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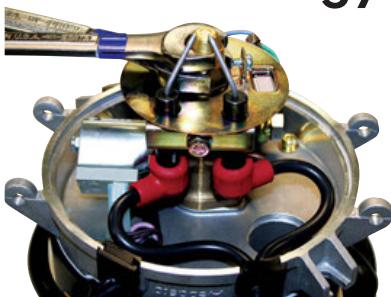
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**On The Cover:** Winnebago's Itasca Meridian 34B, which sports an extensive list of standard features, looks out over the ocean in Southern California. (See test on page 48.)  
**Photo by Rich Cox Photography.**

# CHASSIS TALK

**P**ull into any RV park, set up the coach, unfold the chairs and get ready to do some serious jaw-flappin'. Chances are strangers strolling through the campground will acknowledge your coach with, "nice motorhome, what's the chassis?" It's universal; owners want to know all about your drivetrain, how the coach rides and how fast you can get up a grade, pulling a dinghy, of course.

The first part of your response will probably be something like, "it's a diesel with a 350-HP Cummins," or "Gasser on a Ford chassis, V-10 engine." From there you'll talk about any modifications you've made to increase horsepower, followed by suspension features and how the coach handles on open roads. Eventually you'll get around to the interior, which is ironic, since we spend many more hours living inside the coach compared to time behind the wheel — at least I hope that's the case.

When it comes to discussions about chassis, there's never been more to talk about. And if you want to delve into the near future, the field expands, especially now that the motorhome industry is experiencing a resurgence in sales. Former staffer Bruce Hampson, who now resides in Elkhart, Ind., the heart of the RV industry, takes us on a tour of the chassis that are here today and ones that will be on the scene shortly (see "Chassis Choices," page 52). The field is exciting, and more extensive now that the industry is becoming influenced by the European coach and chassis community.

The Sprinter chassis, first brought to the U.S. under the Dodge nameplate and now marketed exclusively by Mercedes-Benz, changed the paradigm for building fuel-efficient motorhomes throughout all the classes. At one time our campfire conversations would become lively when someone claimed to get 10 MPG. The Sprinter chassis made believers out of us when it achieved closer to 18 MPG.

Years ago, my wife, Lynne, and I spent 10 days touring Europe in



an 18-foot Hymer Class A on a Fiat chassis. Inside, the rig offered surprising room for such a short coach; the bed was one of the most comfortable we've ever slept on, although the late night saunas in campgrounds might have had something to do with our ability to sleep so soundly. Driving the Hymer required a different mindset; in the U.S. we're used to comparatively responsive chassis that actually accelerate when the throttle was pressed, though not at neck-breaking speeds. We remember going down the road happily in our Hymer at a much slower pace and enjoying the low-stress adventure.

Nevertheless, technology has forged ahead, and the diminutive chassis from Europe are pretty darn spirited, and capable of handling much more weight and length. Case in point is the Winnebago Via, introduced four years ago. Continuing the trend, Hymer recently announced it will build coaches in the U.S. in the near future.

The core chassis used for most coaches will continue to come from Freightliner, Spartan, Ford and Chevy, although Detroit will be making some big changes in the Class C chassis arena. Looks like lightweight and improved fuel economy will be focal points as Ford phases out the E-series chassis for the new Transit and Dodge teams up with Fiat to build its Ram ProMaster.

Spartan is straying from its roots with new gas-powered Class A chassis that cater to rigs at opposite ends of the spectrum. The Extol, powered by an 8.8-liter big block from Power Solutions International, will handle up to 28,000 pounds, while the Revel will be slated for smaller rigs up to 14,000 pounds.

I'm sure there's more to come. Stay tuned. ♦

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## WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE EXTERIOR ENTERTAINMENT CENTERS AND OUTDOOR KITCHENS NOW OFFERED WITH MANY MOTORHOMES? LIKE OR DISLIKE?

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

### IDEAL FOR SPORTS

In our opinion, an exterior TV and music system are a must-have. On weekends when we camp, we enjoy watching the St. Louis Cardinals and NASCAR races. Those are three- and four-hour-long events and we love sitting outside instead of being cooped up in the RV. And when friends join us for a visit or we're just tinkering around at the campsite, we like music in the background. When traveling to NASCAR races, we enjoy sitting outside to watch pre-race programs. It's entertaining to have neighboring campers stop by to visit or to check the weather if they don't have a TV in their unit.

**JANET BROWN AND TRAVIS LIVERETT | QUINCY, ILL.**

### NO APPEAL FOR US

My experience with outdoor entertainment centers is that the components are of a lesser quality and lack good sound. We have one on our Winnebago Adventurer and hardly ever use it. We opt to take our portable, rechargeable Bose SoundLink speaker and stream our audio of choice with our iPad.

As for outdoor kitchens, from visiting RV shows I can see they are quite the craze. We love to entertain and cook outdoors but an outdoor kitchen doesn't appeal to us. The dorm-style refrigerator doesn't have much room and it has no provisions for dry camping since AC power is needed to keep the contents cold. Most of the sinks we've seen look like those offered in pop-up campers years ago. Probably the biggest reason is I could not imagine carrying two can openers, spatulas, pots, pans, etc. If you only carry one, where would you put it? Inside? Outside? Move it back and forth? No thanks.

**GENE MARTEL | WASHINGTON, N.J.**

### WANT TO WATCH OUTSIDE

To the reader who in the April P.O. Box said "nothing is more ridiculous than placing a TV in the basement storage area," you may not like it but we love it. We enjoy sitting outside and listening to music or watching our favorite TV program. We keep the volume low and don't disturb our neighbors. Our first RV trip was to the Florida Keys in the month of December. We couldn't wait to escape our cold weather and sit outside in the warm breeze and watch TV. Many people gather

with other campers around the outside entertainment areas.

**LYNN CRIST | INDIANAPOLIS, IND.**

### LIMITS STORAGE

I see no reason to put a TV outside; it just disturbs the neighbors. Leave the TV and the kitchen inside where they belong. Having these things outside decreases storage space. For those of us who RV full time, or soon will be, storage is of primo importance. Maybe an outdoor grill, but anything else is a waste of valuable space.

**TERRY AND LYNN NEUMANN | VIA EMAIL**

### JUST THE MUSIC

I don't think we've watched TV outside our RV more than three times in 15 years of camping. We do, however, enjoy our CD player. I like the small entertainment centers that include a CD player, radio, electrical outlets and speakers. We also have a cable jack and an electrical outlet in the side patio compartment just in case we have an occasion to watch TV outside. We like our cooking done inside but we also carry a nice grill along for summertime occasions.

RVing is a lifestyle without bounds and there are as many different layouts as there are enthusiasts. This topic is another example of how diverse we are as a group.

**DREW AND LAURIE MUELLER | MARTINEZ, CALIF.**

### AVOID THE COMPLICATIONS

Having just purchased our first motorhome, we are having fun learning as we travel throughout our great country. We have noticed in our travels that when the newer RVs near us have entertainment centers on the outside it disrupts our peace with noise levels that would be better observed inside.

As for the kitchen on the outside, we prefer to cook inside or use the fire ring, thus feeling like we are really camping outdoors. In both cases we decided that all the extra bells and whistles just mean there's more to go wrong, more maintenance and a more complicated lifestyle while traveling. We may not have all the latest things in our used coach, but we have fun. If we wanted more luxuries we would have

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

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skipped buying the RV and continued to use fancy hotels.

**ALLAN COLGAN | COLUMBUS, OHIO**

**YOU FORGOT TO MENTION**

I read E. Don Smith's article on wiper blades ("Wiper Blade Battle") in the April issue. One thing about his article that I had already done was up size from 26- to 28-inch blades as I am tall and the smaller blades limited my field of vision from the driver's seat. However, I did not have to change the old-style arms. You can go to an automotive store and buy a conversion kit to make the arms fit most new blades. The kit comes with the heads and screws to attach them to the old arm. Just attach the blade style you want based on the head you use. This is a less expensive alternative than replacing the entire arm.

I also want to comment on Bobbie Hesselbring's article, "Whidbey Island: A World Away." We've been to this area three times and love it. A mention of how the island got its name would have been valuable. As would a mention of a bed and breakfast called the Whidbey Inn, formerly owned by Capt. Whidbey. I know we all travel by motorhome, but this would have added to the history of the name of the island.

Then, in "Cochise County, Arizona" by Mary Zalmanek, she missed the Rex Allen Museum in Willcox. Many readers may not remember this cowboy, but anybody over the age of 70 should.

**HANK SMITH | SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS**

**KEEP TOWING SIMPLE**

In the April issue, all this talk about what to tow is interesting. I tow a 1989 Toyota Corolla five-speed, manual transmission, no extras. I bought it for \$300. I found a base-plate and have towed it more than 10,000 miles with no problem. I get about 35 MPG in town and up to 45 MPG highway — all with no computer controls. And yes, I live in New Hampshire where we do safety and emission testing and it passes every year.

I have also read a lot about TV placement in a coach. Do RV manufacturers not read this magazine? Don't they sit in a new RV and try to watch TV? Why do they place the TV at a 90-degree angle from the seating area? At home, do they have the TV 90 degrees from the couch? I doubt it.

**WAYNE VASQUES | VIA EMAIL**

**MAKE IT YOURS**

I attend RV shows to see what's new and what I would like to see in my 2007 Gulf Stream Crescendo. The outdoor kitchen was the ticket for me. Do I plan on trading in my coach? Absolutely not. I will use the photos I took of the new coaches and make my own outdoor kitchen. I'm not a carpenter by trade, but my love for RVing is matched to my love of building things.

In the year that I've owned my Gulf Stream, I replaced the linoleum flooring with a much heavier product. I also thought the bathroom was too compact and tore it completely out and put in a pedestal sink. There's more room and it's a richer looking and personalized bathroom.

I have RVing friends who can't believe I remodeled my coach. It's your home away from home, make it yours and be comfortable. If other people don't like it, they don't live in it.

**FRANK H. MAURER III  
PENNSVILLE, N.J.**

**CUSTOMIZE YOUR DESIGN**

We agree with Larry Klauser (April, P.O. Box) on making changes that fit your lifestyle. We've been full-timers since 2005 in a 34-foot Itasca Meridian and have made several changes to make it more comfortable. We removed a love seat and replaced it with a small credenza from Walmart where we have our 36-inch flat-screen TV, satellite receiver and printer/copy/fax machine. The TV is on a swivel for easy viewing from the kitchen. We had the TV above the windshield removed and use the area for storage.

Additionally, we had the dinette booth removed and replaced it with a 10-by-33-inch kitchen table from Ikea. There are six 6-by-8-by-12-inch-deep drawers for storage. When the leaves are unfolded we have a 60-by-33-inch table. We use the seat belts from the dinette to secure the table when we're on the road. We are very happy with our new "custom design" coach.

**JOHN DANNENBRING | YANKTON, S.D.**

**QUESTION:**

**What changes have you made to customize your motorhome?**

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# escapes

by LAURA MICHAELS

ROAD FOODIE | WHEELS & GEAR | NOTEWORTHY | CROSSROADS



## WALK ON THE CLIFF SIDE

Enjoy the View Along Rhode Island's Cliff Walk

**A** 3.5-mile stretch of coastline pulls double duty in Newport, R.I., showcasing some of the town's most impressive architectural history plus the rugged natural beauty of its Easton Bay views. Designated a National Recreation Trail in 1975, the aptly named Cliff Walk hugs the rocky shoreline from Easton's Beach south to Ledge Road before curving east to Bailey's Beach. On one side of the trail look out over the glistening open water; on the other gaze up at opulent mansions from the Gilded Age (1865-1914), when Newport was considered the social capital of the nation. Visitors can stroll past The Breakers, the 70-room Italian Renaissance-style summer home of the Vanderbilt family and marvel at Beechwood, where the Astor family hosted the best of New York's high society.

Keep your wits about you while walking, as portions of the trail are mere feet from abrupt drop-offs. And while the first two-thirds of the walk are easy to traverse, parts of the southern half include rocky shoreline and sometimes-slippery surfaces. For more information, call 401-845-5300 or visit [www.cliffwalk.com](http://www.cliffwalk.com).

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Summer is heating up and it's time to drive our motorhomes north where cooler breezes prevail. For those heading to the Seattle, Wash., region, you might want to check out the five-day, fun-filled boot camp for foodies offered by award-winning chef and restaurateur Tom Douglas.

Douglas is a Seattle chef who operates seven successful restaurants in the Emerald City, including Lola, Dahlia Lounge, Etta's Seafood and Serious Pie. In 2012 the James Beard Foundation named Douglas Outstanding Restaurateur, and he beat out Chef Masaharu Morimoto in the Food Network's "Iron Chef" competition. But even more important is that Chef Tom is in love with food and sharing his knowledge in a fun venue, which is what culinary boot camp is all about.

The delectable aroma of 7-bone steaks grilling over a wood fire wafts down Seattle's 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. People, with name tags reading Smokin' Lou and Bouillabaisse Bob, pile their blue tin plates with scrambled eggs, red potatoes sliced thin with peppers and onions, meat and vegetarian chili, thick cowboy toast with fresh fig jam, and slabs of succulent, smoky steaks.

Foodies from all over the country come to this summer playground to mingle with and learn from top chefs and eat and drink with abandon. Today's breakfast, cooked outside Tom's Palace Ballroom, is Chef Tom's idea of a cowboy cookout.

For culinary campers, many who



return year after year, it's all about fun. Seattleite and environmental engineer Sherri Berry, who attended camp for the first time last year, said it was so much fun she doesn't know how she's going to go back to real life. Despite the \$3,000 tuition, both campers and presenters can't wait to come back to camp — the same way we felt as kids.

Inside, Western music blares and campers enjoy mimosas, shots of Maker's Mark and "The Cowboy Flip," a concoction of coffee, egg and bourbon. There's a full bar with free drinks and cheeses, veggies, fruits and dips, and cookies and breads made at Tom's Dahlia Bakery. Every dish demonstrated by the five or six food experts each day is accompanied by tastes paired with wine or cocktails.

"Who's ever had duck-basted white fish at 9 a.m.?" quips Tom as servers bring out perfect bites of succulent black cod over house-pickled sauerkraut that's paired with glasses of Riesling. A close-up of the guest chef-presenter's technique is live-cast on two big screens behind him.

During each class, Tom prowls the room, his wireless microphone ever present. He's the ringmaster of this culinary

Culinary campers line up for a wood-fired breakfast. Dishes at culinary camp are often inventive, like this vegan charcuterie plate. Campers start breakfast with a cowboy cookout that includes succulent, wood-fired 7-bone steaks. Behind the scenes, Chef Douglas' staff prepares tastes of every dish that's demonstrated.

circus, keeping the chef-performers on time, asking questions, making jokes, ensuring everyone has a good time. When a camper volunteers to chop veggies, he rewards her with a spin of a carnival wheel with prizes like hotel stays and restaurant certificates.

Good-natured competition plays an important role in culinary camp. Each day, campers compete for points and prizes. The camper with the most points at week's end wins a culinary adventure for six, complete with hotel and restaurant meals.

Each camper also goes home with autographed books from the chef-presenters. In addition, they receive goodies like camp T-shirts and aprons, gift cards for Starbucks, discount cards to Douglas' 12 restaurants, wine from sponsors and culinary tools.

Sassafras Sara, a returnee who travels down from Juneau, Alaska, said the camp is for foodies like fantasy baseball is for sports fans. This year's culinary camp is July 7-11. You can reserve a spot online at [www.tomdouglas.com](http://www.tomdouglas.com).

To contact Bobbie, send an email to [hasselbring@bctonline.com](mailto:hasselbring@bctonline.com) with "Road Foodie" in the subject line.



## NEW OUTLAW FLOORPLAN

**Thor Motor Coach** has expanded its SURV lineup with a new floorplan for its Outlaw toy hauler. The recently introduced 37MD features a second slide, which creates a space that can serve as a dedicated bedroom or an additional living area. The slide

houses a sofa that converts into a queen-size air bed. A sliding glass door separates the garage from the rest of the coach and includes a powered shade.

The 37MD features side-opening storage compartments, full-body paint and separate entries for the living room and garage. An exterior fueling station can be used to fill up ATVs and dirt bikes, while outside entertainment options include garage stereo controls, wall-mounted marine grade speakers and a 32-inch LCD TV under the patio awning. The optional Party Patio creates a veranda off the rear of the coach, while optional fold-down sofas seat six inside the garage or can be converted into beds. Inside, find solid surface countertops, a double-door refrigerator, three-burner stove with oven and an over-the-range microwave/convection oven. Base MSRP is \$157,775.

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



## KEEP THE FAN RUNNING

Motorhome owners can have ventilation in all weather conditions with a new cover from **MaxxAir**. Built to completely enclose high-speed ceiling fans and vents, the Fan/Mate allows a vent to remain open or fan to run despite rainy weather. The Fan/Mate's louvers with protective galvanized screen provide superior rain protection, according to the company. Hinged opening mounting brackets enable easy cleaning and servicing of the fan.

The Fan/Mate is constructed of high-strength polyethylene with UV inhibitors. The 32.5-by-20.5-by-9.93-inch Fan/Mate is available in two models, the 850 and 950. Both models feature a 20 percent larger vent area than previous versions for improved fan performance. The Fan/Mate comes with a three-year limited warranty and has a starting price of \$79.95.

**MaxxAir, 316-832-3400, [www.maxxair.com](http://www.maxxair.com)**



## SEWER HOSE SUPPORT

A new concept in RV sewer hose support systems from **Practical Products** provides motorhome owners with an easier way to empty holding tanks. The company bills its FlowDown setup as the ultimate hose handling system, with fully adjustable legs that let users choose the right height to maneuver drain hoses over obstacles such as curbs. The system extends to 10 1/2 feet, sets up straight, around corners or over objects, and adjusts to slopes to allow the hose to completely drain. A number of RV parks require the sewer hose to be elevated and have adequate slope to drain the sewage. The FlowDown stores in a compact carry bag. The complete FlowDown kit is \$79.95.

**Practical Products, 800-367-1533, [www.flowdown.net](http://www.flowdown.net)**

# OBAMA DESIGNATES NATIONAL MONUMENTS

Five new national monuments have been added to the list after President Obama signed proclamations under the Antiquities Act. The monuments, located in Delaware, Maryland, New Mexico, Ohio and Washington, help tell the story of significant people and extraordinary events in American history, as well as protect unique natural resources. The monuments are:

**Charles Young Buffalo National Monument in Ohio.** The monument will preserve the home of Col. Charles Young (1864–1922), a distinguished officer in the United States Army who was the third African American to graduate from West Point and the first to achieve the rank of colonel. Young also served as one of the early Army superintendents of Sequoia and General Grant national parks, before the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916.



PHOTO: NEW CASTLE COURT HOUSE MUSEUM

**First State National Monument along the Delaware-Pennsylvania border.**

**First State National Monument in Delaware.** The monument will tell the story of the early Dutch, Swedish, Finnish and English settlement of the colony of Delaware, as well as Delaware's role as the first state to ratify the Constitution. The park is comprised of three historic areas related to Delaware's history: the Dover Green, the New Castle Court House complex and the Woodlawn property in the Brandywine Valley.

**Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument in Maryland.** The monument commemorates the life of the most famous conductor on the Underground Railroad. The park, located on Maryland's Eastern Shore, includes large sections of landscapes that are significant to Tubman's early life in Dorchester County. Also included are Stewart's Canal, dug by hand by free and enslaved people between 1810 and the 1830s, and the home site of Jacob Jackson, a free black man who used coded letters to help Tubman communicate.

**Río Grande del Norte National Monument in New Mexico.** Located northwest of Taos, the Río Grande del Norte contains stretches of the Río Grande Gorge and extinct volcanoes that rise from the Taos Plateau. The monument is also home to a dense collection of petroglyphs and archaeological and cultural resources dating from the Archaic Period to the more recent passage of Hispanic settlers.



PHOTO: GERAINT SMITH

**Río Grande Del Norte National Monument in New Mexico.**

**San Juan Islands National Monument in Washington.** Home to bald eagles, orca whales, harbor seals and other rare species, the San Juan Islands is a chain of 450 islands, rocks and pinnacles in the Puget Sound. A number of historic lighthouses are located on the islands, as well as cultural resources and fossils dating back 12,000 years.

## News Briefs

**Fleetwood RV** recently received the "Large Business of the Year" Award from the Chamber of Commerce in Decatur, Ind., where the motorhome manufacturer is headquartered. The award is presented annually to a business that has more than 25 employees and has demonstrated "apparent, consistent success as well as good corporate citizenry." The business must show a concern for the well-being of the community and have management and personnel who actively participate in civic organizations or community activities.

John Draheim, president and CEO of Fleetwood RV, thanked the Decatur community and its local business. He said Fleetwood RV has experienced a major transformation during the last few years, today employing 950 people. The local work force as well as the community played a critical role in the company's decision to locate in Decatur, Draheim said.

**Hopkins Manufacturing Corp.** has acquired the TowDaddy product line. According to a press release, the acquisition strengthens Hopkins as a leading provider of towing electrical products to the RV and automotive aftermarket. TowDaddy is the originator of the towed vehicle wire harness kits used when towing a vehicle behind a motorhome. Hopkins said the patented technology provides a simplified solution to connect the lights of the towed vehicle with those of the motorhome. In addition, TowDaddy's AutoFUSE product instantly bypasses the fuse of the towed vehicle and charges the battery, which is required by some newer vehicles, eliminating the need for a fuse to be pulled prior to towing. Hopkins will distribute the TowDaddy products from its Emporia, Kan., distribution center.

**Winegard** has introduced a free mobile app that makes it fast and simple to set the elevation on its Carryout Anser portable satellite TV antenna. Through a three-step process, the Anser app lets antenna owners use the GPS on their smartphones to set the satellite elevation. Users first select "Elevation Guide," then select their service provider and then choose the target satellite. The app will display the correct elevation to set using the built-in guide on the Anser housing, as well as clear pointing instructions. The app also offers a dealer locator feature. The Winegard Anser iPhone app is available free to download from the Apple App Store and Google Play.

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## escapes CROSSROADS

# SEE IT IN STONE

**In the southwest countryside** near Comfrey, Minn., surrounded by native prairie, a bedrock outcrop of Sioux quartzite contains the beginnings of the state's recorded history. At Jeffers Petroglyphs Historic Site, visitors will find more than 4,000 Native American images carved into the red-to-pink rock. Bison, elk and various weapons are depicted, along with three thunderbirds. With its multi-joined wings, these thunderbird glyphs correspond to ethnographic descriptions from Dakota Native Americans recorded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Other carvings illustrate parables and prayers, with the earliest images created from 7,000 to 9,000 years ago.

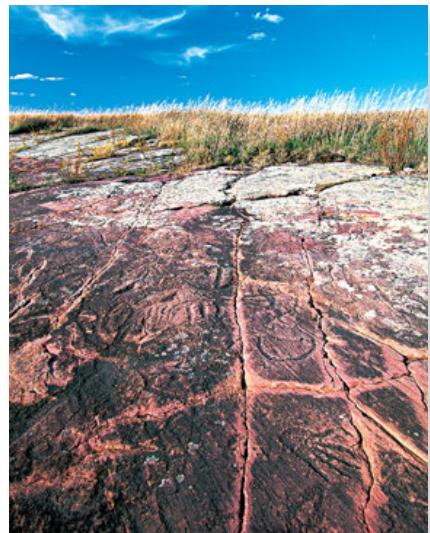


PHOTO: MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Jeffers Visitor Center offers a multimedia presentation and hands-on exhibits, and guided tours are given daily. Visitors can also explore the 160-acre site via two nature trails that wind through the prairie flowers and grasses. **For more information**, call 507-628-5591 or visit [www.mnhs.org/places/sites/jp](http://www.mnhs.org/places/sites/jp).

# UNDERGROUND IN INDIANA



PHOTO: INDIANA TOURISM

**The 2010 discovery of a** massive cavern in southern Indiana not only connected Blowing Hole and Binkley caves to create the state's longest cave system — nearly 35 miles long — it uncovered the bones of Ice Age animals and revealed rare underground cave life. Open to the public since April, Indiana Caverns showcases stunning cave formations and is home to what explorers deemed Big Bone Mountain, an impressive collection of bones more than 15,000 years old. So far, classified species include the flat-headed peccary

(a pig-like mammal) and Pleistocene (Ice Age) black bears and bison. Guided tours of Indiana Caverns run a little more than an hour long and feature a 25-minute underground boat ride and up-close views of a four-story waterfall, along with narrative on the cave's ancient past. Tickets are \$18 for adults and \$9 for children. Indiana Caverns is located outside Corydon, Ind., just 30 miles from Louisville, Ky. **For more information**, call 812-734-1200 or go online to [www.indianacaverns.com](http://www.indianacaverns.com). ♦

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**W**hen Rose Gessner prepares for her family's annual trip to Indian Trails Campground in central Wisconsin this summer, she'll pack up the usual fare of bacon and eggs, hamburgers, hot dogs, brats and potato salad.

But she'll also bring a 7-foot artificial Christmas tree, half a dozen large plastic storage boxes filled with Christmas lights and bulbs, lighted candy canes, a wooden cutout reindeer with a Santa and sleigh, and about 50 homemade snowflakes.

"Sometimes, my husband thinks I'm crazy," the 55-year-old said.

Crazy about Christmas, that is.

Rose and Larry Gessner will join hundreds of campers at Indian Trails Campground the weekend of July 26-28, when

the park hosts its annual Christmas in July festivities, which include a campsite decorating contest, Christmas-themed crafts and games as well as a visit by Santa Claus.

But as unique as these activities may seem, the idea of celebrating Christmas in the middle of summer is widely practiced at private RV parks and campgrounds across the country.

The Jellystone Park Camp-Resort in Hagerstown, Md., has been hosting Christmas-in-July-type activities since 1997.

"We call it our Winter Wonderland Week," said park co-owner Vicki Vitkun. "We decorate for Christmas and have our Christmas lights up. We even do ice skating in the park and have snowball fights."

Of course, with Winter Wonderland Week scheduled for July 22-28, the park won't use real ice. Nor will the kids be wearing sweaters or jackets. Instead, they'll be barefoot



Left to right: Visitors at South Haven Family Campground enjoy Christmas-themed activities during the annual Christmas in July festivities. Bingo winners hold up their Christmas in July presents at Indian Trails Campground in Pardeeville, Wisconsin.

# SUMMERTIME CAMPING WITH SANTA

CHRISTMAS IN JULY  
EVENTS BRING  
HOLIDAY SPIRIT  
TO CAMPGROUNDS

by JEFF CRIDER



and wearing swimsuits.

“We put out Slip ‘N Slide tarps and cover them with shaving cream and the kids literally slide around on the tarps,” Vitkun said. “It looks very snow-like.”

Then comes nighttime, when, four times during the week, the park does a light show against a musical backdrop of Christmas carols. Carolers, often members of a local high school choir, even walk through the campground and guests who want to sing can join in. The park used to rely on its guests to do all the singing, but that wasn’t always a good strategy, Vitkun said with a laugh as she remembered past performances.

The park also has visits from Santa and opportunities for parents to have their children photographed with the jolly man in red. On Saturday night, the park celebrates New Year’s Eve with a dance and countdown to midnight, even bringing in

a jumbo screen to show the ball dropping in Times Square from the previous New Year’s Eve.

Brent Gasser, who co-owns the Jellystone Park in Wisconsin Dells, Wis., said his park started having Christmas in July activities in 1985, but the event became so popular that he now sets aside an entire week in June for its Christmas-themed special event. Holly Jolly Christmas Week includes a sleigh ride with Santa through elaborate Christmas displays accompanied by Christmas caroling, a Jingle Bell Rock dance with glowing candy canes, Christmas cookie decorating and stocking making at a special kids-only party. The weeklong festivities are scheduled from June 14-20.

Many other campgrounds create unique holiday-themed activities. Leafy Oaks Campground in Clyde, Ohio, has a breakfast with Santa Claus as well

as snowman and golf cart decorating contests.

“Last year, we had a guy with 900 Christmas lights on his golf cart,” said park co-owner Joan Faneuff, who has scheduled this year’s Christmas in July activities for the weekend of July 26-27.

Of course, the intensity of Christmas in July festivities can vary at some parks from year to year, depending on the percentage of campers who participate in the activities. Sometimes RVers show up to camp on a Christmas in July weekend, not knowing about the festivities. But when campers come prepared, Christmas in July can easily become one of their favorite times to camp.

“When people have fun, it’s infectious and it draws more people,” said Susan Novotny of South Haven Family Campground in South Haven, Mich. “Some years, we’ve had most of the park



PHOTO: WISCONSIN DELLS JELLYSTONE PARK

Clockwise: Yogi and Santa hit the water park for photos with campers at Wisconsin Dells Jellystone Park. The decorating is underway at South Haven Family Campground during Christmas in July. Santa Claus visits campers and passes out candy canes as part of Indian Trails’ Christmas in July weekend festivities.



PHOTO: INDIAN TRAILS CAMPGROUND



PHOTO: SOUTH HAVEN FAMILY CAMPGROUND



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decorated because people would bring out every decoration they had at home. Of course, the kids all love it. I think it really is important when the adults get into it because their excitement gets the children excited and then that gets other families excited.”

South Haven Family Campground also shows family-oriented Christmas movies and invites its guests to read Christmas stories and drink hot chocolate around the campfire, which is a great way to relax after the kids have spent the day having marshmallow fights or playing with foam emitted by the park’s new bubble machine.

With activities like these, it’s easy to see why Christmas in July is the highlight of many families’ camping season.

“We come on a Friday as early as we can,” said Rose Gessner, who often travels to the park with her children or grandchildren. “It takes a couple of hours to put everything up. But once it’s done it’s very nice. I like to see the look on the children’s faces when they see the decorations.”

But if you think you can outdo the

Gessners’ campsite, be prepared for some stiff competition. The Gessners have won the campsite-decorating contest at Indian Trails Campground five of the past six years. Their campsite includes a train set that goes around the tree as well as a lighted Santa Claus, a 3-foot snowman and Christmas carols, which they play while their rig is on display. She even brings presents — empty boxes wrapped in decorative paper — to put under the tree, while her snowflakes are strung across the tree and the rig.

And if you’re thinking of trying out Christmas in July festivities this year, you’d better hurry up and make your reservations now or plan for next summer, since many parks sell out during this period.

“I’ve already made my reservations for 2014,” Gessner said. “I always book two years in advance.” ♦



Jeff Crider is a Palm Desert, Calif.-based freelance writer, photographer and camping enthusiast who previously covered the RV industry and tourism for newspapers in Southern California.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

**INDIAN TRAILS CAMPGROUND**  
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## STATE PARKS SHOWCASE COUNTLESS SCENIC BEACHES AND SAND DUNES

by DAVID BARBER

**thought three days would be plenty of time to** leisurely cruise the Oregon coast from Brookings, near the California border, to Astoria, west of Portland. It's only 340 miles, but scenic and attraction-laden the entire distance. Mile for mile, Highway 101, also known as the Oregon Coast Highway, may be the most scenic stretch of road in America. A week would have been almost enough; two weeks would be better. You could spend a summer here and not experience it all.

Entering Oregon from California, we stopped at Harris Beach State Park, just north of Brookings. Tide pools, huge rock formations and the crashing surf were a wonderful introduction to the Oregon coastline. Although we weren't ready to stop for the night, the park has a beautiful campground with sheltering trees, just a few yards from the trailheads leading to the beach below.

The first part of our trip north was through dense old-growth forest, with tree canopies occasionally making a tunnel of the highway. You need a dedicated driver to keep his eyes on the road, as the distractions are many. You no sooner pass one scenic viewpoint than another is vying for your attention. Between Brookings and Gold Beach, 28 miles designated as a state scenic corridor, there is one state park, one wayside and 10 viewpoints. We soon realized we should have started up north, at Astoria, and headed south so the viewpoints would be on our side of the road. Many times we were not comfortable crossing the highway in our motorhome to get to the viewpoints, as we had limited visibility of oncoming traffic.

On our way to our first campground we stopped to drool at Bandon Dunes Golf Resort, a first-class destination for golfers worldwide. I say drool because my wife and I love to hit the links but our pocket book favors municipal courses. Bandon Dunes is unique not only in its setting among



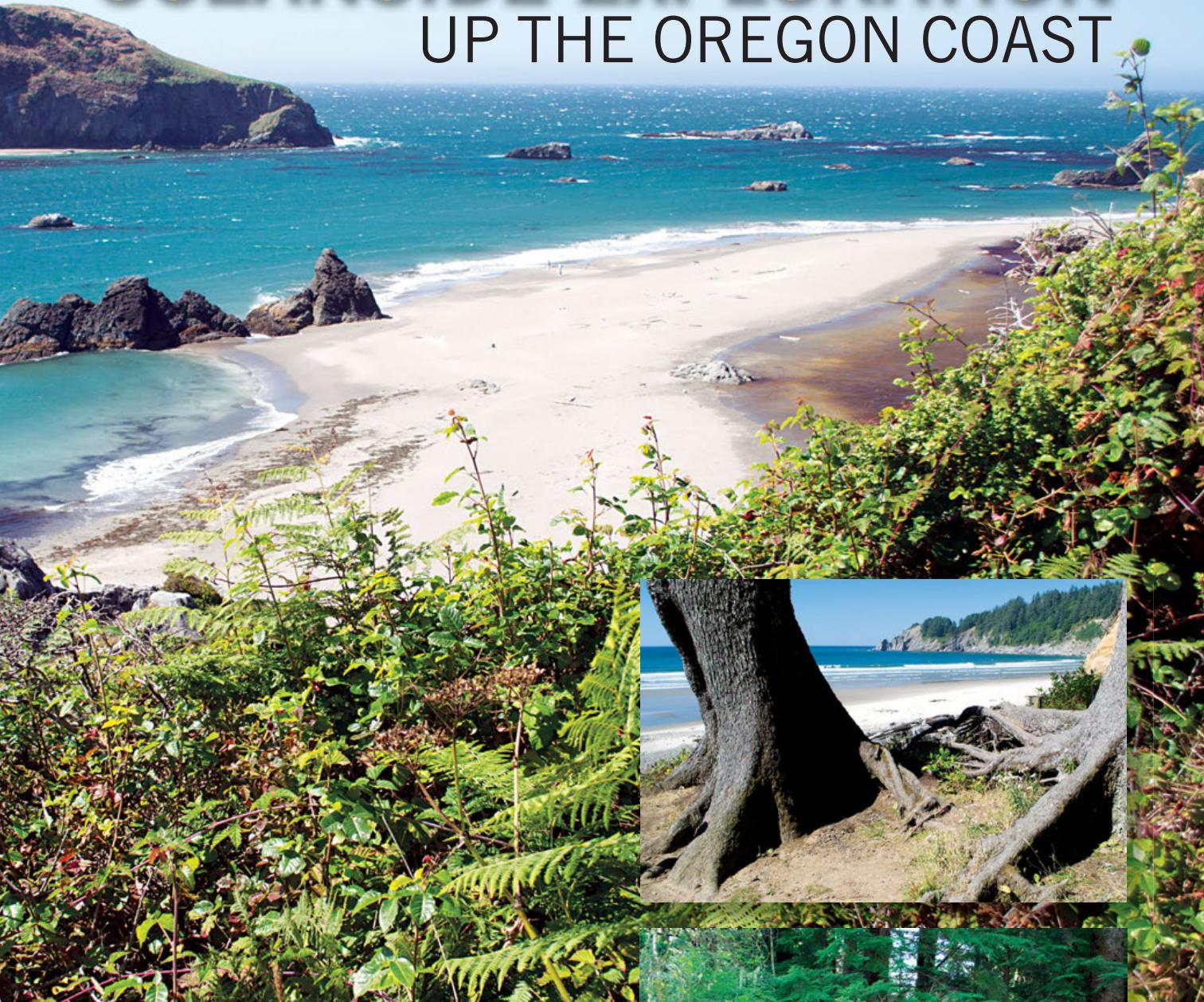
Oregon's coastal dunes, but for a walk-only policy requiring a caddy for all golfers. There are five distinct 18-hole courses, some of which we were able to admire during the short pause on our trip north. We later stopped at Sandpines, a municipal golf course in Florence, but were turned away by a cold, windy day. Maybe next time — it looked quite inviting.

### STATE PARK STOPS

We spent our first night at Sunset Bay State Park, 10 miles west of Coos Bay. Naturally, we followed our GPS, which took us on a winding, two-lane residential road many more miles than necessary. I looked at a real map before we returned to Coos Bay the next day and took the direct route, which was both shorter and more interesting. Sunset Bay is a lovely

# OCEANSIDE EXPLORATION

## UP THE OREGON COAST



small cove, surrounded by high rock cliffs, with the campground set in the adjacent forest. It's the first campground I've seen with a fish cleaning station, complete with running water and a cutting board to aid your task.

Hidden away next to Sunset Bay State Park is Shore Acres State Park, a former private estate with completely restored botanical gardens featuring plants and flowers from around the world. Shore Acres was originally developed by a wealthy lumberman and shipbuilder who made his fortune in the late 1800s. He fell on hard times with the start of the Great Depression, and the state of Oregon purchased his land for a public park.

Today, the contrast between the formal gardens with their evergreen shrubs, rhododendron blooms

**Clockwise from top left: Haystack Rock rises 235 feet from the waters at Cannon Beach. Harris Beach State Park boasts sandy beaches mixed with rocky outcroppings. Short Sand Beach within Oswald West State Park. Fort Clatsop's rendering station, part of Lewis and Clark National Historical Park.**

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Remaining wreckage of the *Peter Iredale* on the beach in Fort Stevens State Park. Right, top to bottom: Umpqua River Lighthouse stands 65 feet tall and casts beams of light some 20 miles out to sea. RV sites at Cape Lookout State Park's campground



and roses and the surrounding old growth forest and rocky coastline is stunning. Parking near the cliffs, you hear the bleating sea lions offshore as you walk through the forest to the gardens.

### ENDLESS NATURAL ATTRACTIONS

Heading north from Coos Bay the highway flanks the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area, where enormous wind-sculpted sand dunes combine with evergreen shrubbery to create a unique shoreline. Dune buggy tours are plentiful, with the most impressive dunes being found in the Umpqua Dunes Area. The dunes continue north past Reedsport to Florence, where the Siuslaw River enters the ocean and the dunes recede.

If you're ready to head inland, Reedsport provides an excellent opportunity to turn east and follow the Umpqua River 35 miles to Elkton, one of the prettiest pastoral valleys I have ever seen. It's another 20 miles to Interstate 5 and reality.

If your plans call for an evening stay, the Umpqua Lighthouse State Park in Winchester Bay offers full hookups deep in the forest, within walking distance to the whale watching platform and the historic 65-foot-tall lighthouse. Surprisingly, there is a picturesque freshwater lake, Lake Marie, in the park for summertime swimming and sunbathing, a few yards from the ocean.

North of Florence the highway once

again flanks the beach, with many opportunities to pause and enjoy the view or take a stroll in the sand. We continued to Newport, stopping to admire the bridge at Waldport, a real port city. Newport promotes its Bayside Historic Area and the Oregon Coast Aquarium, which our schedule did not allow us to visit.

Our next overnight stop was Cape Lookout State Park in Tillamook, part of the Three Capes Scenic Route. Like many of the parks, Cape Lookout is a few miles west of Highway 101, so you hear the pounding surf rather than the passing trucks. We turned west at Pacific City and followed the coastline before turning inland on a winding road through farmland to the park.

The park is set just behind a restored dune, with a choice of open sites near the beach or shaded ones in the forest. We chose an open site to be near the beach, and were pleased to find that my dog, Doodles, was allowed to run on the beach off-leash, much to his delight. His puppy exuberance and frolicking in the surf was fun to watch. Cape Lookout also has several miles of nature trails that provide an up-close look at native trees and plants such as Sitka spruce, black twinberry and false lily of the valley.

Leaving Cape Lookout, we circumnavigated Tillamook Bay, a natural harbor and well-managed wetlands. If you like cheese, you probably know about Tilla-

mook Cheese, which helps support the economy of this region. Daily factory tours are offered, but we passed this up as we were bound for Oswald West State Park and Short Sand Beach.

Short Sand Beach is located at Smuggler's Cove, overlooked by Cape Falcon. Smuggler's Cove? What an image this conjures. The story goes that British explorer Sir Francis Drake buried the treasure he pirated from the Spanish somewhere within what is now Oswald West State Park. Though we didn't find any Aztec gold, a short hike through the dense forest brought us to the quiet beach where Doodles had another run and we enjoyed the tranquility of the place.

Our next stop was Cannon Beach, a few miles north and a quintessential upscale beach town. The merchants try to outdo each other with their floral displays. It's a combination grand garden and quality shopping and dining experience.

Located at the terminus of Highway 26, the direct line to Portland, Cannon Beach enjoys a special prominence along

the coast and flaunts it. It is worthy of a few days stay to enjoy the town and the beach, featuring Haystack Rock, a 235-foot basalt sea stack you can walk out and touch at low tide.

If this isn't enough, nearby Ecola State Park takes your breath away with its magnificent beach and viewpoint. There is no campground, but it's a wonderful place for a wedding (which we observed) or a picnic.

**EXPLORING HISTORY**

Since reading Stephen Ambrose's "Undaunted Courage," I've been fascinated with the story of Lewis and Clark and their Corps of Discovery. They first saw the Pacific and the Oregon coast in 1805, 208 years ago, after walking, riding and paddling their canoes upstream and downstream more than 4,000 miles, the ultimate road trip, without the road.

They arrived in December and built a simple shelter, called Fort Clatsop, deep in the woods, where they spent 106 nights until their return trip east, in late March. It

rained all but 12 nights, according to their journals. A replica of the fort, a few miles from the Columbia River near Astoria, seems not a fort at all, but a small log enclosure with tight quarters for the officers and men. It is easy to imagine being there, with the nearby tripod for rendering their game and the well-worn trail to the river for water. Fort Clatsop is in Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, which includes trails to the sea and other attractions. Fittingly, it marked the termination of our Oregon coast tour of discovery as well.

We spent our last night on the coast in Hammond at Fort Stevens State Park, on the site of a former military outpost, which guarded the entrance to the Columbia River from 1860 until 1946. The campground has full and partial hook-ups and the RV sites can accommodate the largest coaches with dinghies. The nearby coastline has the remains of an English sailing ship, the *Peter Iredale*, wrecked in a storm in 1906. If you are so inclined, you can drive on the beach, though it is not recommended unless your

motorhome is all wheel drive.

The Oregon coast is special for many reasons, among them that it is entirely public. The coastal inhabitants appreciate the contributions visitors make to their livelihood and it is reflected in the quality of the experience they provide. In addition to 34 county, state and federal campgrounds along the coast, there are many private RV parks to accommodate the largest rigs.

Next time I will start up north, at Astoria, and take a few weeks to head south, exploring all the amazing places I only saw in passing on my abbreviated visit. ♦

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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David Barber roams the West in his Winnebago View with his wife, Kathy Van Inwegen, their dog, Doodles, and cat, Bogey. When they're not traveling, find them at home in Colorado.

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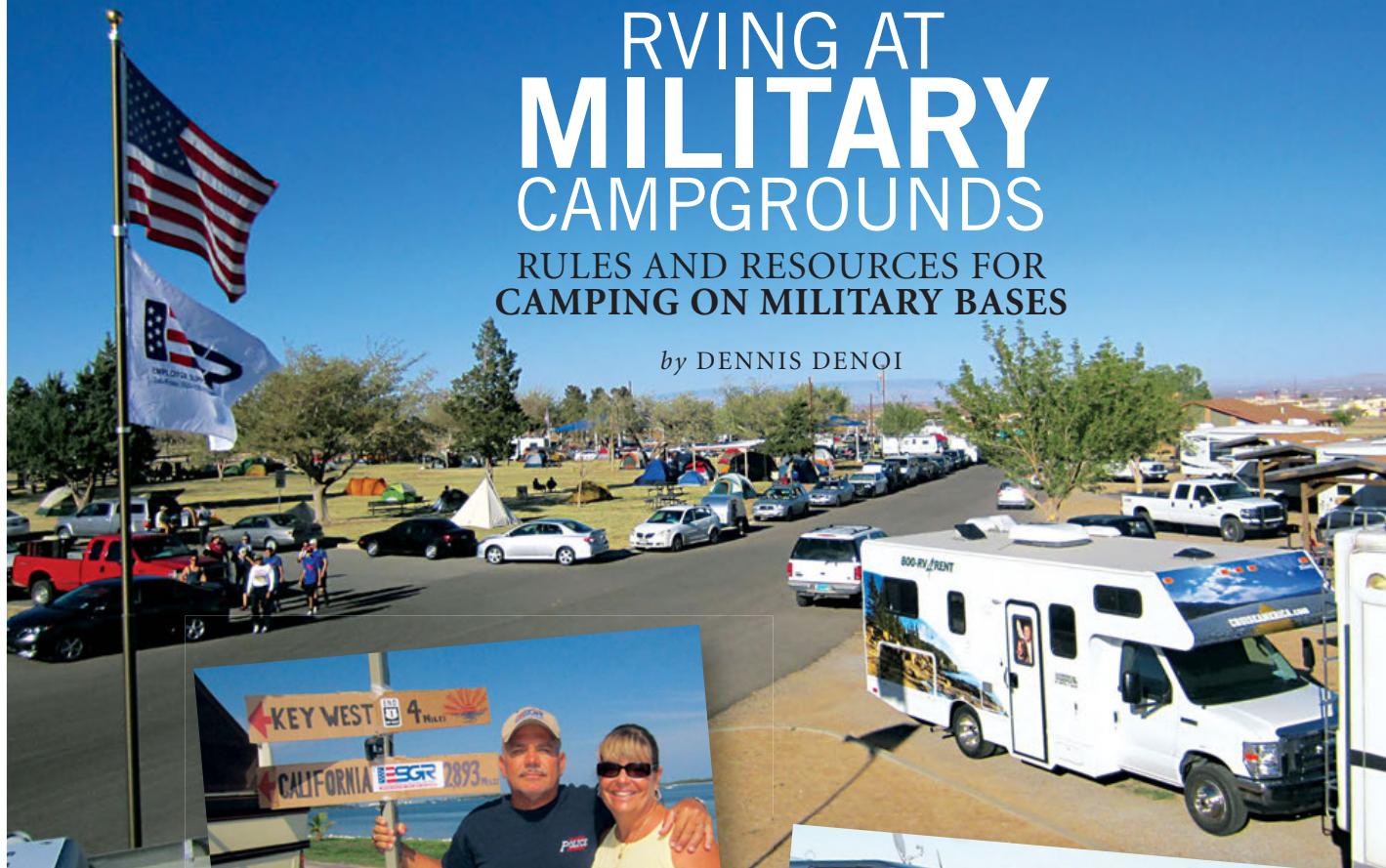
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# RVING AT MILITARY CAMPGROUNDS

RULES AND RESOURCES FOR  
CAMPING ON MILITARY BASES

by DENNIS DENOI



**W**hen considering where to stay during a motorhome getaway, many RVers don't realize our nation's military bases and installations provide ideal accommodations. With hundreds of locations across the country, military campgrounds and RV parks are worth considering as you plan your next trip.

As a retired Marine Corps master sergeant, I am afforded full access to military installations and bases and use them as often as possible. My wife, Cheryl, and I are full-time RVers and we enjoy touring the United States and visiting as many of our nation's attractions and military installations as possible.

As you envision what it would be like to camp at some of America's more famous military bases and installations, such as Fort Benning, Ga., Fort Bragg, N.C., Parris Island, S.C., and California's Camp Pendleton and Lake Tahoe Coast Guard Station, there are several requirements you need to consider, such as valid identification and security checks.

## WHO CAN CAMP?

Active duty members of the U.S. Armed Forces and those serving in the National Guard and Army Reserve can access military recreation areas and take advantage of their facilities. The campgrounds and RV parks are also available to military retirees, disabled veterans and Department of Defense workers, though some campgrounds have different criteria so it's wise to check in advance.

**Clockwise from top:** The overflow portion of Volunteer Travel Park Campsite in Las Cruces, N.M. Left to right: Dennis DeNoi, Marty Weston, Diane Weston, Sara Weston and David Weston gather at a campsite within Camp Pendleton's Del Mar Beach Resort. Dennis and Cheryl DeNoi next to their 1983 Apollo Sceptre at Sigsbee RV Park in Key West, Fla.



Kids and families play and relax at the end of the day at Camp Pendleton's Del Mar Beach Resort. Inset: Enjoying an afternoon on the patio at Seabreeze RV Park, part of Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach in California.

Those with access can sponsor civilian RVers to accompany them as guests at military campgrounds and other facilities. All guests are permitted on a space-available basis, usually during non-peak periods.

To gain access to an active military installation, be prepared to provide a valid military ID and a current state driver's license, vehicle registration and insurance, and pass security screening. These security checks, although not common, can include having your vehicle boarded and some or all of the interior and exterior compartments opened for inspection.

Sponsored non-military guests are required to provide all of the above documentation, minus the military ID, and submit to any security checks. Military personnel and their guests who travel with firearms should be aware that their right to carry and/or travel with weapons may be restricted on bases and federal installations.

**MILITARY RV ACCOMMODATIONS**

The military campground system has more than 200 campgrounds located in 46 states, accounting for thousands of RV sites. Many of these campgrounds are less expensive than their public counterparts,

but most are located within gated bases and are relatively secluded or far from town and tourist attractions.

The benefits to staying on base include exchanges and commissaries, pools, theaters, bowling alleys, golf courses, marinas and exercise facilities. In addition, many bases have museums that highlight the history of the base and some showcase displays of military equipment.

Just as amenities vary, so do the availability and type of hookups. Some military campgrounds offer 50-amp electric service with sewer and water while others only offer dry camping. There's also a wide range in

An example of the wooded, waterfront sites at Blue Angels Naval Recreation Area in Pensacola, Fla.



The campground at Fiddler's Cove RV Park, part of Coronado Naval Base in San Diego, Calif.



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### RVING AT MILITARY CAMPGROUNDS



Above: Dennis DeNoi snorkels in the Gulf of Mexico off the base at Naval Air Station Key West. Below left: Missile Park on base at White Sands houses military planes, missiles and memorabilia. Right: Volunteer Park Travel Campsite, part of White Sands Missile Range in Las Cruces, N.M., offers views of the San Andres Mountains.



price, with campgrounds such as Anniston Army Depot RV Park in Alabama charging \$12 per night while resort-style parks such as Del Mar Beach at Camp Pendleton in California charge up to \$55 per night.

It's important to note that military recreational facilities, services and benefits are purchased, maintained and operated without using taxpayer dollars. These facilities and services fall under the Morale, Welfare and Recreation system (MWR) and are organized under a combined operational program whereby each individual program must generate a profit that is reinvested into that program and/or some of its surplus is applied to other programs within the MWR system that fall short. As a whole, the entire MWR system must generate its own funds to operate.

#### MILITARY RVING RESOURCES

All military installations have official command websites that detail the facilities the base has to offer, but these can be overwhelming and difficult to use at times, which is why those who frequent military campgrounds generally use RV guides to locate and learn about specific accommodations and facilities.

Military Living Publications ([www.militaryliving.com](http://www.militaryliving.com)) publishes more than

a dozen unofficial military-related recreation and travel guides, maps and other resources. Another source of unofficial information is the website of U.S. Military Campgrounds and RV Parks ([www.militarycampgrounds.us](http://www.militarycampgrounds.us)), which was created by Larry Farquhar, a U.S. Air Force retiree and full-time RVer.

This story would not be complete without mentioning a military and veteran travel club called Special Military Active-Retired Travel Club (SMART). SMART's mission is to bring military veterans (active, retired and honorably discharged) together to share camaraderie, RVing and to support fellow veterans and other worthy causes.

Founded in 1982, the club has more than 50 chapters across the country. SMART's chapters run the gamut of special interests from golfers to computer enthusiasts and those who just like to travel. The club also conducts RV caravan programs and publishes a bimonthly magazine called *The SMART Traveler*. To learn more, visit [www.smartrving.org](http://www.smartrving.org). ♦



Dennis and Cheryl DeNoi are freelance writers/photographers who are full-time RVers and proud owners of a rare 1983 Apollo Sceptre motorhome. Dennis is a retired Marine and police officer; Cheryl is a retired school principal.



# SAG WAGON SERVICE ACROSS SOUTHERN LOUISIANA

MUSIC, FOOD AND PLANTATION HISTORY IN THE PELICAN STATE

by MARY ZALMANEK

## Paybacks can be fun. Our trip through Louisiana was a payback.

In 2003, my husband, Jim, and I rode our mountain bikes south from the Canadian border to Mexico along the Continental Divide. Unlike the hard-bodied 30-somethings who carried their gear in a bicycle trailer or panniers, we used our motorhome as a support vehicle, or sag wagon. Jim's sister and her husband, Linda and Tom Coulson, provided support for us through parts of Montana and Idaho by driving the motorhome. Their teenage daughter, Caley, biked with Jim and me.

Fast-forward nine years. Caley has been seriously afflicted with the bicycle touring bug. During a break in her final semester of medical school last spring, she and two classmates biked across the southern U.S. from San Diego, Calif., to St. Augustine, Fla. With one cross-country trip already under her belt, she really didn't need our support. Nevertheless, we tagged along. We were so thankful for the assistance provided by her parents and countless friends during our own biking adventure that we wanted to pay it back.

Touring bicyclists often choose roads less traveled, backroads through small towns, sometimes adding considerable mileage to avoid congested highways. For us, the ideal motorhome journey includes miles of interstate highway and RV parks within sight of the exit ramps to facilitate quick arrival at our final destination. Since the bicyclists' need for safety and adventure trumped our need for pull-through sites and free Wi-Fi, we knew this trip would require flexibility and compromise on our part.

Caley and her friends, Jessica Miller and Tad Schoedel, turned to the Adventure Cycling Association to help plan their route. The Adventure Cycling



Cypress-tupelo swamps cover large swaths of land within the Louisiana State Arboretum, which is part of Chicot State Park. Above: A trio of cyclists departs from Chicot State Park in southern Louisiana.

PHOTOS: MARY ZALMANEK

## SAG WAGON SERVICE ACROSS SOUTHERN LOUISIANA

Southern Tier maps helped us find camping sites off the beaten path that could accommodate RVs and tents. We met the cyclists — and their voracious appetites — at the Cagle Recreation Area near Lake Conroe in east Texas. They'd been riding between 70 and 100 miles each day, which burns around 6,000 calories. After they ate the better part of two racks of smoked ribs, several ears of corn each and a mountain of coleslaw, I added to my grocery list to feed these stomachs on wheels. We spent the next day grocery shopping and running errands before settling down in Silsbee, Texas, at the Red Cloud RV Park.

As we entered southern Louisiana, we stopped at a visitor center on Interstate 10. The friendly clerk told us about her favorite attractions on our route. She promised we would love Ville Platte, which she considered “the happiest place on Earth, next to Disneyland.”

After Jim and I set up camp at the Pine Grove Estates in DeRidder, we rode out on Highway 190 to meet the cyclists. As a mountain biker who's enjoyed single-track biking trails for more than 30 years, I've never gotten used to sharing the road with cars. While we enjoyed riding with them, we decided to use our spare time exploring local attractions and meeting friendly people.

When we arrived in Ville Platte, we were eager to find out why it has a reputation for happiness. Since it's the “Swamp Pop Capital of the World,” it only made sense that our first stop was the Swamp Pop Museum. Sharon Fontenot, the happy and enthusiastic museum curator, greeted us. She explained that swamp pop, created in the 1950s and early 1960s, is a musical genre with Cajun, Creole, rock 'n' roll, country western, and rhythm and blues influences. The museum features stage costumes, records, photos and a jukebox to play swamp pop hits like “Mathilda” by Cookie and the Cupcakes, and “See You Later, Alligator” by Bill Haley and the Comets.

We'd been told the top two reasons to visit Louisiana were the food and the music. Since we had learned a little bit about its music, we set out in search of its famous food. At Otego's Food Lane, we picked up boudin, a mixture of pork, onions, bell peppers, rice and spices stuffed into a sausage-like casing.

At Slap Ya Mama Cajun Seasonings, we browsed the charming gift shop and inquired about the unique name. When T.W. Walker created their signature Cajun spice blend, he proclaimed, “When you use this seasoning, the food tastes so good, it'll make you want to go home and slap ya mama, because she could never



Top to bottom: Kayaking on Bogue Chitto River. Sharon Fontenot, curator of the Swamp Pop Museum, explains the style of music that incorporates Cajun, Creole, rock 'n' roll, country western, and rhythm and blues. A separate kitchen is located behind the main house at Rosedown Plantation. Built in the 1830s by Daniel and Martha Turnbull, the main house at Rosedown is surrounded by pleasure gardens and walking paths.





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make anything taste that great.” Satisfied that no mamas were harmed during the making of this food, we bought several bottles of their Cajun Étouffée Sauce. After buying crawfish, we set up camp at Chicot State Park and cooked a Louisiana-style feast for the hungry riders.

The next morning we explored the 6,400-acre park. Chicot is picturesque, with 22 miles of trails and a 2,200-acre lake. The Louisiana State Arboretum,

established in 1961 as the first state-supported arboretum in the country, lies within the park. Six miles of hiking trails wind through 300 acres of mature beech-magnolia forests and cypress-tupelo swamps. A bobcat darted away soon after we caught sight of it on the boardwalk ahead of us. Bald cypress trees surrounded by cypress “knees” rose out of the duckweed-covered water, giving the swamp an otherworldly feel.

The next stop on our circuitous route was the town of New Roads. It sits on False River, an oxbow lake created when the Mississippi changed its course in 1722. The town is filled with antebellum and French colonial homes and charming shops. After admiring the architecture and browsing the shops, we checked in at Jim’s Campground and RV Park in nearby Ventress. The bicycle gang joined us in time to watch the sun set from our waterfront site on False River.

Since we were in the heart of Louisiana’s Plantation Country, we couldn’t leave without visiting an antebellum mansion. We drove to Rosedown Plantation in St. Francisville. Live oaks draped with Spanish moss line the *allée* leading to the main house, which was built in the 1830s by Daniel and Martha Turnbull. The plantation grew to 3,455 acres during the cotton boom.

It was fascinating to see how the rich and famous lived nearly two centuries ago. A shoo-fly fan hung over the dining room table to circulate the air and keep bugs away. In those days, a servant pulled a rope attached to the shoo-fly to swing it back and forth throughout the meal. The entire house was lit with candles and one

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whale oil lamp. A separate kitchen behind the main house featured two fireplaces for cooking — imagine that on a hot summer day — and a water pump nearby. They had an outdoors ladies privy (sorry, gentlemen), chamber pots for nighttime use and a cistern on the roof to collect rainwater for a bath.

One thing that time and technology could not improve upon was the 18 acres of ornamental pleasure gardens. Many of the plants introduced by Martha Turnbull survive today, including one of the earliest collections of camellias in the Deep South.

Knowing that our cross-Louisiana journey would end in just one day, we wanted to squeeze in more outdoor recreation. We took a slight detour to visit Bogue Chitto State Park, 8 miles south of Franklinton. The 1,786-acre park has 81 RV sites with hookups, 11 lakes stocked with a variety of freshwater fish, 14 miles of equestrian trails, a 7-mile nature trail and one river flowing through it.

It was the Bogue Chitto River that caught our attention, specifically Rocky Bottom Tubing and Canoeing. It seemed like a perfect afternoon to float the lazy river in a kayak. We opted for the one-hour, 3.5-mile trip. Owner Len Bickham told us kingfishers, split-tail kites, cranes and occasionally bald eagles can be spotted along the banks of the river. Turtles entertained us by sunning themselves on logs and slipping in unison into the water as we glided by. Rocky Bottom rents canoes, tubes and kayaks from April through September.

After leaving behind some attractive RV sites at Bogue Chitto, we were

challenged to find an RV park in Bogalusa. We saw a sign for an RV repair business. I called the number and, sure enough, the owner told us Traveler's Rest Motel rents RV sites behind its facility.

The next morning we parted ways with the bicyclists. For the first time in a week, they had to carry their own gear. In the days that followed, we missed their laughter. We knew they missed us, too, when they texted a photo of their sad faces

and their dinner: canned chili and tortillas.

I've always thought the best way to fall in love with a place is to visit it with people you love. Louisiana, with its swamp pop music and stately plantations, will forever have a special place in our hearts. ♦



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](http://www.artofthespark.com)).



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# MERIDIAN 34B

## 2013 MERIDIAN 34B

### WHAT'S HOT

Full-wall slide, big-coach features in shorter length, Ideal Rest bed, comfy living room with retractable TV in hutch, residential refrigerator package

### WHAT'S NOT

Shower fixtures, short shower doors, small porcelain toilet, sound system instructions, wiring for living room TV

Clockwise: The cockpit instrumentation and controls are ergonomic and driver visibility is very good. Expand the couch seating area by pulling out the rear section and using the optional ottomans. Ottoman tops reverse to expose a hard surface for an additional eating area. When the full-wall slide is out, a second galley counter sink is exposed. A TV is stored in a hutch opposite the couch. Screen visibility is great, but a bit close when sitting at the expandable dining table.



# RIGHT-SIZED FOR COUPLES LOOKING FOR TRAVEL FLEXIBILITY, WINNEBAGO'S ITASCA PUSHER IS OUT-OF-THE-BOX READY FOR THE ROAD

by BOB LIVINGSTON

In the world of upper-class coaches, the Itasca Meridian fits right in. It's not opulent by any means, but it does have enough high-end features to satisfy the needs of discriminating buyers.

Well-thought-out floorplans combined with eye-appealing (and comfortable) Ultraleather-clad furniture, well-appointed fixtures and enough pizzazz to turn heads makes the Meridian a suitable candidate for owners looking to move up to a diesel-pusher.

To test the Meridian waters, we evaluated the 34B, a new floorplan in 2013 and one that sits at the shorter end of the model lineup. The longest model reaches 43½ feet and there are two models in between. Enthusiasts looking for a more manageable size pusher will like the 34B, even though it actually pulls the measuring tape to 35 feet 7 inches.

Maneuverability is a big factor for those wanting a shorter pusher. Here, the Freightliner Maxum chassis is the platform of choice, which lets the Meridian move in and out of tight spaces with little complaint. While the chassis has Freightliner genes, the Maxum design resulted from a cooperative effort with Winnebago engineers. It gives Winnebago a lower rail profile to improve storage capacity — including pass-through space on sliding trays that can accommodate bulky items — while providing an air suspension and a 55-degree wheel cut.

Mating the body to the chassis is accomplished with precision and the result is a smooth, quiet ride. The frame, a network of extruded aluminum with steel reinforcement, gets a lot of the credit for a strong superstructure. Interlocking joints connect the side walls, floor and roof for added rigidity, and the entire structure is wrapped with laminated fiberglass walls with block foam insulation and a crowned, fiberglass roof.

The lower portion of the front cap has a racked-out look and is fitted with tiny head and turn lights that contrast against the expansive one-piece windshield. The look is an acquired taste that eventually pleases one's visual senses. Full-body paint finishes off the exterior, protected by an automotive clear coat. The Meridian is a handsome coach, enhanced by shiny aluminum wheels and free-flowing graphics.

Beyond the enthusiasm of owning a nice coach, driving a diesel-pusher that exhibits good road manners is always a big part of the payoff. In this case, the driver has command of the road via superior front and side visibility and can remain in the bucket for long stretches of time. Instrumentation and controls are ergonomically placed, and although the buttons for the stereo are on the small side it's a decent trade-off in exchange for the higher quality components.



PHOTOS: RICH COX PHOTOGRAPHY



The king bed is fitted into the slideout and occupies most of the bedroom. Walk-around space is limited with the bed size, but the trade-off is an exceptionally comfortable remote-controlled mattress. Access the wardrobe via sliding doors on the rear wall.

The coach's 13-ton weight contributes to positive road hugging attributes and the chassis handles beautifully. There is virtually no noise from the cabin, which attests to its fit and finish. But the 340-HP Cummins engine is not a barnburner. Owners get the 360-HP iteration with the 36-footer and once the coach gets to 40 feet, the 380-HP engine is offered. Uphill performance (without a car in tow) was better than expected, considering the sluggish acceleration from a full stop. Full throttle kept the coach at 40 MPH up most of a 6 percent grade, but after the transmission downshifted twice, the hill was crested at 45 MPH. Don't get me wrong, the powertrain is livable under most conditions and once you consider fuel economy at 9.6 MPH, the whole picture gets brighter.

Cameras for the rear and sides of the coach, combined with an exhaust brake, well-placed side mirrors, the MCD power

solar windshield shade and, of course, usable cup holders, all contribute to a pleasant driving experience.

Once the driving is done for the day cockpit occupants can step back immediately into the front living room, the result of the front entry door configuration.

The cockpit seats play an important role in the living room setup. When turned, they face a couch on the passenger side and a hutch with table and freestanding chairs on the curbside. The living room becomes a sensational conversation area that gets even better once the rear section of the couch is pulled out to expand seating into an L-shaped arrangement. The process is simple after figuring it out for the first time.

Push a button to pop up the 40-inch TV from the hutch and the area converts into a nice entertainment environment. The couch occupies most of the front side



## SPECIFICATIONS

### PERFORMANCE

**FUEL ECONOMY:** 9.6 MPG

**ACCELERATION:**

0-60: 36.4 SEC

40-60: 19.8 SEC

### CHASSIS

**MODEL:** FREIGHTLINER MAXUM

**ENGINE:** CUMMINS ISB 6.7-L

**SAE HP:** 340 @ 2,600 RPM

**TORQUE:** 700 LB-FT @ 1,600 RPM

**TRANSMISSION:** ALLISON 2500 MH 6-SPEED

**AXLE RATIO:** 4.78:1

**FRONT TIRES:** 255/80R22.5

**REAR TIRES:** 255/80R22.5

**WHEELBASE:** 208"

**BRAKES:** AIR

**SUSPENSION:** NEWAY AIR, FRONT AND REAR

**FUEL CAP:** 100 GAL

**WARRANTY:** 3 YEARS/50,000 MILES

### COACH

**EXT LENGTH:** 35' 7"

**EXT WIDTH:** 8' 5.5"

**EXT HEIGHT:** 12' 9" WITH A/C

**INT WIDTH:** 8' .5"

**INT HEIGHT:** 7'

**CONSTRUCTION:** STEEL AND ALUMINUM

FRAME, INTERLOCKING JOINTS, THERMAL-PANEL SIDE WALLS, BLOCK FOAM INSULATION, FIBERGLASS EXTERIOR AND ROOF

**FRESHWATER CAP:** 95 GAL

**BLACK-WATER CAP:** 46 GAL

**GRAY-WATER CAP:** 61 GAL

**WATER-HEATER CAP:** 10 GAL

**LP-GAS CAP:** 28 GAL

**AIR CONDITIONER (2):** 13,500 BTU

**FURNACE:** (2) 20,000 BTU

**REFRIGERATOR:** RESIDENTIAL, 20 CU. FT.

**INVERTER/CHARGER:** 2,800 WATTS/125 AMPS

**BATTERY (2):** 12-VOLT CHASSIS,

(6) 12-VOLT COACH

**AC GENERATOR:** 8,000 KW

**MSRP:** \$247,717

**MSRP AS TESTED:** \$256,978

**WARRANTY:** 1 YR, 15,000 MILES BASIC; 3 YRS, 36,000 MILES STRUCTURE; 10 YRS ROOF SKIN

### WET WEIGHT

(WATER & HEATER, FUEL, LP-GAS TANKS FULL; NO SUPPLIES OR PASSENGERS)

**FRONT AXLE:** 9,540 LBS

**REAR AXLE:** 16,560 LBS

**TOTAL:** 26,100 LBS

### CHASSIS RATINGS

**GAWR, F/R:** 10,410/19,000 LBS

**GVWR/GCWR:** 29,410/33,000 LBS

**ROCCC:** 3,310 LBS (DEDUCT WEIGHT OF PASSENGERS FOR NET CARGO CAPACITY)

**GAWR:** GROSS AXLE WEIGHT RATING

**GVWR:** GROSS VEHICLE WEIGHT RATING

**GCWR:** GROSS COMBINATION WEIGHT RATING

**ROCCC:** REALISTIC OCCUPANT AND CARGO CARRYING CAPACITY (FULL WATER, NO PASSENGERS)

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on the curbside while the dinette/hutch is part of the full-wall slide on the street-side. With both slides extended the area is expansive, although the aisle is restricted when the slides are retracted for travel.

We like the hutch arrangement; it gets the TV out of the way when not in use and offers good seating for dining. The table can be extended by adding a leaf and the two chairs stored in the back closet. The flat floor is a nice feature that facilitates chair placement and the hutch offers considerable storage. We'd like to see adjustable shelves in the hutch, which will improve storage versatility. Also, more attention should be given to securing the wires that connect the TV to the antenna and other audio/visual components. The HDMI cable ripped out from the back of the TV the first time the TV was lifted. That's not a pretty repair.

We've always given Winnebago high marks for understanding the entertainment needs of the owner, but you have to be a rocket scientist (or a youngster who is digitally possessed) to figure out the complexity of the system. The HDMI Matrix central video selection system is a nice touch and being satellite ready and having the Blu-ray home theater components is great, but getting everything to work in harmony is complicated. There are three TVs in this coach, counting the one in the outside compartment, and connecting them to the system requires on-screen programming and poring through multiple instruction manuals. I suggest Winnebago build a single instruction manual with a clear road map on programming. Once we got the system up and running, the sound was superb, although we never did figure out how to connect a satellite receiver without an HDMI input.

The center portion of the coach is reserved for the galley on the left and an opposing, enclosed bathroom. Winnebago took an interesting approach to the galley. When the slide is extended, a stationary structure with the double stainless sinks becomes fully accessible. When the slide is retracted, only one side of the sink is usable, but that works fine. Countertops are light-colored Corian and there is actually enough space to prepare elaborate meals, even though it looks somewhat restricted because of the countertop overlap. The cooktop is exposed when the Corian insert



**The bathroom isn't overly roomy, but the sink and counter are large enough for the essentials. The shower's low top railing for sliding doors can be hard on the scalp.**

is lifted out and the microwave/convention oven is built into the upper bank of cabinets. There are plenty of drawers to store kitchen utensils and supplies and enough room under the sink to house the trash container. For bigger items, a pullout pantry next to the refrigerator is available.

The residential refrigerator option was chosen, giving the user a stainless

steel French door refrigerator with a pull-out freezer drawer below. As part of this package, a 2,800-watt inverter is provided along with two more group 31 AGM batteries for a total bank of six. The \$413 option is a pretty good deal, but makes parking without hookups for long periods of time less practical. Fortunately, the 8,000-watt diesel generator is tied to an automatic start system that kicks in when necessary.

While not expansive, the bathroom works well for our tastes, since it's not an area we tend to lounge in. It's about the only floor space that doesn't move inside a slideout, so there's limited square footage. The lav counter has room for essentials and the sink is big enough to get the job done. Cabinets above and below the sink offer sanctuary for just about anything a resident can use in a bathroom. Elbowroom in the shower is decent, but the fixtures are comical for a coach of this status. The cheesy plastic shower wand was less than effective, so we replaced it for the duration of our trip. Sliding glass doors close off the shower, but they could

CONTINUED ON PAGE 84

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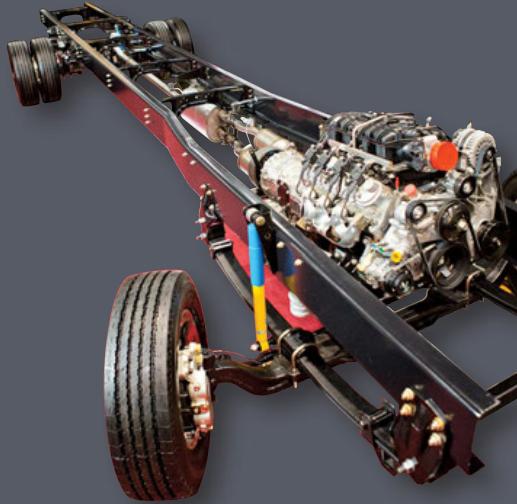
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# CHASSIS CHOICES

MANUFACTURERS EXPAND PLATFORM OFFERINGS  
AS THE RV MARKET CONTINUES ITS COMEBACK

by BRUCE HAMPSON

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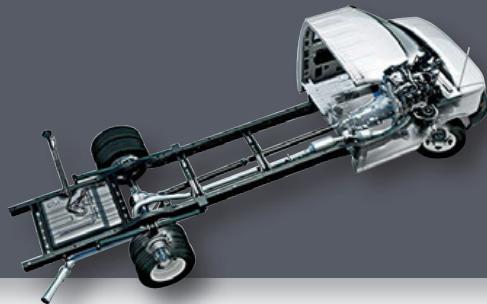


## HYMER SL



PHOTO: LORI BALLARD

## CHEVROLET



If you want to accurately gauge the resurgence of the North American motorhome market, all you really have to do is pay attention to the companies supplying parts to coach manufacturers. And when it comes to motorhomes, no component is more crucial than its chassis.

That's why Ford Motor Co. — the dominant chassis provider in gas-powered motorhomes in the Class A and Class C segments — turned more than a few heads in February when the automaker announced it was increasing production capacity of its popular F53 Class A chassis by approximately 35 percent “to meet renewed recreational vehicle demand in the U.S.” The notification came on the heels of Ford's 2012 F53 registrations, which reached their highest level since 2007.

And the Dearborn, Mich.-based company isn't the only chassis builder committing added resources as the RV industry continues its recovery from the Great Recession. At last winter's National RV Trade Show in Louisville, Ky., Spartan Chassis Inc.

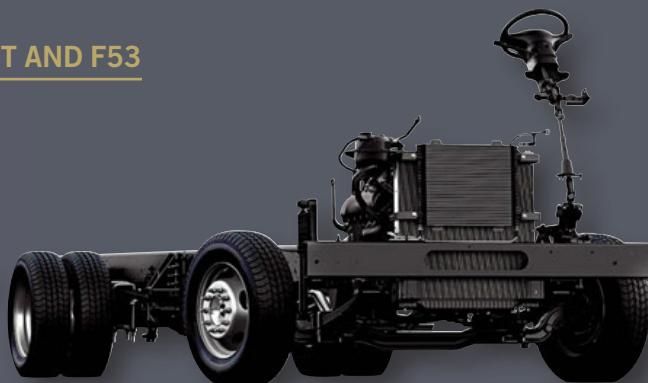
unveiled a pair of front-engine gas-powered “concept” units, while Freightliner Custom Chassis Co. debuted a modular variation of its SLR raised-rail chassis along with an air ride/air brake version of its FRED (front-engine diesel) chassis.

“Last year we introduced the SLR chassis — ‘SL’ stands for ‘superior luxury’ and the ‘R’ signified that it was a raised-rail, or conventional, frame,” said Tony Sippel, director of sales and marketing for Gaffney, S.C.-based Freightliner. However, after Freightliner last year was named exclusive chassis provider for Fleetwood RV — “and they buy modular chassis, what we call ‘SL-M,’” Sippel added — the company brought out a new modular version of its SL unit.

“The ‘SL’ to us is that heavy-duty engine — 500 horsepower all the way up to 600-plus horsepower,” he said. Available in raised- or modular-rail configurations, the SL series has a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 44,600 to 54,000 pounds.

Freightliner also brought back its popular XC-S chassis,

## FORD TRANSIT AND F53



## FREIGHTLINER FRED 2 AND XC-1



## SPARTAN EXTOL AND REVEL



introduced last year in conjunction with the debuts of the Fleetwood Excursion and Thor Palazzo. With a GVWR of 26,000 to 34,700 pounds, the straight-rail chassis offers a wheel cut of 55 to 60 degrees, depending upon front axle/suspension, and Four-Air spring suspension.

"At the time, the dealers didn't really understand what it was," Sippel explained. "Now that those [Fleetwood and Thor] products are available in the marketplace, the dealers were asking 'OK, what is this chassis?' So we brought it back."

By the way, don't let Spartan's "concept" tag fool you. The company has every intention of putting its two new gas chassis — the Extol, with a 28,000-pound GVWR, and the Revel, a 14,000-pound GVWR unit intended for 20- to 28-foot coaches — into production.

"If we were just to show a gas chassis as a concept it would be a waste of time and money," said Spartan President and CEO John Szykiel. "Right now, we're going through the

concept stage, but the path we're going down is to work with select OEMs and have 'test demo' models in the hands of end-users and dealers for rides and evaluations somewhere in late Q3 to early Q4 of 2013."

And, while a 28,000-pound GVWR may seem like a lot of weight for a gas coach, the Extol is designed for use with Power Solutions International's 8.8-liter big block engine introduced in late 2011. According to the company, the engine develops 430 HP and 512 LB-FT of torque at 3,400 RPM, while offering 20 percent improvement in power and 15 percent better fuel economy than the GM Vortec 8.1-liter V-8 that was phased out several years back.

The Revel platform, meanwhile, is based upon the low-cab-forward chassis used for the Isuzu N-series truck. Spartan entered into an alliance with Isuzu and began manufacturing the trucks at its Charlotte, Mich., facility in 2011.

"From our perspective, the two chassis will fill in gaps in

## PRIMARY CLASS A CHASSIS MANUFACTURERS

MANUF./CHASSIS	WHEELBASE	GVWR	ENGINE	TRANSMISSION
<b>FORD</b>				
<b>F53</b>	158, 178, 190, 208, 228, 242 and 252 inches	16,000 to 26,000 lbs	6.8-L V-10; 362 HP, 457 LB-FT torque	TorqShift 5-spd automatic with tow/haul mode
<b>FREIGHTLINER</b>				
<b>MC-L</b>	228 to 254 inches	18,000 lbs	Cummins ISB 6.7-L; 200 HP, 520 LB-FT torque	Allison 1000MH 6-spd automatic
<b>MC (FRED)</b>	228 to 254 inches	24,000 to 28,000 lbs	Cummins ISB 6.7-L front-engine diesel; 300/340 HP, 620/660 LB-FT torque	Allison 1000MH/ or 2000MH 6-spd automatic
<b>XC-S</b>	208 to 276 inches	26,000 to 34,700 lbs	Cummins ISB 6.7-L; 300/340 HP, 660 LB-FT torque; Cummins ISB XT 6.7-L; 360 HP, 800 LB-FT torque Cummins ISC 8.3-L; 380 HP, 1,050 LB-FT torque Cummins ISL 8.9-L; 400/450 HP, 1,250 LB-FT torque	Allison 2500MH 6-spd automatic Allison 3000MH 6-spd automatic Allison 3000MH 6-spd automatic Allison 3000MH 6-spd automatic
<b>XC-M</b>	208 to 278 inches	28,000 to 44,700 lbs	See above	See above
<b>XC-R</b>	208 to 288 inches	26,000 to 44,700 lbs	See above	See above
<b>XC-L</b>	228 to 279 inches	29,500 to 44,700 lbs	See above	See above
<b>SL</b>	252 to 296 inches	44,600 to 54,000 lbs	DD13 12.8-L; 500 HP, 1,650 LB-FT torque	Allison 4000MH 6-spd automatic
<b>SPARTAN</b>				
<b>Mountain Master GT</b>	296 inches	46,000 lbs	Cummins ISL 8.9-L; 450 HP, 1,250 LB-FT torque	Allison 3000MH 6-spd automatic
<b>K2</b>	318 inches	52,000 lbs	Cummins ISX 12.0-L; 500 HP, 1,645 LB-FT torque	Allison 4000MH 6-spd automatic
<b>K3</b>	320 inches	50,000 lbs	Cummins ISX 15.0-L; 600 HP, 1,950 LB-FT torque	Allison 4000MH 6-spd automatic
<b>SPRINTER</b>				
<b>F50</b>	170 inches	11,030 lbs	Mercedes-Benz 3.0-L; 188 HP, 325 LB-FT torque	5-spd automatic

our product line,” noted Szykiel. “Now, we’ll have up to 5,200 pounds of gross vehicle weight (gvw) available in our diesel platforms, up to 28,000 pounds available in the Extol gas platform and up to 14,000 pounds available on the gas Revel. So, for a motorized manufacturer, I think we’ll have the broadest product offering in the marketplace from a stripped-chassis perspective.”

For the first time in years, the trade-only show also featured a brand-new player in the field as American Power Chassis Inc. (APC) unveiled a prototype of the company’s front-engine gas unit intended to accommodate floorplans of 34 feet or shorter. Operating out of a 70,000-square-foot facility in Russell, Kan., APC will focus on A-body rails with wheelbases of 190, 208 and 228 inches. The chassis is powered by a General Motors 6-liter engine and an Allison 2000-series automatic transmission.

### NEW WAVE OF CLASS C CHASSIS

The Class A market is heating up, but the Class C and Class B markets have been just as active of late, with Ford, Chevrolet, Chrysler, Nissan and even Germany’s HYMER AG (with its Fiat Ducato-based coaches) intent upon introducing new products to the North American market. Plus, Mercedes-Benz has hinted at new Sprinter products (although no firm information was available at press time) to help the diesel-powered manufacturer maintain its fuel-efficient grip on the Class B and C market.

The first of these new chassis to actually make an appearance within the U.S. motorhome market was the Nissan NV commercial van series chassis. Built at Nissan’s Canton, Miss., plant, the unit rolled out in 2011 and soon appeared beneath the Roadtrek N6-Active. Built on the NV 2500-series fully boxed ladder frame chassis — the same platform as Nissan’s full-size Titan pickup — and rated for towing 9,000 pounds, the 20-foot 1-inch “activity vehicle” offers campers an optional pop-up roof and is powered by a 261-hp 4-liter V-6 or a 317-hp V-8.

Ford, again, raised a few eyebrows when the company announced the replacement of its venerable E-series cutaway chassis — a cornerstone of Class C motorhome production ever since the E-350 was put into service in 1975 — in 2014 in favor of its new Transit van chas-

sis. Based on Ford’s redesigned global van architecture, the Transit will be offered in three wheelbases (138, 156 or 178 inches) with 8,600 to 10,360 pound gvw ratings. Coupled to a range of fuel-efficient engines including a standard 3.7-liter V-6 and an all-new 3.2-liter PowerStroke diesel option, the Transit provides upfitters with a new, lighter alternative for RV conversions. It’s scheduled for release this year.

The company was also quick to acknowledge that production of the existing E-series stripped chassis and cutaway variants will continue “through most of the decade” to provide motorhome builders with a more robust platform for gvw ratings in excess of 10,000 pounds.

Chrysler, for its part, introduced its 2014 Ram ProMaster van at the Chicago Auto Show in February. Based on the front-wheel-drive Fiat Ducato platform, which has proven immensely popular in Europe and is used there for motorhomes upward of 28 feet long when fitted with dual rear axles, the ProMaster will be offered in three wheelbases (118, 136 and 150 inches) and will be available to upfitters in chassis cab and cutaway versions. A result of Chrysler’s collaboration with Fiat Professional, the ProMaster sports weight-saving unibody construction and either an 11,500-pound GVWR (with a 280-hp 3.6-liter V-6 and six-speed automatic) or a 12,500-pound GVWR with a 174-hp I-4 EcoDiesel and six-speed transmission.

Winnebago Industries became the first domestic RV manufacturer to take advantage of the new Ram ProMaster chassis, using it as the basis for the company’s new Travato Class B coach. Introduced to the company’s dealer body in late April as a 2014 model, the aggressively styled Travato utilizes the 3.6-liter V-6 gas engine and six-speed automatic transmission, and is said to achieve 15-18 mpg. Winnebago also builds on the Sprinter chassis, and is the only manufacturer to offer the economical diesel-powered underpinnings in Class A, Class B and Class C configurations.

The Ducato chassis, by the way, is a favorite with overseas converters and HYMER AG in particular, which builds upward of 22,000 units a year on the underpinnings. Europe’s largest RV builder with annual sales of 47,000 units distributed throughout 28 countries, the company be-

came the first foreign RV manufacturer to exhibit its products on U.S. soil during the Florida RV SuperShow in January. The test marketing display was intended to gauge consumer interest and allow HYMER designers to learn American tastes and adapt European models to the American market.

Roel L.W. Nizet, CEO and chairman of HYMER Group’s executive board, confirmed that the \$1.7 billion German conglomerate is proceeding with plans to enter the U.S. RV marketplace. As Nizet pointed out, however, HYMER, which markets under the Burstner, Carado, Dethleffs, Hymer, Laika, LMC, Movera, Niesmann + Bischoff, Sunlight and TEC brands, has no intention of importing RVs into the United States and is looking to finalize a joint venture with an American concern.

“We are not willing to ship from Europe to America,” he noted. “Our intention is to make a sustainable business out of it. We simply want to be a local [U.S.] OEM with the quality level of Europe, or Germany.”

Chevrolet, too, is re-evaluating its position within the RV market. Although Jim Brieske, manager of the special vehicle manufacturer’s program for GM fleet and commercial operations, admits Chevrolet “over the last several years has been in and out of this market,” he noted it’s a market in which the division has a lot of interest.

“I continue to see us as a major player,” he said of the company that provides conversion specialists such as Roadtrek with vans for the Class B segment and Class C cutaway chassis for Forest River’s Coachmen RV and Thor Motor Coach. “We are still primarily going to be a major player in the lighter-version models. I see us more in the 12,200- to 12,500-pound gvw market.”

Chevrolet provides gvw ratings of 12,300 pounds and 14,200 pounds for its cutaway chassis, but the GM division also maintains a presence in Europe with the rebadged Vivaro and Vauxhall Movano (both Renault-based products). Whether Chevrolet ultimately brings those lighter platforms stateside as the industry moves to smaller, more fuel-efficient chassis is anyone’s guess. ♦



Bruce Hampson has been writing about cars, boats and RVs for more than 30 years. A former senior managing editor at *MotorHome*, he lives in the “RV Capital of the World,” Elkhart, Ind.



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# PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE FOR A MOTORHOME'S FURNACE WILL ENSURE COMFORT CONTROL IN COLD WEATHER

by BILL AND JENN GEHR

It seems like Murphy's law applies just when we least expect it. For furnace operation, it's usually when the temperature plummets and heat is needed to keep warm. Nearly every motorhome is equipped with some type of a forced air unit. Whether the furnace runs on LP-gas or diesel fuel, every model requires an annual visual inspection and a bit of maintenance to keep heat flowing without interruption.

Many safety features are built into today's modern furnaces, and sometimes they are at fault when normal operation is interrupted. The majority of furnace problems are a result of, or combination of, low gas pressure, low voltage, inadequate ducting, insufficient return air and lack of annual maintenance. Be sure a certified RV technician completes any repair work that is beyond cleaning and inspections; improper repairs or adjustments can lead to a hazardous situation. Before inspecting the furnace and/or making repairs, make sure the LP-gas and the thermostat are turned off.

## THE HEAT IS ON



Be sure this compartment area is not used for storage as to protect the many hoses and wiring.



The Aqua-Hot fuel filter is commonly overlooked and must be changed annually.



The antifreeze tank is mounted in a convenient location. Inspect the fluid level before every outing. If the fluid level is too low, it may indicate a leak in the system. Add fluid and check for leaks.



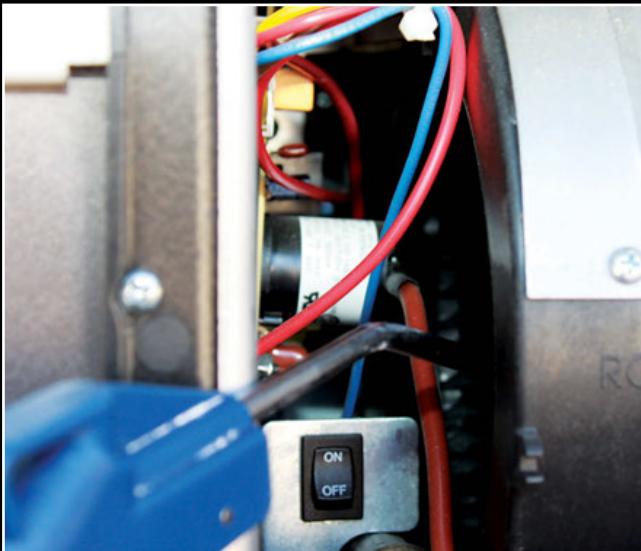
Remove the front cover of the Aqua-Hot once a year and inspect all the components, wires and hoses.



A refractometer is used to test the percentage of propylene glycol in the Aqua-Hot system's antifreeze.



Removing the nozzle from the Aqua-Hot burner assembly requires the use of two wrenches, one on the backing nut and one on the nozzle.



Accessing the Suburban furnace's blower wheel can be a challenge. However, it is important that area be cleaned on an annual basis using compressed air.



With the access door removed, inspection of all components can be quickly visualized. Clean out any excess dust, lint or, in this case, sawdust at the base of the door frame.

**VISUAL INSPECTIONS**

Using a bright flashlight, check for any debris or mud dauber nests residing in the intake or exhaust vents. Remove any obstructions with an appropriate tool. Soot is a product of poor combustion, possibly caused by a spider web, mud dauber nest or rust in the burner. The furnace will need to be repaired by a technician if you are uncomfortable with removing these obstructions. Do not use the furnace until it's been repaired.

Most furnaces do not come with a lint or dust filter, which is commonly used in residential homes. This lack of filtra-

tion leaves furnaces unprotected and is the main reason annual inspections are recommended. On the flip side, never install a filter at the cold air intake, as it will restrict the return air.

For further inspection, remove or open up the access door or panel to allow for a full visual of the front of the furnace. Look for dust and lint buildup and be ready to remove it using moderate air pressure or a vacuum cleaner. Also, check all of the interior components and blower wheels. Heavy lint buildup can cause the blower wheels to rotate out of balance, thus causing premature failure of the blower motor.

Check the circuit board for lint, dust and corrosion. Don't use high air pressure on a PC board; too much air pressure can damage the components. Canned compressed air or a vacuum cleaner works well for this type of cleaning.

Heat ducting can fill with a large amount of dust and lint. Use a vacuum cleaner or a high volume of air to clean these ducts thoroughly. Inspect the ducting at the furnace, making sure each hose is attached and has not been crushed or damaged. Over a period of time, heat ducts can become brittle and split, routing highly heated air into the wrong area.

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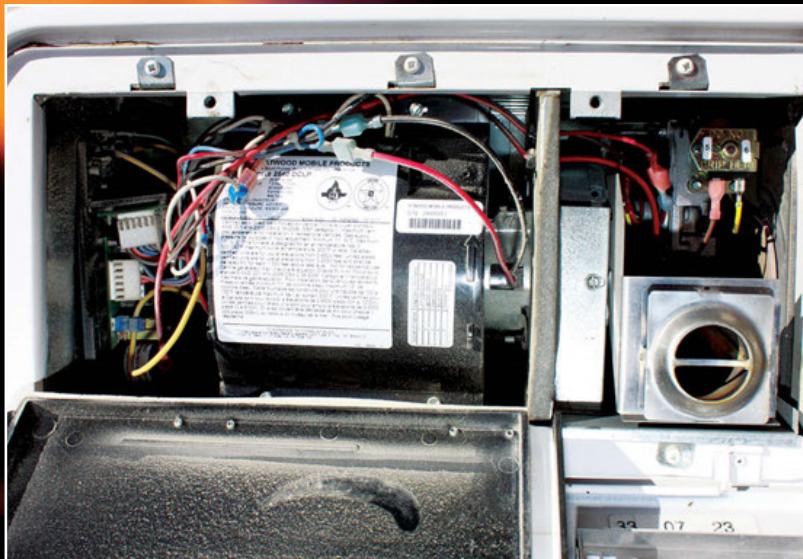


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Although the overall view of the Atwood furnace differs slightly from the Suburban, the annual cleaning and inspection process is the same.



Using an air nozzle, blow air pressure through the intake and exhaust vents from the outside of the coach as part of the annual cleaning.



Remove the floor registers and vacuum out any lint, dust or debris to prevent buildup in the ducting system.

Low LP-gas pressure can result in furnace ignition failure and/or poor operation. The LP-gas regulator may need to be adjusted or replaced by an RV service technician who can properly set the gas pressure on the regulator for optimum safety and function.

Low voltage can slow the fan speed below the threshold for furnace ignition. The fan may sound fast enough but will not trip the sail switch, which is a safety device. If you suspect the voltage is too low, start the motorhome engine or AC generator to boost the battery voltage and try the furnace again. If this solves

the problem, this could be a sign that the motorhome batteries have seen better days, or there are loose or corroded connections in the wiring. Voltage can be checked at the furnace using a multimeter. The furnace requires a minimum of 10.5 volts DC to allow the fan to run fast enough to trip the sail switch.

Bug screens are a popular aftermarket item designed to cover the intake and exhaust vents. However, manufacturers do not recommend the use of such screens as they can become plugged and restrict the flow of air, which can result in poor combustion. Keep in mind that bug

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THE HEAT IS ON



Inspect the flexible ducting for cracks or tears; use aluminum tape for any repairs. Also inspect any areas where the ducting may have become crushed or broken loose from the collars.

The interior return air vent must be clear of any debris for proper furnace function.

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screens will not stop a small spider, but if you need them to prevent those pesky mud daubers from moving in, an alternative is to block the vent with something that can be removed prior to your next outing. It's critical that any vent blockage be cleared before using the furnace.

Aqua-Hot comfort and water heating systems are found in a number of high-end coaches, most commonly in diesel-powered motorhomes. The Aqua-Hot system has a different service and inspection process than standard RV furnaces. Inspection is limited to checking the antifreeze (propylene glycol) level and the visible fuel and rubber hoses. It's a good idea to check each of these before every outing; a 10-second visual inspection just might save your weekend.

Annual service consists of replacing the fuel nozzle, a commonly overlooked item, and the inspection of the burner assembly while replacing the nozzle. Replace the fuel filter annually as well. It's best to carry a spare fuel filter at all times just in case you encounter a bad batch of fuel. Annually check the percentages of propylene glycol in the antifreeze and water solution. If you are unable to test this level, take a small sample to a qualified radiator shop for an accurate reading.

Chances are you've traveled in the spring, winter or fall and have needed the furnace to help combat the chill of the morning or for regular temperature control throughout a colder night. Annual inspections and regular furnace maintenance procedures can keep that chilly air outside where it belongs. ♦



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

# A FRESH OUTLOOK

WHETHER YOU PREFER LIQUID OR POWDER, CHEMICAL OR NATURAL SOLUTIONS, THERE'S A PRODUCT TO COMBAT HOLDING TANK ODORS | by CHRIS HEMER



## There are many things to love about the RV lifestyle.

Spending time with friends and family, discovering new places and reconnecting with nature are just some of the benefits RVing has to offer. But ask any RVer, from a beginner to a seasoned veteran, and they'll tell you the 800-pound gorilla in any motorhome is the holding tank — specifically, the black-water holding tank. And even more specifically, the unpleasant odors that can arise from its murky depths. To be sure, a holding tank gone bad is a good reason to stay outside, but with the right holding tank treatment and some simple maintenance, there's really no reason to suffer olfactory misery.

There are dozens of holding tank treatments on the market, and that can make choosing the right one for your needs daunting. Just remember that holding tank treatments, regardless of the brand, come in two basic categories: natural treatments that use friendly bacteria to break down and digest waste and tissue, and chemical treatments that usually contain dyes and perfumes and may use formaldehyde to break down waste and control odor. From there, it's simply a matter of the delivery method:

liquid, powder or the most recent development, the drop-in.

It comes down to preference, but both liquids and powders allow you to measure a specific amount for your needs, while drop-ins are great for those who consistently require the same amount of treatment for their journey (always a weekend trip with a family of four, for example). Regardless of the product type — liquid, powder or drop-in — keep in mind you'll need to store it in your sometimes space-constrained motorhome.

Two final things to keep in mind are how your motorhome's holding tank is configured and how often you use it. For example, if the holding tank is directly beneath the toilet, or you use your motorhome frequently/full time, you may prefer a scented product that will mask unpleasant odors.

With all of these things in mind, we're presenting this guide to the most current holding tank products, in alphabetical order and in each company's own words. Bear in mind we can't cover every product these companies make in the space we have here, but we'll mention the other products available, and you can always visit each company's website for specifics.

CAMCO



### TST Orange Power

Camco's TST Orange Power RV Toilet Treatment breaks down waste and tissue and its ultra-concentrated formula means only 2 ounces treats a 40-gallon holding tank. It's 100 percent biodegradable, formaldehyde free, stops odors for up to seven days and has a pleasant orange scent. Also available in drop-in form.

**Price:** \$7-\$9 (32-ounce liquid)

**Available at:** Ace Hardware, Amazon.com, Camping World, Wal-Mart and other national retailers  
**Camco Manufacturing, 800-334-2004, [www.camco.net](http://www.camco.net)**

CARR INDUSTRIES



### Eco-Save Dry

Eco-Save is a dry product that contains billions of friendly bacteria and live enzymes in each scoop. It is non-corrosive, has no harsh chemicals, perfume or surfactants, and works by naturally breaking down wastes and toilet paper. In addition, the product lubricates valves, cleans holding tanks and controls odor. Easy to use and lightweight, this product is effective for long periods of boondocking. One scoop treats 40 gallons of black water; half a scoop treats 40 gallons of gray water.

**Price:** \$25 (8 ounces)

**Eco-Save, 800-950-9666, [www.eco-save.com](http://www.eco-save.com)**

CENTURY CHEMICAL



### Travel Jon

Travel Jon Holding Tank Deodorizer/Cleaner controls holding tank odors, breaks down waste and toilet paper, and provides a long-lasting fresh scent. The non-formaldehyde formula is biodegradable and contains detergents to keep the tank clean. The blue liquid formula is highly concentrated, requiring just 2 ounces per treatment. Also available in 2-ounce dry pouches, packaged in eight-pouch boxes.

**Price:** \$14-\$18 (128-ounce liquid) \$5.99-\$7.99 (dry pouch)

**Available at:** Camping World

**Century Chemical, 800-348-3505, [www.centurychemical.com](http://www.centurychemical.com)**

DIRECTLINE/3X CHEMISTRY



### NuGen

NuGen is an all-in-one product that breaks down waste, tissue and debris while creating a nano-shield on holding tank walls to keep waste in suspension until it is discharged. It also controls odors, lubricates valves and cleans sensors. Formaldehyde-free and biodegradable, just 2 ounces of NuGen treats a 40-gallon tank.

**Price:** \$16.99 (20 ounces)

**DirectLine Industries, 866-773-6136, [www.3XChemistry.com](http://www.3XChemistry.com)**

DOMETIC



### Clean 'n Green Liquid

Dometic's Clean 'n Green holding tank treatment is formaldehyde-free, so it's non-toxic and environmentally friendly. Millions of friendly, odor-controlling bacteria in each dose break down waste and keep tanks clean without harming sanitation components or the environment. It's also long lasting and powerful for instant odor control. Also available in Clean 'n Green Week-Enders Bowl Cleaner and Holding Tank treatment in drop-in packets (12 or 24 to a bag).

**Price:** \$10-\$15 (48-ounce liquid), \$10-\$13 (12 2-ounce Clean 'n Green Week-Enders pouches)

**Available at:** Amazon.com, Camping World and other national retailers

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

DOMETIC



### Full Timers Holding Tank Treatment

Designed for RVers on the road 200 or more days a year, Dometic's Full Timers offers the best value with long-lasting odor control in a concentrated, formaldehyde-free formula. Available in 1 gallon and 32 ounce sizes, just 4 ounces are required for treatment. Also available in dry form in resealable bags of six or 12 packets.

**Price:** \$29-\$39 (1-gallon liquid), \$19-\$24 (12-pack of toss-ins)

**Available at:** Camping World

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



### Good Sam Liquid Holding Tank Deodorant

Good Sam Liquid Holding Tank Deodorant controls odors, breaks down waste and tissue and keeps your tank clean. Non-toxic and formaldehyde-free, this product features a 100 percent biodegradable active ingredient.

**Price:** \$9.99 (32-ounce liquid), \$17.99 (64-ounce liquid)

**Available at:** Camping World, 800-262-3636, [www.campingworld.com](http://www.campingworld.com)



### Pure Power Blue

Pure Power Blue is a chemical-free, bacterial enzyme holding tank treatment that performs in all temperature conditions. Its powerful BioBlastPlus technology provides odor control in up to 130 degrees Fahrenheit and keeps holding tanks clean with a fresh scent. Pure Power Blue liquefies all waste and toilet paper, and just 2 ounces treats 40-gallon black- or gray-water tanks. Also available in Bio-Pouch drop-ins.

**Price:** \$22-\$26 (128-ounce liquid), \$12.99-\$14.99 (12-pack of drop-ins)

**Available at:** Camping World

**Valterra Products, 800-806-6159, [www.valterra.com](http://www.valterra.com)**



### Bio-Pak, Porta-Pak

Bio-Pak is tailored specifically for the RV market. Each strong, water-soluble packet disperses instantly when dropped into a holding tank. With an all-natural enzyme formula, Bio-Pak is 100 percent environmentally friendly, biodegradable and septic tank safe. Packaged in a resealable zipper bag containing 10 drop-ins, the product breaks down waste and all types of toilet paper while offering commercial-strength odor prevention. The company also offers its Porta-Pak deodorizer, which will not clog pipes and valves, is formaldehyde-free and easy to handle. Packaged in individual, portion-control packs of 10 inside a resealable zipper bag, the product breaks down waste and paper and also offers commercial-strength odor prevention.

**Price:** \$10-\$13 (10 Bio-Pak drop-ins), \$9-\$11 (10 Porta-Pak drop-ins)

**Available at:** Amazon.com, Camping World, Wal-Mart and other national retailers

**Walex Products Co., 800-338-3155, [www.walex.com](http://www.walex.com)**



### Elemonate

Triple action Elemonate Grey Water Deodorizer Tablets utilizes the same odor control formula found in the company's Porta-Pak deodorizer along with enzymes designed to dissolve grease in the gray-water tank and plumbing lines. It also cleans the tank and sensors of any buildup. Packaged in individual, portion-control bags of five inside a resealable bag, the product powerfully breaks down grease and sludge while offering commercial-strength odor prevention and a fresh lemon scent.

**Price:** \$7-\$9 (package of five tabs)

**Available at:** Amazon.com, Camping World, Wal-Mart and other national retailers

**Walex Products Co., 800-338-3155, [www.walex.com](http://www.walex.com)**



### Odorlos

Odorlos safely and gently liquefies, treats and sanitizes holding tank waste to naturally eliminate odors. It uses a sophisticated natural technology developed in Scandinavia that is exceptionally effective and good for the environment. The 100 percent biodegradable and formaldehyde-free product is available in a nine-pack of 4-ounce bottles, 40- and 68-ounce measuring bottles, a 168-ounce refill, a 5-pound dry economy size and a 10-pack of dry 4-ounce packets. Pour 4 ounces into the toilet, add 1 gallon of water and up to 40 gallons of waste can be treated.

**Price:** \$13.50-19.99 (40-ounce bottle), \$26.99 (68-ounce bottle), \$17.50-19.99 (10-pack of 4-ounce packets)

**Available at:** West Marine and RV parts retailers

**Yara North America, 800-869-8764, [www.odorlos.com](http://www.odorlos.com) ♦**

THE FORD CORP.



### Good Sam Liquid Holding Tank Deodorant

Good Sam Liquid Holding Tank Deodorant controls odors, breaks down waste and tissue and keeps your tank clean. Non-toxic and formaldehyde-free, this product features a 100 percent biodegradable active ingredient.

**Price:** \$9.99 (32-ounce liquid), \$17.99 (64-ounce liquid)  
**Available at:** Camping World, 800-262-3636, [www.campingworld.com](http://www.campingworld.com)

VALTERRA PRODUCTS



### Pure Power Blue

Pure Power Blue is a chemical-free, bacterial enzyme holding tank treatment that performs in all temperature conditions. Its powerful BioBlastPlus technology provides odor control in up to 130 degrees Fahrenheit and keeps holding tanks clean with a fresh scent. Pure Power Blue liquefies all waste and toilet paper, and just 2 ounces treats 40-gallon black- or gray-water tanks. Also available in Bio-Pouch drop-ins.

**Price:** \$22-\$26 (128-ounce liquid), \$12.99-\$14.99 (12-pack of drop-ins)  
**Available at:** Camping World  
 Valterra Products, 800-806-6159, [www.valterra.com](http://www.valterra.com)

WALEX PRODUCTS



### Bio-Pak, Porta-Pak

Bio-Pak is tailored specifically for the RV market. Each strong, water-soluble packet disperses instantly when dropped into a holding tank. With an all-natural enzyme formula, Bio-Pak is 100 percent environmentally friendly, biodegradable and septic tank safe. Packaged in a resealable zipper bag containing 10 drop-ins, the product breaks down waste and all types of toilet paper while offering commercial-strength odor prevention. The company also offers its Porta-Pak deodorizer, which will not clog pipes and valves, is formaldehyde-free and easy to handle. Packaged in individual, portion-control packs of 10 inside a resealable zipper bag, the product breaks down waste and paper and also offers commercial-strength odor prevention.

**Price:** \$10-\$13 (10 Bio-Pak drop-ins), \$9-\$11 (10 Porta-Pak drop-ins)  
**Available at:** Amazon.com, Camping World, Wal-Mart and other national retailers  
 Walex Products Co., 800-338-3155, [www.walex.com](http://www.walex.com)

WALEX PRODUCTS



### Elemonate

Triple action Elemonate Grey Water Deodorizer Tablets utilizes the same odor control formula found in the company's Porta-Pak deodorizer along with enzymes designed to dissolve grease in the gray-water tank and plumbing lines. It also cleans the tank and sensors of any buildup. Packaged in individual, portion-control bags of five inside a resealable bag, the product powerfully breaks down grease and sludge while offering commercial-strength odor prevention and a fresh lemon scent.

**Price:** \$7-\$9 (package of five tabs)  
**Available at:** Amazon.com, Camping World, Wal-Mart and other national retailers  
 Walex Products Co., 800-338-3155, [www.walex.com](http://www.walex.com)

YARA NORTH AMERICA



### Odorlos

Odorlos safely and gently liquefies, treats and sanitizes holding tank waste to naturally eliminate odors. It uses a sophisticated natural technology developed in Scandinavia that is exceptionally effective and good for the environment. The 100 percent biodegradable and formaldehyde-free product is available in a nine-pack of 4-ounce bottles, 40- and 68-ounce measuring bottles, a 168-ounce refill, a 5-pound dry economy size and a 10-pack of dry 4-ounce packets. Pour 4 ounces into the toilet, add 1 gallon of water and up to 40 gallons of waste can be treated.

**Price:** \$13.50-19.99 (40-ounce bottle), \$26.99 (68-ounce bottle), \$17.50-19.99 (10-pack of 4-ounce packets)  
**Available at:** West Marine and RV parts retailers  
 Yara North America, 800-869-8764, [www.odorlos.com](http://www.odorlos.com) ♦



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## LIGHT THE WAY

I park my motorhome in a storage shed that (at the door) is 12 feet wide. Since my coach is 10 feet wide at the mirrors, it's a tight fit. I built a lighted frame out of 1-by-4s and rope lights to help guide me in. The vertical lights are about 2 inches wider than the width of the motorhome, so when I back in using the mirrors I must see light on both sides. If I don't, then I am not aligned properly. It has made the storage process a lot easier on my nerves.

**PETE MEYN | HOUSTON, TEXAS**

## EASY-FILL DEF TANK



We have a rear-engine Class A diesel that requires diesel exhaust fluid (DEF). The placement of the DEF tank is OK for servicing at a fuel station, but I prefer to refill using the 2½-gallon jugs to keep it topped off. However, the tank placement is not ideal for refilling that way. The tank is set back so the hose provided with each DEF jug is too short to allow for tilting the jug. The filler neck is at the top of the tank and nearly even with the top of the access door opening, forcing a funnel to be practically level. I've tried numerous funnel designs but haven't found one that

will stay secure while having ample tilt so the fluid doesn't spill.

I solved the problem by making an extension hose. Each jug of DEF comes with a hose. I cut one in the middle, then inserted a 15-inch piece of scrap 5/8-inch garden hose and used two spring-type automotive clamps to hold it together. It works well since the hose threads onto the jug and is made to fit perfectly into the tank filler neck. The cost was \$1.50 for the two clamps, which is far less than the cost of an exotic funnel.

**LEN BENKOSKY | SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ.**

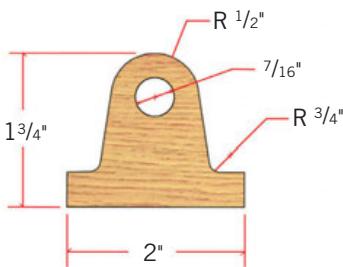
## TRICKY TOWEL BAR

Our motorhome came with a bar right below the gas stovetop that we used as a towel bar. It was a nuisance to hold the towels up to access the drawers below. I had some small ¾-inch oak boards and decided to make a towel rack that would mount on our refrigerator's wood door.

I drew the pattern onto the oak boards, then drilled holes for the small radius at the bottom of the end pieces all the way through. I used a band saw to cut away the remaining wood, and an oscillating spindle sander to sand the pieces smooth.

I bought a ¾-inch dowel and measured the length (plus 1 inch) needed to hang two towels. I cut the dowel accordingly, then drilled a 7/16-inch hole on one side of the end pieces about halfway into the oak. I then stained the end pieces and the dowel, predrilled the mounting holes in the end pieces and mounted them with the dowel in between at the desired location. (Note: Our refrigerator door is made from oak and I made sure it was thick enough to use screws.) Since the refrigerator is next to a wall, the door does not open completely because of the oak end on the right side of the door, but we haven't had any problems hitting the wall with the door and it is more convenient now to use the drawers and towels.

**RODNEY NELSON | EUREKA, CALIF. ♦**



## HOSE HELPER

Thanks to my cats, I had a simple idea to solve the problem of holding my sewer hose to the RV park drain. I buy a 25-pound bag of absorbent clay cat litter from my local grocery store. The litter comes in a super strong woven plastic bag. It occurred to me I could use a partially filled bag for a sewer hose hold-down. I leave about one-fourth of the clean litter in the bag, fold it down to the litter and clip with two clothespins. The bag is strong and waterproof, so the litter stays dry in the rain and the bag never tears. When we leave the park, I toss the bag in one of our RV storage bins and it's ready for the next use.

**GREG SISK | TALLAHASSEE, FLA.**

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

**Quick Tips**, *MotorHome's* monthly column of handy, simple tips by fellow RVers, is looking for submissions. Please send your favorite do-it-yourself ideas to: *MotorHome* Quick Tips, 2575 Vista Del Mar Drive, Ventura, CA 93001, or email letters@motorhomemagazine.com. Be sure to include photos, illustrations or drawings, if necessary. If your tip is selected for publication, you'll receive \$35.

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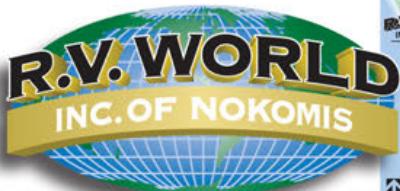


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HANDS-ON | *by* KEVIN LIVINGSTON

## SIMPLISTIC SWEEPER

A lightweight and inexpensive sweeper makes interior cleanup a breeze

**One thing almost all motorhome owners can agree on** is the need for interior cleanliness. Carpets and floors have a tendency to quickly accumulate dust, debris and allergy invaders of all kinds, especially for more active RVers. One of the best ways to help cut down the accumulation of crud is to keep up with vacuuming chores.

To help simplify sweeping tasks and life on the road in general, an As Seen On TV product known as the Swivel Sweeper G2 offers exceptional vacuum-cleaner convenience. The Swivel Sweeper G2 is a small, highly flexible and capable battery-operated sweeping device. The Swivel Sweeper G2 is constructed of aluminum and plastic, providing both strength and a lighter weight. Speaking of lightweight, the Swivel Sweeper G2 tips the scales at a whopping 2 pounds, making this vacuum extra user-friendly for all RVers. Once disassembled, the sweeper occupies little storage space.

Aside from weight, the designers of this condensed package make the best of every inch by packing four rotating brushes, including edge cleaners, along all sides to direct debris toward the center-positioned, touchless dirt tray. Versatility of this product is attributed to an elbow joint and ability to swivel a full 360 degrees.

Use of the Swivel Sweeper G2 is literally as simple as one, two, three. The first step involves assembly of the upper, middle and lower poles. Simply screw Pole A to B and then B to C. Now the sweeper head can be attached by lining up Pole C to where D is located on the head and locking them together. The final step is to properly charge the 7.2-volt battery in order



to get close to the claimed 45-minute run time. For the initial setup it's best to let the battery charge for a full eight

hours, followed by six to eight more hours of charging after fully depleting the battery. From this point the battery can be charged at any time without the full depletion requirement.

The Swivel Sweeper G2 was not only able to clean our interior successfully, but it also "swept" away any initial concern we had regarding its true capabilities. From first glance, we doubted its performance, but like any other test, it deserved a fair shot. We actually were responding after a reader wrote us to extoll the practicality of this product. Simply put, the Swivel Sweeper G2 worked amazingly well, and kudos to the reader who gave us this tip. It easily achieved every advertised capability.

I put this sweeper through the paces cleaning wood, carpeting and vinyl surfaces and even areas with thick dog hair; in all cases the Swivel Sweeper performed better than expected. Also as claimed, the elbow joint not only keeps you from uncomfortable bending, but also complements the function of the 360-degree swivel action during the cleaning process. Even the battery delivered almost every minute of the 45-minute run time on a full charge; we logged 42.55 minutes before the battery gave out. The Swivel Sweeper G2 did so well that it has earned a permanent home in my RV's closet and is well worth the \$40 price tag. The Swivel Sweeper G2 is available online and at home supply stores. ♦

**As Seen On TV, 866-277-3366, [www.asseenontv.com](http://www.asseenontv.com)**





## Premature Failure

FINDING THEMSELVES AT A DEAD END IN TRYING TO BUY AN OUT-OF-WARRANTY PART, TWO READERS ASKED FOR HOT LINE'S HELP. THEY WROTE:

We need Hot Line's help in solving a problem. When we bought our RV in June 2010, we had the dealer install a Xantrex PROsine 2.0 inverter/charger. The inverter worked fine for about a year, then the display panel went bad. I contacted Xantrex and the company sent me a remanufactured display panel, which fixed the problem (thank you, Xantrex).

Now the replacement display panel has gone bad and I can't get it replaced. I realize that the warranty has run out at this time and we are willing to pay for it. The problem is that when I contacted Xantrex I was told that it has a limited supply of display panels and it is saving them for warranty replacements. In the meantime I have a very expensive inverter that will not work because I can't buy a \$115 panel for it.

**ROGER AND JANICE ELZEY  
KING CITY, CALIF.**

*Hot Line passed the Elzeys' dilemma on to Xantrex Technology Inc. for further consideration. We received a follow-up letter from the Elzeys as well as a copy of an email to them from Xantrex. It read:*

I am the manager of the technical support team here and was recently forwarded a letter from *MotorHome* magazine describing your troubles getting your PS2.0 Inverter repaired. I was disappointed to hear that we had not made a replacement display available to you to repair your inverter

and I apologize for that. I have had a replacement display shipped out to you free of charge on overnight service with UPS.

**ROB SYVERTSEN  
CUSTOMER SERVICE  
XANTREX TECHNOLOGY INC.  
ELKHART, IND.**

I am writing to say thank you for solving our problem with our inverter/charger. As soon as Xantrex received Hot Line's letter, I received a call from the company stating that there must have been some sort of confusion about the part I needed. I was told that the part was already shipped that day using next day air. All at no cost to us! I received the new panel the next day and installed it. Thanks again, this may seem like a small problem to most people but to us, at this time, it was extremely important.

**R. AND J. E.**

### BASEPLATE BLUES

*Looking for help in his attempt to secure a refund through an aftermarket manufacturer, a reader asked for Hot Line's intervention. He wrote:*

Last summer I updated our towed vehicle and therefore needed a new baseplate to accommodate our Roadmaster StowMaster 5000 tow bar. The baseplate needed for the new vehicle (a 2010 Dodge Dakota) was the Roadmaster EZ Kit #52276-1, which I ordered online from [www.etrailer.com](http://www.etrailer.com).

Upon receiving the new baseplate, I had it installed by a local auto service garage. The mechanic followed the installation directions that came in the box. The cost was \$82.50 plus tax. When I got the Dakota home and tried to mount the tow bar, it wouldn't fit. The mounts appeared to be 2.5 inches off.

I called Roadmaster's tech support department and asked what the

problem could be. The person I spoke with said the baseplate was on backward and needed to be reversed. I told him that the mechanic had followed the installation instructions to the letter. His reply was that there was an error in the exploded-view illustration (which has since been revised) that came with the baseplate. The callout that reads, "Must be pointing to the outside of the car," should say, "Safety cable tabs must face to the inside of the car."

So back to the auto service garage I went to have the baseplate reversed at a cost of \$100 plus tax.

I contacted Roadmaster's customer service department and spoke with Nancy Wright. I explained the situation to her and she offered me a \$100 coupon on the purchase of anything out of their catalog. I looked through the catalog, but didn't find anything I needed. I told Wright that instead of the coupon, I would like a check for \$100. She offered me \$50 cash, which I refused.

I would greatly appreciate any help that Hot Line can give me in getting a full reimbursement of the \$100 cost for the dismount and remount of the baseplate.

**BEN LINK  
WEST POINT, IOWA**

*Hot Line contacted Roadmaster on Link's behalf. A week later, we received a letter from Roadmaster acknowledging receipt of our correspondence and letting us know the company was reviewing the circumstances. Sometime later, we received a follow-up letter letting us know that the company had sent Link a check for the full amount. We also received the following from Link:*

I have received a check from Roadmaster for the full amount — \$107. Thank you, Hot Line, for all of your help. It was greatly appreciated.

**B. L. ♦**

TO CONTRIBUTE TO HOT LINE, please refer to Contact *MotorHome*, on page 12.

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## AGM Batteries

I was recently in Quartzsite, Ariz., for a month and camped with several Lazy Daze motorhome friends. While working on a 2005 coach where the owner had installed four AGM batteries and a larger converter approximately one year ago, I noticed a large amount of corrosion on most terminals. The owner had outfitted the system with No. 4 welding cable, which is commonly used because of the larger inverter. Having seen this I did a check on five other coaches that came in, which also had installed AGM batteries within the last two years. What I saw was alarming. Only one of the sets of batteries was free of corrosion. It had an application of corrosion preventer on the terminals. The others had corrosion starting on each terminal. I was concerned because the batteries are listed as maintenance free as a selling point. Most RVers who have these batteries know they don't require any water and don't check them routinely as a result.

Would you please explain the difference between an AGM battery and a regular lead-acid type?

**JOHN LEACH | LARKSPUR, COLO.**

*AGM stands for absorbed glass mat, a type of battery construction. An AGM battery still uses lead plates and sulfuric acid as an electrolyte, but has the electrolyte absorbed in a fiberglass mat separator. AGM batteries have a pressure relief valve for each cell that will release excess pressure. Charging thresholds for AGM batteries are 14.4 volts during bulk phase and 13.4 when in float mode. If these values are exceeded, it's possible that the pressure relief valve will open, which can impact corrosion. If the corrosion looks dry and has a powder-type texture, then it's possible that the batteries are gassing because of high charge rates. If the corrosion is darker blue and looks*

*wet, then it's likely the terminals are leaking. Although a long shot, the corrosion could also be left over from the terminals used on previous batteries.*

*Not all AGM batteries are created equal. The higher quality brands like Lifeline and Optima are almost always sealed properly. You can compromise any terminal seal by over tightening the fittings. If that happens, the terminals can pick up corrosion. Also, the cheaper batteries may not be sealed properly from the factory, and many times these batteries can leak from the terminals right from the get-go.*

*It's also common for owners to assume they have AGM batteries when in fact they are using sealed versions that*

**FORD IN-TANK FUEL PUMPS HAVE BEEN A KNOWN PROBLEM. OFTEN, WHEN THEY COOLED OFF THEY WOULD WORK AGAIN FOR A WHILE.**

**BUT DIRT AND WATER WILL RUIN A GOOD PUMP. SO WHENEVER A PUMP IS REPLACED, THE CONDITION OF THE INSIDE OF THE TANK SHOULD BE CHECKED.**

*are labeled "maintenance free" and have flat caps that need to be pried off for adding water. It's very possible for a "maintenance-free" battery to leak and cause a corrosive buildup on the terminals.*

### FORD CHASSIS MPG READOUT

I have a 2012 Winnebago 35F Vista motorhome on a Ford F53 chassis and can consistently get 8 MPG at 60 MPH without a dinghy and moderately loaded. I love the layout and am pleased with the coach. I have one complaint: Why did Winnebago ask Ford to remove the MPG feature on the monitor screen? I asked a local Ford dealer if they could restore it and they blew me off. Can you find out if it can be restored and if there is a charge?

**VICTOR HANKS | VIA EMAIL**

*I checked with Winnebago and received this response from its chassis liaison engineer: "Ford introduced a 'new' cluster with a message center (including MPG) for the 2009 model-year F53 chassis. Ford did receive some 'body builder feedback' reporting negative feedback (i.e. this feature was promoting customer dissatisfaction and increasing customer concerns on fuel economy, even though MPG was pretty typical for large vehicles). It's my understanding that Ford elected to remove (or disable) the MPG feature, although it was still shown in the 2011 F53 Ford sales brochure. Winnebago Industries did not tell Ford to delete the MPG feature and is not aware of a procedure to make the system function."*

### DIESEL POWER LOSS

I own a 2004 Holiday Rambler Endeavor with a Cummins ISC 330-HP engine. For the past several years I have experienced a severe loss of engine power when I turn on the headlights. The power will drop dramatically, but all I have to do is turn the lights off and back on and the power will pick up. I can turn the switch on and off instantly and it affects the power. I changed the light switch but saw no change.





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I have consulted with more than 10 repair facilities and none have pinpointed the problem. I think it has to be an electrical short somewhere, but I don't know where to look. I have spent thousands of dollars on this problem and no one has been able to tell me the cause. I sincerely hope you can give me some guidance.

**ROGER SIMMONS | GULFPORT, MISS.**

*Diesel engines have power-reduction modes that kick in when an engine is running hot, etc. Look at the wiring diagrams for the engine controls and determine what wiring goes near the headlight circuits. The headlights may be sharing a ground connection (or stealing needed power due to a bad connection) with a critical circuit in the engine controls that may be loose or corroded, etc. Check all the ground wires at both ends. I suggest you take it to a Cummins shop.*

**ELECTRIC WATER HEATER CONVERSION**

Last summer I used a Hott Rod water heater and it worked great. The heating

element, however, replaces the anode rod in my Suburban water heater. Without the protection from an anode rod, is the integrity of my heater tank compromised?

**PAUL WEIS | LOVELAND, COLO.**

*Yes, Paul, I recommend keeping an anode in any water heater that came with one from the factory. The Hott Rod kits should come with a reducer that adapts them to a Suburban water heater and includes a built-in anode. If for some reason you don't have this, contact the manufacturer at 800-456-4498, or www.hottrod.net.*

**TOWING A CHEVY CRUZE**

I have a 2013 Chevy Cruze with an automatic transmission that I want to flat tow. Remco doesn't make a pump kit for that car. Is there any equipment available that will make the Cruze flat towable?

**LARRY HATHAWAY | ISANTI, MINN.**

*I checked with my contact at Remco and was advised that the company has been working on a lubrication pump kit for that*

*model with an automatic transmission, but it is not currently available. Customer demand and test results will determine if and when a kit becomes available.*

*Since GM did an about-face in August 2011 and pulled back on its recommendation for towing the Cruze on all four wheels, it has offered some buyers money toward a tow dolly and/or financial incentives to change to another GM model that is towable. I don't know of any product currently available to make the automatic Cruze flat towable. Probably the best bet is to dolly tow it for now. If enough customers let Remco know they want a kit, this may move things along.*

**FORD FUEL PUMP FAILURES**

This is in regard to "Fuel Pump Failures" in the May issue. I purchased a 1995 Rex-hall RexAir motorhome on a Ford chassis. The previous owner drove it from Arizona to California and had a fuel pump failure. The tank was removed and a new pump installed. He headed for Washington and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 81

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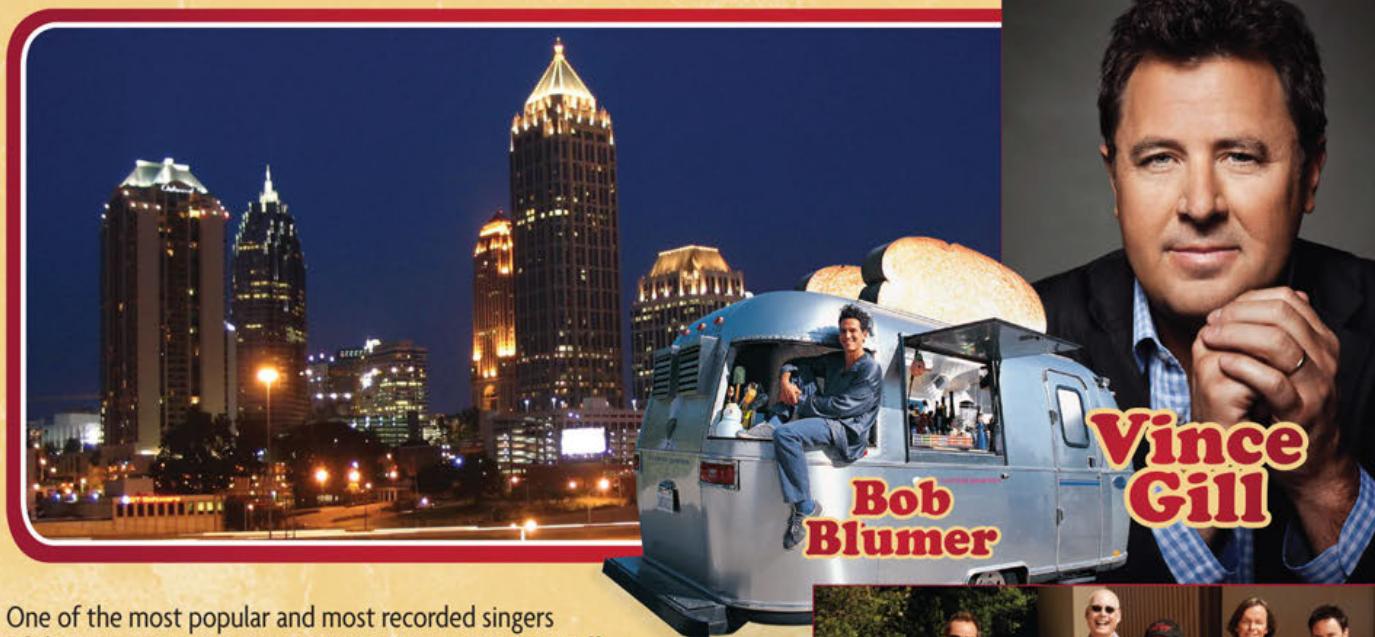


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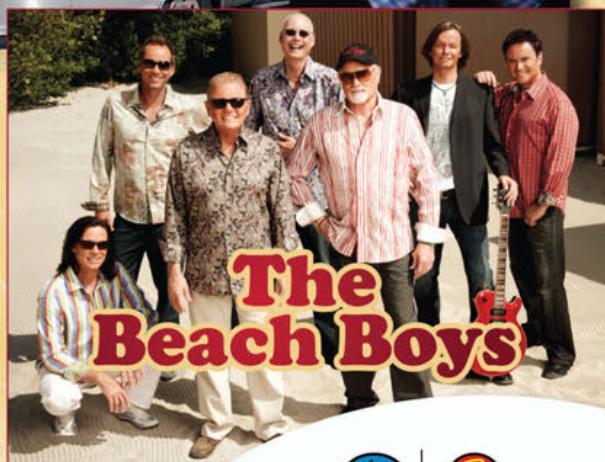
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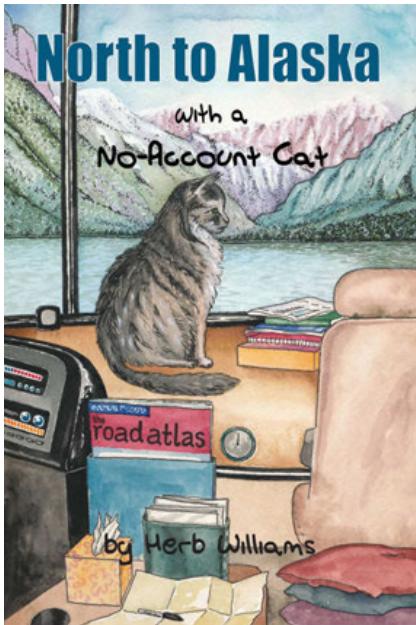
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**Those of us who do even a little dry camping must** also do a bit of figuring on how long our battery reserve power, water and LP-gas will last. Battery capability usually is the first item on the menu. At the end of the day, do we have enough charge left in our house batteries to get us through the night?

Unfortunately, what we take out of batteries must be put back in to keep our coach systems running. The first step in evaluating your needs is to acquire an accurate method of measurement: a good voltmeter, in the form of a digital multimeter, available at hardware stores. This meter can serve as your “gas gauge” for batteries. Beyond a basic multimeter, you might consider the Craftsman Digital Ammeter, Model 82369, which measures voltage as well as the flow of current, in amperes (amps).

In the evening, after you’ve completed your battery charging routine and your AC generator has been shut down for a while, it’s time for a checkup. You’ve already watched your favorite TV show and you’re ready to retire for the night. Turn everything off except one single-bulb light and your refrigerator, and check battery voltage. (Anytime you repeat this measurement, do it the same way.)

With the meter set on DC voltage, 20-volt scale, take a reading at a reliable source (preferably the house batteries themselves, or a 12-volt DC accessory outlet). Make sure the outlet is fed by the house batteries, not starting batteries.



Your voltage reading should be around 12.6. If it’s 12.4 or lower, you’re using quite a bit of power in the evenings, your charging method is suspect and/or your batteries are weak. They may be too small or they may have become partially diminished from inadequate charging.



If your reading is low (a reading of 12.0 volts should be regarded as nearly “dead”), your first checkpoint is the battery charging method. Typical methods used during dry camping are solar panels and the converter/charger built into your motorhome, which is powered by your AC generator. The engine-

driven alternator in your coach also charges the house batteries, but you shouldn’t rely on it after you’ve parked in your site.

To check your converter/charger, perform a voltage check in the morning and start your AC generator. Recheck at 30-minute intervals. You’ll see voltage rise from the overnight low.

After at least a couple of hours of charging, you should see 14.2 volts, or it may be as high as 14.6 (with open-cell batteries, and depending on level of battery depletion) if you have solar panels and/or if your converter/charger is a “smart” unit. Smart converter/chargers have multiple stages, including one for bulk charging and another for float conditions, which means a resting state that follows the completion of charging. During this test, your solar panels (if any) will be assisting your converter/charger.

On a smart charger, switches can be set for different batteries: conventional (flooded, or open-cell) or absorbed glass mat (AGM). In the photo below, 6-volt Trojan T125 flooded batteries are shown in front and Lifeline GPL-4CT are behind. They are



wired in series for 12-volt DC output. A third battery type, gel-cell (not shown), is not as common in RV usage. If your converter/charger is not a smart charger (check manufacturer specifications on your converter), consider changing to something like the Xantrex TRUECharge2 60A.

If your motorhome is equipped with a solar system, repeat the procedure the next day using only the panels, which may not be capable of providing a full charge, depending on the level of battery depletion, number of panels and the viability of your wiring hookup.

If charging voltage meets the criteria during the above test of your converter/charger and you still can’t get through the night without losing power, the problem probably lies in the size and/or number of house batteries or their condition.

As noted above, finish voltage should be higher for flooded batteries (up to 14.6), while the finish for AGMs should be held to about 14.2 volts, or slightly higher during cold weather. Check for specifics on the website for your battery brand.

If you chose a combination voltmeter/ammeter, you can also check charge rate in amps, making battery-watching more interesting and useful in the quest to make life more comfortable while RVing off the grid. ♦



**IMPROVE WI-FI RECEPTION**

Wi-Fi service in some RV parks can be frustratingly weak or even unusable. However, a company called Amped Wireless claims to make it possible for RVers to detect Wi-Fi on their laptop by quadrupling the computer's reception capabilities. Amped Wireless' High Power Wireless-N 600mW Pro is a weatherproof adapter designed to extend a computer's Wi-Fi range in areas where typically no hotspots could be found. The adapter features a 600mW wireless power amplifier, plus a high-gain directional antenna that the company says will achieve up to four times the wireless range of standard networking adapters. The adapter comes with a 26-foot USB cable, a desktop stand, and wall and pole mounting kits. MSRP is \$99.

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appeared to be dirt and small gravel and rust. They recommended having the tank cleaned and sprayed on the inside with an epoxy, which we did. We have since driven to Colorado, through Yellowstone and back to Washington and have not had a fuel pump issue. I hope this can help others who may have this experience.

**MICHAEL BUROKER  
BONNEY LAKE, WASH.**

*Thanks for writing, Michael, and sharing what you learned. The Ford in-tank fuel pumps have been a known problem, particularly from that era. Often, when they cooled off they would work again for a while. But dirt and water will ruin a good pump, so whenever a pump is replaced, the condition of the inside of the tank should be checked to prevent this from happening. This goes for any brand and model. Typically when the sending unit and pump are removed, a small flashlight can be used along with an inspection mirror, so an expensive camera scope isn't*

again had no fuel getting to the engine. Again he replaced the pump.

After I bought the coach we started traveling and had no problems. Then, while on the freeway, we started experiencing the feeling of running out of gas.

We would pull over and check a few things and then start it again and it would run OK. This happened several times. We eventually took the motorhome to The PowerShop in Enumclaw, Wash. A scope was put into the tank and showed what

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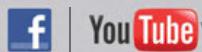
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### COACH & POWERTRAIN FROM PAGE 81

needed. Sometimes these tank coatings can peel off after a short time, so I don't recommend them across the board. However, I'm glad it worked out for you.

#### CHARGING LINE

I have a 2005 Coachmen Class A with a 300-HP diesel. I would like to run a charging line to the dinghy (a 2000 Chevy S-10 Blazer) with a diode in the circuit. Where would I connect my wire from the motorhome, and to what connection would I connect to on the dinghy?

**LARRY BANKSTON**  
LAKE ST. LOUIS, MO.

*The charging line should run from the large output terminal on the alternator back to the dinghy vehicle via a trailer plug connector, then connected to the positive terminal of the dinghy battery. It should be heavy 8-gauge wire to reduce voltage drop, to fully charge the battery. There should be 30-amp auto-resetting circuit breakers at each end because if there is a short circuit, power could come from either the alternator or battery into the short.*

#### WORKHORSE PARTS

In the May issue, under "Radiator Reservoir Replacement," you had information to order parts for Workhorse to contact [www.workhorse.com](http://www.workhorse.com). When you get to the website, the only information available to the general public refers you to Workhorse dealers/service centers. They do have a website for dealers, but you need a dealer code and password to get into it. They apparently do not want the general public to have any of their information.

**DON THOMPSON | VIA EMAIL**

*Yes, that's true. My intention was to provide a way for readers to find a source for parts. In this case, the nearest Workhorse dealer can be found and parts ordered through that dealer. However, if you want to order parts online, you can do this through [www.workhorseparts.com](http://www.workhorseparts.com) and 800-421-7788, or [www.workhorse.com](http://www.workhorse.com) and 877-403-7827. ♦*

TO CONTRIBUTE TO COACH & POWERTRAIN, refer to Contact MotorHome, on page 12.

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MERIDIAN 34B FROM PAGE 51

be taller. Short shower doors with head-banger rails are a pet peeve of mine.

A porcelain toilet is provided, but I'd rather see the elongated version used instead. I understand the logic of the designers thinking the bigger toilet will restrict walk space, but we think that's something we can live with in return for the more comfortable toilet.

Out back are the usual features, with an optional king-size bed centered in the slideout section. The Ideal Rest bed has digital controls to individually manage the feel of the mattress, and it's exceptionally sleep worthy. Of course, the larger mattress consumes most of the walk-around space, but access to make the bed is still attainable. A TV and shelf/cabinet structure is opposite the bed, in perfect sight for watching while reclined. The rear wall houses the wardrobe closet with mirrored sliding doors and the closet for the optional stackable washer/dryer. A ceiling fan is an inexpensive and valuable option for the bedroom.

Rounding out the interior amenities are plenty of light fixtures and indirect lighting, MCD American Duo solar/blackout shades on all the windows, dual 13,500-Btu air conditioners with heat pumps, dual 20,000-Btu furnaces and a two-zone thermostat. The OnePlace systems center makes operating slideouts and appliances/accessories convenient.

Comfort heating and air conditioning are well balanced throughout the coach, with a little more heat concentrated in the bathroom — not a bad thing for those chilly mornings. An energy management system provides versatility when using all those appliances in concert with available 120-volt AC power.

As expected, the list of standard features for a motorhome of this caliber is rather extensive. By contrast the list of options is not that long, meaning it's well equipped right out of the box. Just north of \$9,600 covered all the available options, except for the satellite dish.

By diesel-pusher standards, the Meridian's stature is on the small side, but aside from its physical length, there's nothing small about the 34B. The floorplan is entertainment-friendly, and of course, it's perfect for a couple looking for a big dose of luxury. ♦

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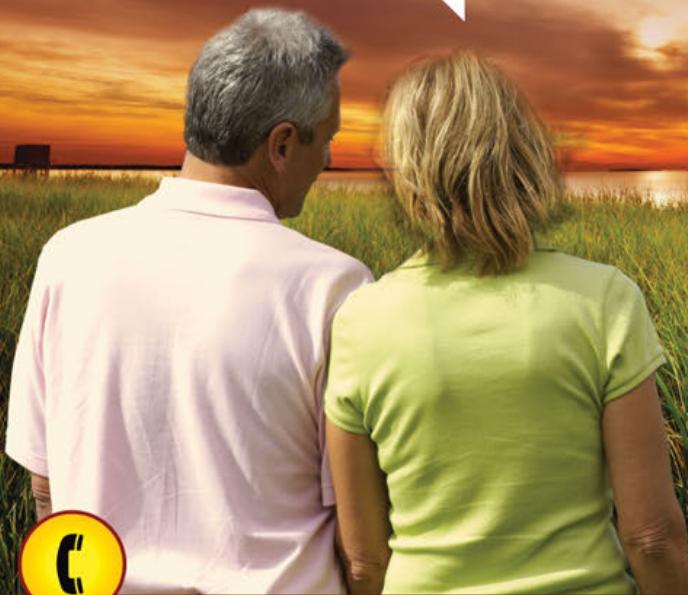
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When my husband Don started suffering from severe chest pains while on vacation in Montana - I panicked. Talk about an unpleasant surprise! After a brief admission the local hospital released him, but the cardiologist insisted my husband fly home from Montana. He said Don was not to drive our RV home, under no condition! Panic set in again. I didn't know how to drive a 30 ft. motorhome! What were we going to do? But upon pulling out our insurance card for the hospital stay I noticed my Good Sam TravelAssist card in my wallet and began to feel at ease. With just one call Good Sam TravelAssist located, booked – and paid for – both of our flights home to Arizona. And on top of that they also hired – and paid for – a professional driver to drive our RV back home! After a successful bypass surgery and several months of rest Don and I are back on the road again – but not without Good Sam TravelAssist! ***Happily Ever After.***



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\*\* Rates and terms may vary with market conditions and are subject to change without notice. APRs noted above are available only for consumer transaction applications submitted by July 31, 2013. APR is valid for 30 days from date of loan approval. For a refinance request, RV must be 2003 model year or newer and current loan must have been open for a minimum of six months. For a purchase request, RV must be 2005 model year or newer. Maximum loan to value is determined by the following: credit score and model year, with collateral value being established per NADA Used Wholesale Trade-in value. Maximum loan term may vary based on model year, loan amount, loan type and lender guidelines. Information is accurate as of April 8, 2013. This offer is not available to applicants who use their RV as a principal dwelling (Full-Timer), visit website for Full-Timer rates and terms. Financing provided through Good Sam Finance Center. ©2013 Good Sam Finance Center. GRL23399 - 0413

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This picture was taken during the summer of 2011 on our first RV trip as a family. We traveled 4,000 miles in 24 days, and when we got home we still weren't tired of our motorhome, much to our surprise! Here's our 1996 Four Winds 5000 at the Mount Moran Turnout on Teton Park Road with the Grand Tetons in the background.

Jim and Shannon Meisinger  
 Colorado Springs, Colorado



**SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:** We accept prints and digital images saved as TIFF, JPEG or EPS files. We prefer uncorrected photos at the highest available resolution. All images must be unaltered and at least 300 dpi. For prints, we accept 4x5 or 5x7. MotorHome pays \$50 for each published photograph. Images, which preferably show a motorhome or motorhomes in the setting, must be your own work. Submissions cannot be returned. Send your image, name, address and phone number, as well as the story behind your image in 60 words or less (location, special trip or significance, etc.), to: MotorHome "Postcards From the Road," 3300 Fernbrook Lane N #200, Minneapolis, MN 55447; or via email to letters@motorhomemagazine.com.

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