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MOTORHOME

NOVEMBER 2013

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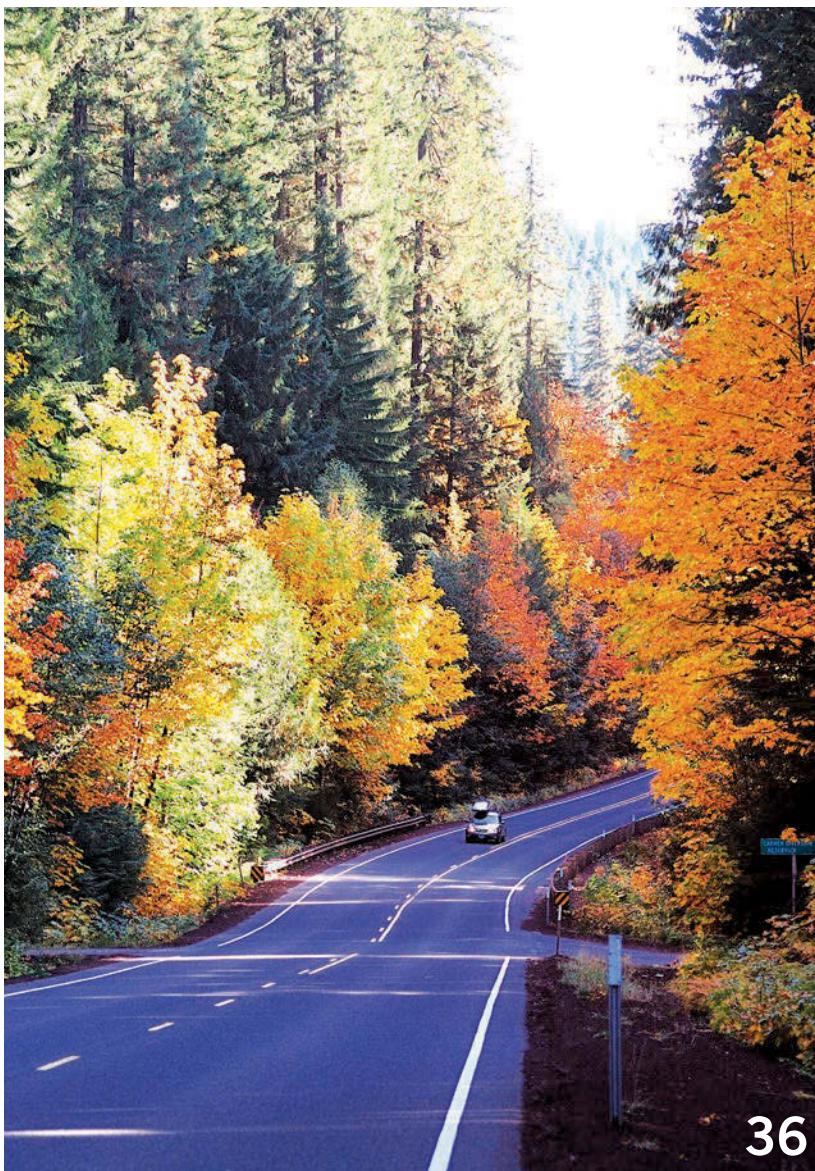
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On The Cover: Winnebago's Vista 31KE Class A doesn't skip on creature comforts and can likely be purchased for an amount of money that's comparable to the cost of a luxury automobile (see Walk-Through on page 50).

TRUE WEALTH

America is all about stories. Stories fuel all media resources. Without stories there would be no newspapers, magazines, or TV — even a big portion of the Internet would be missing. Most of the stories we read, hear or watch on a daily basis gravitate toward bigger events and are typically about politics, crime, health, celebrities, etc. But there are a lot of stories that never get told. Stories that get dug up by inquisitive travelers who stumble upon unique places to visit and simple people who have made a difference in the lives of others.

My hero in this segment of the photojournalism world was Charles Kuralt. His “On the Road” segments mesmerized viewers. I have to admit that traveling in a motorhome to search out interesting and unique stories was near and dear to my heart. For years Kuralt traveled America in the comfort of a motorhome searching out stories for the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite. When he got off the road, he anchored the CBS News Sunday Morning show, which I still consider the best TV program on the air today.

Kuralt’s sixth, and last, motorhome was made by FMC (Food Machinery Corp.) and was unique in its own right. Introduced in 1973, it had a very short lifespan on the market. Many say FMC ceased production (1976) because the motorhome was way ahead of its time. It was luxurious and powered by a rear mounted Dodge 440-cid V-8 that was able to slide out of the side compartment for service. The FMC motorhome will always play a role in the history of the RV industry, even though it was on the market for only a short time.

I had the privilege of meeting Kuralt in the late ’80s and believe me, I was star-struck. While we swapped stories, I daydreamed about becoming a traveling reporter when I grew up, except that by the time I met Kuralt, I was already grown up. Amazing how storytelling can make the mind wander into interesting places. It was a wonderful encounter.

Kuralt died at the age of 62, only



two years after he officially retired. That in itself is a story that should be told over and over. Seize the moment; load the motorhome and see the country.

That’s exactly what new columnist, Alan Rider is doing in his writings that will appear on the last page of this magazine. Rider points his rig in directions based on whim and will be relaying stories on what he sees and hears. Each month, Rider’s “The Road Ahead” column will take us to off-the-beaten-path locations that probably have not been on the radar for most of us. Places where interesting people receive little fanfare, but make significant impact on the lives of those they touch.

In his first column, Rider ran into Mark Twain. Is it possible that Twain is alive and well and still telling stories? Well some people imagine so. Rider ran into Louis Hankins on one of his many explorations of backroads America. Hankins, aka Mark Twain, aka Samuel Clemens, studied the famous writer’s work for 20 years. Heck, he even looks like Clemens, the character he performs in front of live audiences. Performances are drawn from knowledge that Hankins has amassed since his father introduced him to Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn.

Rider doesn’t spend much time in the souvenir shops, preferring to fill his memory bank with interesting places and people. We welcome Rider to *MotorHome* magazine and look forward to many discoveries resulting from his wanderings throughout North America.

In fact, we’re all storytellers. That’s why campfires were invented. I’ve always been a firm believer that true wealth is measured by the number of places we’ve seen and the people we meet.

Exploring America is a pot of gold for RVers. ♦

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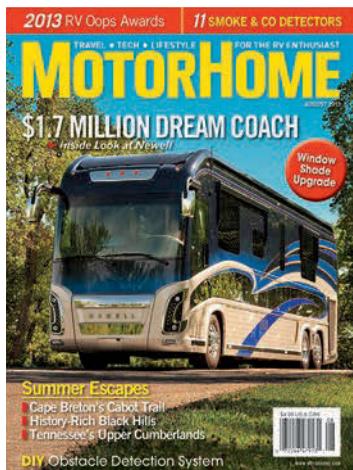
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WHAT IS YOUR MOTORHOME BATTERY PREFERENCE AND WHY?

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

SOLD ON AGM

AGM batteries all of the way! No maintenance and 100 percent dependability.

JIM HAZARD | CROSSVILLE, TENN.

12-VOLT BATTERIES WORK TOO

We have read *MotorHome* for about 30 years and we always look forward to the next issue. We have had a motorhome since 1975. The one we have now has 191,000 miles on it, and believe it or not, it is the old 1973 FMC we bought in 1982. Often, when we come into a campground, people stop and take photos. Now, about the batteries.

My first six-volt batteries lasted 10 years, so needless to say I bought the same six-volt batteries when they needed replacing. I was surprised when they only lasted two years. So now, I buy 12-volt batteries at Wal-Mart and if there's a problem with them, I take them back, no questions asked. Wal-Mart stands by its warranties, and no, I am not replacing batteries all the time. Plus, there's always a Wal-Mart nearby if you do need a replacement.

GEORGE VANDERSTEEN | HANFORD, CALIF.

I'LL TAKE GLASS MATS

I prefer glass mat batteries. They have a longer life and no bad connections or spilled acid.

JACK CAUFIELD | VIA EMAIL

ONE MORE OOPS FOR THE ROAD

The "2013 RV Ops Awards" in the August issue of *MotorHome* reminded me of my own "Oops" moment.

In January, we traded our Winnebago View for a slightly larger Winnebago Vista. One of the first times I drove our new, larger RV, I came upon a tiny car pulling a U-Haul. It was chugging along at 45 MPH on the interstate. I signaled my intent to pass, then once up to speed with enough distance to pull back in (allowing for the 27-foot Vista plus our tow vehicle — a small trailer with motorcycle), I signaled and pulled back in front of the tiny car.

When I checked the dashboard camera screen moni-

tor to see how the trailer and motorcycle had fared during this maneuver, I could no longer see them. In a panic, I announced to my husband, who was reading a book in the passenger seat, "Oh my gosh! We lost the bike and trailer!" My husband yelled, "PULL OVER!"

Once we were safely stopped on the shoulder of the highway with the emergency flashers on, my husband unhooked his seat belt and stood up to look at the camera screen himself. He then told me to turn off the signal. Amazing! There was the trailer with motorcycle still behind our motorhome. I had forgotten that our Vista, unlike our View, has two side-view cameras in addition to a rearview camera. I had been looking at the right side of the motorhome rather than the rear where the trailer and bike were.

Some bloopers can make you feel stupid but otherwise are not true fiascoes. Once I stopped shaking, I could laugh at myself, and no, I will never do that again!

REGINA L. HOLLIS | LOUISVILLE, KY.

BUY AMERICAN

After reading the article "Window Covering Upgrade," I wondered why Dave and LJ used Auto-Motion shades, which are imported, when we have an excellent product from MCD Innovations in McKinney, Texas? The MCD product is entirely U.S.-made and is used as an upgrade on many coaches, including Winnebago and Tiffin motorhomes. I had MCD retrofit my 2007 Monaco Knight last year and I could not be happier. I just think all things being equal, we should buy American!

THOMAS MCKEMIE | GALESBURG, ILL.

DEAR BOB

Mr. Livingston, you have a job to envy. Thank you so much for the August cover photo and article ("The Fine Life") of the \$1.7-million Newell motorcoach. To personally re-view and drive that wonderful machine had to have been an incredible experience. I've seen these beautiful 45-foot Newell motorhome behemoths rolling down the highway and I always wonder what it must be like to drive such a fan-



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tasy machine. I thoroughly enjoyed seeing what \$1.7 million will buy in the way of a luxury motorcoach. Thank you for sharing your magnificent experience in reviewing the Newell motorcoach with your readers and providing a glimpse into motorcoach fantasy land. Now, it's back to our reality!
DON HEROD | MARIETTA, GA.

KUDOS TO CRAZY HORSE MEMORIAL

The brief remarks about the Crazy Horse Memorial in August's Black Hills article ("Monuments and Mining Towns of the Black Hills") don't do justice to the scope of the endeavor. The best part is that they accept no money from any government entity. It remains a family project after all these years, with six or seven of Korczak Ziolkowski's children (and, I believe, some of the grand kids) working on the property along with many skilled workers.

It takes a lot of money to do this work and I'm proud to be a long time supporter. My annual thank-you letter always includes a handwritten note from Ruth Ziolkowski, Korczak's widow and chair-

man of the Foundation. I urge all RVers to visit, and support, this great venture.
ERIC WELLS | HAYESVILLE, N.C.

TIP OF THE HAT

After towing two older Honda CR-Vs nearly 85,000 miles, I finally came face-to-face with the dead-battery syndrome when we bought a new 2012 CR-V. I never thought that Honda would ruin a perfectly good electrical system. Since my experience indicated that this should not happen, I looked everywhere else for a cause or for a solution. I finally decided that I needed to do the contortion maneuver and pull fuse No. 19. Sure enough, it worked.

It is difficult for us mature men to get to this fuse, so the FuseMaster ("Preventing Battery Drain," Hands-On, August) will become a part of our system before we leave home again. What year CR-V was the subject of the article? The 2012 model requires the removal of fuse No. 19, which is in the most inconvenient location on the fuse block. Great tip.
DON NOLEN | GRIFFIN, GA.

You bring up a good point, Don. The CR-V in the article was a 2011. For CR-V model years 2007-2011, fuse No. 34 needs to be pulled; on model years 2012-2013, pull fuse No. 19.

MORE ON PREVENTING BATTERY DRAIN

I installed the Roadmaster FuseMaster on a 2013 Honda CR-V. After figuring out how to take the dash apart without breaking it, things became easier. On the 2013 CR-V there is a place where another switch can be added, which is perfect for the FuseMaster switch. However, I had to extend the wiring to reach the fuse panel.

One complaint I have is that, after removing the fuse, there isn't a socket with the two leads to put in its place. Instead, you have to push two individual contacts into the fuse. I'm afraid that over time, and rough bumps, these contacts could work loose. Without taking the dash apart to see what I am doing, I would have a difficult time inserting the contacts by feel.
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NOWHERE TO WEIGH

I have enjoyed my subscription to *MotorHome*, and found the information invaluable. I have a suggestion. With all of the discussion concerning the relation of appropriate tire pressure to vehicle weight, specifically the proper weighing procedure for a motorhome being by the wheel quarters, it would be a great subscriber service if *MotorHome* would maintain a registry by state of scale service providers that provide weighing by the wheel. I live in north-central Maryland and the RV dealers around here don't seem to be able to point me to a scale operator.

ROBERT TRAVERS | WHITE HALL, MD.

THANKS SMI

I own a Plug-and-Play Smartbox by SMI and was having trouble with the transmitter. I ordered a new transmitter from SMI but the system still would not work. SMI told me it was mismatched. I sent the transmitter and receiver back to SMI, they matched it up and sent it back to me with no charge and they even paid the shipping. You can't beat that for service.

JOHN BRENNAN | VIA EMAIL

DEAR "QUICK TIPS"

I have a problem, not a solution. I hope that fellow *MotorHome* readers can help. We own a 2013 Winnebago Tour 42GD. There is no pantry. Lots of cabinets, lower and upper, but no spot to store soup cans or jars of jelly, etc. I can't see what is in the back of the cabinets because they are so deep. I use plastic "bins" to keep things from sliding around, but the bins are heavy to lift down to see what is inside. The overhead cabinets are all open the entire length. Several doors but no partitions inside. I'd love to know about any and all ideas y'all have.

**SARAH RAYBURN
NORTH FORT MYERS, FLA.**

FINDING A SPOT FOR THE GPS

I recently purchased an RV GPS for my Class A motorhome. I am wondering where other RVers have positioned their GPS? The general instructions say to mount the bracket on the windshield so the GPS has line of sight to the satellites. With most newer Class A motorhomes, it would not be possible to reach the GPS touch screen

if mounted to the windshield. I think this could be an interesting question to post to your readers for a response.

BERNARD JURGIEL | VIA EMAIL

QUESTION:

If you have an aftermarket GPS, where is it positioned in your motorhome's cockpit and why?

Send your comments to *MotorHome*, 2575 Vista del Mar Drive, Ventura, CA 93001; or email letters@motorhomemagazine.com. ♦

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escapes

edited by EILEEN HUBBARD

ROAD FOODIE | WHEELS & GEAR | NOTEWORTHY | CROSSROADS

CATHEDRAL GORGE STATE PARK, NEVADA

WHERE THE AIR IS DRY AND THE SKIES ARE BRIGHT BLUE

Along U.S. Highway 93 in Nevada, midway between Las Vegas and Great Basin National Park, there is a gem of a park with buff colored cliffs and spires that too many RVers drive right by and miss. Cathedral Gorge State Park is surrounded by formations of silt, clay and volcanic ash, and is easily accessible off the main highway. In addition to the geology, there is a wealth of wildlife, vegetation and incredible night skies. We visited the park in early fall when temperatures reached the 70s during the day and 50 degrees at night.

On entry, stop at the impressive regional state park visitor center for information about the geology and wildlife of this high desert environment. Then continue down the paved park road to a 22-site campground that is big-rig friendly, with flat and well-groomed sites. Included at the sites are shade ramadas, barbeque grills and tables. Modern bathrooms are also on-site with flush toilets and hot water showers. Fresh water and clean dump facilities are available.

Take a hike on the 4-mile loop trail, or check out the Miller Point overlook. Meandering through the canyon you might see black-tailed jackrabbits, cottontail rabbits, pack

rats, and a number of birds including ravens, kestrels and flycatchers. There is a surprising wealth of vegetation along the trail, including white and barberry sagebrush, primrose, yucca, saltbush and junipers.

If you don't have the time to spend a few days at Cathedral Gorge, at least take a few hours and enjoy the well-maintained picnic area situated in the middle of an incredible canyon. You can also see the handiwork of the CCC from the mid-1930s, which is still in great condition.

For more information, call 775-728-4460 or visit www.parks.nv.gov/cg.htm — *Morey Edelman*



CORNUCOPIA: A Canadian-style feast



At the “Best of B.C.” event, the town of Whistler resembles a Swiss village. Wine and food pairing is a big part of Cornucopia. The food and wine seminars, which come with recipes and tastes, are affordable and informative. A crispy meatball was one of the seminar samples. Visitors learned how to make meat turnovers. At one of the winemaker dinners, lentils with duck leg confit was one of the courses. Steaks and salmon are grilled over an open fire.



One of my favorite places for fall RV travel is

Whistler, B.C., Canada, that iconic ski town that resembles a Swiss village. In winter, Whistler is best known for copious amounts of snow and black-diamond-level skiing. But, in November, the town comes alive for foodies with Cornucopia (www.whistlercornucopia.com), one of the best food and wine festivals in North America.

At Cornucopia, top restaurants and terrific wineries from throughout British Columbia put on a series of extraordinary lunches and dinners, many around a particular theme like truffles or seafood. There are also plenty of wine tasting events, food and wine seminars, and cooking demonstrations, all with tastes for the audience. And the best news?

This year, the event has expanded to 11 days, November 7-17.

The best place for RVers to set up camp in Whistler is at Riverside Resort, a year-round park that's close to the village. The 40-acre campground offers RVers back-in or pull-through sites, electricity (30- and 50-amp service), water and sewer, free Wi-Fi, and bathrooms and showers with comfy heated floors. This 64-site park is a five-minute drive to Cornucopia events (15 minutes by bike; 25 minutes by foot) and the park offers shuttle service during the festival.

While some events at Cornucopia can put a dent in your pocketbook, there are plenty that are quite affordable. You'll need to check out its website, which describes each event and enables you to buy tickets online. Here's a sampling of what you can expect:

FOOD AND WINE SEMINARS

Viking, maker of high-end ranges, puts on a series of informative cooking and wine seminars where experts give the audience recipes, cooking techniques, and ingredient and cooking informa-

tion, as well as samples of dishes paired with B.C. wines, brews, spirits, or other beverages. Seminars cost \$25-30.

FOOD AND WINE CELEBRATIONS

These large affairs offer big spreads of food and samples of wine and spirits and other B.C. food products from artisan purveyors. Last year, I attended the “Best of B.C.,” which featured ribs and salmon cooked outdoors, and sides like potato salad and wild mushroom rice. Wineries such as Arrowleaf and Black Hills Estate, and artisan brewers and distillers like Granville Island Brewery and Pemberton Distillery offered tastes, as did regional coffee, chocolate and cheese makers.

LATE-NIGHT PARTIES

Last year, Fairmont Chateau Whistler put on a “High Rollers” event featuring all-you-can-eat hors d'oeuvres and wines where guests gamble for prizes, with winnings going to an animal charity. Araxi restaurant offered “Bubbles and Oceans,” a champagne and seafood party with oysters, shrimp, and sushi paired with an excellent jazz violinist and guitarist.

WINEMAKER LUNCHES AND DINNERS

These special menus, paired with wines, are the highlight of Cornucopia. I attended a lunch where the featured ingredient was white Alba truffles, a culinary gem. At a winemaker dinner at the Fairmont, dishes included crab cakes, butternut risotto, venison medallions, smoked quail and chocolate hazelnut tarts. Delicious!

One thing is for sure: you won't leave Cornucopia hungry. And, if you're a foodie, you'll come away satisfied and more knowledgeable than ever.

Riverside Resort, 604-905-5533, www.whistlercamping.com

REDESIGNED TUSCANY

No, not *that* Tuscany ... the 2014 Tuscany luxury diesel motorhomes by Thor Motor Coach, Inc. The Tuscany XTE's new front cap is engineered to maximize visibility for both driver and passenger, and the front entry door is the widest in the industry, according to the manufacturer. Frameless windows throughout the coach are great looking, while providing ultimate functionality.

Residential tile flooring and solid surface countertops round out the plush interior. The Tuscany, meanwhile, also features new end caps and frameless windows, and ride quality has been enhanced via independent front suspension (IFS). Also new is the 40RX, a non-tag axle 40-footer featuring amenities like Aqua-Hot heating, a 450-HP Cummins engine and elegant hardwood cabinetry.

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



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Proper care and maintenance of rooftop air conditioners helps them last longer. MaxxAir's Tuff/Maxx is a replacement cover for newer standard height Coleman-Mach air conditioners, designed to protect them against the rigors of RV travel. Made of tough, high-density polyethylene, Tuff/Maxx features a unique front bumper design to deflect tree branches and prevent wind lift, while a protective rear intake grill prevents damage to the A/C condenser coils. Easy to mount, this shroud comes with stainless steel hardware and clear instructions, and is covered by a limited lifetime guarantee or the original purchaser. MSRP is \$149.95.

MaxxAir, 316-832 3400, www.maxxair.com

ELECTRIC CARGO BIKE

Looking for an alternative to your dinghy vehicle or golf cart? The 2X4 electric cargo bicycle by NTS Works of Santa Cruz, Calif., might be it. Created by the same minds that developed the Zero electric motorcycle, the 2X4 offers a flat cargo bed up front that can carry up to eight grocery bags. An electric motor powered by a replaceable/recyclable lithium-ion battery helps with the pedaling, and offers a range of up to 30 miles, according to the company. Electric assistance is adjustable via a handlebar-mounted display. Retail cost of the 2X4 is \$4,500, and it's available directly online through www.ntsworks.com and through select bicycle shops.

NTS Works, www.ntsworks.com



THE HOPEMOBILE



The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and Farm Sanctuary are bringing hope — the “Hopemobile,” that is — to neglected and abused farm animals. The organization’s Freightliner Sprinter cargo van was specially designed to transport rescued animals and take them to greener pastures in one of three locations in New York and California. The van’s exterior sports a life-size photo of a rescued calf, named Elijah, in his new home. The motorhome’s custom-built interior has removable cages to accommodate various bird species and rubber flooring to provide traction for animals. The Sprinter is lined with stainless-steel for easy cleaning and is equipped with emergency medical kits with fluid bags and IV sets.

Farm Sanctuary’s National Shelter Director Susie Coston said, “We are grateful to the ASPCA for providing this state-of-the-art vehicle to make their ride as comfortable as possible. We named it the Hopemobile because for the frightened and abused animals who will ride in it, it will be the first step in their journey to a life free from the fear and pain that all too commonly colors the lives of farm animals.” — *Donya Carlson*

News Briefs

On August 5, the **RV/MH Heritage Foundation** inducted the Class of 2013 into the RV/MH Hall of Fame. Those inducted included Craig M. Bollman, a housing community developer/operator from Mobile Home Communities in Littleton, Col.; Theresa M. Desfosses, a housing industry veteran of retail, communities and manufacturing from State Manufactured Homes in Old Orchard Beach, Maine; Kirwan Elmers, an RV bus converter from Custom Coach in Columbus, Ohio; C.M. Fore (deceased), an RV manufacturer from Foretravel, Inc. in Nacadoches, Texas; Lawrence C. Lippert, an RV and MH industry supplier from Lippert Components in Goshen, Ind.; Thomas P. Meyers, a housing manufacturer from Guerdon Industries in Louisville Ky.; Claude N. Palmer (deceased), a housing retailer from Palmer Homes in Waverly, N.Y.; Mathew Perlot, (deceased) an RV manufacturer from Safari Motorhomes in Harrisburg, Ore.; and Thomas Walworth, an RV and manufactured housing industry consultant and statistician from Statistical Surveys Inc., in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Elkhart, Ind.-based **Thor Industries Inc.** has been named to this year’s 50 Best U.S. Manufacturers list compiled by **Industry Week** magazine. The builder was ranked No. 37 in the listing. The publication bases the rankings on key areas over a three-year period, including profit margin and revenue growth. For the year ending July 31, Thor’s preliminary consolidated sales were \$3.69 billion, up 19.6 percent from \$3.08 billion last year. The company’s RV sales also increased more than 23 percent to \$3.24 billion.

The Joffrey Ballet recently announced that Marcus Lemonis, chairman and CEO of **Camping World Inc.** and **Good Sam Enterprises LLC** and star of CNBC’s “The Profit,” has made a substantial leadership gift to support and enhance the ongoing work of the Joffrey’s Bridge Program, a dance education residency in Chicago Public Schools. In recognition of this gift, the program will now be known as The Joffrey Ballet Lemonis Bridge Program. The Bridge Program provides Chicago Public School students in grades 1 and 2 with a highly structured dance experience where they develop life skills such as listening, following directions and respect; engaging in creative expression; and practicing physical awareness and healthy lifestyle choices.

CAMPING WORLD, GOOD SAM PLANS FOR GROWTH



Camping World Inc. and Good

Sam Enterprises LLC announced its forecast for expansion and future development to meet customer needs for product and service in new markets. The new markets will raise the number of supercenters to just shy of 115 nationwide.

Plans are under way to expand the company footprint with additional locations in high traffic, outdoor-centric markets within the following timeframe and markets:

- NOVEMBER:** Berkeley (Boston area), Mass.
- JANUARY 2014:** Coburg (Junction City area), Ore.; Fresno, Calif.; Harrisburg, Pa., retail store expansion; Lake Park, Ga.
- FEBRUARY 2014:** Saukville (Milwaukee area), Wis.; Olive Branch (Memphis area), Miss.
- APRIL 2014:** Rossford (Toledo area), Ohio; Rapid City, S.D.; Pittsburgh, Pa.; Jackson, Miss.

“We are proud to continue our commitment to the U.S. market with the opening of these new supercenters and look forward to having customers in these regions visit their new one-stop location for everything outdoor and RV,” said Marcus Lemonis, chairman and CEO of Camping World.

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escapes CROSSROADS

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from Minneapolis-Saint Paul and located deep in Wisconsin's North Woods is an area so remote that locals say organized crime figures from Chicago used to hide out there in the 1920s, '30s and '40s. These days it's a popular spot for snowmobiling, fishing and camping.



Schatzi's 4 Seasons Resort in Wascott, Wis., has a seasonal campground, two cabins and its own lake, called Cranberry Lake. The resort also has snowmobile and ATV trails that run through the property, and a restaurant overlooking the lake. The on-site 60-seat restaurant, The Chipmunk Bar & Grill, features barbecued pork ribs, half-pound hamburgers and Friday night fish fries.

Cranberry Lake is filled with walleye and northern pike as well as perch, bluegill and large- and small-mouth bass. Boaters can follow into a 2,400-acre lake called the Minong Flowage as well as ice fish during winter.

For more information, call 715-466-4095, or go to www.schatzisresort.com

— Jeff Crider



CIVIL WAR WEEKEND

The year may be 2013, but

if you visit Liendo Plantation in Hempstead, Texas, the weekend before Thanksgiving, you'll think you've somehow stepped back in time 150 years. That's because Civil War Weekend, an annual two-day festival now in its 14th year, is underway (Nov. 23-24, 2013).

More than 1,000 re-enactors take part, as civilians demonstrating Civil War-era life skills, and as soldiers doing battle for the North and South. A battle is fought each afternoon, and this year will include more than 65

mounted cavalry and 25 cannons. One of the days each year the Union wins, the other day the Confederates prevail, but only the re-enactors know the outcome in advance.

The festival will also feature a historic fashion show, "pop" music of the 1860s played by a period orchestra and performances of dances of the time. Set up camp at Lone Star Yogi RV park (www.JellystoneTexas.com) just 4 miles away.

For more information, call 979-826-3126 or visit www.liendo.org.

— Pamela Selbert ♦

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RECAPTURING AMERICA'S

GOOD OL' DAYS

ONE PIECE AT A TIME

LARRY SINGLETON HAS AN UNUSUAL JOB — FINDING LOCAL AND REGIONAL ARTIFACTS FOR NEW CRACKER BARREL LOCATIONS

by PAM WINDSOR

Larry Singleton has spent the past 30-plus years traveling back in time, from the 1800s up through the 1940s, '50s, sometimes dipping into the '60s. It's been a full-time job, literally. And there's a strong chance you've seen the results of his labor and just didn't know it.

Singleton is the man who turns those Cracker Barrel Old Country Stores just off the interstate into mini-museums of America's "good old days." If you've ever been inside one and looked on the walls or up at the ceiling, you've likely seen wagon wheels, sleds, antique pots and pans, farm tools, old-time portraits, tin signs for companies like Texaco and RC Cola, and much more. He visits antique stores, flea markets, garage sales, warehouses and other unique spots across the country to search for the numerous pieces of memorabilia that fill each store and restaurant. When you consider Cracker Barrel operates 624 locations in 42 states and every store has more than 1,000 items inside with no copies or duplicates, the numbers seem staggering. And all were handpicked by either Singleton or his parents. "Yeah," notes Singleton with a laugh, "somehow, some way, we're responsible for every piece that's ever come through or into a Cracker Barrel."

Now 55 years old, he was still a kid when founder Dan Evins built the first store off Highway 109 (near Interstate 40) in Lebanon, Tenn. The year was 1969 and Evins wanted to create a place where families could feel comfortable stopping while traveling. "He just wanted to create the feel of an old country store," Singleton recalls. "He was a Shell Oil distributor so they sold gas to the little country stores around this part of the country. He was familiar with them and thought the feel and comfort and the way those stores were, would be a great place to put out on the interstate."

Singleton's parents, Kathleen and Don, owned a local antique shop and Evins asked if they'd help decorate that first store. One store led to another, then another, and soon Singleton's parents took to the road shopping for antiques — sometimes leaving for weeks at a time. Singleton joined them when the trips didn't interfere with school, learning the antique business along the way. He became more involved later when his mother







became ill, eventually taking the family business over altogether. "They did probably the first 33, 34 stores," he remembers. "They taught me everything."

Since then, for the past three-and-a-half decades, Singleton has been on a never-ending search for pieces of America's past, looking for everything from hammers, hatchets, small pieces of furniture, lanterns, dishes, cleaning products, biscuit tins, food canisters and more — the kinds of things you'd find in those old country stores. "The good thing about country stores, they sold everything, whatever you needed in America to sustain your daily life on the farm or just life, from food to farming tools to whatever you needed."

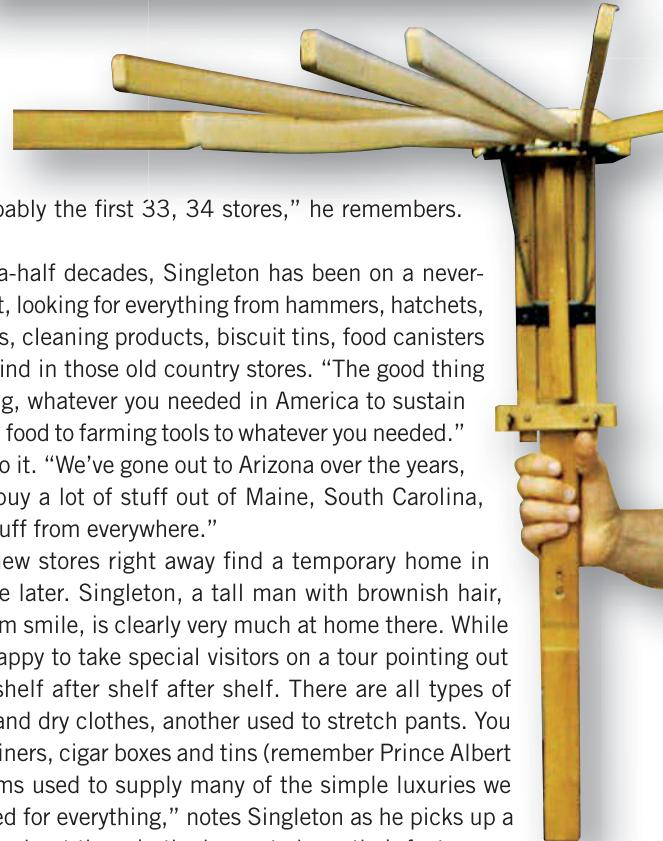
And he's canvassed the country to do it. "We've gone out to Arizona over the years, we've bought stuff from California, we buy a lot of stuff out of Maine, South Carolina, a lot of stuff from Texas, we've bought stuff from everywhere."

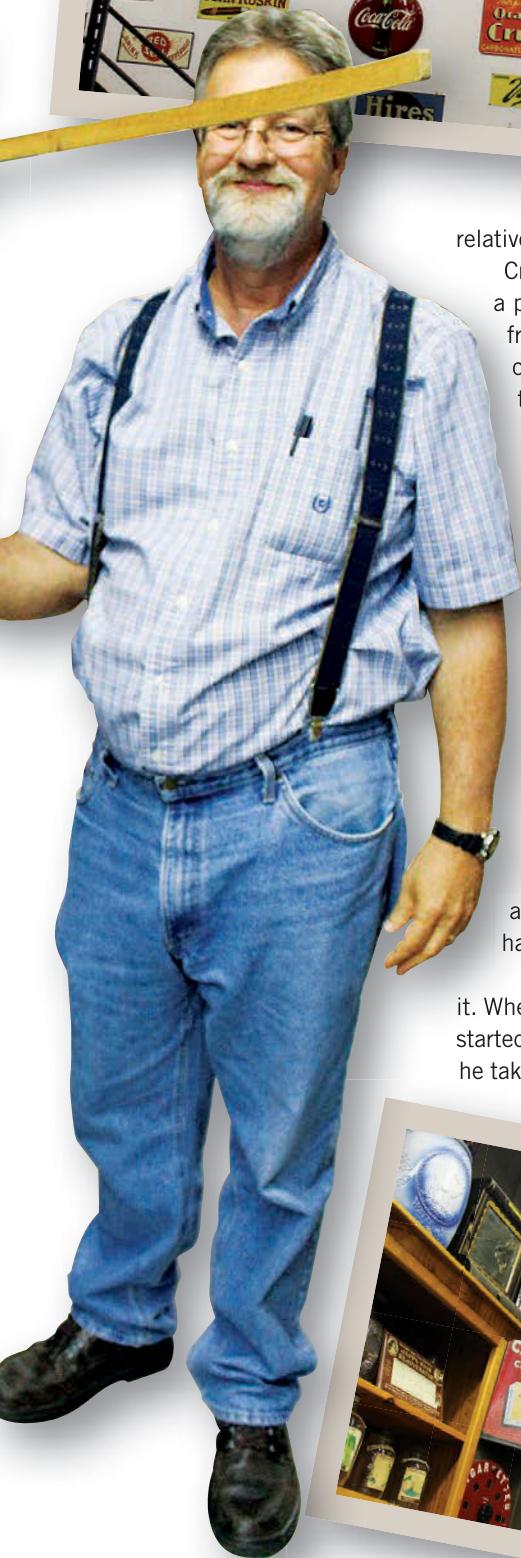
Items that aren't snapped up for new stores right away find a temporary home in a massive warehouse in Lebanon for use later. Singleton, a tall man with brownish hair, glasses, a gray speckled beard and a warm smile, is clearly very much at home there. While it's not open for public showings, he's happy to take special visitors on a tour pointing out some of the nearly 100,000 items on shelf after shelf after shelf. There are all types of wooden contraptions, one used to hang and dry clothes, another used to stretch pants. You see food items in colorful cans and containers, cigar boxes and tins (remember Prince Albert in a can?), and practical homemade items used to supply many of the simple luxuries we now take for granted. "Stuff that was used for everything," notes Singleton as he picks up a big, flat stone. "They warmed those up and put them in the buggy to keep their feet warm. Those early cars didn't have heat."

Brightly colored soda pop signs dot the warehouse walls. Many are from a long list of companies that no longer exist, while others have slogans from yesteryear like Pepsi's "More bounce to the ounce," and Mountain Dew's promise to "tickle your innards."

There are medicinal remedies like a product called Pepgen Tonic made by the American Drug Company in Ohio, that touted multiple uses as an appetizer, invigorant and even mild laxative. "I bought these years ago," explains Singleton holding one of the boxes. "They're out of Dayton, Ohio so they've got a plane (on the front) for the Wright Brothers." And then, pointing to the listing of a certain special ingredient, he adds, "That's what really cured you, 12 percent alcohol." He laughs as he puts it back with the others.

Singleton has developed relationships with antique dealers around the country who help him expand his search for antiques. Dan Cross with Cross Spruce Antiques in Milford, Maine, buys estates and in addition to running his own shop, watches out for items Singleton might need. "You have to have a good eye for what you're looking for, like Larry looks for certain things for the Cracker Barrel design," says Cross. "You know scrub boards, old tools, instant





relatives” (They use the term “instant relatives” to refer to photos featuring real people.)

Cross adds that he also pays close attention to where items originated. Singleton makes a point, when possible, to return items from a specific location back to where they came from if Cracker Barrel opens a restaurant in that city or state. “Larry’s always looking for certain things that are unique to the local area. A lot of times we find stuff here in Maine that’s maybe unique to somewhere like Kentucky or Tennessee or elsewhere. Stuff travels back and forth.”

For antiques — those in the antique business — much of the joy comes from the thrill of the hunt and the discovery of that rare, special or unusual find. “I always love finding things I don’t know what they were used for,” says Singleton. “Years ago this guy brought these, they looked like wooden paddles, but they had a hinge on them, a little hole inside and a little pin.” He says the paddles sat in his office for a long time because he had no idea what they were used for until one day he stumbled across an old catalog. “We looked through it and there it was — it was called a slapstick. And that’s what they used to make the gun sound when they were doing Vaudeville. They’d put a blank in there (between the paddles) and close it ... and that’s where slapstick comedy comes from.”

Through the years, Singleton says he’s learned quite a bit about history and developed a deep appreciation for the creative and inventive spirit of early Americans. “They were skilled people, they worked with their hands. They made things to last a lifetime, things that you could use and if it broke, you could fix it. I love blacksmith tools and anything blacksmiths made because you know that guy was going through the process to hammer out and design it. What talent there was, I’m just amazed at what they could do.”

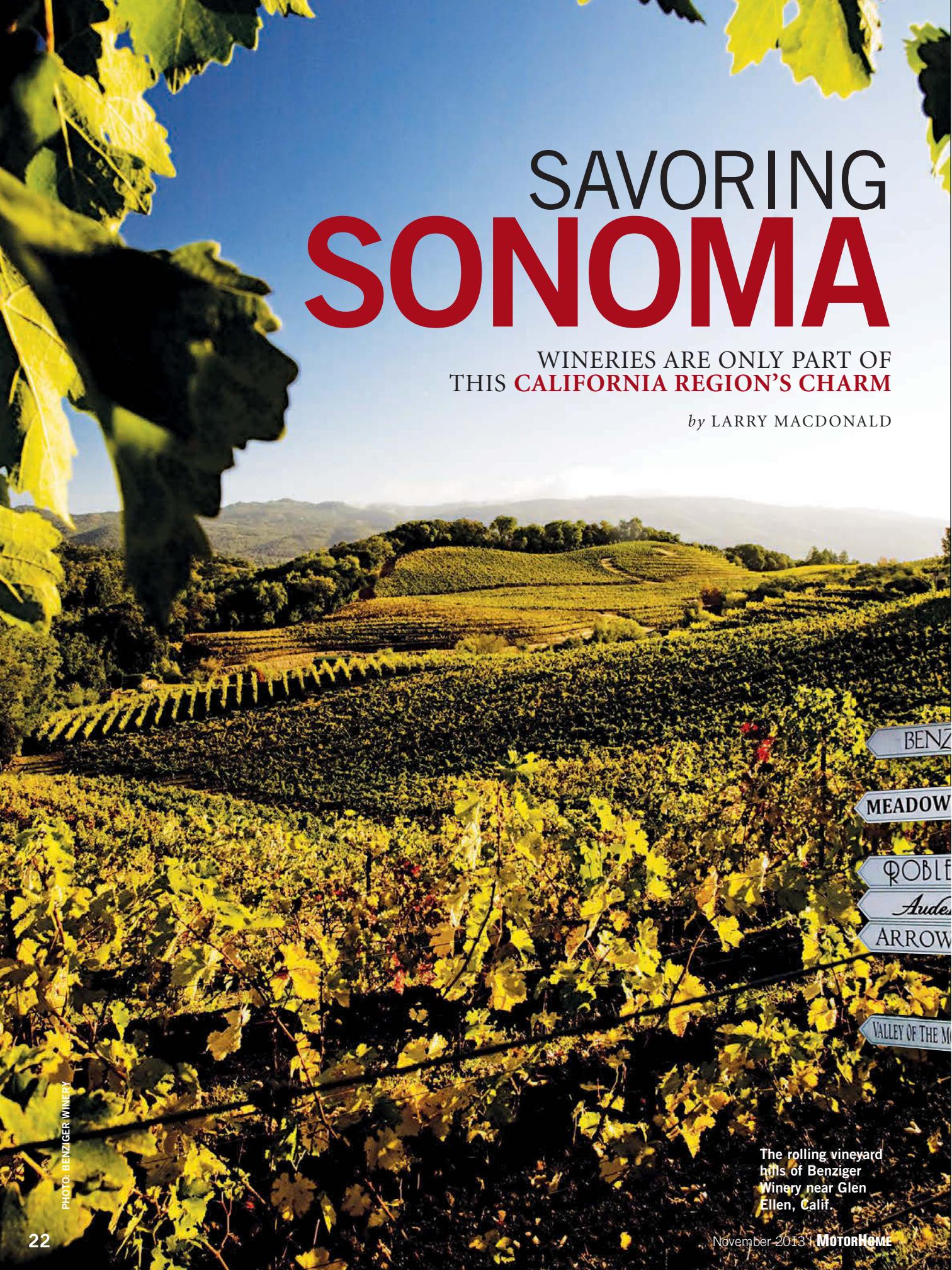
Thanks to his love of that history, Singleton has ended up becoming a vehicle to preserve it. When he started the job more than 30 years ago, he did it to continue something his parents started and his mother, especially, dearly loved. Now, it’s turned into a legacy of his own, and he takes great pride in catching someone like a father and son, or grandfather and grandchild, share a little bit of what made America great.

“You’re walking down and he’s pointing to this and saying ‘This is what we had when we were young and this is what it did,’ and you can see him wanting to share a little bit of his life with his son or his grandson. I love seeing people share that.”

And for Singleton, he plans to keep on making that possible — one store at a time. ♦



Pam Windsor is a freelance writer and photographer in Louisville, Ky., who enjoys traveling and sharing the stories of the many fascinating people and places she finds along the way.



SAVORING SONOMA

WINERIES ARE ONLY PART OF
THIS **CALIFORNIA REGION'S CHARM**

by LARRY MACDONALD

BENZIGER
MEADOW
POBLE
Audens
ARROW
VALLEY OF THE M

The rolling vineyard
hills of Benziger
Winery near Glen
Ellen, Calif.

PHOTO: BENZIGER WINERY



Clockwise from above: The author and his wife, Sandy, sip wine while traveling in Sonoma County. Wine Country RV Park is centrally located in Rohnert Park. Walk through Armstrong Redwoods to find a tree estimated at more than 1,400 years old. This sign in Glen Ellen lists numerous wineries and other local attractions.

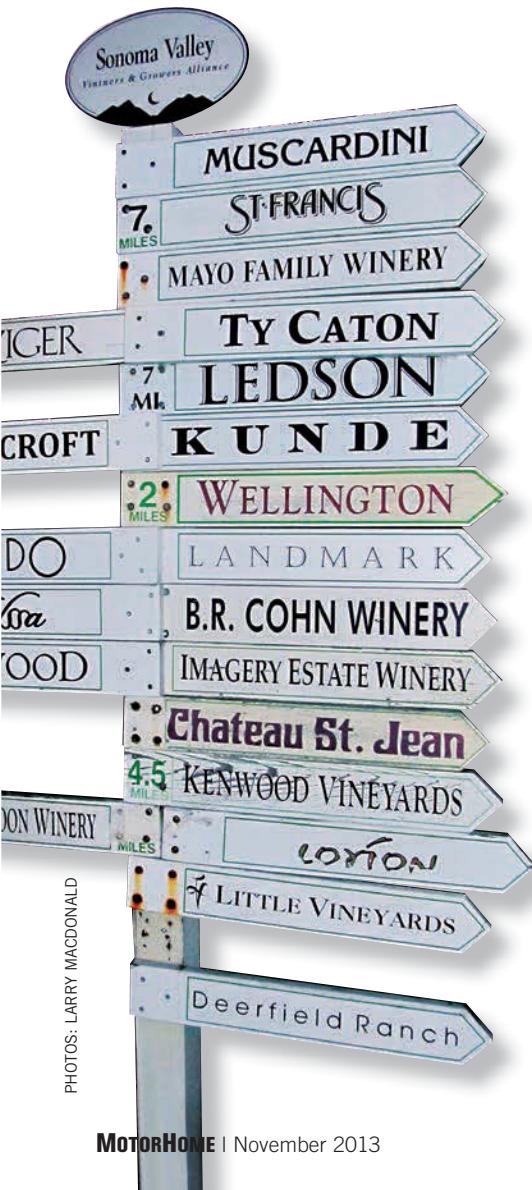
Mention “Sonoma” and most people inevitably think of California wines. As well they should. Nearly 300 wineries and a thousand vineyards blanket the gently rolling hills of Sonoma County just north of San Francisco. “The sight of mile after mile of grapevines, in shimmering shades of gold and burgundy, is breathtaking,” reported a fellow RVer who visited this area last fall. We decided to see for ourselves during our November getaway from chilly British Columbia to warmer climes. From California’s Interstate 5, we diverted west to the town of Rohnert Park, centrally located near Sonoma Valley, the redwood forests and the Pacific Ocean. Each of our day trips would be within a half-hour’s drive of our campground at Wine Country RV Park.

Our first stop was the California Welcome Center in Santa Rosa, where my wife, Sandy, and I learned that Sonoma County is more than just fabled vineyards. The area offers a host of visitor options, including adventure tours, natural beauty, cultural and historic sites, eclectic eateries and shops, and of course, multiple wineries for wine tasting, known locally as “corkhopping.”

In Santa Rosa we visited several recommended attractions, including historic Railroad Square, a collection of specialty shops with turn-of-the-century architecture and old-town allure; the Charles M. Schulz Museum, a fun place depicting the life and works of this celebrated cartoonist and his *Peanuts* characters; and Vintners Inn, a luxury hotel with splendid Spanish architecture and beautifully landscaped grounds, set among fields of vineyards.

While walking through a courtyard at Vintners Inn, we struck up a conversation with the inn’s sommelier, a person trained in the serving of wine. I asked if he could recommend a winery tour and he immediately suggested Korbel Champagne Cellars, which not only produces the world famous Korbel California Champagnes, but also provides free tours and samples. (Most wineries charge for these services, usually \$10 for four or five samples, although many offer two-for-one coupons.)

The next day, we drove from Santa Rosa on River Road, a winding two-laner, which according to our visitor guide “has been compared to driving through Tuscany for its magnificence.” Undulating hills, towering redwoods and vast stretches of vineyards greeted us around every turn as we followed the Russian River to the Korbel winery in Guerneville.



PHOTOS: LARRY MACDONALD

PHOTO: WWW.SONOMACOUNTY.COM



PHOTO: WWW.SONOMACOUNTY.COM



Clockwise, top left: The fishing village of Bodega Bay played host to Alfred Hitchcock's movie "The Birds." A Segway tour includes a stop in front of the home of Mexican general Mariano Vallejo. The Charles M. Schulz Museum in Santa Rosa depicts the life and works of the famous cartoonist. Korbel Cellars offers free tours and samples of its Korbel California Champagnes.



PHOTO: WWW.SONOMACOUNTY.COM

Kathy, our tour guide, provided a brief history of the three Korbel brothers who emigrated from Czechoslovakia in the mid-1800s and eventually settled in the Russian River Valley. After several business ventures, they began to appreciate that the region's microclimate and soils were ideal for cultivating grapes, and so they did, focusing on pinot noir and chardonnay, the two main varieties used in their champagne. Many of the early methods of producing champagne, such as inducing the in-bottle fermentation of the wine to affect carbonation, were done by hand using crude and labor-intensive mechanical devices. Nonetheless, the Korbel business thrived and production increased dramatically, at least until Prohibition put a temporary halt to the sale of alcoholic beverages. Their first case of champagne produced after the repeal of Prohibition was sent to President Franklin D. Roosevelt ... "with our regards." Incidentally, the name "Champagne" cannot be legally applied to wines made outside

the Champagne region of France. However, the label "California Champagne" seems to sidestep that technicality quite nicely, even though some states such as Oregon ban producers from using the term when referring to sparkling wine.

Just a few miles farther northwest of Guerneville is Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve, which contains more than 800 acres of coastal redwood trees. The reserve can be accessed by auto for a small fee, but we chose instead to walk through these stately giants, an experience warranting humility and reflection.

A short distance from the parking lot stands the tallest tree — the Parson Jones Tree — rising to 310 feet, as well as the oldest tree — the Colonel Armstrong Tree — estimated to be more than 1,400 years old. A display showing historical events superimposed on the rings of a cross-section of trunk puts the longevity into perspective. This particular forest sanctuary has remained intact thanks to the foresight of Colonel James Armstrong, a

19th century lumber baron who purchased much of this dense redwood forest to preserve it for future generations.

Around mid-week we were looking forward, with some trepidation, to our pre-booked Segway tour of Sonoma, a historic town nestled in its namesake valley. Hunt Bailie, our tour guide and owner of Sonoma Segway, began with some hands-on instruction. "Gently lean forward to go forward and back to go backward. Tilt the handle slightly left or right to turn, and stand upright to stop; it's actually quite simple." And it was ... within 10 minutes all four riders in our group were zipping confidently around the parking lot.

Our first stop was the Gothic-style home of a Mexican general, Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, who was sent here with troops in 1834 to prevent Russian expansion from nearby Fort Ross. In 1846, a small rag-tag group of American frontiersmen took over Sonoma and raised a homemade flag, the Bear Flag, which has since been incorporated into California's



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Mission San Francisco Solano de Sonoma is the oldest building in Sonoma.

state flag. Just 26 days later, American troops were deployed to claim the territory as part of the United States, replacing the Bear Flag with the Stars and Stripes.

We leaned forward for several miles on a wide, sun-dappled path beneath gigantic eucalyptus trees. Periodically, clusters of people watched us silently glide by in joyful amazement, as if we were on magic carpets. Our next two stops, Gundlach Bundschu and Buena Vista wineries, were opportunities to learn about winemaking and to swirl, sip and smile. A cute card at the former winery described a

Sonoma Valley Sobriety Test: “If you can’t say ‘Gundlach Bundschu Gewurztraminer,’ you shouldn’t be driving!”

I pretended to be a connoisseur by swirling and commenting on the “legs” of the wine; that is, how long it clings to the glass. Our server disputed my assumption that longer legs indicate higher quality. “Not so,” he said. “Viscosity maybe, but not quality.” I couldn’t wait to share this tidbit with fellow RVers at our next happy hour.

Later, pausing beside a vineyard, Baillie encouraged us to sample some freshly picked grapes to appreciate why wine-makers dispose of the seeds. Biting into a plump red grape, the sweet juices excited my taste buds. Chewing on the seeds, however, produced a pungent taste, more akin to old leather than a fine wine.

Our final stop was the sturdy stone-walled building of the Vella Cheese Factory where, since 1931, the Vella family has been making cheese by hand. Our visit concluded in its small storefront, nibbling away on a variety of award-winning cheeses, including Asiago, cheddar and Habañero

Jack. They were so delicious we ended up purchasing a couple of packages. By the end of our tour, we all felt like Segway pros, just as Baillie predicted. What a fun and informative way to spend a few hours, topped off with a complementary bottle of wine to boot.

Afterward, we explored the cobbled alleyways surrounding the town’s plaza, poked through quaint shops and art galleries, lunched at a friendly pub, and sampled chocolate truffles. Adjacent Mission San Francisco Solano de Sonoma is one of the last established Franciscan missions in California, founded in 1823. It is also the oldest building in Sonoma and has since become a historic landmark.

The next day, we returned to the Sonoma Valley to tour Benziger Family Win-

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ery in Glen Ellen, which according to *Wine Spectator* magazine, “may be the most comprehensive vineyard visit offered by any winery in California.” Mike, our tour guide, took us by tram up into the vineyards, stopping on a panoramic overview to explain their environmentally friendly approach to winemaking, which uses biological pest control instead of insecticides, and compost instead of artificial fertilizers in their quest to produce the finest grapes. We then moved on to the processing area to learn how their wine is made.

When the grapes are ripe, usually in September, they are immediately hand picked and crushed. The resulting juice is fermented in large stainless steel vats, then transferred to oak barrels for the aging process. Underground cellars are used to store the wine for up to two years at constant temperature and humidity levels. Finally, when the wine has suitably matured, it is filtered, bottled and packed for shipping, or in our case for sampling.

Also in Glen Ellen is Jack London State Historic Park, which includes the

famed author’s beloved ranch and 800 acres of spectacular land on which he spent his final years, from 1905 until his death in 1916. A well-maintained path leads to his gravesite.

To return to our campground, we took a shortcut on Bennett Valley Road, winding our way through magnificent canyons and hillside vineyards, all in full fall splendor. This road, with several narrow sections and sharp turns, is not suitable for large motorhomes.

The Pacific Ocean beckoned so we drove out to the beautiful fishing village of Bodega Bay. The town and nearby hamlet of Bodega provided the setting for Alfred Hitchcock’s thriller “The Birds,” produced in 1963. St. Teresa’s Church and the memorable white schoolhouse are still there, although the latter is a private residence. We had lunch overlooking the expansive bay at the Tides Wharf Restaurant, where Hitchcock aficionados can read relevant news articles and view photos of various scenes shot in the movie. The sandy beaches, rocky coastline and

crashing waves north along U.S. Highway 1 provided many photo opportunities, although I never quite managed to get a flock of angry birds in any of my pictures.

Our final day included a visit to the small town of Healdsburg, its Spanish-style plaza bordered by trendy restaurants, antique stores, art galleries, jewelry stores and, of course, wine tasting rooms. We were so captivated by its charm that we ran out of daylight before we had a chance to drive up into the mountains for a reported bird’s-eye view of the Russian River Valley.

A week wasn’t long enough to see all that Sonoma County has to offer, but it did provide a taste that would tempt us to return. Not only did we acquire a barrel full of memories, we also headed south with a case of fine wines to share with fellow RVers. I’m sure we’ll be extra popular this winter because of our trip. ♦



Larry MacDonald is a Canadian freelancer who sold his “sticks and bricks” home several years ago and now travels full time with his wife, dog and cat. He enjoys writing about life on the road.

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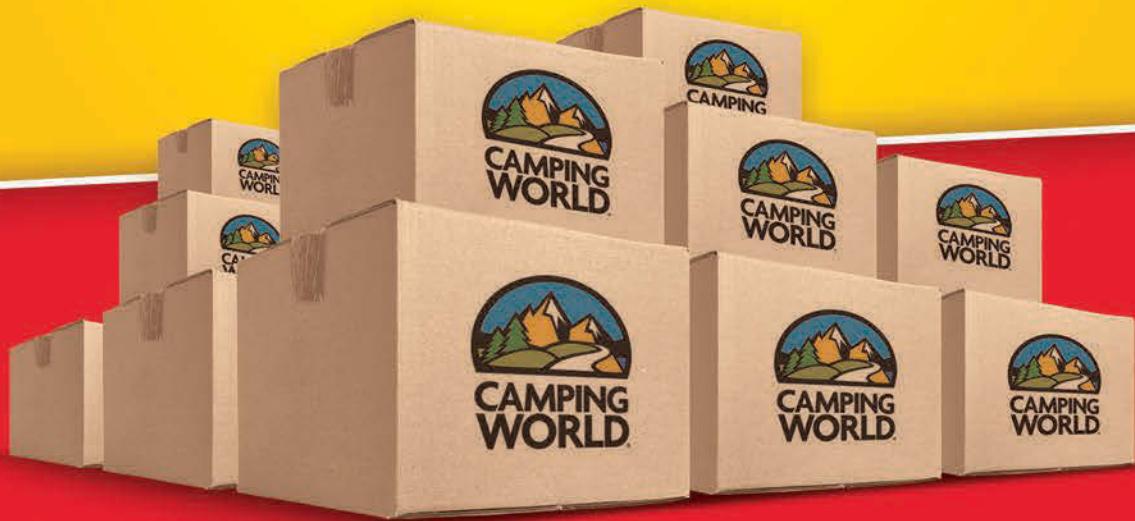
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ADVENTUROUS AUTUMN IN NEW HAMPSHIRE'S WHITE MOUNTAINS



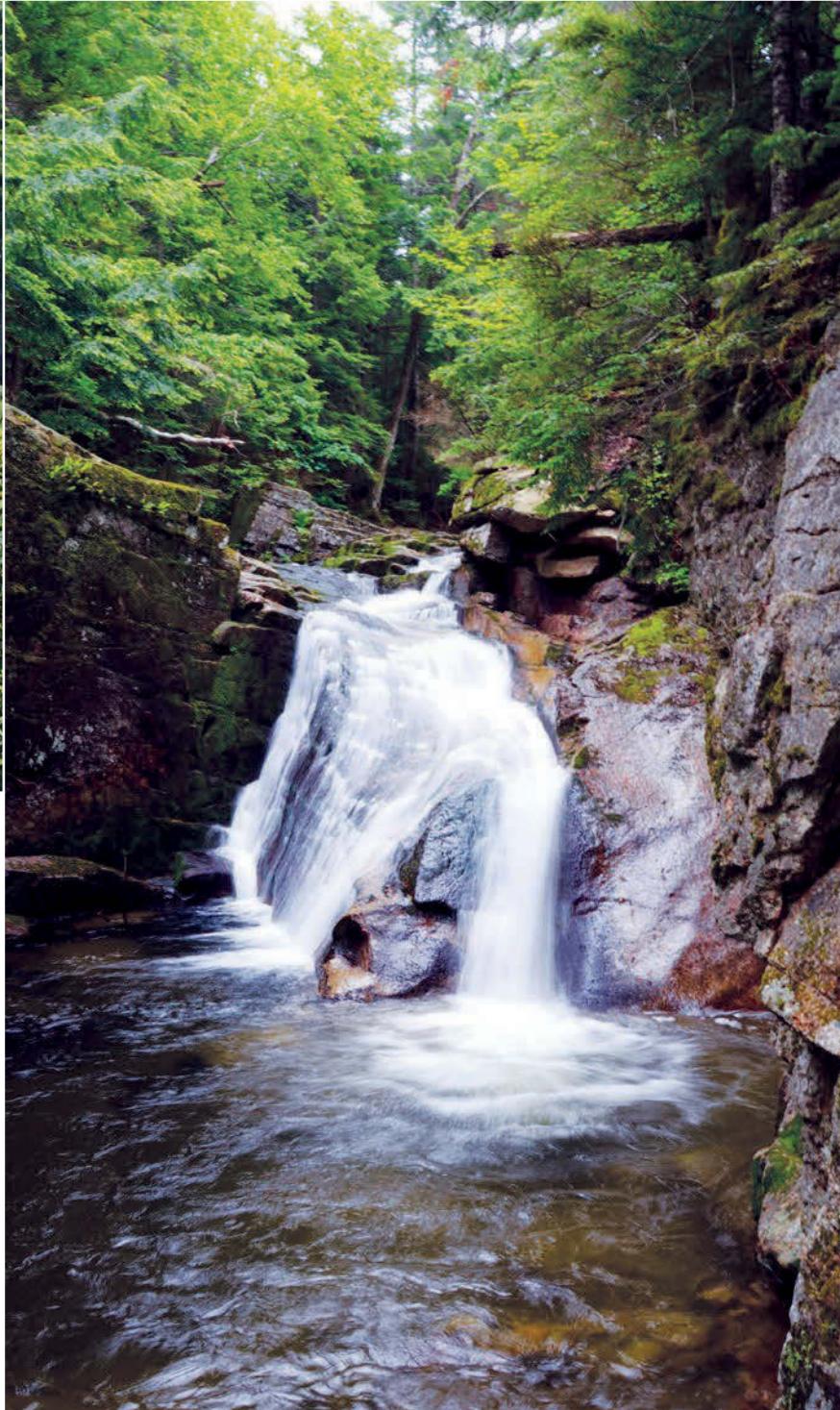
PHOTO: OMNI MOUNT WASHINGTON RESORT



PHOTO: COG RAILROAD

THIS REGION IS PACKED WITH EXHILARATING RECREATION, HISTORICAL CHARM AND STUNNING SCENERY

by LISA DENSMORE



As I traveled across the sky, the red and orange landscape rushed by in a blur as if Monet had brushed the color from his painter's palette. Paul, one of my two guides, stood on the platform suspended in an impossibly tall hemlock, pumping his palms in a downward motion, the "slow down" signal. I touched my leather-gloved hand to the cable above my head and felt myself decelerate. The harder I pressed, the more my speed dropped. With surprising control, I coasted onto the platform. Paul quickly unclipped my harness from the cable, clipped me to a safety line then turned his attention to the next zip-liner, a 50-something mom from Wisconsin touring New Hampshire with her 20-something daughter. Our adventuresome group of 10 also included my son Parker (age 16), two middle-aged couples from Australia and Rhode Island, and our guides Paul and Neal.

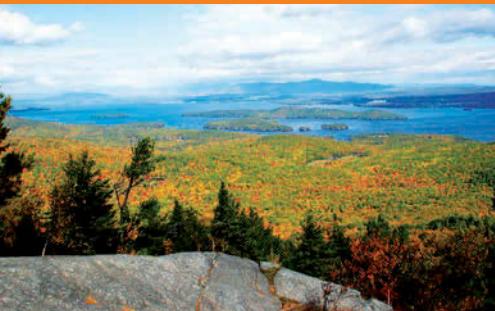
I relaxed and looked around from my treetop perch. The oranges, reds and yel-

Opposite page, clockwise from top: Fly from tree to tree on the zip line canopy tour at Omni Mount Washington Resort. This unique canopy tour features dual-cable construction with two separate cables. Cascade Path Trail near Waterville Valley leads to a series of cascades and waterfalls. The Mount Washington Cog Railway, the world's first mountain-climbing cog train, ascends to the 6,288 foot summit of the highest peak in the Northeast.

PHOTOS: LISA DENSMORE

Two famous routes for leaf-peeping

LAKES REGION LOOP (75 MILES)



Hike to the summit of Mount Major for spectacular views of Lake Winnepesaukee.

From I-93, follow Route 3 from Ashland through Holderness on the east side of Squam Lake where "On Golden Pond" was filmed. Continue south on Route 3 down the western shore of Lake Winnepesaukee (location of the film, "What About Bob?"). In Weirs Beach, continue south on Route 11 along the lake. At Alton Bay, turn north on Route 28A, then Route 28 to Wolfeboro. Continue up the east side of the lake on Route 109 to Moultonboro. Turn west on Route 25, closing the loop at the junction with Route 3 in Meredith.

MOUNTAIN REGION LOOP (100 MILES)



Tranquil Echo Lake is located at the northern end of Franconia Notch State Park.

From I-93 in Lincoln, go east on Route 112 (Kancamagus Highway) to Conway. Head northwest through North Conway on Route 302/16. In Glen, continue west on Route 302 through Crawford Notch and Bretton Woods to Twin Mountain. Turn south on Route 3 then on to I-93 south, which narrows to two lanes through Franconia Notch State Park. Close the loop just beyond the park in Lincoln.

lows came into focus, the myriad leaves of maple, birch, oak and beech at the peak of their autumn show. A canopy tour at Bretton Woods was certainly a unique way to see the fall foliage in New Hampshire's White Mountains. Instead of looking at the trees from a roadside pullout or a hiker's overlook, I was in them!

Zip lines are well named. You literally zip visually and audibly from one platform to the next. I was held aloft by a harness and roller system that traveled along a cable and made a loud zipping sound as I accelerated. When the guide gave the

word, I rested my hands over the rollers above my head, picked up my feet and left the rest to gravity.

While many destinations have zip lines, most are set up as parallel cables in which two people zip side-by-side. Bretton Woods has that, too, but the bigger draw is its canopy tour. Patterned after the rainforest tours in Costa Rica, Bretton Woods' arbor-top attraction is a succession of a dozen progressively longer and faster cables that zigzag almost a mile down the side of the mountain.

It was a thrill to fly from tree to tree.



In 1944, diplomats from around the world gathered here at Mount Washington Hotel Resort to establish the International Monetary Fund.



Flume Gorge in Franconia Notch is a 2-mile self-guided nature walk through a spectacular natural chasm with covered bridges, waterfalls and incredible mountain views.

PHOTO: OMNI MOUNT WASHINGTON RESORT

PHOTO: WHITE MOUNTAIN ATTRACTIONS ASSOCIATION

At first, I felt like a Bond girl escaping evil henchmen. Then, on one of the higher cables which crossed a broad ravine, I felt like an eagle soaring over the forest. I glanced to my right and got an expansive view of the Presidential Range towering above the historic Omni Mount Washington Hotel. In 1944, diplomats from around the world gathered at this massive, white, palace-like landmark to establish the International Monetary Fund.

One of my goals for this trip was to

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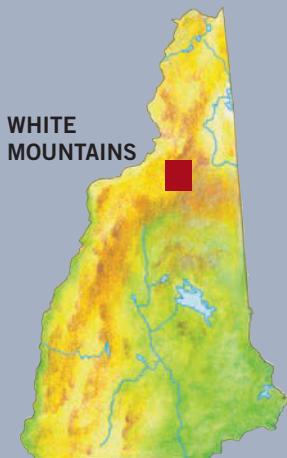
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WHITE
MOUNTAINS

get to the top of the Mount Washington, the high point in the Presidential Range, elevation 6,266 feet, the tallest peak in the northeastern United States. With the leaves at their peak color, the view from atop Washington sounded particularly appealing. However, my son was more interested in things we could *do* rather than *see*, which is why we were touring New Hampshire. The Granite State offered endless options for both of us beginning with its marquee mountain.

You can reach the summit of Mount Washington by hiking, driving up the 7.6-mile-long Mount Washington Auto Road or riding the Mount Washington Cog Railway, an old-fashioned steam engine that slowly, deliberately chugs upward on a narrow-gauge track. A frequent visitor to, and former resident of New Hampshire, I've been to the top of Mount Washington all three ways. (Note: Some vehicles, including RVs, are not permitted on the Mount Washington Auto Road due to the steep, winding climb.) Regardless of how you get there, on a clear day, the top of Mount Washington is worth putting on your to-do list. The journey takes you through the most expansive Alpine zone in the northeastern United States, which is surprisingly colorful during the fall, its rare sedges, alpine cranberries and ground covers turning the terrain a patchwork of blond, cerise and deep purple. The summit has a cafeteria, gift shop and several historic buildings, not to mention the weather observatory where, in 1934, the wind was clocked at 231 MPH, the highest surface wind speed ever recorded in the world.

On this clear fall day from the zip lines across the valley, it was hard to imagine such a tempest. All seemed calm, except for my heart rate, which raced from the excitement of zipping down a mountainside. As each person in our group rappelled down from the last platform, I glanced at my watch. The morning had melted away. We would need to hurry to make our 1:00 p.m. appointment to go rock climbing, another outdoor adventure offered at Bretton Woods, no experience necessary. Personally, I would rather examine small rocks in a rock shop than climb oversize ones on the side of a mountain, but John, our instructor, assured me it would be easy and

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ADVENTUROUS AUTUMN IN NEW HAMPSHIRE'S WHITE MOUNTAINS

enjoyable. The things we do for our kids!

Tethered to John by a red nylon rope, he patiently coached me up the rock face. The ascent required primarily a "go for it" attitude and a sense of balance rather than arm and leg strength. Upon reaching the top, Parker claimed it the most fun he had ever had. I was pleased, not only at his delight but also by the view, another cascade of color. Even better, we didn't have to down-climb. We simply hiked a short way to a chairlift then rode to the base area while ogling yet another view of crimson and gold-washed hills and valleys below stunning 4,000-foot peaks.

As a lifelong skier, I have gratefully taken chairlift rides to the top of ski areas in the winter, but during my autumn visit to New Hampshire, I gained an entirely different appreciation of them when the ground is bare rather than white. I was also impressed by how many things you can do at the various ski resorts in the Granite State when there's no skiing. The ski areas are all relatively close to each other, an hour or less from most campgrounds and easily accessible from Interstate 93. Even better, most of the offerings are beginner-friendly for those who want a taste of adventure as an appetizer to a delicious dinner, a sip of fine wine and other accoutrements of civilization.

As another example, prior to arriving at Bretton Woods, Parker and I explored the Waterville Valley Resort an hour to the south. Waterville Valley was the brainchild of Tom Corcoran, an Olympic skier during the 1950s. Though Corcoran was one of top winter athletes of his era, he believed the key to a ski area's success was offering lots of user-friendly terrain, as the bulk of the skiing population was at the beginner to intermediate level. The philosophy has carried over to the resort's off-season offerings, including paddle-boarding on Corcoran Lake in the middle of the resort and mountain biking on its ski trails.

My son and I were neophytes at mountain biking. With much encouragement from Waterville's bike rental shop, we decided to give it a try. As instructed, we followed the resort bike path to the bottom of a chairlift on Snows Mountain near the resort's public golf course. I got on the chairlift first, then a helpful lift attendant loaded my bike onto the chair

just behind me. Parker and his bike road a couple of chairs back. With no one to talk to, I relaxed, letting my feet dangle, and took a few photographs.

Once at the top, we weren't sure where to go. We turned to the lift attendant for advice.

"Take the Upper Snows Mountain Trail," she coached us, "It's a wide, gentle descent and there's a great waterfall at the first bridge."

The trail was indeed gentle, a dirt road really and not intimidating. We coasted down the path winding around its elongated curves. The dense hardwood forest on either side of us seemed aglow in the speckled rays of sunshine, the leaves dripping rich red and ochre.

As instructed, we parked our bikes at the bridge. The cascade was pretty, but underwhelming. There had to be more. I spotted a trail to our left and proposed we follow it, leaving our bikes at the bridge. Within a few steps, we came to a lovely waterfall that spilled into a deep clear pool. We followed the trail a little farther and discovered a series of beautiful waterfalls. We had wandered into a hidden Eden. It was so peaceful and pretty that we didn't want to leave.

Eventually, we returned to our bikes and finished our ride, which meandered a mile or so farther through the woods then curved back toward the base of Snows Mountain along a rock-speckled river. Maple leaves drifted in the water, fell like random red feathers through the air and adorned the shoreline giving the path a rosy glow. I stopped to take another photo.

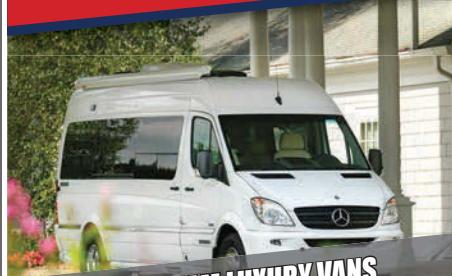
"What shall we do tomorrow?" asked Parker, pulling up beside me.

We had lots of options, horseback riding at Black Mountain, visiting the New England Ski Museum at the base of Cannon Mountain and then taking the tram to the summit of Cannon appealed to me, not to mention my goal of reaching the top of Mount Washington. New Hampshire's White Mountains offer so many possibilities for adventure, I wanted to experience it all. ♦



Lisa Densmore (www.lisadensmore.com) has been writing and traveling for more than 25 years. When she's not exploring interesting places in North America, she parks in Red Lodge, Montana.

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Fall has arrived and I'm not ready for the rain. I'm also not ready to give up RVing for the season.

In the Pacific Northwest, when the rain starts on the damp west side, people in-the-know head for the sunny high desert of Central Oregon and the town of Bend, a delightful mecca of cool museums, brew pubs and outdoor activities that make a perfect RV escape.

We start late on Friday afternoon, but the traffic is light on U.S. Highway 26. It's spitting rain when we leave and, as we climb toward Mount Hood through the thick canopy of the Mount Hood National Forest, the rain becomes more insistent and finally turns to snow. Fall has firmly arrived in the Cascades and 16 inches of the white stuff has already fallen at Mount Hood Meadows, a popular ski destination.

After cresting the summit, the fir and cedar forests of the west side give way to pine and manzanita and the rain lessens and the sky lightens. By the time we reach the wheat-colored grasses and sage of Central Oregon, the rain has stopped. We motor down to the little settlement of Warm Springs through a magnificent canyon cut by the Deschutes River and spot a sign for fry bread, a Native American treat. We pull off and pony up \$3 for a dinner-plate-sized disk of puffy, freshly fried dough liberally dusted with powdered sugar.

We pass a turnout where die-hard fishermen cast their flies into the chilly, fast-moving river and climb out of the canyon into high desert fields of onions, beets and winter wheat. The sun weakly burns through the clouds. At least it's not raining!

We drive through Madras, a little up-and-coming town that sits at 2,437 feet elevation, where we top off the gas tank. Nine miles south of town, we stop for the night at one of our favorite parks, the Madras/Culver KOA. As we pull in, the sun peeks from behind the clouds to give us a blast of warmth.

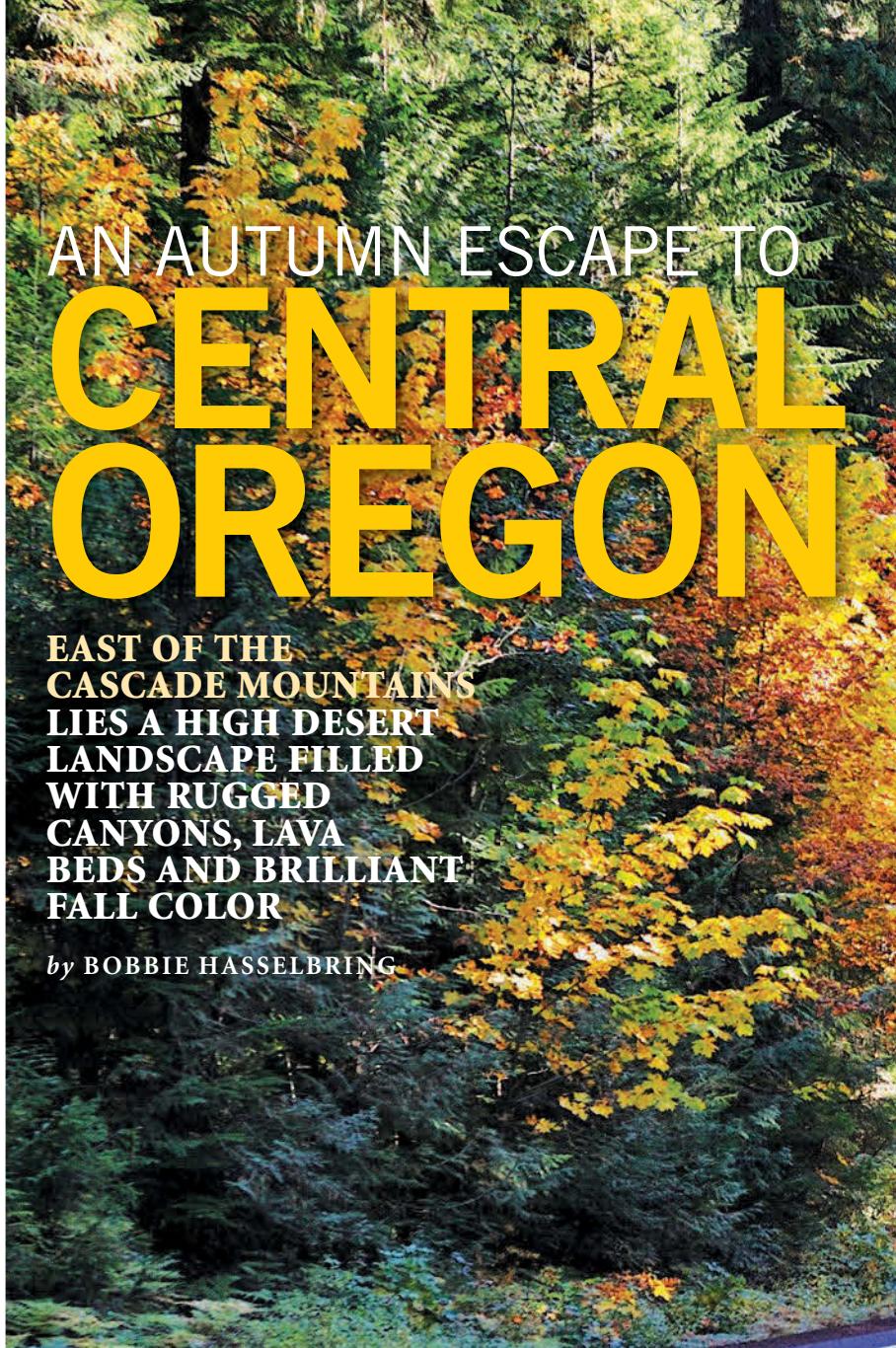
The KOA here is a neat-as-a-pin campground that features full- and partial-hookup sites, extra-long pull-through spaces, grass and shade, a nice pool and kids' area, and super-clean showers. My favorite, however,

Right: A solar shower house in the campground at Tumalo State Park, which is located along the Deschutes River. Far right: A hiker crosses a bridge on the Deschutes River on the short walk to Benham Falls.

AN AUTUMN ESCAPE TO **CENTRAL OREGON**

EAST OF THE CASCADE MOUNTAINS LIES A HIGH DESERT LANDSCAPE FILLED WITH RUGGED CANYONS, LAVA BEDS AND BRILLIANT FALL COLOR

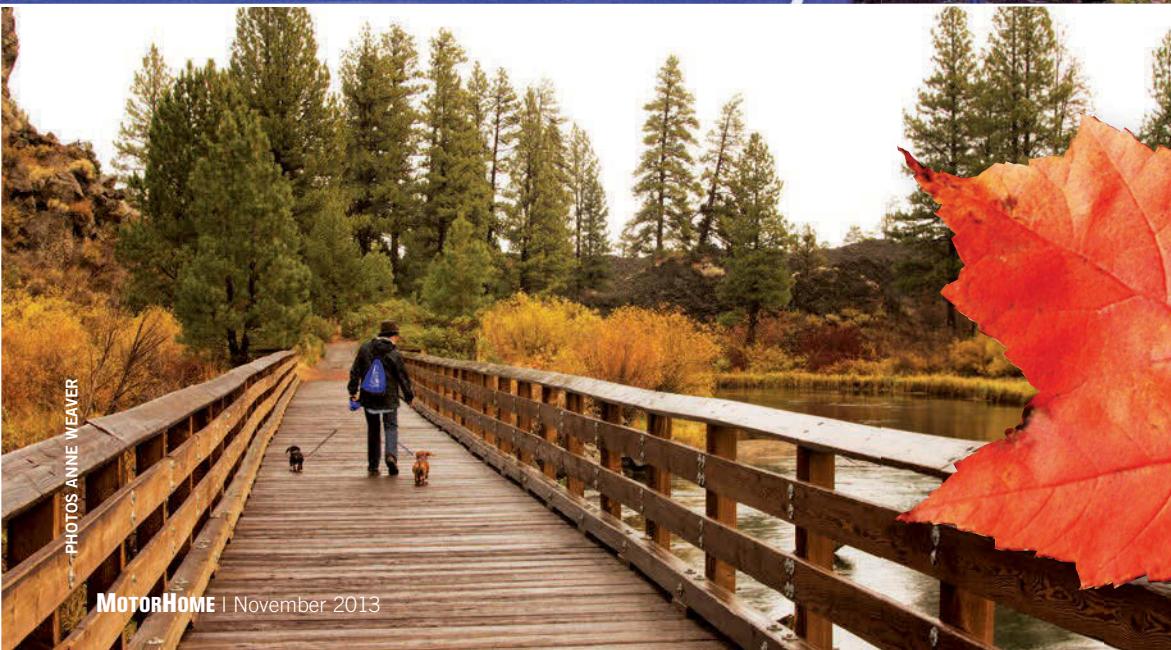
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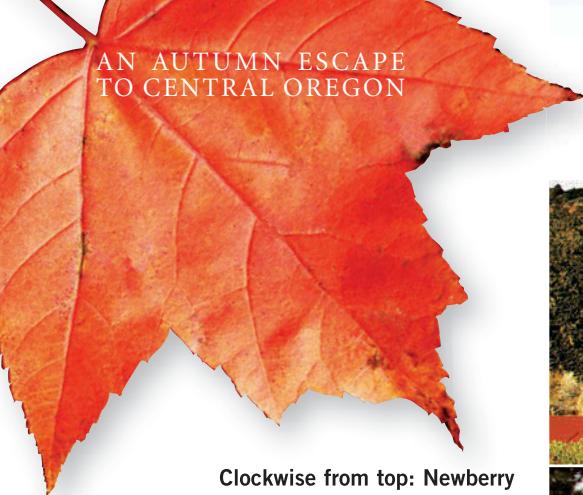


Brilliant fall foliage highlights the highway on an Oregon road trip.

PHOTO CHRISTIAN HEEB

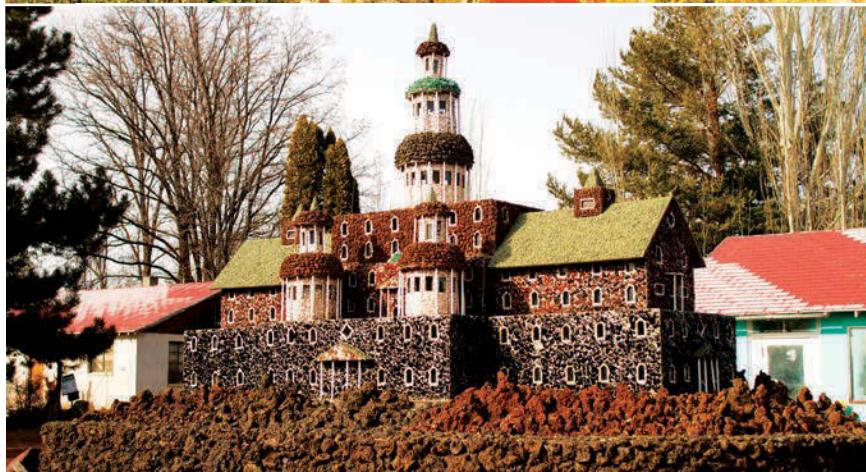


PHOTOS ANNE WEAVER



AN AUTUMN ESCAPE
TO CENTRAL OREGON

Clockwise from top: Newberry National Volcanic Monument provides a unique opportunity to view the Lava Lands of central Oregon. North of Bend, along Highway 97, Petersen Rock Gardens features detailed structures built entirely from rocks. Deschutes Brewery is one of 12 artisan breweries in Bend. A Wanderlust guide provides natural history as we explore the Boyd Cave, a lava tube near Bend. A pioneer wagon at The High Desert Museum provides a glimpse into early life and transportation in the high desert of Central Oregon.



is the pancake breakfasts (\$3) cheerfully served by the staff.

The following morning (after a few too many pancakes), we motor south on U.S. Highway 97. Though the area's iconic mountains — the Three Sisters, Three Fingert Jack and Mount Bachelor — are all hidden in mist, the clouds are doing their best Maxfield Parrish impression and the temperature has risen to a balmy 60 degrees.

We pass a bridge that crosses over the Crooked River Gorge. Most motorists whiz past this pullout, but it's worth a stop to peer into the craggy, almost vertical canyon walls. We drive through the burg of Terrebonne and, to the east, spot the rocky spires of Smith Rock State Park. This is a day-use area that's popular with rock climbers and a great place to enjoy a picnic.

We spot a small sign for Petersen Rock Gardens. Intrigued, we turn off Highway 97 onto Young Avenue, then right on 77th. We meander a bit, wondering if we're on a goose chase, but soon we see more signs and arrive at an old farmhouse surrounded by an amazing rock garden. We pay the small fee and wander amidst bridges, castles, and entire towns in miniature made from local lava rock and semi-precious stones. The high desert of Oregon is a rockhound's paradise and its bounty is evidenced by this creative display.

Instead of getting back on Highway 97, we follow our GPS on to the Old Bend-Redmond Highway to Tumalo State Park, our home for the night. It's late in the season so several of the many loops in this park are closed, but Loop A has plenty of level, paved spots with water/electric or full hook-

ups at the bargain price of \$26. It also has picnic tables, fire rings, big solar showers, and the clean, herbal smell of sagebrush.

Once settled in our campsite, we spend the afternoon hiking along the Deschutes River. Our dogs are more interested in digging up ground squirrels under every rock, but they reluctantly follow us along the spectacular river trail. As darkness falls, we're surrounded by a deep quiet only found in the desert.

**DESERT MUSEUM,
LAVA FLOWS, WATERFALLS**

The next morning, we wake feeling refreshed to broken clouds. We drive a few miles on U.S. Highway 20 past Bend, at 80,000-plus people, the largest city in Central Oregon, and then south on Highway 97. Our destination this morning is

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the High Desert Museum, a world-class museum that celebrates the plants, animals and natural history of the high desert. We wander through the many galleries — exhibits filled with Gila monsters, bobcats, Canadian lynx and the Hall of Settlement and Exploration, which features dioramas of the area's Native Americans, early trappers, emigrants and miners. The museum has created an entire town with sound effects that includes a saddle shop, assay office, mercantile and Chinese store that visitors can walk through. The exhibits go on and on — the Spirit of the West gallery explores “leapers and creepers,” snakes, frogs, geckos and more; and the Hall of Plateau Indians features a big tule mat summer tipi as well as colorful and intricate embroidery, shell work, hand-beaded dresses and moccasins.

Outdoors, the museum is even more impressive. We walk along pine-shaded paths past big bronze sculptures of elk, bear and pronghorn. But it's the birds of prey exhibit that's really breathtaking. The museum houses native birds too injured

to return to the wild — and seeing bald eagles, golden eagles and great-horned owls up close is humbling. When a golden eagle stretches its wings, we're awed by her 7-foot wingspan that, in the wild, would carry it over a 60-square-mile territory.

Exhilarated by the High Desert Museum, we churn a couple of miles south on Highway 97 and spot a sprawling field of black lava surrounding a large cinder cone. More than 750,000 years ago, Central Oregon was a hotbed of volcanic activity. As lava flowed from Newberry Volcano, it cooled and shrank, leaving large buttes like this cinder cone and miles of craggy lava strewn across the landscape. This is Newberry National Volcanic Monument and site of Lava Lands Visitor Center. As we pull off the shoulder to snap a few photos, the sun skirts a cloud and streams onto the lava field, forming a beautiful rainbow over the mountain of lava.

Lava Lands Visitor Center is closed for the season and, while we could hike into the lava beds, instead we turn off at the Center and drive 4 miles down a narrow road to the parking area for Benham Falls. We snug the rig under the pines, leash up the dogs and head off along the Deschutes River on an old railroad-bed-turned-hiking-trail that used to service the area's logging industry. The trail, wide and flat and wheelchair accessible, is only a mile round trip. And though the sun has disappeared and it's starting to mist, it's a pleasant jaunt to the falls, a turbulent gush of water swirling through steep canyon walls. We're surprised to see loads of people — parents pushing strollers, young couples with dogs and daypacks, groups of older hikers — out enjoying the trail, despite the iffy weather.

The area's volcanic activity has left plenty of lava tubes and caves and we're keen to explore them. After our falls hike, we drive a short distance to Lava River Cave, but we're disappointed to find a gate preventing entrance. While fewer crowds are a plus during fall, some attractions are closed for the season. Undaunted, we make a few phone calls and hook up with Wanderlust Tours, a local group that leads visitors through local sights like Boyd Cave. While Boyd isn't open to the general public, Wanderlust has a special permit to take visitors into its fragile ecosystem.

With our guide, we stop at what looks like sagebrush covered land and hike a quarter mile to a crack in the earth with a steep metal staircase descending into the gloom. Discovered in 1920 by a man scouting for timber, the cave is one of 15 in the Arnold Cave system.

We flip on our helmet lights and scramble over rocks to walk along the room-sized tunnel. It's cool year-round, about 45 degrees, and Native Americans used these caves to store food in the summer. Unlike limestone caves that have stalagmites and stalactites (rock icicles), lava caves are made up of basalt, silica, and white opal and the walls are relatively smooth. We spot tiny bats, their fuzzy coats huddled against the ceiling. At one point, our guide turns off our lights. The inky black and the silence are so deep it feels as though we've fallen like Alice in Wonderland into some otherworldly dimension.

It's late afternoon by the time we return to Bend's small, walkable downtown. The rain has stopped and the sun is shining so we grab a sub sandwich at the New York Deli and spend a couple of hours poking around the town's interesting shops and strolling along the river at Drake Park.

Then we head to the Old Mill District, a former timber mill that's been converted into an upscale shopping area. We're amazed when we see a strange looking craft that's part bar, part bicycle peddle by. This is CyclePub, an innovative roving bar that lets people cycle around town and simultaneously drink craft beer. In recent years, Bend has redefined itself as an artisan beer town and, with 12 breweries, it's become one of the hottest brewing cities in the country. In fact, there are more breweries per capita here than in any other city in the U.S. We join the fun by quaffing a couple of pints at Good Life Brewing.

Alas, all good things must come to an end, and it's nearly 6 p.m. when we pack up and head toward Mount Hood and home. As we drive westward into a black wall of clouds ahead, we know we're heading into rain. No worries, we can always come back to our sunny oasis in Central Oregon. ♦



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

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Stealth dinghy braking system was installed on a 2011 Honda CR-V towed by a 35-foot Ford chassis motorhome.

SILENT PARTNER

THE **NEW STEALTH BRAKE SYSTEM** FROM HOPKINS MANUFACTURING IS AN EFFECTIVE SOLUTION FOR DINGHY BRAKING

by OWEN MITCHELL

Motorhome braking with a dinghy in tow can never be too good. While the service brakes in all motorhomes are adequate for stopping the gross vehicle weight rating of the motorhome, longer stopping distances can be expected when towing a vehicle. The problem is exacerbated in gasoline-powered motorhomes that can't take advantage of an engine or exhaust brake commonly found on diesel motorhomes.



The Stealth controller can be adjusted for braking effect, and it signals when the dinghy brakes are actuated.

PHOTOS: OWEN MITCHELL

The Stealth kit includes a brake controller (lower left) and actuator unit (foreground) plus other hardware for inertia-sensed dinghy braking.

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Aside from increased safety, legality is another item that suggests the value of dinghy brake systems; manufacturers cite numerous laws in both the U.S. and Canada that require auxiliary braking for towed vehicles.

Fortunately, motorhome owners have a variety of portable and permanently-installed dinghy braking systems available to them, and recently, another product has been added to the fold: The Stealth by Hopkins Manufacturing Corp., makers of the BrakeBuddy family of dinghy towing products.

The Stealth's list of features seems to address the main concerns of motorhome owners. The system is out of the way and out of sight, and there's nothing additional to install, remove, connect or disconnect whenever the vehicle is hitched or unhitched. It's also a proportional system, meaning that it senses deceleration of the coach/dinghy combination and applies the dinghy brakes accordingly. A dash-mounted controller allows for easy adjustment or manual braking if desired.

In addition to the controller, the Stealth system includes three primary components that help the motorhome and dinghy vehicle stop as one. An actuator unit for the dinghy vehicle is connected via cable and pulley to the brake pedal; a vacuum pump under the vehicle's hood maintains vacuum to the brake booster; and a specially designed, safety break-away wiring harness connects the coach and dinghy.

Here's how it works: When the motorhome driver steps on the brake pedal, the controller senses motorhome braking (inertia) and signals the actuator unit (a small linear winch) to reel in the cable attached to the brake pedal, effectively depressing it. The pedal is "live" (fully vacuum powered), so it doesn't take a heavy pull to actuate the brakes. Meanwhile, the controller gives the driver a "bb" signal to indicate that dinghy brakes are being applied.

INSTALLATION

To get an idea of how Stealth is installed and how it works while traveling, we observed as the system was installed in a 2011 Honda CR-V, towed behind a 35-foot Ford chassis motorhome. The installation was performed at Camping World,



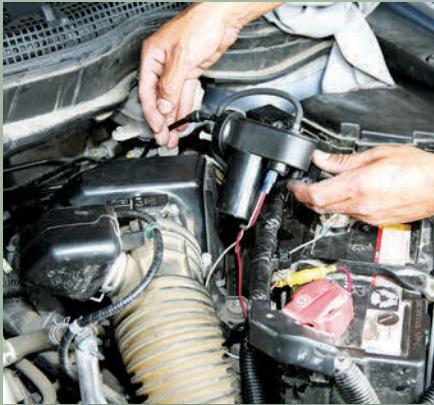
The control unit is mounted in the cargo area with the cable and wiring routed forward under door thresholds.



Cable and wiring are routed under the driver's door threshold.



Cable housing from the main unit is routed to a pulley bracket, where cable is routed around the pulley and attached to a bracket on brake pedal arm. Excess cable is trimmed.



Space for the vacuum pump is tight in the CR-V — sandwiched here between the battery and air cleaner.



Hopkins' plug-and-play taillight wiring kit includes a diode converter mounted behind a panel in the cargo area.



The Stealth kit includes a unique electrical motorhome-to-car wiring harness and receptacle for the front of the vehicle.

Wood Village, Ore. (near Portland) by a very competent and experienced staff. The labor estimate for the Stealth installation was about five hours for a technician who is experienced with the product.

The Honda CR-V offers reasonably good access for the Stealth components, including the 13.5L x 4.5W x 3.5H-inch actuator, the largest component in the system. It would not quite fit under the driver's seat, so it was mounted behind the left-side passenger seat, occupying a bit of cargo space.

From this location, the cable leading from the control unit is routed forward along door thresholds and under the driver's seat floor mat to a position below the brake pedal.

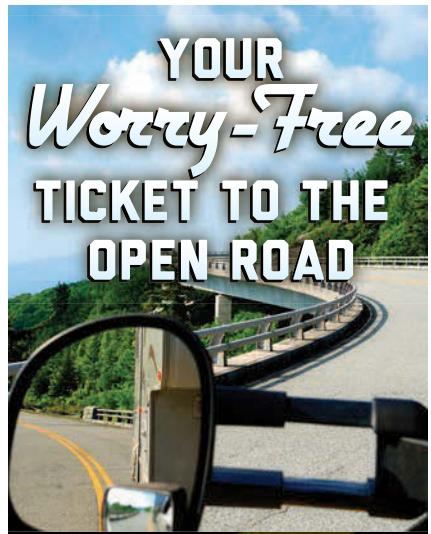
The cable and a pulley are attached to the floor below the brake pedal, and the cable is connected to a bracket on the pedal arm for a straight, downward pull. Electrical wiring is routed forward from the control unit through the firewall and into the engine compartment.

The vacuum pump is installed in the engine compartment, and a one-way check valve is teed into the CR-V brake booster line so the pump can keep the brake booster at full vacuum while the car is being towed.

The controller, which is the brain of the system, is mounted to the motorhome dash and wiring is routed to a connector at the rear of the coach. This controller is similar to those used in vehicles used to tow trailers equipped with electric brakes — in fact, it can be used for activating the brakes in either a dinghy or a trailer. An inertia sensor detects motorhome braking and electronically actuates the dinghy brakes proportionately.

The Stealth actuator and vacuum pump are operated from the dinghy battery, and the system includes a method of maintaining battery charge by the motorhome alternator. This is handled through the main harness.

The Stealth coiled power cord from the motorhome to the dinghy includes not only the tail/brake light circuits, but also control wiring for the Stealth main unit and vacuum pump. Fortunately for us, Ford includes a wiring harness in the motorhome for trailer brakes and lights; the receptacle for this harness is found under the dash.



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However, Ford didn't include a 12-volt DC hot line or a connector spade inside the rear wiring receptacle for such the line, which is required for the Stealth. So, the line and a new receptacle had to be installed and an optional Hopkins taillight wiring kit was required for the CR-V.

If, for some unlikely reason, the dinghy were to become accidentally unhitched from the motorhome while on the road, the Stealth coiled wiring cable (tethered by a steel cord to the coach) would be yanked from the receptacle on the dinghy, activating its brakes. After disconnecting the harness plug, a special cover is inserted into the receptacle on the dinghy when you're not towing to prevent brake activation.

ON THE ROAD

With the installation complete, we dialed the controller's sensitivity and output settings to maximum, tested the manual control button to see if it would activate dinghy brakes (it did), and unplugged the wiring harness from the front of the car to simulate an emergency break-away. The Stealth immediately pulled the brake pedal down, and the vacuum pump switched on. We were ready for the next part of our test.

To get a close picture of how Stealth would perform, we had a motorhome driver plus a passenger in the dinghy driver's seat, able to place a finger lightly on the brake pedal to feel its movement. For safety's sake, this portion of the test was performed in a controlled environment. At speeds varying from 20 to 60 MPH, the motorhome driver applied brakes at different levels of force.

Braking effect was modulated well. During light braking, the pedal was pulled down but neither the motorhome driver nor the passenger in the dinghy could feel any surging or jerking; it was seamless. The same was true for heavy braking. With manual activation at highway speed, dinghy braking was barely perceptible, although we knew it was happening — and how much — by monitoring the pedal from inside the dinghy.

During heavy braking (inertia sensing) or with full manual activation, the Stealth did not pull the pedal down enough to take the slack out of the tow bar and hitch (audible), which would

have meant that the car was creating drag on the motorhome. But it was close. We could press the pedal lightly with one finger and make this happen, demonstrated by a clanking sound between hitch ball-mount and receiver. Thus, we had what felt like about the right amount of braking.

The brake controller sensed motorhome braking with very little lag, and signaled "bb" each time dinghy brakes were activated either via inertia sensing or manual control.

The goal for a dinghy brake system is that it should enable the car to handle braking for most or all of its own weight — to keep it from adding significant braking load to the motorhome — which in this case the Stealth provided.

The Stealth and taillight wiring kits include all the necessary parts for the job, as well as a set of instructions that feature most of the detail needed for the installation and operation. A few more descriptions would have been helpful, including a brief explanation of Stealth's operational concept, suggestions on judging performance, adjusting the controller, and a troubleshooting guide. Although installation of the Stealth can be handled by a competent do-it-yourself mechanic, turning the job over to an RV technician with prior experience installing this system may be a wise decision.

The Stealth has an MSRP of \$1,099, but is offered at Camping World for \$999. An optional Hopkins Manufacturing taillight wiring kit, priced at \$79.99, is also required. Many motorhomes already have a "hot" line at the rear of the coach. If not, that installation would be at additional cost.

In addition to the permanently installed Stealth, Brake Buddy offers four portable systems suitable for all types for dinghy braking: Digital Classic, Digital Classic Boost, Vantage Select and Vantage Select Boost. So now, there really is no reason not to use a dinghy braking system, and enjoy the peace of mind that comes with safer travel. ♦

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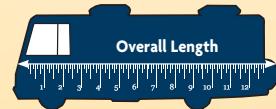
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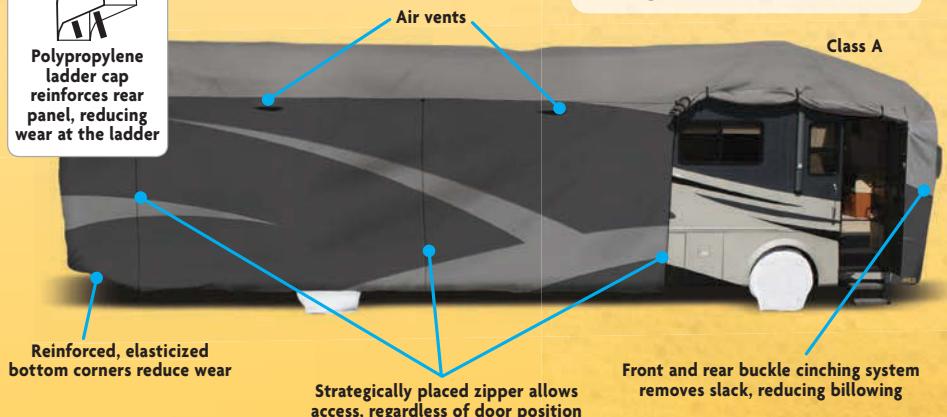
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VISTA 31KE

Winnebago adds a new floor plan for 2014 that emphasizes sleeping, storage and an entry-level price



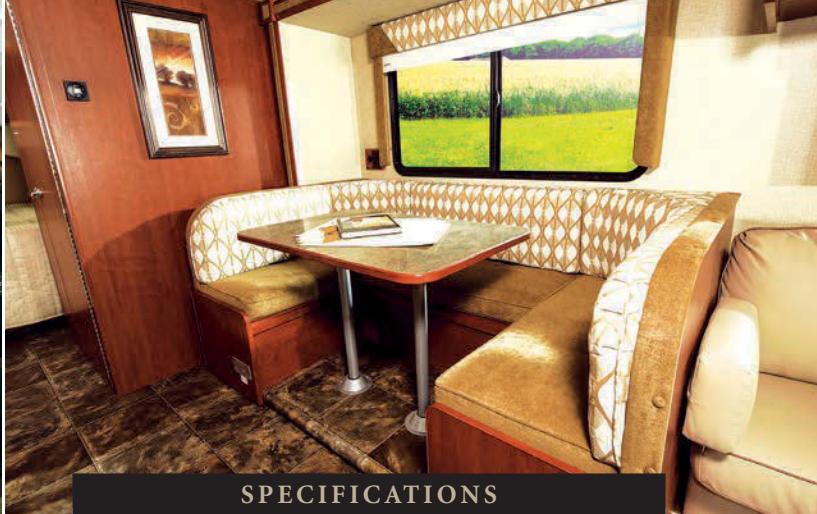
When a potential buyer of a Class A motorhome hears or reads about an entry-level product, the message conjures an image of a coach that's going to be missing a number of creature comforts. Normally, manufacturers scale back on materials and features to keep the price low. Buyers

understand the limitations and are appreciative that there are products on the market that allow those with budget constraints to be part of the RV lifestyle.

Winnebago positions its Vista line as entry level, but takes a different approach when outfitting some of the models. Take the 2014 Vista 31KE, for example. Here's a coach that spans a few inches beyond 31 feet and sports a retail sticker of \$97,504 with the optional loft bed in the cab (\$735) and freight. The kicker: This coach is loaded with feature-rich amenities, can sleep a large family, and after working out a fair price with the dealer, can likely be purchased for an amount of money that's comparable to the cost of a luxury car.

The coach is augmented by a single slide that moves a U-shaped dinette and adjacent sofa bed out enough to make the living room surprisingly roomy. Turn the two cockpit seats around, and the area works nicely for gathering that large family or for entertaining guests.





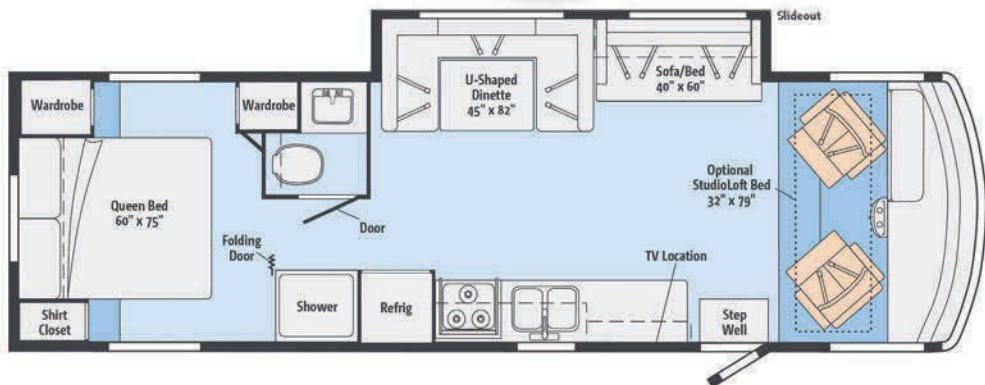
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CHASSIS: FORD F53	WHEELBASE: 190"
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There's a lot going on in the front section of this motorhome, where the bulk of the sleeping accommodations are located. Two people can sleep on the U-shaped dinette when converted into a bed, after dropping the table and piecing together the cushions into a 45-by-82-inch surface. A younger person can sleep on the jackknife sofa since dimensions are restricted to 40-by-60 inches. A third sleeping area is provided by the aforementioned loft bed that deploys by dropping the platform, which is stored flush against the ceiling above the driver and co-pilot seats. It comes down with little effort by opening the latch on either side and pulling down. The result is a 32-by-79-inch bed, which can comfortably sleep an adult or two



small kids. In all, four people can comfortably sleep in the front of this coach, as long one or two are kids.

By day, the dinette can easily seat four or five, with plenty of room to spread out using the oversize table. The sofa is not the most comfortable place to sit, but it's tolerable for short periods of time.

The galley, directly across from the dinette, serves multiple purposes. A large counter offers plenty of room for the cook to spread out. Appliances are basic, and include a three-burner stove with oven, microwave and two-door refrigerator. The double sink occupies the back portion of the counter, but the biggest uninterrupted section is devoted to food prep, etc. A 32-inch LCD TV is hung on the wall behind this part of the counter, putting it in perfect eyeshot of the dinette and couch. Users just have to be careful not to get too wild while preparing meals to protect the screen from flying debris.

Storage above and below the galley counter is plentiful, with large enough cabinets to handle bulky items. The wall



next to the microwave is fitted with the controls for the slide, generator, water heater, water pump and systems monitor — in keeping with Winnebago's OnePlace configuration that centralizes such panels.

A short hallway connects the living area and rear bedroom. Between the two is what seems like a small sliver of space allocated to the bathroom. While this area is definitely a minor part of the floorplan, in actuality, this center bath works exceptionally well. The door to the toilet/lavatory room can be opened fully to add privacy to the bath area, and if the folding door

to the bedroom is not utilized, the entire bath/bedroom area can be isolated from the rest of the coach for a master suite effect. Larger people will have no problem showering, and plenty of room is provided around the toilet. There's not a lot of counter space surrounding the sink, but the nearby cabinets can supplement.

Out back, the short queen bed (75 inches long) is not fitted with the best foam mattress we've ever slept on, but it was more comfortable than most in this category. There's plenty of walk-around room to make the bed, and areas for stashing personal items are strategically located on each side of the mattress. Wardrobe space is fairly decent, considering the bedroom does not have the benefit of a slideout. Large windows allow good cross ventilation and ambient lighting. When night falls, incandescent fixtures, spread out and plentiful, produce good artificial lighting.

Overall aesthetics make it clear that this motorhome is not pretending to be something it's not. Décor, although maybe a little understated, is pleasant and accented by a few niceties that would not normally show up in a motorhome in this price range. Features like MCD Innovations blackout roller shades, a glass shower door, rear view camera and automatic leveling jacks are items not normally seen as standard equipment in entry-level motorhomes.

The Vista shares construction techniques used by Winnebago throughout its lines. A stout aluminum structure is built on top of the Ford F53 chassis and the cab portion is strengthened by a steel cage. High-gloss fiberglass is used for the side walls and caps, and the roof is also topped with fiberglass. High-density block

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foam insulation in a vacuum bonded environment provides necessary insulation. Dual-pane windows are not offered in this model, but they are tinted.

Buyers have a choice of white or taupe-colored fiberglass, the latter of which is richer looking and visually can almost be confused with full-body paint. Graphics blend nicely with the taupe exterior and the overall look is neither splashy nor Spartan. The stainless steel wheel covers — which are typically used at this price point, rather than aluminum wheels — add some flair to the appearance.

What really stands out is the exterior storage. Side opening doors with slam-latch locks lead to cavernous compartments, which is totally unexpected for a 31-foot coach on a 16,000-pound-rated chassis. A large locker in the rear of the coach has three access doors — one on each side and one in the back wall. While that space alone can swallow up a lot of gear, the side compartments offer sanctuary for longer, flatter items that can be packed in the pass-through section — a feature less common in smaller motorhomes. One of the compartments is re-

served for hookup utilities and it's neat and well organized. The power cord must be connected to a junction box when using the 4,000-watt generator.

Owners will have to understand that there are loading limitations with the lighter Ford chassis and refrain from going hog-wild, even though the available space will be very tempting to fill.

The Vista line consists of six models ranging from just a tad shorter than 27 feet to 36 feet, 4 inches. As you go up in size, the features richen and so does the price. What doesn't change are the genetics. The Vista 31KE is not just an inexpensive motorhome destined to disappoint. It's pure Winnebago — and with that comes the comfort in knowing that the coach has the engineering and design prowess behind it to promote good longevity. The value is there and so is the livability for growing families on a budget, or even couples looking to spend time with children and grandchildren in a right-size motorhome that's suitable for just about any destination. ♦

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Progressive Insurance, Circle 118 on Reader Service Card

In the last two issues, we concentrated on maintenance schedules and procedures to help keep the chassis rolling down the highway without surprise interruptions. We stressed becoming familiar with the chassis owner's manual, and hopefully, you're keeping a detailed log of necessary scheduled maintenance items and services. Complete chassis maintenance on a timely basis is important to the reliability and durability of your motorhome — and promotes peace of mind while on the road.

Perhaps because their motorhome is not used on a regular basis, some owners pay less attention to the brakes than they should. However, it's important to remember that brakes are not indestructible and are a normal wear item for all motorhomes. At some point in time, the brakes will need to be replaced. It is recommended to have a professional inspect the front and rear brakes annually — and be sure

to have the emergency brake system checked out at this time as well.

AIR BRAKE SYSTEMS

The majority of diesel motorhome chassis are equipped with an air brake system. Air brakes have their advantages over hydraulic brakes since there is no fluid to regularly check or replace. In addition, air brakes are not comprised of a master cylinder and wheel cylinders that can be prone to failure. The lack of high-pressure rubber hoses that eventually fail or deteriorate also simplifies overall maintenance.

In order for air brakes to function properly, air pressure needs to be maintained at 80-100 PSI. Gauges are provided in the instrument cluster to monitor air pressure. An audible, low-air-pressure warning will sound at roughly 60 PSI. If this occurs,

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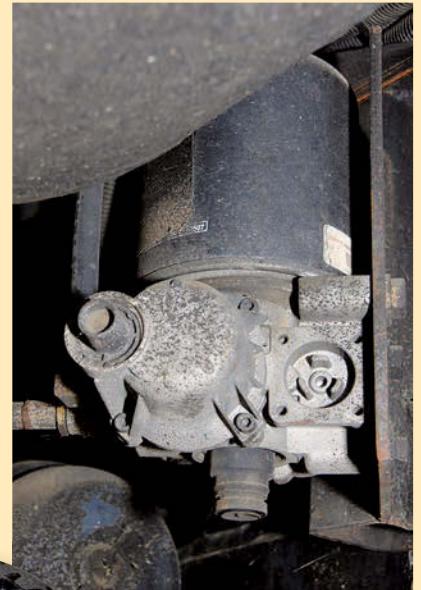
**TIMELY BRAKE AND WHEEL BEARING
INSPECTION AND SERVICE ARE
CRITICAL TO SAFE —
AND EFFICIENT —
OPERATION**

by BILL AND JENN GEHR





Most diesel coaches are equipped with an air brake system that includes an air storage tank (above). Even with an automatic moisture ejection system, it's a good idea to manually drain the air storage tank by pulling on the valve lanyard every six months or so to remove any residual moisture



The moisture ejection system (commonly called an air dryer, above) is equipped with one of two types of desiccant cartridges (left). Make sure you verify the type of filter your coach has before beginning the service procedure.



pull over as quickly as safely possible. When the air pressure reaches 40-45 psi, the emergency brake — not the parking brake — will automatically engage. Low-air pressure stems from an air-pressure leak or failure of the system to provide compressed air.

Excess moisture in the air system can cause brake failure. Most air brake systems are equipped with a replaceable desiccant cartridge (an air dryer) designed to trap moisture and oil produced by the air compressor during operation. Low air pressure can result if the filter becomes clogged. Plan on changing the desiccant cartridge every two or three years; it's a good idea to carry a spare cartridge in case of emergency. In fact, simply changing the desiccant filter may be just enough to get you rolling again.

There are a few chassis that utilize an air brake system equipped with an automatic moisture ejection system. Despite these built-in automatic systems, it may still be necessary to manually drain the air storage tank. Just to be on the safe side, it's best to manually drain the air storage tank every six months to ensure that there is no moisture contamination, regardless

of the type of moisture control system. Some manufacturers install a pull-style lanyard located inside a baggage door compartment for convenient draining of the air storage tank.

Modern diesel and gasoline chassis have anti-lock brake systems (ABS) that make routine inspections and maintenance even more critical. If the dash ABS indicator illuminates, don't ignore it. The brakes may feel normal, but there can be a serious problem that must be addressed in order to avoid premature failure due to normal or abnormal wear and tear on one or more system components.

HYDRAULIC BRAKE SYSTEMS

Hydraulic disc brakes have changed considerably in the last few decades, from basic drum brakes on all four wheels, to powerful anti-lock rotors and discs at each corner. There's little doubt that hydraulic braking has come a long way toward providing added safety and decreased stopping distances. Annual inspections must include checking rotors, pads, drums and linings (depending on the type of braking

system) for excess wear, as well as the integrity of the entire hydraulic system.

For inspections, the starting point is the brake master cylinder. As brake pads and linings wear, the brake fluid level will diminish. Check the owner's manual for the correct type of fluid necessary when topping off the reservoir. When adding fluid, be sure to inspect the cap and reservoir for any debris, moisture or rust. If any of these contaminants are present, have the hydraulic system flushed immediately. Since brake fluid is hygroscopic (absorbs water), it should be changed every two years to keep its boiling point high.

The brake rotors should appear smooth with no deep grooving, cracks or blue/purple heat spots. The inner and outer brake pads should be measured from the metal backing plate to the rotor surface; this is typically done through an inspection port in the brake caliper. The pads should also be measured top and bottom (leading and trailing edges) to ensure they are wearing evenly. The brake and/or chassis manufacturer has a recommended minimum thickness that must be adhered to; once the brake lining is worn away and the backing plate begins making

contact with the rotor, you're on your way to an expensive repair bill.

Chassis that are equipped with a hydroboost system rely on pressure cre-

ated by the power steering pump or electric motor to provide proper brake fluid pressure. Make sure the reservoir is filled to the correct level and that the drive belt

(where applicable) is in good shape.

Take into consideration the environment that the coach — and dinghy vehicle — is regularly exposed to. For example,



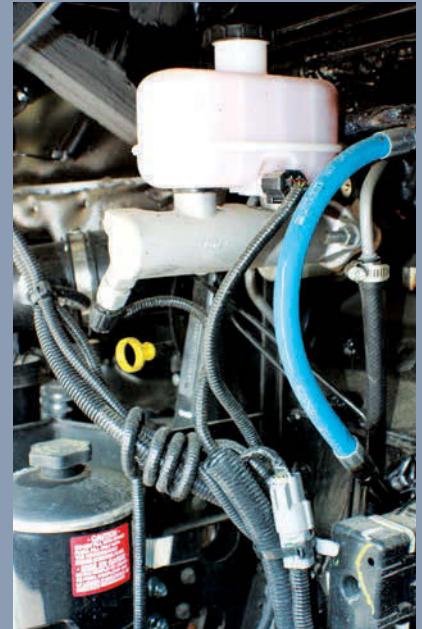
A brake rotor in good condition (like this one) should be free from any deep grooves (galling), heat spots or cracks.



Knowing how to measure (or at least see) brake pad wear is important. The brake caliper typically has an inspection port that shows the caliper (rust-colored part to the left), pad (black line in the middle) and metal backing plate (thin black strip).



If your motorhome spends a lot of time near the coast, keep an eye out for signs of corrosion. Rust and/or oxidation can hinder brake caliper function, causing loss of braking performance, uneven wear, or both.



Earlier hydroboost systems used pressure from the power steering pump (instead of a large vacuum booster) to provide proper brake fluid pressure. With that in mind, paying attention to drive belt wear is particularly important.



Brake fluid is hygroscopic so it should be flushed and replaced every two years under normal conditions (more often in very humid climates) to maintain the correct boiling point.



Left: Depending on the environment in which you live, additives can help the performance of your diesel coach. Diesel fuel conditioners/supplements have various claimed benefits depending on the brand, while air brake anti-freeze inhibits moisture and corrosion in air brake systems. Above: Newer hydroboost systems utilize an electric motor to provide pressure to the brake system. If your motorhome is so equipped, you can often hear the motor running when the brake pedal is applied.

if you live near the beach, rust can be a problem. Make a point to have the brake system checked twice a year. This is essential when opting for the coastal lifestyle. Rust is a killer, especially on brake calipers where corrosive buildup will almost certainly restrict the action of the caliper, causing loss of braking or uneven wear.

WHEEL BEARING MAINTENANCE

Several years ago, an owner was complaining about a noise emanating from the right front wheel area. I drove the coach a short distance to the service bay, and to my surprise, the tire and wheel fell off. The bearings had literally disintegrated from lack of lubrication. The damage was extensive and the repair time consuming; the owner unfortunately lost two days of vacation time while waiting for replacement parts.

Front wheel bearings seem to be an “out of sight out of mind” maintenance item. Whether you have a diesel or a gas chassis, check the section in your owner’s manual that refers to wheel bearing maintenance for service intervals. Ford



Regular front wheel bearing service is vital for long bearing life and safety. This bearing had been run so long without proper maintenance, it was on the verge of disintegration. Note the missing roller in the middle, and severe pitting in the rollers.

converted most of its Class A chassis to sealed bearings around 1999. The Workhorse W16 and W18 chassis have a spindle-less hub system with uni-pack bearings that don’t require maintenance or adjustment. W20, W22, and W24 chassis have an “oil lubricated front hub” bearing system. The oil level needs to be checked



An oil lubricated front hub (aka oil bath) system allows you to visually inspect the oil level. Make sure you use the correct oil, and keep it at or near the fill line.

every year through a sight glass that is located in the center of the hub. Make sure the oil is up to the full line, and check for leaks if the oil level is low.

Be sure to consult the owner’s manual for the correct type and weight of oil if you plan to top off the oil level yourself. Remove the cap in the center of the hub adjacent to the sight glass and fill to the line. Inspect the condition of the oil once a year.

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Chevrolet P-chassis utilize a conventional bearing system that requires periodic maintenance; they should be cleaned, inspected and pressure packed with a high temperature wheel bearing grease. Don't forget to replace the grease seals. While the hubs are removed, the calipers, brake pads, brake hoses and overall condition of the brake rotors should be checked. Be sure to use a torque wrench when tightening the spindle nut, as the adjustment is critical. Ford E-350- and E-450-based Class C chassis require the same maintenance as the Chevrolet P-chassis.

Most modern diesel motorhome chassis use a wet hub (oil bath) front wheel bearing system that requires an annual inspection, similar to the Workhorse chassis. Prior to 2005, most diesel chassis required the same servicing as the Chevrolet P-chassis.

Basic service for any oil lubrication system is fairly simple. Remove the wheel covers and inspect the inner and outer parts of the hubs for any signs of oil leakage; it's not necessary to remove the tires

or wheels. The oil can be changed on a short-term basis by removing the rubber plug that is located to the right of the plastic inspection cover and sucking out old oil using a syringe. Another way to do this is to remove the plastic cover and allow the oil to drain into a pan. Drawbacks to this method: it's a messy process and the seal on the plastic cover will need to be replaced before reinstalling.

Converting a conventional wheel bearing system on a diesel motorhome chassis to an oil bath system is simple and less expensive over the long run. Many experts agree that converting to an oil bath system not only lubricates more efficiently, but the changeover will save money in wheel bearing service.

With the proper maintenance, you can expect your brakes and bearings to be functioning at their best the next time you hit the road. ♦



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



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GIMME SHELTER

AS THE SEASON WINDS DOWN, IT'S TIME TO MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A PROPER COVER FOR YOUR MOTORHOME

by KRISTOPHER BUNKER

At some point, you're probably going to have to put your motorhome away for storage, and when you do — whether at home in the driveway or in a storage facility — it's a wise decision to invest in an RV cover. A motorhome sitting in the driveway or the side yard is subject to the best (and worst) that Mother Nature has to offer, and not giving it any protection can be a recipe for expensive wear and tear, not to mention the affect on the exterior aesthetics.

"UV degradation is probably one of the biggest problems facing motorhome owners today," says Morgan Ein, managing partner at ADCO Products Inc. "The UV light will essentially destroy everything in its path." And that UV exposure goes beyond simply fading the coach's color; it can lead to much more expensive repairs. "Not only does covering your motorhome preserve its appearance, but you must remember that the paint itself is a protective barrier used to keep metal and plastic components from breaking down," says Lane Wilkinson, merchandise manager at Classic Accessories. "If an RV's paint is not protected, the components underneath will eventually be exposed and begin to show signs of damage."

Paint is not the only subject of damaging exposure. Gel-coated fiberglass can oxidize over time, losing its luster and looking dull and chalky. This damage can



greatly affect a motorhome's resale value. And since a motorhome is an investment, it should be protected as such. It's no secret that, when buying a used motorhome, the first thing that grabs a buyer's eye is the overall condition of the exterior surface. Faded decals, chalky front/end caps and sun-damaged components can seriously impact the selling price.

But the sun isn't the only element that's hard on a motorhome. "Tree sap can also be very damaging to the paint, causing staining and erosion to the finish," says Marina Monet, sales manager at www.CoverQuest.com. Motorhome covers are also designed to protect vehicles from bird droppings and acid-rain situations, and obviously help keep the exterior clean — especially EPDM roofs. "If you use an RV cover, it's very easy to see that you'll spend less time washing it and more time enjoying it," says Ein.

So now that we have established the need for a cover, it's time to do a bit of research. Remember, a motorhome cover is protection for your investment, so it's not always wise to pick the cheapest option at the local warehouse store. "If you're going to get a product, get a brand," says Skip McKee, CEO of Eevelle Covers. "We've seen an onslaught of overseas covers being produced, and shipped here with the promise of a lifetime warranty. There's no way you'd get a lifetime warranty on an RV cover."

Generally, a motorhome cover is made from polypropylene fabric or polyester, with varying methods of doubling or even tripling the layers for additional protection on the roof section. The fabrics are sometimes treated (or formulated) with different water and UV repellents, and also must allow water and moisture to evaporate to avoid mold and mildew forming beneath. There are, of course, higher-end and custom covers that contain different construction materials. Essentially, the more expensive options offer more protection (don't they always?), and custom covers tend to billow less in the wind than universal covers due to their tighter fit.

Once the cover is in place (see sidebar), it is generally connected with straps beneath the belly of the coach. Good-quality covers will feature vents to reduce billowing, and some offer zippered panels to allow access to the doors and compartments, which come in handy when loading for a trip. Also, the better quality covers may be lighter, which makes handling — and storage while the motorhome is in use — much easier.

Next comes the decision to buy a universal or a custom-fit cover. Custom covers are indeed more expensive, but their exact fit can mean a longer lifespan for both cover and motorhome finish. And they fit better, usually requiring fewer tie-downs, if any.

When selecting a cover based on the motorhome size, measure it yourself; don't rely on the model numbers or the registration paperwork. "Measure end to end, bike rack to ladder," says McKee. "That is the key."

Covering a motorhome is a wise choice to protect your investment. You likely have a cover on the grill in your backyard; why not your home on wheels?

To help you with your search, we've listed some of the top companies in the RV cover field. Many also offer tire covers, which we also recommend you purchase even if the cover appears to conceal most of the tires.

ADCO



ADCO RV covers are produced in both universal and custom configurations in a variety of outdoor fabrics. ADCO's core products are what they refer to as Designer Series Contour-fit RV Covers, available in SFS AquaShed and DuPont TyvekRV product lines. Both lines feature three-ply polypropylene side walls, while the roof of each cover features either the SFS AquaShed or the DuPont TyvekRV fabrics.

The SFS AquaShed is a three-layer fabric, the outer two layers being polypropylene and the middle layer a high-tech film that allows moisture to pass through. It's intended to be used in moderate climates or for short-term storage. The fabric is gray and very gentle on automotive finishes, according to the company.



DuPont TyvekRV fabric is engineered to block up to 98 percent of dirt and dust particles larger than 3 microns, and also blocks up to 99.8 percent of the sun's damaging UV rays, according to DuPont. TyvekRV is also resistant to solvents, acids and alkalis, offering the motorhome improved protection from bird droppings and acid-type rain. This fabric has a two-toned yellow/beige body and a white roof, and is available in contour-fit and custom-fit configurations.

Produced in custom-fit configurations only, Sunbrella fabric by Glen Raven Mills is made from woven acrylic, meaning it is resistant to cold-cracking, and the color of the fabric is placed into the fibers as it is extruded, to make the material fade-resistant. This fabric is offered in tan and gray and is recommended for anyone who plans to own their motorhome for many years and wants a tailored-fit RV cover.

ADCO products are available at www.campingworld.com. Visit the site for pricing.

ADCO Products, 800-541-ADCO, www.adcoprod.com

Camco



Camco RV Products offers a variety of RV accessories, including covers. The UltraGuard is recommended for cold, snowy climates. The triple-layer SFS top panel is formulated to repel water, allowing for maximum resistance to rainfall and snow. The sides are constructed using heavy-duty polypropylene, and the vented design helps battle mold and mildew. The integrated vent flaps reduce wind lofting and inside moisture.

UltraShield covers are recommended for use in warm, sunny climates. The lightweight woven polyester offers protection from the elements, and vent flaps reduce billowing in the wind. UltraShield covers also feature an integrated self-adjusting hold-down system. Visit the website for pricing and ordering.
Camco, 800-334-2004, www.camco.net

Classic Accessories



Classic Accessories offers three product lines for covering motorhomes. The most advanced line is PermaPRO, which is made from polyester using rip-stop technology, which can also be found in parachutes. PermaPRO is a thin material that is treated to keep water from penetrating the fabric. The covers carry a four-year warranty.

Classic's midline cover is called the PolyPRO 3, and is made from polypropylene. The roof features three layers of poly for extra UV-protection, in addition to preventing moisture damage to the motorhome's roof. PolyPRO 3 covers feature a three-year warranty.

The entry-level cover is the PolyPRO 1, which is constructed from a single layer of polypropylene. The covers feature a two-year warranty. Visit the website for more info and pricing.
Classic Accessories, 800-854-2315, www.classicaccessories.com

Covercraft



Covercraft covers are available in three fabrics.

Ultra'tect Custom covers are made from solution-dyed SaturaMax yarns, offering superior shape retention and water-shedding capabilities. Ultra'tect covers are recommended for motorhomes that are subject to prolonged sun exposure and extreme elements, and are available in brown or gray.

WeatherShield HD covers are woven by Glen Raven Mills using solution-dyed UV-resistant polyester fibers, and then finished with an immersion encapsulation process, wherein a finish is placed inside the fabric to bond to each individual thread.

Sunbrella covers are also manufactured by Glen Raven Mills, and are made of the same fabrics used in the marine industry for bimini tops, sail covers and deck enclosures. Sunbrella fabrics provide superior UV blockage while still allowing moisture to evaporate out from the coach. Visit the website for more info and pricing.

Covercraft Industries, 800-426-8377, www.rvcovers4u.com

CoverQuest



CoverQuest.com offers ADCO products (mentioned previously) in addition to Carver covers. Carver covers are made in the USA and are constructed of a woven, 6-ounce polyester material that is significantly lighter than many covers on the market, according to the company. The polyester material is made of 300-denier filament polyester yarns, and is treated with marine-grade water-repellent, UV and mildew inhibitors. Available in two colors, Silver Cloud and Desert Sand, CoverQuest covers carry a five-year-warranty.

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Evelle

Evelle offers three universal covers at varying price points designed for the RV market. All covers feature straps every 3-4 feet for securing to the motorhome, and vents in the fabric work to allow moisture to pass through to help fight mold and mildew. The covers are treated with a No. 8 UV finish to minimize sun damage.

The entry-level Traveler is a lightweight polypropylene cover that doesn't have any zippers. It is recommended for light use and carries a one-year warranty.

The midline Expedition covers are Evelle's most popular selling brand. They are also made of lightweight polypropylene and feature straps and roof vents, but offer the additional feature of a zippered side entry. Expedition covers are designed to be a bit more durable



and thus carry a three-year warranty.

The top-of-the-line Goldline covers are made of a marine fabric and offer all the features of the Expedition. Goldline covers are semi-custom in that the sizing pattern comes within 18-24 inches of the actual motorhome make/model. Visit the website for more info and pricing.

Evelle, 760-434-2231,
www.evelle.com



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

Covering Your Motorhome

HERE ARE SOME TIPS FROM THE PROS:

- Get a buddy! Anytime you're on the roof, it's a good idea to have somebody on the ground helping you.
- When the cover is taken out of its packaging, spread it out on a clean surface, such as a lawn. Open all the clips, zippers, etc., and get a good look at the geography of the cover before you take it to the roof.
- Once you've stretched it out a bit, apply it inside out so that it falls into place. Some companies even package their covers inside out for this reason.
- Installing a cover does not come without necessary precautions. Climbing on the roof can be dangerous and should only be done if you are confident of your footing and balance and the roof is designed to be walked on. A safer way to roll out the cover is to use a ladder on the side of the rig.
- Over the years, RV owners have devised various methods for storing/installing covers. One method is to roll the cover off the roof, fold the sides neatly into the center and place it in a 55-gallon trash can for storage. When it comes time to cover the motorhome, a rope is tied to the end of the material, lifted to the roof and dragged to the front and the sides unfolded as the user walks toward the rear.
- Regardless of the method for installing and/or removing a cover, make sure any sharp edges — gutter spouts, antennas, accessories, etc. — are prevented from rubbing against the material. Premade insulators for ladders, gutter spouts and other rough edges are available from most cover manufacturers. Owners have also used swim noodles and pipe insulators to protect the covers from sharp edges.
- Using a cover to protect a motorhome may require a little effort but there are tremendous upsides, like spending less time cleaning and protecting the finish. Considering the cost of full-body paint or shiny gel-coated fiberglass, an RV cover is a good investment in money and time. ♦

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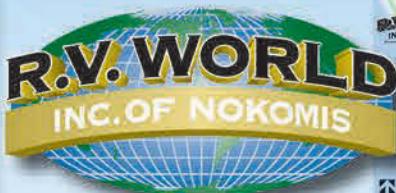
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▼ WATER HOSE HELPER



Many smaller motorhomes have a water-tank filler inlet that is separate from the city water connection. Filling the tank often requires patience while holding the hose in place and adjusting the water flow to prevent the water from backing up. I bought a length of ½-inch clear plastic tubing and a female brass garden hose fitting plus a small hose clamp. Now I can attach the hose and filter to this adapter and slide the tube into the

filler opening far enough to hold it in place. The tube is also small enough to allow air to escape while the tank fills.

RAY I. SCROGGINS | LAS CRUCES, N.M.



KEEPING AN EYE ▲ ON BASEMENT HEAT

Our motorhome has all of the plumbing in the heated basement so winter travel is easier. I do get concerned about the basement temperature when we are using the dash heat or campground electricity for heat, since only the gas furnace heats the basement.

To keep tabs on the temperature in the basement, I purchased a wireless two-zone thermometer and placed both sensors in the basement — one in front, in the water pump area and the other near the dump valves in the rear. The monitor is in the coach and with a push of a button, I can see how cold the basement is and run the furnace if needed.

KEVIN WILMOUTH | GREENWOOD, IND.

SPEEDY BATTERY CABLE CLEANING

To simplify and speed-up battery cable cleaning, I use 20-gauge shotgun cleaning brushes in a portable drill. The diameter of these brushes is a bit less than ½ inch. For even faster, aggressive cleaning, I use 12-gauge brushes, which are ¾ inch (18 mm). I have used a variety of gun cleaning brushes for lots of cleaning projects around the house and in the garage. The brushes are available in stainless steel, bronze and plastic.

**NORM KUBOTA
TORRANCE, CALIF.**

CURBSIDE CONVENIENCE ▼

To make it more convenient to spray things off, I ran a hose from the street-side utility bay. A Y-fitting with valves was used to split the incoming water supply, and then the hose was routed across the basement to the curbside. I placed a hook near the curbside storage door so that the hose is within easy reach. The valve is used so that the hose does not remain pressurized all of the time reducing the risk of leaking. For further convenience, two shelf brackets bolted together back-to-back make a great way to hang the hose on the rear tire so it's ready for quick use. Now I can easily rinse off picnic tables upon arrival, and clean muddy bikes, shoes, the grill and lawn furniture before stowing for departure. This has saved me a lot of time lugging things over to the spigot on the street side.

LEN BENKOSKY | SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ. ♦



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

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

techsavvy

HANDS-ON | HOT LINE | COACH & POWERTRAIN

HANDS-ON | by KEVIN LIVINGSTON



COMPLETE NAVIGATION

Garmin's RV 760LMT GPS is specifically designed for RVers looking to stay one step ahead while on the road — and have access to campground information

Ever get into a situation when you're just not sure which way to go? As a motorhome owner, individual profile information is important when traveling to unknown places where the wrong move can get you into trouble or cause embarrassment.

In an effort to provide a tool for RVers that goes beyond cookie-cutter GPS nav systems, Garmin recently released its RV 760LMT. This Garmin device features travel throughout the U.S. and Canada using preloaded street maps, specialized RV routing and every other imaginable GPS option an RVers could want.

The Garmin RV 760LMT has a monitor with a 7-inch color TFT screen with a white backlight, projecting actual display dimensions of 6.1 inches W x 3.4 inches H. Aside from the massive display, the RV 760LMT features special routing that recognizes RV related restrictions throughout the U.S. and Canada, completely customizable by weight, height, length and width of the motorhome you're driving. The RV 760LMT has 20,000 RV parks and service locations in its memory and offers information on a host of campground amenities.

Bluetooth connectivity allows the unit to be fully compatible with iPhone and Android smartphones. There's also a Smartphone Link for live services using downloadable apps to

access a number of resources, including traffic and weather. This thing is so directed toward RVers that even the icon on the screen is a traveling motorhome.

The unit gets its power by plugging into a 12-volt DC utility socket (aka cigarette lighter) and is equipped with a rechargeable lithium-ion battery, which provides up to 1.5 hours of run time so the Garmin can also be used as a large screen portable GPS. It is also possible to use the RV 760LMT as a back-up video monitor using the external input and the optional wireless camera (\$150).

The Garmin RV 760LMT is so packed with functions, upon setup you might get the feeling that programming and learning this device might be overwhelming and time consuming. But in fact, it's so simple to operate that being able to read and push touch-screen icons are all that's required; it doesn't even come with conventional instructions — just a few basic diagrams to follow. To get started, log on to www.Garmin.com and download any updates using the included USB cable. Access to updates is free for life. Once all downloading is completed, it's just a matter of attaching the window mounting bracket to the power adapter, the GPS unit to the mount and finding a suitable location that's ergonomic for the driver.

Installing the Garmin in a coach may present some challenges, depending on the dash design. It's not practical to mount the suction-cup bracket on the front window in a Class A motorhome because of the distance to the driver, even though there's a 5-foot power cord. It's possible to mount the unit on the side window, and since it responds to voice commands, the driver doesn't have to touch the screen while driving. Mounting on the dash is best for inline visibility, but the suction cup may not stick to all surfaces. Owners can opt for the portable friction mount (\$25) or devise a system to secure the standard bracket.

The RV 760LMT is packed with features and offers the latest technology for getting travelers to their destinations. Having instant knowledge about what's on the road ahead is a big benefit for any motorhome traveler. Viewing a big screen with clear voice commands and easy-to-follow navigational graphics puts safety as priority one. The RV 760LMT has an msrp of \$399.99.

Garmin, www.garmin.com ♦





Disenchanted Customer

UNABLE TO SECURE WARRANTY REPAIRS THAT HAD BEEN PROMISED TO HIM BY HIS RV DEALER, A READER CONTACTED HOT LINE FOR HELP. HE WROTE:

I purchased a new 2012 Forest River Forester Class C motorhome in April 2013 from Southern RV Supercenter in Lafayette, La.

I would like Hot Line's help in getting Southern RV Supercenter and Forest River to repair the folding board on my slideout and replacing the mattress for the bed.

It has been three months since Southern RV Supercenter promised me the motorhome would be repaired. Every time I speak to someone at Southern RV, they say that parts have been ordered and that it will take a couple of weeks to get them.

It is now Aug. 4, 2013, and I have yet to receive my repair work or mattress. Could Hot Line please help me.

**BILLY R. DEROUEN
NEW IBERIA, LA.**

Hot Line contacted Southern RV Supercenter in an attempt to facilitate a positive resolution to DeRouen's dilemma. We received the following letter from DeRouen that filled us in on the conclusion to his case. He wrote:

I would like to thank Hot Line for its assistance in solving my problem with Southern RV Supercenter and Forest River. The job they did was satisfactory. I appreciate your help.

B.D.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

These days we see many letters written about not getting help from RV manufacturers. I have a positive one that I think everyone needs to read.

This summer, on our trip to Wyoming from Texas, my tow dolly trailer tires began separating. I had one changed before we left for our trip, and

I figured it was a fluke or that I had hit something. Then, the other three gave up. The tread began to crack and come off around the entire circumference. These tires had less than 1,000 miles and were only 14 months old.

I contacted Carlisle Transportation Products and they asked for pictures as well as the normal things. I provided the details and received authorization to go get four new replacement tires on their dime. Unfortunately, the nearest store did not handle Carlisle tires. So Carlisle authorized a set amount of money to cover the tire replacement. I purchased, and had installed, four new trailer tires, and submitted my receipt to Carlisle. Guess what ... I received my reimbursement in three weeks, just like they promised.

I say hats off to Carlisle and their customer service folks. The woman I dealt with made the entire ordeal as painless as possible and really made me feel like an important customer.

**ROBERT SLOANE
VIA EMAIL**

HELPFUL CUSTOMER SERVICE

We are full-timers and have a 2002 Newmar Dutch Star with Auto Motion Shades. These are the manual day-and-night double shades. We had a bracket break on the night shade after 13 months. When we contacted Auto Motion Shades, the company replaced the bracket and sent a rewind wrench to rewind the spring — all at their cost. They also sent instructions on how to rewind the shades.

With their good, helpful customer service, we highly recommend them to anyone wanting shades for their coach. We love ours and considered it a hardship during the time they were down.

Thank you Auto Motion Shades.
ED AND YVONNE MCGANN ♦

TO CONTRIBUTE TO HOT LINE, please refer to Contact MotorHome, on page 10.

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Parts Paucity

Do you know where I can get parts for my 1997 Triple E Commander motorhome?

**PIERRE GODIN
VANIER, ONTARIO, CANADA**

It all depends on what parts you need. First, try contacting the coach manufacturer at www.tripleerv.com. It may no longer produce your coach model but that would be the best place to start looking for parts. Motorhome builders use a wide variety of parts from different sources. Many of the items such as lights and appliances are also used by other manufacturers and are fairly readily available through RV repair shops and online. Chassis and drivetrain parts are also widely available, because they were not specific to your coach. Ford chassis parts are available through Ford dealers. The few items that are specific to your make and model may be found at companies listed on www.rv.net/obsolete/?action=group&groupid=1. You can also use an Internet search engine to look for specific items by name and/or brand and part number, or search for "RV salvage yards in Canada" for example.

"GUMMY" GASOLINE GENSET?

We have a 2011 Itasca SunCruiser with a Cummins gasoline generator model 5.5 HGJAB-103 E. Where is the fuel filler for the generator? Does it feed off of the main fuel tank of the chassis? I need to know so I can add fuel stabilizer to keep the carburetor from gumming up. I have had to have a new carburetor installed this year.

BILL BRYANT | CHICAGO, ILL.

The fuel for the genset does come from the motorhome's main tank, and the fuel pickup locations are designed to only draw down to about 1/4 tank, so

they won't run the tank dry if inadvertently left on too long. The reformulated ethanol-laced E10 gasolines are causing havoc with small engines all over the country. You can install a manual fuel cutoff in the fuel line going to the generator, and before you put your coach away for any period exceeding a few weeks, shut the fuel off while the genset is running and allow it to run out of fuel and stall. For longer-term storage, you can add enough fuel storage stabilizer for the main tank, mix it by driving, then follow the same procedure of stalling the genset to remove fuel from the jets and passages.

DINGHY DECISION

We have a 2011 Forester Class C motorhome. Can I tow a 2004 Chrysler

PT cruiser GT stick shift four wheels down?

GEORGE FRANK | CLOVIS, CALIF.

MotorHome's annual Dinghy Towing Guides, which list the vehicles for that model year that are approved for towing behind a motorhome and give specific details about restrictions, are available for download at www.motorhome.com/download-dinghy-guides for \$1.99 each. The guide can save you thousands of dollars if it helps prevent a potential owner from towing a vehicle that's not safely towable.

That said, the PT is actually certified by Chrysler for four-wheels down towing behind a motorhome ONLY with the manual transmission. Keep in mind that you must also have sufficient towing capacity. To calculate this, subtract the fully loaded weight of the coach from the gross combination weight rating (GCWR). The difference will be how much weight your coach can tow. Weigh the fully loaded PT Cruiser to verify you are within limits.

MONACO MISCELLANY

We bought a 2004 Class A Monaco motorhome that has 37,000 miles on the chassis. The black and gray tanks read wrong. Where would sensors be on the tanks? Also, the inside lights (12 volt) flicker, including lights in luggage compartments. Also, the rear slide on the curb side goes out, but when trying to slide in it only works if I lean the whole coach to the left and push on the outside of the slide while my wife works the switch. What can I do for that?

**CALVIN SCHWARZ
SAN ANGELO, TEXAS**

The sensors should be on the sides of tanks, with wires connected to them. Problems with these are very common, and you'll find lots of stories on the forums about what folks have done to solve them. You might start by filling the tanks with water, driving around to slosh the water, and dump them. There are also chemicals you can put in the tanks that are designed to clean the contacts. Some people report that

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CAN BE CAUSED
BY A NUMBER OF
PROBLEMS. SLIDE
SEALS AND TRACKS
NEED TO BE CLEANED
AND LUBED,
AND ADJUSTED TO
PREVENT STICKING.
WIRING CONNECTIONS
CAN ALSO BECOME
CORRODED, WHICH MAY
CAUSE A VOLTAGE DROP.**



BACK TO BASICS How to Use a Multimeter

A multimeter, also known as a multi-tester, can be one of your most useful tools. It allows you to measure a variety of electrical functions including DC and AC voltage, circuit continuity and resistance. If you don't have one, check hardware stores for a variety of these meters that have a digital readout.

A primary role for a multi-tester may be considered a "gas gauge" for battery state of charge, and to measure the viability of your charging sources — very important if you frequently dry camp. To assure consistent results while using the meter for charge status of the house batteries, readings should be always be taken the same way — with no load (except refrigerator) or charging input.

To test charging via the engine alternator, start the engine and use the meter's 20-volt or 40-volt DC scale (depending on brand and model) to check voltage at the starting as well as



house batteries. The reading should be 13.5 to 14.2 volts, varying with battery state of charge and with ambient temperature. A voltage reading as low as 13.5 is not ideal, but is normal for some engine alternators in warm weather.

Next, test performance of the motorhome's converter/battery charger, which will tell you how well the system will fare while relying on it and the AC generator — unless you rely mainly on solar panels for battery recharging.

With the generator running or the coach connected to a land line, voltage at the house batteries should be about 13.8 after an hour or so of running, if the converter is single-stage. With a multi-stage "smart" converter/charger, voltage will vary between 13.5 (battery float following full charge) and 14.2 to 14.5 at full charge.

Checking circuits is another valuable use of the multimeter. Example: a 12-volt-DC light bulb fails to function. The bulb filament appears to be good, and the fuse is OK.

a) Set the meter on the appropriate DC scale and touch the red probe to the contact inside the socket (+) and the black probe to the rim of the socket (-).



If you get a reading, the power source is good; if you get no reading, check for a loose connection behind the light, and proceed to b) if necessary.

b) To check the hot (+) circuit, touch a meter probe to the bulb socket contact and the other probe to the rim (-) of a nearby light that works, using alligator-clip extension wires if necessary. If there is no reading, the hot circuit (+) is dead, usually caused by a loose connection.

A fuse can be checked by setting the meter on "continuity." Touch a probe on each end of the fuse; the meter reading should drop to near zero. Light bulbs also can be tested for continuity. Never test continuity in a "hot" circuit.

Before connecting the coach to an outside 120-volt-AC electrical source, it should be checked for correct polarity (wires properly connected) and/or a faulty ground connection — problems that can cause damage to appliances.

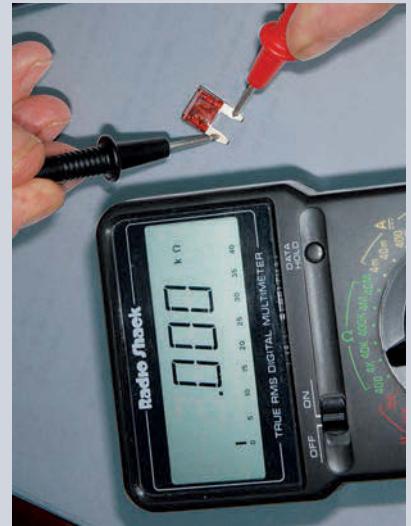
Set the meter on the 200-volt AC voltage scale, and use the probes carefully to avoid a nasty jolt if a finger inadvertently makes contact with the metal tip.

Checking 30-amp outlets: With the circuit breaker in the "on" position, insert the black probe into the half-round slot (ground). Insert the red probe into the left rectangular slot (hot). The reading should be 115 to 120 volts, which indicates that the ground connection is good and that the polarity is correct.



Keep the black probe in the ground slot and move the red probe to the right slot (common); this should produce no reading — no voltage between common and ground. If either of the tests fails to produce the desired reading, don't connect; inform park management.

The instructions packaged with multimeters cover many additional diagnostic functions, which can be very useful. ♦



VOLTAGE	STATE OF CHARGE
12.6 or higher	100%
12.4	70%
12.1	50%
11.8	30%
11.5	10%



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Musty odors can accumulate when motorhomes are closed up. The MaxxFan Standard model ventilation fans from MaxxAir Ventilation Solutions, with reversible fan option, efficiently draw in fresh air and also remove hot, stale air. MaxxFan Standard fans are available in remote control or manual lid-opening models. Sturdy and durable twin lid-lifting arms ensure smooth and safe operation with no lid fluttering during high winds or when the motorhome is moving. A powerful, fuse-protected 12-volt DC ball-bearing motor with built-in thermal protection operates a 12-inch, 10-blade fan to circulate more than 900 cubic feet of air per minute. A keypad has 10 fan speeds, as well as control thermostat, air intake and exhaust functions. The flush-mounted fan fits any standard 14-by-14-inch roof opening, and closes securely for a low-profile appearance. When the lid is closed, the MaxxFan also operates as a ceiling fan, a MaxxFan exclusive. The interior insect screen removes easily for cleaning.

MaxxFan Standard Model 4000K (\$265) features a white manual open lid. Model 4500K (\$375) features a smoke-colored electric opening lid and comes with a hand-held remote control with easy-to-read LCD screen.

MaxxAir, 316-832-3400, www.maxxair.com.

several bags of ice cubes put into the tank through the toilet will help clean the contacts if the coach is driven vigorously right after the ice is put in; the idea is that the ice will knock off hard deposits. You might also look into aftermarket monitor kits that replace the original trouble-prone sensors.

Flickering lights are caused by voltage fluctuations. You may want to put a voltmeter on the power wire going to the lights, and also measure voltage after the converter. If the voltage from the converter is fluctuating, the converter may be faulty. Loose connections could also cause this, and especially, a bad ground connection somewhere in the

system could affect many lights as well as other 12-volt DC devices.

Sticking slides can be caused by a number of problems. Slide seals and tracks need to be cleaned and lubed, and adjusted to prevent sticking. Wiring connections also may be corroded, causing a voltage drop. Have you tried running the motorhome engine to raise the voltage while you work the slide?

WINDSHIELD WIPER PROBLEMS

My brother and I both GM chassis Dolphin motorhomes. Mine is a 2004, his is a 2008. We both have a perplexing problem with our wipers. Both of us have had our wipers stay on after extended use and

cannot shut them off without shutting the engine down. If one doesn't wait at least 15 minutes, it is necessary to remove the fuse or the wipers will start up on their own again. I have also had the wipers start up without being turned on after filling with gas, and the same procedure is required to stop them. My brother has also been able to turn his wipers on the intermittent setting, but could not turn them to the faster speed when required.

My brother had his wiper motor replaced and both of us have had a module replaced in a panel behind the dash gauges. We are now hearing that it may be a relay switch problem. The most perplexing thing is they only do it infrequently. This winter on our trip to Arizona, no problems were encountered but I did not have to use the wipers for any extended time.

We hope you are able to help us, as few people seem knowledgeable about this issue. Our feedback indicates this is a GM problem and not a motorhome issue.

**GERALD BORBRIDGE
CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA**

The wiper motors were supplied by GM with the chassis and have nothing to do with National RV/Dolphin. They have an auto-park feature, which is likely the problem. Sometimes moisture gets into them, or the contacts short or go bad. The fact that the problem went away when you were in dry Arizona supports this.

I would open up the wiper control (on the motor) or replace it. These motor assemblies can be found online with a Google search if you're having a problem finding them.

REFRIGERATOR — ON OR OFF?

We have a diesel Class A motorhome. We use it about once a month for a week at a time during the summer. Is it better to leave the refrigerator on all the time or should we turn it off between uses?

**JAMES NELSON
LATROBE, PENN.**

Shut it off. You'll save energy and wear on the unit. When it's off, prop the doors open so that it doesn't get musty inside. Start it up the night before you load it with food so it's cold when you're ready to go.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 79



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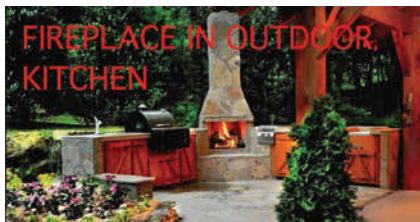
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DASH DISTRESS

My motorhome is a 2001 Newmar 40-foot Dutch Star on a Freightliner XC chassis with a Caterpillar 3126 and an Allison six speed with about 44,000 miles. Understandably, since it's used, there have been some issues and through Web searches, and drawing on my background as a general contractor and mechanic (not diesel), I have been able to solve most. However, this one is a real puzzle for me.

The motorhome's dash heater does not heat; it blows cold air. The A/C cools moderately. So far I can deal with that. The puzzle is, when I turn on the heat or the A/C the transmission temperature gauge drops to cold. According to Freightliner, the transmission temperature should run at about ten o'clock. When the A/C and/or heater are off, the transmission runs where it should; but when either is turned on, it drops to cold.

Normally I wouldn't consider something running cold to be a problem, but the transmission doesn't work as well when cold (a particular problem driving narrow, winding roads.) A separate issue is the dash heater doesn't heat. If I could get some help with that it would be great, but my big concern is the transmission temperature.

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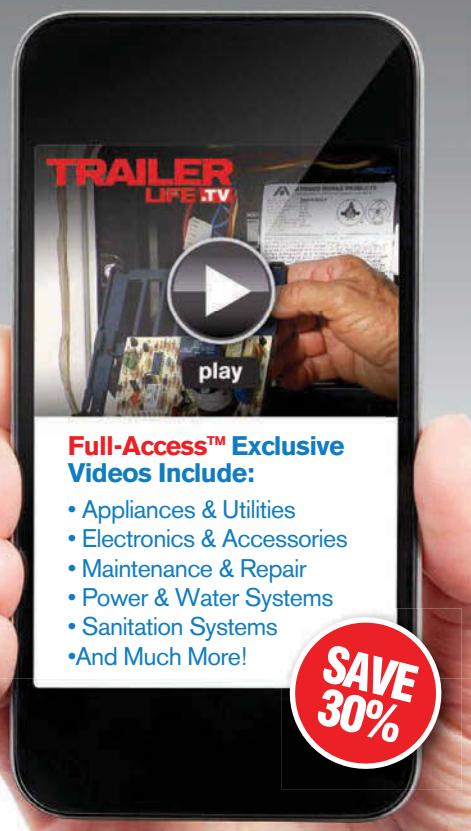
The temperature of all those gallons of transmission fluid is not going to change instantly the moment you switch the dash heater/air conditioner on or off. This is a classic symptom of a faulty ground connection causing feedback into an adjoining circuit. You need to check the ground connections of these two items. There is a very good chance this will also fix the heater problem. If not, it may be a control issue related to the air-mixing flap operation that switches between heat and air conditioning. A lack of heat usually means the water-control valve is not being opened. The fact that the A/C is cool indicates that most everything, including the compressor, is working. To make it colder, you probably need to have refrigerant added and the system leak checked.

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COACH & POWERTRAIN

in, the power cord's plug got so hot that it melted at the box. Why does this happen?
JOHN GORDON
DOLTON, ILL.

The extreme heat comes from electrical current passing through the plug. Besides being in direct sunlight (which shouldn't melt it) there are two basic ways it can get excessively hot. Either the circuits are overloaded, or there is a problem at the plug that causes excessive resistance to current flow (for example, dirty or corroded prongs or contacts on the plug).

If the new plug continues to get hot, have an electrician measure the current flow (it can be done with a clamp-on meter) and inspect the plug and wiring for damage.

INOPERATIVE FRIDGE

My Dometic refrigerator in my 2010 won't cool. Can you help me locate the problem?
KELLY JONES | VIA EMAIL

Your request is not very specific and does not include a model number or what you have checked so far. Does it not work on either gas or electric? Is power getting to it? Is the gas shut off because of a gas detector? Start by reading the owner's manual. If you can't locate your manual, go to Dometic's website www.dometic.com/enus/Americas/USA/Custom-Support/Operation--Installation-Manuals. You can also call customer service at 800-544-4881 for help.

INOPERATIVE SMART WHEEL SYSTEM

We have a 2003 Country Coach Allure Class A. The motorhome's "Smart Wheel" fuse keeps blowing. I replaced the fuse, which did not repair the problem with the wipers, horn and cruise control. Any ideas will be appreciated.
DAVE WILKINS | HOUSTON, TEXAS

Did you have any problems with any of these systems before the fuses started blowing? This would give you a hint where to look. You may need to disconnect the items that are part of this system and then reconnect them one at a time until the fuse blows again. That will identify the problem circuit. Then you'll have to trace that circuit for short circuit source. ♦



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Difficult-to-remove electrical cords can make motorhome life frustrating, even miserable, particularly for those who suffer from arthritis or other hand weakness. Ergo Grip adapter and extension cords from Conntek give users greater leverage, making cord handling easier. The handle's ergonomic design reduces hand fatigue and simplifies the task of grasping and unplugging cords. Injection molding gives the impact-resistant, all-weather cables increased strength. Handle and prongs are arranged at a 90-degree angle, reducing cord stress for added safety and long life.

Conntek's Camp Power line includes Ergo Grip RV adapter cords with a 30A rating in 25-foot and 30-foot lengths. Also available are 25-foot and 50-foot Ergo Grip RV 30A extension cords, and 15-foot and 30-foot Ergo Grip 50A extension cords. All feature built-in LED power indicators and Ergo Grip handles on both the plug and the connector.

Additionally, Conntek's Ergo Grip RV generator adapter cords offer a secure locking generator plug to a straight-blade RV side. Offered in a 1.5-foot length, these have an Ergo Grip handle and LED indicator on the connector only. Conntek's Camp Power 30-amp RV Ergo Grip 50-foot Extension Cord has a retail price of \$89.99. **Conntek, 414-482-0800, www.conntek.com.**

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 EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

Meaningful Mementos

WHY THE BEST SOUVENIRS ARE PRICELESS

by ALAN RIDER



As far as I'm concerned, the road ahead is where the magic happens. For as long as I can remember it has been a balm for past hurts, an escape from today's troubles, and a promise of something new and interesting in the days to come.

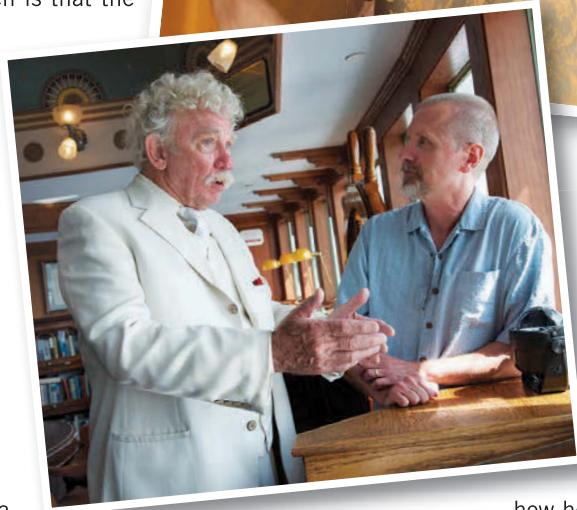
It has also taught me any number of important lessons, not the least of which is that the only worthwhile souvenirs from my journeys aren't things that can be rung up by a sales clerk. No, the keepsakes I treasure most are the memories of those unforgettable people and places that I believe are the reason we all take to the road in the first place.

My recent encounter with a remarkable man named Louis Hankins is a good example. Fascinated with author Samuel Clemens (aka Mark Twain) since his English teacher father introduced him to the adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, with his wild silver hair and bushy mustache Louis has grown into the spitting image of the man he portrays in the one-man show he calls *Marking Twain*.

Seeing him perform in his all-white suit is a borderline magical experience, as he seems to be channeling the spirit of Clemens himself. Even more remarkable than the feeling that the famous author is suddenly in the room with you is the fact that Louis' performances follow no script. To watch him hold an audience spellbound with little more than his gravelly voice, you would never suspect that he improvises each show entirely from the vast storehouse of knowledge he's spent a lifetime accumulating.

If you are able to catch one of his limited number of performances each year (you'll find a current schedule on his website www.markingtwin.com), be sure not to rush out the door after the lights go up. Spend even a few minutes talking to the man himself and you'll quickly come to the conclusion that Louis is every bit as unique as the man he portrays onstage.

Like Clemens, the man who practically invented the art of travel writing, Louis has done his share of gallivanting. Unlike the famous author however, who in his later years admitted privately that he'd grown weary of the vagabond's life, Louis' enthusiasm for each new journey remains undiminished. And the joy he gets from the folks he meets and new vistas he en-



counters in those travels is unmistakable.

Perhaps his greatest pleasure, however, is spinning a great yarn, as I discovered when he described to me in all seriousness

how he studied the writings of

Mark Twain during his 20 years in the penitentiary (in reality, he spent a quarter-century as an officer and detective with the Kentucky state police). The sparkle in his blue eyes and his hearty laugh when I finally realized that he'd quite successfully pulled my leg was absolutely priceless.

As Louis and I parted company, after a spontaneous hug, I had some time to reflect on this and similar experiences I've had over the years. And though it sometimes makes me a little wistful to think that these moments may never come again, I know that these people and places will live on in my memory. And that I am all the richer for it.

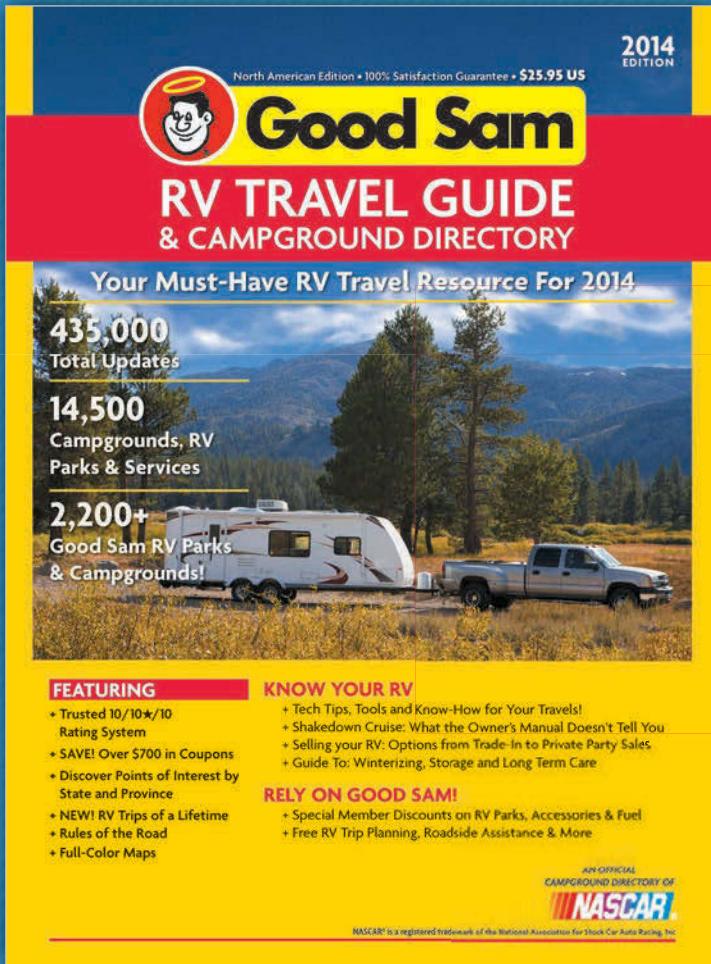
All of which is a long way of saying that these are the real mementos I collect in my travels. And the reason I wake up every morning, eager to see what's waiting for me around the next curve in the road ahead. ♦

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

PHOTOS: JOHN NATION

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