easy to attend.

KEN BRAY | VIA EMAIL

We never miss the RV SuperShow at the Tampa Fairgrounds in January. You get two days for one admission, and you need the two days to see everything. It has big, small, Class

A, Class B, Class C, towables, truck campers, etc.

J CAPELLANI | VIA EMAIL

The very best show is the Tampa RV SuperShow. All the major RV manufacturers are represented. If you don't find what you are looking for in Tampa, it's just not made. Overnight dry camping is allowed for a fee in the parking lot.

Before you go, do your homework. What kind of camping do you want to do — RV resorts, commercial campgrounds with full hook ups, dry camping in the national park system, BLM camping? Make a list of things you absolutely can't live without as well as compromise items.

There are several hotels across from the fairgrounds, and some offer a shuttle to/from the airport and may even take you back and forth to the fairgrounds, although it is walkable. Make reservations early, as hotels fill fast! The weather is usually mild, bring a light jacket and come on down.

LINDA HOUK | MELROSE, FLA.

HERSHEY IS THE LARGEST

We are first-time RVers and are looking at Class C's and B's. We attended the Hershey, Pa., show in September and it lived up to its claim as The Largest RV Show in the USA. There were acres of all RV classes. We didn't buy at the show, but we narrowed our search and came away with more knowledge.

DREW KOVAL | CHANTILLY, VA.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

I have visited some small RV shows at local convention centers and was not impressed. However, in October 2013, I made the trek to the Pomona Fairplex for the 10-day California RV Show and was not only impressed, I was overwhelmed. There was so much to see and do in one place that I couldn't get everything in during the three days I was there. Then again, I did want to see everything from small towables to large diesel Class A's. I also attended many of the RV seminars.

Attending a large RV show is a great way to see the possibilities, for those who are not yet part of the RV lifestyle, and for seasoned RVers to improve their knowledge of the technology coming into use in RV manufacturing.

Compared to my 2004 Winnebago Journey 36G, a

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2014 Winnebago Journey 36M is far more driver friendly and livable. Alas, I'm relegated to my 2004 unless some kindly dealer wants to trade straight across. I'm not holding my breath, but neither am I horribly unhappy with my current coach. My only caveat is, don't buy on your first visit unless you've done lots of research and know what type and size of RV will fill your needs. Dealers are there to sell, and the bling is very tempting. On the plus side, making a few good salesperson contacts will help when you're ready to make the plunge or move to new digs.

JIM SHORT | VISALIA, CALIF.

RELIABLE REPORTING

Chris Hemer's review of the Charleston 430FK in the December 2013 issue was one of the best product reviews I have read in a long time. The usual articles normally have only good things to say about the RV being reviewed, reading almost like something the coachmaker would write to promote its product. However, anyone who has ever owned a motorhome

knows that apart from all the wonderful things we appreciate in our unit, there are always certain issues that could have been engineered or built better. Hemer's article describes the positive aspects of the Charleston, but also makes note of few points where he feels there is room for improvement. After reading the review, I was left with the impression that Hemer wrote an unbiased and honest article. That way, when he concludes by saying that "this big pusher offers great bang for the buck," I feel more comfortable that his observations are well-founded and thorough, and that I can rely on his recommendation.

**PAUL REMILLARD
ROCKLAND, ONTARIO, CANADA**

OBSOLETE PARTS

In December 2013 Coach & Powertrain, Mel and Linda Volkert asked for help in locating parts for their motorhome. Vison RV (606-843-9889, www.visonrv.com) in East Bernstadt, Ky., advertises as the World's Largest Selection of used motorhome parts. I've been there for other rea-

sons and have seen its vast area of used coaches being parted-out. Hope this gives them a lead on what they're in need of.

NORM HAPPEL | VIA EMAIL

MORE OBSOLETE PARTS

I had the same problem as the Volkerts, who are looking for obsolete parts for the Firestone IntelliRide system in their 2005 Holiday Rambler Scepter.

When I test drove my used 2005 Holiday Rambler Scepter, two years ago, I noticed the Firestone IntelliRide system was not functioning properly. Freedom RV in Tucson, Ariz., where we bought the coach, had promised to fix any problem with installed systems that we identified prior to purchase. When the faulty Firestone system was discovered, the service manager searched for repair parts, but none could be found. I was told that the Firestone IntelliRide system had been discontinued, and no replacement parts were available.

The fix Freedom RV found for me was to replace the nonworking system with a new leveling/suspension system from HWH

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Corp. Freedom RV said that if I drove the coach from their location to the HWH factory in Moscow, Iowa, they would pay the fuel cost and have the system replaced with an HWH Active Air System. I was delighted at the proposed fix, completed the purchase and drove to Moscow. The HWH Active Air System was installed without delay.

Now, I can report that the HWH Active Air System has made our 2005 Scepter a joy to drive. Additionally, it requires no more than a touch of a button to level. Freedom RV and HWH Corporation turned my troubles into a blessing.

I suggest the Volkerts look to HWH to solve their problem. Possibly their insurance would cover the cost, as Freedom RV did for me. Nonetheless, having experienced the difference in handling and leveling, I would pay for it myself without hesitation if necessary. We hope this provides an alternative worth considering.

JIM AND PAT ROWEN | SIOUX FALLS, S.D.

FAVORITE APPS

I found E. Don Smith's article, "An Easy

Tablet To Take," (December 2013) to be useful. In fact, I signed up for Key Ring after reading the article, and I love it!

Readers might also want to consider "phablets" — hybrid extra-large cell-phones with tablet characteristics. It could cut down one device for traveling and, if you're like me and wear cargo pants camping, phablets easily fit in a pocket.

From the Android side, there are many apps I use on the road. I made a page on my smartphone just for traveling expediency. For emergencies/assistance: Emergency Alert. For travel: Google Maps, Rest Stops, Super Compass and Scanner Radio.

Then, there's Evernote — a brilliant app that acts as a digital notebook synchronizing automatically with all your devices. I use it to plan trips and journal camping with notes, pictures, video and voice memos. All of my vehicle info is there. See an article or ad in *MotorHome* you like? "Scan" it. Anything you can think of can be stored in Evernote.

I also use Google Keep to make notes and make to-do lists. Intellicast is my

weather favorite. Mint.com synchronizes with almost all of my financial accounts and has an outstanding bill pay reminder.

These are but a few of my favorite apps. Smith is right; there are thousands of apps to choose from and they get better every day. Happy camping!

WALT KOELLN | ACWORTH, GEORGIA

WINDOW-BASED TABLETS

I've been a computer geek since 1970, when I was programming computers in college and I applaud the article "An Easy Tablet to Take." Very well written. I want to add two points missing from the article.

I'm sure it was a simple oversight for the author to neglect to mention the Windows-based tablets. I've owned a Windows 8 (now Windows 8.1) tablet for almost a year and it's great. I'll admit that Windows-based platforms are not for everyone, but it works for me. The downside was highlighted in the article — only a fraction of the apps available to the Apple platforms are available to the Windows platforms. The upside is my tablet has wireless ca-

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pability associated with the data plan for my Windows smartphone, which means my tablet is a fully functional computer with a full Internet connection, so I really don't need a lot of apps (and my wireless carrier has outstanding coverage).

I think there was an even more critical omission to the article with respect to Wi-Fi and wireless access for tablets. All really smartphones have an option for the phone to be a Wi-Fi hub (my Windows smartphone calls it "Internet sharing") and since almost all tablets have a Wi-Fi capability, people with smartphones can use their tablet anywhere they have wireless access (data usage rates for the smartphone would apply to data usage by the tablet). We used this on a bus trip and gave a friend Internet access from our Windows smartphone to their iPad mini.

I know a lot of people don't like Windows-based platforms, but for those of us who do like the Windows systems and for those of you who have children/grandchildren who can be your Windows help desk when needed, the Windows-based plat-

The advertisement features a horizontal timeline at the top with five points: 1994, 2001, 2010, 2011, and Present. Below each point is a silhouette of a different brake pedal design. The 'Present' point shows the actual RV brake 2 unit. The main text reads "Yeah...it was time for a change." Below this, a large image of the RV brake 2 unit is shown with red lines radiating from it towards a car and an RV in a landscape. The RV brake 2 unit is a grey, rectangular device with a control panel and a pedal. The background shows a white RV and a dark car parked in a field with mountains in the distance.

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forms are an excellent option.
ROGER PHILIPSEK | VIA EMAIL

A HOME FOR THE GPS

We had the same problem as Bernard Jurgiel ("Finding a Spot for the GPS," November 2013) in our Class A, so we created an adapt-a-kit that solved the issue.

You probably already have the GPS and a suction cup mount. Buy one of those donut-style GPS holders with a plastic surface and rubber bottom. Affix the suction cup to the plastic part inside the donut. Adding a little bit of dish soap helps keep the suction cup stuck to the plastic surface better. What you must add now is one of those sticky rubber pads designed to hold keys, coins, etc. They are very gooey and sticky on the upper and lower sides.

Place the sticky pad on the dashboard where you want the GPS to remain. Then set the entire GPS assembly (donut rubber side down, suction mount and GPS) on the sticky pad and it will remain there.

**GREG AND SAGA BROWN
MCLEANSVILLE, N.C.**

WEIGHTED BASE

The GPS window suction cup mount is too far away on our 2013 Itasca Sunstar. We found a weighted base dashboard mount by TomTom that our Good Sam 7-inch Rand McNally GPS fits on. The weighted base can be placed anywhere on the dash to allow access to the GPS. Once we decide where we like it best, we'll attach it with hook-and-loop fastener.

**BOB AND DEB WALTER
OROFINO, IDAHO**

BETTER ADHESIVE

I have a 35-foot Forest River Windsong, and the cockpit wraps around the driver a bit, which makes it easy to keep a GPS nearby. I stuck the soft half of the self-adhesive marine-grade hook-and-loop fastener on the top of the dash, just to the right of the instrument cluster. The GPS came with a self-adhesive disc. I didn't use the adhesive on the disc, I stuck the nylon side of the hook-and-loop fastener to that. Then secure the suction cup mount to the plastic disc and let the

hook-and-loop fastener work its magic.
RUSS HINES | GLEN ROCK, PA.

MOTORHOME LICENSE PLATE

We purchased this license plate a couple



of years ago. When we camp at an RV park, we enjoy watching people walk past our motorhome, read the plate and smile.
FRED AND BARB SCHNEIDER | VIA EMAIL

QUESTION:
Does your rig have a humorous license plate or license plate holder? If so, what does it say?
Send your comments to *MotorHome*, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036; or email letters@motorhomemagazine.com. ♦

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escapes

edited by EILEEN HUBBARD

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RED ROCK, BLUE WATER

SAND HOLLOW STATE PARK, UTAH

Warm, azure-blue water surrounded by red sandstone terrain draws RVers from around the country to Sand Hollow State Park in southwest Utah. Located 15 miles east of St. George, Utah, this 20,000-acre state park offers boating, fishing, camping, hiking and off-highway vehicle (OHV) riding. The park's Westside Campground has 50 full-hookup sites

(\$28 per night) with fire pits, barbecues, tables and a cabana. There's also Sand Pit — an OHV-accessible campground — that has 30 sites (\$25) with partial hookups and primitive camping (\$15) is available along the east and south shores of Sand Hollow Reservoir. For more information, call 435-680-0715 or visit www.stateparks.utah.gov/park/sand-hollow-state-park





MEXI-RIO



In winter, many RVers enjoy

the sunshine and balmy temperatures of snowbird destinations like Florida, Arizona and Texas. It's a time when many of us travel less, but, in some ways, enjoy our RV lifestyle more, because we can really get to know our winter community and explore the local food scene. One of the more popular places for wintering over is the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), located in the southernmost tip of Texas. Last December, I wrote a feature, "Fly Away to the Magic Valley," about this phenomenal place.

The food in Valley towns close to the border has a definite Northern Mexican influence. If you're a lover of great Mexican food like I am, you won't be disappointed in the RGV. You'll find plenty of traditional Mexican dishes like enchiladas, soft handmade tortillas and queso fundido con chorizo (melted cheese with Mexican sausage). You'll also find Tex-Mex food — regional cuisine that blends American food products like yellow cheese with Mexican culinary creations. Popular dishes like chili con carne and mixed beef and chicken fajitas are common Tex-Mex dishes in this part of the world.

This is also ranching country, on both sides of the border, so the cowboy culture of South Texas and Northern Mexico has also had an im-



Clockwise, from top left: Cabrito (kid goat) at La Fogata is juicy and tastes like pork. Tamales at Delia's are traditionally made with corn (masa) wrapping, though they also offer Veracruz-style tamales steamed in banana leaves. Trevino's serves plenty of traditional Mexican plates at prices that won't break the bank. At Delia's, customers line up to order tamales by the half- or whole dozen at bargain prices.

pact on cuisine here. You'll find plenty of dishes like cabrito (kid goat), barba-coa de cabeza (barbecued beef heads), carne seca (dried beef) and other meat products.

One place to find great cabrito is **La Fogata**, an upscale Mexican restaurant in Mission. (Don't be afraid of goat; it tastes like a juicy pork chop.) La Fogata's cabrito comes as two thin, bone-in goat steaks sautéed with sliced onion and served with a baked potato topped with melted cheeses and handmade corn and flour tortillas. For carbritto to be juicy and tender, order it medium or medium rare. If it's cooked too long, it dries out.

Botanas is an RGV regional specialty that comes with chips, beans, cheese, meat, tomatoes, onions, guacamole, bell peppers, quesadillas, jalapeños and tortillas. You can find a wonderful version of botanas for two at **Trevino's** in the little town of in Edinburg. This authentic and affordable Mexican restaurant also serves delicious chicken enchiladas and chile relleños with citrusy tomatillo sauce and melted white cheese. Trevino's refried beans have an earthy flavor and the Mexican rice is perfectly fluffy. You'll leave with boxes of leftovers and a tiny bill that will inspire you to come back again and again.

Another RGV area specialty is handmade tamales. **Delia's** is a small chain that specializes in tamales. In McAllen (two locations), Pharr, Edinburg, Mission and San Juan, customers line up for pork, chicken, beef, bean, and specialty tamales like cream cheese and jalapeño by the half-dozen (\$3.89-5.49) or by the dozen (\$6.79-9.29). These are traditional tamales wrapped in corn meal (masa) and steamed in corn husks. They also serve large Veracruz-style tamales (chicken or pork) that are steamed in green banana leaves. They are absolutely delicious.

La Fogata's corn and flour tortillas are pillow-soft and grilled to perfection.

Do you have a RGV Mexican or Tex-Mex favorite? Let Bobbie know by sending an email (with Road Foodie in the subject line) to hasselbring@bctonline.com.

PHOTOS: ANNE WEAVER

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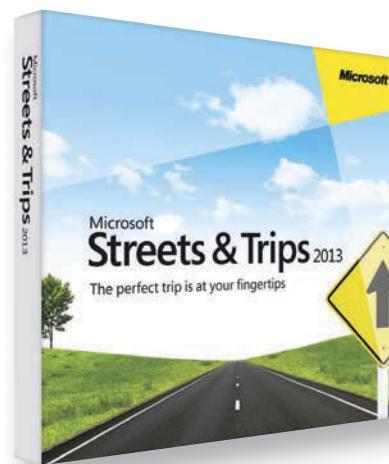
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Designed for planning the perfect road trip from start to finish, this software allows you to create a theme (such as historical sites), generate maps and directions, customize start/stop times

and set driving speeds. There are more than 2.5 million points of interest, including specialized ones that consider low clearances, big-rig friendly fuel stations, Walmart stores and more. Change plans on the go or re-route your trip, even without an Internet connection. Microsoft Streets & Trips 2013 has an MSRP of \$39.95 and offers a free 14-day test drive.

Microsoft, www.microsoft.com/streets



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Living in a motorhome often requires hands-free light, whether working outside the coach, or reaching into a dark wardrobe. The **NeckLITE** from Neutek USA helps solve numerous wide area task lighting needs in a new way. NeckLITE is a fully adjustable light that can be worn at any angle around your neck at chest height, or simply remove its magnetic safety lanyard and it quickly converts to an all-purpose self-standing micro task light. Two alkaline or rechargeable AA batteries power a constant regulated "pure white" HD LED 150-degree-wide light beam for eight-plus hours of use. NeckLITE measures $2\frac{1}{2}$ by $1\frac{1}{4}$ by $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and comes with a magnetic lanyard available in nine colors. MSRP: \$35.

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Mark your calendar for the following 14 fee-free public land days for the new year. Participating agencies include the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The entrance fee waiver, however, does not include amenity or user fees for camping, boat launches, transportation, or special tours.

Jan. 20	Martin Luther King Jr. Day	BLM, NPS, FWS and USFS
Feb. 15-17	Presidents' Day Weekend	BLM, NPS, FWS and USFS
April 19-20	National Park Week's Opening Weekend	NPS
June 14	National Get Outdoors Day	USFS
Aug. 25	National Park Service's 98 th Birthday	NPS
Sept. 27	National Public Lands Day	Corps, BLM, USBR, NPS, FWS and USFS
Oct. 12	National Wildlife Refuge Day	FWS
Nov. 8-11	Veterans Day Weekend	USFS
Nov. 11	Veterans Day	Corps, BLM, USBR, NPS and FWS

RV SHOWS

MARCH 7-9
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& Camping Show
Kenner, La.
337-436-4355

MARCH 13-16
37th Annual Flint
Camper & RV Show
Flint, Mich.
517-349-8881 x11

MARCH 21-23
22nd Annual Northwest
Michigan Camper &
RV Show
Traverse City, Mich.
517-349-8881 x11

MARCH 7-9
York Campers World
RV Show
York, Pa.
610-767-5026

MARCH 14-16
10th Annual
Virginia RV Show
Hampton, Va.
804-243-8847

MARCH 21-23
43rd Rockford RV,
Camping & Travel Show
Rockford, Ill.
815-997-1744

MARCH 7-9
New Hampshire
Camping & RV Show
Milford, N.H.
603-736-5540

MARCH 14-16
North Carolina
RV Dealers' Association
RV Show
Raleigh, N.C.
336-317-5538

MARCH 21-23
Chattanooga RV
Super Show
Chattanooga, Tenn.
941-780-0538

MARCH 12-16
Spring California
RV Show
Arcadia, Calif.
818-248-6600

MARCH 20-23
Tacoma RV Show
Tacoma, Wash.
253-756-2121

MARCH 28-30
Springfield RV
& Camping Show
Springfield, Ill.
309-692-6465

News Briefs

The Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) honored *MotorHome* contributor Bob Ashley with the association's Distinguished Achievement in RV Journalism Award on Dec. 3, 2013, in Louisville, Ky. Ashley has covered the RV industry for nearly 20 years as a writer for *RVBusiness*, and has been a frequent contributor to *MotorHome*. The Distinguished Achievement in RV Journalism Award recognizes journalists for exemplary coverage of the RV industry or RV travel before national audiences.

Last December, *Thor Motor Coach* received the *RVBusiness* 2014 RV of the Year award for its 25-foot Axis and Vegas Class A Recreational Utility Vehicles. In addition, *Winnebago* garnered a Top 2014 RV Debut for its Trend Class C motorhome.

In November 2013, *Ventura Ranch KOA* in Santa Paula, Calif., was named Campgrounds of America's (KOA) 2014 Rising Star Award winner. The 75-acre campground, which is surrounded by lemon orchards, features two ziplines, a climbing wall, deluxe cabins, a soon-to-be-opened resort swimming pool, a creek with "Bigfoot's Watering Hole," a pedal car racetrack and miles of nature trails. The award was presented to business partners Scott Cory and Steven Bitter, who own *Ventura Ranch KOA*.

The *U.S. Forest Service* now offers access to a variety of visitor maps for Android and iOS devices. The PDF Maps Mobile App is available as a free download from iTunes and the Android Play Store. The app provides access to Forest Service maps, which are free, while pages from national forest atlases are 99 cents and forest visitor maps are \$4.99. Almost 700 Forest Service maps are available through the app.

A new RV resort is slated to open March 17. *Anchor Down RV Resort* (www.anchordownrvresort.com) is located on Douglas Lake in Dandridge, Tenn., 30 minutes from Sevierville and Pigeon Forge. The waterfront resort has 175 sites with full hookups, concrete pads, fire pits and picnic tables.

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At dawn on May 18, 1980, Mount St. Helens in Washington stood at 9,677 feet. At 8:32 a.m., a magnitude 5.1 earthquake beneath the volcano triggered an eruption, causing the largest landslide in recorded history. This reduced the height of the mountain by 1,313 feet. An eruption column reached a

height of 80,000 feet in less than 15 minutes. Fifty-seven people, an estimated 7,000 big-game animals and 12 million salmon fingerlings were killed. Hundreds of square miles were devastated. Several smaller eruptions have occurred in subsequent years.

Today, plants and animals have rebounded sooner than expected. Cold-water Lake, one of the lakes formed as a result of the debris avalanche, is a now peaceful, picturesque place for kayaking or fishing. Four visitors centers on Spirit Lake Highway, each with a unique perspective, provide insight into the mountain and its history. RV parking is available at the visitors centers.

For more information, go to www.fs.usda.gov/mountsthelens. — Mary Zalmanek



PHOTOS: MARY ZALMANEK

JOHNNY CASH'S BOYHOOD HOME



PHOTO: GUY SELBERT

Dyess, Ark., was founded by the federal government during the Depression as a resettlement project. Uncle Sam gave land to 500 families that they were to farm and would eventually own. With the land, came a small, five-bedroom house.

Country-music legend Johnny Cash was 3 years old when his family moved into one of those houses — the Cash family moved out in 1954.

Cash died in 2003. The Arkansas State University's Heritage Sites Program is refurbishing the house. Johnny's brother and sister have been drawing on their memories to make the restoration authentic.

Dyess is in the northeast corner of the state. The house is 10 minutes out of Dyess on County Road 924. It is expected to be open to the public in April. — *Bill Graves* ♦

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S ANTELOPE VALLEY



If you enjoy clean air, a temperate

high-desert climate, miles of unobstructed visibility, rugged beauty and peaceful solitude offered by surrounding mountains — with hundreds of serpentine ravines and steep canyons just waiting to be explored, plus a wide variety of flora and fauna — then Antelope Valley, California, is a destination worth considering. If those factors alone aren't sufficient to garner your interest, there are several major family entertainment attractions located close enough for easy day trips.

Each year, travelers come from all over the world to experience Southern California's Antelope Valley and the western tip of the Mojave Desert. But those of us who are fortunate enough to get there by motorhome have some definite advantages. Among the most important is having the option to bring along pretty much anything we want, for increased comfort and enhanced recreational experiences.

My wife, Gayle, and I, have visited parts of the Mojave Desert on prior occasions during our 44-plus years of RVing, but never to this western edge. The trip from our home in Northern California was

LOCATED ABOUT AN HOUR NORTHEAST FROM THE HUSTLE AND BUSTLE OF METROPOLITAN LOS ANGELES, LIES A DESERT HAVEN FOR NATURE LOVERS



PHOTOS: KEN REID

Top: Each spring, during years when there is sufficient rainfall, the Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve is ablaze with color. With plentiful trees and 545 full-hookup sites, Soledad Canyon RV & Camping Resort is like an oasis in the desert.



PHOTOS: KEN REID

PHOTO: COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES PARK & RECREATION

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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661-946-6092
www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=627

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Clockwise from above: Serpentine ravines and canyons in the Antelope Valley area await exploration. Even during dry years, flowering yucca can be found in this high desert. Many of the mammals living at Devil's Punchbowl are nocturnal and are seldom seen. The number one X-4 Bantam (foreground/right) is part of the indoor collection of aircraft in the Air Force Flight Test Center Museum at Edwards Air Force Base.



PHOTO: U.S. AIR FORCE/REBECCA AMBER



made during a particularly dry period, which significantly reduced our planned experiences (like viewing and photographing desert wildflowers), but we were able to adapt by finding other fun things to do.

Since our motorhome is 35 feet long, and we tow a dinghy four-wheels-down, our maneuverability is limited to some extent, so we typically try to find a place to camp that is central to the area that we will be exploring. Though we passed at least three RV resorts located along the Santa Clara River on the way in, we had already chosen Soledad Canyon RV & Camping Resort in Acton as the home base for our seven-day stay.

The RV park is like a giant oasis. Hundreds of tall trees, mostly cottonwood

and eucalyptus, provide ample shade over large grassy areas. There are 545 full-hookup sites, plus another 410 with just power and water. For those with motorhomes pulling a dinghy, pull-through spaces are available. Miles of internal roads and trails afford the opportunity for most, including children and those with limited mobility, to safely negotiate the mostly shaded and relatively level areas.

The number and diversity of attractions should afford most everyone with plenty of worthwhile experiences. For nature lovers, like us, examples include the Devil's Punchbowl, Arthur B. Ripley Desert Woodland State Park, Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve, Saddleback Butte State Park, Pleasant View

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Ridge Wilderness, San Gabriel Wilderness, Sheep Mountain Wilderness, Cucamonga Wilderness and Magic Mountain Wilderness. Those locations, in particular, offer scenic drives and wonderful vistas, but they also afford hikers, bikers and equestrians opportunities to encounter and photograph unusual geography and plentiful wildlife.

During our stay, we learned that the Antelope Valley was named for the pronghorn antelope that once roamed there in large numbers. Unfortunately, they were pretty much decimated during the 1880s by hunters, bad weather and extremely dry conditions. Between 1882 and 1885 alone, approximately 30,000 head (or about half of the total herd) died. There are still a few roaming the western part of the valley and mountains, but sightings are rare.

Black bears, deer, antelope, foxes, mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes, red-tailed hawks, great horned owls, roadrunners, plus many other animal, reptile and bird species, are prevalent here. But the

challenge is to see them among the cover of creosote, sagebrush, juniper, yucca, manzanita, California scrub oak, piñon pine, rabbit brush, cacti and myriad other plant species.

For the rapidly growing number of RVers who are also off-highway vehicle enthusiasts, there are extensive and varied terrains generally available to them — like the Littlerock, San Gabriel Canyon, El Mirage, and Rowher Flat OHV designated recreation areas. There are several public campgrounds on or adjacent to those, which make longer stays more practical, too.

If you're interested in seeing a spectacular display of colorful wildflowers, try walking the paved 2.5-mile loop trail through the Antelope Valley California Poppy Preserve (between March and May, during years when rainfall is sufficient to sustain growth). This particular location affords visitors with young children or with limited mobility the opportunity to experience high-desert terrain, but on segments of trail that are paved, smooth and vary

from gentle to moderate in slope.

Those who want a wider variety of options to choose from, have all sorts of major attractions within an hour or so of Antelope Valley. For instance: Disneyland, California Adventure, Six Flags Magic Mountain, Knott's Berry Farm, Universal Studios and all that the Hollywood area has to offer. In fact, Hollywood film studios have often used the mountain areas above Antelope Valley to create commercials and movies. During a drive through some of the mountain routes, like along Soledad Canyon Road, there are permanent signs and facilities indicating the continued presence of movie industry elements.

The principal cities in the Antelope Valley are Palmdale and Lancaster — though there are many small communities scattered throughout the valley and mountains. Many of which have interesting histories and each has at least something different to offer.

One example is the city of Acton, which is only about 3 miles from Soledad



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Canyon RV & Camping Resort. The town has a Western theme throughout, parts of which have been used as a backdrop for movies. I even saw signs at one shopping center, warning people not to hitch their horses to nearby railings. Once a boomtown of sorts, it was created by and for miners, who were primarily employed at two very large gold mines. During the period of 1899 to 1903, California Governor Henry Gage, made an attempt to move the state capital from Sacramento to Acton. That was because he owned one of those mines, which was appropriately named Governor's Mine.

The earliest inhabitants of the Antelope Valley and surrounding mountains include tribes of Native Americans known by the names of Kawaiisu, Kitanemuk, Serrano and Tataviam. The first settlers from Europe entered the valley in the 1770s. Also, a Franciscan Friar named Francisco Garces is believed to have traveled the west end of the valley in 1776. An unintended result of visits to the area by settlers and missionaries was sickness

and death for the original inhabitants. With the coming of stagecoaches and trains, came an influx of settlers, who created farms and towns.

For those interested in aeronautical accomplishments, both past and present, Antelope Valley has much to offer. Edwards Air Force Base is located northeast of Palmdale, at the lowest geographic point in the valley. The first flight to break the sound barrier occurred there. NASA space shuttles originally landed there too, before the huge landing strip at Kennedy Space Center was built. Edwards is still the backup, in case of bad weather at Cape Canaveral. NASA's Hugh L. Dryden Flight Research Center is co-located there. It is best known for the X-15 experimental rocket ship program, but also for the X-1 program. The Orbiter even landed there.

Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, BAE Systems and other aerospace industry leaders, are located in the Antelope Valley, too. Projects originating in whole or part there include: space shuttle orbiters, B-2 Spirit bomber,

F-117 Nighthawk fighter and the F-35 Joint Striker fighter. The recently dedicated Mojave Air and Space Port is also there. That is the base of operations for Scaled Composites, the company that designed SpaceShipOne, which was the first manned private suborbital space flight (in 2004), and also won the \$10 million Ansari X-prize the same year.

Whether you plan on spending a week or a weekend here, the Antelope Valley area offers plenty to see and do, pretty much any time of year. For those who are hoping to see a profusion of desert wildflowers, we recommend visiting from March through May. Otherwise, a visit to the Antelope Valley area most any time of year (except mid-summer) should afford a wonderful experience, with plenty of options to keep most RVers interested and happy. ♦



Ken Reid is a freelance writer and photographer who travels extensively with his wife, Gayle, in their Southwind motorhome. Ken is also a frequent contributor to various travel magazines.

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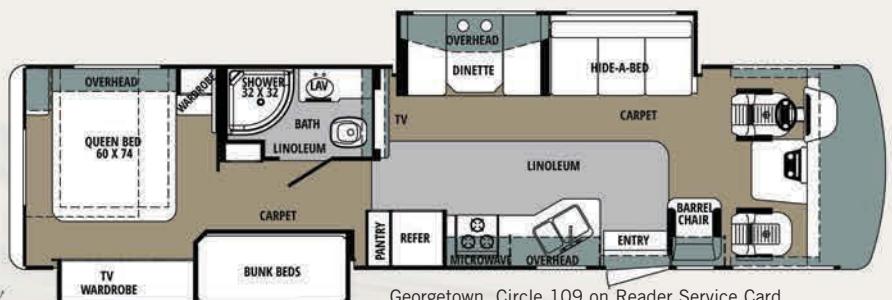


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MEET RVER KAREN BROCKETT AND HER HEARING DOG, CHERELLE

by CHRISTINE GOODIER

On a warm summer day in South Dakota, Karen Brockett is outside, like a lot of other RV owners, walking her dog and enjoying the scenery on a biking/hiking trail. A sudden movement of the dog's head alerts Brockett that something is happening behind her, just in time to step away from a bicycle that speeds past.

"I think the cyclist may have announced herself first, but of course I did not hear," said Brockett, who has coped with a hereditary, progressive hearing loss in both ears since she was a teenager. "Cher did, though."

Like others with her level of moderately severe to profound hearing loss, Brockett has to rely on hearing aids, lip-reading and the ears of her spouse, if he happens to be nearby. She cannot detect sounds like doorbells, oven timers and smoke alarms. And with an invisible disability and no way to discern where sounds originate, Brockett's safety is compromised.

In 2007, Cherelle, also known as Cher, came on the scene with her own disability issues. A golden/yellow Labrador mix, she was a "career change" dog from Guide Dogs for the Blind. After arriving at Central Point, Ore., with Dogs for the Deaf (DFD), a nonprofit organization that rescues and trains unwanted dogs for productive careers, Cher went through screening that revealed she had developed knee problems.

Meanwhile, Brockett carried on the organization's waiting list, willing to do

Above right: Sporting a service dog vest complete with zipper pocket for scoop bags, Hearing Dog Cherelle is always ready for a walk. Right: At the 2010 Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta in New Mexico, Cherelle did her job even amid distracting sights and sounds.

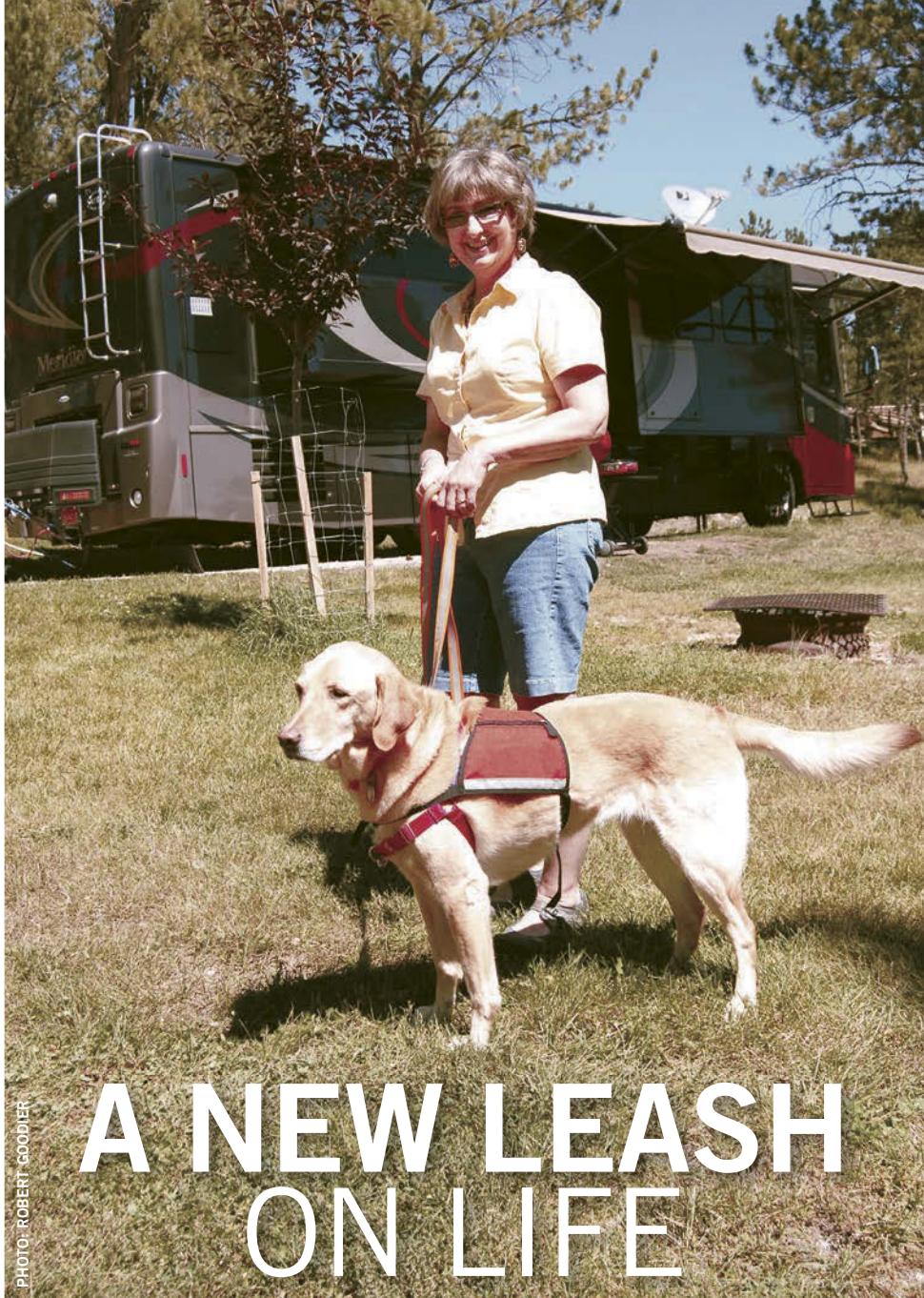


PHOTO: ROBERT GOODIER

A NEW LEASH ON LIFE



PHOTO: LARRY HOLCOMB

anything necessary to get a Hearing Dog, even one that needed the two knee surgeries for installation of metal plates that DFD would pay for and arrange. After Brockett convinced them that she could handle whatever it might take to get Cherelle up to speed, trainers came back and forth to Brockett's home, rather than the Central Point training facility, to teach the

Clockwise from right: Brockett, her husband, Larry Holcomb, and Cherelle visited Lake Louise, Alberta, Canada, while RVing for four months in 2013. Actress Betty White met Brockett and Cherelle at an October 2013, Dogs for the Deaf fundraising event called, "Hooray for Hollywoof." Cherelle is a Hearing Dog certified for public access in locations such as the Journey Museum in Rapid City, S.D.



PHOTOS: LARRY HOLCOMB. BETTY WHITE PHOTO: DOGS FOR THE DEAF. WWW.BRIANKRAMER.NET

Lab how to become a working Hearing Dog. During the seven years since human and dog joined forces, they have developed into a team extraordinaire. Cherelle alerts her partner throughout the day with a nudge of the nose and leads her to the source of household and RV sounds like microwave timers and door knocks. Brockett reinforces the dog's training constantly with affection and salmon or chicken-flavored treats, and always reacts to Cher's alerts whether she feels like it or not.

"You need to be consistent in working the sounds," Brockett said. "If you don't respond, the dog thinks it's not needed." The two work together to add new sounds, like a different cellphone ring tone. Some sounds are easier to reinforce than others; Cherelle is particularly fond of pizza deliveries arriving at the front door, for example. "She gives a very aggressive alert for that," said Brockett.

Other people must avoid responding to household sounds that fall within the

dog's training, and only Brockett dispenses Cher's food and treats (although her husband, Larry Holcomb, fills in if she is sick or absent). "Larry had to remain aloof early on," Brockett said, so that Hearing Dog and partner could form a strong bond.

Certified for public access, Cherelle can accompany Brockett to public places where pets are not allowed, and her orange leash and assistance dog jacket (complete with zipper pocket for scoop bags) provide a visible symbol of Brockett's disability.

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When they are out together, she relies on Cher's body language for awareness of her surroundings. "I watch her head and I know where sound is coming from," said Brockett.

With Cher by her side, Brockett has regained her autonomy and become an advocate for the rights of deaf and hard-of-hearing people. She has served on the boards of the Oregon Communication Access Project and the Hearing Loss Association of Oregon, and worked with Corvallis-Benton County Public Library officials to encourage installation of an

audio induction system (hearing loop) and a Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) system for patrons.

In 2012, Brockett became a Volunteer Ambassador for DFD and makes presentations to community clubs and organizations on the nonprofit's behalf. She was invited to speak about the positive impact Hearing Dog Cherelle has had on her life on Oct. 27, 2013, at a DFD fundraiser in Los Angeles. The two mingled and shook paws with guest host Betty White, and with Marlee Matlin, Lea Thompson and other cast members of the

About Dogs for the Deaf

Many RV owners travel with their beloved dogs, which may be why the Good Sam Club began providing support to DFD in 1980, not long after the organization was founded by the late Roy G. Kabat, a Hollywood animal trainer. Kabat's daughter, Robin Dickson, became his successor as CEO and President in 1986. Dickson recently announced her retirement after 32 years with DFD.

In 2012, to mark DFD's 35-year milestone, the Good Sam Club contributed \$191,036 to the organization, including donations from individual members, regional chapters and the club itself. Members throughout the United States also volunteer for DFD in a variety of roles. A page on the DFD website features donation details and photos.

DFD rescues dogs that may otherwise be euthanized from animal shelters, gives them full veterinary attention, trains them to become service dogs and matches them with applicants who need help and commit to maintaining the dog's training.

Other than a small application fee, there is no cost to any recipient to receive a dog.

Since 1977, DFD has placed more than 3,000 canines after professionally training them to become Hearing Dogs certified for public access, Home Hearing Dogs, Program Assistance Dogs, Autism Assistance

Dogs, and Career Change Dogs, at an average investment of about \$25,000 per team. DFD is a 501(c)(3) non-profit agency that receives no government funding and relies on donations of all sizes to carry out this satisfying, congruous mission that forever changes the course of two lives.

Tours are offered at DFD's southern Oregon facility, the oldest Hearing Dog training center in the world, twice daily Monday through Friday. RV parking is available.

Dogs for the Deaf, 541-826-9220, www.dogsforthe deaf.org



PHOTO: ROBERT GOODIER

Robin Dickson (shown here with a demonstration dog) recently retired as President and CEO of Dogs for the Deaf, and was a familiar presence at Good Sam Club Rallies for many years.



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PHOTO: LARRY HOLCOMB



PHOTO: ROBERT GOODIER



Above: The National Park Service permits service dog teams to hike on trails like this one, which circles the base of Devils Tower, Wyo. Left: Cherelle's body language gives visual cues that help Brockett's awareness of sounds in the environment.

ABC TV show, "Switched at Birth."

At ease wherever her partner goes, Cherelle adapted easily to RV life. Brockett and Holcomb bought their first motorhome shortly before the dog arrived, and the trio now tours the United States and Canada in a 35-foot Itasca Meridian. Holcomb has made cabinetry modifications, such as a compartment for Cher's gear and a desk where Brockett can work on her blog, "Travels With Hearing Dog."

"We took her to the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta, with all the balloons taking off," said Holcomb. Cherelle remained the picture of canine calm, even in the presence of horses transporting crowd control officers. During four months on the road in 2013, Cher visited Custer State Park in South Dakota, Devils Tower National Monument and Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming, then journeyed north through Montana into Alberta and British Columbia, Canada, before returning to Oregon.

Like many RVing dogs, Cher's favorite sunny perch is the large front dashboard window where she can survey the campground scene. But she's never off duty and has learned to "work the sounds" of the motorhome, such as a refrigerator



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PHOTO: ROBERT GOODIER



PHOTO: LARRY HOLCOMB

Top: Holcomb, Brockett and Cherelle travel together in a 35-foot Itasca Meridian motorhome. **Above:** Brockett spoke about what Hearing Dogs mean to recipients at a Dogs for the Deaf 2013 fundraiser in Los Angeles, Calif.

alarm that beeps if someone accidentally leaves the door ajar, and even the tire-pressure alarm.

Cher wears a vest lettered, “Working Dog, Do Not Pet,” a visual reminder that people should avoid distracting service animals on the job. Her partner considers it positive when well-intentioned admirers approach them wanting to pet, since she gains an opportunity to explain the role of a service dog. “It opens a dialog,” said Brockett. Her advice: “Ask the trainer, but don’t take it personally if they say no.”

Strangers sometimes ask Brockett, “How do I get one of those vests for my dog?” She explains, “If you do, it undermines the hundreds of hours of training.” Improper behavior by untrained, fake service dogs can make business owners resistant to providing access to the next legitimate team that walks in. DFD follows

the strict guidelines set by Assistance Dogs International and requires four to six months of professional Hearing Dog training and a year of monitoring via regular written reports by the recipient after being paired with a dog.

Holcomb and Brockett recently moved into a new home near Albany, Ore., and Hearing Dog Cher has already begun working with her partner on the new sounds and challenges of an unfamiliar house and community. Once again, she has proven herself to be an essential member of the household. “I cannot imagine having to function without Cherelle,” said Brockett. ♦



Christine Goodier is a freelance writer and editor who lives on the North Carolina coast and travels with her husband, photographer Bob Goodier, in a Class B Sprinter motorhome.



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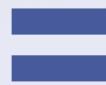




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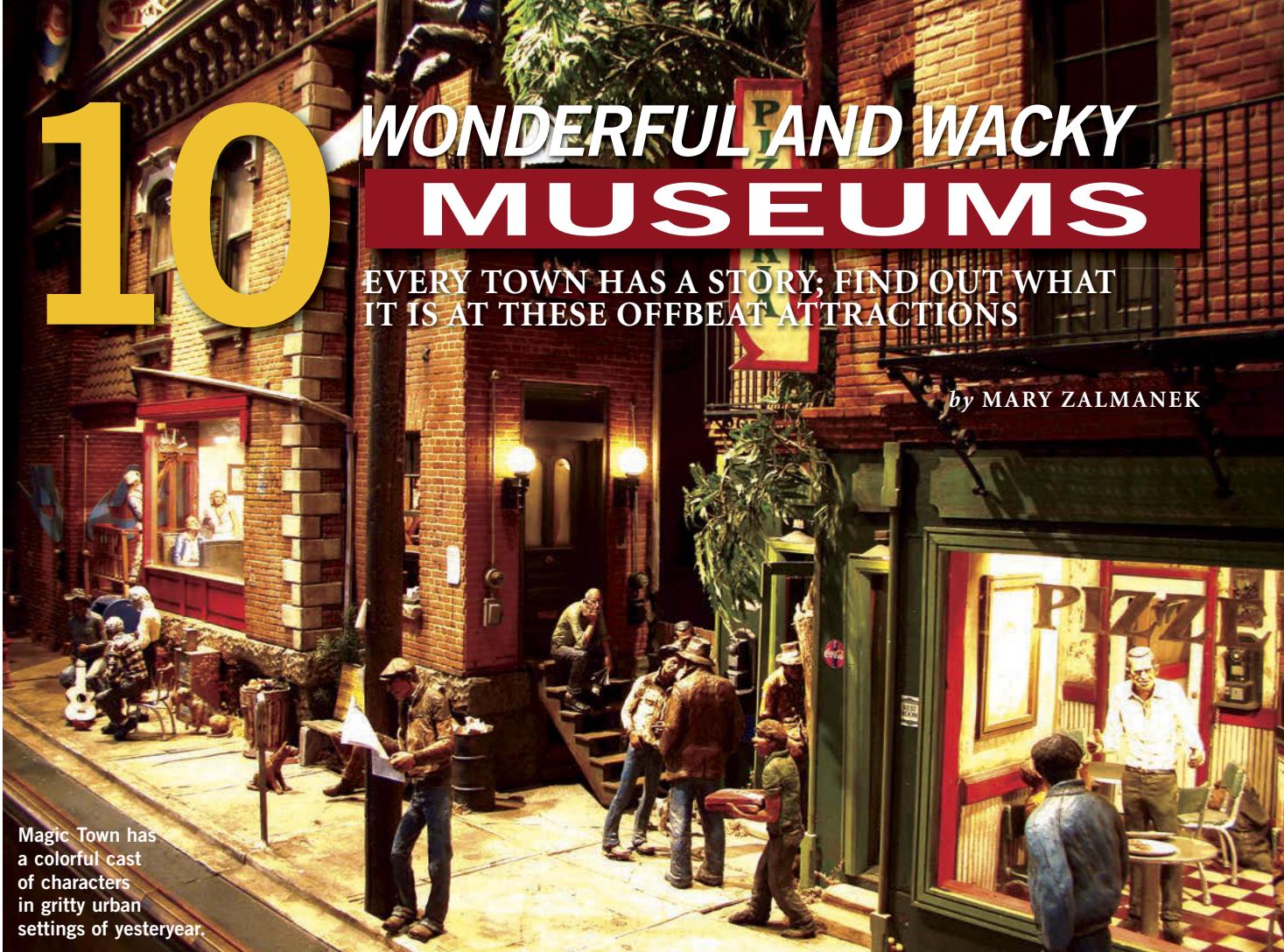
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10 WONDERFUL AND WACKY MUSEUMS

EVERY TOWN HAS A STORY; FIND OUT WHAT IT IS AT THESE OFFBEAT ATTRACTIONS

by MARY ZALMANEK



Magic Town has a colorful cast of characters in gritty urban settings of yesteryear.

My husband, Jim, and I have found there's no better way to learn about a nation's people and their cultures than to visit museums. It's where we can explore history and heroes, pastimes and passions, and collections from wonderful to wacky. Here are our 10 favorite unusual museums across America.

GATEWAY COLORADO AUTO MUSEUM, GATEWAY, COLO.

The last thing I expected to find in this tiny town was one of the world's most expensive automobiles. The Gateway Colorado Auto Museum houses one of the finest collections of American cars in existence today. The Hendricks Collection, owned by Discovery Channel founder John Hendricks and his family, features more than 50 cars. The star attraction is the 1954 Oldsmobile F-88 Convertible. Developed as a concept car, it was to be destroyed, according to GM company policy, once it had outlived its marketing usefulness. Instead, it was disassembled, packed into crates and passed through several owners before it was restored. Hendricks acquired it in 2007 at the Barrett-Jackson Auto Auction for a record \$3.24 million.

The museum is part of Gateway Canyons, a 58-room luxury resort in the red rock canyons of western Colorado. Nearest RV parks are in Grand Junction, one hour northeast of Gateway. **Gateway Colorado Auto Museum, 970-931-2895, www.gatewayautomuseum.com**



The 1954 Oldsmobile F-88 Convertible was acquired in 2007 at the Barrett-Jackson Auto Auction for a record \$3.24 million.

GRASSROOTS ART CENTER, LUCAS, KAN.

Lucas, Kansas, population 392, is a hotbed of grassroots art, a term describing art made by people with no formal artistic training using ordinary materials in an extraordinary way. The Grassroots Art Center merges creativity with recycling, ingenuity with opportunity. Remember those removable pull-tabs popular on beverage cans in the early '70s? Herman Divers used them to create a full-size motorcycle and a two-seater automobile. M.T. Liggett turned junk metal into folk art — with humorous political commentary — as evidenced by his sculpture of Kenneth W. Starr, Cigar Detective. Inez Marshall used hand tools to chisel limestone sculptures, including a

PHOTOS: MARY ZALMANEK

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Clockwise from above: Herman Divers used removable pull tabs from beverage cans to create a full-size motorcycle. Mark Moorhead, Curator of Education at the Hall of Flame, explains the horse-drawn fire engines. The National Atomic Testing Museum showcases a comprehensive collection of nuclear history.

1,500-pound covered wagon, complete with three people and two mules.

A tour of the Deeble House is included with admission to Grassroots Art Center. From 1950 to 1999, Florence Deeble used rocks she collected on vacations to build fanciful versions of Mount Rushmore, Capitol Reef National Park and the Rocky Mountains in her backyard rock garden. In 2002, grassroots artist Mri Pillar transformed the interior of the house into the “Garden of Isis,” which features wacky art from recycled materials. The “ReBarb” collection showcases Barbie dolls in out-of-this world attire.

Grassroots Art Center,
785-525-6118, www.grassrootsart.net

HALL OF FLAME, PHOENIX, ARIZ.

The Hall of Flame, opened in 1961, is the world’s largest firefighting museum, containing fire apparatus from the United States, Europe and Japan. Collections are displayed in six galleries covering 35,000 square feet. The first gallery we entered contained horse- and hand-drawn fire engines and wagons from 1725 to 1908. Other galleries contain motorized apparatus dating from 1897 to 1969. The Wildland Firefighting Gallery is dedicated to the hotshots, smoke jumpers and other firefighters who make up the majority of America’s wild land firefighting corps. The National Firefighting Hall of Heroes is a tribute to American firefighters who were killed in the line of duty, including a memorial for the firefighters and police whose lives were lost in the collapse of the Twin Towers on Sept. 11, 2001.

All equipment has been restored to its original appearance, most of it by Don Hale. Hale, 91, got his start when he was 11 by helping his grandfather. Hale’s friend, George Batsche, 80, has assisted Hale on many restorations, calling himself “the oldest apprentice in the world.”

Hall of Flame, 602-275-3473,
www.hallofflame.org

MICHAEL GARMAN MUSEUM AND GALLERY, COLORADO SPRINGS, COLO.

Michael Garman is a sculptor of extraordinary American heroes and everyday people. His small sculptures, available hand painted or in a bronze-tone patina, include firemen, police officers, soldiers, cowboys and nurses, just to name a few. He casts the sculptures using a clay-wax technique.

While it’s interesting to browse the museum and gallery, a tour of Magic Town is a one-of-a-kind experience. The 3,000-square-foot sculptural theater contains a 1/6-scale miniaturized city neighborhood, complete with 18 different buildings. The colorful cast of characters in gritty urban settings of yesteryear are reminiscent of Garman’s early years as a vagabond. The scenes in Magic Town’s bars, restaurants and back alleys change right before your eyes. Holograms of its residents talk about their lives, giving Magic Town a unique smoke-and-mirrors charm. The best way for visitors to appreciate the intricate details is to participate in the scavenger hunt included with the price of admission.

Michael Garman Museum and Gallery, 800-731-3908, www.michaelgarman.com



NATIONAL ATOMIC TESTING MUSEUM, LAS VEGAS, NEV.

The National Atomic Testing Museum showcases a comprehensive collection of nuclear history. It has a wide variety of materials and artifacts relating to the development of the atomic bomb, atmospheric and underground testing, the Nevada Test Site, the Cold War and radiological technology.

Its newest exhibit is called “Area 51: Myth or Reality.” Area 51, a U.S. Air Force installation 83 miles north of Las Vegas, has been called the most secret place in America. Secrets were revealed in March 2012 when this exhibit opened its doors. It explores the myths, presents existing evidence, and lets you decide. To enter this secret exhibit (no cameras are allowed) visitors are given a badge. Mine identified me as an ET named Plum — a 3-foot-10-inch, 50-pound, bald, purple farmer from the planet Epsilon Eridani b.

National Atomic Testing Museum,
702-794-5151,
www.nationalatomictestingmuseum.org



PHOTO: THE NATIONAL QUILT MUSEUM

NATIONAL QUILT MUSEUM, PADUCAH, KY.

This is not your grandma's quilt museum. While the National Quilt Museum's extensive collection does include some traditional quilts that could have been the envy of any old-fashioned quilting bee, the art quilts and miniature quilts gave me a new appreciation for the craft. The museum, established in 1991, is the largest in the world devoted to quilts and fiber arts. The 27,000-square-foot facility has three galleries. Exhibits are rotated 10 to 12 times per year. The primary gallery features 50 to 60 quilts at any time from its diverse collection of more than 320 works of art.

The other two galleries house touring exhibits. With its constantly changing exhibits, one visit is not enough.

National Quilt Museum,
270-442-8856, www.quiltmuseum.org

PIMA AIR & SPACE MUSEUM, TUCSON, ARIZ.

The Pima Air & Space Museum has something to interest everyone, from professional pilots to children with flying aspirations. It is one of the largest aviation museums in the world, with more than 300 planes in its collection. Aviation buffs will appreciate the SR-71 Blackbird with a top speed of 2,500 mph, or Mach 3.5 —

Above: The National Quilt Museum is the largest in the world devoted to quilts and fiber arts. Opposite page, from left: More than 4,400 aircraft are stored on 2,600 acres at the Pima Air and Space Museum's Boneyard. The 1850 Gypsy Wagon on display at Pioneer Village, was the "first trailer-house."

more than three times the speed of sound; the only existing Martin PBM-5A Mariner, a patrol bomber flying boat from World War II; and the North American F-107A, a tactical-fighter bomber prototype from a U.S. Air Force design competition in the 1950s. The kids in our group were fascinated by the world's smallest, the Starr Bumble Bee with a 6½-foot wingspan.



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One of the highlights of our visit was a bus tour of the 309th Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group (AMARG), also known as the Boneyard. More than 4,400 aircraft are stored on 2,600 acres. Aircraft may be kept intact for future military needs or picked apart and used for spare parts. Excess aircraft are sold commercially, whole or in parts.

Pima Air & Space Museum,
520-574-0462, www.pimaair.org

PIONEER VILLAGE, MINDEN, NEB.

Pioneer Village, 12 miles south of Interstate 80 in south-central Nebraska, is a complex comprised of 28 buildings on 20

acres. Twelve historic buildings, including a church, general store and doctor's office, surround a circular Village Green. While the Village Green is quite picturesque, we spent most of our time browsing the large buildings that house more than 50,000 pieces of Americana dating back to the early- and mid-1800s. Exhibits feature multiple modes of transportation, including more than 350 antique cars, 100 antique tractors, 17 flying machines, a few covered wagons and an 1822 ox cart.

We enjoyed seeing the forerunners of modern RVs. The 1850 Gypsy Wagon was the "first trailer-house." Pulled by one horse, the ornately engraved and

hand-carved wagon had a stove and beds. Since gypsy wagons were normally burned when the owner died, there are few left in existence today.

Wendell Turner built a motorhome on a 1939 White truck chassis. After using the vehicle in his trucking business for 11 years, he stripped it down to the frame and four wheels. People laughed when he told them he was building a "home on wheels," but that's exactly what he did. Between 1953 and 1975, Wendell and his wife, Edna, traveled 100,000 miles in it.

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Winegard® Company, the leader in design and innovation of mobile television reception products, and DISH have collaborated to bring you Pathway X1 and X2 automatic portable satellite TV systems. Designed for stationary use, the Pathway antennas are backed by Winegard's industry best warranty of 2 years parts, 1 year labor. These revolutionary antennas cater to the 'on the go' lifestyle and provide the following key features:

Effortless Setup –

Powered by single coax connection through the receiver; no power cable is needed.

Simple to Use –

100% automatic. No aiming. No pointing. No hassle. Customized DISH receiver interface offers quicker satellite acquisition.

Versatility -

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Pay-As-You-Go Programming -

No monthly contracts or commitments. Only pay for TV service the months you use it. HD packages available.



Antennas shown with tripod mount TR-1518 (sold separately)

PATHWAY X1

Smallest Portable

The X1 is 40% smaller than the popular Winegard Carryout GM-1518, and has the sleekest, most lightweight design ever. At a mere 10 lbs, the X1 is easy to handle and even easier to tuck away when not in use.

Over 40% smaller
than the Carryout.

13.5" h x 14.3" dia



Quickest Acquisition Time

The X1 has the fastest acquisition time of any other DISH automatic portable antenna saving more time to enjoy your favorite TV program.

SMALLEST PORTABLE ANTENNA

QUICKEST ACQUISITION TIME

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PA-2000 white PA-2035 black

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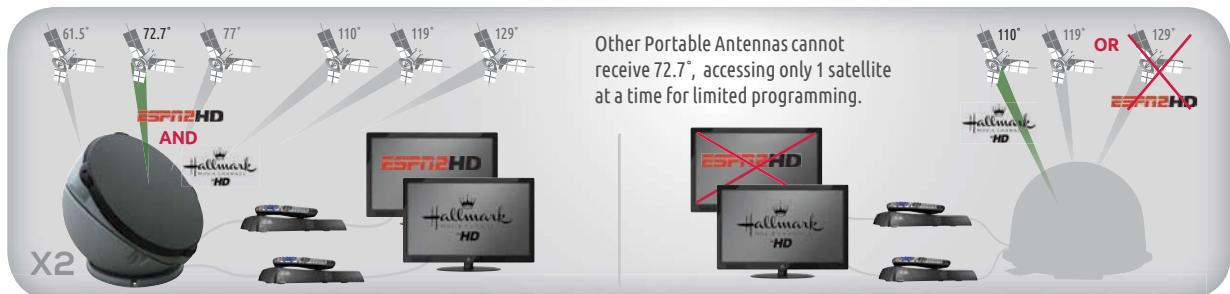


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*Coverage areas may vary slightly; weak spots include the Pacific Northwest and areas in the Great Plains.



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10 WONDERFUL AND WACKY MUSEUMS

RIPLY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT! ODDITORIUM, ORLANDO, FLA.

From the outside, the building looks like it's slipping into a giant sinkhole. Ripley's Believe It or Not! Odditorium is even wackier on the inside. We saw man-made oddities, such as a 14-foot-wide rendering of DaVinci's "The Last Supper" made of colorful laundry lint, a collection of antique bed pans and a three-quarter scale model of a Rolls Royce 1908 Silver Ghost made from more than 1 million matchsticks. Other exhibits include a six-toed pig, a two-headed calf and a full-scale mannequin of Robert Wadlow, who, at 8 feet 11 inches, was the tallest man who ever lived.

In addition to the facility in Orlando, Ripley's has 28 other attractions in North America.

Ripley's Believe It or Not! Odditorium, 407-345-8010, www.ripleys.com/orlando/your-visit/believe-it-or-not-odditorium

SPAM MUSEUM, AUSTIN, MINN.

A company doesn't produce more than 7 billion cans of one product without



creating some fans along the way. From Monty Python's *Spamalot* on Broadway to the Spamettes singing their rendition of "Mr. Spam-man" and "Stand by Your SPAM" in the SPAM Museum in Austin, Minn., many are singing its praises. Even Nikita Khrushchev credited SPAM for the survival of the Russian Army during World War II. After the war, Dwight Eisenhower forgave Hormel for its only sin: "Sending us so much of it."

Whatever your personal feelings are about the canned meat, a visit to the in-



Left: Ripley's Believe It or Not! Odditorium lets visitors see how they measure up to the full-scale mannequin of Robert Wadlow, who at 8' 11" was the tallest man who ever lived. Above: SPAM is distributed around the world.

teractive SPAM Museum will surely put a smile on your face. I was amazed at all the wacky ways to have fun with SPAM: get cooking tips from internationally famous chefs as they prepare exotic recipes at Chez SPAM; hearing KSPAM, a fully operational radio studio airing old SPAM commercials; and competing in the Spam Exam.

Spam Museum, 800-LUV-SPAM, www.spam.com/spam-101/the-spam-museum ♦



Mary and Jim Zalmanek enjoy traveling in their 2003 Safari Trek when they are not at home in Monument, Colo. Mary is the author of *The Art of the Spark* (www.artofthespark.com).



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Pay-As-You-Go programming provides convenience of no monthly contracts or commitments. HD packages available.

PATHWAY X1 AND PATHWAY X2

FINDING OLD FLORIDA

A MOTORHOME JOURNEY DOWN
THE ATLANTIC COAST

by CHRISTINE GOODIER



A section of Henry Flagler's 1912 Overseas Railway, the Bahia Honda Bridge, can still be seen from the state park's beach. Inset: Bahia Honda staffer Mona McCauley (left) and Ranger Artie Engler (right) portray Mary Lily and Henry Flagler on the Railway Car 91 stage.

“They’re paving the whole state,”

observed novelist John D. MacDonald's fictional alter ego, Travis Magee, back in 1982. And there's no doubt that development has changed Florida since the days when my family piled into a '56 Chevy to visit Grandma in Coral Gables. With fond memories of those trips, I've been wondering if my husband, Bob, and I can still find “Old Florida” experiences when we head south on Interstate 95 in our motorhome.

ORANGE JUICE AND INFO

We're off to a great start when we discover that one tradition hasn't changed since 1949. Free, fresh orange juice is still on tap at the Florida Welcome Center along with maps and brochures. I spot a 73-page guide to Florida State Parks, lured by the catchphrase: “Welcome to ... *the Real Florida.*” Months ago, we reserved campsites in several state parks and I'm raring to go check them all out.

OLD, OLD FLORIDA

St. Augustine is a fine place to exit I-95 and start our time-travels. Founded by Don Pedro Menendez de Aviles in 1565, it's the oldest permanent European settlement in the continental United States.

We park our 22-foot Leisure Travel Vans Free Spirit motorhome in town and explore the Castillo de San Marcos National Monument on the old city's Matanzas Bay waterfront. Built by Spain in 1672 to protect its growing empire in America, this star-shaped castle fortress still has pride of place despite hurricanes, bombardments and sieges.

Up on one of the fort's four bastions, costumed re-enactors decked out in tricorner hats and red-trimmed blue coats are poised to fire a cannon at a ghost fleet of British invaders across the bay. As the smoke clears, a spokesman tells the assembled crowd that the fort has changed hands many times over three centuries —



PHOTO: COURTESY VISIT FLORIDA

In St. Augustine, troop re-enactors defend the 17th century Castillo de San Marcos, which was never defeated in battle.



Sleep among the palms and pines at Jonathan Dickinson State Park's River Campground.



At Anastasia State Park in St. Augustine, visitors can stroll or bicycle on more than 4 miles of beach.



PHOTO: COURTESY ST. AUGUSTINE, PONTE VEDRA & THE BEACHES CVB

but has never been defeated in battle.

Back in the motorhome, we navigate through a historic district teeming with tourists, cross the Bridge of Lions and head for Anastasia State Park on Anastasia Island. In addition to the shady, full-facility campground where our site awaits, this park has water sports rentals and a 4-mile Atlantic beach for biking and beachcombing.

The next morning, we drive north on the island to find St. Augustine Light. Once a Spanish tower, the present 1874 lighthouse sports black-and-white spiral stripes and a jaunty red tower. After admiring it inside and out, we browse through the former Keeper's house, now a maritime museum.

WINDSWEPT BEACHSIDE CAMPING

We turn south via Highway A1A to Gamble Rogers Memorial State Recreation Area at Flagler Beach and check in at the

Ranger Station, where we notice a stack of CDs for sale. Folk singer Gamble Rogers was well known from the 1960s through the '80s as "Florida's Troubadour." But while camping at this beach with his wife in 1991, he drowned attempting to rescue a tourist in rough surf. The Florida Legislature renamed the park to honor his heroism the following year.

After backing into our 24-foot campsite, we cross the dunes on a boardwalk and realize why no RVs have awnings out — brisk winds are whipping the Atlantic to a froth. After a walk on the sunny beach, we dodge highway traffic and cross to the Intracoastal Waterway side of the park.

On the Joe Kenner Nature Trail named for a park ranger, we're protected from the wind for a mile's hike through maritime hammock and scrub. Under a canopy of pines and hardwoods, we pass holly shrubs, cedar trees, and palmetto palms for a vision of how ancient coast-

al dunes and saltwater marshes looked before bulldozers came to Florida.

FISHING BOATS AND TREASURE FLEETS

We return to I-95 the next morning, drive two hours south, cross the Indian River and return to the barrier islands. Our destination is Sebastian Inlet State Park, where north and south sections are linked by a tall bridge. Prime campsites face the inlet, but ours today is near a mangrove swamp, so we rummage around for our mosquito repellent, essential for any Florida RV vacation.

With two jetties, a boat ramp, and small craft rentals, this park is a magnet for saltwater fishermen. Anglers stop by the bait and tackle shop before heading out to haul in snook, redfish, bluefish or mackerel. When it comes to Old Florida activities, fishing tops the list, and there's even a fishing museum near the campground.

It's the park's second museum

PHOTOS: ROBERT GOODIER



PHOTO: ANDY NEWMAN/FLORIDA KEYS NEWS BUREAU

Left to right: Both public and private campgrounds in the Florida Keys, like Jolly Roger Travel Park, have waterfront RV sites. A glass-bottom boat takes visitors 7 miles offshore at John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park on Key Largo. Drivers enjoy the view from the Seven Mile Bridge in the Florida Keys; the historic span on the right is no longer used for traffic.

that reels us in, though, the fascinating McLarty Treasure Museum devoted to the 1715 Spanish Plate Fleet. After a hurricane sank the entire fleet just offshore, Spain mounted a four-year salvage effort that recovered only half the ships' treasures. The long-forgotten wrecks were rediscovered in the 1960s, and modern salvors have brought up gold doubloons, pearls and much more. Park volunteer Anne Lins tells us that artifacts still turn up along the museum's beach. Hurricane Sandy blew a brass cup ashore in 2012 and a Chihuahua named Coco found a silver piece-of-eight coin recently.

WILD TIMES ON THE LOXAHATCHEE

Our next stop, Jonathan Dickinson State Park at Hobe Sound, offers two good choices for motorhome travelers. The Pine Grove campground along U.S. 1 has large, gravel sites with full hookups in a parking lot setting, but we'll take our search for Old Florida to the wooded River Campground 4 miles into the park.

We drive down to the Loxahatchee River and buy the last two tickets for a tour to the Trapper Nelson Interpretive Site, accessible only by boat. On the winding waterway, we're immersed in a wild, green world for two hours as our captain points out osprey nests, swimming manatees and great blue herons.

Ranger Ron Cyrus greets the group at a backwater dock and leads the way through the isolated camp where a colorful character arrived in the 1930s and lived off the land for four decades. Known as the "Wild Man of the Loxahatchee," Trapper Nelson established a wildlife

zoo as a tourist attraction, amassed large land holdings and became a notorious recluse until his death in 1968. After the state acquired the property to establish a park, rangers found the Wild Man's long-rumored "hidden treasure," more than 5,000 old coins of little value tucked into the chimney's chinking.

KEY-HOPPING THE OVERSEAS HIGHWAY

We head inland, pick up Florida's Turnpike and bypass traffic congestion around Miami. Rejoining U.S. 1 below Homestead, we aim toward the Keys, that necklace of tropical islands dividing the Atlantic Ocean from the Gulf of Mexico.

Key Largo was the setting for a movie of the same name starring Bogart and Bacall in 1948, and the location for the first undersea park in the United States in 1960. John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park now offers a full hook-up campground along with scuba diving, snorkeling, boating and two man-made beaches.

Next morning we board a glass bottom boat, *Spirit of Pennekamp*, and enjoy the sun while our captain cruises past mangroves filled with white egrets. He picks up the speed on open water to reach a reef almost 7 miles offshore and we go inside to stare through the glass floor panels. Colorful fish swim around the corals below; it's like snorkeling without getting wet.

Driving south the following day, we set off down the Overseas Highway, a name that conjures up adventure and escape. Mile Marker signs cue our location as we roll from Key to Key, passing pleasantly tacky, low-rise roadside establishments. Vintage signs for the likes

of Sid and Roxie's Green Turtle and Jo-Jo's Restaurant compete for attention with thatched tiki bars and Betsy, the Giant Lobster.

MR. FLAGLER'S RAILROAD

Driving the Seven Mile Bridge is a treat: blue skies, fluffy clouds and aqua water as far as the eye can see. We're on our way to Bahia Honda State Park for two nights. With 80 campsites, sandy beach

FOR MORE INFORMATION

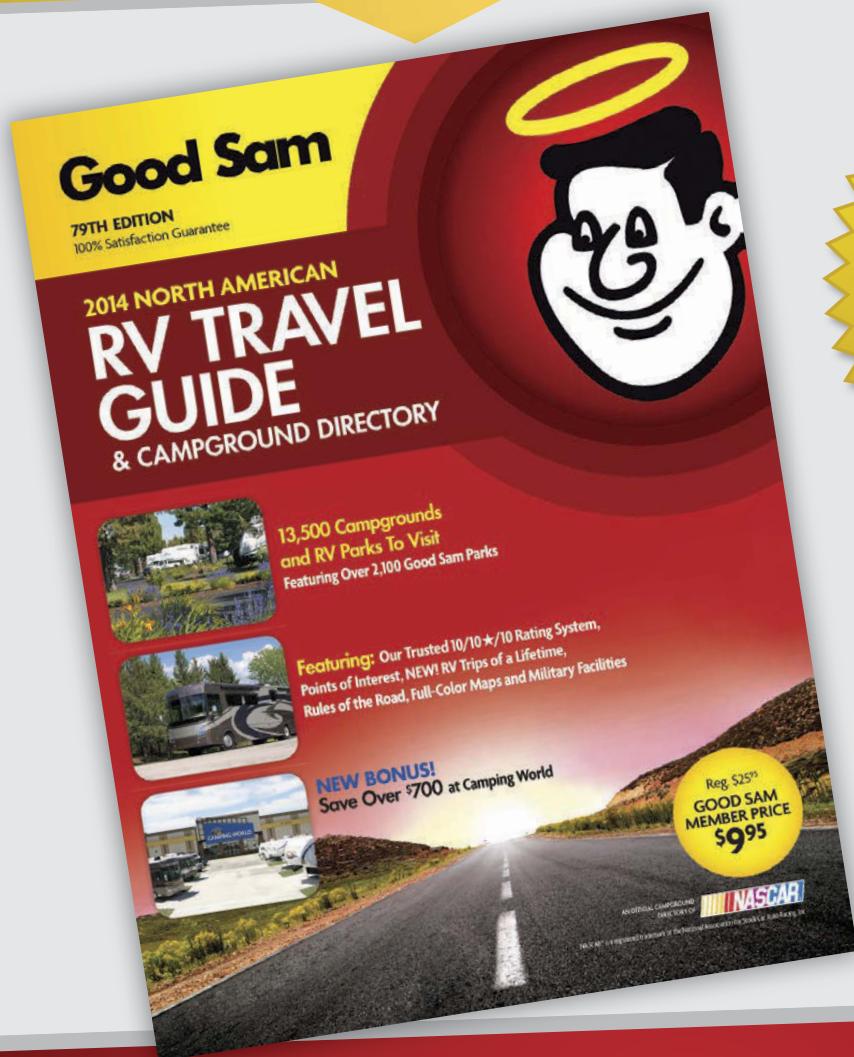
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and marina, this park is just 35 miles north of Key West.

We join Park Ranger Elaine Mason for a nature walk our first morning at Loggerhead Beach. As orange butterflies flit by, she points out edible purslane, wild poinsettia, and other native plants, and describes how ecosystems vary from the lower to upper Keys.

Campers bring their folding chairs the next day to a railway car stage, complete with steam and sound effects, where Ranger Elaine and other costumed park employees perform the "History of the Overseas Railway." They bring to life the tales of Henry Flagler, a multimillionaire who built bridges to extend his railroad 128 miles from Miami to Key West, a difficult project completed in 1912.

Special effects (water, palm branches, even flying coconuts!) simulate the Labor Day Hurricane of 1935 that destroyed 40 miles of Flagler's track. At the end of the performance, the Ranger-actors take a bow, answer questions and explain that the state eventually bought the brid-

es and rail line, which became the basis for today's U.S. Highway 1.

FLORIDA FOUND

Park Manager Eric Kiefer tells me later, "The only trouble with Bahia Honda is you can't get in." I nod, since I've learned it's difficult to reserve sites in some Florida State Parks for winter stays, even 11 months ahead when the booking window opens. Our solution has been to check often for cancellations, snap up random nights when we find them and fill in the gaps with private campgrounds.

At family-run Big Pine Key Fishing Lodge at Mile Marker 33, we get a rustic site where we're treated to frequent visits by small, federally protected, endangered Key deer. And at Jolly Roger Travel Park at Mile Marker 59, we enjoy full hookups and wallow in luxuries that state parks lack — a pool, Internet and cable TV. We've recrossed the Seven Mile Bridge so often that Bob has begun calling it the "42-mile bridge."

We reflect on the Florida history

and atmosphere we've absorbed during this trip. Minutes away from I-95 and other main roads, we've found tropical forests, winding rivers and pristine beaches. "Old Florida" is alive and well, enhanced by a warm welcome and rich array of visitor amenities everywhere we've been. "New Florida" is mighty nice in our book, too, and there's a lot left to explore, including springs, lakes and caverns.

Before packing our flip flops and heading north, we stop for one last night at Long Key. A glamorous fishing lodge here housed the rich and famous until a hurricane destroyed it in 1935. Long Key State Park has been here since 1969 and now has 60 campsites by the sand a few feet from the Atlantic's shallow tidal flats. We put out the awning, unfold our camp chairs and watch the shore birds until the sun sets. We'll be back. ♦



Christine Goodier is a freelance writer and editor who lives on the North Carolina coast and travels with her husband, photographer Bob Goodier, in a Class B Sprinter motorhome.

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WINNEBAGO TREND 23L

EUROPEAN STYLING AND A NEW PLATFORM
PROVIDE ECONOMICAL RVING FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

by CHRIS HEMER

OK, I'll admit it. I didn't want to like the new Winnebago Trend Class C.

It's certainly not because I have anything against Winnebago, as the company has one of the broadest, high-quality product lines in the industry and is widely known for its fresh, innovative thinking. And it's not because I don't like small Class C motorhomes, although I do think some are lacking in their execution. No, in the case of the Trend, my trepidation originated with the styling. The Ram ProMaster chassis (the North American version of the Fiat Ducato) is built with a front fascia designed for easy replacement in the event of a midtown fender bender. A great feature for the commercial applications that originally spurred its creation, but not exactly what most would call stylish. In fact, one onlooker likened it to a cattle guard. And its single rear wheels, tucked far beneath the body, reminded me of a fat kid trying to ride his little brother's bike.

But I liked it anyway. And the more time I spent with it, the more I liked it.

The reason has to do with how well this motorhome works for its intended purpose — but also the potential it represents

2014 WINNEBAGO TREND 23L

WHAT'S HOT

Good power, handling and fuel economy, room for the whole family

WHAT'S NOT

Odd styling, slippery seats, engine can get noisy





Above left: The Trend's 49-by-75-inch bed has unique, adjustable backrests. The TV above the fridge can pivot for viewing from living or bedroom areas. **Above right:** The galley and adjacent wardrobe have plenty of storage space, and cabinetry is well constructed. A countertop extension allows for more prep space. Forward-facing dinette has two three-point seatbelts. **Opposite page:** Motorized StudioLoft descends from the ceiling with the touch of a button. Curbside bench seat and dinette convert into a second bed. The cab offers a simple layout with logically placed switchgear and gauges. The navigation unit on the prototype motorhome was an aftermarket product; production models will use Chrysler's U-Connect system.

for the future of RVing. The ProMaster opens up a new world of possibilities — not just for consumers, but manufacturers as well. By its own estimation, Winnebago says the ProMaster chassis will carve several thousand dollars off the sticker price of any alternatives it offered previously.

But cost is only part of the equation. The ProMaster chassis carries with it a number of uncommon benefits, not the least of which is an unprecedented array of 35 safety features that includes anti-lock brakes with brake assist, six air bags, electronic stability control, traction control, hill start assist and much more. There's even one feature called Drift Compensation Technology, which can detect conditions such as road crown and side winds, and adjust the steering system to compensate for pulling and/or drifting.

Winnebago is also leveraging Chrysler's U-Connect multi-media system, making it standard in the Trend, and its sister product, the Itasca Viva. U-Connect offers some very useful features for RVers, including Bluetooth hands-free phone functionality, hands-free text reply capability, and a full-color, 5-inch touchscreen with GPS navigation and a backup camera — features that, quite frankly, I think every motorhome should have.

The ProMaster is unconventional in other ways, as well. First and foremost, it is a front-wheel-drive configuration, which may seem odd at first, until you consider the functional aspects. Front-wheel-drive offers better control in inclement weather, which is why the bulk of passenger cars on the market today use this configuration. Second, and something RVers can cer-

tainly appreciate, is that it eliminates the need for a doghouse between the driver and front passenger seats, so the floor is flat and the foot wells roomy.

Stepping into the cockpit, there are numerous similarities to the Sprinter chassis, including the dash-mounted shifter (with manual shift function), firm, manually-adjustable seats and rubber flooring. However, the controls in the ProMaster are far more intuitive and easy to use than they are in the German-designed Sprinter. Three knobs are all that's required to adjust the climate control, and the speedometer/tachometer are laid out in a very legible dial arrangement. There's also a driver information center between the two gauges that can relay myriad information, from the mundane (door ajar) to the miniscule (ours notified us of a license plate light that was burned out!).

Initially at least, Winnebago is offering the Trend in two floorplans: the 23B, with its large rear bath, and the 23L, which features a 49-by-75-inch bed in the curbside corner. For our test, Winnebago furnished a preproduction 23L, which, while lacking some of the final details of the production units, was close enough to production for our evaluation. We loaded it up with gear and headed for California's high desert.

The ProMaster's Chrysler 3.6-liter Pentastar V-6 has been recognized as one of the best engines available on the market today — but powering a half-ton truck and an 8,000-plus-pound motorhome are two very different things. Regardless of this fact, the Trend feels very lively at drive-off, thanks (in part) to a low 3.90:1 first gear ratio (compared to 3.00:1 in

the current six-speed automatic in Ram 1500-series trucks). With 280 horsepower on tap, the motorhome had no problem climbing a 6 percent grade at 65 mph, although manually shifting into fourth gear before the grade is recommended to keep the engine in its torque peak. And owing to its commercial nature, the engine roar can be quite pronounced at higher engine rpm, although it's very acceptable during highway cruising.

Likewise, the suspension is designed for heavy use, and is a bit bumpy over expansion joints and such — but the flip side is that the coach felt very stable even during high crosswinds, and exhibits excellent handling. Speaking of which, the ProMaster's turning circle is unbelievably tight — we were able to perform a U-turn on a city street with absolutely no drama. And the four-wheel disc brakes, with their Brembo calipers, had excellent pedal feel and stopped the motorhome effortlessly.

For years, we've criticized some coach manufacturers for providing sleeping quarters for several guests, but belted seating positions for just two. That's certainly not the case with the Trend — in fact, this coach is the first to have three-point seat belts (like the ones used by the driver/front passenger) in the dinette area — something traveling families will doubtlessly appreciate. However, our passengers didn't enjoy sitting here for very long, as the smooth, Ultraleather upholstery made for a lot of slipping and sliding, and the padding was a bit thin for our taste. Personally, I'd prefer it if Winnebago made the seat thicker and upholstered it in cloth, or at least offered cloth as an option. Like-

wise, the curbside bench seat also has two belted seating positions, but again these seats are slippery during travel. Also, the anchors for the belts extend down into the doorway for the storage bay underneath, which we thought odd — but Winnebago says it will address this in future models.

It was late afternoon by the time we arrived at our site in the Mojave Desert, so we set up camp and got ready to prepare a simple dinner. The Trend has a kitchen typical of these small Class C units, featuring a two-burner stove and sink with glass covers. Something fairly uncommon, however, is the cabinetry. Not only is it good looking and well constructed, there's also plenty of it — I've tested full-size Class A motorhomes that didn't have this much space in the kitchen. And the countertop extension gives the mobile chef adequate room for prep duties.

At first glance, the dining area looks odd, as there's only the one, forward-facing bench at the dining table. For additional seating, the driver/front passenger seats swivel rearward to become the other two dinette seats. We can't speak for how well this works, as our prototype didn't have swiveling seats in it, but it seemed like it would do the job. Likewise, a table extension allows another diner (or perhaps two small ones) to sit at the end of the table on the curbside bench. That's a total of five adults — more than most dinettes in full-size coaches can handle.

TV placement is always a challenge, especially in a smaller motorhome like this one. Winnebago placed a 22-inch LCD TV in a recess above the refrigerator, and it's on an arm so it can be viewed from either the living or bedroom area. Because the fixed dinette bench faces forward, that means the TV must be viewed from the

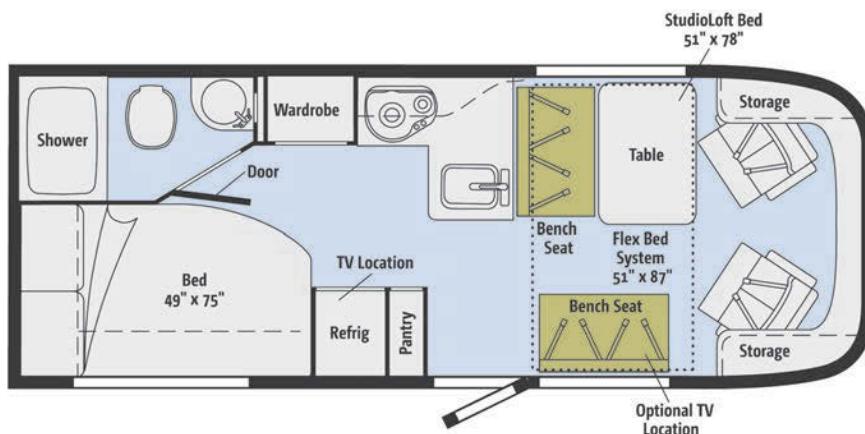


Bath area is surprisingly roomy, with a large shower and sink. Residential-style brushed-nickel faucet is a nice touch.

swiveling cockpit seats (putting that small TV kind of far away) or from the curbside bench, which means watching TV with your head turned to the left. And if viewed from the rear bed, the controls for the AM/FM/DVD player are on the other side, near the entry door. It's not ideal, but again, space is limited, so we made due.

Just to the rear of the galley on the street side is a wardrobe with plenty of room for a couple's hanging clothes, plus more drawers. And in the streetside corner is a surprisingly roomy bath, with a good-size shower, a foot-flush toilet and a large sink finished in what looks like solid-surface material. Mounted just underneath the sink is the control for the tankless water heater system, as well as a water-pump switch, which is always appreciated. In general, the switches throughout the coach are logically placed and within reach.

When it comes time to turn in for the evening, you've got options. Boy, do you. In the living area, the dinette table



SPECIFICATIONS

PERFORMANCE

FUEL ECONOMY: 15.65 MPG
0-60 MPH: 15.4 SEC
40-60 MPH: 8.9 SEC

CHASSIS

MODEL: RAM PROMASTER
ENGINE: 3.6-L V-6
SAE HP: 280 HP @ 6,400 RPM
TORQUE: 260 LB-FT @ 4,175 RPM
TRANSMISSION: 6-SPEED AUTOMATIC
AXLE RATIO: 3.86:1
FRONT TIRES: 225/75R16
REAR TIRES: 225/75R16
WHEELBASE: 159"
BRAKES: 4-WHEEL DISC WITH ABS
SUSPENSION, F/R: MCPHERSON WITH STABILIZER BAR/SOLID AXLE WITH LEAF SPRINGS
FUEL CAP: 24 GAL
WARRANTY: 12 MONTHS/15,000 MILES

COACH

EXT LENGTH: 24'
EXT WIDTH: 7' 6.5"
EXT HEIGHT: 10' 4"
INT WIDTH: 7' 3"
INT HEIGHT: 6' 7"
CONSTRUCTION: ALUMINUM FRAMING, LAMINATED FIBERGLASS SIDE WALLS, ONE-PIECE FIBERGLASS ROOF, BLOCK FOAM INSULATION
FRESHWATER CAP: 26 GAL
BLACK-WATER CAP: 32 GAL
GRAY-WATER CAP: 40 GAL
WATER HEATER CAP: TANKLESS ON-DEMAND
LP-GAS CAP: 13 GAL
AIR CONDITIONER: 13,500 BTU
FURNACE: 20,000 BTU
REFRIGERATOR: 5.1 CU-FT
CONVERTER/CHARGER: 45 AMPS
BATTERY: (1) 12-VOLT CHASSIS, (1) 12-VOLT COACH
AC GENERATOR: 2.8 KW GAS
MSRP: \$89,268
MSRP AS TESTED: \$91,844
WARRANTY: 3 YRS/36,000 MILES

WET WEIGHT

(WATER & HEATER, FUEL, LP-GAS TANKS FULL; NO SUPPLIES OR PASSENGERS)
FRONT AXLE: 3,540 LBS
REAR AXLE: 4,640 LBS
TOTAL: 8,180 LBS

CHASSIS RATINGS

GAWR, F/R: 4,630/5,291 LBS
GVWR/GCWR: 9,350/11,500 LBS
OCCE: 1,170 LBS

GAWR: GROSS AXLE WEIGHT RATING
GVWR: GROSS VEHICLE WEIGHT RATING
GCWR: GROSS COMBINATION WEIGHT RATING
OCCE: OCCUPANT AND CARGO CARRYING CAPACITY RATING

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swivels down to meet the forward facing bench, and the curbside bench pulls out like a big drawer to fill the gap. Arrange the seat and back padding appropriately, and voila! You've got the 51-by-87-inch Flex Bed System. A more impressive option, however, is the 51-by-78-inch StudioLoft bed that descends from the ceiling via a power switch and stops about 4 feet from the floor. Now, you've got a bunk bed arrangement that can sleep four; a supplied ladder helps the top sleeper(s) gain access to the StudioLoft. When stowed, the bed looks like part of the ceiling and doesn't compromise headroom very much — but if you're much taller than 6 feet, you might need to duck a little here.

The rear 49-by-75-inch bed holds more surprises. Besides being a cozy place to catch some shut-eye, the bed allows individual adjustment of the backrests. The mattress is bisected at the top half, and underneath this section are two corresponding panels with pull straps. Pull one of the straps up, and the panel ratchets up into place; pulling it all the way up allows the backrest to fall flat again. Lift on the

front of the bed, and you've got storage space for the StudioLoft ladder and privacy curtains for the cab windows, as well as anything else you want to stow. Above the bed are reading lights underneath the overhead cabinet, and the thermostat control is at the foot of the bed. A privacy curtain is another nice touch.

You might have noticed that we haven't discussed options — and that's because there aren't that many. Winnebago offers the Trend in one well-equipped version, with only a few available features. For example, the 23L had Aosta Cherry cabinetry (\$504), a heated drainage system (\$259) and an applique package in the cab area (\$259). The option sheet also showed a 19-inch LCD TV (\$371), but it hadn't been installed in the prototype. This brought the total as-tested price to \$91,844 — well below the cost of a comparably equipped Sprinter-based coach.

The combination of the European-inspired Trend and the Ram ProMaster chassis it rides on may take some getting used to, but I'm willing to bet you'll learn to like it — just like I did. ♦

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Rebate form will be available at SafeTAlertRebate.com beginning March 1, 2014!



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Imperial Blue #31175

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Green #21421 ♦

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Brown



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GET READY FOR SPRING



PHOTO: E. DON SMITH

A THOROUGH CHECK UP WILL HELP ENSURE TROUBLE-FREE DAYS ON THE ROAD DURING THE UPCOMING TRAVEL SEASON

by BILL AND JENN GEHR

The onset of spring, with its warmer days, beckons RVers to get their motorhomes ready to hit the road for new adventures. We've compiled a number of helpful tips for a thorough spring check-up that will ensure your house-on-wheels performs as well as possible throughout the upcoming travel season.

Let's start with de-winterization, for those who have stored their motorhome in preparation for freezing temperatures. Attention is first given to the water system; thoroughly drain and flush the antifreeze from the entire water system, including the toilet and water heater. Start by returning the water heater bypass valve to its normal mode/position. After the antifreeze has been flushed, household bleach (without extra cleaners) can be used to sanitize the freshwater tank. Use



Flush the water system until all the antifreeze is gone. The water should run clear and smell clean.

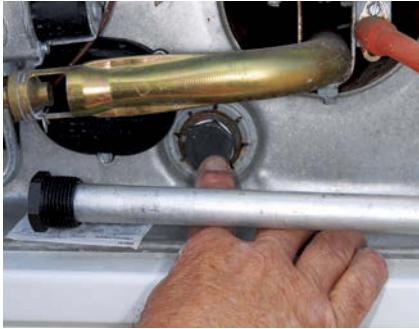
¼-cup bleach diluted in water for every 15 gallons of tank capacity. Once the bleach is added (either via a gravity fill or pumped in), fill the water tank to the full mark, and pump the bleach-water solution through the entire system and allow it to stand for five to six hours.



Make sure the water heater bypass valve is returned to the normal mode before pressurizing the system.

PHOTOS: BOB LIVINGSTON

Drain the water tank and open the low point valves to drain the water lines. Remove the plug or anode rod from the



The Suburban water heater anode rod doubles as a drain plug. Replace the anode when only 25 percent of the material is remaining.

bottom of the water heater and allow the water to drain. This is a great time to replace an old, corroded anode rod (if there is only 25 percent of the material showing) and flush the water heater. You'll also want to flush the freshwater system until you are sure that any foul taste and odor are gone. Baking soda added to the tank (about half a cup) will help remove any offensive odors. You may need to flush the system more than once. Leave the demand-water pump on (all faucets closed) for 48 hours to thoroughly check for any water leaks that may have shown up during storage. If the pump cycles with all faucets closed, there may be a leak in the system (or the pump needs repair).

Now is a good time to give your motorhome a bath. Washing your coach will allow you to get up-close and personal with areas that are often out of sight, and thus, out of mind. Start on the roof. Care must be taken when walking on the roof, especially a rubber roof that is wet. Use a non-caustic product to clean a rubber roof. Membrane suppliers to the industry recommend using Spic and Span cleaner with a medium-bristle brush, and for tough stains, Murphy Oil Soap. If you have an aluminum or fiberglass roof, any type of car-wash product and the same medium-bristle brush will do the job. Pay close attention to the rubber membrane for any cracks or deterioration of the white surface coating.

While scrubbing the roof, be on the look out for deteriorated caulking that will often show up around vents, seams and antennas. Also inspect the plastic vent



After a thorough washing of the rubber roof membrane, inspect it carefully as it may need some type of maintenance.



After careful inspection, the vents, seams, antennas, skylight or other accessories may need scraping and resealing.



Look out for window caulking that has gone bad. If you see cracks, shrinkage and missing seals, scrape and recaulk as needed before wet weather returns.

lids and skylights for sunlight deterioration and cracks.

Washing the motorhome and rinsing thoroughly around the windows will help locate possible leaks. Careful inspection of window seals and caulking around compartments and accessories is important. Now is also a good time to wax the exterior.

Routine tire inspection is a critical part of regular maintenance as well as an integral procedure during the spring checkup. Note the date of manufacture from the D.O.T code that is located on



Check the D.O.T. code on all tires. The last digit indicates the year of manufacture. Steel-belted radials will need replacement if they are more than 7 years old.



Large cracks like these on your tire's sidewalls or treads are a sure sign that the tires will need to be replaced.

the outside tire sidewall, but sometimes found on the inside of the tire, depending on how it's mounted. Every tire contains the week and year of manufacture.

The general rule of thumb is any steel belted radial will time out after seven years, regardless of tread condition. Some manufacturers recommend 10 years if the tires have been maintained properly and

covered when not in use. During inspection, check every tire for cuts, cracks, or bubbles — including the inside sidewall. Front tires should be free from any signs of abnormal wear that may be caused by an



Check tire pressure to make sure that all of the tires are properly inflated before every trip.

alignment problem. Inflate the tires to the correct pressure. To determine the proper pressure, either refer to the motorhome manufacturer's label near the driver's seat (assuming the coach is not overloaded) or weigh the wheels individually and consult the tire manufacturer's load and inflation tables.

Battery condition can be problematic after long periods of storage without proper charging. Battery maintenance not only ensures proper function, but will extend service life as well. The specific gravity can be checked using a hydrometer in open cell batteries, while a multimeter can be used to establish state of charge for sealed batteries. Remove any corrosion from the posts and the terminals; baking soda and water works well, but commercial cleaners and acid neutralizers are available. Replace any terminals that have been damaged by corrosion. Clean the battery trays and the hold-downs and



Clean all the starting and house batteries in the system and don't overlook the compartment. Spray terminals and posts with a battery corrosion protectant.

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GET READY FOR SPRING

paint if necessary. After cleaning, coat the battery terminals and posts with a protectant; this will help prevent future corrosion. When replacing batteries, always replace all of them, not just one of two, or two of four. Keep in mind that it is much easier to replace the batteries at home rather than being pressured to do so when on a trip.

Safety and efficiency are what we want from the propane system. Before opening the valve after winter storage,



Remove the cover from the LP-gas pressure regulator and inspect the regulator for integrity and corrosion.

carefully inspect the regulator, rubber hoses and fittings, and inspect the LP-tank for cracks or corrosion. LP-gas regulators do not last forever, and are often overlooked. Some technicians recommend replacement every five years, but professional LP-gas suppliers can help make that determination. Have the gas pressure tested by a certified technician, and ask to have a leak-down test performed annually.

Service all appliances after the propane system has been thoroughly tested. Start with the refrigerator; check the burner area for any debris or rust. If mothballs or dryer sheets were used, remove them before operating the refrigerator for the first time. Using compressed air, clean the burner tube and the flue. Check all the electrical connections for corrosion.

Illuminate the back of the refrigerator with a flashlight and look upward to check for any birds nests or other debris that may have found a winter home during storage. Start the refrigerator on gas, and listen for a flame to ignite. Let the refrigerator run on gas for several hours to be certain it will reach the set cooling



Using a flashlight, inspect the exterior furnace vent, looking for mud daubers and/or debris that need to be removed.

temperature. Turn the gas off, open the doors of the refrigerator and let it sit for a few hours. Close the doors, select electric and allow to run long enough to verify that it works properly in this mode.

Before testing the forced air heating system, use a bright flashlight to look in to the exterior vent, checking for mud dauber nests or any other type of debris. Check the return air grille to be sure that it is free of any obstructions. Set the thermostat for 10 degrees higher than the ambient temperature and let the furnace run. Listen for any variation in fan speed. If you notice a fluctuation in the fan speed, have the furnace checked by a professional. Use a bright flashlight to inspect the floor registers or heat ducts for any debris or obstructions. Let the furnace run for 10 to 15 minutes, and again listen for any variation in fan speed. If necessary, consult an RV repair technician to make sure the fan motor is not on its last legs.

Continuing the spring overhaul, clean the water heater flue and burner assembly with compressed air. Visually check the burner assembly and all LP-gas and electrical connections. Replace the burner and the spark probe assembly if they are rusted. Start the water heater on gas, and let it run through a full cycle to be sure



Inspect the water heater burner, gas valve and pressure relief valve, and replace any corroded or rusty parts. Operate the water heater one full cycle for a complete test.

that it is functioning properly. Check the TP valve, commonly known as a pop-off valve, for any leaks, corrosion or dripping during the heating cycle. If the TP valve is leaking, make sure the air space at the top of the hot water tank is restored before replacing the valve. To restore the air space, drain the tank and replace the plug/anode. Open a faucet in the system and allow the tank to fill.

If your water heater is equipped with an electric element, turn off the gas, run some hot water out of the tank and turn electric on. Be sure it heats to temperature.

Check the LP-gas, smoke and carbon monoxide warning detectors. Start by replacing the battery in the smoke detector (which should be done once a year). Push the test button in each device to verify proper operation. Most of these detectors will not last the lifetime of your coach; check with the manufacturer, or look on the back of the detector to see if there's an expiration date. And don't forget the fire extinguisher. It should be tested and replaced according to the manufacturer's timeline as well.

With summer right around the corner, servicing the rooftop or basement air conditioner(s) is prudent. Clean or replace the intake filters first. Rooftop air-conditioners should have their shrouds removed and the condensers cleaned with compressed air (regulated to 80-90 psi). Be sure to check all connections and the fan motor for corrosion and rust. Grab that bright flashlight and check the inside evaporator for any buildup of dirt, oil or other debris that could affect the air conditioner's efficiency. Using a vacuum cleaner, remove any loose debris or dirt.

Straighten bent cooling fins. Use mild detergent to clean off any oil or sticky residue; warm water and mild soap may also be used to gently hand-wash intake filters that are in good condition. Plug in to shorepower or start the generator and run the air conditioner(s); carefully listen for any variation in fan speed. Check the temperature from the registers and be certain that the air is cold and the air-conditioner(s) is functioning properly.

Next, inspect ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) receptacles and all 120-volt AC outlets; there should be no loose or faulty outlets. Don't forget the outlet that the refrigerator plugs in to. At this time, inspect the condition of the power cord (and any extension cord) for burns or a partially melted end; replace if either look unsafe.

Test the microwave oven. Using a glass of water, run the microwave for two minutes and be sure the water reaches a point of near boiling.

Grab the flashlight again and open all cupboards/closets and look for signs of moisture intrusion that may have occurred during winter. Also be on the look out for mold and mildew. Mold, and any water stains that have formed on the ceiling, can be cleaned with a product called InstaGone. Check under the galley, and



Operate all dump valves and replace if they stick and/or are difficult to pull. Inspect the valve and the area around the valve for any type of leak.

open all drawers and inspect behind them with the flashlight as well. Look for mice, rat's nests or dead critters.

Checking the operation of the waste valves will help eliminate inopportune failures down the road. Fill the gray and black tanks to roughly half and add food dye. Let the water and food dye solution sit for two or three days with the valves



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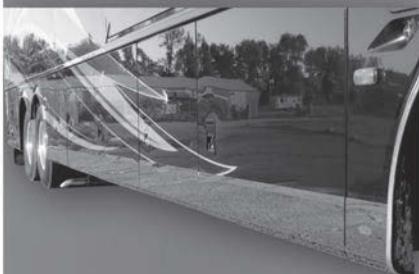
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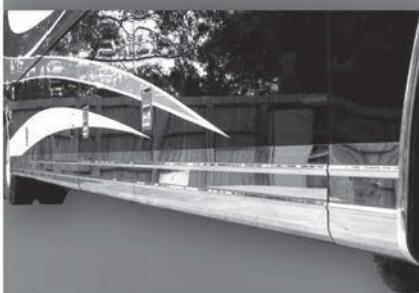
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GET READY FOR SPRING



Check slideout mechanisms, rails and/or gears if you can see them. Follow the manufacturer's recommended lubrications schedule if needed.

closed and look for any signs of leakage. Freezing weather can damage the holding tanks as well as the dump valves.

Remove the sewer hose from its storage area and inspect for cracks on the seals, tube or fittings. Better to find out now that there is a pending problem than when your full black tank needs dumping.

With the correct oil or silicone spray, lubricate the electric step and slideout mechanisms per the manufacturer's recommendations.

Open the patio and window awnings to check for proper operation and inspect the fabric for any damage or mildew that may have occurred during storage. Clean the fabric with Murphy Oil Soap or a mild detergent and let the material dry thoroughly before rolling up the awning. Using a ladder, check the fabric on all slideout toppers. Inspect the mounting hardware and spring mechanisms.

Take a few minutes to check the turn signals, backup lights, taillights and clearance lights for any bulbs that may not be functioning. The two most common problems come from corrosion or a burned-out element. Check taillight and clearance light lenses for cracks or broken pieces and make sure the seals between the light fixtures and exterior surface have not been breached. If so, reseal with RV caulking. Check the high- and low-beam headlights. Visually inspect each headlight for any chips or cracks that may have occurred from rocks or other roadway debris.

Windshield wiper blades should be replaced annually. Operate the wiper blades and the windshield washer fluid system



Replace wiper blades on an annual basis. Over time, rubber hardens and the edges break away, making the blade ineffective.



For motorhomes that have an oil bath front wheel bearing system, check oil level before every trip. This simple, five minute step is vital for proper function.

and make sure the washer nozzles are covering properly. Spray nozzles can become clogged and ineffective. Inspect the windshield carefully for any cracks they may have started; look for chips that can lead to larger cracks. Many smaller chips can be spot-repaired at a much lower cost than replacing the entire windshield.

It's best to take your motorhome for a two- to three-hour test drive to make sure all drivetrain and suspension systems are working properly. Before taking that test drive, check all the fluids and replace if needed.

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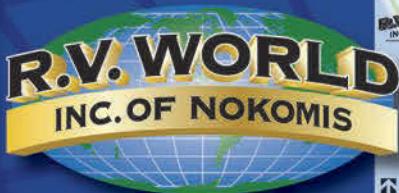
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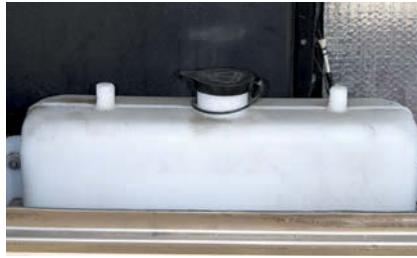
During the test drive, pay close attention to all gauges, especially the alternator output to make sure that there are no major fluctuations in voltage. Check the engine air filter for blockage and possible visitation from critters; they can do a lot of costly damage. Run the in-dash air conditioner for an extended period time, even if



Familiarize yourself with the generator's oil and antifreeze fluid levels. Keep a logbook of maintenance intervals and running time.

it's cold outside. A slow leak may not show up for an hour or two. Find a street or parking lot where there is no traffic, and apply the brakes at a low speed, hard enough to experience possible pulling. Address any alignment issues that may have been noticed during the test drive.

When summer arrives, you will probably enjoy using the generator to run the air conditioners while on the road or parked without hookups. So it's important to check the engine oil level, then inspect the engine air filter. Look at the hour meter to determine if service is due. With your conditioner(s) on, run the generator for a good hour and a half. If there's a problem with the carburetor or other component,



Although often ignored, inspect and test the windshield washer reservoir for cracks and proper fluid level.



Remove the generator's dipstick and check oil level at least once a week during use.

it will show up at this time. If you have a diesel generator, you will need to check the antifreeze level as well. Remember, it's important to "exercise" a generator; follow the manufacturer's guidelines for operational intervals — usually once a month.

Taking the time to give your motorhome a thorough spring checkup will make for much more enjoyable travels. And finding the little problems before they become big headaches also keeps more money in your pocket! ♦



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



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The Winnebago Touring Coach lineup consisted solely of Sprinter-based products in previous years, but will now offer the gas-powered Travato, based on the Ram ProMaster chassis.

AT THE RV INDUSTRY'S PREMIER TRADE SHOW, THERE WERE HUNDREDS OF REASONS WHY THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT

by CHRIS HEMER

WHAT'S NEW 2014



Also on display at Winnebago's expansive booth was the new Itasca Viva!, a sister product to the Winnebago Trend. Built on the new Ram ProMaster platform, it promises to be a viable, lower-cost solution to Sprinter-based motorhomes.



The Thor Axis was one of the most-talked-about coaches at the Louisville show. Built on a Ford E-Series chassis, the futuristic motorhome is only 25 feet, 6-inches long and comes in one floorplan with a single living area slideout.

PHOTOS: SHAWN SPENCE PHOTOGRAPHY

In every industry, there is an event that is recognized as “the one” — a happening that has become so famous, naming it in its entirety is no longer necessary. The Cannes International Film Festival, for example, is now just “Cannes.” The Greatest Spectacle in Racing, the Indianapolis 500, is known by practically every American as “Indy.” And within the RV industry, all you have to say is “Louisville” and everyone knows you mean the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) show, where dozens of manufacturers and thousands of RVs converge on Kentucky’s largest city.

In addition to an ocean of RVs and related products, RVIA is also where industry professionals learn about the health of the RV industry as a whole, and after seeing the year-by-year sales figures since 2007, we can tell you the prognosis is good. After years of cautious optimism, RV sales are definitely on the upswing, and you can see this good news reflected on the gleaming finish of hundreds of new RVs. Not just freshened with a new graphics package and interior décor, mind you, but all new models and floorplans and technologies.

With display halls larger than four football fields, there’s obviously no way we can cover all the new stuff you’ll be seeing at RV dealerships coming this spring, but we did find a great selection of interesting, innovative and exciting products that are certainly worth your attention. Here are just a few, in alphabetical order.

FOREST RIVER

Forest River is one of the biggest names in the RV business, and although its product offerings have always been expansive, the company isn’t particularly well known for its Class A motorhomes — but that’s changing. “In the past year, we have really focused on our motorhome business,” said Forest River’s general manager, Jeff Babcock. “We built motorhomes and trailers for years, but now we’ve become a true motorhome manufacturer. I think we’ve caught a lot of people by surprise.”

Indeed. Take, for example, the company’s FR3 Class A “crossover,” so named because it combines the livability and affordability of a Class C motorhome with the space and convenience of a Class A coach. Available in two floorplans — 25DS and 30DS — the FR3 may be comparatively short for a Class A, but with two slideouts, it lives like a much bigger motorhome. Built on the venerable Ford F53 gas chassis, the FR3 starts around \$109,000.



Founded in 1949, Truma is the largest supplier of heating, air conditioning, LP-gas and water systems for the European RV market. The company seeks to expand its product line in North America.



Forest River’s FR3 is targeted at those who want the space and convenience of a Class A, but in shorter floorplans that may be ideal for first-time RVers or veterans looking to downsize.



Forest River also displayed its new Legacy SR 300, a diesel-pusher Class A based on the Freightliner XCS chassis. Powered by a 300-hp Cummins and Allison 2500MH transmission, the Legacy is offered in three floorplans, including the 340BH, which features bunk beds in the streetside slide.



Freightliner's new V-Ride suspension is the first-ever single rear axle suspension rated at 24,000 pounds, which will give coachbuilders the freedom to offer customers more in a two-axle coach.

and benefits to the RV market," said John Paul "J.P." Davis, RV Product Manager for Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp. (FCCC). "It is the first-ever single rear axle suspension rated at 24,000 pounds. This gives motorhome builders the additional capacity to design new floorplans as well as luxury amenities. We should now be able to see bath-and-a-half floorplans with granite countertops and granite floors in a two-axle motorhome configuration. For motorhome owners, it means more capacity to carry their stuff — all without compromising the stable ride and the comfortable driving experience that FCCC products are known for."

It also means a significant cost savings; adding a tag axle, the traditional way to increase capacity in a large Class A, typi-

FREIGHTLINER

It seems like there's no limit to what luxury coachbuilders can do these days — but balancing cost, content and capacity has always been one of the industry's biggest challenges. Freightliner's new V-Ride Suspension is being billed as a game changer, as it will allow coachbuilders to offer customers more for less.

"V-Ride brings a lot of features

cally tacks \$15,000 onto the retail price.

Taking advantage of the new federal "bridge" laws organized by the RVIA, which now allow recreational vehicles to exceed 20,000 pounds per axle, the V-Ride gets its name from the V-Ride upper-arm connections. "It actually dissipates the suspension forces into the frame and the cross members," Davis explained, "which increases the durability of the product as well as its longevity. To go along with that, the trailing arms and the transverse beam are integrated together; think of it as a big sway bar. It also reduces the amount of bushings and moving components that you would typically see in a traditional suspension."

By combining the integrated transverse beam and the V-rod upper connections and adding the volumetric air bags that FCCC is known for, says Davis, customers will get a smooth, stable and comfortable ride that will be especially noticeable in curves and on uneven road surfaces. "That's the ride that luxury motorhome (owners) expect and demand from FCCC," said Davis.

MONACO COACH

Monaco dominated the entrance to one display hall with two familiar names: Dynasty and Vacationer. "When we decided to come back, after we were purchased by Allied Specialty Vehicles, it was kind of a restart," said Mike Snell, President of Monaco Coach. "What we're trying to do now is return to the basics of our product portfolio, so we're starting with the two most iconic names. Dynasty has been around since 1991, and Vacationer has been a mainstay since the '70s. Later, we'll be filling in the lineup with our other iconic names like Ambassador, Endeavor, Windsor and Diplomat. We'll have a total portfolio." Though only a prototype of the new Vacationer was on display at the show, Snell says it will be available in two 36-foot floorplans, the DBT and SBT.



Adorned with a banner that read, "Return to Power," Monaco Coach Corporation proudly displayed its new Dynasty, which the company claims was created through the input of more than 2,800 Monaco owners.



The Motorhome Industry Continues to Grow
 Analysts use a variety of indicators to determine the health of our nation's economy — including new home and car sales. But when it comes to the RV industry, perhaps the best sign of recovery is chassis sales — and Ford is ramping up. "Between Class C and Class A we've built 40-ish percent more for this industry than we did a year ago," said Len DeLuca, director of commercial sales for Ford Motor Co. "Between the E-Series at Ohio and F53 Class A at Detroit Chassis, we've actually built around 40 percent more. And the market itself between those two segments is up by about 33 percent."



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WHAT'S NEW 2014

Monaco displayed its 2015 Holiday Rambler Vacationer in dramatic fashion, with the body and slideout rooms separated and mounted on a platform for easier viewing.



The biggest focus in the Monaco display, however, was the all-new Dynasty. Adorned with a banner that read, "Return To Power," the 40-plus-foot diesel pusher sparkled under the hall's halogen lighting and had a near continuous line of interested onlookers waiting



to get on board. "The Dynasty really is a coach that was produced by our owners," explained Snell. "We actually had 2,800 owners spend an hour filling out our survey, which had 170 questions. We took anything that customers agreed upon at a rate of 70 percent or better, then incorporated it into this product. For example, the kitchen is probably the best kitchen of any motorhome ever produced. Look at the utilization of space — from spice drawers to a pop-up coffeemaker to an appliance garage — these are attributes that you'll see in a residence. The kitchen is where people always congregate in a home, so we built the coach around it."

Other interesting survey results? Seventy-eight percent of owners said they would prefer a computer desk and a recliner opposite the sofa — yet roughly 96 percent of the coaches produced by Monaco had two sofas. "So now you'll see that the Dynasty does not have two sofas," Snell pointed out. "They didn't want a TV that they had to turn their head to see, so the TV is directly across from the sofa. Women didn't want to look at a wall when using the sink — they wanted to look outside — so we added a window there. And no one produces a round (dining) table, but our owners wanted one, because when you're seated next to someone in a booth, you have to turn your head to talk to them."

So, you guessed it, the Dynasty has a round dining table, which is also removable — another customer request.

PLEASURE-WAY

Pleasure-Way appears to be on a relentless pursuit of the ultimate small motorhome, and the all-new Prestige is further evidence that the company has no intention of resting on its laurels. Following the Pursuit model launched just last year, the Prestige is a 22-foot Class C motorhome built on the Ford E-350 chassis with some pretty unusual features. "What we've done is create a



Pleasure-Way's Prestige is a compact Class C built on the Ford E-350 chassis. Its modern interior is highlighted by a large rear bath area complete with a Corian-lined shower.

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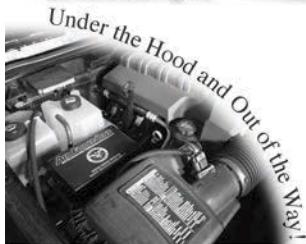
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really large, 32-inch-wide rear bathroom with a stand-up shower that's completely wrapped in Corian," said Pleasure-Way's Dean Rumpel. "There isn't a bathroom like it in anything of this size. We also developed a new power sofa that mechanically lays down into a queen-size bed at the push of a button. That's one of the firsts as well. Between the two, they give us a bigger front living room area and a larger bathroom, all within the 22-foot footprint."

Rumpel also points to the coach's construction as another unique feature. "We bond all the fiberglass to the steel frame; there are no screws in the exterior of the body holding anything together. So the front cap and rear cap overlap the roof, and the roof overlaps the side walls." The Prestige retails for \$110,000, fully loaded with no options. "It has every conceivable option you could want," Rumpel concluded.

WINNEBAGO INDUSTRIES

Winnebago debuted what could be the next big thing in RV paint schemes: matte finish paint. Similar to what you'll find on high-end automobiles like BMW and Mercedes, the finish looks striking, and has some side benefits, according to Scott Degnan, vice president of sales and product management for Winnebago Industries. "We build as good of a side wall as anyone, but with a gloss finish you will always see a little bit of ripple. All that disappears with this new finish. We also went with a white powder-coated wheel, and did a frosted look on the windows as well. The response has been 100 percent 'Wow!' It's getting a lot of attention." Although Degnan could not



Owing to the current trend in high-end automobiles, Winnebago Industries displayed its Itasca Ellipse in a matte-finish paint scheme, and finished the look with frosted windows and white wheels.

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WHAT'S NEW 2014

provide confirmation at press time, he believes the matte-finish package will add an extra \$8,000-\$10,000 to the price of the Ellipse and its sister product, the Winnebago Tour. "It's a little longer process and requires more attention to detail," he says. "But with it, you're also getting fully painted awning covers and rear ladder." Winnebago also went to 3M for a matte finish to cover the front cap, which is usually finished in a high gloss. "We think we can set a new bar for the industry and move forward with this process."

In other news, Winnebago seeks to expand on its Touring Coach line (which up until now consisted solely of the Sprinter-based Era) with the new Travato, based on the Ram ProMaster (the Fiat Ducato in Europe). "Even though we see this as a small market, we also see it as an emerging one," said Degnan. He sees fuel economy as being one driving force, but also sites the most recent GoRVing campaigns, featuring sports families. "The Touring Coach products are perfect for something like that," he says. "They're



The Itasca Ellipse comes in two 42-foot floorplans. Shown here is the 42QD.

easy to drive, and easy to park."

And easier to afford, too, as Degnan predicts the gas-powered Travato will be priced some \$20,000-\$30,000 less than the diesel-powered Era. "In Europe, the Ducato chassis is all you see," Degnan continued. "So we're seeing a move to it,

as well. We love our Sprinter business and will continue to grow it, but we see (the Travato) as another big piece."

With new products, new thinking and a multitude of options, the motorhome industry truly offers something for everyone in 2014. ♦

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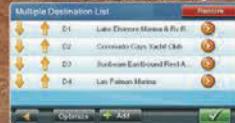
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SEELEVEL II TANK MONITOR

GARNET INSTRUMENTS USES EXTERNAL SENSORS AND HIGH-GRADE ELECTRONICS TO ELIMINATE ERRONEOUS READINGS

by BILL AND JENN GEHR

Holding tanks make it possible to experience true self-containment in any motorhome, but keeping track of the content level can be frustrating. The vast majority of holding tank gauges leave a lot to be desired. Inaccurate monitoring can usually be traced to probes that are susceptible to corrosion and a build-up of residue caused by poor cleaning habits. These probes are usually screwed into the side of the tank and end up sensing moisture inside the tank walls even after the contents have been emptied. The result leaves owners in the dark when it comes to knowing the true content levels and when it's time to empty the gray and black tanks. Garnet Technologies takes a different approach to sensor placement and markets the SeeLevel II Tank Monitor System that ties in solid-state electronics and provides accurate measurements without being affected by probe fouling.

The key to SeeLevel's accurate monitoring is a spe-

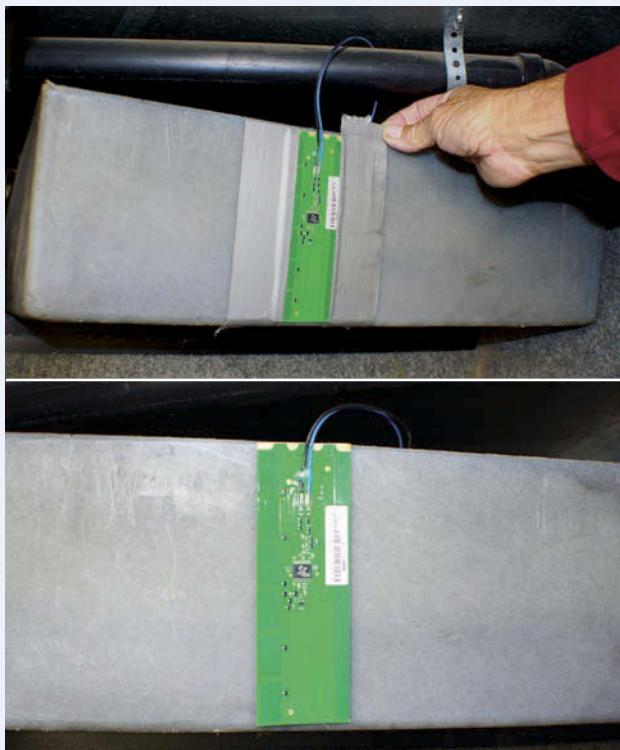
cially designed inductive sensing strip that is mounted to the side of any ABS or polyethylene holding tank. Water/waste level is read through the tank wall and processed using patented digital techniques that are pre-programmed into the sender microprocessor. When the sender transmits the water/waste level information to the display, it sends a digital code that has built-in error detection. The sender also transmits diagnostic information about its operation. This information can be used to determine if there is a buildup of sludge on the inside of the tank, or if the sender is delaminating from the side of the tank.

Information from the sender panels is transmitted through a simple two-wire system and is displayed on the monitor in percentage of full in a three digit, LED window. When the selector button for a particular tank is pressed, the display powers up and reads the level for



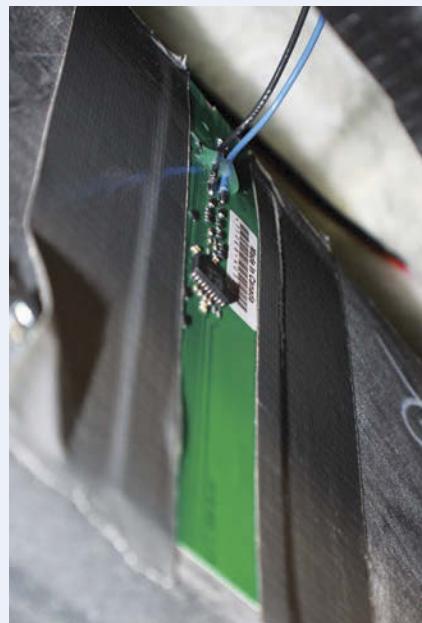
The SeeLevel tank monitor system is a very simple, two-wire system that comes with an easy-to-read LED display and multiple electric senders.

The kit comes with 12-inch senders that are used on 13-inch or taller tanks. A smaller sender, which is shown on the left, can be ordered for use on shallower tanks.



For testing purposes, attach the sender to the desired location on the tank using duct tape before permanently mounting.

Once you are certain the SeeLevel is working properly, remove the duct tape and permanently adhere the sender into position.



Some tanks will be difficult to access, which makes it even more important to use duct tape to hold the sender in place to verify operation before permanently mounting.

that tank. The display will show the level for about five seconds and then shut down automatically. If another button is pressed before the display shuts down, the level for the respective tank will immediately be shown. If the same button is pressed twice, the display will continue to show updated levels in that particular tank for five minutes — a valuable feature when filling a tank with water for flushing.

The digital nature of the tank level sensing technology and the diagnostic attributes make it almost impossible for the system to indicate an incorrect water/waste level. In the unlikely event an error was to occur, the user can discover the issue using SeeLevel's diagnostic information.

The toughest part of the installation will be gaining access to the water and gray/black holding tanks. Fortunately, the test motorhome used to install the system allowed easy access to all three tanks.

Before starting the installation, it's best to flush out the gray and black holding tanks thoroughly so that accurate baselines can be determined at the calibration stage of the process. Using a tank-flushing device, like the No Fuss Flush, is the best way to clean out the black tank. Consider attaching a clear fitting between the termination pipe and dump hose so you can monitor when the tanks are clean. And if the tanks have been in service for

a while, it might be wise to use a commercial RV tank cleaner to make sure any sludge is removed. In some cases, you might have to let the water and cleaner stand in the tank(s) for a few days so all the soap scum, oils, tissue and waste are broken down. Once this is done, drain the tank(s) completely before proceeding with the installation.

Determining the location for the senders is the most important task before installing the system. The sender will be attached to the side or end of each tank. Most water tanks require the sender to be installed 1 inch above the bottom of the tank because the pump port does not allow for the water to drain completely. When determining a location for the sender mounting location, make sure that there are no metal structures nearby.

Locations for the senders will be influenced when in close proximity of ferrous metal brackets or frame components. Garnet recommends a minimum of 2-inches clearance from any metal that may be lying across the face of the sender board after mounting on the holding tank. Covering the metal with a rubberized material might help if the clearance is compromised. Likewise, Garnet recommends staying well away from large metal components, including metal plates or covers.

If the tanks are exposed to the ele-



With the sender mounted permanently to the side of the tank, make sure the blue and black wires do not run across the face of the sender.

ments (where there is no belly pan), protection of the sender boards from road spray and debris is necessary. Garnet recommends the use of a body undercoat made of tar-based material, which will cling well to the sender boards and protect them from water and debris. Products like 3M's Rubberized Undercoat, are available at most auto parts stores. Make sure you

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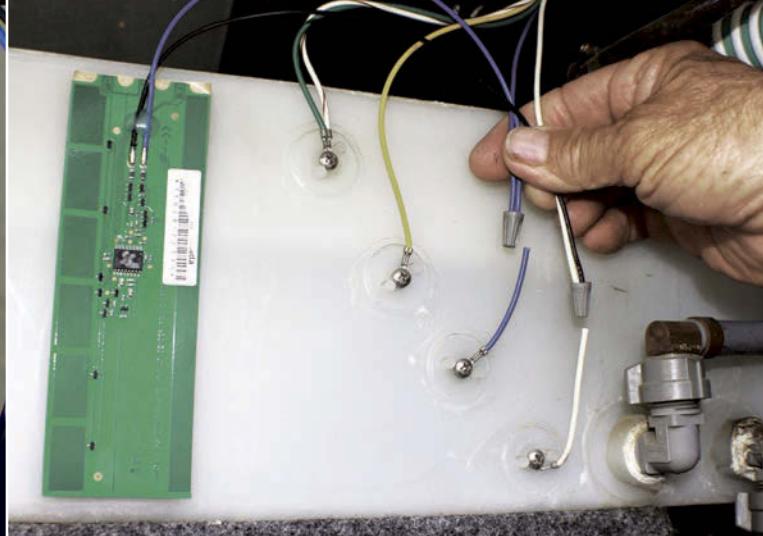
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Garnet Technologies makes the senders easy to calibrate by simply cutting the appropriate tab. Using a black felt pen, mark the gray and black tank senders before cutting the tabs to avoid confusion during installation.



The sender is attached permanently to the water tank and wired to the blue and white wires that run to the display.

do not apply the undercoat until the install is complete and tested for proper operation; removing the undercoat is very tedious and messy.

Once the correct sender is determined for each tank, it will need to be programmed by cutting the appropriate tab at the top of each strip for the respective tank. For example, to make the sender work properly for the gray tank, you'll simply cut the "GRY" tab at the top of the sender strip; "BLK" will be cut for the black tank. The sender defaults to the freshwater tank, so no cutting is needed when used for this application.

If the tank is taller than 13 inches, two senders will need to be stacked. If this is the case, the tab labeled "TOP" will have to be cut on the sender strip that's used at the top. For the freshwater tank, there are no cuts made to any of the tabs on the bottom sender. However, the tabs for the respective black and gray tanks will have to be cut on each sender. The unit's instructions have complete details about this seemingly confusing procedure.

Before mounting the sender permanently, position it against the tank and outline with a felt-tip marker. Use duct tape to hold it in place temporarily, making sure there are no air gaps on the sides of the senders. This will allow for a test run on the system to make sure the chosen locations for the sensors are producing the correct values on the monitor. Most tanks have a smooth surface, however, the use of 220-grit sandpaper will help smooth out any rough areas.

The next step is to wire the system.



Use a clear elbow at the end of the sewer hose to monitor the cleaning/flushing of the holding tanks. Clean tank side walls will ensure accurate results.

First, connect all sending unit black wires together and all blue wires together. Find the white wire (the ground wire used in almost all factory monitors) and one other color wire from the existing system (going to old probes) and connect the black wires to the white and the blue wires to the other. Once this is done, make sure the wires are routed away from each sender; secure them with cable ties or cable clamps. This will prevent inductive signal interference and protect the wires from

breaking over time.

Next, find a suitable location for the new monitor panel. If the monitor is the same size as your original, it can be installed in that location. If the display is smaller or larger and a new hole is needed, mount the monitor near the original to simplify wire routing. Remove the old monitor to gain access to the wires coming from the holding tanks and find the white and selected color wire that are connected to the new senders. The white wire will be the ground for all senders and is connected to the black wire from the new monitor (and must be on the same ground plane); the blue (sender information wire) connects to the selected color wire going to the old unit. The SeeLevel display requires 12-volt DC power. The red, 18-gauge wire from the display can be attached to the power source running to the original monitor.

SeeLevel includes a pump switch as part of the monitor; however, the switch is only designed to carry a maximum of 6 amps of current. If you have a high output water pump that draws more than 6 amps, you will need to use the original pump switch in the existing monitor panel. Another option is to install a Bosch-type relay in the circuit, which makes it possible to connect to the pump switch in the SeeLevel monitor.

The monitor display will need to be calibrated using precise, step-by-step instructions that are provided to program the number of senders for each tank. Once completed, fill each tank to about ¼ full and take a reading from the monitor; each

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Garnet Technologies has made connecting to the display a simple three-wire hookup. Connecting a positive, negative and sender wire is all that's required.



After the SeeLevel system has been installed, add water to either the gray or black tank and press a button on the display for the percentage reading. In this case, the black tank is showing 50 percent full.

tank should display roughly 25 percent. If any error codes are displayed, consult the owner's manual for specific instructions.

After complete testing and calibration, remove the duct tape, clean the tank location with alcohol or acetone, peel the protective sticker from the 3M tape on the back of the sender and install it inside the outlined location of the appropriate tank; repeat the process for each tank.

The SeeLevel installation can run from easy to difficult, depending on the specific location of the individual tanks and gymnastics needed to gain access to each tank. Water tanks can be hidden behind false walls as well as in the underbelly of the motorhome. Generally, holding tanks are side-by-side, but they may be well hidden. Just be sure to plan for patience and extra time. Since access was

easy in the test motorhome, the installation and calibration ran just a little more than two hours.

The old adage is true: If it's worth having, it's worth working for. Considering the consistent reliability of the SeeLevel and the accuracy in displaying the true levels of each holding and water tank, the installation time and potential difficulty with access is certainly worth the effort. SeeLevel offers different models; the most extensive unit also includes several additional features as well as temperature readings and alarms.

Tested here was the basic SeeLevel II System, Model 709-P3, which retails for \$235 and comes with a one-year limited warranty. ♦

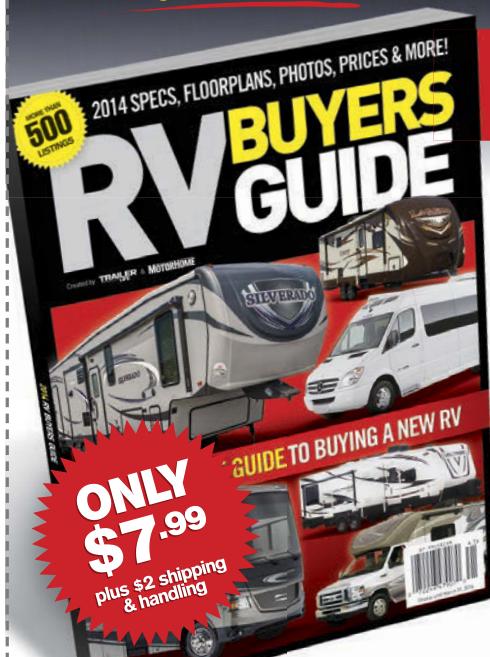
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REFRIGERATOR AIRFLOW

My refrigerator lacked air circulation inside, so I added a fan. It's a 12-volt DC computer fan that is 3¼-inches square. These fans can be found with .12- to .15-amp draw, which amounts to about 3 amp hours per day. It's very good for dry campers. I mounted the fan to a piece of aluminum bent in a "U" and then attached the unit to the inside of the refrigerator with hook-and-loop fastener. I placed it on top of the light, where it doesn't take up a lot of space, and positioned it forward to allow air to enter the backside. I connected the fan to the refrigerator light wiring. The fan only runs when the refrigerator is in use. I added a switch to turn the fan off. Now I have good air circulation with no batteries to replace.

[Editor's note: Modifying the refrigerator's electrical system could void its warranty.]

GEORGE DEITRICH | WESTMINSTER, COLO.

▼ LIGHTING THE WAY



We often return to our RV after dark, and fumbling for the light switch is a nuisance, even if we have a flashlight. We tried leaving a light on, but it attracts flying insects, and tends to deplete our batteries when boondocking. The obvious answer was a motion-activated light. We looked

at several, both battery operated and plug-in, and settled on a motion-activated light that is powered by AA batteries. It is made to mount under a kitchen cabinet, and the motion detector can be adjusted to point straight down or out horizontally or anywhere in between. We put one on the ceiling by the door, with the sensor pointed down at a 45-degree angle, so that the light goes on when the door opens. Since the light came in a two-pack (Costco, item #580978 for \$20) we put the second one outside the sleeping area add illumination the area for those night-time jaunts to the bathroom or refrigerator; be sure not to mount it too close to the bed or it will light up whenever you roll over.

FRANK WINTER | MANALAPAN, N.J.

SAFER KNIFE HOLDER ▼



We needed a place to store our knives and grater that would keep them sharp and our fingers safe from cuts. We fashioned custom holders and attached them securely to the side wall of our slideout pantry. They are out of the way and very accessible. When the pantry is secured, and the door is closed for travel, there is no way the knives or grater can escape. We love it.

KLAUS AND MARIE RAU | POST FALLS, IDAHO ♦

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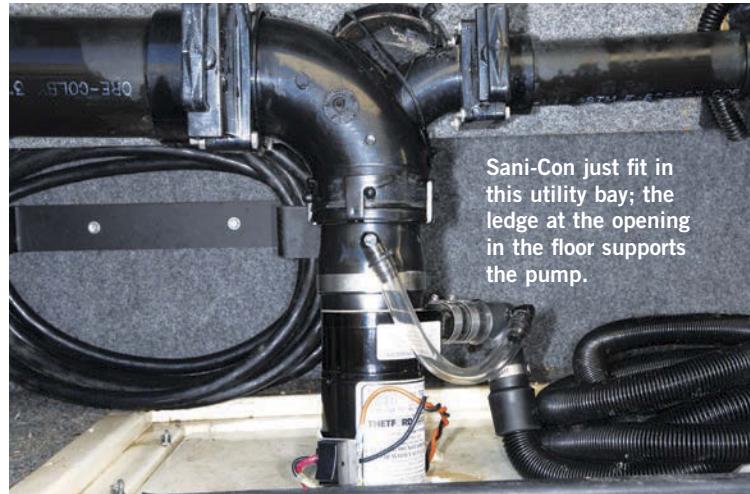
Thetford's Sani-Con macerator system liquefies waste and pumps holding tank contents through a convenient 1-inch flexible hose, even uphill and over long distances

The great adventure of RVing can sometimes be overshadowed by situations that are less than fun when things don't go exactly as planned. Take dumping of the holding tanks, for example. Few people will argue that this chore is a least favorite RV activity. Let's face it, handling cumbersome 3-inch dump hoses and connectors can be a dirty job.

An alternative to hooking up a standard dump hose and wrestling with the connections to a dump station, which may be too far away or require an aftermarket apparatus to manage slope and flow problems, is Thetford's Sani-Con macerator system. In simple terms, the Sani-Con grinds black waste to a liquefied consistency and pumps the contents into the dump station, smoothly and cleanly. There are three models offered, two for permanent mounting and one portable for additional versatility. We took a look at the Twist-On Sani-Con that's intended to be permanently mounted.

The Twist-On Sani-Con is comprised of materials best suited for this sort of application. A strong, well-finished, sealed metal housing contains the motor and all moving hardware necessary for grinding and pumping waste. All of the macerator components terminate into a plastic bayonet-type mounting point just like those found on your average every day sewer hose. Directly attached to the side of the motor is a switch box that's easy to access. Wiring is designed for permanent connection to the RV's 12-volt DC circuit.

As far as the actual installation goes, it's just a matter of connecting a couple of wires and twisting the motor assembly onto the receiving end of the termination pipe that extends past the dump valves. The Twist-On model is configured for a dump pipe that's housed inside a utility bay. When installing the Sani-Con, there must be at least 9½ inches between the end of the dump pipe with the bayonet fitting and the nearest obstruction. If adequate space is not provided, a Box Mount system can be used, which does



Sani-Con just fit in this utility bay; the ledge at the opening in the floor supports the pump.

the same thing as the Twist-On model, but has a different configuration. The motorhome we used to test the Sani-Con had just enough room to install the macerator and store the hose.

Wiring the macerator to the coach's 12-volt DC system was a fairly simple procedure, and it's best to connect directly to the battery bank. Some owners might be tempted to connect to local wires found in the utility bay, but the macerator pump requires 12-gauge wire for runs shorter than 20 feet and 10

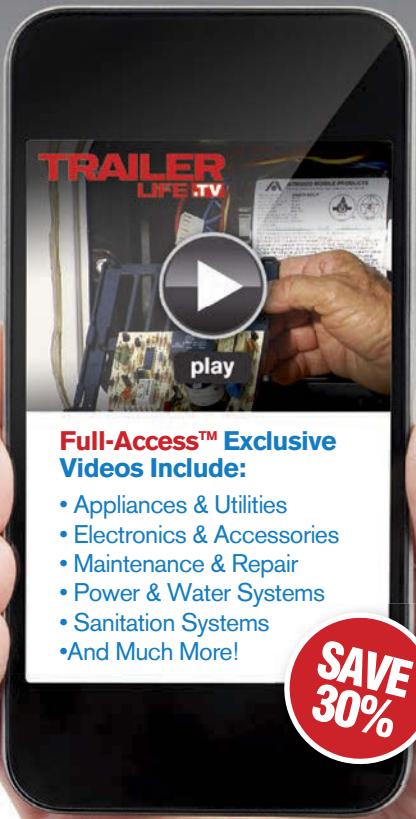
gauge for longer runs. The factory wiring to the utility bay may not be heavy enough to handle the current. The positive wire must be protected by the 20-amp circuit breaker provided in the kit. Once wiring is complete and the pump locked on to the drainpipe, the system is ready to use. Dumping



Bypass hose allows gray water to flow freely without the use of the pump.

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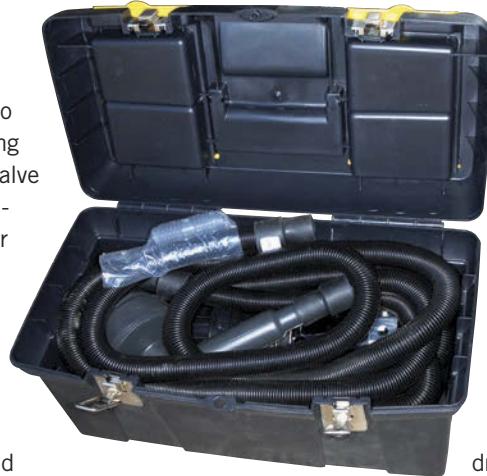
HANDS-ON



Stair-stepped nozzle makes it easy to connect to dump station opening. Below: Portable kit has its own storage box.

is now simply a matter of stretching the Sani-Con hose to the sewer, pulling the respective valve handle and turning on the power switch.

Overall performance of Thetford's Twist-On Sani-Con macerator is quite good and certainly convenient. The build quality is excellent and the components are packaged quite well. Included in the kit is a very flexible 1-inch-diameter hose that can stretch to 21 feet from its compressed 7-foot state. The hose remains attached to the pump and there is a bypass built into the housing so that gray water can flow freely without the use of the motor. At the end of the hose is an ergonomic handle with a stair-stepped nozzle that will fit into just about any dump station; a threaded fitting allows connection of additional hoses. The system needs a 1-inch diameter hose to successfully fulfill the promise of operation up to 150 feet from a dump station and the ability for contents to flow smoothly up to 20 feet in elevation. A screw-on cap seals the nozzle to contain any residue when the hose is stored inside the compartment. The space savings when compared to a standard



3-inch sewer hose is dramatic.

It's important that foreign items are not put into the holding tanks. The pump is designed to handle waste and tissue; other items can plug up the system and even damage the motor. Also, the motor cannot be run dry. There is a distinct change in motor sound

after the contents are emptied; owners will quickly recognize this sound variance and must turn the motor off immediately.

About the only significant differences noticed between using the Sani-Con and a standard type hose was the dump time. It takes longer to discharge the contents from the tank because the Sani-Con must grind the waste and pump the liquefied matter into the sewer. But the convenience of dumping holding tanks into household sewer cleanouts and elevated dump stations, without having to manually handle the dump hose to facilitate adequate flow, is a big selling point for retiring the ol' 3-inch sewer hose. The Twist-On Sani-Con sells for \$399 at Camping World and the retail/Internet sources.

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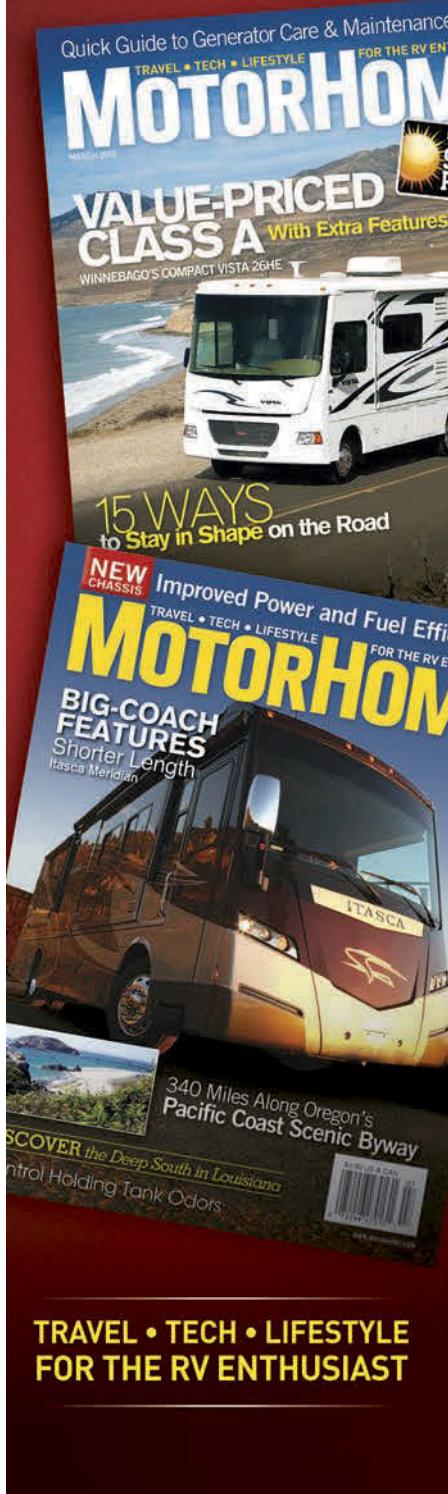
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GCR26437 - 0913

Faulty Fuel Gauge

My 1996 Coachmen Santara has a faulty fuel gauge. It's pegged over full whether the ignition is on or off. I can't find anyone who can help me or is willing to replace the gauge. I have to get this fixed. Please help.

**GARY QUACKENBUSH
TILLAMOOK, ORE.**

A "pegged" fuel gauge is usually caused by a bad sender or an open circuit, such as a broken wire or poor connection. I would start by looking underneath the coach to see if a wire was snagged or rubbed through as it makes its way from the gas tank sending unit to the dash. It runs along the inside of the frame rails in a wire loom.

Also check for grounding of the gas tank. You can run a temporary ground wire with alligator clips (must contact clean, bare metal on the tank and chassis). Your coach should be on a Ford E-series chassis, so in the event that you need parts, they should be available from a Ford dealer.

TIRE SCRUBBING CLASS C

I have a 2001 Class C coach on a Ford E-450 chassis. Every 30,000 to 40,000 miles, the tread on the right rear tires gets scrubbed off, while the tires on the left rear axle and front axle show normal wear. The vehicle has 129,000 miles, and hasn't been in an accident or driven off-road. Inflation is kept at 70 psi.

I had the alignment checked at shops that work on heavy-duty trucks and all alignment specs were correct. The original tires, changed out at 60,000 miles, didn't show this wear. But the last two sets went bald in an even pattern around the circumference of the right-side tires. The outside dual seems to wear faster than the inside. The last technician had the rear axle jacked up and, with the vehicle idling in drive, checked both sides for wobble or alignment problems, but none were detected. Any ideas?

DAVID SHANAHAN | DURANGO, COLO.

This is quite unusual, but I love a challenge! I assume that all of the tires on the drive axle are the exact same size and brand/model of tire. If not, that could cause the problem, as tires may vary slightly in actual rolling diameter and greatly accelerate wear if mismatched on an axle. Also, different brands, models, tread styles and rubber compounds wear at different rates. You could improve things if you begin a tire-rotation schedule, at least between the drive tires to maximize the set.

You mentioned having checked the alignment, but did not say whether or not four-wheel alignment was performed. I suspect that you may have a "dog-tracking coach," which could result from the rear axle not being square with the centerline of the chassis. The rear axle housing may also be slightly bent. Either condition would result in uneven tire wear.

You may want to have a technician

at a heavy truck shop check to make sure that the tires are also running parallel, in other words, running true from side-to-side. This same shop should also be able to perform an inspection to verify that the axle isn't bent using laser-equipped instruments. This process can be expensive, however, as the shop may need to remove the axles and differential carrier to enable inspection of the axle bore alignments, but this process could help answer any axle alignment questions. One more distinct possibility is that one tire had less inflation pressure for a significant period of time. When one tire in a dual pair is underinflated, it has a smaller effective rolling diameter and causes it to be skidded or dragged more during cornering and turns.

It's also possible that your motorhome is extra heavy on that side and in the back corner. Not all motorhomes are built in exact balance side to side. Weigh the motorhome side to side, with one set of tires on a certified scale with a flat apron so the coach isn't significantly tilted with one set of tires on the scale and one on the nearby pavement. Scales typically have segments to measure a commercial truck's tractor and trailer separately. Compare the weight ticket figures to determine if a side-to-side weight imbalance exists. Combined with the right-side weight shift that can occur when driving on crowned roads, extra weight in the back corner could be aggravating the tire wear situation.

STICKING CALIPER PISTONS HAVE BEEN A PROBLEM SUBJECT TO RECALLS WITH SEVERAL MOTORHOME CHASSIS, AND WILL HEAT THE BRAKE FLUID ENOUGH TO CAUSE BOILING, EVEN WITH FRESH FLUID.



IGNITION SWITCH FAILURES TIP

This is regarding "Ignition Switch Failures" in the January issue. If the coach is built on a Workhorse chassis, there have been many ignition switch failures on this unit; not enough failures for it to be considered for a recall, but enough that Workhorse introduced a heavy-duty upgraded ignition switch for these units. I had two failures in my 2001 R-Vision before learning of the upgrade. The coachbuilder put too much electrical load on the ignition circuit and overloaded it. It's been two years now without a problem. Try Work-

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GFCI RECEPTACLES PROTECT RVERS FROM SHOCK

National Electric Code requires that ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) receptacles be installed wherever people are vulnerable to severe electrical shocks. If your motorhome has one or more receptacles that require replacement, Hubbell Marine and Hubbell/Wirecon offer advanced GFCI receptacles that comply with Underwriter Laboratories' 943 mandate. Should a defective tool, appliance or power cord cause a ground fault, the GFCI opens the circuit. With power interrupted, the duration of electrical current flow is limited. Once tripped, the receptacle is reset with the touch of a button. If for any reason GFCI protection is disrupted, a red LED flashes to alert the user, a feature not available on comparable products, according to the company. These GFCI receptacles can be mounted on any standard 2-1/2-inch-deep box. Thanks to a feed-through feature, the receptacle and any other receptacles located downstream on the same circuit gain ground fault protection. Rated for 15 and 20 amps, they come in various colors. Hubbell Marine, 475-882-4838, www.hubbell-marine.com



horse part No. W8002085.

ROBERT WILLIAMSON | CANTRALL, ILL.

The kit you mentioned should fix the problem, and is a good way to go, although it will cost considerably more than doing it the way I described. This kit offers two relay switches and a new ignition switch to relieve the load on the ignition circuit, renew terminals that have been damaged at the ignition switch and redirect electrical flow to eliminate the overload condition. The kit fits all P32-series Workhorse chassis coaches but is most beneficial on those motorhomes in which the body builder has not used stud B of the fuse box electrical supply.

EXTRA FUEL CAPACITY COMMENT

In regard to Donald Tyson's letter ("Sprinter Extra Fuel Capacity," January), I have a 2007 Winnebago View on a Sprinter chassis. In the past five years, I've averaged 18 mpg and have gotten as high as 20 mpg. I don't know why Tyson is only seeing 10-12 mpg on his Sprinter, unless he is overloading his unit, towing something heavy or driving 80 mph. The Sprinter's sweet spot is 55-60 mph, so that's as fast as I ever go.

TIM TAYLOR | SIXES, ORE.

It seems like you are getting just about the best fuel mileage out of yours that I've heard, while Tyson is getting closer to the low end of the mpg spectrum for these motorhomes. Certainly, how fast you drive is the major factor in fuel economy.

POWER AWNING PROBLEMS

I have a 2010 Tiffin with a Dometic WeatherPro power awning and wind sensor. At times, it will automatically retract five minutes to several hours after extension, even though there is no wind. I had an RV shop check the system, but they couldn't find anything that would cause this. They did clean the wind sensor, although this did not seem to solve the problem. Any ideas?

MIKE DUGGAN | PLANO, TEXAS

We contacted Dometic technical support on your behalf. The problem you're experiencing isn't common, but Dometic is aware of it. It is typically caused by a controlled voltage issue (where power to the awning's control unit is fluctuating), radio frequency interference from adjacent rigs or buildings, or AC voltage current ripples crossing into the DC line where you're plugged in, commonly called "dirty voltage." One way to isolate the problem is to have a technician turn off all power to the coach, disconnect the battery (or batteries), then run a separate 12-volt DC source to the awning control unit. If it still does not function properly, there could be a broken wire/short in the awning's control unit (which should be evident when the unit is inspected), or there could be a problem in the harness going from the control box to the wind sensor. If the unit functions properly on separate 12-volt DC power, there could be a break or some other problem in the wiring for the coach itself. Also, if the sensor detects less than 10.5 volts, it

will automatically retract the awning and won't deploy it again until voltage is higher than this threshold. Another cause could be ignition power to the control unit's pink wire. If there is power to this wire when the coach is stationary, it will cause the unit to retract and won't allow it to deploy again because the unit "thinks" the vehicle is in motion. Finally, make sure the pink wire is properly secured and is not grounded.

SOLAR DINGHY CHARGING COMMENT

I read with interest the "Solar Dinghy Charging" letter in the January issue. We also have a Class C motorhome and tow a 2008 Saturn. Our first long trip towing resulted in the battery in our Saturn constantly dying. I called the dealership and everyone else I could think of to fix the problem. They all said to follow the owner's manual for towing. Once we got home, my husband went to the dealership and they printed up instructions to pull the IGN fuse, which is not written in the manual. Now, once the car is ready to tow, we just pull that fuse and never have a problem. When you stop to refuel, and want to run the car, you'll have to put the fuse back in.

SUSAN CROSS | LUMBERTON, TEXAS

Thanks for your tip, which should reduce the rate of battery discharge. We recommend that anyone towing a dinghy vehicle use an auxiliary braking device, and even with the ignition fuse removed, the battery won't be able to keep up with a dinghy braking system that uses a considerable amount of power on a continued basis. This is why we recommend a charging line.

FUEL FILLING FOIBLES FIX

This is in response to John DeYoung's problem ("Fuel Filling Foibles") with his 2003 Dolphin in the January issue. I have a 2003 Dolphin LX and had the same problem as DeYoung.

I crawled under the coach and saw that the fuel tank has one inlet and two outlets. The one outlet on the driver's side has all the plumbing to get fuel to and from the generator and to the unit's engine. The other outlet, on the passenger side of the fuel tank, has a rubber cap and was loose. I repositioned it and tightened the clamp, but that didn't solve the leaking fuel problem.

Using a mirror, I saw that the fuel line



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to and from the generator was cracked. When the tank was too full, or the coach was leaning to the driver's side, fuel leaked out of the line. I also noticed the fuel leaked when the generator was running. I had to have the gas tank emptied, lowered and new hoses installed. Fuel line replacements should be done with hose designed for high-pressure fuel injection.

WILLIAM GENT | CULPEPER, VA.

Chassis manufacturers design the gas tanks so they can be used with a variety of floorplans, hence the fuel fittings on both sides. As the rubber gets old it begins to crack, so this is a good reminder for owners of older motorhomes to check and replace these vital hoses as needed. A good time to do this is when the coach is taken out of winter storage and prepared for the upcoming season.

FRONT-END STABILITY

I have a 1997 Dodge B-3500 van with a Wide One conversion. During the conversion (when they cut the vehicle in half and added 14 inches to its width) they lengthened the rear axle on the right rear and removed the stabilizer bar on the front end. Now, I sometimes hear noises coming from the front when turning or braking.

I have had a lot of upper ball joint and upper A-frame wear during the past 10 years, and I wonder if a motorhome stabilizer (anti-sway) bar would fit where the Dodge bar once did, but I can't find a mechanic who wants to work on my van, as it is too heavy for most lifts. Do you know of an RV mechanic who is knowledgeable on the subject of front-end modification? I also wonder if there is some way to take weight off the front, which is likely overloaded. Any ideas on the utilization of air bags?

BILL WEINGARD | CAVE CREEK, ARIZ.

I'm not a big fan of such modified vehicles because they often result in problems like you have described, and are not fully engineered for safety and durability. Clunking when turning and braking is often a result of worn control-arm shafts and bushings. The front end should be carefully inspected for wear and looseness. Installing air bags in the front end will not take weight off the suspension, except for reducing

load on the stock springs. You might be able to find an anti-sway bar from a Class A motorhome or delivery truck that is the right width, but it probably would be too stiff because it was designed to use on a heavier vehicle. There are several suppliers of anti-sway bars, including Addco (800-621-8916), Hellwig (813-769-2451), Roadmaster (800-669-9690) and Eric's RV (360-683-3696). You will need to determine mounting points, width and what diameter is needed.

BOILING BRAKES AND FUEL LEAKS

In the January issue, two letters hit home for me. The first is "Boiling Brake Fluid." While driving my 1989 National RV Dolphin (on a P-chassis) in heavy traffic, my brakes decided to go on vacation. I was able to gear down and get off the interstate to a backroad. Quick diagnosis showed brake fluid boiling out of the master cylinder. I had tools, and with help was able to bleed the brakes. After this scare, I did some research and found there was a problem with the disc brake pistons sticking on that model. I purchased new calipers for all four, as well as replacing the rubber lines and had no more issues.

Item two is "Fuel Filling Foibles." My coach would leak gasoline if I filled it completely. Also, if I ran the fill nozzle wide open, I often had spillage. Crawling under, I saw the large-diameter rubber hose going from the filler neck to the opening in the tank was cracked. After pricing this fuel line, I wanted to see what options I had. I went back under the coach with a tape measure and a length of stiff wire, which gave me a pattern. A local exhaust shop got me a pipe bent to match the curves, then a 2-foot section of hose and some clamps put a stop to the leaking. You must use a fuel-rated hose, and it's expensive.

ALLAN THAXTON | DOUGLASVILLE, GA.

Sticking caliper pistons have been a problem subject to recalls with several motorhome chassis, and will heat the brake fluid enough to cause boiling, even with fresh fluid. When coaches sit idle for long periods, especially in damp conditions, the calipers are more subject to sticking. Make sure the calipers are checked for dragging, corrosion and pad wear when taking a coach out of storage and during

routine services. With a wheel jacked up, if it resists turning by hand more than normal, it's a tip off of possible sticking.

Deterioration of fuel-filler hoses is another often overlooked consideration, and replacement is not covered in most maintenance schedules. Therefore it's another item that owners have to keep in mind and check for, especially on vehicles more than 10 years old.

REUSABLE AIR FILTERS

What is your opinion on reusable air filters, such as AFE and K&N? These filters are cleaned and then oiled. I have an AFE filter in my 2005 Country Coach Inspire with a Cat C-9 engine. After a long trip with rain, snow and slush driving, there was a lot of dirt in the intake tube. I inspected the filter, and didn't see any holes or defects. I cleaned it, oiled the filter and reinstalled it.

AL WRIGHT | LAKESIDE, CALIF.

They are popular and I have used them. Stock dry filters have been known to block airflow when they become wet from rain and snow ingestion to the point that the engine shuts down. So, oiled elements should work better in these situations.

The manufacturers of these products claim performance gains over stock filters, and I know some engine-performance specialists who prefer them. I do not have any definitive way to compare their filtering ability to stock elements, although the improved shapes of some of the aftermarket units also contribute to potential performance gains. How thoroughly the filter is cleaned, and how much oil is applied has a great deal of effect on the filter performance. It is important to add just the right amount.

When you describe dirt particles in "the intake tube" we aren't sure if you mean before the air filter or after. If it is after, you might have a loose fitting that is allowing raw air into the intake, so all of the connections should be checked. If it is where the air comes in from outside, the grit is normal under adverse driving conditions. ♦

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Ask my long-suffering wife, and she'll tell you straight out that remembering things is not my forte. Which is why I find it kind of remarkable that I can clearly recall exactly what it was that first got me interested in motorhome travel.

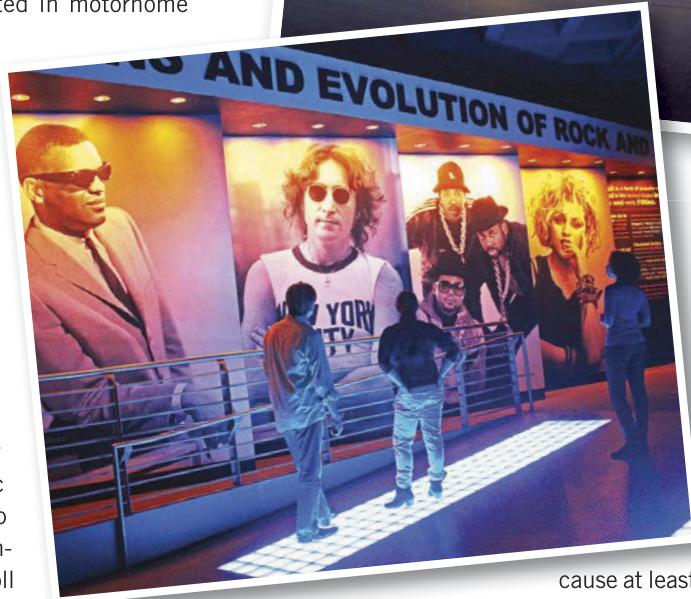
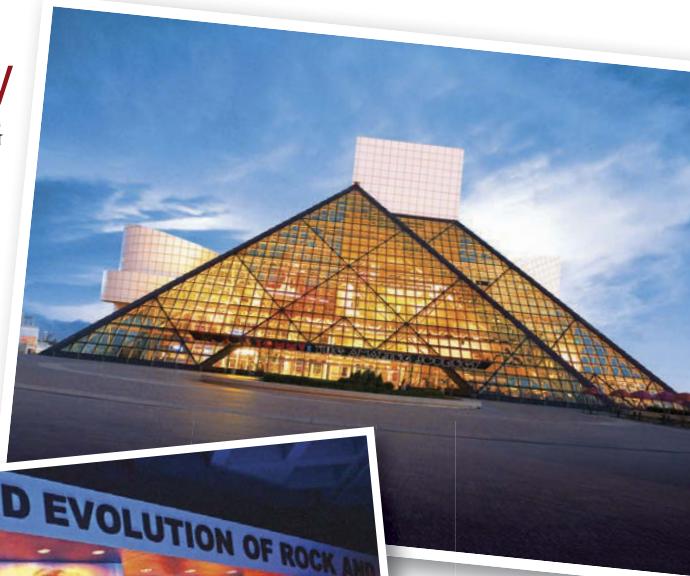
As it turns out, the seeds of my house-on-wheels obsession were sown decades ago by a popular rock 'n' roll song, namely The Who's *Going Mobile*. Something about Pete Townsend's lyrics in this prophetic ode to RV living — particularly the line that says, *"I can lay in bed, with only highway ahead,"* — just spoke to the wanderlust I heard calling my name even as a teenager.

If that connection sounds a bit tenuous, perhaps it bears mentioning that — like many of my fellow baby boomers — rock music has always served as a sort of soundtrack to my life. Which also helps explain why I was inextricably drawn to Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum (216-781-7625, www.rockhall.com) on a recent swing through northern Ohio. As for what happened inside this steel-and-glass pyramid on the shores of Lake Erie, well, let's just say it was one of the most enjoyable déjà vu experiences I've ever had.

Part of what makes the Rock Hall so compelling is that its layout follows a metaphorical "road" that leads visitors through the history of rock 'n' roll, from its early 20th-century roots in blues, gospel and country through its more recent offshoots like punk and heavy metal. Along the way, the museum's curators have made liberal use of their extensive multimedia collection, including rare video footage like a white-jumpsuited Elvis seen pacing around backstage and admitting he still gets nervous before every show.

As you might expect from a place that's all about the music, there are several listening stations that allow you to actually hear key pieces of this story. Like the influence pioneers such as Woody Guthrie and Big Mama Thornton had on the artists that followed in their footsteps including, respectively, Bob Dylan and Janis Joplin. There's even a way-fun listening booth dedicated to one-hit wonders, all-but-forgotten performers who put out a single chart-topping record and then quietly faded into obscurity.

While the artifacts on display here — from the battered



sign for Max Yasgur's dairy farm someone rescued from the aftermath of Woodstock to John Lennon's yellow *Sgt. Pepper's* band uniform — are sure to

cause at least a few "Oh wow!"

moments, the Rock Hall also addresses the music's importance as a cultural phenomenon. Which means the early preachers who warned their flocks about the dangers of the music they called "outrageous filth" are treated with just as much respect as electric guitar inventor Les Paul or Alan Freed, the Cleveland disc jockey who's credited with coining the phrase *rock 'n' roll*.

Ultimately though, what makes the Rock Hall so special is that, unlike some museums that can seem like soulless repositories of dusty relics, this place is as vibrantly alive as the music itself. Perhaps because, in some ways, what it really chronicles are the lives of its visitors.

In the end, what all the performers enshrined in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame wing upstairs have in common was a desire to push the boundaries of popular music, taking it — and, by extension us — to places no one had ever been before. Which, when you come to think of it, is exactly the same spirit that keeps all of us motorhome owners out here searching for the new and novel along The Road Ahead. ♦

Alan Rider has been wandering the backroads of America for more than four decades. Though he's never been big on traditional souvenirs, he's passionate about collecting memories of the remarkable people and unforgettable places he encounters along the way.

PHOTOS: ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM

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