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On The Cover: Thor Motor Coach's AXIS 24.1 (see review on page 48) ushers in a totally new genre: the Recreational Utility Vehicle (RUV).

AND THE WINNERS ARE ...

Everyone has an opinion these days. Campfire chats commonly elevate to spirited conversations about motorhomes, accessories, service, maintenance and places to go, just to name a few topics. To capture that energy and glean the experience from motorhome owners, last year we introduced the Readers' Choice Awards — asking readers to vote for their favorite coaches, products, places and things related to the RV lifestyle. Right out of the gate, the voting was brisk and we compiled valuable information that was shared with the readers for the first time in our January 2013 issue. The Readers' Choice Awards are now an annual event and the latest winners have been announced in this issue (see page 41). Reader contributions, especially when targeted by subscribers of a special interest publication like *MotorHome*, are very valuable to people looking to make purchases that will impact their lifestyle.

The most important decision motorhome enthusiasts will make is buying the right coach for their needs. That's not an easy process, unless you're a repeat buyer and already have a favorite brand. But beyond that, the RV industry is rather fluid these days. R & D teams are coming up with new concepts and products aimed at current demographics and buying habits. Fuel prices have made the European influence in America more practical than ever and manufacturers are "Americanizing" compact RVs to keep prices affordable and designing living quarters that are attractive to the I-want-more-space-and-better-mileage-too-crowd.

Case in point: the new AXIS featured on page 48. This coach is certainly a departure from traditionally built Class A's, a product of over-the-counter resources that have been utilized in a unique and creative manner. Call it a hybrid, if you will, without the electric motor. Using a readily available Ford E-350 chassis and building a body following common RV construction protocol, the AXIS can be delivered at an affordable price point. The floorplan is



compact, but clever use of space makes it highly livable. No doubt it won't get the fuel economy of a Sprinter-based motorhome, but unless your coach is driven more frequently than average, the added purchase price of the diesel chassis will take a long time to amortize.

Obviously, buyers will drive the direction of the motorhome market. Coaches like the AXIS are designed to appeal to those looking for maneuverability, lower cost of entry and maybe to owners who prefer not to tow a vehicle, but big motorhomes are still hot sellers. Most builders of larger, much more expensive motorhomes are reporting brisk sales. Will this new genre of RVs push buyers' buttons? Time will tell. Fortunately, market dynamics are pretty easy to track these days as owners stay in touch digitally with each other, sharing experiences from travel destinations to product reliability.

People are not shy about posting comments on website forums and from the huge response to our Readers' Choice Awards program, dissemination of information through social media has made it possible to collect comments and publish ratings from people who are using their coaches in real-life situations. If your current motorhome, or one that's high on your shopping list, is awarded Readers' Choice Gold, Silver or Bronze status, the chances are pretty good it's going to perform to your expectations or even better. That's the beauty of social media, but there's another benefit of experiential information sharing — manufacturers are on the hot seat and are responding with continual product and service improvements.

Earning a Readers' Choice Award is a big deal for any manufacturer, supplier or vendor. Congratulations to the winners and thanks to all the readers who voted. ♦

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MotorHome (ISSN 0744-074X) is published monthly by GS Media & Events (a division of Good Sam Enterprises, LLC), 2750 Park View Ct., Ste. 240, Oxnard, CA 93036. Periodicals postage paid at Oxnard, CA 93036 and additional mailing offices. The annual subscription rate is \$19.97 per year in the U.S. For Canadian and International subscriptions, add \$12 per year. U.S. funds only.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *MotorHome*, P.O. Box 5860, Harlan, IA 51593-1360.

CANADIAN RETURN ADDRESS: GS Media & Events, 4960-2 Walker Road, Windsor, Ontario N9A 6J3. Publication Sales Agreement #40012332.

CUSTOMER SERVICE Call 800-678-1201 (U.S.) or email motorhome@cdfsfulfillment.com

Printed in the United States.

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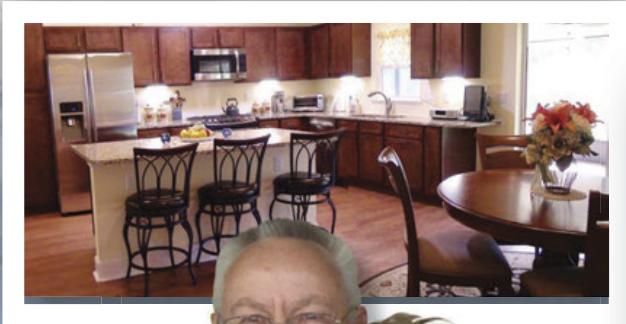
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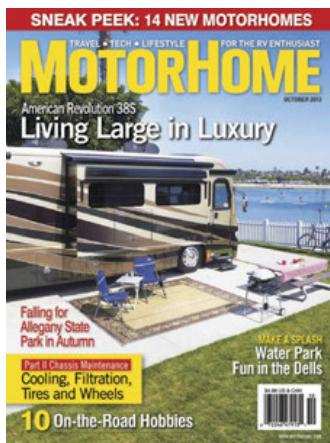
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WHAT CAMPGROUNDS AND RV PARKS HAVE YOU STAYED AT THAT ALSO HAVE GREAT BIKE PATHS?

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

BIKING THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE CONTINENT

I would love to see an article come out of the responses you receive about campgrounds with bike paths. It's something I look for each time I book a reservation, and it's often a deciding factor in where we stay. Here are several from our experiences:

In Florida, any of the state or private parks are adjacent to the bike path that usually parallels U.S. 1 through the Florida Keys. We have also enjoyed the Nature Coast State Bike Trail from Suwannee River Hideaway Campground near Old Town; it requires a short ride to the access point, but the road is a quiet one, and you can bike in several directions, including into Fanning Springs State Park to see manatees in winter. From Grayton Beach State Park in the panhandle, you can bike 30 miles along the Route 30A bike path.

On Mission Bay in San Diego, Calif., Campland on the Bay is a great place to start off on the bike trails that circle the bay, including SeaWorld, and all the great restaurants in Pacific Beach. You can even bike to La Jolla.

Fidalgo Bay RV Resort near Anacortes, Wash., is on the Tommy Thompson Parkway, a walk/bike trail that has a scenic route into town.

In Vancouver, British Columbia, cross Lions Gate Bridge from Capilano River RV Park and you are in gorgeous Stanley Park where the bike trail follows the beach. From Cavendish Campground in Prince Edward Island National Park, you bike for miles along the scenic coast. Kouchibouguac National Park in New Brunswick has 37 miles of bike trails right from the campground, some of it on wide boardwalks over coastal marshes.

That's it for the four corners of the continent (well, almost) and here are a couple in the middle:

Minnesota's Itasca State Park has a nice bike trail. You can walk across the headwaters of the Mississippi River there.

In Vidalia, La., you can bike on the Mississippi River levee. This is just over the bridge from Natchez, Miss.

Give me more ideas! My wheels are ready to roll! I'd also like an explanation (if there is one) of the difference between a bike path and a bike trail. We already know we don't

like bike lanes, where cyclists must fight for their space.

TRUDY ROWE | VIA EMAIL

A PAIR OF PARKS

We have stayed at several campgrounds with bike paths nearby, but two stand out. The first is Big Woods Lake Campground in Cedar Falls, Iowa. This is a county park with 55 full-hookup sites and the Big Woods Trail runs right by the RV park. From the Big Woods Trail, you can connect to more than 80 miles of other paved trails in and around Cedar Falls, and there are many interesting things to see and do.

Another campground we like is Fries New River Trail RV Park in Fries, Va. The park is just a block off the New River Trail, which is a Rails-to-Trails and a Virginia State Park. The trail is not paved, but it is easy riding for all levels and runs along New River. The trail makes for beautiful, peaceful riding. It is 57 miles long and connects Fries to Galax and Pulaski. The RV park has 14 full-hookup sites and is very well maintained.

MARK DEARDORFF | ROANOKE, VA.

OREGON RAILS-TO-TRAILS

In response to Margaret Flannery's request for campgrounds with bike paths, L.L. Stub Stewart State Park in Oregon sits in the middle of the Banks-Vernonia State Trail. This trail is a 21-mile bike path between the two cities that follows an old railroad bed. Most of the trail is on a very gentle slope; there is one steeper section where the trail traverses around a missing trestle. Stub Stewart for camping also has a mountain bike course and a Frisbee golf course in the park.

RUDOLPH VAN DER ZANDER | VIA EMAIL

FLORIDA FUN

Although it's not really a greenway, the bike and walking trail starting at Topsail Hill Preserve State Park in Santa Rosa Beach, Fla., is a great little ride. Pick it up in Santa Rosa Beach off U.S. Highway 98. It's 10 miles to Seaside where you can stop for a cool drink and a fresh and tasty grouper sandwich at Bud & Alley's Waterfront Restaurant and Rooftop Bar. There are several places to stop and browse shops and check out the views. Don't miss The



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Red Bar in Grayton Beach. You can also ride through Grayton Beach State Park.

Top Sail is one of our favorite places to stay mainly because of this safe and easy bike path. Happy Biking!

**ALAN AND BRENDA COUCH
GAINESVILLE, GA.**

A SPIN AROUND THE ISLAND

Jekyll Island, Ga., campground has a beautiful, wide paved bike path that goes around the whole island and through the old streets with cottages (mansions) on both sides and with large live oak trees. Many restaurants also are along the path.

**CARL AND KAYE PETERMAN
GREENWOOD, DEL.**

CRUISING COLORADO

We are avid weekend campers — awaiting the day full-timing becomes a reality — and we, too, look for campgrounds that offer bike paths nearby.

Cherry Creek State Park in Denver, Colo., has miles of paths throughout the park that are completely separate from the road. These paths also lead to the 800-mile bike path system that connects Denver to many outlying cities and recreational areas without having to travel on the road.

We also enjoy the bike paths that lead from Heaton Bay Campground in Silverthorne, Colo. You never have to get in your car. You can ride to Breckenridge and take the free gondola (with your bike) to the top of the mountain for some amazing views, then head over to Frisco for lunch and back down through Dillon to your campsite.

We also ride the Rio Grande Trail out of Aspen while camping at Maroon Bells. It's a 42-mile rails-to-trails through Carbondale to Glenwood Springs. If you don't want to ride back, you can take the RFTA bus back from any city along the way to Aspen.

**SIMON AND DANI WHITELEY
EMMETT, IDAHO**

TRAVERSE CITY TOURING

If you ask me, Traverse City State Park in Michigan is the ideal place to park, camp and ride! Located on the trail on East Bay, the bike path is just a walk through a fence access to travel east to Acme or west to Traverse City and on to Suttons Bay. A footbridge to beaches and a swim

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GARY MCCLURE | CERESCO MICH.

STRIKING GOLD IN SACRAMENTO

One of the best bike paths in the country is along the American River Parkway in Sacramento, Calif. You can stay at the Cal Expo RV Park in Sacramento and pick up the bike path just up and over the levee. You can go to Old Town Sacramento one day and all the way to Folsom Lake the next. The trail will impress you in quality, beauty and length! We have traveled it many times and love it.

**CURT AND SHARON MINARD
SACRAMENTO, CALIF.**

THE GREAT LAKES STATE

We are seasonal campers at Trailway Campground in Montague, Mich., which is on a bike path that goes 21 miles north to Hart, Mich. They just added on to the south another 10 miles or so. There's another bike path in Muskegon, Mich., that goes close to 40 miles to Marne, Mich., from Muskegon's downtown area.

RICHARD LOWER | MUSKEGON, MICH.

TWO PARKS IN IOWA

Just got back from visiting my son in Lake View, Iowa. There are two places to camp: Black Hawk State Park and Camp Crescent RV park. The Sauk Rail Trail is 33.2 miles of paved railroad bed, which means barely any up and down. It connects Lake View and Carroll, Iowa. Take water, as there are no facilities, although it does run through a few small towns, but be advised to pack your own.

DON PETERSON, ARVADA, COLO.

RIDE ALONG LAKE ERIE

My husband and I have traveled all over the United States and our favorite place to ride bikes is at Maumee Bay State Park in Oregon, Ohio. There are bike paths everywhere and at one point you are even riding right along Lake Erie. Bikers of all ages are able to do the paths. Love to go there!

RON AND CINDY ROBINETT | VIA EMAIL

A TRIO IN CALIFORNIA

Here are my top parks with bike paths:

Bernardo Shores RV Park, Imperial Beach, Calif. Adult only. Beautiful, well maintained park. Easy access to the Bayshore Bikeway.

Chula Vista RV Park, Chula Vista, Calif. Family RV park. Easy access to the Bayshore Bikeway.

Silver Strand Beach Campground, Coronado, Calif. State park on the ocean. Easy access to the Bayshore Bikeway.

KAREN SOUTHER | VIA EMAIL

NORTHERN PENNSYLVANIA

Pettecote Junction, located in Cedar Run, Pa., is next to the 67-mile-long Pine Creek Rail Trail. The bike path runs from Jersey Shore to Wellsboro, Pa., and the RV park is approximately midway on the trail.

MIKE VACARO | VIA EMAIL

SOUTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA

River's Edge Campground in Connellsville, Pa., is south of Pittsburgh and right next to the Great Allegheny Passage Trail, which runs from Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C. On the other side, is the Youghiogheny River. You can rent whatever kind of equipment you need at the RV park.

BRUCE NEELEY | VIA EMAIL

PEDALING PINELLAS COUNTY

Pinellas County Florida has more than 50 miles of flat, paved, wide bike/walking trails. The main trail runs from the north county line to the southern tip of the county. It runs along the Gulf Coast along U.S. Route 19 Alt, with spurs running east to other small towns. There are several campgrounds right on the trail: Madeira Beach KOA at the southern end in St. Petersburg; Dunedin RV Park and Resort in Dunedin; Sherwood Forest RV Park in Palm Harbor; plus three more in Palm Harbor, Ozone and Crystal Beach. All are on the Pinellas Trail, which runs through many picturesque villages, with many fine restaurants, antique shops and museums.

TERRY SMARDON | PALM HARBOR, FLA.

CAMPING WITH THE CORPS

Starting in Pella, Iowa, and running for 12 miles along wooded areas in a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Recreation area, along the Des Moines River and beside Lake Red Rock, is a fine bike path with benches to

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stop and view the scenery. The trail passes by multiple Corps campgrounds.

TONY GRAY | VIA EMAIL

A TRAIL RUNS THROUGH IT

A campground with a good adjacent bike path can be found in Thomson, Ill. The path is fairly flat from Savanna to Fulton, Ill., and this part of the trail consists of a paved surface through quiet woods and prairie. The Great River Trail runs 60 miles along the Mississippi River. The endpoints are in Savanna and Sunset Park in Rock

Island. It includes a mixture of paved rail-trail, sidewalks and bike lanes. There is RV camping at the Thomson Causeway and the trail goes through there.

SUSAN SWANSON | VIA EMAIL

GAS, NOT DIESEL

Would you please print a correction on the Winnebago Adventurer feature ("New For 2014," October, 2013) on page 55? It is listed as a diesel-pusher. The Adventurer has Class A diesel features in a gasoline-powered motorhome. The Adventurer is not available on a diesel platform.

SHEILA DAVIS
WINNEBAGO INDUSTRIES
FOREST CITY, IOWA

TIRE SIDEWALL DATE CORRECTION

I'm writing in regard to the Tire Checklist (Back to Basics, October 2013), page 64. Upon doing research and looking at my tires, the code actually is the week and year of the manufacture, not the month and year.

RIPTON RICHARDS | HUGHESVILLE, MD.

You are correct, Ripton. Since 2000, the first two numbers indicate the week the tire was produced; and the second two, the year. MotorHome regrets the error.

WANTED: BETTER WI-FI

What's the deal with Wi-Fi at campgrounds? Either we have really bad luck, or RV parks really don't have good Wi-Fi. Every campground we stay at always states in their brochures or on their website that Wi-Fi is available, but we have never had a Wi-Fi signal that was usable in our coach.

Come on campground owners, it's 2014! Upgrade your wireless Internet service so it's available throughout the whole campground, not just around the office! Around here, most E/W/S sites are priced between \$55 and \$70 per night. Usable Wi-Fi should be available for these prices!

STEVE STRENNER | TUCKERTON, N.J.

QUESTION:

Do you use the Wi-Fi provided at campgrounds? If so, what has been your experience with the service?

Send your comments to *MotorHome*, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036; or email letters@motorhomemagazine.com. ♦

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escapes

edited by EILEEN HUBBARD

ROAD FOODIE | WHEELS & GEAR | NOTEWORTHY | CROSSROADS

The area along California Highway 395 east of Mount Whitney, the highest point in the contiguous United States, is filled with wonderful opportunities for camping in a serene desert setting. The valley is so picturesque that more than 400 films have been shot in and around Alabama Hills — a range of rock formations near the eastern Sierra Nevada. The Alabama Hills Recreation Management Area, which is operated by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), offers dispersed dry camping. Other camping options include 85 unpaved sites at Tuttle Creek (also managed by the BLM) and 43 paved sites at Lone Pine (maintained by the U.S. Forest Service). For more information, go to www.lonepinechamber.org/recreation/camping.html.

CALIFORNIA'S
FAMED OWENS
VALLEY —
HOME OF
MOUNT WHITNEY

CAMPING IN THE SHADOW OF A GIANT

PHOTO: CALIFORNIA TRAVEL AND TOURISM COMMISSION/ANDREAS HUB

RESOLUTIONS FOR RV FOODIES



PHOTO: ANNE WEAVER

With the New Year, you're probably

thinking about resolutions — those annual “exercise more, lose weight, eat healthier” promises most of us make. The RV lifestyle can play havoc with resolutions, especially when it comes to healthy eating. Too often,

we opt for convenience when we travel instead of eating healthfully. Here are a few tips to help you eat foods that are healthy and tasty whether you're at home or on the road.

GET REAL. If you want the best flavor and healthful foods, trying eating foods as close to nature as possible. Go for fresh veggies, not canned or frozen (if you must, frozen is better than canned). Instead of opening a can of soup that's laden with sodium, make your own with chicken stock, veggies and lean chicken or fish.

BUY LOCAL. It will be fresher (and taste better). Local foods also use fewer resources like fuel for transportation so are they're better for the planet. Try eating grass-fed beef, free-range chicken and wild-caught (not farmed) fish. You'll be doing a kindness for the earth.

GO SMALL. Try foods made by small, artisan vendors. Seeking out regional food producers is a great way to explore an area and get familiar with the tastes different areas have to offer. You might pay a little more, but the quality is worth it and you'll experience flavors you can't imagine.

GET OUT OF YOUR RUT. I'm just as guilty as the

next person for going to the same restaurant or using the same food or recipe over and over. There's nothing wrong with long-time favorites. But the food industry is dynamic. New restaurants are opening all the time. New food producers and artisan craftspeople are selling new foodstuffs. Ethnic flavors are more available than ever. Chefs are producing new recipes all the time. Commit this year to try new tastes, new flavors and explore the world with your palate.

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LEARN ABOUT REGIONAL FLAVORS.

When you travel in your motorhome, find out which foods make that country or area special and enjoy them, whether it's tamales in New Mexico, foie gras (goose paté) in Quebec, or

boudin (rice sausage) in Louisiana. Shop in local markets. When you're on the road, take a cooking class. Or hire an expert to take you on a local food tour. You'll develop a much greater appreciation for the history, culture and people of area you're visiting.

GO FOR QUALITY, NOT QUANTITY. The Western Hemisphere is in the throes of an obesity epidemic. Portion sizes have risen so much that we think a quart or more is a normal drink size! Many of our foods are laden with unhealthy and fattening high fructose corn syrup. And we're eating more and more processed foods filled with dyes, fillers and preservatives. Vow to eat less, but better, more real foods.

These are just a few ideas for your New Year's foodie resolutions. Let us know your own resolutions for eating and traveling in the New Year by emailing me at hasselbring@bctonline.com with “road foodie” in the subject line. Happy foodie traveling!

Left: Foraging, fishing and clamming are great ways to get fresh food. Below: Shopping at local produce markets provides the opportunity to discover regional foods. Attending festivals, like the Lobster Festival in Maine, is another way to tickle your taste buds. Cooking classes are a fun way to break out of a food rut.



Food carts are an inexpensive way to try the foods of different areas. Ethnic foods, like these healthy fruit cups, are popular in Hispanic regions. These bubble waffles are a popular Chinese treat. Explore smokehouses like Tackleman's in Ann Arbor, Mich.

PHOTOS: BOBBIE HASSELBRING



GET INTO THE SPIRIT

Free Spirit TE, that is. This new Class B luxury touring coach from Leisure Travel Vans features dual sliding doors, four Ultraleather seats up front, a three-passenger sofa out back and TVs front and rear — not to mention solid wood cabinetry, French-seamed upholstery and Corian Private Collection countertops. Other high-end equipment includes bi-xenon headlights, a multifunction

steering wheel, front and rear parking sensors, blind spot monitoring, collision prevention assist, lane keeping assist and high beam assist. Built on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 3500 dually chassis, the Free Spirit TE is powered by a 3.0-liter V-6 turbodiesel or the new 2.1-liter four-cylinder turbodiesel. MSRP: \$119,600 (base).

Leisure Travel Vans, a brand of Triple E Recreational Vehicles, 877-992-9906, www.tripleerv.com



A PATH TO HD SATELLITE TV

Winegard has collaborated with DISH to develop and introduce the Winegard Pathway X2 Portable Satellite HDTV antenna, designed exclusively for receiving DISH HDTV programming. According to the company, the system automatically points to DISH satellites, allowing you to set up and watch TV in less than 15 minutes. You can also watch different HD channels on two TVs simultaneously. The Pathway X2 comes with an easy-grip carrying handle, a security eyelet molded into the base and 25 feet of coax cable. It's available through Camping World Supercenters and RV dealerships nationwide. MSRP: \$449; bundle with DISH ViP Receiver, \$499.

Winegard, 866-609-9374, www.winegard.com

MIGHTY LIGHT

With all the choices of LED flashlights these days, it's hard to find a stand out among them — but the HP7R rechargeable from Coast has some pretty unique features. First, the exclusive new Flex Charge Dual Power Rechargeable System uses AC, DC or USB power sources and also includes an alkaline battery pack.

Patented Pure Beam focusing optics produce a consistent, bright light across the entire beam. On the HP7R, that means up to 201 lumens, and a beam distance rating of up to 1,003 feet. According to the company, run time on the "high" setting is 7 hours and 45 minutes on lithium batteries, 2 hours on standard alkaline batteries. MSRP: \$147.49.

Coast, 877-704-4545, www.coastportland.com





NEW CAMPGROUND IN DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

Furnace Creek Resort in Death Valley

National Park has added 26 full-hookup RV sites and created the new 35-site Fiddlers' Campground adjacent to its golf course. Located at The Ranch at Furnace Creek, both facilities are within easy reach of the

Borax Museum and visitor center. All resort amenities are available to guests staying in the RV sites, including the Ranch's spring-fed swimming pool, shower facility, laundry, WiFi, tennis, shuffleboard, volleyball, Bocce ball and basketball court.

The 26 full-hookup RV sites accommodate motorhomes up to 35 feet, 45 feet and 50 feet long, and most of the new sites have shade trees. The rate is \$37 per night. The 35 dry camping sites at Fiddlers' Campground can accommodate 40- and 50-foot motorhomes, and feature community barbecue pits and picnic tables. The rate is \$25 per night. Campground reservations can be made by calling 800-236-7916.

Furnace Creek is centrally located in Death Valley National Park. To the south is Badwater Basin at 282 feet below sea level, Artist's Drive and a variety of geologic formations. To the north are sand dunes, wagon wheel trails, Ubehebe Crater and Scotty's Castle.

For more information, call 760-786-2345, or visit www.furnacecreekresort.com

RV SHOWS

JAN. 3-5

4th Annual New Mexico RV, Boat & Travel Show
Albuquerque, N.M.
847-229-6730

JAN. 8-11

24th Annual Colorado RV Adventure Travel Show
Denver, Colo.
847-229-6730

JAN. 8-12

2014 Ohio RV Supershow
Cleveland, Ohio
330-678-4489

JAN. 10-12

28th Annual Washington Camping RV Expo
Chantilly, Va.
804-425-6556

JAN. 10-12

53rd Annual RV & Campgrounds Show
Allentown, Pa.
610-360-3253

JAN. 10-12

25th Annual North Carolina RV & Camping Show — Greensboro
Greensboro, N.C.
804-425-6556

JAN. 10-12

Knoxville — Smoky Mountain RV Show
Sevierville, Tenn.
941-780-0538

JAN. 11-19

Pittsburgh RV Shows
Pittsburgh, Pa.
412-310-7781

JAN. 15-19

Florida RV SuperShow
Tampa, Fla.
813-741-0488

JAN. 16-19

2014 Mid-America RV Show
Kansas City, Mo.
847-229-6730

JAN. 16-20

Cincinnati — Dayton RV Show
Vandalia, Ohio
941-780-0538

JAN. 17-19

47th Annual New Jersey RV & Camping Show
Edison, N.J.
804-425-6556

JAN. 17-19

Toronto RV Show & Sale
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
905-659-8800

JAN. 18-26

31st Annual Sports, Vacation and RV Show
Quartzsite, Ariz.
714-377-7940

JAN. 23-26

25th Annual Inland Northwest RV Show & Sale

Spokane, Wash.
509-466-4256

JAN. 23-26

Grand Rapids Camper, Travel & RV Show at DeVos Place
Grand Rapids, Mich.
616-447-2860

JAN. 23-26

Fort Myers RV Show
Ft. Myers, Fla.
239-482-6006

JAN. 24-26

Atlanta Camping & RV Show
Atlanta, Ga.
770-447-3334

JAN. 24-26

North Carolina RV Dealers Association RV Show — Charlotte
Charlotte, N.C.
336-317-5538

JAN. 30-FEB. 1

All Valley RV Show
Mercedes, Texas
956-428-6434

JAN. 30-FEB. 2

2014 Calgary RV Expo & Sale
Calgary, Alberta, Canada
780-455-8562

JAN. 30-FEB. 2

Hamilton RV Show & Sale
Stoney Creek, Ontario, Canada
905-659-8800

News Briefs

HGTV's annual RV special — which has run for the past 13 years — will air Jan. 1, 2014. The program has been the cable network's highest-rated special for the past several years. This year's show — RV 2014 — was filmed in October 2013 at **America's Largest RV Show** in Hershey, Pa. During filming, host Chris Lambton took three families on a journey to find their dream RV. The special will also feature the newest RVs and the latest RV accessories.

Guaranty RV Super Centers has expanded its Junction City, Ore., facilities with the addition of the Guaranty RV Travel Center. The new facility includes RV lifestyle clothing and accessories, a 3,000-square-foot convenience store, RV rental service, LP-gas sales, an RV service center with more than 5,000 parts on hand, a laundry facility, dog groomer and free overnight parking

Thor Motor Coach has expanded its motorhome manufacturing facilities and opened a second campus in Wakarusa, Ind. The new factory is open to the public for free factory tours Monday through Wednesday at 3:45 p.m. Participants must call 574-584-3655 to make reservations and no photography is permitted. Motorhomes built at the Wakarusa facility, which may be included on the tour, include the Challenger and Miramar gasoline Class A's; Palazzo, Tuscany and Tuscany XTE diesel Class A's; and the Outlaw Class A and Class C toy haulers. Free factory tours are also available at the company's Elkhart, Ind., facility and are held Monday through Thursday at 3 p.m.

In October 2013, **Winnebago Industries** was selected to the Barron's 400 Index after a four-year absence. This marks the fourth time Winnebago Industries has been selected to the index since the index's inception in 1997. "We are indeed honored to be included in the Barron's 400 Index," said Winnebago Industries Chairman, CEO and President Randy Potts. "We have had significant growth over the past four years and this is certainly affirmation that we are on the right path. We look forward to continued growth as we move forward with aggressive product development in the RV sector."



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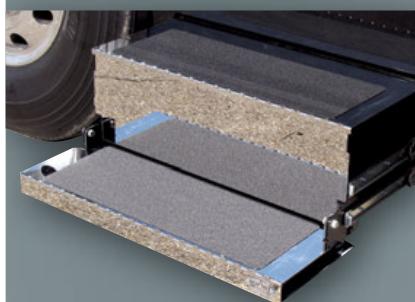
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escapes CROSSROADS

BUFFALO BILL'S MUSEUM AND GRAVE



First-time visitors to Buffalo Bill's Museum and Grave in Golden, Colo., probably know William Frederick Cody as a buffalo hunter and a performer in the Wild West show, but there's much more to learn about this man. Here's what it took to become

a legend when the West was wild: get a job herding cattle at age 9; work as a driver on a wagon train and cross the Great Plains several times; join the gold rush; ride for the Pony Express; serve in the Civil War; hunt for buffalo; and receive the Medal of Honor for service as an Army scout.

Buffalo Bill's life was the topic of newspaper articles and dime novels. At age 26, he entered show business and eventually created Buffalo Bill's Wild West, an outdoor spectacle featuring cowboys, cowgirls (including sharpshooter Annie Oakley), soldiers, American Indians, buffalo, cattle and other animals. The popular show was invited to England in 1887 to perform at Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

When Buffalo Bill died, Jan. 10, 1917, more than 25,000 mourners attended his funeral. His grave is located on top of Lookout Mountain, which overlooks Denver. **For more information**, go to www.buffalobill.org. — *Mary Zalmanek*

TEXAN RV PARK

At first glance, Texan RV Park

in Athens, Texas, might seem like any other campground, but the story of its owner, George Toone, is extraordinary. Toone is completely blind.

"I'm classified as 100 percent," Toone told *MotorHome*. Despite the blindness, Toone has plowed ahead with everything he's done in life, from milking cows to learning how to drive a tractor. Growing up, he worked with his brother on the family farm.

Toone also uses his head. He earned a master's degree in education and spent 23 years working as a rehabilitation counselor. But while his counseling job was fulfilling, Toone longed to have a campground, which he purchased in the spring of 2012.

Texan RV Park has 70 campsites, 24 of which are pull-through. The park has two fishing ponds stocked



with bass, crappie and catfish. There's also a 1,500-square-foot rally hall with a kitchen and an outdoor gazebo that overlooks the fishing ponds.

Toone is assisted by three work-amperers who live on-site, helping him with everything from guest registrations to campground maintenance and park improvements.

Looking to the future, Toone said he hopes people find inspiration in his story and that it inspires them to live out their own dreams, whatever they may be.

For more information, call 903-677-3326 or visit www.texanrvpark.weebly.com — *Jeff Crider* ♦



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PHOTO: LAKE HAVASU CITY CVB

LAKE HAVASU CITY, ARIZONA

After a visit in our motorhome to Lake Havasu City, Ariz., my wife, Gayle, and I are convinced this particular high-desert area of Arizona should be on the 'bucket list' for every RVer. Sixty miles of scenic lake waterways, sandy beaches, no jellyfish or sharks, hidden coves surrounded by canyon cliffs, and connection to the navigable Colorado River, all add to the attraction of the area. Waterskiing, wakeboarding, houseboating, kayaking, canoeing and fishing are just some of the activities here. No wonder Lake Havasu was named the "Best Non-Ocean Beach Destination" in 2011 by Yahoo. But there's so much more to Lake Havasu.

Of particular interest to me are the 24 working lighthouses that have been erected and maintained by the Lake Havasu Lighthouse Club. All but the one original lighthouse (located at the entrance to the marina), are scaled-down replicas of actual U.S. lighthouses, and can be seen during a self-guided tour. They are used as navigational aids by those on Lake

WITH 24 LIGHTHOUSES AND THE ORIGINAL LONDON BRIDGE, THIS DESERT OASIS IS FULL OF SURPRISES



Top: A bird's-eye view of vibrant air balloons near London Bridge and Bridgewater Channel during the Annual Havasu Balloon Festival and Fair held in January. Above: Split Rock Lighthouse — one of the operational replica lights on the lake — stands 21 feet tall. Left: With approximately 1,718 RV sites, the Lake Havasu City area is very motorhome friendly.



PHOTOS: KEN REID



PHOTO: LAKE HAVASU CITY CVB



PHOTO: LAKE HAVASU CITY CVB

Clockwise from left: In 1964, London Bridge was dismantled and shipped from England to the U.S. where it was rebuilt on Lake Havasu in 1971. The lake is home to several fishing tournaments throughout the year. Lake Havasu's 60 miles of lake and river waterways and its quiet coves make it ideal for all types of boating. There are more than 20 all-terrain vehicle trails within easy driving distance of Lake Havasu City. They wind over and through sand dunes, canyons and open desert.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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- CAMPBELL COVE RV RESORT**
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Havasu, and meet all U.S. Coast Guard requirements. Some of the lighthouses I saw were Cape Hatteras, West Quoddy, East Quoddy, Umpqua River, Montauk Point, Vermillion, Split Rock, West Point and Thunder Bay.

This was our second visit to Lake Havasu. The first time we stayed in our motorhome at Bullhead City, Ariz., which

is across the Colorado River from Laughlin, Nev. We went down the river by boat from Laughlin, through steep but uniquely scenic canyons that offer glimpses of rarely encountered wildlife such as desert bighorn sheep and wild burros. Eventually, we arrived at London Bridge, in Lake Havasu City, which is close to the border with California. Within an easy

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walk of the bridge, on both sides of the waterway, are restaurants, quaint shops, excursion boats, a brewery and many other attractions worth checking out.

During our most recent visit, we stayed at one of many, many RV resorts that are located in and around Lake Havasu City; some of those situated right on the shore. One of the discoveries we made the first day was that there is an amazing infrastructure in place to ac-

commodate most any type of service or repair, for virtually any RV or boat. Another thing learned was there are no apparent size restrictions on either. We saw dozens of beautifully painted offshore racing boats, with three or four high-performance engines, which normally would only be encountered in glitzy coastal recreation areas. Likewise, there were lots of extravagant motorhomes that made our 35 footer look really small.

One of the most important reasons this location is so attractive to such a large number of people is the weather — more than 300 sunny days a year. Around 750,000 visitors come each year, drawn, in part, by the calm water of the lake and the low-humidity desert weather. The average high temperature during the coldest part of the winter is in the mid-60s. By the end of May, the average high has reached an uncomfortable 95 degrees. But in October, it's back in the upper 80s.

Of course, the London Bridge is an attraction worthy of mention. It once spanned a section of the Thames River in London, England. Built in 1831, it was not designed to handle the stress of 20th century vehicle traffic. In 1967 the Common Council of the City of London placed it on the market. On April 18, 1968, the winning bid went to Lake Havasu City founder, Robert P. McCulloch, for \$2,460,000. Each block was numbered before being disassembled. They were shipped through the Panama Canal to California; then trucked from Long Beach. The entire bridge was then reconstructed at the new location and rededicated on Oct. 10, 1971. The total cost of this huge tourist attraction (the second biggest in the state), including initial purchase, relocation and reassembly, was \$5.1 million.

Also within walking distance of the bridge is the Lake Havasu Museum of History. It showcases the history and culture of this unique city. Included are exhibits pertaining to the history of the Native American Chemehuevi tribe; building of the Parker Dam and formation of Lake Havasu; and how the vision of city founder Robert McCulloch led to the creation of Lake Havasu City as it is today.

If fishing is your thing, Lake Havasu ranks as one of the best fishing destinations in the Southwest. A valid Arizona fishing license and Colorado River stamp are required for anglers 14 years or older. Large- and smallmouth bass, stripers, panfish and catfish can be taken all year long — but bag limits vary, so it's best to pick up a copy of the regulations at one of the several local businesses that are authorized to issue licenses, including Kmart and Walmart.

I like to hike, especially on nature trails where wildlife abounds. The Lake

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PHOTO: LAKE HAVASU CITY CVB

Bighorn sheep can be spotted in several locations in the desert around Lake Havasu City.

Havasu area has many trails for hikers of all levels. Those who want a leisurely stroll can walk on paved surfaces, around and beneath the London Bridge. Those who want something more challenging can try the trails in SARA Park, where you can see canyons with towering cliffs and perhaps desert bighorn sheep. Experienced hikers can also try conquering Cupcake Mountain. Birders will find the nearby Havasu National Wildlife Refuge, which extends across the border into California, to be of particular interest.

Walking and bicycling are excellent ways to see the city and lake while getting exercise. For those who don't have a bicycle, there are at least three area businesses that will be happy to rent one to you. But there are other ways to get around, too — like the Lake Havasu Trolley. Of course, there are plenty of excursion and adventure tours, such as helicopter, airplane, seaplane and hot-air balloon rides; parasailing, ultralight flights, Segway tours, jet boat rides, kayaking tours, sunset cruises — the list goes on and on. There's even the ASA-sanctioned Havasu 95 Speedway. Stock car races with late-model cars, modified, truck, street stock, legend, bandolero and factory stock classes, happen from September through May.

There are more than 20 all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trails within easy driving distance. They wind over and through sand dunes, canyons and open desert. If you don't have your own, there are plenty of places to rent 4WD trucks, dirt bikes, ATVs and UTVs.

Within an hour's drive of Lake Havasu City is a quaint little town left over from the Old West, named Oatman. It still has wooden sidewalks, and merchants dress in late-1800s costume. But we found the

most interesting aspect is that wild burros roam freely in the streets. You can purchase pellets of food that they will gladly take from your hand — but be careful that's all they take. There were some real cute young ones with their mothers when we were there.

There's so much to see and do in Lake Havasu City, we will definitely be going back. On our next visit, we would love to bring our kids and grandkids. If dreams

could come true, the entire family, plus our friends and their friends, would get together there for at least a week. Based on our experience, we're sure that virtually everyone would enjoy a long weekend or a week there. ♦



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



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Top insets: A harbor seal at one of Oregon's Marine Gardens — areas that allow visitors to enjoy and learn about intertidal resources. Canoeing is popular on the South Slough in South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve. Main photo: Boulders line the beach at Roads End State Recreation Site.



Meeting Winter Along OREGON'S COAST

SAVORING THE OFF-SEASON IN THE
PACIFIC NORTHWEST | *by* RHONDA OSTERTAG

While winter snowbirding is the answer for many, for a few freewheeling spirits confronting winter head-on is the preferred ticket, and it doesn't get much better than at the Oregon coast, where the Pacific Ocean is anything but placid. Who knew 50-mph winds, 30-foot seas and periods of drilling rain could actually be a calling card? In conditions any worse than these, staging a watch is just plain crazy!

The winter majority, though, sensibly leave the storms to the hardy, or foolhardy, depending where you come down on the issue. Listening to raindrops, lyrical or percussive, on the motorhome roof is sufficient. Besides, waiting out the storm perfectly pairs with sipping a good Oregon wine or craft brew or curling up with a steaming cup of cocoa.

All celebrate winter's clearings, which do occur. Despite the national weather maps parking a raindrop over the Pacific Northwest for the duration, rainbows, clearings and sunbreaks (an Oregon weather term for sudden beautiful weather) also grace the winter calendar and are glorious — just harder to time. When they do arrive, it's time to play.

Coastal winters hold little chance for boredom, with a full lineup of activities. True, some campgrounds and services do close or reduce offerings, but with fewer crowds to fight, you can act on a whim and not solely on reservations.



Clockwise from above: The most photographed lighthouse in Oregon is Heceta Head. Blow your own glass at Jennifer Sears Glass Art Studio in Lincoln City. Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park has more than 120 sites with electricity and 45 full-hookup sites. Agates can be found on the beach at Lost Creek State Recreation Site. Sunset Bay State Park is one of the most scenic areas along the Oregon coast.

STORM WATCHING

Although few would dispute the transfixing power of a full-out storm, the aftermath holds magic enough and is a good time for most of us to pick up the show.

The storm-charged seas still crash to shore, and towers of spray rocket two-stories skyward before raining back to earth and sea. Racing cascades stream over the jagged black rock of headlands and jetties, and the thumping surf pounds in your chest. Freshly churned foam walks inland, fashioning a curvaceous foot-high seawall of iridescent bubbles. As wind bites at the ephemeral barrier, rafts of foam bounce down the beach. Giggling youngsters and tail-wagging dogs give chase.

When storms rage, stick to headlands and high ground. The unpredictable surf and fast, erratic sneaker waves that can steal footing make beach conditions too woolly. Beware: Logs normally settled in the sand can dislodge in as little as an

inch of water, becoming weapons. Let the storms have the beaches. There will be time afterward for strolling, but always keep a seaward eye for sneaker waves, a year-round phenomenon.

Snow is a rarity. Daytime temperatures range mid-40s to mid-50s, and nighttime lows are in the mid-30s. Whatever the weather, though, come armed with a good rain suit. A jacket and pants are the key to comfort. The protective clothing dulls the wind's bite as well.

THE ART OF THE FIND

Winter beaches look different from the way they look in summer. Storms carry away top sand layers to reveal gravel beds spangled with sea-tossed-and-tumbled gemstones. Eroded from the inland mountains and transported to the ocean by coastal rivers, rounded agate, jasper and petrified wood fuel the hunt. Downward-looking seekers bend in hopes of adding



to pockets and plastic bags. New material brought in or rolled over with the tide starts the hunt anew. Newport blues, blue-black agates of the central coast, are special finds. Shells rarely survive the ride.

Not sparkling enough?

Each October through May, Lincoln City's secret "fairies" hide thousands of decorative floats and sea-inspired medallions for beachgoers to find and keep. The town initiated "Finders Keepers" in 2000, to reinvigorate tourism during winter's normal sleep. Modeled after an earlier flotsam — the utilitarian blue-green globes formerly used on Japanese fishing nets that would break free and dot winter shores — the modern treasures are art.

The popularity of Finders Keepers has inspired an entire artisan industry of glass blowers. Rainbow-colored floats are gallery staples, together with decorative vases, dishware and original glass art. Several glass shops allow you to breathe life into a float of your own creation. Elsewhere you can try your hand at fused glass art.

The peeling away of sand holds other surprises. You may discover the silvered roots and stumps of ghost forests covered alive thousands of years ago by the advance of sand or a shipwreck long-forgotten. One girl even found a cannon, which sparked a segment of the Public Broadcasting Service's *History Detectives*. Other finds are scallop, snail and clam shell fossils eroded from the cliffs, and whale burps — a humorous nickname for the tightly compressed knotted balls of sea grass that tumble to shore.

LIGHTHOUSES, WHALES AND SEA LIONS

In winter, lighthouses show their original value — their simple white profiles wrapped in fog and blinking the way. In the late 1800s, a growing fishing and logging industry compelled safe passage, and the

lights met the call of the Pacific's rough sea, fierce gales and dangerous rocks.

Eleven lighthouses, not all active, line Oregon's coast. The most accessible are Cape Meares (west of Tillamook), Yaquina Head and Bay (both in Newport), Heceta Head (north of Florence), Umpqua River (southwest of Reedsport), Coquille River (north of Bandon) and Cape Blanco (northwest of Port Orford).

Oregon's tallest, Yaquina Head, stands 93 feet tall, with 114 steps climbing to its top. Yaquina Bay, although retired after three years, functioned long enough to acquire a ghost. The 1899 mysterious disappearance of a seaman's daughter and early reports of a young female ghost walking the beach fanned the legend. Heceta Head Light is the most photographed, and the 1870 Cape Blanco Light, atop 200-foot cliffs on Oregon's most westerly jut, is arguably the most battered. Winds can reach 100 mph.

Near-shore passages of gray whales draw a winter following. During peak passages, whale-watch volunteers staff lighthouse headlands and other elevated seaward posts, providing curious seekers with knowledge and sighting tips. Backs and tails, showery spouts and glassy footprints hint at the multiton through-travelers.

December through early February, the creatures make their annual 6,000-mile journey from the Arctic to the warm waters off Baja California for birthing. The northern return with calves runs March through October.

Sea lions, too, may call your attention with their barking, or you may sense being watched by big black eyes. Harbor seals — small, earless seals with blotchy coats and bulbous heads — bob in the bay and turn curious eyes toward shore.

California and Steller sea lions, eared and dog-faced, can be seen along the coast. While California sea lions are more numerous, the Stellers are bigger and more lionlike. Look for the animals near piers, on rock haul-outs or at the privately operated Sea Lion Caves, north of Florence. At this mainland sea lion rookery, an elevator sinks 208 feet to the cave floor. In winter and fall, sea lions favor the cave, but can also be seen on rocky shores and in offshore waters here and elsewhere.

Sea- and shorebirds, bald eagles and

peregrines attract the binocular-eyed, as well. Sometimes, an interloping snowy owl travels can be spotted flying south.

DUCKING THE DROP

Indoor coastal attractions have even greater appeal in winter. Fish markets, restaurants, museums, breweries, aquariums at Seaside or Newport's Oregon Coast and Mark O. Hatfield Marine Science Center, casinos (in Lincoln City, Florence and Coos Bay) and shops all bid entry.

The historic waterfronts of Newport and Florence — the boardwalks, fishing boats, warehouses and buoys — hold even greater romance under gray skies. Fishermen look as if they stepped from the page of a novel. In yellow slickers and bibs and black rubber boots, they move with purpose. Washed by rain, Newport's sea-inspired murals have renewed color and life.

Turning sights inland, the coastal rain forest is seen at its loveliest. The big firs filter out some of the rain, while the undergrowth is vibrant, polished and new. Falling waters boom in their race seaward. East of Reedsport, Roosevelt elk at Dean Creek Elk Viewing Area rest and graze in the wet grasses. Turnouts allow watching from the vehicle.

EVENTS AND FESTIVALS

Festivals dot the winter calendar. In January, Florence holds a Winter Folk Festival (Jan. 18-19) and Lincoln City hosts a Special Glass Art Drop (Jan. 19-20). In February, Fisher Poets gather in Astoria (Feb. 20-23). Seafood is celebrated at the Annual Crab Feed in Charleston (Feb. 15), and March marks the South Coast Clambake Jazz Festival (March 14-16), which livens up Coos Bay-North Bend.

TRAVEL

Winter travel requires attention to weather and road reports. Tall trees and high winds are a bad combination, as are low areas and high rivers and seas. During big storms, head inland. In the meantime, meet the coast with gusto and bring a smile. ♦

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

KEEN ON KENAI

AN **RV TOUR OF THIS PENINSULA** REVEALS
CALVING GLACIERS, WORLD-CLASS FISHING
AND WHALE WATCHING

by BOBBIE HASSELBRING
photos ANNE WEAVER



Alaska is on many RVers' bucket lists. They save for a lifetime to "do Alaska." However, Alaska is HUGE — 663,300 square miles to be exact. If you divide Alaska in half, Texas would *still* be third in size. Alaska is simply too big to see in one RV trip. So we divided Alaska into several regions we can thoroughly explore. Our first: the Kenai Peninsula, a large fist of land that juts from the southern coast of Alaska into the Gulf of Alaska.

It's 2,400 miles from Portland, Ore., to Anchorage, Alaska. With gas hovering at \$4 a gallon, we decide to fly and rent a Class C motorhome from Alaska Motorhome Rentals. In addition to our rental rig, our other travel tool is *The Milepost: Alaska Trip Planner*, a beefy tome divided by highway that provides invaluable, mile-by-mile information.



Main photo: Motorhome sites at Oceanview RV Park overlook Cook Inlet and the Alaska Range. Inset: Entire families pitch in for the annual hootigan run in Turnagain Arm.

ANCHORAGE TO SEWARD

Our rig isn't ready until 2 p.m., so we explore Anchorage. It's early in the season, a gray and cool 50 degrees. The rule in Alaska is dress like an onion — layers, layers, layers — no matter the season. We head to the Anchorage Log Cabin and Downtown Information Center at 4th and F streets. The visitors center used to be in the sod-roofed cabin, but now it's in a modern structure out back. We pick up a map to get our bearings.

Outside the visitors center, we grab a free shuttle to The ULU Factory a few blocks away. The ulu is the Alaskan Eskimo's traditional knife, used for everything from skinning seals to sewing mukluks (Eskimo boots), and eating seal and muktuk

(whale skin and blubber). Ulu knives are everywhere in Alaska — and some are made in China. Those from The ULU Factory are high quality and, after getting an impressive demo, we buy an ulu and a rounded cutting board. These may come in handy in the RV.

At the downtown farmers market, we buy some birch syrup for breakfast pancakes and a loaf of bread for our trip and then head to Oomingmak Cooperative, a native weaving cooperative specializing in handcrafted qiviut (or qiviuq) products. Qiviut is the soft undercoat of Arctic muskox that's lightweight yet eight times warmer than wool. The weavings are beautiful, but pricey.

It's 5:30 p.m. when we check out our rig, but the sun is high. We're in the Land of the Midnight Sun and it'll be light nearly 24 hours. With the clouds clearing, we head southward down Highway 1 (Seward Highway).

The highway out of Anchorage is an easy four-laner (the "New" Seward Highway), but it soon narrows to two lanes (the "Old" highway). A photographer's delight, this road has been designated an All-American Road and a National Scenic Byway.

We're barely 10 minutes into our drive when we pass Potter Point (Potter Marsh) State Game Refuge, a favorite place for bird watching. We spot ducks, gulls, and big fluffy white swans nesting and my photographer pal insists we stop for a few shots. (If you love photography, travel in Alaska can be amazingly slow!)

Just a few miles farther, we pull off at Beluga Point, a drop-dead-gorgeous view of Cook Inlet and the Kenai Mountains. The water is gray/green, thick with glacial silt (rock flour). Beautiful white belugas are often seen here, but not today, so we continue on.

The highway scuttles along the south shore of Turnagain Arm and Cook Inlet. The Inlet is known for huge tides — 30 to 35 feet between the high and low tides, the second largest in the world. Because the inlet is shallow, it's also noted for tidal bores, huge

breaking waves that rush up the channel when the tide comes in. In fact, Turnagain Arm got its name when Captain James Cook, an early explorer, recognized the dangerous tidal bores and told his crews to "turnagain" and go back out to sea.

We're passing through Chugach National Forest and Chugach State Park, a half-million acres of some of the most accessible hiking, skiing, camping, wildlife viewing, rafting and climbing in Alaska. We spot our first bald eagle scanning the water for dinner; a little farther on, a big owl swoops low over a wetland. When we pass a modest building housing Turnagain Arm Pit BBQ, I realize I'm starving. Fortunately, we're meeting a friend for dinner in Girdwood.



Top to bottom: Young and old can enjoy the moderate hike to Exit Glacier. Visitors learn about the Valdez oil spill at the Pratt museum in Homer. Glacial ice in Kenai Fjords National Park is highly compressed and displays aqua-blue colors.



SEVEN GLACIERS AND ANCIENT BISON

We turn off at the Girdwood Junction and head a few miles to Alyeska Resort, Alaska's largest ski area. The resort boasts the longest continuous double black diamond ski run in North America. Last year, this world-class ski resort received a record 1,000 inches of the white stuff. But we're here for the food at Seven Glaciers and what our friend calls "the best restaurant view in the world."

She's right. After a surprisingly smooth, six-minute tram ride up the nearly vertical slope, we step out on the top of the world. We're surrounded by endless peaks of the Chugach Mountains, views of Turnagain Arm, and yep, just like the restaurant's name, seven "hanging" glaciers.

We splurge on a delightful meal of halibut ceviche, scallop bisque, and king salmon and end with the signature Baked Alyeska, creamy layers of chocolate mousse covered with ganache and Italian meringue. Then we save a few dollars by camping in the hotel's RV parking lot (no services) for a thrifty \$10.

We're up early the next morning because we've got an appointment with Scott Michaels of the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center (AWCC) just a few miles down the road (milepost 79). On the way, we cross the Twentymile River, where fisherman catch oily hooligans often used for bait. Sleek Arctic terns dive-bomb the water and, to the north across Turnagain Arm, we spot Twentymile Glacier, its river of jumbled ice spilling into the water.

At the Conservation Center, we step out of the rig and we're swarmed by mosquitoes, the infamous insect Alaskans jokingly call their state bird. "Sorry, we had a big hatch two days ago," says Michaels, swatting a few of the pesky creatures.

We lather on bug spray and I don my favorite Tilley Insect Shield hat and the bugs mostly leave us alone. Some visitors take a 50-minute shuttle through the property, but we walk.

The Wildlife Center's mission is education and conservation, teaching people about Alaska wildlife, including bears, moose, eagles, elk, musk oxen and wood bison. It has the largest bear enclosure in North America and, as we approach, Joe Boxer, a 1,000-pound brown bear, stands on his hind legs, showing us his impressive 9-foot height. The Center has five bears — two brown, one black and one grizzly. All have been injured or found as cubs and cannot be returned to the wild.



Top to bottom: Stellar sea lions, which are endangered in the Seward area, rest above the tide line. A brown bear emerges from the pond at the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center. These wood bison are part of a project to reintroduce this endangered species to the wild.



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One of the Center's most interesting projects is the wood bison, a shaggy 3,000-pound animal that's the largest creature on the continent. Long thought to be extinct, a small group of these hirsute giants was discovered in Canada. Today, this herd of 130, the only one in the U.S., is part of a project to reintroduce this ancient bison to the wild.

Before we leave, we peruse the extensive gift shop and grab a couple of juicy reindeer sausages for the road. Back on the highway, the landscape now is all willows and brush — perfect moose habitat — and we spot our first "Watch for Moose" sign. The road has deteriorated into potholes and frost heaves, but

Six Mile Creek, a beautiful ribbon of water seething with Class 4 and 5 rapids, makes us forgive the weathered blacktop.

We cross Canyon Creek Bridge and start climbing, the landscape changing to almost vertical mountains patchy with snow and heavily forested with evergreens and spring green deciduous trees. Dozens of waterfalls cascade down rock faces, some feathery and lacy, others muscular rumble-jumbles of water.

We pass Jerome Lake, and at Homer Junction, veer onto Highway 9 toward Seward. Here the mountains are massive and, as the road begins to descend, "No-stopping — Avalanche Area" signs are frequent.

FISHING VILLAGE OF SEWARD

We've left the traffic behind as we follow Kenai Lake, a 24-mile-long glacial lake filled with aqua-green water. Along a willowy wetland, we spot our first moose, an impossibly tall, gangly female loping through the marsh. A little farther along, we spot a gaggle of white swans.

The temperature drops as we leave the wetlands and climb back into the mountains. Before long, the road descends and we cruise into Seward, greeted by a massive roadside eagle's nest.

Seward is a historic village (population 2,700) on Resurrection Bay that thrives on fishing and cruise ships. The marina is filled with dozens of fishing and pleasure boats and several huge cruise ships dock along the seawall. The town is also known for cool, windy, and often rainy weather, even in summer, and we're glad we brought jackets and raingear.

After picking up a few groceries, we head 6 miles north of town to Stoney Creek RV Park and pull into our full-service, gravel-topped spot. RV parks in Alaska are often little more than gravel parking lots. Stoney Creek has the distinction of some grass, a few camp rings, a clean shower house with hair dryers and delicious quiet.

The next morning we motor to town, bypassing the tour operators and restaurants along the marina, and head for downtown Seward and Alaska SeaLife Center's free parking lot. Alaska SeaLife Center is devoted to life in Alaskan waters. Since Alaska has 45,000 miles of coastline and is bordered by two oceans, three seas, and the Gulf of Alaska, there's a lot to see.

The Center features a fascinating exhibit on the 1989 Valdez oil spill, which dumped 11 million gallons of oil into pristine Alaskan waters, killing 250,000 seabirds and harming 14 different species of animals. There is also a seabird exhibit filled with puffins, terns, guillemots, murrelets, oystercatchers and more. Sleek silver harbor seals glide through a two-story tank — and Woody, a massive 1,700-pound stellar sea lion, effortlessly swims in slow circles as visitors shoot pictures.

We're hungry after visiting SeaLife, so we dig into creamy fish chowder at Nellie's Roadhouse, named for a famous Alaskan pioneer woman. Then we cruise historic downtown's Western-front buildings that include galleries, an ice cream shop, a scattering of restaurants and the Seward Brewing Company.

Top to bottom: Fishermen line Turnagain Arm dipping nets to catch hooligans, a herring-like fish. The Anchorage Visitor Center features an authentic sod-roofed cabin. Birders watch graceful Sandhill cranes at the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge in Homer.



The rain has held off, so we drive a few miles to Exit Glacier, one of the few easily accessible glaciers in the state, to meet volunteer ranger Ann Fineman for a free 3.5-mile naturalist hike. As we walk the paved pathway, Fineman points out signs — 1815, 1917, 1926, 1951 — marking where Exit Glacier used to be. Today, the glacier is farther in the mountains.

She stops at a pile of marble-sized pellets, picking up a few. “It’s moose poop,” she says, crumbling the dusty material. “They eat woody materials and digest it so well that their poop is sawdust.”

We leave the pavement and angle up a rocky dirt path, making me grateful I brought my hiking poles. We climb up and up and suddenly we’re face-to-face with 2-mile-long Exit Glacier, layers of craggy ice — some incredibly blue — stacked layer upon layer. Fineman tells us that Exit Glacier descends 2,700 feet from the Harding Icefield and, during warm months, moves downhill at an impressive rate of 1 mile per day.

WHALES AND KENAI FJORDS TOUR

The rain is spattering as we make our way down the mountain and scurry back to the RV park. We’re up early the next day to join Kenai Fjords Tours for a day-long exploration of Kenai Fjords National Park, one of the wildest parks in Alaska. We board the Explorer, a 90-foot diesel-powered Westport. Captain Mark Lindstrom, a veteran sailor who’s been plying Kenai’s waters for 20 years, motors us into Resurrection Bay under gray skies.

As we enjoy juice, fruit and hot cinnamon rolls, a Dall’s porpoise frolics off the bow of a nearby boat. Before I’ve finished my coffee, we spot our first whale, a large humpback feeding on small fish. We also spot sea otters, effortlessly floating on their backs. The largest member of the weasel family, otters’ dense fur traps air and keeps the animals warm and afloat.

The sea is rougher now, and although Captain Lindstrom tries to keep us steady, we’re rocked about. Kenai Fjords Tours is the only tour boat that visits Northwestern Fjord, the farthest and wildest fjord in the area. Sometimes weather makes the trip impossible, but today, the captain goes for it.

It’s 11 a.m. when we spot our first orcas (killer whales), their triangular-shaped dorsal fins standing tall. Orcas, the largest members of the dolphin family, are a



Top: Water cascades off the cliffs in Northwestern Fjord. **Above:** Each licensed fisherman can catch two halibut on charter boats out of Homer.

North to Alaska

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After all, the lure of the North is as strong today as it was when gold was first discovered, and there are still plenty of riches left to enjoy.

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matriarchy, with females directing where the pod goes. This group of several females, distinctive by their smaller, swept-back dorsal fins, swims near the Explorer with their offspring. Three big males swim farther out, their tall dorsal fins looking like black sails.

After negotiating stomach-churning, 4-foot waves around Aialik Cape, we turn into Northwestern Fjord and calmer waters. We munch on chicken sandwiches and Lindstrom tells us Northwestern is one of the most pristine fjords in the state — having been visited by only 250,000 people. It's humbling to think we're two of that small number.

Steep snowcapped rock laced with thousand-foot waterfalls lines both sides of the fjord. Icebergs, some the size of shoeboxes, others icy semi-trucks, float silently in the steely water. On some, harbor seals with pups haul up for rest and protection from predators. The only sounds are the rumbling of the waterfalls and the occasional cries of gulls wheeling overhead.

As Lindstrom navigates slowly to the massive glacier's face, a thunderous crack rips the air and a colossal chunk of the ice tears (calves) from the wall sending spray 50 feet into the air and shockwaves that rock the hull. Then he noses the bow within a few feet of Cataract Cove's 1,000-foot granite wall and its cascading waterfalls and we scramble out into the spray to grab photos.

On our return, we're tired and feeling satisfied when the captain calls out, "Whales on left."

A pair of massive humpbacks rolls on their sides, slapping the water with barnacled, 15-foot pectoral fins. We are so close we can hear their smacking and blowing. They turn and dive together, showing us their wide tails.

Suddenly, the two leviathans simultaneously leap out of the water, their huge bodies arching high before crashing back into the waves, sending a giant cascade of water skyward. It's a fitting end to our time in Seward.

ON TO HOMER: END OF THE ROAD

We've loved the little fishing village of Seward, but the end-of-the-road has a lure like no other. And the village of Homer, Alaska, at the end of Alaska's Highway 1, calls us to one of the westernmost

edges of America.

We leave Seward, heading north, and, at the Homer Junction, turn west onto the Sterling Highway (we're still on Highway 1, but they also name highways). At 131 miles from Homer, we encounter a summer constant in Alaska — road construction. However, views of serene Kenai Lake and the Kenai River keep our minds off road flaggers and the stretches of chewed up pavement.

We're soon out of the work areas and cruising at 60 mph. In swampy, tundra areas, many of the evergreens and aspens are stunted, forming strange dwarf forests. This is glacial country, and in many places, the thin topsoil and cold winter temperatures make survival difficult and create these miniature treescapes.

We pass through the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Seeing a sign that this roadway has the highest vehicle/moose collision rate in the state causes us to ease off the gas. Through breaks in the trees, we get glimpses of the massive mountains across Cook Inlet. Then, as if the moose sign were a premonition, we spot a big cow moose grazing contentedly along the roadside.

There are plenty of inviting RV parks along the Sterling, but we're eager to get to Homer so we press on. We come to the little town of Sterling and then Soldotna, the last "real" town before Homer. Soldotna offers everything from Starbucks to Fred Meyer, and with less expensive gasoline, it's a good place to fill up.

From Soldotna south, we're following the west coast of the Kenai Peninsula, and at Clam Gulch, we get our first sweeping view of the inlet — endless deep-blue water edged by craggy, snowy mountains.

Russians played a big role in the settlement of the Kenai Peninsula and we begin to see places with Russian names — Kalifornsky Beach Road, Kasilof Riverview, and Ninilchik, a popular fishing village and home to an old Russian Orthodox Church. There are plenty of RV parks offering scenic views of the water, but we've got reservations in Homer so we keep going.

At Homer Hill, we pull into the turnout and are greeted by the sign "Homer, Alaska, Halibut Fishing Capital of the World." From here, we can see the town, the Kenai coastline, Homer Spit, and the snow-

capped Alaska Range across Cook Inlet.

Homer Spit is a narrow ribbon of sand extending 4.5 miles into Kachemak Bay. It's home to Homer Port & Harbor, a busy marina serving 1,500 commercial and pleasure boats during the summer. The Spit is also filled with hotels, restaurants and plenty of tour operators offering ev-

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everything from whale watching to fishing excursions. We pass a couple of RV parks on the beach, one rustic and another with full services, and wish we'd booked a beach site. But when we get out of the rig and feel the chilly wind blowing across the Spit, we quickly change our opinion.

Back in town, we check out Pratt Museum, a surprisingly sophisticated exhibition of Native American artifacts, fishing vessels, homesteader history and geologic wonders. Especially poignant is "Lost and Found," a display about local fishermen who died — or survived — harrowing accidents at sea.

Then we head over to the Alaska Islands & Ocean Visitor Center, headquarters for the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge Center, and its free exhibit and video on the area's shorebirds and estuaries. Outside, we walk along Beluga Slough Trail, a raised boardwalk that extends into the wetlands. Suddenly, the air fills with honks and quacks as dozens of ducks and Canada geese take to the air. A moment later, an eagle, the source of the commotion, glides silently overhead.

The trail leads us to Bishop's Beach on Kachemak Bay, a favorite place for walking dogs. We stroll the sand, collecting a few rocks and chunks of shiny black coal that naturally occur in the Cook Inlet coal beds.

Our home for the night is Oceanview RV Park, a family-owned campground with level gravel sites, full services, a well-stocked gift shop and awe-inspiring views of the water. We snug in and sit outside our motorhome watching eagles dive from the cliffs to the water below.

JUST FOR THE HALIBUT

At 6 a.m., we're back on the Spit to join Captains JR and Sean of North Country Halibut Charters for a half day of halibut fishing. Sixteen of us crowd into the cabin of the 54-foot Irish for the 90-minute trip to the fishing grounds. The captains and deckhand Daniel position us around the boat, bait our lines and we start fishing. My line is in the water less than a minute before there's a telltale tug and I start reeling.

Before long, everyone is yelling, "Color" (the fishermen's term for "fish

on") and reeling like crazy. JR, Sean and Daniel hustle from person to person, unhooking fish and re-baiting hooks. The halibut don't have a lot of fight. However, because they're flat, pulling them up is like dragging a piece of plywood through the water and my arms burn with the effort.

The halibut we're catching are "chickens," averaging 3 to 5 pounds. While small, they're the best tasting. Our limit is two per person and, at this rate, we could limit quickly. Instead, we toss back the fish unharmed, hoping for a larger one, and the fish keep biting.

By 10 a.m., it's all over. The fish hold is full and my arms are weary. As our boat churns back toward the harbor, we sit with silly grins on our faces talking about eating halibut for dinner and how Kenai Peninsula is as delicious as it is beautiful. ♦



Bobbie Hasselbring, a frequent contributor to MotorHome, is an award-winning travel writer and editor of www.realfoodtraveler.com that celebrates artisan and regional food. She owns a Jayco Greyhawk 24SS. Anne Weaver is a professional photographer whose work often appears in MotorHome and Northwest Travel magazines.

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Whether you've been an RVer for a few weeks or a few decades, it probably didn't take long for you to figure out what works — and what doesn't — for your motorhome lifestyle. Life in an RV, whether part time or full time, requires knowledge on a broad scale; after all, as it is often said, a motorhome is a vehicle and a home. It's cool stuff like flat-screen TVs and surround sound systems, but also things we may take for granted, like toilets and tires. But outside of the coach itself, there's so much else to learn — like who has the most convenient dinghy brake system, what truck stops are most convenient, and of course, who has the nicest RV park or campground.

RVers are a social bunch, and they love to share their experiences and knowledge with others who share their passion. That's why we asked *MotorHome* readers to vote for their favorite stuff in this, our 2013 Readers' Choice Awards. We created a category for just about every aspect of RVing (26 in all) and asked our readers to choose from more than 150 brands, products and services. After more than three months of your voting, the results are in ... and here are your favorites.

OUR READERS' FAVORITES IN 26 RV-CENTRIC CATEGORIES

APPLIANCES & ACCESSORIES



MOTORHOME AWNING

GOLD: Carefree of Colorado
www.carefreeofcolorado.com
 Carefree of Colorado offers patio awnings to suit any motorhome.

SILVER: Dometic, www.dometic.com/enus/Americas/USA/RV-Products

BRONZE: Girard, www.girardrv.com/rv



MOTORHOME GENERATOR

GOLD: Cummins Onan
www.cumminsonan.com
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SILVER: Honda
www.powerequipment.honda.com

BRONZE: Generac
www.generac.com/RV/RV_Generators



RV REFRIGERATOR

GOLD: Norcold
www.thetford.com
Norcold has a wide variety of refrigerators to complement any motorhome galley.
SILVER: Dometic
www.dometic.com
BRONZE: Atwood
www.atwoodmobile.com



RV TOILET

GOLD: Thetford/Tecma
www.thetford.com
The Tecma gets top honors for floorplan flexibility and performance.
SILVER: Dometic/SeaLand
www.dometic.com

CLEANING & PROTECTING

MOTORHOME COVER



GOLD: Empire, www.empirecovers.com
Made in the USA, Empire's factory-direct covers help to protect motorhomes from the ravages of Mother Nature.
SILVER: ADCO, www.adcoprod.com
BRONZE: CoverQuest, www.coverquest.com



RV CLEANER

GOLD: Protect All
www.protectall.com
The name says it all. From the tires to the trim, Protect All has a product to keep RVs in tip-top shape.
SILVER: Thetford
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BRAKE ACTUATOR



GOLD: Hopkins BrakeBuddy
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Hopkins' portable BrakeBuddy helps improve safety when towing a dinghy.
SILVER: Roadmaster
www.roadmasterinc.com
BRONZE: SMI, www.smibrake.com

DINGHY VEHICLE



GOLD: Jeep Wrangler, www.jeep.com
Relatively lightweight and capable of going almost anywhere, Wrangler is a versatile dinghy vehicle.
SILVER: Honda CR-V
www.automobiles.honda.com
BRONZE: Jeep Liberty, www.jeep.com

TOW BAR



GOLD: Blue Ox, www.blueox.com
Blue Ox has towing equipment designed for just about any dinghy.
SILVER: Roadmaster, www.roadmasterinc.com
BRONZE: Demco, www.demco-products.com

ENGINE/PERFORMANCE

FUEL ADDITIVE

GOLD: Lucas Oil Products
www.lucasoil.com/products
Lucas additives and lubricants are designed to improve the performance and longevity of any vehicle.
SILVER: Sea Foam
www.seafoamsales.com
BRONZE: Gold Eagle STA-BIL
www.goldeagle.com



PERFORMANCE ENHANCEMENT



GOLD: 5 Star Tuning, www.5startuning.com
5 Star Tuning specializes in custom tuners for more power and/or improved fuel economy.
SILVER: Banks Power
www.bankspower.com
BRONZE: Bully Dog, www.bullydog.com



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SILVER: Mobil 1, www.mobiloil.com
BRONZE: Pennzoil, www.pennzoil.com

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RV RETAILER

GOLD:
Camping World
www.campingworld.com
 Everything you need for a great RV experience can be found at Camping World, either online or at one of its nationwide locations.
SILVER: Local Dealer
BRONZE: Walmart
www.walmart.com



MOTORHOMES

CHASSIS

GOLD: Freightliner
www.freightlinerchassis.com
 Freightliner is the leading supplier of diesel pusher chassis to coachbuilders.
SILVER: Ford, www.ford.com
BRONZE: Spartan
www.spartanchassis.com



CLASS A MOTORHOME

GOLD: Tiffin
www.tiffinmotorhomes.com
 Tiffin specializes in Class A coaches in gas and diesel configurations, and is known for its customer service.
SILVER: Winnebago Industries
www.winnebagoind.com
BRONZE: Newmar
www.newmarcorp.com



CLASS B MOTORHOME

GOLD: Roadtrek, www.roadtrek.com
 Roadtrek's claim to fame is fuel-efficient Class B's with the comforts of larger rigs.
SILVER: Leisure Travel Vans
www.leisurevans.com
BRONZE: Pleasure-Way
www.pleasureway.com



CLASS C MOTORHOME



GOLD: Winnebago Industries
www.winnebagoind.com
 You can't think of a Class C without thinking of Winnebago favorites like the Minnie Winnie and the high end Aspect.
SILVER: Jayco, www.jayco.com
BRONZE: Forest River
www.forestriverinc.com

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GOLD: Winegard, www.winegard.com
 Watch your favorite programming almost anywhere with a portable or roof-mounted satellite system from Winegard.
SILVER: DISH Tailgater by King Controls
www.dish.com/technology/tv-outdoors
BRONZE: KVH Industries, www.kvh.com

SATELLITE PROVIDER



Gold: DirectTV, www.directv.com
 DirectTV's wide variety of programming packages brings high-quality entertainment to just about anywhere.
Silver: DISH Network, www.dish.com

TIRES



RV TIRES

GOLD: Michelin, www.michelinrvtires.com
 Michelin RV tires are engineered to provide excellent handling, comfort and durability. Choose from XCA, XPS, XRV, XZA or XZE designs.

SILVER: Goodyear, www.goodyearrvtires.com

BRONZE: Toyo, www.toyotires.com



TIRE MONITORING

GOLD: TireMinder
www.minderresearch.com/tireminder
 TireMinder's complete systems and components keep tabs on tire pressure for greater peace of mind on the road.

SILVER: Pressure Pro
www.advantagepressurepro.com

BRONZE: Doran
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TRAVEL SERVICES

FUEL STATION



GOLD: Pilot Flying J, www.pilotflyingj.com
 Pilot Flying J offers the largest network of RV-friendly travel centers in the U.S. and Canada.

SILVER: Love's Travel Stops
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SILVER: Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground, Orlando, Fla., <https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/resorts/campsites-at-fort-wilderness-resort>

BRONZE: San Diego RV Resort, La Mesa, Calif., www.sdrvresort.com

RV CASINO RESORT



GOLD: Pechanga Resort and Casino, Temecula, Calif., www.pechanga.com

A 200,000-square-foot gaming floor makes Pechanga California's largest casino. And of course, you can set up camp at the adjacent Pechanga RV Resort.

SILVER: Seven Feathers Casino Resort, Canyonville, Ore., www.sevenfeathers.com

BRONZE: Turning Stone Resort Casino, Verona, N.Y., www.turningstone.com

SIT-DOWN RESTAURANT



GOLD: Cracker Barrel www.crackerbarrel.com

Comfort food dishes are the specialty of Cracker Barrel Restaurants, which also offer quaint country stores.

SILVER: Applebee's www.applebees.com

BRONZE: Denny's, www.dennys.com

STATE TO RV IN



GOLD: Florida, www.visitflorida.com

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AXIS 24.1

Bigger than an SUV, Smaller Than a Traditional Class A, Thor Motor Coach Introduces a Totally New Genre: The RUV

Introducing a new model, or even a new brand to the RV industry would seem a pretty simple undertaking from the consumer's point of view. After all, if you visit a local RV dealership, most of the nameplates you'll encounter there are variations of the same general theme, and are often only differentiated by size, drivetrain, equipment and floorplan.

Defining an entirely new genre, on the other hand, is a more intricate undertaking.

That, however, is just what Thor Motor Coach is attempting to do with its new AXIS motorhome. The first Class A coach built on a Ford E-series chassis, the diminutive motorhome is, as Thor executives note, only about 5 feet longer than a Chevrolet Suburban. But while it doesn't cost much more than a high-end SUV, it is certainly capable of much more.

"We call it an 'RUV' — a Recreational Utility Vehicle," said Jon Krider, director of marketing for Elkhart, Ind.-based Thor Motor Coach. "It's small and nimble enough to drive around town — but when you're at, say, your kid's soccer game and there's a break or the weather turns, it gives you a place to relax, use the facilities, have some lunch — every-



Above: Oversize captain's chairs swivel, and in conjunction with a second, smaller table, can create a more intimate dining environment. **Top:** Dash includes a flip-up computer tray. For meals, a table is supplied that mounts in the floor forward of the sofa. **Opposite page:** Abbreviated galley includes a 6-cubic-foot two-door refrigerator, three-burner cooktop, convection microwave, single-bowl sink with gooseneck faucet and flip-up countertop addition.

thing you can't do in an SUV."

Thor isn't the first to build a Class A motorhome on a chassis usually associated with traditionally smaller Class C and Class B coaches, but it *is* the first company to design and engineer a Class A "house" on the Ford E-350 framework. As Krider noted, the V-10-powered/five-speed TorqShift-equipped Ford offered a number of advantages.

Price, as might be expected, was one concern; he estimated that building on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis, for example, might have increased the MSRP by as much as \$12,000 — and it adds a diesel component to the mix. "Gas is still pretty much the universal fuel in the U.S. and Canada," said Krider. More to the point, though, the Ford allowed Thor designers a lot more latitude and the ability to offer higher gross vehicle weight rating (12,500 pounds) and gross combined weight rating (18,500 pounds) capacities.

"The E-350 chassis actually has wider frame rails than a traditional Class A gas chassis, so it has a solid stance, further enhanced by its lower (by 5 inches) center of gravity," Krider pointed out. "Plus, we were able to lengthen the rails. As a consequence, this motorhome has a 188-inch wheelbase — there's not a lot of overhang. It all adds up





SPECIFICATIONS

EXTERIOR LENGTH: 25' 6"	GRAY-WATER CAP: 37 GAL
EXTERIOR WIDTH, REAR: 7' 10"	LP-GAS CAP: 10 GAL
EXTERIOR WIDTH, FRONT: 7' 3"	WEIGHT (DRY):
EXTERIOR HEIGHT: 11' 3"	10,300 POUNDS (ESTIMATED)
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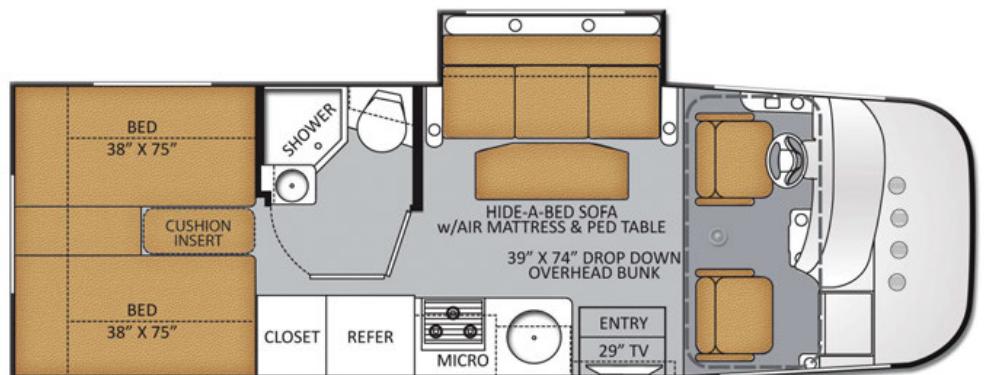
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to an extremely stable platform." The motorhome's maneuverability is improved further by an inconspicuous narrowing of the frame up front, where the AXIS is a full 7 inches narrower than out back.

Using a strip chassis (most consumers are only familiar with the E-350 in cab chassis form, which maintains the cab, doors and windshield, none of which are included in the strip version) also places the engine "doghouse" farther forward, eliminating the traditional "hump" and opening up the forward cabin. Thor fills the space nicely with a removable coffee table, which, combined with the swivel feature of the twin oversize captain's chairs, creates a second, more intimate dining location (the primary table works in conjunction with the sofa seating). The clean, unencumbered dash places the stereo and major switches in the center dash pod, within reach of both driver and passenger, with a fold-out computer tray built into the dash on the navigator's side of things.

Directly above the cockpit is the same type of electronically actuated and hidden 39-by-75-inch bunk bed that Thor introduced in its larger A.C.E. Class A gas coach, though it's so well-integrated into the interior design (the bottom of the bunk



even incorporates cabin lighting) that it's unnoticeable when not in use.

In fact, there are a wealth of sleeping locations in what might otherwise be mistaken for a "couple's coach" based upon its size. The streetside sofa, housed in the motorhome's only slideout, also provides ancillary sleeping arrangements, folding out into a 54-by-75-inch hide-a-bed (the position of the slide was, in fact, intended to allow easy access throughout the coach with the hide-a-bed extended) while twin 39-by-75-inch bunk beds in the rear can be converted into a king-size playroom for the kids by using the extra cushions.

What really distinguishes the interior, though, is a unique double-hinged "extender-room" door that turns the street-side mid-coach bathroom into a virtual changing room. Essentially, the entire inside wall of the bathroom can be folded out, combining the bath and hallway into one large space; the double-door butts against the 6-cubic-foot curbside refrigerator when the area is in use. And, while at first blush a shower curtain seems a poor



The entire inside wall of the bathroom is designed to fold back — Thor calls it an "extender-room door" — to open up the bathroom into a comfortable changing room.

choice when even small travel trailers are being fitted with neo-angle shower stalls, it, too, was chosen for space utilization.

"A hard-walled shower would 'enclose' the bathroom," Krider said. "It's

just larger without it."

Nuts and bolts aside, Thor wrapped the AXIS with a decidedly distinctive design set off by the arched one-piece panoramic windshield — and, again, tweaked the status quo. Chromed side mirrors with integrated cameras are mounted well forward so screens on the oversize side windows don't interfere with vision (a rear backup camera also is standard), headlight pods are ringed with LED strips, Jalousie-style frameless windows are used throughout and, as Krider pointed out, there's plenty of storage, including pass-through compartments both front and rear accessed by side-opening baggage doors.

The new Thor Motor Coach Class A actually comes in two flavors: the AXIS, and, with a bit more aggressive styling, the Vegas. Either one can do everything an SUV can't. ♦



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

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AIR REPAIR

**FINDING AND
FIXING LEAKS
IN YOUR
COACH'S
AIR SYSTEM
MAY BE
EASIER THAN
YOU THINK**

by E. DON SMITH

If you drive a Class A diesel motorhome, eventually you are going to experience an air leak. An air ride motorhome has a complex system of hoses, tanks, bags, connectors and an onboard compressor that keeps the air bags at proper height and maintains the pressure necessary to operate the air brakes as well. Since the compressor runs continuously as you drive, a small leak is usually overcome by the refilling of the tanks — but a larger leak will leave you stranded.

In a correctly operating system, a short stop for dinner, or even after a few hours or days, the system should be at or near normal air pressure. Even a week or two can yield good pressure as you restart the coach if the system is really “airtight.” If you start up after a few hours or days and are greeted by the chassis low air alert, the likely cause is an air leak. Fixing the leak is not usually as hard as locating it, but if you can find it, you can probably fix it.

There are numerous causes for air leaks, and they can emanate from a variety of sources, but if you do a little investigation of your own, you can likely identify all but the smallest of leaks. This particular coach when new could sit a week or more and never leak down enough that the low air alert would sound. But lately we noted that an overnight or long rest stop resulted in the pressure dropping to a point where the low air alarm would sound on start up. It never caused an operational issue, as the pressure stayed up while the engine was running, so we knew that it was a fairly small leak and hopefully one that we could find.

After returning from our last trip, we shut down the coach, and while unpacking the storage bays, the sound of leaking air could be easily heard. Since the sound came from the basement, that is where the search began. With nothing other than some courage, a flashlight and reading glasses, it was time to end this annoyance.

When searching for a leak such as this, the coach will need to be aired-up. So if you have been parked a while, you will need to run the engine until you hear the air dryer valve activate. This will ensure the system is at max pressure and will make locating the leak that much easier.

The first step was to unload the storage bay where the leak was heard in order to get access to the “tray” that usually houses all the air lines. These lines route from the compressor in the rear of the coach to the front where the air tanks, front air bags and brakes are located. Most chassis manufacturers use some form of a tray or a large wiring loom to protect the plastic air lines, and they usually locate them along one of the frame rails.

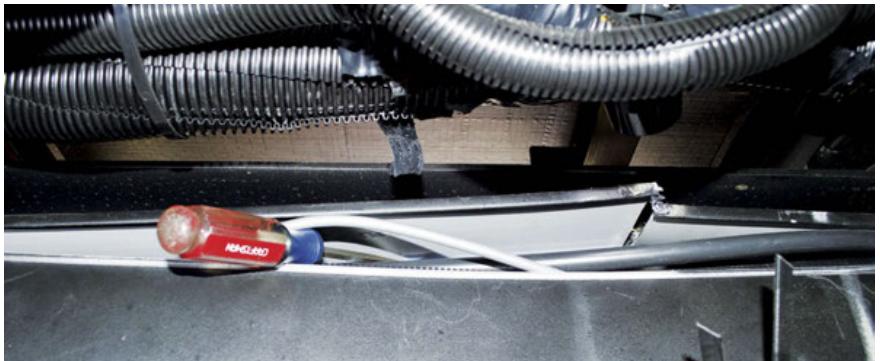
After 20 minutes of unloading, the first thing noted was that we carry too much stuff that we never use, but that’s the topic of another article. The next thing noted was that the storage bay was in need of a good cleaning, so out came the shop vacuum. With the bay clean, entering and exiting could be made without the risk of a stray fishhook making an unauthorized catch. With the coach at full air pressure and the storage bay cleaned out, the leak could be pinpointed, and as expected it was inside the basement.



1. After cleaning out the basement storage bay where the leaking air line was thought to be, and chocking the tires to prevent the coach from moving, the real work could begin.



2. The first step was to locate the general area of the air line tray and then cut open the cable ties holding the lid of the tray that houses the air lines.



3. Since the tray is located at the top of the frame rail, getting inside is very difficult. The only access you will have is to reach into the tray and carefully move the various air lines around until you hear the sound of the leaking air change. Then you will know you are moving the right one. Once you locate the correct hose you will have to fish it out to the top so you can repair it; usually there is enough slack in the hose to do this without damage. While the hose is still in the tray you can hopefully feel the escaping air with your fingers so that you are sure you located the right one. In instances where you can hear the leak but can’t see it, a spray bottle containing a water/soap solution can be a great help. Once the leak is located, use the air reservoir tank manual water drain valve (if available) or a manually accessible air pressure release valve to bleed air pressure from the system before cutting into any pressurized lines or unscrewing any pressure fittings — or serious injury could occur.



4. After pulling the hose outside the tray, you can start the repair procedure. First, you need to locate the defect that is causing the leak. Here, you can see that this pinhole in the air line was the culprit. In order to make a clean cut, we used a Craftsman Handi-Cut razor cutter because it will produce a crisp cut without crushing or leaving any frayed edges.



5. Both sides of the defect were cut leaving two ends of the airline free. Try to cut as little as possible so the hose is not too short to be rejoined.



6. There are a variety of inline hose repair unions available at most industrial supply houses or truck parts stores. We selected an inline brass union (DOT rated) that uses ferrules and wrench flats for easy tightening. Notice the inner tube is steel, which is required for DOT air line use. Most brass fittings at home repair centers are *not* DOT rated, so make sure you get the proper part.



7. First, slide the nut over one end of the hose followed by the ferrule. Then push the air line over the fitting on the main body of the union until it bottoms out. Pull the nut down over the ferrule and tighten with a wrench. Then repeat on the other end. Since the fitting seals on the inside between the ferrule and the hose, no thread sealant is required.



8. After properly tightening one side of the brass fitting it should look like this.



9. Since this large diameter fitting will now reside in a tray full of polymer air lines, it is important to cover it so that the brass union will not rub against the other air lines and cause additional leaks.



10. To wrap the brass fitting, we used a short piece of plastic wire loom, then secured it with cable ties.



11. Air line repair unions are available in many different sizes and types, including some that do not require any tools. Here is an example of a “push to connect” fitting, made to withstand the high pressure of a typical air line which can reach 150 psi. If you don’t already have any of these in your tool kit, it may be a good idea to obtain a selection (make sure they are DOT rated) of sizes and keep them available. Quarter-inch, 3/8-inch and 1/2-inch are all very common on motorhomes, and one of each should be in your toolbox for quick repairs on the road.



12. After extended downtime, the chassis air pressure will need to build again, which could take several minutes. Keep that in mind before departing your house or RV park in the early morning to avoid disturbing your neighbors.

Every leak may not be as easy to find as this one, and every repair may not be a failed hose, but from our experience, it is usually a leak in a hose, a failed fitting or valve. Using the steps in this article, you should be prepared to tackle an air leak and keep the air bags from leaking down, just as we did.

After our repair, the coach stayed at normal pressure for almost a week, which is more than enough to meet our criterion of a tight air system. If you have a failed valve, or other, more serious problem, you may require professional assistance, but many of those annoying leaks can be fixed at home or even on the road. ♦



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

THE COACH SCENE

There was a time — OK, let's be frank: it was about four years ago — when the concept of a well-equipped, sub-\$100,000, 25-foot-long Class A motorhome was about as foreign to the RV industry as a Class C American coach built on an Italian chassis.

Then came the recession, and RV enthusiasts still in a position to buy became a lot more particular about what they were spending their money on. In retrospect, a case could be made that as painful as it was, the economic downturn instigated in large part a renaissance in coach design, engineering and pricing.

Witness, as Exhibit A, the year 2013. While all the figures won't be in until next spring, the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) reported that through September 2013, motorhome shipments to dealers were just shy of 30,000 coaches. Granted, less-restrictive credit accounts for some of these sales — but the great majority have been fueled by innovative product design.

And everybody's onboard — including Elkhart-Ind.-based Forest River Inc., a multi-division manufacturer that historically battles with cross-town rival Thor Industries Inc. for No. 1 market share.

"We've always been known as a towable company," Forest River General Manager Jeff Babcock recently told the RV trade journal *RVBusiness*. "Looking at it four years ago, five years ago, we always had that bar on towables being so high and motorhomes were so much lower in comparison. Now we've put in a really strong effort into our motorhomes — and with the addition of Coachmen, we are now the No. 1 motorhome manufacturer, and we are continuing to build that edge every year."

Both companies — Forest River and its Coachmen RV division, which it acquired in 2008 — released a number of new ideas in 2013, including the **Forest River FR3** gas Class A coach, the **Legacy** diesel-pusher motorhome and the gas-engine-powered **Coachmen Pursuit**.

COACHMEN PURSUIT



FLEETWOOD DISCOVERY



WINNEBAGO FORZA 34L



RENEGADE VILLAGIO



RENEGADE PHOTOS: SHAWN SPENCE

MANUFACTURERS ARE FILLING DEALERS' LOTS WITH EXCITING MOTORHOMES FEATURING FRESH IDEAS AND FORWARD THINKING

by BRUCE HAMPSON

Like certain of the models discussed here, the FR3 debuted at Elkhart County's RV Open House Week in September 2013, a laid-back trade show held at different venues throughout the county and one of three late-year events now used by the RV industry to debut new-model-year products (the others are the PRVCA Hershey Show in Pennsylvania, also in September, and RVIA's National RV Trade Show in Louisville, Ky., which at press time had yet to happen).

The rather short 25- and 30-foot FR3 is referred to by Forest River as a "crossover" line — "Class A styling with the drivability of a Class C." Built on a 362-hp V-10-powered Ford F53 chassis, both units sport twin slideouts and the same gray-toned exterior and coffee-colored décor, with rotocast bays offering 112 cubic feet of outside storage.

"One of the main things customers notice about the FR3 is its curb appeal," said Product Manager Mike Hums, who developed the coach. "It is set off by a radius roof and a painted

one-piece fiberglass front cap. The headlights and fog lights have LED trim rings that are really distinctive."

Like many shorter Class A motorhomes, the FR3 increases sleeping capacity through the use of an automatically actuated bunk snuggled up against the ceiling of the cockpit. Additional sleep stations are created with a convertible oversize dinette and, in the larger 30DS, a fold-out hide-a-bed sofa that incorporates dual footrests for comfortable TV viewing. Interestingly, the 30DS is equipped with a queen bed out back, while the shorter 25DS features a rear king bed and shares the rear space with a corner bathroom (mid-coach in the bigger model). The 25DS has a 16,000-pound gross vehicle weight rating (gvwr) and retails for around \$109,000.

The Coachmen Pursuit, built using AZDEL composite side walls on the same Ford F53 chassis (with a gvwr of 18,000 pounds) found under the FR3 30DS, features a similar power-bunk system and swivel/reclining cockpit seats along with Co-

FOREST RIVER LEGACY



FOREST RIVER FR3



JAYCO MELBOURNE 4x4



TMC MIRAMAR



PHOTOS THIS PAGE: SHAWN SPENCE

gnac Maple cabinetry. It's available in four two-slideout floorplans — including a new 27-footer — with MSRPs from \$90,000 to \$95,000. The slightly longer, family-size 33BHP also includes a horseshoe dinette and curbside bunks in the bedroom slideout, opposite the bath (although this does reduce outside storage a bit). There's also a lighted “mudroom” for dirty shoes just inside the entryway along with a small broom and coat closet and a pull-out pantry that provides extra counterspace.

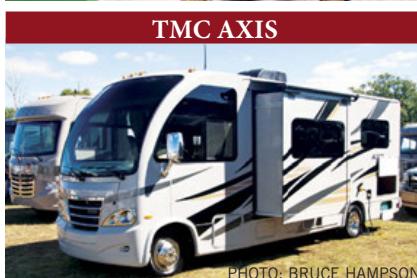
Two very notable features of the Pursuit of interest to pet owners: there's a floor-level window on the passenger side of the cockpit that provides four-legged travelers an unobstructed and safe view when at the campsite, while inside the lowest drawer in the galley pulls open to reveal a pet feeding station.

Also carrying an “entry-level” price — at least, for its segment — is Forest River's Legacy. Positioned to catch the eye of a used diesel buyer, the \$189,000 (MSRP) Legacy is assembled on a Freightliner straight-rail chassis powered by a 300-hp Cummins diesel. Designed for families, it can sleep eight with the now-familiar front overhead bunk and flip-down sofa and dinette.

Winnebago Industries, meanwhile, introduced a number of coaches on the new Chrysler Ram ProMaster chassis, an adaptation of Europe's extremely popular Fiat Ducato platform. The first of these, which debuted to the company's dealer body last April, was the front-wheel-drive, 22-foot **Travato**, with a GVWR of 9,350 pounds and powered by a 280-hp 3.6-liter Pentastar V-6. According to Winnebago Product Manager Russ Garfin, the Travato will use the higher roof variant offered on the ProMaster (it's available in 90- and 101-inch roof heights).

Taking it a step further — literally — Winnebago more recently introduced the **Trend** at the PRVCA Hershey Show. It, too, is built on the ProMaster chassis, but in a larger Class C configuration.

“We've got all the mainstream products at Winnebago, obviously, but we love the niche stuff also,” Scott Degnan, Winnebago's vice president of sales and product management, told *RVBusiness*. “We're trying to grow the overall pie in addition to growing our piece of it and get some nontraditional RVers into the RV lifestyle.



We think that's a natural way to do that.”

Available in two 23-foot floorplans on chassis with a 9,350-pound GVWR and a fuel-efficient V-6 Pentastar gas engine said to get 14 to 16 MPG, the unit also offers six air bags in the cab for added safety. Both floorplans feature a powered StudioLoft bed that lifts tight to the ceiling to conserve space during the day plus LED lighting, Ultraleather furniture and three-point seat belts to the dinette.

Backed by a five-year, 100,000-mile drivetrain warranty, the Trend and its Itasca-brand companion **Viva!** product line will retail in the “high \$80,000s to low \$90,000s,” depending on equipment, Degnan added.

Winnebago Industries also unveiled its **Winnebago Forza** and **Itasca Solei** Class A luxury diesel pushers last spring. Initially available with two slideouts in lengths of 34 and 38 feet on a 6.7-liter, 340-hp Cummins-powered Freightliner XCS chassis with a GVWR of 26,000 pounds, the Forza/Solei features a 50-inch, ceiling-mounted LED TV and a galley with polished Corian countertops and tile backsplashes. A side-entry 34-footer — options on which include a fireplace, front-powered drop-down bunk and

stackable washer and dryer — retails for about \$210,000.

Thor Motor Coach (TMC), the motorized arm of Thor Industries, also has been delving into the use of non-traditional chassis for Class A coaches. More can be found on the new **AXIS** and **Vegas** sister-ships elsewhere in this issue (see page 48), but we'd be remiss if we didn't mention it here as well, if for no other reason than TMC's use of a Ford E-350 strip chassis in the first modern-era employment of that Ford underpinnings in the Class A marketplace.

Another recent TMC gas coach entry — on a bigger scale — is the **Miramar**. Built on a Ford F53 chassis with a GVWR of 22,000 pounds with a 362-hp Triton V-10 engine, the Miramar is available in four 32- to 35-foot floorplans with up to three slideouts, each of which can be equipped with an optional drop-down bed over the cockpit. An HD-MAX exterior with partial paint design is the standard finish, while a wide-open basement structure allows for multiple pass-through storage areas.

Inside, the galley is equipped with a solid-surface countertop, 30-inch over-the-range microwave, residential Whirlpool refrigerator, two-tone furniture and blackout roller shades. All floorplans feature the Denver Mattress sleep system with king-size beds in select models.

“The Miramar is a ‘couples coach’ intended to be used more than a couple of weekends a year,” noted Jon Krider, Thor Motor Coach director of marketing.

For an entirely different look, Jayco introduced an American version of a design it's been selling overseas, the **Melbourne 4x4** Class C. Built on a Ford E-450 chassis with a GVWR of 14,500 pounds and equipped with four-wheel-drive, black chrome wheels, aggressive “mud” tires and a choice of two striking full-body color schemes, the 31-foot, 7-inch **Melbourne 29X** includes a comfort lounge, “dream dinette” and, as might be expected, lap belts built into every seating position.

“It appeals to a younger demographic, a different market for those folks who really want to get to places they normally can't get,” said Chuck Lasley, Jayco vice president of corporate marketing. “Nobody's done anything like this in the U.S. market for a very long time.”

In a more traditional vein, Jayco in-



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troduced an all-new gas Class A coach last spring. Two floorplans for the **Precept** are available, both on a Ford F53 chassis with a GVWR of 18,000 pounds. Features include pass-through exterior storage, 40-inch LED TV, Corian kitchen countertop, 36-inch shower with glass door, six-way powered driver and passenger seats and an ergonomically designed cockpit dash with burlwood accents and passenger-side computer workstation. Like the Melbourne, it also boasts Jayco's exclusive JRide ride-and-handling system, which according to the company features state-of-the-art shocks and suspension systems for optimum handling and comfort.

Not far from Jayco's Middlebury, Ind., headquarters, Kibbi LLC also released a new model just before the summer season. But while Kibbi is more known for its line of upscale Renegade motorcoaches built on Class 7 and Class 8 chassis — including the high-end Ikon — the Bristol, Ind., company went in a different direction with its **Villagio**. It's still every inch a luxury coach — there are just fewer inches. As noted by company execs, the

25-foot, Mercedes-Benz Sprinter-based Renegade takes design cues from European coaches and upscale yachts with its stainless-steel accents, bonded leather upholstery, available Corian countertops, lightweight AZDEL composite side walls and Euro-style cabinets. The 2014 Villagio is also available with a Carefree power awning, one-piece fiberglass shower and three-color full-body paint. Three floorplans are offered, with MSRPs in the \$130,000-\$140,000 range.

As you can see, it's been a blockbuster year for motorhome enthusiasts and there's even more. Some of the new floorplans and there's even more. Some of the new major-league nameplates, include:

- Tiffin Motor Homes' new 37-foot **Allegro Bus** Class A. The center-aisle coach is built on Tiffin's proprietary PowerGlide chassis, with a Cummins 450 ISL engine mated to a 3000MH Allison transmission. "A lot of our customers want something smaller," said Tiffin founder Bob Tiffin. "So, we came up with this 37-footer to take the place of 40s and 45s if that's what they want. It's got all the equipment

that a 45-foot Allegro Bus has — heated floors, three air conditioners, diesel generator and more. It's the best driving motorhome on the road, bar none."

- Fleetwood RV's restyled 2014 **Discovery** diesel pusher Class A is the first major upgrade of the company's popular Discovery since 2007. The 36- to 40-foot 2014 Discovery is available in four floorplans (two with full-wall slides) on a Freightliner XCM modular chassis (with a GVWR of 32,000 pounds) that has been adapted to Fleetwood's PowerBridge platform and equipped with a 380-hp Cummins 8.9-liter diesel engine. The exterior sports oversize headlights with LED accent lighting, a front slideout generator access door and revised colors and graphics. Inside is a more automotive wraparound dash with faux-wood inlays and soft-touch surfaces, while new interior décors and wood options have been added. ♦



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

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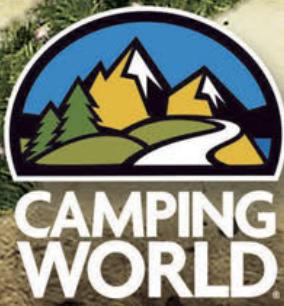
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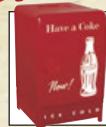


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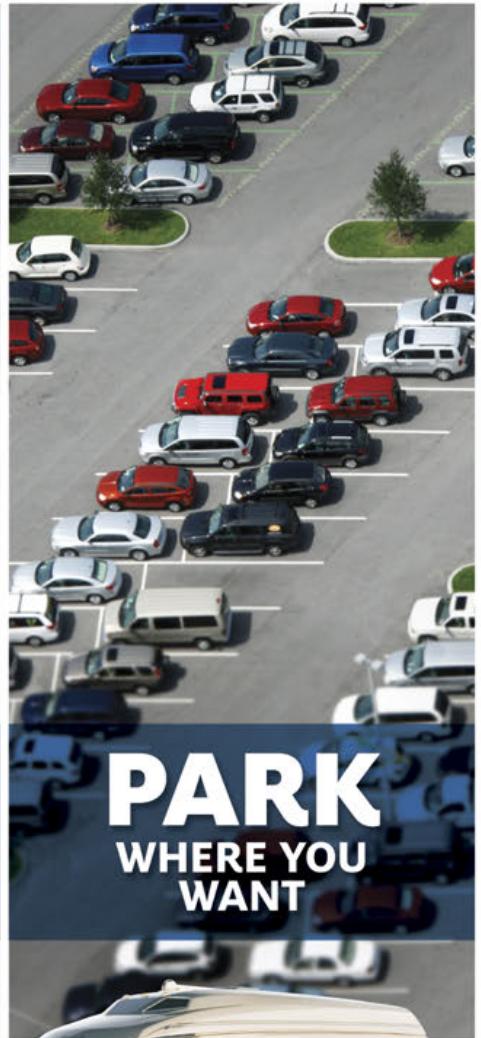
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SLIDEOUT PROTECTION

INSTALLING A
DOMETIC SLIDETOPPER DELUXE
KEEPS THE ELEMENTS
AT BAY

by BILL AND JENN GEHR

Slideout awnings have become a popular motorhome accessory in recent years, and for very good reasons. A slideout awning helps avoid having dirt and debris pulled into the living space when the slideout is retracted, and also helps deflect sun and rain when it's extended. If your coach is not equipped with a slideout awning from the factory, the good news is that you can install one in as little as two hours to add another layer of protection from the elements.

For this project, we installed a Dometic SlideTopper Deluxe on a rig that was never originally equipped with a slideout awning. The Deluxe version features vinyl fabric and a white vinyl weathershield that protects the material from the sun while rolled up. The fabric is waterproof, and with the weathershield wrap, can withstand many years of outdoor exposure. A more expensive version, the SlideTopper Elite, offers a metal weathershield for even greater protection and durability.

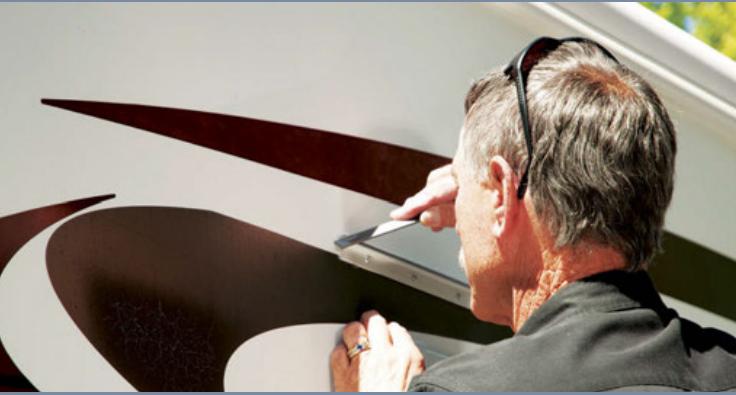
Before ordering the SlideTopper, a few accurate measurements must be taken. SlideToppers are available from 66 to 192 inches, so to get the right size fabric, the first step is to measure the width of the slide from edge to edge. The Dometic SlideTopper can be installed on slideouts with a maximum extension of 44 inches; arms and hardware are available in four colors.



1. It's best to mount the awning rail using silicone rubber sealant rather than putty tape. The bead of silicone rubber follows the previously marked pencil line.



2. With the silicone rubber in place, use three people to assist in installing the awning rail. Gently press into place and install the supplied screws. Wipe off excess sealant at this time.



3. Filing the awning rail entry point before installing the SlideTopper fabric will prevent the vinyl fabric from getting hung up and/or damaged.



4. After prepping the entry point of the awning rail, enlist the help of another person to feed the SlideTopper assembly into the awning rail.



5. Following the manufacturer's directions, install the right-hand mounting bracket with the supplied screws. Be sure to apply silicone rubber onto the surface where the mounting bracket is to be placed.



6. Install the Hex extension bar using the supplied rivet into the right-hand casting before inserting into the mounting bracket.



7. Mount the left-hand bracket following the same measurements as the right-hand bracket.



8. The Hex extension bar should insert into the mounting bracket without any binding.

To begin the project, unpack the SlideTopper, then locate and mark the center on both the awning rail and the slideout. The instructions call for 6 to 7 inches of clearance from the bottom of the awning rail to the center of the mounting bracket. Because there was a window in the way, we had to reduce that clearance to about 4½ inches, which actually presented no problems. The reason for the dimension is

to provide slope to the fabric when it's extended to allow moisture to run off. Even if the fabric has to be mounted fairly level because of obstructions, the weight of the moisture will cause the fabric to sag and will likely runoff anyway. It's still beneficial to have a slideout awning versus going bare even if exact clearances can't be met.

We used a good quality silicone rubber sealant and fastened the railing with

the provided screws. Some installers prefer to apply putty tape, but using silicone rubber has the added benefit of "gluing" the railing to the wall and provides additional sealing for the screws. Filing the opening will prevent the fabric from hanging up when sliding into the railing.

From here, one end is prepped for installation of the fabric roller tube assembly (FRTA). The mounting brackets are

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9. Rivet the left-hand Hex extension bar after the SlideTopper has been centered over the slideout room.



10. After the SlideTopper is centered, install the supplied screws through the mounting bracket into the Hex extension bar.



11. Remove the cotter pins that hold spring tension on both sides of the SlideTopper before attempting to operate.

attached to both the upper left and right corners of the slideout. You will need to follow the directions carefully, since individual brackets have their own specific guidelines.

Next, carefully place the FRTA on a padded surface to prevent damage, install the left-hand extension arm into the appropriate assembly and rivet together. Dometic supplies all hardware necessary for installation with the exception of sealant.

At this point, you will need two ladders and two friends. Unwrap one roll of fabric and slide the fabric into the prepped end of the awning rail far enough so that the arm extension goes beyond the mounting bracket. Insert the arm extension into the mounting bracket and install the other extension through the arm into the mounting bracket. Secure with the supplied pop rivet.

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SLIDEOUT PROTECTION



12. Double-check all measurements and installation before testing the slideout awning.



13. The SlideTopper fabric should be taut when the slideout is fully extended. If not, you may need to add more tension to the right- and left-hand spring assemblies.

Center the SlideTopper on the slideout and install a No. 10, 3/4-inch screw through the bracket and into the extension arm on both sides. Remove the cotter pins from both ends of the FRTA and run the slide in and out several times to verify everything is working properly. Be sure that the SlideTopper is still centered, then install the No. 6, 7/16-inch Tek screws into the awning rail, 2 inches from each end to prevent the fabric from shifting inside the awning rail. Lastly, install the anti-billow stop and brackets.

The Dometic SlideTopper is a great way to add protection and comfort to your motorhome. Prices range from around \$150 to \$400, depending on size. For example, Camping World sells a 10-foot SlideTopper Deluxe for \$296.99 (club price); add \$71 for the Elite model. Camping World's online calculator will help you find the right price for your rig. ♦



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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OUT OF SIGHT ▼



We needed extra storage drawers in our motorhome, so I utilized the space under the sink in the galley. I removed the top shelf from the cabinet, mounted the drawers to the shelf and then reinstalled the shelf. The drawers are out of sight and it's a great place to store small items. I also added two in the bathroom. The drawers were purchased from Camping World.

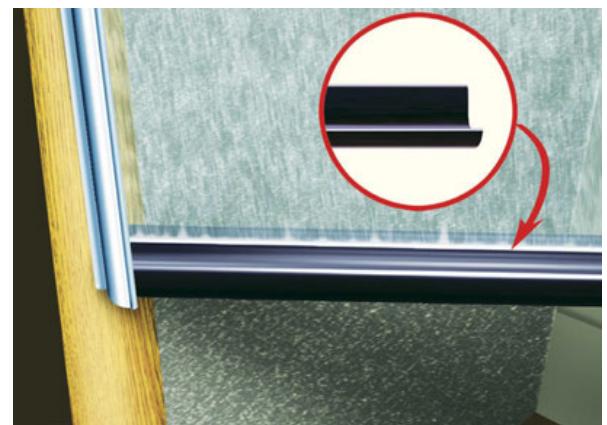
HARVEY W. SCHWARTZ | SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ.

DOUBLE-DUTY DOORSTOP

The airflow through one of our motorhome windows — the window next to our entry door — is blocked when the door is latched open. To help solve this issue, we use our awning wand. We attach it to the latch on the door and then to the awning leg attached on the motorhome.

This allows the door to remain open and not block the window. It also prevents the door from being shut by a breeze. Now we have airflow from both the window and the door.

**BONNIE AND VANCE CLEGG
GREEN COVE SPRINGS, FLA.**



NO MORE ▲ SHOWER DOOR LEAKS

The seal on the bottom of my motorhome's shower door leaked. The small piece of plastic on the bottom of the door rubbed off and broke. I solved the problem by installing an RV rain gutter upside down. I attached it as close to the bottom as possible without rubbing the bottom frame. It works great. I bought the drip rail from Essential Products in Salem, Ore., 800-560-7147, www.rvgutters.com.

WILLIAM SCHMALL | COARSEGOLD, CALIF.

LIGHT THE WAY

We often arrive home after dark, and I must be extremely careful when backing up the motorhome into our driveway next to our house. To provide a reference point that is easily visible in the rearview mirror, I put a solar-powered light at the end of the driveway. I bought this particular light from Harbor Freight, and it is designed for use on driveways.

FRANK WINTER | MANALAPAN, N.J. ♦

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TAKING OUT THE CHILL

Stadler Form Anna Little ceramic heater adds a touch of warm air while enhancing interior décor with Swiss styling

Winter is a great time to explore, with fewer crowds and a lighter impact on RV parks, but the chilly air usually requires the use of a heating source inside our motorhomes. Forced air furnaces are the norm, but they can be overkill when looking for a way to take the chill out of the inside air, not to mention the noise and the cost of LP-gas. Many of us turn to small, portable 120-volt AC heaters to add just the right amount of warmth — or to supplement on colder days. There are a number of these heaters on the market from tiny cubes to rotating towers; Stadler Form offers a Swiss-designed heater called the Anna Little that is as stylish as it is petite.

Admittedly, it's hard to get excited about a portable heater, but this one portrays art form as well as function. It's less than 10 inches tall and only 5³/₄ inches wide and 3³/₄ inches deep. The body is perched on a metal frame that presents an open look while offering outstanding stability. Even if the heater accidentally tips over, the internal switch will immediately turn it off. This safety device is activated when the heater is tipped in any direction.

The Anna Little has a two-position switch that toggles between the high and low settings. On high, the heater offers a power output of 1,200 watts and on low, 700 watts. Heat output is a little lower than most portable heaters, which range in the 1,500-watt category, but it offers a surprising amount of heat for such a little device. And, the lower rating allows owners with only 30-amp service to conserve a little power for other uses while the heater is on. For those looking for maximum output from a portable heater, the Anna Little has a bigger sister, the Anna, which is rated up to 1,500 watts



Controls for the Anna Little heater are in the top, back portion of the housing. Switches are used to turn on/off, choose high or low heat outputs and to set the desired temperature. Filter is removed from the back for cleaning.



and only tacks on 5 inches to the height.

The controls are very simple. A push-button switch turns the heater on and off, indicated by a red LED on the front. Another push-button switch changes the heat output and a dial regulates the temperature. The dial has no visible settings, but finding the desired comfort level is just a matter of rotating the dial toward the hotter or colder icons until the heater clicks on or off. Once set, the heater will automatically cycle on and off to keep the desired temperature. When cycled off, the heater fan is also shut down. The fan is whisper quiet, which will be appreciated by light sleepers or those trying to watch TV.

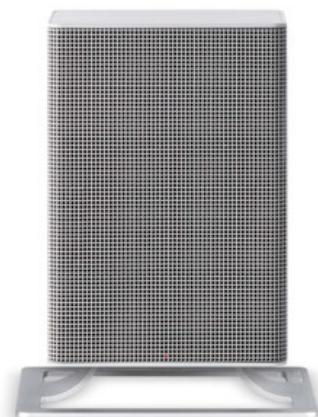
The heart of the heater is a ceramic element that is self-regulating. It provides very comfortable warm air and is protected from overheating. The housing becomes warm while the element is active but the sides and back are cool enough to touch. For cleaning, a filter is built into a plastic frame that snaps into place on the backside of the heater. It's easy to visually inspect and to wash when necessary.

At 3 pounds, the diminutive Anna Little can be moved into any small space where

there is at least 3 feet of clearance from combustibles. It's perfect for warming bathrooms and other areas inside the coach when the air is chilly, and for colder days, it's a good supplemental heater for use in areas where heat distribution from the forced air furnace is ineffective.

The Anna Little has a retail price of \$80; the Anna is \$100. There are a number of resources online where the Anna Little can be purchased. ♦

Stadler Form USA,
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www.stadlerformusa.com



Swiss styling and petite size make the heater visually pleasing and easy to fit inside an RV.



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Towing Trouble Redux

THE AUGUST 2013 HOT LINE LETTER "TOWING TROUBLE" REMINDED A READER OF A SIMILAR EXPERIENCE HE AND HIS WIFE HAD. HE WROTE:

The letter from the Bradleys in the August 2013 issue regarding a problem with Coach-Net is very similar to our situation. We, too, had a problem with Coach-Net regarding damage done when our motorhome was towed.

On Jan. 15, 2013, we had a mechanical problem with our coach while returning home from a trip. We called Coach-Net. The company dispatched a tow truck from Motter's Collision Center in Pine Grove, Pa. When the truck arrived, the driver found he didn't have the proper tools to disconnect the driveshaft, so he had to go back to the shop to get the tools.

Once the motorhome was hooked up for towing, I had to flag down the driver because he was dragging the rear gravel guard and almost dragging the hitch receiver. After that was secured, the coach was towed to the repair shop and we went home.

Three days later, when I picked up the coach, I noticed damage to the fiberglass under the left corner of the motorhome. There were scratches and gouges in the fiberglass that I think were caused by the wheel-lift tow bar on the tow truck.

When they backed the coach into the repair facility, they had to go from the street level up a slight grade into the garage. The coach and tow truck were on different planes and at an angle to one another. I think the left wheel bar rubbed the underside of the front cover on our motorhome as the two vehicles were going from the street into the garage.

I reported the damage to Coach-Net that day. It took several calls and until Feb. 18, 2013, before my calls

were returned. As instructed, I took photos of the damage, secured a repair estimate and sent these to Coach-Net.

On March 12, 2013, I was advised by Jessica Waldon, Central Regional Manager at Coach-Net, that she had not received the estimate. I emailed it again that day. On March 27, 2013, I was advised that the towing company was not responding to Coach-Net's communiques and that Coach-Net would file a claim with the towing company's insurer.

On April 10, 2013, after several attempts, I was able to reach a representative of Zurich Insurance Co., the towing company's insurer. Subsequently, an adjuster came and looked at the damage, took photos and wrote a report, including a repair estimate.

On June 3, 2013, after hearing nothing from anyone in more than a month, I called Zurich and was told that they were denying the claim. They said the damage could not have come from the tow truck.

Our motorhome had no front-end damage before it was towed, and I feel that Coach-Net or Motter's Collision Center is responsible for the repair. I would appreciate any help Hot Line can give me.

ROGER ALTEMIER | GREENTOWN, PA.

Coach-Net was contacted with Hot Line's request for further consideration. We received a note from Jessica Waldon stating that the Coach-Net claim had been paid and that the case was closed. We also received the following update from Altemier. It read:

We received the reimbursement for the damage to our motorhome from Coach-Net. Thank you, Hot Line, for your assistance in the matter.

R.A. ♦

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

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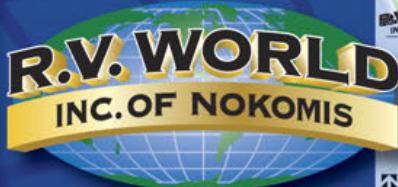
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Tire Pressure Advice

I have been a loyal customer of Les Schwab Tire Centers for many years, but have been less than happy with their customer service lately. I brought my 2000 38-foot Diplomat pusher to Les Schwab to have the tires balanced and pressure checked. The tires are Toyo 255/70R22.5 rated 5,510 pounds at 120 psi. They said that the 90 psi I was running was best, rather than the 120 psi that the sidewalls state. Granted, it might be smoother — but what about safety and fuel mileage? Wouldn't it be logical to just run them at maximum air pressure, which in my mind would yield best fuel mileage due to less tire rolling resistance?

GUY BRUMMET | KENT, WASH.

It seems like your Les Schwab experience was more a technology and specification matter than a customer service matter. They were right in suggesting a lower tire pressure, but perhaps they could have backed up the recommendation with more specifics to help explain why.

The pressure molded into the sidewall is the minimum pressure recommended by the tire manufacturer for when the tire is carrying its maximum rated load. If a particular tire is carrying significantly less weight, it should be inflated according to the manufacturer's load-inflation table. These are available at tire dealers and on the manufacturer's website. Until you know the actual weight of your loaded coach (which can only be determined by using a truck scale) you should either run the pressures found on a placard on your motorhome, or in lieu of that, run the tires at maximum load pressure. Actual weights on tires vary considerably from left to right on many coaches. Therefore, individual wheel weights should be measured. Running tires overinflated causes them to bulge and prematurely wear the center of the tread, and also causes an unnecessarily harsh ride.

SOLAR DINGHY CHARGING?

I have a Class C motorhome and tow a 2008 Saturn with a Roadmaster hitch system. Having a dead battery in the towed car is my issue. Roadmaster does not provide a trickle charger as part of its system. I purchased a 5-watt 12-volt DC solar trickle charge panel for the Saturn that plugs into the cigarette lighter. I asked Roadmaster about it, and they said I might screw up my wiring system or computer in the car. What do you think? Are they just being conservative? I need a live car battery for my brake system. It is not safe or acceptable as is?

DEBBIE BARNES | ONTARIO, CANADA

A small solar panel such as your 5-watt unit won't damage the wiring or computer. However, it also won't be enough to keep up with an auxiliary braking

system. You need a charge line from the motorhome. There are various companies that make them; one is ISL Products: (<http://www.islproducts.net/ToadChargePage.html>)

THICK BRAKE FLUID

We have a 2000 Pace Arrow Vision motorhome that we bought used in 2006. It hasn't had any real problems, and I have it serviced regularly. Recently, I serviced it myself. When I checked the brake fluid it looked and felt like STP. I haven't had a brake problem with this coach. Can you soothe my worry about this? I was a mechanic for 50 years and never saw anything like it.

**WILLIAM REEVES
BULLHEAD CITY, ARIZ.**

Manufacturers generally recommend that brake fluid be flushed and replaced (and bled) about every two years. Brake fluid is hygroscopic, which in this case means it absorbs moisture from the atmosphere. It occurs slowly over time and has little to do with mileage accrued. Fourteen years is way too long, and this is probably why the fluid has become more viscous. I recommend you have the brake fluid changed and the system bled right away. Old fluid also has a much lower boiling point and can boil, under a high-demand situation causing total brake failure.

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TROUBLESOME TURN SIGNAL

I have a 2010 Allegro Open Road on a Workhorse W22 chassis. My problem is with the turn signals. The fuse is good, I replaced the flasher and sometimes they work, but most times they won't work. What is causing this problem?

SLOAN TRIGG | RICHTON, MISS.

There could be a loose or corroded bulb socket or connection, a bad ground connection, rodent chewing damage to wiring, or previous owner tampering, etc. Having said that, these chassis do have a record of having turn-signal switch problems. If nothing turns up with the items mentioned then you should test the switch and replace if necessary.



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SalVinCo, LLC, www.salvinco.com/where-to-purchase

DUALLY VALVES

The October 2013 letter from Cliff Stice on page 66 addressed the problem of tire valve extenders. On page 68 is an ad for www.duallyvalve.com. Three years ago I was faced with adding tire pressure monitor sensors, as this column recommended. Tire dealers advised me to use solid metal valve stems for that, and warned against extenders with monitor sensors on the end. As a solution I used the dually long metal valve as advertised, which is a one piece valve stem, but in the shape and length of a metal stem plus extender. There was a cost for installation, but it solved the problem and the worry about stems and extenders and their valve pushing mechanisms. I wonder why you don't feature this product more in your column. I have never seen it mentioned.

STEVE WILLEY | SANDPOINT, IDAHO

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ORNERY ODOMETER

We have a 1997 Class C Winnebago Minnie 329RQ on a Ford chassis with a V-10 engine. The odometer and trip-meter stopped working, but the speedometer works fine and is still accurate. I checked it by going 60 mph on the interstate and passing a mile marker every minute.

Any idea what it would take to repair the odometer? I just had the cassette radio replaced with a Pioneer radio/ CD player and backup camera. I noticed that the installer connected a wire to the transmission harness, tapping into the backup switch. The odometer stopped working about 500 miles later. Any chance this could have interfered with the odometer?

GEORGE GABRIEL | PEARLAND, TEXAS

The speedometer and odometer get their pulsing signals from the vehicle speed sensor (VSS), which is mounted in the tail-shaft of the transmission. So if one works, but the other doesn't, it indicates the VSS is working and the problem is within the speedometer gauge. That would have nothing to do with the power wire going to the backup light switch. The gauge needs to come out and be repaired by a speedometer specialist or be replaced.

SPRINTER EXTRA FUEL CAPACITY

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CONTINUED ON PAGE 79

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tried without success to find a larger fuel tank. This coach is a fairly good unit, but with only a 26-gallon fuel tank, at 10 to 12 mpg (and diesel not available at every service station) it makes travel not as fun as it could be. I know there are a lot of similar units on the road and I can't be the only person with this problem. If we had been aware of the travel range we would have gone with a different chassis, but hate to take the beating on trading it. Any help would really be appreciated; carrying spare fuel cans doesn't really work.

DONALD TYSON | VIA EMAIL

The Sprinter Store (503-692-0846, www.sprinterstore.com) offers an auxiliary tank for 2007 and newer Sprinters and it has a product for Class B and C motorhome conversions as well. It is not DOT certified at this time, so you will have to decide if it's right for you.

FUEL FILLING FOIBLES

We have a 2003 Dolphin 5320 Class A motorhome and love it. It has one problem that I have not been able to fix: When I fill the gas tank, if I try to fill it to the top, it overflows. Not from the gas fill spout, but from somewhere inside. Consequently, we can never fill the tank to its full capacity not to mention the danger of spilling gas on the ground. Is there some type of vent that could be causing the problem?

**JOHN DEYOUNG
CANYON LAKE, CALIF.**

You'll have to get underneath and follow the large filler hose and vent hose from the gas cap back to the tank. Check for kinks or tight bends in the lines. This is the most common cause of this problem.

Also look for obviously loose or disconnected fittings or stains on the sides of the fuel tank. The stains, where the spilling fuel has traveled down the tank on its way to the ground, can help you hone in on the leak.

DASH DISTRESS TIP

This is in reference to Bill Souther's dash heat problem "Dash Distress" in the November 2013 issue. I have a 2002 Dutch Star on a Freightliner chassis that had the same problem. After replacing the dash controls, flushing the cooling system, in-

stalling new antifreeze and many other things, I still had a problem. At the Hershey, Pa., RV show I talked with a Newmar tech. He told me to remove the inline cooling system filter, which I had already cleaned. I did, and I now have heat. The filter is under the front cap.

WAYNE WATTS | HUGHESVILLE, PA.

Thanks for writing, Wayne. There's nothing like firsthand experience when trying to solve an unusual problem. According to Newmar's tech department, these filters were provided by the engine manufacturer because there were some problems with residual sand from the engine-casting process clogging the heater valves. They recommend that the filter be retained as a precaution, although it's likely by now that all the sand has been trapped.

With heater problems in general, a quick check can be made by feeling the heater hoses when the engine is at operating temperature and the heater set on maximum heat. They should be quite warm or hot to the touch. If they aren't, it indicates coolant is not flowing through the heater. After checking to verify the heater valve is open, the restriction caused by the coolant filter may be suspect. This can be verified by removing it and trying the heater again. Make sure the engine is fully warmed up.

FIBERGLASS CRACKING

I have a 2004 Fleetwood Bounder with a combination washer/dryer. I see hairline cracks in places underneath the dryer vent. Could this be from the heat coming from the dryer, and what can I do to protect the finish of the RV?

JAMES LOFTIN | VIA EMAIL

Without seeing the affected area we can only guess. If the cracked area is also discolored, it might be caused by heat. However, heat rises — and since it's the underside, it's more likely flex cracks or aging of the fiberglass. If you take it to an RV body shop they should be able to tell by looking at it.

IGNITION SWITCH FAILURES

I have a 2001 Georgie Boy Suite that I bought new. About seven years ago, right after I made a stop on the road it would not crank. The mechanic had to replace



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Conntek, 414-482-0800, www.conntek.com.

the ignition switch that is inside the steering column. Recently, the same thing happened and the switch was replaced again. Then I began having trouble cranking it and the switch was bad again. The mechanic has not determined what is causing it. Can you help?

DAVID CARSON | HOUSTON, TEXAS

The shop that made the repairs should provide an explanation of what caused the problem. Part of the solution is to take apart the failed switches to determine if the contacts were burned from excessive current, or if there was some other defect. I had a problem like this on a Jeep and I found that the contacts were melted because there were too many aftermarket accessories running through the switch, overloading and melting the contacts. I installed a continuous duty heavy-duty relay to carry the current and that solved the problem.

BOILING BRAKE FLUID

I own a 1998 Fleetwood Bounder 34J with a Vortec V-8 on a Chevy chassis, with four wheel disc brakes. Forty miles into a five-day trip, I had to step on the brakes, and the brake pedal went to the floor. I had to use low gear and the parking brake to slow down. I worked my way into a parking lot. I put the RV on jacks and checked the wheels and hoses, there were no leaks anywhere. I popped the top off the master cylinder, and the brake fluid was up to the full mark, so I checked the lines from the master cylinder, and still no leaks. Finally, I put the cover back on the master cylinder, started the engine and the brakes were back; the pedal only went down 2½ inches. I didn't have any more trouble with the brakes.

I've had this happen two times before and never have found anything wrong. I thought the RV had power brakes, but haven't found a vacuum chamber or vacuum hose around the master cylinder. I really have to step on the brake hard. Am I missing something?

BOB DAUGHERTY | GATES, N.C.

All large motorhomes come with power brakes; nobody would be able to stop them otherwise. Gas engines that don't have vacuum boosters use hydraulically boosted systems running off the power steering pump.

From your description, it seems like you experienced brake fluid boiling in the calipers. Liquid is not compressible, but vapor is. So when the fluid becomes a vapor, the brake pedal may go to the floor. This typically occurs with old brake fluid, which has absorbed water vapor from the air, thereby reducing its boiling point. If the boiling point gets low enough, even normal driving can boil the fluid. Usually though, it happens on steep downgrades when you use the brakes most. Then when you stop and allow the brakes to cool down, the fluid becomes a liquid again and the brakes seem to work normally. This is why I am a stickler on recommending that brake fluid be flushed and changed every other year. ♦

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Treasure Hunt

MY SEARCH FOR ONE OF MOTHER EARTH'S RAREST ROCKS UNEARTHS A GEM OF A MAN

by ALAN RIDER



In my travels during the past four decades, I've crossed paths with thousands of people. But, as near as I can remember, Blue Sheppard is the only person I've ever met whose parents actually named him after a color.

Which somehow seems fitting, as Blue is a man who is both as unusual as his name and as

multifaceted as the colorful gemstones he's spent his lifetime pursuing. In his trademark black leather vest, he is equal parts tough hard-rock miner, globe-trotting treasure hunter, master gem cutter, respected teacher, humorous TV shopping channel pitchman and — as if all that weren't enough — inveterate philosopher. Not to mention being one of the nicest and most interesting guys you could ever hope to meet.

After getting to know him, I've actually come to think of Blue as an explorer in the truest sense of that word. A humble man whose unbounded enthusiasm leads him into the depths of the earth again and again, into dark places where few of us would dare follow, only to return with dazzling natural treasures that give us all a glimpse at some of the unseen wonders just waiting to be discovered beneath our feet.

As owner of Southern California's renowned Stewart Mine since 1990, Blue is justifiably proud of the mine's distinguished 160-year history. Known for producing some of the highest-quality pink tourmaline the world has ever seen, its eye-popping stones were once a full-blown obsession of China's last Dowager Empress.

If you're not familiar with tourmaline, it's considered one of the world's more remarkable gemstones because of its wide range of colors, from solid pinks, blues and greens, to bicolor examples like the mixture of green and red known as watermelon. It is also exceedingly uncommon, with gem-quality tourmaline being five times more rare than rough diamonds.

Today, ordinary travelers can get a taste of the same thrill of discovery that's kept Blue poking around underground for more than 40 years at his rustic storefront operation known as Gems of Pala. Each weekend the shop, which is located about an hour's drive northeast of downtown San Diego, throws open its gates to allow a limited number of visitors to do a little treasure hunting of their own by methodically sifting through buckets



of gravel Blue has hauled up from areas surrounding the mine's countless gem pockets (\$20/bucket, all equipment included, reservations required, 760-742-1356, www.gemsofala.com).

Though I've never come away with anything more valuable than a handful of small, sparkly mementos, it's not uncommon for visitors to find larger specimens worth some serious cash. Ask Blue about his guests' more memorable discoveries, and watch his eyes light up as he tells the story of the 9-year-old boy who picked up a soda-can-sized rock the adults in his party had cast aside and, after cleaning it up a bit, found he had unearthed a huge tourmaline worth more than \$10,000.

While that possibility certainly exists, my suggestion is to approach your visit to Gems of Pala with much more modest expectations. Because, to my way of thinking, the possibility of striking it rich here is really beside the point.

You see, as neat as it would be to find that spectacular specimen that would ensure my comfortable retirement, for me the real payoff is getting to spend time with Blue Sheppard, a gem of a man who's a perfect example of the priceless finds that lay waiting for us out there on 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: ALAN RIDER; CHRISTINA R. NEWTON

JOURNEY TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

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Fig. 1 Saturn

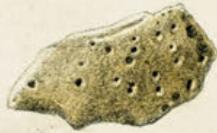


Fig. 3 Asteroid Gaspra



Fig. 5 Mercury

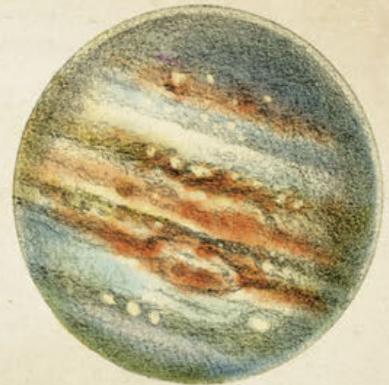


Fig. 7 Jupiter

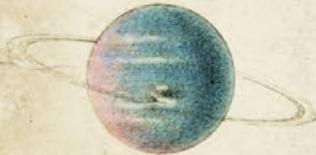


Fig. 2 Neptune

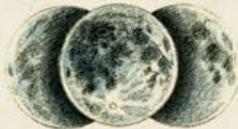


Fig. 4 Phases of the Moon



Fig. 6 Mars

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