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SEPTEMBER 2013

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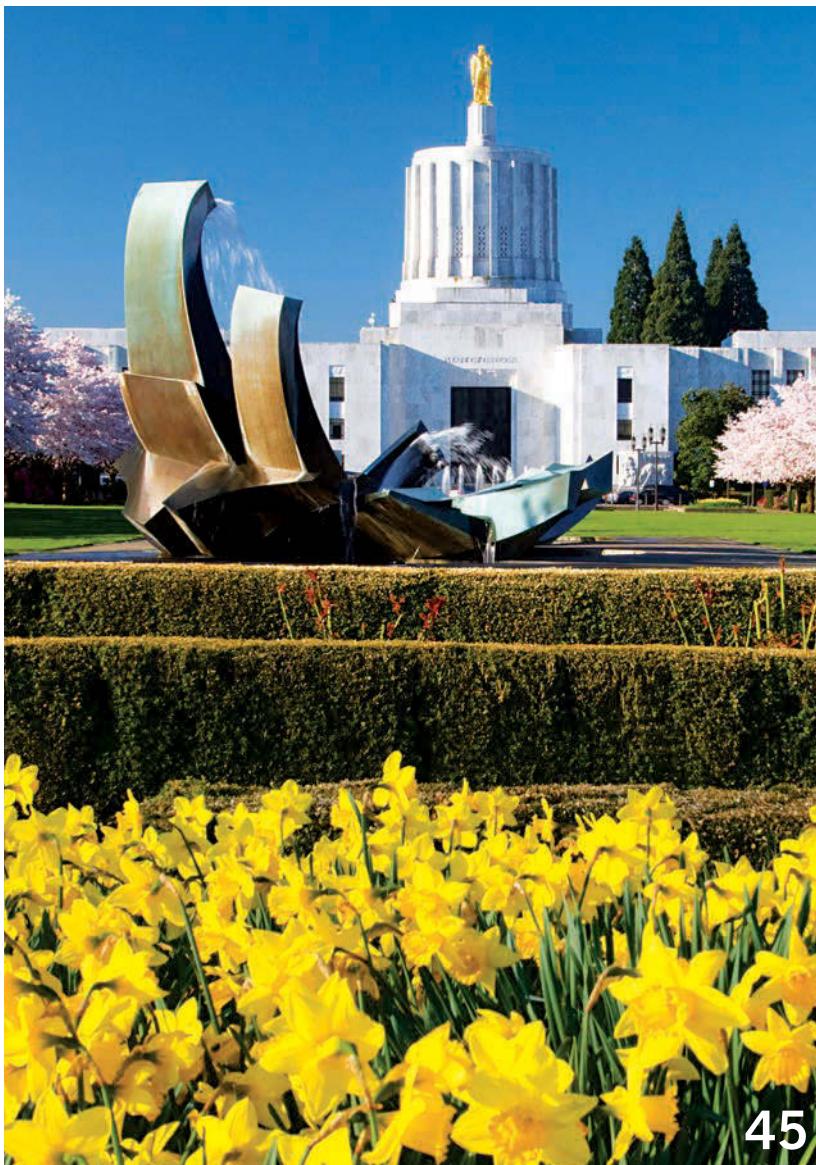
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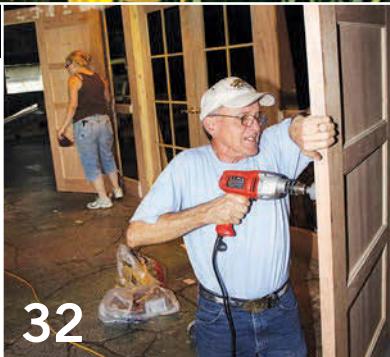
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**On The Cover:** Fleetwood's new Southwind 36L navigates the roads within the Ventura Ranch KOA in Santa Paula, Calif. (See the review on page 52.) Photo by Chuck Campbell.

# JOB HUNTING

**E**ver wish you could switch off your current life and make a drastic change? You know, escaping from the day-to-day humdrums that create uncontrollable stress and situations that force us to ask serious questions about the sanity of our current routines. Well, there is a whole segment of the motorhome population that has explored exactly that and has quit their jobs (or retired), sold the house and furniture and pared down belongings to hit the road full time.

I venture to say that most motorhome owners have explored the possibility of going full time at one point or another. It's great to dream about hitting the road full time, but the reality is that many owners simply can't afford that drastic of a change to their lives.

While technology has made it possible to communicate freely while on the road, the financial factor always crops up, and rightly so. It can be expensive to stay on the road when racking up the miles. Fuel costs can dramatically impact the budget and there's the cost of "housing," which in the full-time scenario is the cost of campground sites.

To offset these costs and pursue a lifestyle that the vast majority of full-timers will agree is the best decision they ever made, a large number of enthusiasts turn to working on the road — and subscribe to *Workamper News*, a publication operated by people who have perfected the art of finding work while traveling. In writing about the Workamper phenomenon (see page 32) Arline Chandler takes you through a number of examples of how RVers have supplemented their income to pursue the full-time lifestyle. Chandler's passion for Workamping is inspiring, as discovered by her article describing the Workamper organization and how it's impacted the lives of so many RVers.

Chandler doesn't just write about Workamping, she lives and breathes the process, and with husband Lee Smith, approaches the mobile lifestyle with contagious enthusiasm. Being on the



road and working in different places provides the spice that makes life interesting and unpredictable, and the chance to meet new friends along the way.

I know a lot of motorhome owners — and hear from readers — who have chosen to work on the road. Some of the jobs are downright fun. I met a couple that worked at a luxury RV resort. The husband ran the golf pro shop while his wife worked in the office. In return they were paid for their time and were given a nice space with full hookups to park their motorhome. They coordinated their days off and literally became social butterflies. Other friends have camp hosted in a number of state and national parks, some worked reservations, some cleaned the facilities, some worked gift shops, etc. Some of the jobs require physical labor and the ability to be handy with tools, like what Lee Smith did in building the set at Opera in the Ozarks described in Chandler's article. I have friends who work at a lighthouse in the Pacific Northwest every year after spending two summers in Alaska working in a gift shop that caters to cruise ship passengers. In return they were given a place to camp (with all utilities), a decent paycheck and an unforgettable social life.

Most of the people described above didn't have to take jobs to stay on the road. They are actually addicted to Workamping and love being involved with other RVers. Many have built life-long relationships and all will tell you that the jobs keep their bodies and brains active.

Workamping provides unique and fruitful opportunities and is a great way to put your talent and experience to work. Happy job hunting. ♦

# MOTORHOME

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## WHAT PRODUCTS DO YOU FIND MOST USEFUL WHILE RVING AND WHAT DO YOU USE THEM FOR?

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

### FASTENER FIXES

My coach is on a Ford F53 chassis and has a relatively stiff suspension system. I also keep the tires inflated to the maximum sidewall pressure for better handling, longer wear, less fuel consumption and optimum load rating. The drawback is that more vibration is transmitted to the body, particularly on rough roads, which makes fasteners work loose. I use several different products to tighten them, depending upon the materials involved. Loctite works well on metal-to-metal machine screws. I coat exterior screws with clear silicone caulk. The caulk provides cushioning against vibration and also creates a water seal. Round toothpicks coated with wood glue and broken off in screw holes will effectively tighten loose cabinet latches, hinges and other hardware mounted to wood or wood-like products. Super Glue applied to metal screws fastened to plastic products is effective. Quick-setting epoxy is a good heavy-duty alternative to Super Glue. Screw holes that are stripped must be filled with a (compatible) material the fastener will tighten against. Adhesives bind everything together so they remain tight.

**EDWARD PHILLIPS | GREERS FERRY, ARK.**

### MULTIPLE-USE WET WIPES

We use wet wipes every day. They help save water and are antibacterial to help keep everything clean and sanitary and keep the motorhome smelling fresh. We use them to wipe up small spills; wipe down the kitchen counters and table; clean the bathroom sinks and toilet; wipe off dirt and grime on outside furniture; and wash our hands if water is not available.

**MIKE AND SUSAN BARTKOSKI | COLUMBIA FALLS, MONT.**

### KEEP CELL HANDY

The most important tool to me is my cellphone and a complete list of technical support numbers for all the products that randomly take a dump when I need them most. The second most important things are my road- and extended-service plans. Last, but not least, is my well-worn credit

card to pay for the stuff that fell off or broke on the highway.  
**TODD ZEILE | INDIO, CALIF.**

### A TRIO OF COMMENTS

The June issue had a Coach & Powertrain letter titled "Monaco Trailing Arms Recall." I own a 2007 Monaco Cayman. I had the trailing arms on my coach replaced with Source Engineering trailing arms and the company's Ride Enhancement Kit, which consists of new air bags, Bilstein shocks, air lines and ping tank. Additionally, Henderson's Line-Up in Grants Pass, Ore., installed a Roadmaster rear sway bar, front motion control valves and a Safe-T-Plus steering stabilizer. These modifications made a huge difference in coach handling.

Another letter in that column, "ABS Problems," references a TSB number about the wheel sensors. I had a similar problem on a GM vehicle and after a great deal of dealer time wasted on the wheel sensors it was found that the transmission speed sensor was bad. Problem solved once the part was replaced.

Also in June, the "Rattle Reducer" Quick Tip suggests using a toilet tissue roller to reduce rattles in a microwave. That tip should have come with a warning that a plastic toilet paper roller with a metal spring inside must be removed from the microwave before using the oven. Failure to remove the roller will result in the metal spring heating to the point where it will ignite the plastic roller sleeve, causing a fire.

**JOHN KAEHMS | LAFAYETTE, CALIF.**

### AMATEUR RADIO LICENSING

I was delighted to see the subject of amateur radio on the cover of the June issue. While most of the information in the article is good, I was very disappointed with the lack of information to help people who are interested in getting a license.

While it is impossible to cover everything significant about the capabilities of amateur radio for motorhome owners, it is a serious shortcoming to not have mentioned the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) — the only national organization of ham operators. ARRL provides a wealth of

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**JERRY CRAWFORD | VIA EMAIL**

**THANKS FOR THE TRIP TIPS**

They say you can't always believe what you read, but that is not the case for the great, accurate information in the article "Scuffing and Scoffing through Newfoundland" in the June issue! I had already planned a retirement celebration trip to Newfoundland when my copy arrived. I was excited to see this article about travel in a Class B motorhome like I have. I read and reread it and highlighted reference points for our trip. We owe the author, Christine Goodier,



**WHAT YOU'RE SAYING ON OUR FACEBOOK PAGE:**

We asked readers to share the products they find most useful while RVing. Here's how some of our Facebook fans responded:

**JoAnn Lorinski Gemmrig:** *Restwarmer heated mattress cover — nice to crawl into a pre-warmed bed. I use my Food-Saver, not only to preserve foods but to extend the "left-over" life of leftovers.*

**Tom Prevost:** *We have a lot of shoe-box-size plastic containers with tops. They stack nicely and fit inside the cabinets to keep things organized and easy to retrieve.*

**Bev Wasson:** *I don't leave home without my CobbQ grill (it cooks a whole chicken dinner and doesn't get hot on the outside), doggie playpen and electric heater.*

**Susan Woods Kalkbrenner:** *GPS to get to gas stations that your motorhome can get in and out of. A user-friendly gas station is a godsend.*



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thanks for to tip about seeing puffins from land in Elliston, as I would not have known about this great spot otherwise. Also would not have known of Trinity Cabins and Camping. We spent two nights there and as the article states, "Coreine and Glen Johnson offered the warmest hospitality RVers could ever hope to encounter." I shared my well-worn, marked up *MotorHome* copy with them and they were very excited, as they did not know of the article and their mention in it. As thanks for their great assistance I ordered them a clean copy of this issue, which I am sure that they will be thrilled to have! Thanks again for your role in what was a great two-week trip touring Newfoundland!

**MICHAEL AND BEVERLY LYTWYN  
SCARBOROUGH, MAINE**

**GO ALL FIBERGLASS**

My biggest complaint about motorhome materials is the EPDM rubber roof. Some manufacturers are moving toward fiberglass roofing and I think this should be the standard. A rubber roof degrades, chalks and causes horrible black streaks. It also requires too much maintenance. I'd rather just wash and wax a fiberglass roof with the rest of the vehicle.

**JEFF SPADJINSKE | TOLLAND, CONN.**

**BETTER FUEL ECONOMY**

For the sake of RVing's good name, I would like to make a suggestion. It bothers me that the federal government can mandate a given amount of mileage per gallon for cars but not RVs. I think it's time the auto industry and RV builders look at the high gas mileage that is built into our motorhomes.

Years ago, when we had big-block high horsepower engines, an inventor came up with the idea of running on four cylinders. This worked automatically and would take place when high horsepower is not needed. I have one of those kits in my garage. Why can't the RV industry come up with some kind of aftermarket product to improve the efficiency of our engines?

I am retiring from camping because of gasoline prices. Even though I'm giving up this exciting hobby, I believe we all would be winners if the improvements were realized.

**ALFRED MILLS SR. | HAMMOND, IND.**

**QUESTION:**

**Do you think RV manufacturers should have to follow the government's fuel-economy standards or be required to improve fuel efficiency?**

Send your comments to *MotorHome*, 2575 Vista del Mar Drive, Ventura, CA 93001; or email [letters@motorhome.com](mailto:letters@motorhome.com). Please include your name, city and state. Letters may be edited for length or clarity. ♦

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**ASK A TECHNICAL QUESTION:** Send questions for our Coach & Powertrain column to *MotorHome*, 2575 Vista del Mar Drive, Ventura, CA 93001 (please include your name, city and state). Or email questions to [tech@motorhomemagazine.com](mailto:tech@motorhomemagazine.com). Selected letters will be answered in the magazine, but time does not permit individual replies.

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# escapes

by LAURA MICHAELS

ROAD FOODIE | WHEELS & GEAR | NOTEWORTHY | CROSSROADS

## NATURAL BEAUTY IN NEW JERSEY

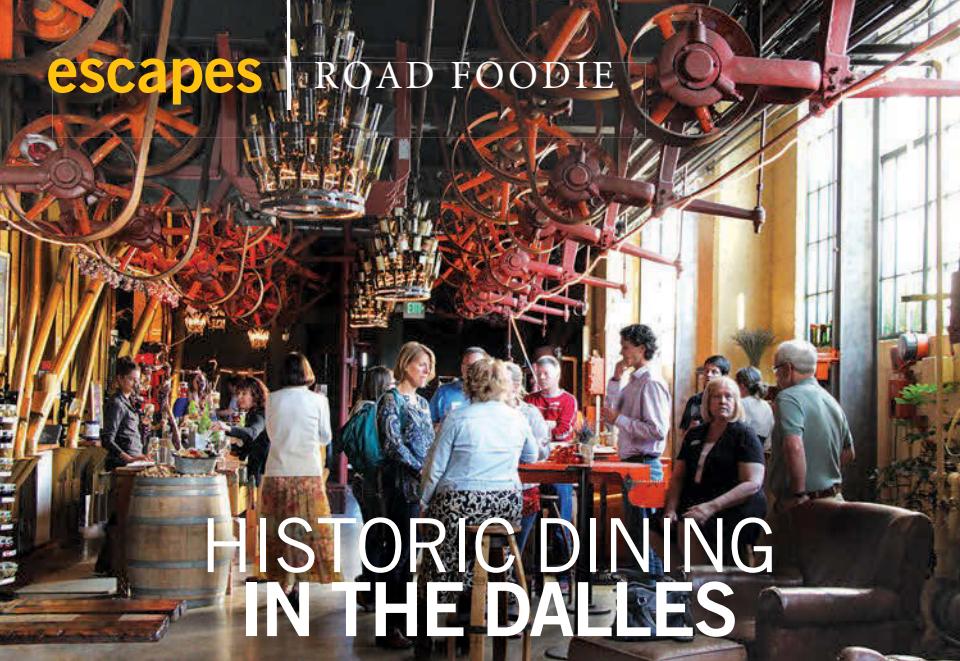
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Within the reserve is Edwin B. Forsyth National Wildlife Refuge, mostly a tidal salt

meadow unparalleled in its bird watching, including great egrets, peregrine falcons, ospreys and bald eagles. Batsto Village is another Pinelands highlight. Located within Wharton State Forest, the village consists of 33 historic buildings and structures, including the Batsto Mansion, gristmill, sawmill, general store, workers' homes and post office. For more information, call 609-599-6540 or visit [www.visitnj.com/pine-barrens](http://www.visitnj.com/pine-barrens).





# HISTORIC DINING IN THE DALLES



Clockwise, top left: At Sunshine Mill, wine lovers are surrounded by antique milling equipment and tables created from old mill materials. The Baldwin Saloon is famous for its large dessert selection. Clock Tower Ales offers more than 30 craft brews on tap. High tea selections at Anzac Tea Parlour include crustless sandwiches and fresh baked pastries. Anzac Tea Parlour is inside the Ben Snipes house, built in 1867. Snipes was a cowboy who became known as the “Cattle King” of the Northwest.

## In the Pacific Northwest, Interstate 84 wends its way

along the mighty Columbia River through one of the most beautiful basalt canyons in the world. The Columbia River National Scenic Area, or “The Gorge,” as locals call it, with its grand waterfalls, numerous parks, opportunities for fishing, hiking and wind surfing, and a growing wine and culinary scene, is a popular destination for RVers.

Along the busy route, small towns have sprung up like poppies. Hood River, the windsurfing capital of the planet and a popular place for pick-your-own peaches and apples, is the best-known Gorge foodie destination. However, The Dalles, a historic town just 20 minutes farther east, is fast becoming a place for food and wine lovers. I recently traveled there and was

amazed at the quality and variety of food and wine choices.

The Dalles, from the French word “dalle” meaning flagstone, was a place where the Columbia River narrowed before The Dalles Dam was built in the 1950s. It’s full of colorful history — explorers Lewis and Clark camped here; one of the first Christian missions was established here; and there are remnants of an old fort built to protect Oregon Trail immigrants from local tribes. Mark Twain and other luminaries stopped at The Dalles en route to San Francisco. Today, the town is full of quaint, historic buildings, many which house terrific eateries. Whether you’re just passing through or playing in the Gorge for a while, The Dalles is worth a taste. Here are some of my favorite choices:

### SUP IN A SALOON

The Baldwin Saloon, built in 1876 and run as a bar by brothers James and John Baldwin, has been a saddle shop, a warehouse, a coffin storage site and a steamboat navigational office. Today, it’s returned to its roots as a bar and fine-dining restaurant serving local natural beef, fresh fish, house-made pasta and some of the best desserts around. It also offers a huge selection of sandwiches, from turkey, bacon and Tillamook cheese to prime rib dips and gourmet burgers. [www.baldwinsaloon.com](http://www.baldwinsaloon.com).

### TAKE TEA IN A VICTORIAN

Who’d expect to find an Australian teahouse in Oregon? Anzac Tea Parlour serves high tea that includes 50 types of tea, crustless chicken-almond sandwiches, delicate cream scones, chocolate-dipped strawberries and coconut-oatmeal Anzac biscuits — cookies originally developed to ship overseas to Australian soldiers. It’s fare fit for a queen. [www.anzactea.com](http://www.anzactea.com).

### CREATE A FRENCH PICNIC

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2nd Street, Petite Provence Boulangerie and Patisserie makes luscious to-go sandwiches for a picnic and wonderfully decadent French pastries and desserts. [www.provence-portland.com](http://www.provence-portland.com).

### QUAFF IN A FLOUR MILL

The massive grain silos and concrete walls of the old Sunshine Mill dominate the east end of town. From 1908-1978, this was a working flour mill. Today it’s an industrial-hip wine tasting room and event space. Amid ancient fans, belts, motors, and

chutes, you can drink the mill’s Copa de Vino and Quenett wines and munch on plates of cheeses, olives, charcuterie, breads and crackers, and silky dark chocolate. [www.sunshinemill.com](http://www.sunshinemill.com).

### DRINK DRAFT BREWS

If craft beer is more your style, check out Clock Tower Ales, housed in Wasco County’s 1883 courthouse, site of the town’s last public hanging. It offers 30-plus artisan brews on tap and soups, sandwiches and burgers. [www.cloctowerales.com](http://www.cloctowerales.com).

PHOTOS: BOBBIE HASSELBRING

## READY FOR ADVENTURE

**Roadtrek** has added the CS-Adventurous to its lineup of Mercedes-Benz Sprinter-based Class B motorhomes. The new motorhome features an Alde hydronic heating system that provides in-floor radiant heat and hot water, and takes advantage of engine heat to distribute warmth throughout the coach while on the road.

An expanded galley includes a 7-cubic-foot refrigerator/freezer, raised convection/microwave oven, and hot and cold filtered drinking water dispenser. Find storage space above and below the Paperstone countertop — made of recycled paper and phenolic resin — and inside the large pantry. A rear power sofa converts to large twin beds or a king-size bed.

Roadtrek says the CS is manufactured using high levels of environmentally conscious recycled and e-certified materials. The CS is also available with Roadtrek's E-trek electric and environmental package (\$12,740), which includes an engine-mounted electric generator, solar charging system, eight 6-volt AGM deep-cycle batteries and a Webasto combination furnace/water heater. Base MSRP is \$114,855.

**Roadtrek, 888-762-3873, [www.roadtrek.com](http://www.roadtrek.com)**



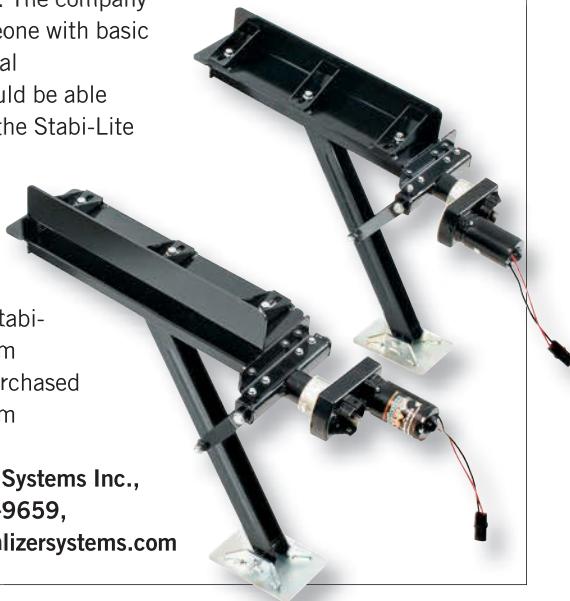
## STOP THE MOVEMENT

**Equalizer Systems Inc.** has introduced its Stabi-Lite automatic electric motorhome stabilizing system to the retail aftermarket. Designed for Class C and B motorhomes that experience noticeable movement when RVers walk around inside with the slideout extended, the Stabi-Lite system provides a solid, level platform through a single-touch, automatic system. Equalizer says the Stabi-Lite is an ideal aftermarket application for lighter Ford, Chevrolet and Sprinter chassis, and at less than 80 pounds, the system itself doesn't add much weight.

Installation is meant to be simple, with a chassis-specific, clamp-style mount that requires no welding or drilling. The company says someone with basic mechanical skills should be able to install the Stabi-Lite in about two hours.

MSRP is \$825 and the Stabi-Lite system can be purchased online from Equalizer.

**Equalizer Systems Inc.,  
800-846-9659,  
[www.equalizersystems.com](http://www.equalizersystems.com)**



## COMPATIBLE SATELLITE CAPABILITY

The new FLEX portable automatic satellite antenna from **King Controls** offers an easy way for motorhome owners to get their favorite TV programs from DIRECTV, DISH and Bell TV. The FLEX antenna connects directly to the coach's portable satellite input via coaxial cable with no need for an external power source. It's designed to work with a variety of receivers for SD programming from DIRECTV as well as SD and HD programming from DISH and Bell TV. Dual coaxial outputs provide hook up for up to two receivers. The compact, lightweight antenna unit measures 17.5-by-16 inches and weighs 10 pounds.

Inside the motorhome, a small antenna controller with an AC to DC power supply eliminates the need to find a properly fused power source. The antenna controller can be attached to the top of the main satellite receiver or mounted inside a cabinet with the provided hardware. Indicator lights on the controller provide complete diagnostic information including verification of proper coaxial connections and satellite signal blockage. The FLEX model VQ2100 portable satellite antenna has an MSRP of \$649.

**King Controls, 952-922-6889,  
[www.kingcontrols.com](http://www.kingcontrols.com)**



## CALIFORNIA TOUTS LIGHTHOUSES



**When people think of lighthouses, they** usually think of the famous towers that dot Cape Cod or the coast of Maine. But California has 15 historic lighthouses, including the oldest and tallest lighthouses on the West Coast. To help RVers plan their own lighthouse tours, the California Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds recently enhanced its website, [www.camp-california.com](http://www.camp-california.com), with a section featuring lighthouse destinations and nearby campgrounds across the Golden State.

Among the state's listings is Alcatraz Island Lighthouse, the first lighthouse on the West Coast, located in the San Francisco Bay Area. The Alcatraz lighthouse, built in 1852, was damaged in the 1906 earthquake and replaced with an 84-foot-tall tower. Hop on the ferry and take a guided tour of Alcatraz Island. Overlooking Monterey Bay is Point Pinos, the West Coast's oldest active lighthouse. Built in 1855, its light has been operating ever since.



## UPGRADES FOR GRAND CANYON TRAILHEAD

**The trailhead of one of Grand** Canyon National Park's oldest and most visited trails was renovated earlier this year, with a special dedication held May 18. The ceremony at Bright Angel trailhead opened with a traditional welcome by tribal representative Diana Sue Uquala from the Havasupai nation. It was the Havasupai people who built the Bright Angel trail, one of the first entryways into the Grand Canyon.

Park Superintendent Dave Uberuaga spoke of the significance of the renovations to the historic trail that included a new seating area and plaza, new restrooms to replace portable toilets, paved parking, new stone masonry walls, accessible walkways and a new etched rock identity sign. The \$4.65 million project was funded by park entrance fees and private donations raised through the park's Grand Canyon Association.

## News Briefs

**Good Sam Enterprises** launched a new Web-based trip planning service this summer. The Good Sam Trip Planner, available exclusively to Good Sam Club members, is a comprehensive road trip planning tool featuring routing and information about thousands of RV parks and campgrounds as well as points of interest across the U.S. The Trip Planner is the second product to be released as part of the Good Sam-Rand McNally partnership and follows the release of the Good Sam GPS. With the Trip Planner, Good Sam Club members can create point-to-point directions, research and plot thousands of points of interest across the U.S., and create custom road trips, either across town or across the country.

Users can map their routes from start to finish while searching for and adding points of interest along the way. Camping World Super Centers and Pilot Flying J locations are integrated into the Good Sam Trip Planner, making it a comprehensive road trip planning solution. It will also include pre-planned scenic routes and recommended points of interests based on content from Rand McNally's Best of the Road program.

**Navistar Inc.** announced that Allied Specialty Vehicles (ASV), a producer of specialty vehicles and parent to motorhome builder Fleetwood RV Inc., has purchased certain assets of Navistar RV. The deal includes all of the equity interests of Navistar RV and the manufacturing operations for Navistar's R-Vision and Holiday Rambler towable units in Harrisburg, Ore., and Navistar's Monaco and Holiday Rambler brand motorized RVs in Wakarusa, Ind. ASV has also entered into a multi-year leasing agreement for Navistar RV's Elkhart, Ind., facility.

**Kampgrounds of America (KOA)** is in the process of rebranding each of its 485 campgrounds into one of three segments: a KOA Journey, a KOA Holiday or a KOA Resort. The Journey-designated campgrounds will be close to major highways and include long pull-through sites. Holiday campgrounds will be designed for getaways or short vacations, and include family activities, deluxe cabins and additional amenities. Campgrounds identified as Resorts will offer luxurious pools, patio RV sites, deluxe cabin linen service and a specially trained activities and recreation staff.

### RV SHOWS

**SEPTEMBER 6-8**  
North Carolina RV Dealers  
Association Fall RV Show  
Raleigh, N.C., 336-232-4794

**SEPTEMBER 6-8**  
St. Louis Fall  
RV Show & Sale  
Hazelwood, Mo., 618-288-9952

**SEPTEMBER 11-15**  
America's Largest RV Show  
Hershey, Pa., 888-303-2887

**SEPTEMBER 12-15**  
Fall Maryland RV Show  
Timonium, Md., 410-561-7323

**SEPTEMBER 13-15**  
Outdoor RV Bargain Expo  
Aurora, Ohio, 216-970-7500

**SEPTEMBER 20-22**  
Progressive Insurance Great MN RV Fair  
Prior Lake, Minn., 763-383-4414

**SEPTEMBER 27-29**  
Progressive Insurance 11<sup>th</sup> Annual  
North Carolina RV Show  
Greensboro, N.C., 800-441-0013

**SEPTEMBER 27-29**  
Northeast RV Show's Fall  
RV Marketplace  
Middletown, N.Y., 845-343-2772

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## escapes CROSSROADS

# TOUR THE CATSKILLS BY TRAIN

### There was a time when

passage through the Catskill Mountains was only possible by train. From the 1870s to 1976, freight moved along the Ulster & Delaware Railroad's (later the Catskill Mountain Branch) network of tracks, with vacationers also taking advantage of access to the region's grand hotels and outdoor adventures.

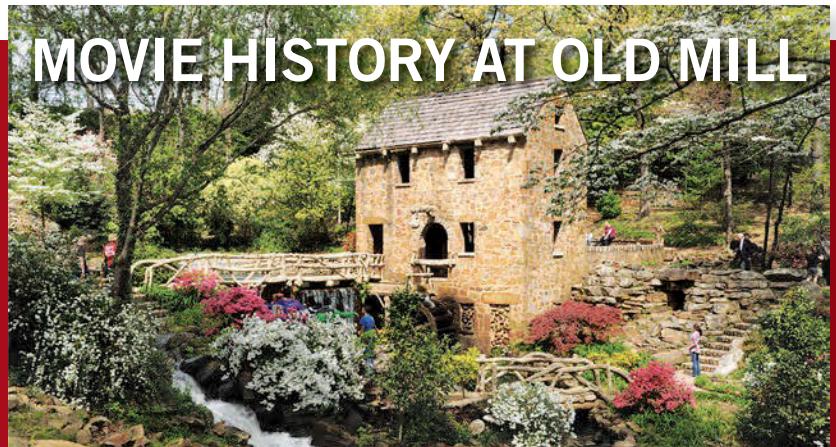
Filled with natural beauty, New York's Catskills remain a destination for those seeking a country escape. Visitors can combine the scenery with railroad history by hopping aboard a restored 1920s Catskill Mountain Railroad caboose. If you choose the Esopus Scenic Train (\$12), which takes travelers along Esopus Creek on a 5-mile round trip between Mount Tremper and Boiceville, keep an eye out for hawks, great blue herons and even bald eagles while taking in views of the Catskills' Mount Pleasant and Romer Mountain. Fall foliage trains will offer panoramas of dramatic autumn colors beginning September 27 and running until October 27. Though flood damage from Hurricane Irene prevents service to Phoenicia, the town's Empire State Railway Museum is worth a visit.

**For more information,** call 845-688-7400 or visit [www.catskillmtrailroad.com](http://www.catskillmtrailroad.com).



PHOTO: CATSKILL MOUNTAIN RAILROAD CO.

## MOVIE HISTORY AT OLD MILL



### Those who've watched the

American classic "Gone With the Wind" shouldn't be surprised if they experience a sense of déjà vu upon visiting the Old Mill at T.R. Pugh Memorial Park in North Little Rock, Ark. Completed in 1933, this historic recreation of an 1880s water-powered grist mill made its silver screen debut in the opening credits of the sweeping historical romance film released in 1939. The mill is believed to be the only remaining structure from the film and was placed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.

Set alongside a lake and designed

to appear abandoned, the Old Mill is made mostly from tinted concrete laid over steel and copper rods to give the appearance of wood, iron or stone. Sculptor and artist Senòr Dionico Rodriguez was responsible for the details of each piece, as well as the designing of the footbridges and rustic seats. Many items in the mill are historic relics, including the gristmill, which dates to 1828. There is no admission fee and guided tours are available with reservations.

**For more information,** call 501-758-1424 or visit [www.northlittlerock.travel](http://www.northlittlerock.travel). ♦

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# ANNA MARIA ISLAND

## RELAX AND ENJOY THE AREA'S OLD FLORIDA FEEL

PHOTOS: MARK WINFREY



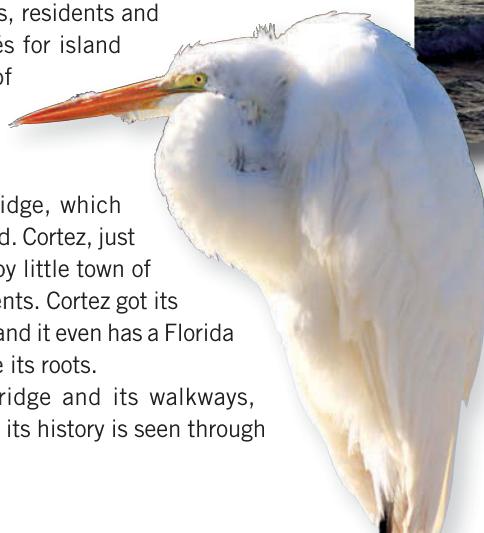
**A** trip to Florida can mean different things to different people, and though you may put most Florida vacations into one category, nothing could be further from the truth. While the Sunshine State is best known for its beaches, a visit to Anna Maria Island made me realize this barrier retreat is in a category all its own.

Anna Maria Island isn't just another beach haven but a hidden treasure, and it's quickly becoming a popular travel destination. With its laid-back atmosphere and "old Florida" feel, this island is truly special. If you traveled to Florida in the 1960s or '70s and want to return to the time before commercialization, a trip to Anna Maria Island and Cortez will take you back 40 years to see its natural beauty without the intrusion of high-rise condos or touristy venues.

Sitting across the bay from the town of Cortez, Anna Maria Island is a barrier island nestled in the Gulf of Mexico and includes the small municipalities of Anna Maria, Holmes Beach and Bradenton Beach for a total population of 8,500 people. The residents and business owners of this beautiful area have worked hard to maintain its unique visual appeal. Everything from the design and height restrictions of the buildings to the absence of many of the chain restaurants helps create a beautiful and inviting area. The island is free of chain hotels and instead has quaint private beach cottages, bungalow motels or villas with lush tropical settings. With abundant choices, residents and visitors head to locally owned cafés for island cuisine and enjoy the character of small shops and art galleries.

On a recent trip we stayed at Holiday Cove RV Resort, located just over the Bradenton Beach Bridge, which connects Cortez to Anna Maria Island. Cortez, just 50 miles south of Tampa, is a sleepy little town of fewer than 5,000 permanent residents. Cortez got its start as a Gulf Coast fishing village, and it even has a Florida Maritime Museum to help you trace its roots.

As you wander across the bridge and its walkways, the connection between Cortez and its history is seen through



**Top:** Take a stroll or do some fishing on the Historic Anna Maria City Pier. **Middle:** Anna Maria's Gulf of Mexico beaches are quite different from the Atlantic side of Florida, with the pristine sand and clear water practically calling your name to enjoy them. **Above:** Since Anna Maria is on the Gulf side of Florida, the sunsets are an event you don't want to miss. **Left:** White egrets are a common sight in the area.

PHOTO: JOEY CHAMPION

PHOTO: E. DON SMITH

## ANNA MARIA ISLAND

the marinas and piers, old fishing relics found in the landscape and even the skeleton of the old fishing cannery. Today, you can go to the Cortez Fishing Village and buy freshly caught shrimp or fish, chat with the fishermen and experience pride in the community's rich history.

Thanks to its prime location and excellent facilities, Holiday Cove was a pleasurable part of our trip. Not only is it located less than a mile from the beach, it also includes a waterway providing Gulf access and a boat launch area with slips. All the amenities that one would expect such as a pool, paved sites with 50-amp electrical, cable TV, and water and sewer hookups were included, as well as a professional staff with a pet-friendly approach. After spending more than a week here it is easy to see why the resort is so highly ranked in the *Good Sam RV Travel Guide & Campground Directory*. The re-

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Top to bottom: McKechnie Field in Bradenton is the spring training home of the Pittsburgh Pirates. Holiday Cove RV Resort is well maintained and is conveniently located near many of the area's major attractions. The aquarium at Mote Marine Laboratory offers visitors an up-close look at more than 100 species of marine life. The G. WIZ Science Museum in Sarasota has numerous interactive exhibits to explore.



PHOTOS: E. DON SMITH

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sort is small but the facilities are extraordinarily clean and occupied to a large degree by site owners who adhere to strict covenants to maintain the facility in tiptop condition. The grounds were impeccably landscaped with a variety of colorful and flourishing tropical specimens that added to the beauty of the surroundings.

**ATTRACTIONS GALORE**

There's plenty to do in the area should you want to venture away from the resort. Though I'm admittedly a Major League Baseball fan, there's nothing purer than Minor League Baseball. If you also enjoy the game, you won't have to travel any farther than Bradenton, just 10 minutes from Cortez. Bradenton is home to the Bradenton Marauders, a Class A Advanced affiliate of the Pittsburgh Pirates. The Marauders play at McKechnie Field, a beautiful park that should not be missed by serious baseball fans.

If you prefer something more educational, check out Mote Marine Laboratory in nearby Sarasota on City Island. Mote is



**The Florida Maritime Museum preserves the area's commercial fishing history.**

a working research center focused on dolphin research and other nonprofit ocean and forensic aspects of marine life, plus an accredited aquarium that is sure to put a smile on anyone's face. The aquarium includes exhibits showcasing Florida Bay habitats, dolphins, manatees, sea turtles, sharks and stingrays.

Sarasota is also home to another entertaining and educational attraction. The G. WIZ Science Museum (currently under renovation) is an interactive center with exhibits on topics such as renewable energy and an actual racetrack to test your sprinting ability against the clock. If you prefer a more cerebral challenge you can play Mindball, which lets partners com-

pete to see who can move more matter with their mind.

For those who enjoy shopping, you needn't go farther than the south end of Anna Maria Island into Longboat Key, where you'll find upscale European-style shopping and dining at St. Armand's Circle. On a historical note, the inner circle of St. Armand's honors circus greats such as P.T. Barnum and John Ringling in the Circus Ring of Fame. For bargain hunters, Bradenton boasts one of the largest indoor flea markets in the region. The Red Barn Flea Market Plaza offers a wide variety of discounted merchandise as well as food and seasonal produce. With more than 600 stores and booths it's no wonder the market attracts about 2 million shoppers a year.

**LOCAL FARE**

Sampling local restaurants is part of the fun of RVing, and this area certainly provides a range of choices. A trip to Cortez starts with breakfast at Cortez Café, which sits just across the street from Holiday Cove. The café, voted a top breakfast

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## ANNA MARIA ISLAND

choice in many local contests, has been open for 50-plus years and is a staple of the community for locals and visitors alike. If you go, make sure to try an omelet, created with fresh ingredients and served with a smile, likely by the owner or a family member. A number of other cafés feature everything from local seafood to specialty menus suited to anyone's taste.

If something more upscale is on the agenda, take a quick trip across the bridge and enjoy a curvy scenic ride down Gulf Drive to Holmes Beach. There, at the end of a sandy lane, your culinary experience at Beach Bistro will be second to none. The bistro consistently ranks as one of Zagat's top restaurants, so you will need to plan ahead to get reservations. This small beachside restaurant has been in operation since 1985 and enjoys national and international praise for its incredible food.

We were smitten as we stepped through the front door. As we moved into Beach Bistro's main dining area, we were impressed by the breathtaking view of the Gulf and the elegant dining atmosphere.

As the menu choices were presented in rich detail, it was evident this would be a dining experience like no other.

With an island inspired menu and a focus on local, seasonal foods, we made our selections with ease, knowing that any choice would be a great choice. Our delectable appetizers of Lobstercargots and sweet melon salad were followed by scrumptious entrées of a fresh rack of domestic lamb and the Bistro's classic Floribbean Grouper, a sweet, delicate combination of flavors. We finished our special evening with two Happy Endings desserts, the Berry Celebration Cinnamon Crepes and the Praline Alexander. The food was delicious, the atmosphere perfect, and combined with the attention to detail and the professional staff, this was an evening to remember. If you have a special occasion to celebrate or simply want to enjoy a world-class meal, Beach Bistro is the place to go.

Anna Maria Island really is about quiet strolls on the beach, pedaling a bike down picturesque paths, charming little

shops and restaurants, one-story beach cottages and the tropical beauty that surrounds them, and enjoying the pristine sandy space between you and the ocean. Though small, this 7-mile island offers a free trolley service to help you venture about from north to south. It makes stops along the way at the beach, or for shopping on Bridge Street or to the city proper where you can find popular spots for eating, shopping, or even attending cultural events. Last but not least, you can stop at the Historic Anna Maria City Pier to catch a glimpse of the dolphins or a vibrant sunset at the end of the day.

If you're looking for a beautiful place that offers warm weather, great food, a mixture of old and new, and a friendly, relaxed atmosphere, then as the locals say, Anna Maria Island is your "island in the sun." ♦



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

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<sup>††</sup> Eligible models are limited to: Tiffin Zephyr on a Spartan K2 Chassis, Newmar Essex on a Spartan K2 Chassis, Newmar King Aire on a Spartan K3 Chassis, Entegra Aspire on a Spartan MG Chassis, Entegra Anthem on a Spartan MG Chassis and an Entegra Cornerstone on a Spartan K3 Chassis.



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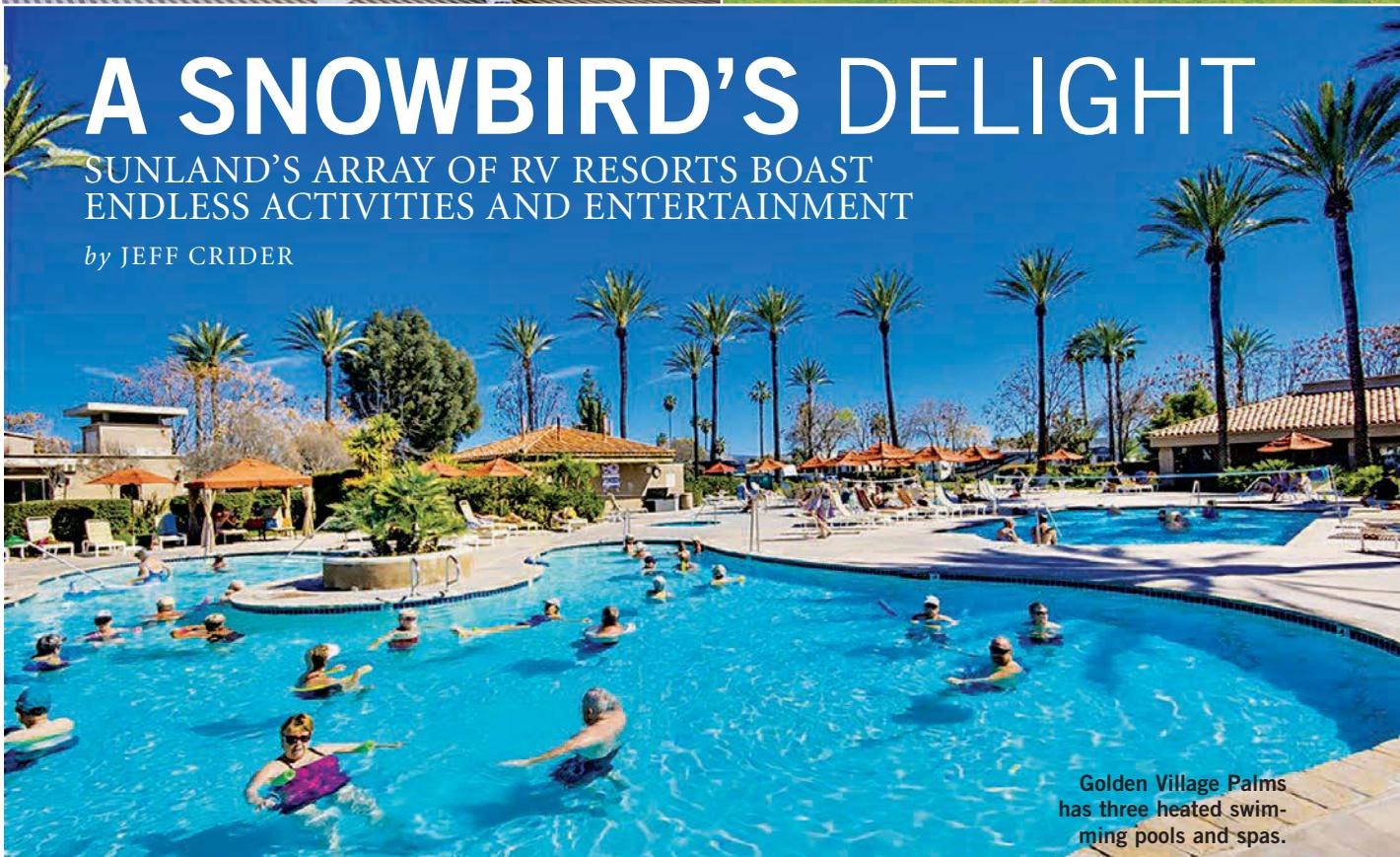
Clockwise, below: Emerald Desert RV Resort in Palm Desert, Calif., offers manicured lawns and walking trails as well as a state-of-the-art fitness facility. Sand volleyball games are popular at Golden Village Palms RV Resort in Hemet, Calif.



# A SNOWBIRD'S DELIGHT

SUNLAND'S ARRAY OF RV RESORTS BOAST ENDLESS ACTIVITIES AND ENTERTAINMENT

by JEFF CRIDER



Golden Village Palms has three heated swimming pools and spas.

**F**or 62-year-old Rod Kummer and his wife, Carol, spending the winter at Golden Village Palms RV Resort in Hemet, Calif., isn't just an opportunity to escape the snow and ice at their home in Montana. It's an opportunity to feel young again.

"There are so many activities going on, you don't even think about being old," Rod Kummer said.

The park features more than 100 activities a week during the winter season, including water aerobics, water volleyball, sand volleyball, Zumba, pinochle, hiking and dancing. Golden Village guests also enjoy a state-of-the-art exercise room, swimming

pools, spas and pickleball courts, four of which were just added last fall.

The park even has a weekly farmers market, live entertainment and special events during the winter season, such as the park's Academy Palms Award Show, which features celebrity impersonators taking pictures and interviewing Golden Village Palms guests as they walk down the red carpet. The event also includes a variety of musical entertainment, an elegant dinner complete with an ice sculpture and park awards.

"We have awards for the most comical RVer



**Left:** Enjoy a heated pool and spa at Vacationer RV Park in El Cajon, Calif. **Right:** San Diego RV Resort, which is centrally located to all the major attractions in the area, offers 147 large sites with full hookups.

in male and female categories, the best looking RV site and the best block party, among others,” said Michael Carle, Golden Village Palms’ general manager. “We also do Friday night tastings with 1-ounce samplings of different types of alcohol from a local liquor store. One recent Friday we had 16 different types of whiskey. Before that we had different types of tequila and vodka.”

Golden Village Palms guests say they are amazed by the variety of entertainment provided. Kummer noted that tribute band concerts, which play music from artists like Jimmy Buffett and the Rolling Stones, get everyone dancing.

Golden Village Palms is one of seven Southern California RV resorts owned and operated by La Jolla, Calif.-based

**Right:** Oak Creek RV Resort in El Cajon, Calif., welcomes pets. **Below:** Escondido RV Resort, just north of San Diego, Calif., has 125 full-hookup sites.

SunLand RV Resorts, which is investing millions to ensure its parks provide the highest quality amenities and services.

SunLand’s parks are popular destinations for snowbirds from the Pacific Northwest and Canada, who come to Southern California each winter to enjoy the sunny warmth and Sunland’s growing roster of activities and events.

Sunland’s 251-site Emerald Desert RV Resort in Palm Desert also offers snowbirds a wide variety of activities and entertainment, which it pairs with some of the most luxurious facilities of any RV resort in the country.



The resort’s 1,200-square-foot lobby features a floor mosaic with tumbled marble, two shades of travertine and Vitoria Regia granite, while its custom designed reception desk incorporates sapele wood veneer with a rich walnut finish and inlaid marble. Other furnishings include bronze finished sconces, raffia upholstered wall panels and rich-toned rattan seating groups.

“We are committed to elevating Emerald Desert to become one of the finest recreational vehicle resorts in the country, with unparalleled amenities and the highest quality guest services,” said Reza Paydar, president and CEO of SunLand RV Resorts, which has invested more than \$1 million in improvements to the resort during the past four years.

Other recent improvements include an upgraded clubhouse with hardwood floors and flatscreen TVs and an expanded library, which includes complimentary coffee in addition to the books and other





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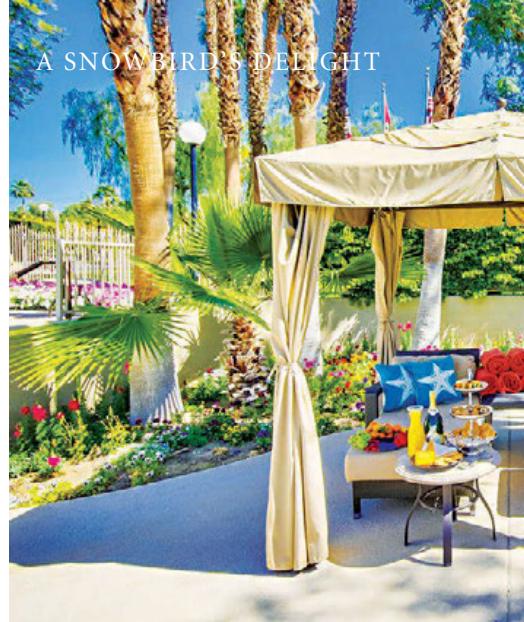
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The pool area at Emerald Desert RV Resort in Palm Desert, Calif., features shaded relaxation areas and plenty of space for sunning.

information on things to see and do in the Coachella Valley.

"It's one of the nicer parks we've looked at," said Robert Wold, 59, a wheat farmer from Alberta, Canada, who has spent the past three winters at Emerald Desert with his wife, Darlene. "The grounds are always well manicured. Every time you turn around there is somebody mowing the grass. They look after the park very well."

Emerald Desert also has a nice clubhouse and kitchen facilities, which guests are able to reserve for special events.

And Emerald Desert, like Golden Village Palms, has a busy roster of activities and entertainment, including Zumba, water aerobics, poolside happy hours, movie nights and ice cream socials, while muffins and mimosas are served on Saturday mornings. Live entertainment includes musical performances as well as wine tasting events and gourmet dinners that are paired with live jazz performances.

Emerald Desert and Golden Village Palms are also pet friendly and not only have frequent "bark and wine events" and pet parades, but pet-focused fundraisers as well. Emerald Desert recently raised money for a local animal shelter, while Golden Village Palms raised more than \$7,000 for the Hemet Police Department so that it could obtain a new police dog.

While Emerald Desert and Golden Village Palms are SunLand's top destinations for snowbirds who like lots of activi-

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ties and entertainment, the company also has five resorts in San Diego County that offer clean, well-managed facilities for RVers who are taking in the sights of San Diego or visiting family in the area.

These include Escondido RV Resort in Escondido, which is near the San Diego Zoo Safari Park; San Diego RV Resort in San Diego; and three parks in El Cajon, including Circle RV Resort, Oak Creek RV Resort and Vacationer RV Park.

And while SunLand's San Diego resorts do not offer the wide range of activities and entertainment found at Golden Village Palms or Emerald Desert, they do offer special events, including Sunday brunches, Easter egg hunts and St. Patrick's Day dinners.

RV resort activities are important, said Carle of Golden Village Palms, because they help bring people together.

Karen and Wayne Davidson of Alberta know this from experience, having spent the past five winters at Golden Village Palms. "We really enjoy it," Karen Davidson said. "The people are so friendly here. We don't let a lonely couple come in and not join a group in the park." ♦

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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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.

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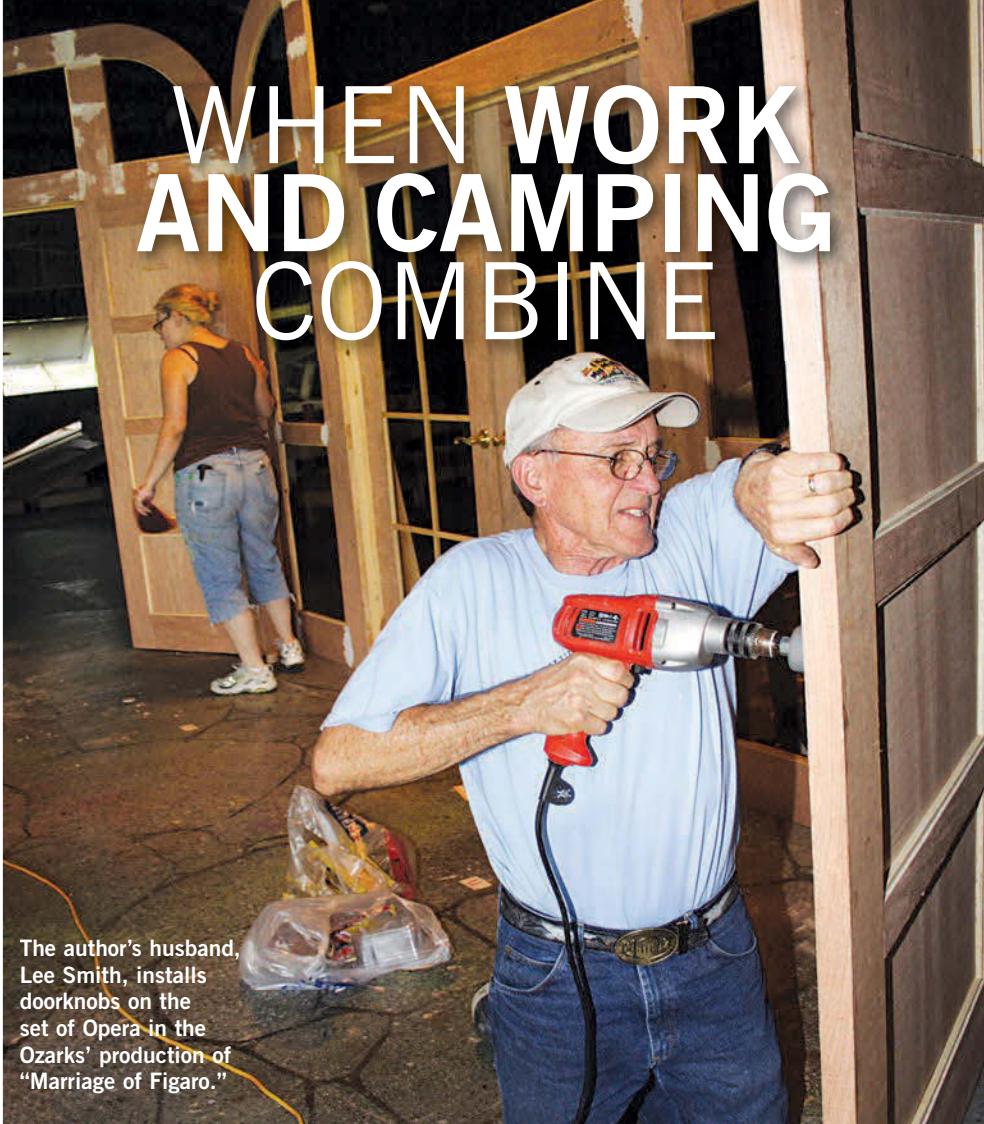
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# WHEN WORK AND CAMPING COMBINE



The author's husband, Lee Smith, installs doorknobs on the set of Opera in the Ozarks' production of "Marriage of Figaro."

PHOTO: ARLINE CHANDLER



In 1987, Greg and Debbie Robus founded *Workamper News*, a publication that later expanded into numerous services including a job hot line, a resume service and a bookstore to serve RVers who want a ticket to travel. Notice, I didn't say a "free" ticket, but a means to pay one's way on the road. That's exactly what my photographer husband, Lee Smith, and I did to spend six weeks in the midst of Maine's spectacular autumn.

When I read an ad on the *Workamper News* hot line from Coastal Kayaking Tours and Acadia Bike in Bar Harbor, I mentioned to Lee that New England was a place I'd like to spend the fall. But the ad appeared in mid-August, and we had commitments through mid-September. Lee pointed out the mantra that I've shouted over and over in my presentations about Workamping: "It never hurts to ask!" Upon inquiry, I discovered the company's season runs to the end of October. Cruise ships dock in the harbor and customers come ashore to rent bicycles and kayaks. We were hired over the phone to begin work in the middle of September.

For six weeks, we stayed at Smuggler's Den, a wooded campground in Southwest Harbor, a village on Mount Desert Island only 30 minutes from downtown Bar Harbor. Two other Workamping couples from Coastal Kayaking were our neighbors. The first day I reported for work, Billy Nettles, attired in a formal morning coat with tails and a top hat, greeted me in a pronounced South Carolina accent. I felt right at home.

Billy and his wife, Molly, garbed in a long dress and white apron, guided Victorian walking tours around Bar Harbor. In between their scheduled tours, they worked the customer service desk for Coastal Kayaking and Acadia Bike. The two immediately began training me on answering phones, renting bicycles and booking ocean kayak tours. Another co-Workamper whisked Lee away to the depot, an area about a mile from the downtown shop

## FOR RVERS, WORKAMPING IS A TICKET TO TRAVEL

by ARLINE CHANDLER

Top to bottom: Workamper Reta Averill prepares a pizza as part of her job at Compton Ridge Campground near Branson, Mo. Fellow Workamper Richard Averill is on the job at Compton Ridge. One of Arline Chandler's Workamping experiences included cleaning a piano at Opera in the Ozarks.

PHOTOS: LEE SMITH

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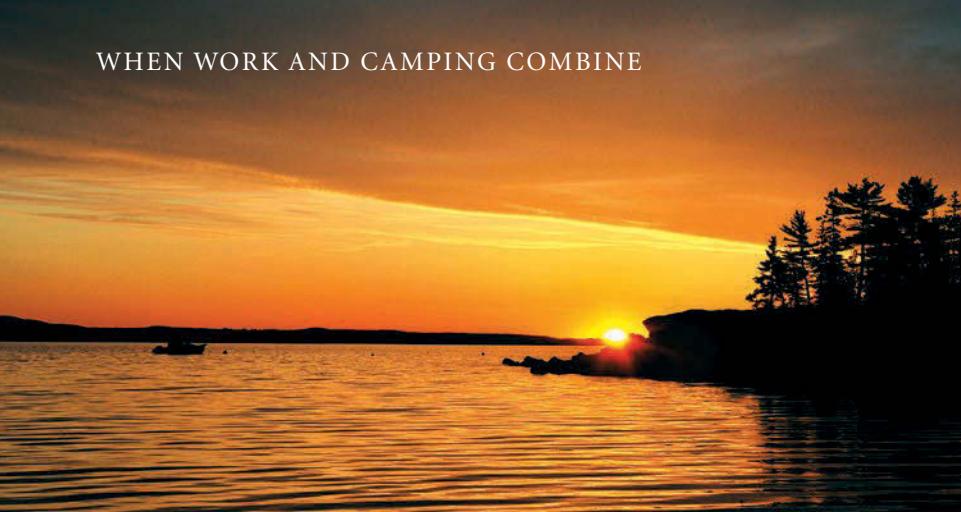


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**Top to bottom: A fiery sunrise over Maine's Frenchman Bay. On her day off, the author paused at a scenic lake spot along a carriage road in Acadia National Park. Opera in the Ozarks' Workampers gather for a photo.**

where kayaks, a bus and vans were stored. Lee started driving vans that pulled trailers of kayaks to launching points around the island.

From the start, we began absorbing the history of Bar Harbor, Frenchman Bay and the mountains of Acadia National Park that surround Bar Harbor on three sides. On our days off, we picked up a couple of mountain bikes — a bonus for our work contract — and set off to explore Acadia's carriage roads. The roads, designated for hikers, bikers and horses only, make up a 45-mile system of well-engineered crushed stone roads financed by John D. Rockefeller Jr., who donated them to the national park. We bicycled through deep forests and alongside natural lakes carved centuries ago by glaciers. At last,

I could impart information to customers that I had actually experienced.

If we had gone to Bar Harbor earlier in the season, we could have hiked more trails, taken more boat excursions, eaten more lobster and pocketed more income. However, in the six weeks we lived and worked on Mount Desert Island, we experienced the beauty and wildness of Acadia National Park, worked with great people, and watched maple leaves turn flaming red and then drop to the forest floor. Workamping made this opportunity possible.

Workampers, a name the Robuses registered, come from all walks of life and with diverse talents. The jobs they seek are equally different and fit a wide range of requirements, lengths of employment and compensation. Lee and I have met dozens of people hired for numerous jobs, some as mundane as cleaning restrooms in a campground, others as challenging as running away with the circus. In annual sessions of Workamper Rendezvous, an event hosted by *Workamper News'* current

owners, Steve and Kathy Jo Anderson, I present "Faces and Places of Workampers," featuring RVers doing real jobs in actual places. The scope of opportunities for RVers who want to work or volunteer is vast and the places they stay are often in nature's best environments. I tell my participants: "Workampers get to live and work on America's prime property."

Lee and I have chosen a few opportunities; some jobs pay, and others are volunteer positions that provide a campsite and hookups as compensation. One May, we volunteered to sell firewood at Cape Lookout State Park on the coast of Oregon. We parked a sand dune away from the beach; together, we worked 20 hours a week and spent the rest of our time exploring Oregon's lighthouses.

Following our six-week assignment at Bar Harbor, we traveled to Kansas and spent another six weeks with a temporary workforce in a fulfillment center for the online retail giant, Amazon. Located in the southeast corner of Kansas, only 75 miles north of Tulsa, Okla., Coffeyville is not necessarily an RVing destination. A friendly but economically strapped town of about 10,000, Coffeyville's bottom line to Workampers was good wages for a short period of time.

Ten-hour shifts, day and night, ran for four or five consecutive days. With people sleeping and working in shifts, the typical potlucks and get-togethers around campfires happened less frequently. Amazon's focus is on "working hard, having fun and making history as the Earth's most customer-centric company." We can personally attest to the working hard part. However, I count the experience of an assembly line job alongside approximately 400 other Workampers as one that stands out in my career.

Other Amazon facilities took note of the productivity of Workampers at the Coffeyville center. Since 2008, the company has recruited Workampers during the Christmas rush at additional locations in Campbellsville, Ky., and Fernley, Nev.

At Amazon in Coffeyville, we met scores of fellow RVers and created a few lifelong friends, including our RV park neighbors, Richard and Reta Averill. At Amazon, Richard and Reta worked in the "picking" department, meaning they used



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hand-held computers to select merchandise from bins to place in plastic totes and send down the assembly line to our stations in shipping. While Lee and I chose to work that following summer for Opera in the Ozarks, a nonprofit training camp for aspiring opera artists, Richard and Reta took jobs at a campground in Branson, Mo.

We served as support staff for the opera camp; Lee did jack-of-all-trades maintenance and occasional set building. I cleaned restrooms in the girls' dormitory and helped at lunch and dinner in the kitchen. We parked our motorhome on Opera in the Ozarks' campus a few miles from Eureka Springs, Ark., ate all our meals in the dining hall and, as a bonus, received complimentary seating to all four operas staged that summer.

Over at Compton Ridge near Branson, Reta took reservations and checked-in guests, clerked in the campground store and filled orders for pizzas. Richard did maintenance at the campground and escorted RVers to their sites. They, like us, lived on their workplace property. While

Lee and I pick and choose our Workamping jobs, sometimes not working for a full year, Richard and Reta stay busy with wage-earning jobs and volunteer positions in state and national parks. For two winters they served as gate guards for companies in Texas, primarily opening and closing the gates for traffic onto properties on which gas or oil rigs operate. Those jobs are 24/7, requiring one person to be on duty every hour of every day. While this work is confining, the pay is good and the jobs typically run for two or three months.

Workamping is a fitting option for numerous RVers with varying agendas. Some folks need a paycheck to stay on the road. Others merely want to be productive. Some add to their retirement income, possibly to afford a few luxuries. Most Workampers are couples, but the lifestyle works well for singles, too.

If *Workamper News* made a poster to encourage solo Workampers, Joy Ethridge's face would be front and center. After the end of her 31-year marriage, she began eight years of Workamping jobs.

New to RVing, she purchased her first travel trailer and started as a waitress in an almost deserted town outside Texas' Big Bend National Park. Next, she drove to Iowa and ran games for Adventureland, a family-oriented theme park. Joy has since worked at mall kiosks in Texas and Louisiana, handed out samples for See's Candies, bussed tables for a concessionaire in Yellowstone National Park, staffed offices of KOA campgrounds from Niagara Falls to Bozeman, Mont., and worked two seasons at Amazon. Her summer job for 2013 was in the bookstore at Mount Rushmore National Monument in South Dakota.

Joy credited Workamping for allowing her to travel to different places and do things she would never have been able to otherwise. For Joy and thousands of other RVers in America, Workamping is indeed a ticket to travel. ♦



Arline Chandler is a freelance writer who lives in the Arkansas Ozarks. She travels with her husband, photographer Lee Smith, and their dog, Spot, in a Class A Mountain Aire motorhome.

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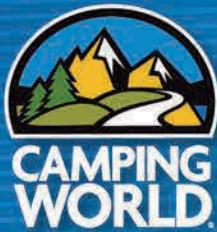
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| 2013 | Winnebago ACCESS PREMIER 31WP    | POR827114 | C    | \$104,818 | \$24,830 | \$79,988  |
| 2012 | Holiday Rambler ALUMA-LITE 32SBD | SRV100055 | A    | \$128,336 | \$39,341 | \$88,995  |
| 2012 | Pleasure-Way PLATEAU RB          | KIN76770  | B    | \$135,205 | \$39,206 | \$95,999  |
| 2013 | Itasca SUNOVA 30A                | JAC42110  | A    | \$143,095 | \$33,662 | \$109,433 |
| 2013 | Thor Motor Coach PALAZZO 33.1    | CRV21309  | AD   | \$189,482 | \$49,487 | \$139,995 |
| 2012 | Fleetwood EXPEDITION 38S         | KC5695944 | AD   | \$252,526 | \$75,261 | \$177,265 |



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ANIMAL  
ENCOUNTERS  
ABOUND  
ON THIS LIVELY  
SOUTH TEXAS  
ISLAND

by BOBBIE HASSELBRING

# SOUTH PADRE WILD

O

ur first glimpse of South Padre Island's high-rise skyline and the super-modern Queen Isabella Causeway linking the South Texas mainland and this stretch of white sand makes my heart sink. We've driven our motorhome to this island in hopes of finding nature and wildlife; not concrete and development. But it doesn't take us long to discover there's plenty of wild left on South Padre Island.

We'd motored over from the Rio Grande Valley, a favorite hot spot for RVers. Along the way, we pass miles of flat farmland and tidelands, peppered with tall yuccas blooming with fluffy white flowers and dozens of hawks swooping from telephone poles along the four-lane highway.

In the mainland beach town of Port Isabel, we pause long enough to snap a few photos of the iconic Port Isabel lighthouse. Though the beacon is long gone and the tower now stands surrounded by beachy shops and restaurants, it's the only lighthouse open to the public along the Texas coastline. A quick trip up 75 stairs provides spectacular views of South Padre Island and the Gulf of Mexico.

Those interested in military history can take a left and head 20 minutes into Brownsville. The Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Park is where the first shot of the Mexican-American War was fired. The victorious outcome of that war doubled the size of the United States.

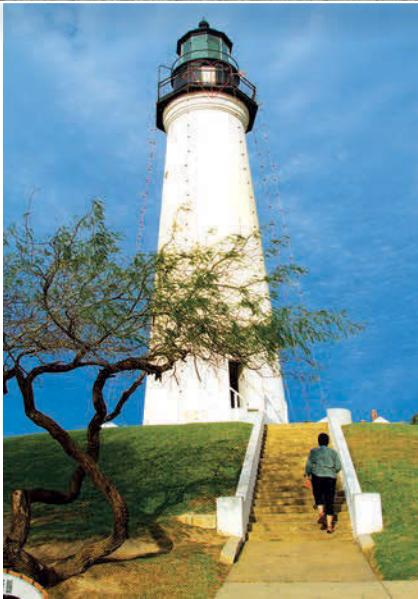


PHOTOS: ANNE WEAVER

An Ibis spreads its wings at the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center. Opposite page, top to bottom: RVs park under the palms at South Padre Island KOA. Gorgeous sunsets are another reason RVers love South Padre Island.



The extensive boardwalk at the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center keeps visitors and birders high and dry while offering up-close-and-personal wildlife viewing.



Above: There are lots of opportunities for beachcombing along the shoreline on South Padre Island. Left, top to bottom: Port Isabel Lighthouse, built in 1852, was occupied by soldiers from both sides of the Civil War and is in the National Register of Historic Places. A rescued turtle surfaces in one of the rehabilitation tanks at Sea Turtle Inc.



Ironically, while Brownsville is the site of the first battle with Mexico, it's also where the final land battle of the U.S. Civil War was fought in 1865.

Today we're more interested in beaches than battles so we press onward over the causeway, which at 2.6 miles is the longest bridge in Texas. This roadway, named after the Queen of Castile who financed Christopher Columbus' voyage of discovery to the New World, offers sparkling views of the turquoise waters of the Laguna Madre from its 85-foot height.

For many, South Padre Island is renowned as a spring break destination for high school and college students. However, spring break happens for only a few weeks, and the rest of the time this island is left mostly to the grown-ups and the wildlife.

Padre Island, a 113-mile-long strip of sand arcing along the southern tip of Texas in the Gulf of Mexico, is the largest of the state's barrier islands and the world's longest. South Padre, where we're headed, is the island's southern third, separated from North Padre by man-made Port Mansfield Channel. The town of South Padre is where the population is concentrated and the rest, as they say, is for the birds — and the turtles and the dolphins. But more about them later.

South Padre has two RV parks and we've heard great things about South Padre Island KOA so we pull the rig into this 200-site park. The park is right along Laguna Madre and many sites have views of the water and the causeway. In fact, several RVers tell us they prefer this park

to many in the Florida Keys because it has the same balmy weather and waterfront scenery for less money.

The water-view sites have long been taken so we settle for a mid-section, white-rock-topped pull-in under the palms with full hookups for about half the price and content ourselves with dog walks along the water's edge. At dinnertime, we wander over to Pier 19, a restaurant next door, and enjoy watching the sun set over Laguna Madre. As I sip my tropical drink, it's easy to see why RVers spend weeks or even months in this tropical haven.

### BIRDS AND DOLPHINS

The next morning, we wake to full sun and gentle breezes. After a quick breakfast, we head to South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center, one of nine World Birding Centers that stretch from the top of the Rio Grande Valley to the Gulf.

This center is a unique collaboration with the island's water treatment plant and features 4,800 feet of boardwalk



RV sites near Port Isabel hug the bay and offer spectacular views of the water.

and seven birding blinds along nutrient-rich tidelands loaded with birds, including cormorants, sandpipers, ibis, herons, curlews, plovers, brown pelicans and the magnificent roseate spoonbill. In several ponds, ducks paddle about the reeds. It's a birder's paradise and we join several dozen nature lovers armed with cameras and binoculars trying to capture the sights.

The center's boardwalk extends across tidelands and ponds created by effluent pumped from the treatment plant. While the plant's industrial machinery next door contrasts sharply with the natural setting, the water from the plant

provides food for wildlife while wetland plants cleanse the water. The center is open 9 a.m.-5 p.m., but avid birders have access to the boardwalk early and late via a fee-entry gate system.

The center also has an attractive clapboard building housing an auditorium, a small exhibit space and a five-story tower with expansive views of Laguna Madre, the beaches and dunes, the Gulf of Mexico and the island's skyline. From the tower's viewing deck, we spot an osprey and a northern harrier.

We while away the hours watching the magnificent birds until hunger finally overcomes us. A local suggests Daddy's Seafood and Cajun Kitchen, a restaurant right on the main drag, and it's a terrific choice. We happily dine on blackened fish and big, garlicky grilled shrimp. We take pieces of cheesecake and key lime pie to enjoy in the motorhome and buy a couple of bottles of Dirty Al's blackening seasoning so we can have a taste of this place later on the road.

In the afternoon, we meet up with Capt. Scarlet Colley, a self-proclaimed "dolphin whisperer," on the Skimmer 2, a small boat operated by Colley's South Padre Island Dolphin Research & Sealife Nature Center, a tour company specializing in intimate encounters with dolphins. Unlike larger dolphin-watching boats, the Skimmer holds only six passengers; a young couple and their 9-year-old son join us. Moments after we motor into the bay, the dark silhouette of a bottlenose dolphin breaches the water.

"Oh, they are welcoming us!" exclaims Colley as the big marine mammal crashes back into the bay, sending a rooster tail of spray skyward. "They sense we are coming. They are inviting us." Colley eases back on the throttle and dolphins, their grey and white bodies swirling around the boat, suddenly surround us.

I have never been this close to these

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### SEA TURTLE INC.

956-761-4511, [www.seaturtleinc.org](http://www.seaturtleinc.org)

#### SOUTH PADRE ISLAND BIRDING AND NATURE CENTER

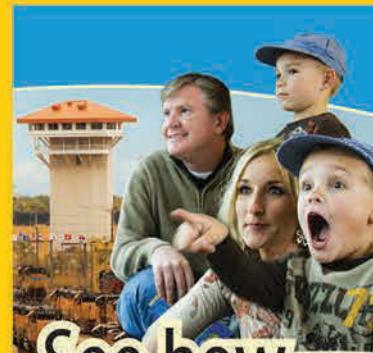
956-243-8179, [www.spibirding.com](http://www.spibirding.com)

#### SOUTH PADRE ISLAND DOLPHIN RESEARCH & SEALIFE NATURE CENTER

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[www.spinaturecenter.com](http://www.spinaturecenter.com)

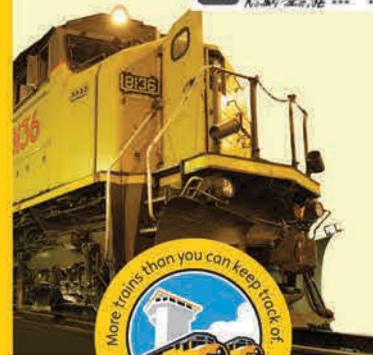
#### SOUTH PADRE ISLAND KOA

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intelligent creatures and it's magical. As they swim on their sides, showing us their bellies, I see old scars and even barnacles on their skin. Colley, who's been observing several pods here for nearly 20 years, says the marks are from encounters with other animals or from boat propellers.

When a large barge churns by, the dolphins, like little kids, rush over to surf its wake. Then they swim back to play with us. After 90 minutes and encounters with

at least two dozen dolphins, we reluctantly turn toward home.

**SAVING THE TURTLES**

The following day, after an evening enjoying the KOA's pool and hot tub, we head for Sea Turtle Inc., a small, grassroots non-profit that rescues and rehabilitates sea turtles. When we arrive, a talk is going on. "Back in the 1940s, you'd find 40,000 Kemp's ridley sea turtles coming onto the

beaches here to lay their eggs," the volunteer tells the group. "That number dropped to 250. Last year, thanks to the efforts of volunteers, we had 7,000 of them."

We wander around large circular pools filled with turtles — Kemp's, hawksbills, leatherbacks, green sea turtles and the massive loggerheads. Sea Turtle Inc., rehabilitates all five species of turtles that occur in the Gulf and returns many to the wild. "If they have 75 percent of their flippers, they can usually go back to sea," explains Kat Lillie, the organization's assistant curator. "Many things happen to their flippers — sharks, crabs, boat propellers."

Allison is a 10-year-old green turtle who has lost three of her flippers. In the wild, she'd die. But here at Sea Turtle Inc., they've built a prosthesis they strap to her shell that enables her to swim almost normally. Budro, another turtle who can't be released, is missing two flippers that got tangled in fishing line. Because the agency has rehabilitation hospital and zoological permits, it can keep the turtles too ill or injured for release.

"We couldn't do this without volunteers," says Lillie. "They're our lifeblood." Two hundred volunteers, many RVers who come for the snowbird season, contribute 4,000 hours annually feeding turtles, maintaining the center, staffing the gift shop and patrolling the beach for stranded turtles.

We step into the cramped gift shop and see six critically ill turtles on the floor. "This is our intensive care unit," Lillie says. She points to a 60-pound turtle on a wet towel, its normally green skin bluish. "We think he's got an intestinal infection, but we're not sure."

Plans for expansion are underway, but for now, visitors must dodge sick turtles until the agency raises enough money. And it costs plenty to rescue these gentle giants. Gerry, one of their biggest green sea turtles, consumes 500 heads of romaine lettuce every day.

Before we leave, we write a \$100 check for a new building brick. As we pass Allison's tank, she raises her head. Call me crazy, but I swear that turtle gives me a big smile. ♦



**Bobbie Hasselbring is a frequent contributor to MotorHome and editor of [www.realfoodtraveler.com](http://www.realfoodtraveler.com), which covers authentic food and travel. Bobbie owns a Class C Jayco Greyhawk SS.**

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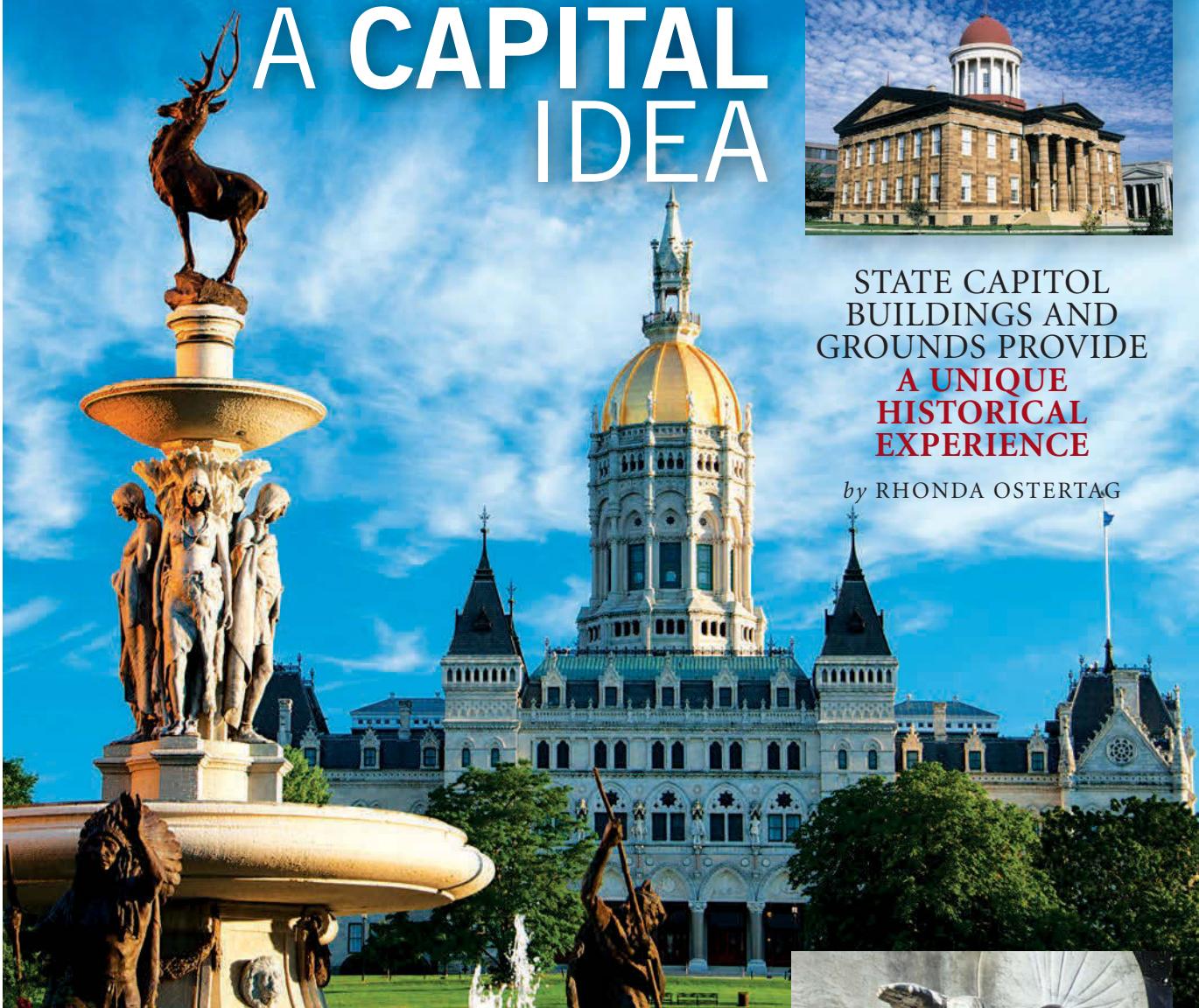
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# A CAPITAL IDEA



STATE CAPITOL BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS PROVIDE  
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by RHONDA OSTERTAG



**It's not uncommon for RVers to build collections of the national and state parks, ballparks and halls of fame they've visited. Why not add capital cities and their capitols?**

Learning, reciting and visiting the state capitals is a rite of grade school passage. But, why waste the exercise? Brush away the cobwebs and put the knowledge to use. Seats of government can provide insight into destination states and often suggest side trips.

Capitol buildings (state houses) offer architecture, art, history, story and legend, while the grounds roll out restful strolls among the statues, memorials, fountains, gardens and arboretums. Guided and self-guided tours fit busy travel schedules. Print materials for self tours are generally available at the information desk or online.

As your collection grows, you'll find common story threads. In the choice

**Main: Overlooking Bushnell Park and the Corning Fountain, the Connecticut State Capitol in Hartford is among the most elaborate. Top inset: The Old Capitol in Springfield, Ill. Right: Sculptures such as this are prominent throughout State Capitol State Park in Salem, Ore.**





Clockwise from above: Cherry blossoms and daffodils surround the Oregon State Capitol in Salem. This Texas cowboy statue is part of the Texas Capitol Complex in Austin. View the legislative chamber at Benicia Capitol State Historic Park in California. Head north of Montana's capital city of Helena to the Prewett Creek Fishing Access Site.



## FUN FACTS

■ Connecticut's Capitol dome originally sported a statue, "The Genius of Connecticut." After suffering hurricane damage in 1938, the statue was removed, and during World War II, it was melted down for the war effort to make ammunition and machine parts.

■ The Oregon Pioneer stands 23 feet tall and weighs a whopping 8.5 tons.

■ During the 1877 Illinois legislative session, 198 spittoons were located in the House chamber, 129 in the Senate.

■ Colorado's Capitol cornerstone weighed 20 tons and required 60 mules to haul it.

■ The State House in Concord, N.H., is the oldest state capitol in which the legislature meets in its original chambers. In 1818, the dome sported a gold-painted wooden statue of a war eagle looking left. In 1957, it was replaced with a copper peace eagle looking right.

of capital city, you'll hear about wandering capitals, political gamesmanship and overturned election results when the winning city didn't fit expectation. Design competitions were held for many capitol buildings. Most are in the National Register of Historic Places or are National Historic Landmarks. Several met with natural disasters, including fires, floods and earthquakes.

As centers of business and legislation, capital cities sit on main travel routes and serve as starting points to popular attractions, with public and private campgrounds often in proximity. Because of capitol bustle, it's best to arrive by passenger vehicle or to use local transit systems. Parking is a bit easier when legislature is not in session. Despite sometimes missing out on guided tours, I like the calm of weekends, and evening and early morning hours for parking

and making an unhurried study of the architecture, monuments and grounds.

Here are six destinations to start your collection.



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**SALEM, ORE.**

Spring is the best time to visit Salem and its Greek-style Art Deco capitol. The mall's flowering cherry trees funnel views to the seat of government with the gilded Oregon Pioneer piercing the sky. This is one of the newer capitols in the nation, built in 1938, and the design had its share of detractors. Gazing upon the Capitol, I'm reminded of my father's bowling trophies atop the old upright piano, but I have great fondness for the pioneer and relief panels at the entry to the Capitol. They represent the heroism of average people.

Like most capitols, there is an echoing chill of importance as you enter the marble interior with its wings of government, art and history. On the grounds, statues honor Jason Lee, founder of Willamette Mission and Willamette University, and Dr. John McLoughlin, the "Father of Oregon," who assisted arriving pioneers. Fractured columns harken to an earlier capitol lost to fire. The Walk of the Flags honors all 50 states and the Native

American nations of Oregon. Towering redwoods and a Douglas fir grown from a seed carried to the moon on Apollo 14 lend to the shade and enchantment of the grounds.

**Oregon State Capitol, 503-986-1388, [www.leg.state.or.us/capinfo](http://www.leg.state.or.us/capinfo)**

**BENICIA, CALIF.**

No cause for alarm, Sacramento is still the current seat of working government and its capitol building, at 10<sup>th</sup> and L streets, is a fine museum of California history. But California also offers travelers a rare opportunity to visit one of the state's early capitol buildings.

Four cities preceded Sacramento as California's capital city: Monterey (the capital during the Mexican period), San Jose, Vallejo and Benicia. The latter's capitol still stands. Touring Benicia Capitol State Historic Park at 115 West G Street in Benicia (open weekends only) takes you back to 1853. Ascending the steps to the brick two-story Greek temple-style building, you pass beneath twin columns

to enter this time capsule with original ponderosa pine flooring and original and period furnishings. Brass spittoons, ink wells and quills, candles, felt hats, senator name tags and 1853 copies of the *Columbia Gazette* are among the artifacts. Old photographs, duplicate archives and an early copying machine advance the story. Next door, the Fischer-Hanlon House, shown by guided tour, recalls the Gold Rush era.

**Benicia Capitol State Historic Park, 707-745-3385, [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)**

**HELENA, MONT.**

This quintessential Western state capital is not far from Last Chance Gulch, where gold was found by the Four Georgians. Admiring the Treasure State's neoclassical Capitol goes hand in hand with admiring the statue of sword-wielding, horseback-riding Irish freedom fighter and first territorial governor Thomas Francis Meagher. A proud figure, in life and bronze, his Irish campaigns led to a life sentence at an Australian penal colony and an escape to

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the United States, where Meagher made his mark in the Civil War and Montana government. His story ends with a fall overboard from a Missouri River steamboat near Benton, Mont. Because his body was never recovered and because of his colorful life, conspiracy theories follow his name.

The House of Representatives wing displays the impressive 1912 mural by Charles M. Russell, "Lewis and Clark Meeting Indians at Ross' Hole." The "People's Place" is at 1301 East 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, with generous hours for self-touring; for group tours call 406-444-4789 or visit <http://visit-the-capitol.mt.gov>.

Within the Capitol Complex (east of the Capitol, at Roberts Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue), the Montana Historical Society's Montana's Museum (a fee site) honors the state's story with nods to Lewis and Clark, Charles M. Russell, Big Medicine (a stuffed white buffalo), frontier life and the Native peoples.

**Montana Historical Society, 406-444-2694, [www.mhs.mt.gov/museum](http://www.mhs.mt.gov/museum)**

### AUSTIN, TEXAS

As you might expect from Texas, its 1888 capitol building has the biggest footprint in the country, stands taller than the nation's Capitol and sits on a 22-acre campus that designers dubbed "Capitol Square." It exemplifies late 19th century public architecture with a Renaissance Revival style. Signature features are the grand three-story entry arch and pinkish facade of Texas sunset red granite. The zinc Goddess of Liberty rises from the dome. Stephen Austin and Sam Houston are Capitol greeters in life-size statues.

Touring the Capitol, you'll learn about the battles for Texas, its agriculture, art and people. I've been told the building has 400 rooms and more than 900 windows. The gracious grounds hold art and memorials, with the historic grounds south, east and west of the building. One of my favorite features, the historic Lone Star iron fencing, defines these grounds.

The Capitol sits at Congress Avenue and 11<sup>th</sup> Street. Except major holidays, daily tours, including guided ones, are

available. The Capitol Visitors Center, at 112 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street (corner of the grounds), has interactive exhibits and video presentations to get you started.

Because the Capitol's proximity to The University of Texas at Austin means additional traffic congestion at the changing of classes, bring your patience.

**Capitol Visitors Center, 512-305-8400, [www.tspb.state.tx.us](http://www.tspb.state.tx.us)**

### SPRINGFIELD, ILL.

Here you can celebrate old and new. The current capitol building, at 2nd Street and Capitol Avenue, is the sixth since statehood in 1818. This statuesque building with silvery facade stands 361 feet tall, holding skyline prominence by city ordinance and occupies 9 acres with its Latin cross configuration. Two other cities have hosted the seat of government. In 1836, though, a young lawyer, Abraham Lincoln, stoked the cause for moving the center of government to Springfield. The fifth Capitol — the Old Capitol in Springfield — is intricately tethered to the Lincoln legacy.

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### HARTFORD, CONN.

One of the most elaborately decorated capitols, you can spend hours with craned neck, deciphering its detail. This cathedral-like capitol has an Eastlake style with French and Gothic Revival elements. With fountains, monuments and a park-like setting, it occupies the former site of Trinity College. It sits adjacent to Bushnell Park and the stunning Civil War memorial, the 116-foot tall brownstone Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch that spans Trinity Street.

Since before the American Revolution, the General Assembly had alternated its meetings between New Haven and Hartford. After the Civil War, Hartford won approval as the permanent seat. Among the Capitol's proudest records are its Civil War battle standards, 30 regimental flags presented by 10,000 state veterans on Sept. 17, 1879.

Together, the central drum, dome and cupola rise 257 feet. The facades hold statues, medallions and carved tympana above the doors. Politicians and civic leaders are recognized. Twenty-four platforms are provided, but some remain empty for future honorees. Governor John Winthrop Jr., Reverend Thomas Hooker, Noah Webster and the first female governor of the state, Ella T. Grasso, are among the honor roll. The north facade acknowledges pre-Revolutionary War figures; the east and west facades represent the Revolutionary War era, and the south facade is reserved for the Civil War forward.

The grounds hold statues and the arresting Corning Fountain, with its antlered stag (or hart) and noble warriors. Weekday guided tours are available.

**Connecticut State Capitol, 860-240-0222, [www.cga.ct.gov/capitol tours](http://www.cga.ct.gov/capitol tours) ♦**



Rhonda Ostertag is a freelance writer who travels and collaborates with her husband, photographer George Ostertag. The couple lives in Oregon when not on the road.

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# SOUTHWIND 36L



Latest Southwind floorplan boasts a full bath and a half, with ample twin slideout roominess

by CHUCK AND TERESA CAMPBELL

PHOTO: CHUCK CAMPBELL

**F**leetwood RV of Decatur, Ind., has recently unveiled a bath-and-a-half 36L floorplan to complement its ever-popular lineup of Southwind motorhomes. As one of the company's top-of-the-line gas coaches, this 36-foot 11-inch dual slide unit will accommodate five to six people comfortably, and appears to be loaded with just about anything a couple with a large family or group of friends

might want in a motorhome.

Fleetwood's most recent floorplan bears a passing resemblance to more upscale diesel-pushers in both appearance and finish, and is the most well equipped of four Southwind models available. The 36L carries a suggested base retail price of \$144,459, and presents an impressive profile with its molded aerodynamic front end, expansive one-piece panoramic windshield, distinctive headlamp and high-mounted taillight clusters, and standard Pewter Mist full-body paint.

This motorhome is loaded with standard niceties such as Sony audiovisual electronics, automatic leveling jacks and a 5.5 kW generator as prime examples. Noteworthy options include a Splendide washer/dryer in a mid-coach closet (\$1,638), an LED high-definition TV above the cab (\$917), a Sony Blu-ray surround sound system (\$553) and an exterior entertainment center with an LED HDTV in a curbside bay (\$1,932). This coach with extras has a sticker price of \$156,054.

The 36L's forward compartment with streetside slide





## SPECIFICATIONS

|  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| <b>CHASSIS:</b> FORD F53                   | <b>INTERIOR HEIGHT:</b> 7' 0"      |
| <b>ENGINE:</b> TRITON V-10<br>6.8-L 362 HP | <b>WHEELBASE:</b> 228"             |
| <b>FUEL:</b> 80 GAL                        | <b>FRESHWATER CAP:</b> 80 GAL      |
| <b>GVWR:</b> 22,000 LBS                    | <b>GRAY-WATER CAP:</b> 58 GAL      |
| <b>LENGTH:</b> 36' 11"                     | <b>BLACK-WATER CAP:</b> 42 GAL     |
| <b>WIDTH:</b> 8' 5"                        | <b>LP-GAS CAP:</b> 25 GAL          |
| <b>HEIGHT WITH A/C:</b> 12' 10"            | <b>BASE MSRP:</b> \$144,459        |
|  | <b>MSRP AS REVIEWED:</b> \$156,054 |

### FLEETWOOD RV

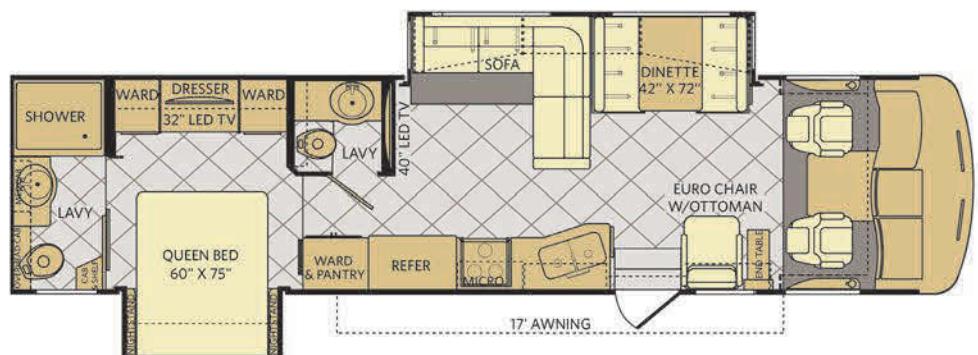
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houses a 41-by-23-inch dinette with handy drawer storage beneath each seat, and a Euro-recliner with ottoman curbside. To the rear is a luxurious L-shaped convertible sofa with 50-by-49-inch foldout bed, while a 40-inch LED HDTV is mounted on the area's back wall. Mid-coach curbside is a full-featured galley.

The aft curbside slideout supports a 60-by-75-inch queen bed (king bed optional) with generous aisle space all round. Like its sister 36D model, it offers a rear full bathroom, with mid-coach half bath (toilet and washstand).

Fleetwood's new coach is built on the proven Ford F53 chassis with Triton V-10 engine that can knock out 362-HP and 457 LB-FT of torque with confidence-inspiring ease. Backing this potent mill is Ford's dependable TorqShift five-speed automatic transmission with overdrive, plus Tow/Haul capability. Parabolic spring sets front and rear, plus Bilstein shocks and 22.5-inch aluminum wheels and tires round out the package, and help deliver a smooth, supportive driving experience under most traffic, weather and highway conditions.

Cockpit space in this coach contains an automotive-style dash with easily readable gauges, a rearview camera monitor, and important switches and essential fea-



tures grouped within close proximity to the driver. Flexsteel captain's seats take center stage in this area, and are both electrically adjustable, upholstered in soft Ultraleather, and sumptuously comfortable to say the least. Further enhancing the cab's usefulness, the dash ahead of the copilot is set up with a handy, retractable computer workstation.

I took a quick spin in the Southwind during our walk-through, and expe-

rienced firsthand the coach's impressive power, highway stability and dependable handling. At almost 37 feet in length, the unit is relatively easy to maneuver, exhibited noticeable mid-range power when passing slower vehicles at higher freeway speeds and navigated the narrower rural confines of the Ventura Ranch KOA in Santa Paula, Calif., with ease.

A spacious, contemporary interior in the 36L included a Pewter Mist décor

treatment with dark cherry wood Cinnabar cabinetry, brushed nickel hardware and Corian-like counter surfaces. The galley also contains an attractive tile backsplash, and extra deep, dual stainless steel sinks.

The package additionally includes a 7-foot-high, soft touch vinyl ceiling for optimum acoustics, composite tile flooring, with the sofa and dinette upholstered in off-white Ultraleather with charcoal piping. Overall, quality craftsmanship is evident in every corner of this sizeable coach, and reflects what one might expect in a unit at this price point.

The galley should be a real crowd-pleaser with its residential, solid-surface countertops (including range and sink covers). Other high points of this zone include a four-door refrigerator, an overhead microwave/convection oven and three-burner stove with a conventional oven below.

The back bedroom is well appointed with cabinetry and drawers to stow adequate amounts of clothing and other soft goods. Dual wardrobe closets bracket a 32-inch LED HDTV on the streetside wall, while the full master bathroom at the very rear of the floorplan includes a porcelain toilet, washstand and an exceptionally generous 31-by-39-inch shower stall with more than 6 feet of headroom.

Storage on this model, both inside and out, is quite generous. Numerous exterior bays using the company's EZ Storage system plus a full rear pass-through bay provide lots of cargo options for extended travel, and up to 118 cubic feet of capacity. Inside, cabinets, cupboards and closets offer up to 140 cubic feet.

Fleetwood's Southwind 36L should be a popular floorplan for long range traveling as well as entertaining, with its twin slides, bath-and-a-half, four TVs and generous storage capacities. Loaded with a host of high-end, residential amenities and sporting fashionable, eye-grabbing coachwork, the new design should serve its users well, while impressing from every angle. ♦



Chuck Campbell served 31 years as a sworn member of a state law enforcement agency before retiring. He is a frequent contributor to *MotorHome* and enjoys traveling in his Class C coach.

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by BILL AND JENN GEHR



# M

otorhomes provide years of enjoyment as long as the scheduled routine maintenance is performed on a timely basis. Sometimes the excitement of preparing for a trip can find owners overlooking basic maintenance procedures, which can contribute to unnecessary repairs down the road. Even if you don't plan on completing the actual services yourself, strong knowledge of maintenance requirements and procedures will give you advantages when working with repair center technicians.

Locate your owner's manual and become familiar with the chassis maintenance schedules. If you don't have an owner's manual, refer to Internet Web pages where manufacturers post information that relates to your specific chassis and drivetrain. Hopefully you've kept an accurate logbook (with receipts) of all the service procedures that have been performed at certain mileage milestones. This is your best resource for keeping track of maintenance history.

Compile a list of pending maintenance procedures and note those items that need to be completed in the near future. Plan ahead, taking into consideration upcoming trips and how many miles you plan on traveling. Though it's best to avoid being on the road during service times, that might not be possible, depending on travel plans. Get in

PHOTO: TREVOR TALLMAN/CAMPING WORLD



**Clockwise from top:** This is an example of the drain plug that comes standard on current-model transmissions. The red transmission oil filter is used mainly on Allison transmissions. The white engine oil filter shown here is mounted in a vertical position, making it practical to fill with oil before installation.

the habit of checking your list two or three weeks prior to departure to allow a bit of wiggle room to perform any necessary maintenance or repairs. Most importantly, do not neglect scheduled maintenance just because you're on the road.

To begin a service routine, grab a flashlight and a handheld mirror to perform a visual inspection from one end of the coach to the other, scrutinizing all engine and chassis components. Target areas are deteriorating hoses, broken welds and oil leaks. Finding potential issues and addressing them before they become major problems can help keep you out of the repair shop during a hard-earned vacation. Don't forget to inspect the tires, including the spare. Tires lose air while sitting in storage, and unless they are covered, dangerous cracks

in the sidewalls can develop. Inflate to the proper pressure before any trip and check the manufacture date to make sure the tires have not timed out. Generally, replace tires, even if the tread condition is still safe, after seven years. Some



tire manufacturers extend that interval depending on storage conditions.

**LUBE, OIL AND FILTER CHANGE**

Newer gas and diesel engines are designed for higher mileage intervals between scheduled oil changes, unlike engines manufactured 10-15 years ago. Oil viscosity and blend chemistry have also changed, especially for diesel engines. Diesel engines also hold considerably higher volumes of oil than their gasoline counterparts. Later model diesel and gas engines have been designed to run up to 7,500 miles before needing an oil change and filter service.

Check the manual carefully to determine the required type and weight of oil as well as the number of quarts necessary to fill to the proper level. Also note the filter part number required for replacement. Don't forget to take into account the amount of oil required when using a new oil filter. For example, the owner's manual may list a 12-quart capacity that moves to 13 quarts when the filter is replaced.

Be sure to follow the owner's manual instructions for warming up the engine — diesel or gasoline — prior to an oil change. This step is important; warm oil drains better than cold oil, removes more sediment when emptied and the engine is not subject to cold starting after the oil change. If the engine has a vertically mounted oil filter, fill the new filter with oil prior to installation to avoid starving the engine of lubrication for several seconds upon restart.

Wait until the oil drains back into the pan before checking the level on the dipstick. This is the perfect time to lube the chassis. The owner's manual will identify points to lube. Keep in mind that many newer chassis don't require grease, since normally greased components such as ball joints are sealed. Be sure to check the driveline as well; many have Zerk (grease) fittings that require lubrication.

The basic tools needed for this service include a pan capable of holding the oil drained from the engine, a quality oil filter wrench, a wrench or





socket to remove the drain plug, a funnel, a lube gun, a grease cartridge and a few rags. Once the job is complete, be sure to recycle the used motor oil and filter and record in your logbook the details of this service. Many auto parts stores have recycling provisions for old oil.

### TRANSMISSIONS

Along with the advent of overdrive transmissions came the reformulation of transmission fluids. Automatic transmission fluids (ATFs) have evolved from Type F to Mercon 5 to full synthetic. Wear additives, friction modifiers, corrosion inhibitors, detergents and more have become necessary ingredients for today's expensive and complicated transmissions. Heavier motorhomes, coupled with towing a dinghy, only increase the importance of regular maintenance procedures. Heat through friction in the torque converter and clutches is the biggest cause of failure of automatic transmissions. An ideal temperature for oil measured in the transmission sump is 175 degrees Fahrenheit. Unfortunately, there are hills to contend with and towing a vehicle can also influence oil temperature. Any temperatures higher than 250 degrees can cut the ATF life in half. Install a quality gauge to accurately monitor ATF temperature. Consider installing a larger transmission oil cooler if fluid temperature is hard to control while traveling in hot weather.

It is best to consult the owner's manual for the recommended service intervals as well as the specific fluid type requirement. If the transmission light illuminates at any time while driving, pull over as soon as it is safe and check the fluid level.

Start the engine and, using a flashlight and mirror, inspect carefully for



**Clockwise from top left: Most auto parts stores carry synthetic or paraffin-based oil for gas and diesel engines. Transmission fluid is available in a variety of specifications, including synthetic. Items commonly used for servicing the rear differential include additives, oil and a hand pump.**

leaks, corrosion or any deteriorated parts. Follow the transmission lines to the transmission cooler; check for any leaks or obvious signs of corrosion at the transmission cooler. This inspection is important in older motorhomes as rubber lines were commonly used prior to metal lines found today. The rubber tends to crack over time, resulting in a leak or, in a worst-case scenario, total fluid loss.

Transmission fluid will usually not be low unless there is a leak. Pull the dipstick and follow the instructions at the end of the stick to check fluid level — be sure to comply with recommended procedures. If nothing is imprinted on the dipstick, consult the owner's manual for specifics.

Color alone does not indicate the quality/condition of the transmission fluid. A quick, simple way to test the quality of the transmission fluid is to purchase test pads from Robinair (No. 92001). These test pads are not as accurate as a chemical analysis, but they will give you a gener-

al idea of the current state of the transmission fluid. To use, place a few drops on the pad from the dipstick and the color will change to indicate fluid status.

A professional should complete motorhome transmission service. When selecting a service location, call ahead and ask which method is used to change the fluids. Flushing with a machine is easiest, but controversial; the owner's manual usually doesn't list machine flushing as an option.

While switching to synthetic fluid is more costly, the benefits are superior protection and longer service intervals. For example, an Allison transmission using Mercon 3 has a service interval of 25,000 miles or one year. The same transmission with TranSynth Synthetic has a service interval of 150,000 miles or four years.

If you do take on the task of changing the transmission fluid and filter yourself, you'll need a large drain pan, a socket set, a funnel and rags. Beyond purchasing the required number of quarts and correct type of transmission fluid, you'll need a filter and gasket kit that corresponds to your particular transmission. This information can be found in the chassis owner's manual or by using the cross-reference books at auto parts stores.

If the transmission has a drain plug, remove and drain the fluid into the drain pan. If there's no drain plug, the pan will need to be unbolted and a corner slowly pulled from the transmission. Once the transmission fluid is finished draining, completely remove the pan to expose the filter. Carefully remove the old pan gasket and clean the surfaces prior to reinstallation. Follow the instructions for replacing the gasket and the filter. Some trans-

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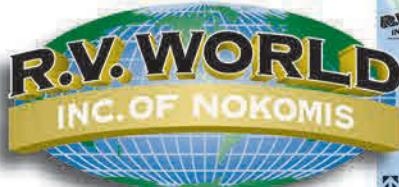


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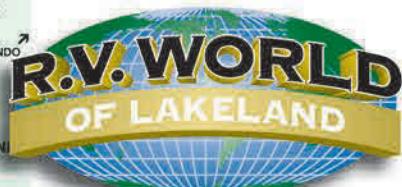
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missions have a reusable gasket. Note: Allison transmissions also have one or two external filters. Reinstall the transmission pan and torque the bolts to the manufacturer's specifications.

Determine the fluid capacity of the transmission. Better yet, measure the fluid drained from the transmission. Then, using the funnel, add that amount of new fluid back into the transmission through the dipstick tube.

**REAR DIFFERENTIAL**

Often referred to as the rear end, the rear differential allows the rear wheels to turn at two different speeds while providing power to propel the coach down the road. Its job is to regulate the number of turns made by the drive wheels in relation to the number of turns of the driveshaft. It also compensates for differences when turning since the inside wheels travel a

shorter distance through the turn. Without the rear differential, the tires would scrub and hop during the turning sequence. Lubricated by a specific volume of oil — usually 3 quarts for a gas chassis and 19 pints for a diesel (no filter) — the rear differential has quite a taxing job so paying close attention to regular service intervals is important. In general, servicing runs every 30,000 to 50,000 miles, depending on chassis manufacturer.

Tools needed for changing gear oil in the rear differential include an oil drain pan, socket set, a gasket scraper and clean rags. Carefully consult the owner's manual for the proper oil and/or friction modifiers. Now would be a good time to change to synthetic oil because of its outstanding ability to resist heat and because the oil will usually last two to three times longer than standard gear oil. Consider purchasing a small hand pump to add the

new differential fluid since the oil fill hole is usually in a cumbersome location and Murphy's law generally applies.

Class C motorhomes — 1980s models — and Chevrolet P-chassis as well as some Ford chassis models prior to 1990 utilized rear differential covers without a drain plug. In the early '90s, motorhome manufacturers started using a heavier-duty third-member-type differential that includes a convenient drain plug, eliminating the need to remove the differential cover and gasket. Do not forget to use a thread sealant on all bolt threads!

Find the data plate on the rear axle and count the number of bolts on the cover to ensure the proper gasket is purchased from the local auto parts store. You will also need to buy the necessary type and amount of gear oil.

To drain the oil, remove all but the top bolt from the rear differential cover and loosen the top bolt two turns. With the oil pan under the differential, gently pry the cover away from the rear axle housing so that the oil will drain into the pan. (The reason we leave the top bolt in place is to keep the cover from popping off too quickly, resulting in a gush of gear oil.)

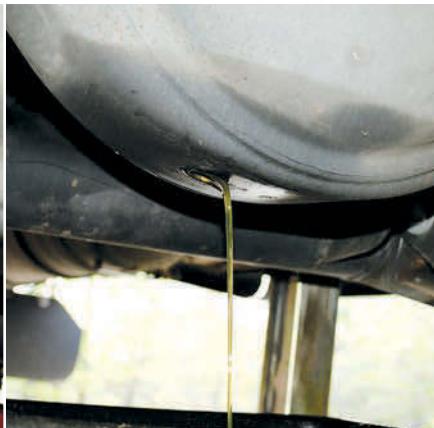
After the oil is drained, remove the top bolt and the cover. Scrape off the old gasket and clean the differential cover, as well as inside the gearbox using clean, lint-free rags. Install the gasket. Bolt the cover to the gearbox and torque to manufacturer's specs. Add the gear oil through the top fill plug until the oil weeps out the hole. Install the friction modifier before the oil, if needed. Finally, install and tighten the fill plug and check for leaks. Check for leaks again after the first 25 miles of driving.

For those who enjoy getting their hands a dirty, there's nothing more satisfying than knowing that you have some skin in the game. Be advised to keep accurate records and save all receipts. That way you'll be protected if a warranty issue requires proof of scheduled maintenance.

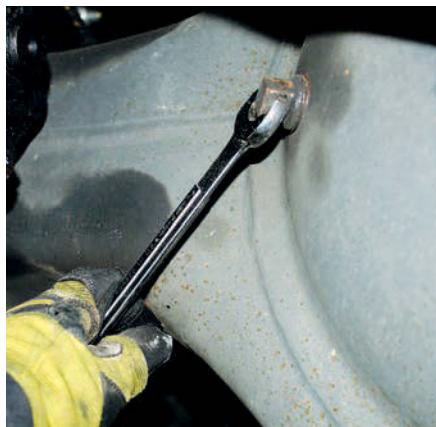
Check out *MotorHome's* October issue for Part II, which will focus on radiators, belts and hoses, power steering, brake fluid, wheel bearings, tires and brakes. ♦



Removal of drain plug on rear differential can be accomplished by using a ratchet.



Make sure the oil from a third-member rear differential is completely drained into an oil catch basin.



Remove the upper plug from the rear differential and pump in the new oil until the level reaches the bottom of the threads.



Be certain that you use an appropriately sized catch basin or resealable bucket when you drain any fluids from your RV.



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

PHOTOS: E. DON SMITH

# ALLEGRO 36LA

Bath-and-a-half gasser from Tiffin has lots of room and plenty of creature comforts



## It was the Allegro line that helped launch the Tiffin

brand more than 40 years ago, and today this Class A coach is still a popular choice for motorhome owners. Six floorplans fill out the 2013 Allegro lineup, ranging from 31-and-a-half feet to just shorter than 37 feet and all employing Tiffin's craftsmanship and attention to detail.

The 36LA, a plan that is the longest of the gassers built on the F53 Ford chassis, features a bath-and-a-half normally reserved for diesel pushers. The Allegro has a one-piece, molded fiberglass roof cap and aluminum side walls, components that help to provide longevity and ease maintenance.

The cockpit's curved dash houses large, clearly labeled controls, accompanied by a backup camera with color monitor and a CD player with AM/FM stereo. Cloth driver and passenger seats are standard, with the option for powered and leather versions.

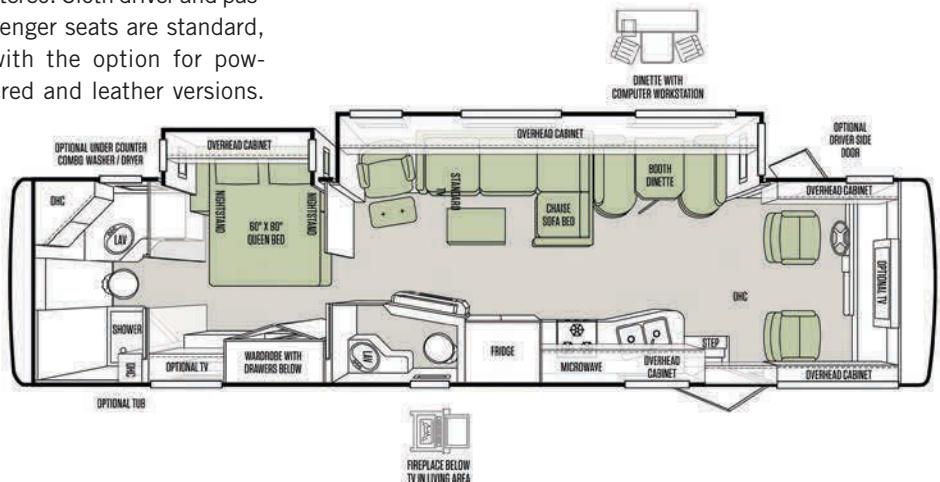


## SPECIFICATIONS

|                                 |                          |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| CHASSIS: FORD F53               | EXTERIOR HEIGHT: 12' 10" |
| ENGINE: FORD 6.8-L V-10, 362 HP | WHEELBASE: 252"          |
| FUEL: 75 GAL                    | FRESHWATER CAP: 70 GAL   |
| GVWR: 24,000 LBS                | GRAY-WATER CAP: 50 GAL   |
| EXTERIOR LENGTH: 36' 10"        | BLACK-WATER CAP: 66 GAL  |
| EXTERIOR WIDTH: 8' 4"           | LP-GAS CAP: 24 GAL       |
|                                 | BASE MSRP: \$140,840     |

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## ALLEGRO 36LA

The passenger side is also equipped with a pullout laptop workstation.

A large streetside slide creates a roomy living area and houses a booth dinette and L-shaped cloth chaise sofa/sleeper. A recliner and ottoman (standard in the 36LA) are perfectly placed to view the midsection flat-screen TV or relax in front of the optional fireplace. A home theater with surround sound and DVD player is offered for those looking to ratchet up the entertainment. A bank of overhead storage cabinets with solid wood faces stretches the length of the slide. Vinyl tile flooring is laid throughout the coach and the Allegro's windows are covered by RollEase solar/privacy shades.

Tiffin's high-gloss English Chestnut cabinetry, one of two choices, is also dominant in the galley, where several cabinets and drawers with ball-bearing slides provide kitchen storage. A recessed three-burner cooktop with solid surface covers, along with an oven and overhead microwave give Allegro owners plenty of meal preparation choices. A double bowl stainless steel sink is ready to handle cleanup duties, while the 8-cubic-foot refrigerator/freezer can accommodate leftovers and anything else owners want to bring along.

The 36LA is the only Allegro floorplan with both a full rear bathroom and a guest bath amidships for maximum versatility. A sliding door separates the rear bedroom and bath from the rest of the coach, providing privacy for owners.

A second streetside slide houses a queen bed, nightstands and an overhead cabinet. Opposite is the full-wall dressing area that provides mirrored wardrobes as well as handy drawer and hamper storage. The wardrobe module also houses the optional flat-screen TV.

The roomy master bathroom features a molded fiberglass, one-piece shower with skylight, and the 36LA floorplan offers a tub option in place of the shower.

Outside, standard features include full-body paint, fiberglass front and rear caps, a power patio awning with aluminum shield and 203 cubic feet of basement storage. A 5.5 kW Onan generator and two high profile roof air conditioners come standard. Or upgrade to a high profile roof air conditioner with heat pump and 7 kW generator. ♦

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- Sept. 27–29 ..... Marion, North Carolina
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- Oct. 3–6 ..... Richmond, Kentucky
- Oct. 17–20 ..... Claremore, Oklahoma
- Oct. 25–27 ..... Frederick, Maryland
- Nov. 20–24 ..... Eustis, Florida

### WHAT'S A SAMBOREE?

Ranging in size from 50 rigs to over 500, Samborees are RV get-togethers planned by state and provincial directors, making each Samboree unique. Along with fun and games, many Samborees include RV exhibits and educational seminars. Most states and provinces have a Samboree each year!



Learn more about Fall Samborees at [GoodSamClub.com/samborees](http://GoodSamClub.com/samborees)



## WIPER WRAP ▲

Windshield wiper blades can be quite expensive to replace. I discovered a cheap way to provide UV protection. I bought <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>- to <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>-inch foam pipe insulation, cut it in half and wrapped it around the blades. Now I have protection for the wipers and it cost me less than \$2.

**RON MCNEVIN | CENTERVILLE, UTAH**



## ▲ CARGO CADDY

Here's a way to keep everything that might be needed in the utility bay area handy and organized. It will work for motorhomes with side-hinged doors. I mounted a shower caddy on the door using a couple of sheet metal screws. It conveniently holds sanitizer, degreaser, bleach cleaner, pipe pliers, extra hose fittings, gloves, a flashlight and soft water test strips. The caddy keeps everything out of the way yet within easy reach for quick set up or departure. To ensure no interference with closing the door, first use masking tape to hold the caddy to the door in the planned location and make sure the door closes before permanently mounting.

**LEN BENKOSKY | SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ.**

## BRIGHT BASEMENT IDEA

After installing an on-demand water heater, I found that I had a vacant 120-volt AC line in the basement. Instead of continuing to switch on individual lights at each door, I installed several 120-volt AC light fixtures controlled by the now vacant water heater switch in the overhead. One flip of the switch when going out lights up the whole basement and one flip when going back in turns all the lights off.

**WAYNE SIKES | CHELSEA, ALA.**

## ▼ BOLT DOWN THE DOOR



Most RV water heater doors are mounted on two tiny pins at the bottom of the door. Only a single plastic or metal spring-loaded latch secures the top, which means the water heater door can come loose. Road vibrations can unlatch the door or a loose door can jump off the tiny pins. This can be expensive if you have a custom paint job. A very simple way to prevent the loss is to place a <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-inch bolt and wing nut through the latch. That way the door cannot be lost even if the latch vibrates into the open position.

**ROLAND JOHNSON | WOODBRIDGE, VA. ♦**

## 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](mailto: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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## GUIDING YOU HOME

Torklift's GlowGuide entryway handrail has a unique mounting system and a couple of surprises

**Getting in and out of a motorhome seems like a simple enough proposition,** but a misstep can result in injuries that can ruin a trip, or worse, require protracted medical attention. Some entry steps can be sized smaller than you're used to, or at a height that's not natural to a normal stride, which is why an entryway handrail is important for safety.

Most manufacturers equip their units with handrails that only offer assistance coming and going from the top step; from there it becomes awkward to reach and retain a suitable grip. Until recently, there have been very few products available to provide a full-length, add-on handrail without serious modifications. Thanks to well-known RV aftermarket supplier Torklift International, the GlowGuide is available to help remedy this.

The GlowGuide is an adjustable full-length handrail that ties into the coach at three points for maximum support and is designed to be universally mounted, regardless of the motorhome's style or shape. The GlowGuide comes packaged with every possible mounting bracket and the bolts, screws and molly rivets needed for installation. Detailed instructions accommodate a wide variety of framing and entry steps. Installation is a relatively straightforward process that only requires common hand tools.

To begin, find the RV Step Mount Cage Bracket and determine the best way to attach it to the bottom entry step. This bracket is versatile and can be adapted to most steps. Two-sided tape is used to facilitate the installation. Once this procedure is complete, it's a matter of locating the attachment points for the door and strut mounts. Because of the multitude of installation and assembly possibilities, it's best to carefully read through the instructions and find the appropriate method for your specific motorhome before drilling away.

After deciding the best way to affix the two remaining brackets there will only be four small holes to drill, followed by selecting the appropriate hardware. Don't forget to use silicone rubber when adding new holes and hardware to any side wall. The system is comprised of three telescopic aluminum arms and all three have the same length of adjustability. The upper door mount goes to the entryway, the lower arm attaches to the step and the strut can be attached to the bumper (depending on door location) or on the side wall, depending on the location of the entry door. The adjustability feature allows the arms to be tightened in positions that allow for best personal support.

There are two ways to store the arms: take the system apart and store in an exterior compartment, or fold it up against the wall and lock it in place. The location of an existing grab handle or other components may preclude storing the arms against the side wall, as it did with the unit we used for the install. Disassembly takes only a few minutes.

The GlowGuide offers handrail assistance from the top step to the ground, which provides ergonomic support. Although the GlowGuide may not appear massively stout, considering it weighs only 44 ounces, we found that when assembled correctly it's quite strong and sturdy. To make nighttime use even safer, strategically mounted glow-in-the-dark stickers illuminate for up to 10 hours, which makes the arms highly visible.

Oh, did I mention that the GlowGuide also doubles as an adjustable, long-reach wash brush? Remove one of the arms, attach the wash brush that comes with the kit, and the handrail can be extended from 32 to 53 inches, giving it plenty of reach for washing a rig.

The GlowGuide is made in the USA. The motorhome model retails for \$206.

**GlowGuide, 800-246-8132, [www.torklift.com](http://www.torklift.com) ♦**





## Corroded Connector

EXPERIENCING PROBLEMS WITH THEIR DINGHY'S AUXILIARY BRAKING SYSTEM, TWO READERS TURNED TO HOT LINE FOR HELP. THEY WROTE:

On our way back home from wintering in Gulf Shores, Ala., we noticed the auxiliary braking system on our Jeep was not working, so we disconnected the system. After we arrived home, I called the manufacturer's technical support help line. The technician had me use a voltmeter to diagnose the problem, and he determined it was a faulty power module.

AP Products (the manufacturer of the tow brake) sent me a new power module, which I installed only to find the braking system still did not work. After further investigation, while trying to remove the ground-wire bolt for the breakaway switch, I noticed that the hot wire for the switch was corroded at a connector. I replaced the connector and the braking system worked. I immediately replaced the original power module and it also worked.

I called AP Products and informed the technician of my findings and asked to return the new power module for a refund. He said I could not return the module because the seal on the package had been broken. Since the technician diagnosed the problem, I think AP Products should make a full refund.

**JACK AND CAROLYN GLENN  
FOSTORIA, OHIO**

*Hot Line contacted AP Products regarding the Glenns' request for a refund. Soon afterward, we received a copy of the company's response to the Glenns as well as a thank-you letter from the Glenns as follows:*

AP Products:

Please find the enclosed check in the amount of \$223.19. We are sorry that you experienced problems with the Unified Tow Brake and we are happy to hear the problem was easily resolved by cleaning a few wire connections.

One of the most challenging issues

for exterior electronics is that of corrosion. It should be part of a regular maintenance schedule to check for corrosion on all connections where possible.

While I agree with our technician's statement regarding returns on electronics, as most companies maintain a policy of not accepting returns on products in that category, I am making an exception in this case for the reasons you stated; we helped you troubleshoot the problem and made a wrong diagnosis.

We do staff tech people to help our customers with problems. However, sometimes the problems experienced are not the easiest to troubleshoot over the phone, such as yours. Without having the advantage of seeing it, some issues are not readily apparent. Nothing can replace taking the product to a shop for a technician to inspect first hand. In this case, a visual inspection would have likely prevented the misdiagnosis.

Please keep the power module as a spare, in case of problems in the future. It is our gift to you.

**TOM MANNING, PRESIDENT  
AP PRODUCTS  
COLDWATER, MICH.**

The Glenns:

We recently requested Hot Line's assistance with getting our money back from United Tow Brake. We are happy to report that AP Products recently sent us a check for the full amount and allowed us to keep the new controller for the braking system as well.

### **STUCK AND FROZEN**

*Unsuccessfully struggling to secure warranty compensation for work on his motorhome, a reader asked Hot Line for assistance. Our reader wrote:*

The stop engine light was coming on when I would first start up the engine on my Fleetwood Bounder turbodiesel motorhome. I took it to TransChicago Truck Group in Elmhurst, Ill., which is a Freightliner dealer. The service

department there ran a diagnostic check and found that the turbocharger actuator was stuck and frozen. When they checked for warranty they discovered the turbocharger was not under warranty and would cost \$2,610.28 to replace. I authorized the repair because we were scheduled to go on vacation soon and we were extremely anxious to get our motorhome back.

As the turbocharger is a major component of a diesel engine, I think it should be covered under warranty. I do not know how I could have caused the actuator to get stuck and frozen by just driving it. I purchased the motorhome new in 2008, it has less than 30,000 miles and has been serviced regularly.

I would like Hot Line to assist me in getting my money back.

**JIM MAZZARO | SCHAUMBURG, ILL.**

*To help Mazzaro resolve his dilemma, Hot Line contacted Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp. Some time later, we again heard from Mazzaro with an update on his situation. It read:*

I would like to thank Hot Line for the letter sent to Freightliner on my behalf. A representative from the company called me and I was able to explain my problem. He instructed me to contact Cummins NPower in Hodgkins, Ill. I went there with a copy of my invoice from TransChicago. The Cummins receptionist scanned the invoice and sent it to the warranty claims department.

Soon after, a representative from the warranty department called me and said that after doing some research, she had found that the model listed on the invoice was for a school bus chassis, not a motorhome, and the repair should have been covered by Cummins.

I received a check for \$2,510.28 (all but the \$100 deductible) from Cummins NPower. None of this would have occurred without Hot Line's help. I will tell this story again and again, about how you helped me.

**JM**

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

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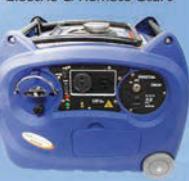


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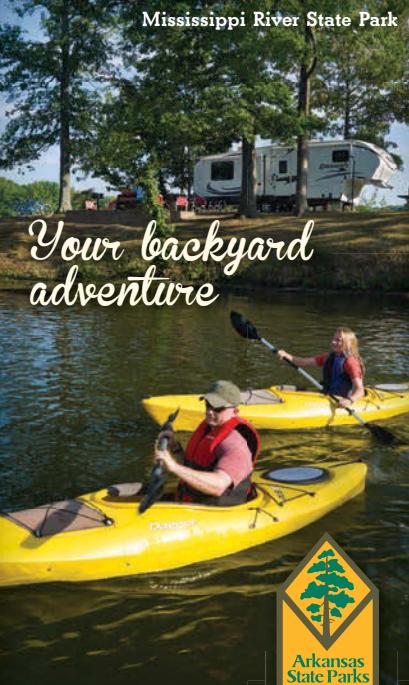
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## Ford Body Control Module Fits

I recently purchased a used 2008 Sunseeker 2900 LTD Class C motorhome with a Ford E-450 chassis. Before a winter trip to Florida I replaced the blower-motor resistor, which required removal of the engine battery and box for access to the resistor. After completing the repair and checking the operation of the blower motor, I realized the key ignition chimes, dome light and radio weren't working. After removing the battery again to check for pinched wires under the battery box and to check the fusible link located under the battery box, I reinstalled the battery, cleaning the terminals and cables. Still no chimes, power windows, dome light or radio, and I found out on the way to the dealer there was no speedometer or dash gauges.

The next morning the dealer called and I explained the electrical issues. I was told everything was working fine but they would continue to look for a problem. They removed the battery cables to clean them and called back to say there were problems with all of the above items not working; they didn't know why and were contacting the Ford hot line. About 18 hours after disconnecting the battery cables everything started to work again. Ford can offer no explanation except a possible aftermarket anti-theft device. I contacted Forest River and the dealers that ordered and sold me the RV and all three tell me no anti-theft equipment had been installed. As long as I don't disconnect the battery cables, my RV is fine, but I am afraid this problem will only get worse. I hope you can help.

**JO ANN ZUROWSKI  
LEWISBERRY, PA.**

*The likely culprit is called a "Body Control Module" or "Smart Box." This component is located at the driver's left-foot area and is mounted on the firewall bulkhead. The module has several connectors plugged into it. I'm told*

*the two connectors at the lower right side are the connections that need attention. Simply disconnecting and reconnecting them results in a reboot. A low-voltage condition triggers a time-out function in the body control module and the forced reboot gets things working again. It's likely that you had things drawing current (such as doors open, key on, etc.) while you were working on it, which caused the low system voltage that triggered the problem.*

### DASH AIR VERSUS HOUSE AIR

I recently purchased a 31-foot Chateau Class C with the Ford 6.8-L Triton V-10. I will be driving it from New Jersey to Florida. While on the road, would I get better gas mileage if I ran the generator

and house air conditioning instead of the in-dash air conditioning?

**TERRY HUFFMAN | ANDOVER, N.J.**

*I believe you will use less fuel if you use the dash air, and it will also result in less wear and tear on the generator (you have to run the motorhome's engine anyway). I have a trick: I buy a thin clear plastic painter's tarp (a dollar or two) and hold it in place with masking tape to separate the cab from the rear of the coach, which makes the dash air keep the cab much cooler. Since the roads on your trip are essentially flat (for consistent results), why don't you try both ways and measure the MPG results over several fill-ups?*

### LED CONVERSIONS

Can I just replace the incandescent light bulbs in my coach (a 2010 Sightseer) with LED bulbs, or do I need to change the fixtures, too? I have a lot of pancake fixtures with two bulbs, plus several reading lights. If I can, how do I know what the correct LED bulb number is?

**EUGENE WENGERT  
FITCHBURG, WIS.**

*You can find LED replacements for most popular incandescent bulbs used in motorhomes. Many sellers provide conversion charts or listings based on the original bulb number or base type.*

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### GENSET PROBLEMS

I have a 2001 Fleetwood Bounder with an Onan 5500 generator that has always started well. It gets its gas from the same tank as the engine. The engine starts fine, but the genset seems to now get plugged from the tank. The filter at the genset is OK. When I blow out the line to the tank it starts right up and will keep running. But then when I drive the coach to the next stop and start the genset and run it for a bit, it dies. What could be wrong?

**WARREN SABIN | VIA EMAIL**

*Most motorhome owners don't run the generator as often as the engine, and the fuel in the hoses and filter going to the genset gets stale. The motorhome's*

# 2013

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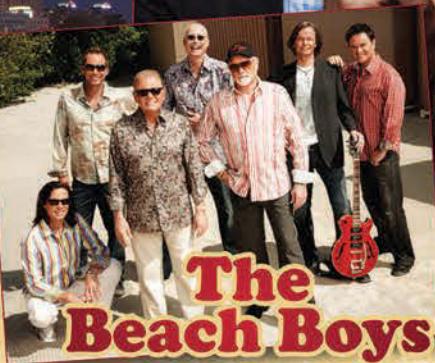
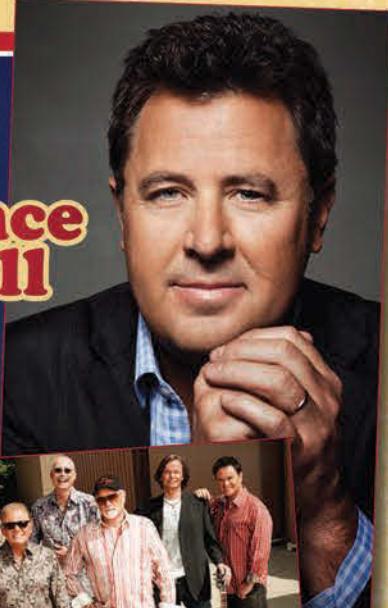
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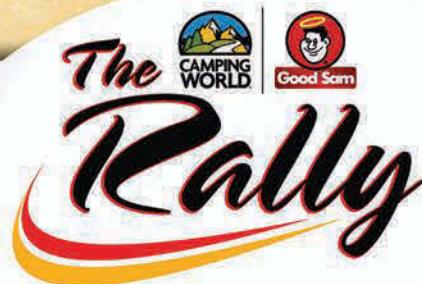
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# BACK TO BASICS How (and Why) to Weigh

Even though we've been lectured for decades about the need to weigh our motorhomes — and that we should not just assume or hope we haven't exceeded load ratings — the importance of a trip to a certified scale can't be overemphasized.

We usually don't realize how much weight we are adding and we may have even started out with a problem: an unbalanced coach. While a motorhome owner may take comfort in meticulously maintaining the chassis manufacturer-recommended tire pressures, overloading invalidates those pressures. The only insurance against tire overloading is to determine the load on each tire or set of tires on a certified scale.



Chassis manufacturers' load ratings and tire inflation recommendations are based on balanced loads. A motorhome's most vulnerable component usually is its tires, which are subject not only to overloading but to underinflation.

Only one tire or set of dual tires may be overloaded and underinflated, but it only takes one to cause a big problem, and collateral damage during a blowout is always a concern.

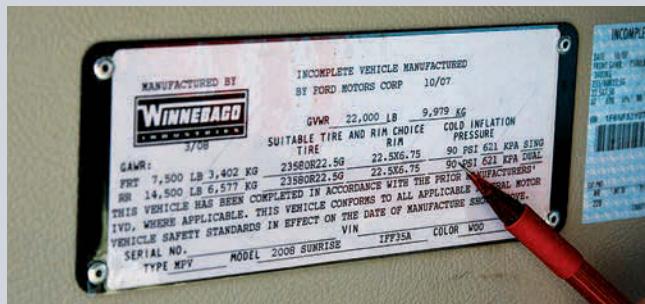
With the coach loaded for travel, the ideal approach is to locate a set of individual wheel scales, possibly at an RV rally where the RV Safety & Education Foundation offers a weighing program. Short of that, look for a truck axle scale, a short scale that weighs one axle at a time.

If neither is available, a commercial platform scale will suffice if it has level aprons that allow you to weigh one wheel or dual set at a time without throwing the coach off level. The procedure is to weigh one wheel or dual set after positioning the remaining three slightly off the edge of the scale. This will take a bit of time, and commercial scales often are busy; it's good to ask the operator to identify a time when traffic is light.

After you've weighed each wheel position, weigh each axle or the entire coach (platform scale) to give you an idea of the margin of error in the individual wheel weight numbers you've acquired. Weigh your dinghy vehicle as well. Compare the results with

your chassis ratings, usually found on a sticker in the left front of the motorhome:

- **GVWR** = Gross Vehicle Weight Rating: The chassis manufacturer's maximum allowable weight of the motorhome as well as its contents.
- **GAWR** = Gross Axle Weight Rating: The maximum allowable weight on the front or rear axle with all content loaded.
- **GCWR** = Gross Combination Weight Rating: Maximum



allowable weight of fully loaded coach and towed vehicle.

If you find one wheel position on a given axle heavier than the other (usually the rear), inflate all tires on that axle for the heavier weight, using ratings molded on the tire sidewalls or a load-inflation table provided by the tire manufacturer.

### Example:

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| Right rear dual set .....                                 | 7,500 lbs     |
| Left rear dual set .....                                  | 7,950 lbs     |
| Total.....  | 15,450 lbs    |
| Rear GAWR listed by coach manufacturer .....              | 14,500 lbs    |
| Inflation pressure recommended by coach manufacturer..... | 90 PSI (cold) |

In this example, the coach manufacturer is recommending 90 PSI as adequate tire pressure for loading up to the rear GAWR (maximum rear load rating). This assumes that the load is balanced perfectly (7,250 pounds for each set of duals).



the tire sidewalls: 110 PSI in this case, which is the minimum pressure for the tire's maximum load (molded on the tire sidewall). This tire is rated to carry 4,410 pounds (cold) at 110 PSI, which would take care of the tire overload. But the rear GAWR overload should be corrected, to avoid potential axle, spring and brake problems.

Such is the exercise that can help us be safe on the highway. ♦

engine is fuel injected, and the genset has a carburetor. Carbs don't atomize gasoline as effectively as fuel injection, and therefore have a harder time starting and running on stale gas. The carb may be gummed up with deposits from old gasoline and the genset's fuel pump may be going bad. I suggest you replace the hose and filter and test the pump; at 12 years old it may be starting to fail.

**PORTABLE AIR COMPRESSORS**

I have a Class C Sunseeker and my emergency portable air compressor quit. I'm having difficulty finding a replacement that will inflate my rear tires that run with 85 PSI. Do you have any recommendations for a replacement? I have an onboard generator so I could use either a 120-volt AC or 12-volt DC unit.

**BOB VINE | VIA EMAIL**

*I've seen 12-volt DC portable air compressors at Camping World, Pep Boys and NAPA that can inflate truck tires. I think you'll find that the 12-volt DC units are less expensive, lighter and smaller and therefore more convenient for your use.*

**POOR POWER STEERING**

I have a 1993 Pace Arrow 33-foot motorhome with a 454-cid Chevy gas engine. My problems started with the replacement of the power steering unit (PSU) about 18 months ago. After the initial PSU replacement, I drove it about 150 miles round trip. On the return portion of the trip, the PSU acted up again, making a loud noise and it became difficult to control the coach. The mechanic replaced the PSU with a new one at my second expense. Upon taking the coach home, it became almost uncontrollable. At times, the steering was fine. Then, all of a sudden, I could not turn the unit for the road curves and the brakes went down to either zero or near zero. The PSU will not keep fluid in. It's not safe to drive. Can you help?

**JACK KIMES | COOKEVILLE, TENN.**

*The power steering system consists of two major components, the pump and steering box, plus connecting hoses and a belt. From the context I surmise you are talking about the pump. Since both the brakes and power steering rely on pressure from*



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*the pump, it sounds like you have a slipping belt (loud squealing noise), a pump problem or air trapped in the system.*

*The mechanic should have performed a pressure test for output, and I am incredulous that you were charged to replace a pump that had just been replaced. You need to have a serious talk with your mechanic and consider taking him to small claims court if he doesn't come around.*

**REAR DUALY CHANGE**

Before traveling this summer, I changed the rear drum brakes on my 1995 Class C Corsair Aristocrat; it's old but in excellent running order. The problem arose when jacking the rear axle to remove the duallies on each side. When jacking manually, it drives the wheels farther up into the wheel well, making it impossible to remove the wheels as they hit the bottom of the RV that extends to the top of wheel well. There are no removable panels to assist in getting the tires off. I had to borrow a friend's bottle jack, which was put on several blocks of wood in order to reach and jack up the RV frame, allowing the top of the tires to clear. What if I have to replace a dually while on a trip? The Aristocrat doesn't have a lot of cargo space, and packing more items like jacks and blocks of wood equals more weight and less gas mileage. Other than ensuring my roadside assistance is up to date and staying within cellphone range, do you have any suggestions?

**L. WHITING | VIA EMAIL**

*Many motorhome owners don't change their own tires, so they don't notice this. You should be able to use just one bottle jack (rated for the load) under the frame. Use the same blocks for leveling and wheel chocks, and tuck them in somewhere.*

**FUEL PUMP GAMBLE**

We've been vacationing in a 1999 coach on an F53 chassis for 11 years and would like to run it another three years. At this age, should I replace the working fuel pump at home just to avoid a breakdown on the road? At this age and 85,000 miles, how much longer can it last? If replaced, is it best to purchase one from Ford, or will an aftermarket one work as well?

**JOHN PFALZ | OCONOMOWOC, WIS.**

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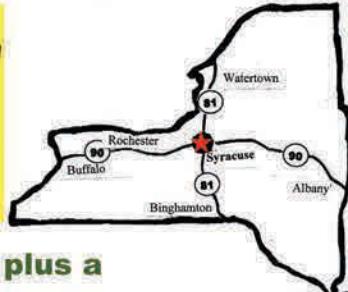
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*I understand your dilemma, but there's no way I can predict when your pump will fail. If I could reliably predict when parts will fail, I wouldn't have to write this column. This is something you have to decide, based on your circumstances and level of risk aversion. If you buy an aftermarket pump, as long as you buy a reputable brand, it should be fine.*

### REFRIGERATOR TEMPERATURE QUESTION

I enjoyed reading the refrigerator maintenance article in the May issue ("The Cold Facts"). One thing I'm curious about is if my RV fridge is limited to a maximum temperature difference. In other words, when in Arizona and the temperatures are more than 100 degrees, is my fridge (by design) limited to say a 60-degree maximum cooling ability? If the fridge is working 100 percent under these high temps, then do I have to be happy with 50-degree fridge temps? Are you aware of a maximum cooling ability in RV refrigerators?

**KEVIN SMITH | TUCSON, ARIZ.**

*The performance that you will get varies by ambient temperatures and humidity, how much food is inside, how often and how long the door is opened, the condition of the door seals, the condition of the cooling unit and whether it is on the sunny side or shady side.*

*The design parameters do typically call for a 60-70-degree spread between inside and outside temperatures. But you can improve performance by shading the unit, keeping the inside of the coach cool and installing a fan designed to move air. Camping World offers a 12-volt DC Fridge Vent Exhaust Fan, catalog item No. 19709 that should help you.*

### SYNTHETIC OIL SWITCHING

We have a 2001 diesel-pusher motorhome with a Cat 330 engine that has 70,000 miles and was purchased last summer. I was told synthetic oil was always used in it. Should I keep using synthetic oil?

**BRIAN RIGGS | PHOENIX, ARIZ.**

*I know these engines hold a lot of oil, and synthetic oil is expensive. You can switch between synthetic and conventional oil. The most important thing is to use oil*

*that has the correct viscosity for your operating conditions, is designed for diesels and meets the engine manufacturer's requirements. For most conditions, 15W40 oil is used. If you don't drive much, it's probably better to use conventional oil and change it a little more often, since synthetic is so costly.*

### SEARCHING FOR MORE MILEAGE

We own a 21-foot 1999 Chinook Concourse on a Ford F-350 dually Super Duty chassis with a 6.8-L V-10. I think the transmission is a 4R100 four-speed overdrive with a Dana axle with 4.10 rear gears. I am hunting for better fuel mileage, which now is 10-11 MPG. After some research and talking with a local gearing specialist, I was told I could go to as numerically low as 3.31 rear gears. Is this the best way to achieve better mileage? I understand that allowing the engine to breathe better would be a plus, but is this necessary? Also, I am told that a chip change will cause the engine to operate more efficiently. Is this true? If 3.31 rear gears, or any change to the 4.10 rear gears are made, are there any other modifications needed? Other than losing climbing and pulling power, what other anomalies could I expect if the 4.10 rear gears are replaced with taller-ratio gears?

**ROB DENTON | MOBILE, ALA.**

*Changing gears to a "taller" (lower numerical) ratio will definitely reduce acceleration, passing and hill-climbing power. You might go one ratio taller, but I think if you go all the way to a 3.31 gearset, you'll be disappointed with performance and will have to spend more time in the lower gears, which will offset most of the possible fuel savings of taller gearing. The cost of changing gears will typically take years for occasional users to recover in fuel savings. If you are getting 10-11 MPG you are beating everyone I've talked to with one of these. So-called chips usually richen the fuel mixture for more power, which loses MPG and advance timing, which may improve mileage but may also require costlier premium fuel. You might try a free-flow exhaust, which reduces pumping losses and can improve mileage somewhat. Otherwise, focus on driving smoothly and slower, which can*

*yield gains of up to 20 percent for free.*

### RV MAINTENANCE SOFTWARE

Can you recommend software to track maintenance that has been performed and maintenance that is due on my 2008 Tiffin Phaeton? I'd like to be able to input the miles and/or time intervals until the next required maintenance for each item and then have a reminder for the maintenance that is due when I input the current mileage and/or date. I used an Excel spreadsheet in the past but it's not as user-friendly as I'd like. Any help will be appreciated.

**JACK AND KATHY HAROOTUNIAN  
SPRINGFIELD, MO.**

*A quick Google search brought up several. Here's one that's inexpensive: Travel Pac, [www.travelpac.com](http://www.travelpac.com).*

### DIESEL POWER LOSS REVISITED

This is in reference to Roger Simmons' letter, "Diesel Power Loss," in July concerning power loss in his Holiday Rambler Endeavor. I have a Monaco Diplomat, which has the same engine/transmission as his Endeavor. I had a similar problem with my exhaust brake circuit. When the exhaust brake is turned on and the throttle is released, the circuit energizes the brake lights as a safety measure. I normally run with the headlights on. What happened in my case was I installed a new combination brake/taillight bulb and the bulb contacts came adrift, creating a short between the headlight and brake circuits.

Nothing happened when the exhaust brake was energized, but when it was released, 12-volt DC power came from the headlight circuit through the brakelight circuit and re-energized the exhaust brake solenoid. The effect was an immediate slowing down and a loss of power. When I pulled off the road and turned off the headlights, everything went back to normal. Since nothing else has worked for Roger, this might be a good place to check.

**BILL MARCUM | PADUCAH, KY.**

*Thanks for writing and sharing your solution to this unusual problem. ♦*

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Ed and Linda Houk  
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