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MotorHome

Travel, Tech, Lifestyle – For the RV Enthusiast

February 2015



CHILL OUT

Portable Refrigerator/
Freezer Will Keep it
in The Cool Zone

Pg. 60

**ULTIMATE
ALASKA**

**PART II:
THE ADVENTURE
CONTINUES**

**STAR
POWER**

Custom Luxury in Newmar's
Dutch Star 4369

HOW-TO

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The George Black ferry carries vehicles across the Yukon River from Dawson City, Yukon, to the beginning of the Top of the World Highway in Alaska (see page 32).



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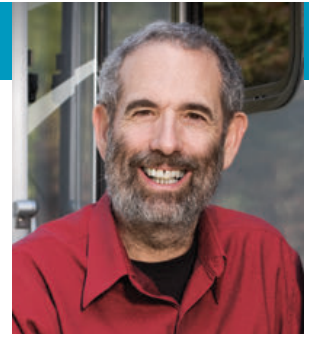
Electrical system maladies can be diagnosed using a multimeter and jumper wires to discover potential breaches in circuit integrity

ON THE COVER

Newmar's distinctive paint scheme and smooth lines look stately against any roadside backdrop. The Dutch Star 4369 diesel pusher (see test on page 38) has a long list of amenities and can even be outfitted with ADA-compliant components for owners with physical limitations. Coach image by Mark Quasius.



By Bob Livingston



Europe's Influence is Refreshing

It's been a long time since my wife, Lynne, and I traveled in a European-built motorhome, so we were pretty excited to get an opportunity to sample life in a small Hymer Class C last fall. We were in Munich, Germany, where we spent a number of days on the Truma campus, learning about Europe's leading supplier of appliances and systems to its RV industry.

Truma, a company that was launched in 1949, manufactures comfort heating, water heating and energy systems that can be found in most of Europe's motorhomes and has entered the U.S. market after setting up offices in Elkhart, Indiana. It's a very dynamic company with emphasis on high-quality systems that are very efficient.

"Efficiency" is the operative word in Europe. It's the code word for "small." Naturally, Europe's infrastructure calls for motorhomes that are compact, but RV enthusiasts there are no less passionate about the lifestyle, and are serious about convenience and comfort.

When I first stepped into our borrowed motorhome that we took to a beautiful lake close to Austria, my eyes rolled. No doubt we're spoiled here in the U.S. It was built on a Fiat cutaway chassis, so it was classified as a Class C, but the cabover was more like those in what some U.S. manufacturers call a Class B-plus. The inside was really

compact and many of the fixtures were designed for multitasking. There were no slideouts to stretch the interior and overall length and width were restricted to handle narrow roads and smaller campsites.

The diesel-powered Fiat chassis was fun to drive. Not a rocket ship, and it had a manual transmission, but it was certainly comfortable and easy to handle. I found out the hard way just how critical size is in Europe when maneuvering around a construction site near our lakeside campground. A truck blocked most of the already tiny road and had no intention of moving over. I squeaked by, but there was very little air space between our motorhome and the obstruction. After a while you get used to the narrow roadways and the fun factor overcomes the tension.

While I missed the spaciousness

of motorhomes I'm used to traveling in, livability in the diminutive Hymer was surprisingly good. The beds were comfortable, the shower was roomier than expected and the kitchen totally workable. And the combination front dinette/seating area was cleverly designed to handle lounging and eating with little complaint. The real shocker was the size of the rear storage locker, which was large enough to handle just about anything most people take on a motorhome trip, including bicycles.

During the last few years, motorhomes influenced by European design and size have become increasingly popular in the U.S. Mercedes-Benz Sprinter and Ram ProMaster chassis have made it possible to build downsized motorhomes that are easier on fuel consumption, easy to handle and offer exceptional livability for their dimensions.

The American version of a compact motorhome offers slideout-enhanced spaciousness and additional features. No doubt, Europe's influence on the U.S. RV market has been positive; I'll have to think about that manual transmission. **M**

“ Motorhomes influenced by European design and size have become increasingly popular in the U.S. ”

Contributors | February



Neela Bhagat is a freelance writer who travels extensively throughout North America with her photographer husband, Arjun, and their dog, Count Reggie, in their Class A Challenger motorhome.



Dennis C. Brewer and his wife, Penny, have spent four years full-timing and three years snowbirding across the 45th parallel in their motorhome. Dennis is a technology author and consultant.



Bobbie Hasselbring is an award-winning travel and food writer and editor of www.realfoodtraveler.com, which covers authentic food and travel. Bobbie owns a 2003 Jayco Greyhawk SS Class C.



Mark Quasius has been writing RV tech articles and reviews for the past 12 years. He and his wife, Leann, enjoy traveling in their Class A whenever possible and look forward to full-timing in a few years.



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



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

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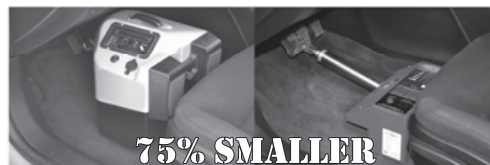


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When you travel in your motorhome, how many nights, on average, do you stay in parking lots such as Wal-Mart or Cracker Barrel?

That's the question we asked in our November 2014 issue, and here are some of the replies we received.



Staying With Friends

During a recent trip to Oregon and Washington, we stayed in our motorhome 27 nights. We travel in a Winnebago View 24-foot motorhome and do not tow a car. Our motorhome's size allows us to stay with friends and family and park in their driveways. We also stayed at casinos a few times and Wal-Mart once. Eleven nights we paid nothing and that allowed us to spend more at some nice places on the Oregon coast. Our average cost for 27 nights was \$18.30 per night and we all had a great time.

Michael and Sheryle Wyatt
Henderson, Nevada

Welcome to Camp Wal-Mart

Recently, we used Wal-Mart about 10 nights out of a 2½-week trip from Georgia to Illinois, then out West, back to Illinois and home to Georgia.

My husband and I decided to take my parents (who are in their 80s) on a once-in-a-lifetime trip out West to visit all of the traditional sites: Badlands National Park, Yosemite National Park, Mount Rushmore National Memorial, Grand Canyon National Park, Las Vegas and Hollywood.

We only had a limited time frame to make this happen. While we definitely wanted to spend nights in campgrounds along the way in order to relax and enjoy the more leisurely part of traveling, we often traveled late into the evening to reach our next destination. We were so thankful that there was always a Wal-Mart available to provide a safe and convenient place to pull in for a short overnight stay. We also were able to restock anything we needed by simply walking across the parking lot.

We weren't being cheap; rather

we thought it was more considerate of already sleeping campers to opt for Wal-Mart over a campground. We all know there is a certain amount of noise that occurs while trying to settle in, especially at an unfamiliar campground in the dark of night.

In our case, that involves trying to park a 40-foot diesel motorhome towing a car. If a large enough pull-through site was not available, it would require removing the car from the tow dolly, opening and closing storage doors to hook up, opening our slides to access sleeping areas, lowering jacks, etc. — or running a generator late at night when most of our fellow campers would have already retired for the evening.

Truthfully, we all enjoyed joking about spending time at Camp Wal-Mart. We appreciated having that option.

Nancy Watkin | Peachtree City, Georgia

Featured Letter

No Mooching a Free Space

Never is the number of times I have mooched a spot at Wal-Mart or any other free place, and I've been at this motorhoming thing for 19 years. After spending seven or eight hours behind the wheel listening to the engine, wind and tire noise, I am ready for some quiet time ... and I have yet to hear a quiet generator.

My motorhome is a 2012 Winnebago Sunstar with a

Ford V-10 and 362-hp engine with a five-speed automatic transmission that gives me 8.1 mpg. I travel at 57 mph or 67 mph, depending on the speed limit, and use cruise control. I just completed a trip to Lancaster, California, and back, and stayed at five campgrounds for nine days. The most I had to pay was \$27.50 per night.

Luther Struve | Pocatello, Idaho

Something for Nothing

Nights at Wal-Mart — 0. Nights at Cracker Barrel — 0. And yes, absolutely, those who do are just plain cheap and want something for nothing.

Gordon Manion | Via email

Spending the Equivalent Amount on Food

My husband and I have been staying overnight at Cracker Barrels for more than 10 years. They are located just off the interstates we travel. We stop in the evening and have supper at Cracker Barrel, sleep in our motorhome overnight and then get up early to have breakfast at the restaurant before we leave for another day of travel. We are not cheap! We just spend the money at Cracker Barrel that we would have spent at a campground. We use campgrounds when we get to our destination.

Eugene and Jean Chesna | Via email

Would you Sleep in Your Car?

We've been RVing for about 25 years and have spent only one night in the parking lot of a Wal-Mart, which happened to be under construction. If you were traveling by car and pulled into town at 9 p.m., would you sleep in your car rather than pay for a motel?

Alicia Rozell | Campo, California

Never Any Security Concerns

We have been RVing for more than 30 years and recently had to call it quits for medical reasons. We used Wal-Mart parking at least 85 percent of the time when we traveled. We always asked a store supervisor if it was OK to park in their lot overnight and what area they preferred. Many times we called ahead to be sure that it was OK. They always welcomed us. We also did all our travel shopping at Wal-Mart. We have many interesting stories about our stays in their lots but never a security concern.

Elvin Shaw | Mesa, Arizona

It's Against the Law in Some Areas

I agree that is a good option, but we rarely stay there. In some cities, states, and all of Canada and Yukon

Territory, it is against the law to spend the night in parking lots. Two cities that I personally know of are Durango, Colorado, and Vancouver, Washington. Some Wal-Marts post signs, but at night they are hard to see, so be sure to check.

Les Spillman | Spokane, Washington

Tram Law Resort?

My wife and I agree with Nancy Westmoreland about spending a single evening at Wal-Mart while on the road. My wife's sister coined the phrase, Tram Law Resorts (Wal-Mart spelled backward) and it works for us. We can stock up on needed items, and fill up at Murphy USA gas stations and save 3 to 10 cents per gallon using a Wal-Mart gift card to pay for the purchase.

RVers who overnight at Wal-Mart need to be courteous and mind their manners. Always ask permission at the customer service desk (some Wal-Marts are not allowed to let you stay due to local ordinances). Park in the designated area. Minimize your use of slideouts and generators. Pick up your garbage, and return your shopping carts to designated areas in the parking lot. This is a courtesy to customers who travel in RVs, not a right. You are a guest. Act like it.

Tony Mitrione

Carolina Beach, North Carolina

Lodges are Another Option

My wife and I took a trip a few years ago from Union City, California, north to Washington, then east to Maine, and south to Florida, then back home along the southern routes. We were gone for six months and only stayed at Wal-Mart once.

We did, however, stay at 36 Elks Lodges along the way. We have books that show all of the Elks Lodges in the country, so when we could not get to one for the night, we would stay at an RV park. There are a lot of Moose Lodges that let members stay for a while, too.

Walter D. Terry | Union City, California

Support Private RV Parks

My wife and I spend roughly six months

of each year (for the past 20 years) in our motorhome. We have never stayed at a Cracker Barrel parking lot and have, in those years, spent about six nights (total) in Wal-Mart lots while in transit and when there were limited other options.

We are fully capable to dry camp when we're on the road, but we know that there are many, many private campgrounds that would like to have us stay with them nearby. We are not affluent, but truly believe that private entrepreneurs who have invested their personal resources in our lifestyle of choice need our support far more than chains like Wal-Mart and Cracker Barrel!

Kurt Kindschi | Merrimac, Wisconsin

There's a Difference Between Traveling and Camping

When we are traveling, we spend close to 100 percent of the nights in Wal-Mart, Cracker Barrel or similar others. We make it a point to have breakfast and our evening meal at that Cracker Barrel, or shop at the Wal-Mart, and thank them. We have called for information on a specific Cracker Barrel and had the manager meet us in the parking lot, welcome us and help us park!

At a destination, or if staying a few days, we will not be at either, but in a campground or even better a relative's driveway. There is a difference between traveling and camping.

Robert Geers | Via email

Overnight Parking Restrictions on the Rise

When traveling en route to our destination, I frequently stay in Wal-Mart parking lots. I have found lately more "no overnight parking" signs in Wal-Mart parking lots, either by itself or accompanied with a city ordinance sign stating chapter and verse why. In fact, one Wal-Mart in west Louisiana off Interstate 10 had big poles at each entrance with an overhead pole attached not allowing anything higher than 12 feet in the parking lot. Apparently they did not want RVs in the lot. I have only stayed

once at a Cracker Barrel as I find the parking lots and parking spaces not as conducive to a 40-foot motorhome towing a car. I wish they were, as we love the food.

Sean Sears | Dahlonega, Georgia

Wouldn't Stay in a Parking Lot to Avoid Campground Fee

We have not done it yet. I would if the weather was dangerous, I was getting too tired to drive safely or traffic was at a standstill, but I would not do it to avoid paying for a campsite and I definitely would patronize the owner of the parking lot. Back in the 1960s there were many places to spend the night free of charge, but with absolutely no amenities.

Bob Cleary Jr. | Jersey City, New Jersey

Canadian Snowbirds

Just want to point out that if you are snowbirds, you do not have any other choice than to "Wal-Mart RV" when you leave or return home. There are simply no campgrounds open due to the cold season. This is why we must stay at Wal-Mart two or three nights a year. Otherwise, we use campgrounds whenever we can. We are very grateful to Wal-Mart, Flying J, and the like, for accommodating us and we favor them with our business in return.

Michel Gadbois

Sainte-Adele, Quebec, Canada

Engine Idle Comments

This is a reply to the comment in November 2014 concerning not letting your engine idle. Yes, Fleetwood and others recommend or require running the engine when operating slides and/or jacks. And, yes, it has to do with amperage drain on batteries.

Most coaches now use the chassis batteries to operate these features not the house batteries. That is twofold, primarily as the chassis batteries are a high-amp-use battery and house batteries are not. Also the alternator can provide a high-amp current output, whereas the inverter/charger cannot.

To hook up to pedestal power will do little if any to assist in powering these accessories for the reason first

stated and also the nature of your battery control computer. The default on your pedestal power charger is first to direct charge to house and then lock in the chassis whereas when the engine is running the sequence is reversed, first to the chassis then to the house. Regardless, the house charger is not designed to be a high-output amperage charger.

Steven Ballard | Gadsden, Alabama

The November 2014 letter "Don't Let the Engine Idle" by Leo Aragon in P.O. Box is interesting. On most coaches, the inverter shorepower does not charge the chassis engine-starting batteries, only the house batteries. On the motorhomes I have owned, you cannot retract the slides with the ignition key on, but it must be on to raise the jacks. I don't know about the Winnebagos though. If your engine-starting batteries go weak or dead after being plugged into shorepower after about 30 days, you really need to install something like an Amp-L-Start from LSL Products. I have installed several of these and they work great — no more dead starting batteries!

Les Spillman | Spokane, Washington

I take exception to the letter by Leo Aragon about letting the engine idle while the jacks go down and sliding out the sides. According to Itasca technical support, without the engine running you put the batteries at risk and may damage the slideout motors.

The leveling jacks manufacturer's manual states, "Coach must be running for LCI Electronic Leveling System to operate."

The following are instructions (from the Itasca 2013 Suncruiser owner's manual) that I post in my motorhome when it goes in for service regarding the leveling jacks and sliding out the sides.

Before extending, level the coach and set the parking brake. This is to assure proper alignment of the "boxes" to the coach structure for strength and sealing.

Start the engine so the alternator can provide maximum power for

proper operation of the slideout mechanisms.

Insert the safety lock key and turn to activate slideout room control switch.

Press the slideout room extend/out switch and hold it until the room is fully extended, then release the switch.

To stop extending the room during operation, release the button.

Deactivate the slideout switch with the safety lock key.

According to Itasca and Schwintek you should press the slideout button in three times and then extend the box; this allows the mechanism and coach to be lined up properly. Check with Itasca, but I think if you do, it will agree with me.

Stephen E. Calderwood | Boring, Oregon

Data Streaming in Campgrounds

I am writing in regard to the article "Give Your TV a Ph.D" published in the November 2014 issue. While the information provided by the author, E. Don Smith, was correct in what can be used and how easy it can be to stream shows, seeing that this is a magazine for motorhomes, he left out a large issue — the data needs and requirements to do such streaming.

Most RVers travel with a hotspot, MiFi, data card, or even use their cellphone to connect to the Internet. Because of this, data plans surely come into play and the data use to stream such shows or movies. For example, here are the typical data estimates for Netflix, one of the largest and most used stream providers:

Good Quality — 310 MB per hour
Better Quality — 720 MB per hour
Standard Def — 1,024 MB per hour
High Def — 2,400 MB per hour

As such, by not having a warning in the article, it could likely do harm to some of your readers in the form of data fees.

The issue, when using an RV park's Wi-Fi to stream, is that most campgrounds cannot handle the data needs as it is, or have placed limits on speed or use. Some even block streaming services all together.

So please be so kind as to alert

your readers of this before someone finds out the hard way that streaming shows while in your motorhome could be a costly mistake.

David Bott | Via email

Shelling Clarification

We have a comment about the “Shellicious Sanibel Island” article by Bobbie Hasselbring in November 2014.

First, note that we are lifetime Good Sam Club members, Camping World members and *MotorHome* subscribers. We are fortunate enough to be snowbirds staying at Periwinkle Park on Sanibel for four months each winter. Having said that, after reading the wonderful and well-written article about Sanibel, we are concerned about the photo on page 28 showing a man on the shore retrieving shells.

While we are not accusing any wrongdoing, we feel that in most instances shells taken from deep water often have live creatures inside. Based on our many years at Sanibel,

we would like other readers to know that the law for Sanibel is that no live shells are to be taken. In fact, beach patrol game wardens watch for this activity. You can verify this information at the Sanibel Chamber of Commerce, the shell museum or with any Sanibel resident.

Harvey Malone and Esther Kezur
Via email

Get Rid of Carpeting, Dark Cabinets and Ovens

I’ve been wondering for years now, when will RV manufacturers and designers get it? Two of the first things people do when they purchase a used RV are tear out the carpet and install vinyl, and paint the cupboards white. Light colors make a motorhome seem so much more spacious, and I don’t know any woman who wants to clean carpets while on vacation. Wall-to-wall carpeting in a bathroom is just plain vile. Also, who wants to cart around a vacuum cleaner when space is at a premium.

Speaking of space, they could also quit installing ovens — make it an option, not standard. Most of us use them for storage anyhow. I also think a two-burner stove would be adequate for most RVers.

Thanks for listening, now please pass it on!
Karen Amidon | Traverse City, Michigan M

Question of the Month

How much of the time do you use the oven in your motorhome? Do you consider it a necessary appliance for traveling or a waste of space?

Send your comments to:

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In Focus ➔
Vortex Optics Diamondback binoculars bring far-off sights into view. **pg. 16**



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An Off-the-Beaten-Path Gem in Central Utah

This state park is a hole-in-one for RVers who love to golf

By Mary Zalmanek

Palisade State Park in Sterling, Utah, features a picturesque 18-hole golf course overlooking the park's campground (with 55 RV sites — 30 have full hookups) near a small reservoir. For the signature hole number four, golfers should bring a camera and a ball they don't mind losing to the canyon. It's a par 3 with a narrow green and nothing but air on three sides.

Palisade's visitors can also enjoy fishing, swimming and boating. Birdwatchers may spot Western tangers, bald eagles, great blue herons, flickers, kingfishers and

hawks. Winter activities include ice fishing, ice skating and cross-country skiing.

Nearby Six-Mile Canyon provides access to Skyline Drive and its large network of trails for off-highway vehicles and snowmobiles. This 10,000-foot-high road along the crest of the spectacular Wasatch Plateau also attracts hikers, mountain bikers and hunters in season.

The park is open year-round. Reservations are recommended. For more information, call 800-322-3770, or go to www.stateparks.utah.gov.

By Bobbie Hasselbring

Sampling Regina, Saskatchewan

Winter is a great time to begin travel planning and a road trip through the wide-open prairies of Saskatchewan, the “land of the living skies.” This western Canadian province is an RVer’s delight. You’ll find miles of rolling hills, scenic valleys and mountains, amazing cloud formations and millions of nighttime stars, and numerous parks, including Grasslands National Park. For foodies, the tidy city of Regina, the province’s capital, is a must stop.

Previously, Regina was best known for chain restaurants like Red Lobster, Olive Garden and Tim Hortons. Today, exciting new chefs are changing all that. Here are a few of my favorites:

Breakfast: Radisson Plaza Hotel Saskatchewan, opened in 1927 by the Canadian Pacific Railway, is where Queen Elizabeth II stays when she comes to town. Chef Milton Rebello has made the hotel one of Canada’s finest dining establishments.

Rebello, who has cooked in India, the Middle East, the U.S. and in Canadian heritage hotels, is a Gold Medal Plates winner (one of the country’s highest culinary honors). Breakfast in the hotel’s regal Cortlandt Dining Room includes eggs Benedict made with rich, organic duck eggs and locally smoked trout or soft, sweet pickered cheeks. Everything from flaky croissants to crunchy granola is house made. They also offer a weekday, all-you-can-eat breakfast buffet and a special Sunday buffet with even more goodies.

Lunch: For big, fragrant Italian sub sandwiches, head downtown to Italian Star Deli. For 30 years, the Giambattista family has been making flavorful sandwiches with Italian meats and cheeses on soft



The Royal Canadian Mounted Police Heritage Centre is worth a visit during a trip to Regina. At Italian Star Deli, Carlo Giambattista and his family have been making big Italian sandwiches for more than 30 years.

rolls. Buy a premade sandwich, or order one with cheeses like Brie, cheddar, cambozola, provolone, Parmesan, and Greek and Italian feta, and meats, such as pepperoni, prosciutto, calabrese (dry hot sausage), prosciuttini (dry-cured ham), Genoa salami, capicola (ham) and mortadella (large pork sausage). Add some of their fragrant basil pesto to your sandwich.

Then load up your motorhome with Italian meats and cheeses, capers, pasta, Italian coffee and olive oil from the deli’s well-stocked shelves.

Dinner: The Willow on Wascana overlooks Lake Wascana and Chef Tim Davies makes regional “comfort foods” like bison and bacon tourtière on a pillow of herb whipped potato with pickled red cabbage and sweet tomato jam. Davies says 90 percent of the food on every plate is locally sourced, including pork, chicken and rabbit. It’s comfort food served in a fine-dining environment.

The menu changes seasonally. The summer menu features dishes like mushroom bok choy bowl, ginger-lime-marinated game hen and maple-glazed pork tenderloin. Fall menus offer heartier offerings like fork-tender beef short ribs with celery root, parsnips, and kale, and pecan-crusted baked trout on roasted sugar beet and spinach. There are plenty of nonmeat options too.



Top Picks

From far left: Everything, including flaky croissants, is made in-house at Hotel Saskatchewan. The Willow fall menus feature hearty dishes like fork-tender short ribs.



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Italian Star Deli, 306-757-6733, www.italianstardeli.com

Hotel Saskatchewan, 306-522-7691, www.hotelsask.com

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Smoke-Free Fire Pit

Campfires are always enjoyable, but not everyone likes the associated smoke — and some campgrounds prohibit wood-fueled fires. Campfire In A Can keeps the convivial ambiance alive while providing an approved means to sit around and enjoy a soothing flame — and it's pretty warm, too. The propane-powered portable campfire is made of a cylindrical aluminum stand that doubles as a carrying case, plus a small propane burner assembly, a log set, some black fire glass and even a removable cooking grate. Campfire In A Can has an MSRP of \$249.99.

Campfire In A Can, 888-768-7737, www.campfireinacan.com



See the Sights

RVers spend a lot of time in the great outdoors, and getting a good look requires good binoculars. Vortex Optics Diamondback 8x42 binoculars bring far-off sights clearly into focus without getting too close to timid or less-than-friendly wildlife. Vortex is well-known among outdoor enthusiasts for incredibly clear optics, even in low-light conditions. The company stands behind its products with a no-questions-asked lifetime warranty. Retailing for about \$220, Diamondback 8x42 binoculars can be found at major sporting goods stores such as Cabela's and Sportsman's Warehouse.

Vortex Optics, 800-426-0048, www.vortexoptics.com



Keep the Cold Out

Winter travelers are well aware of the issues associated with trying to keep heat inside their coach. Unless a motorhome has been specifically designed to withstand frigid climates, cold-weather RVers have to look for ways to help keep comfortable. Camco RV Vent Covers provide four solutions for keeping heat from escaping through the roof vent. The SunShield RV Vent Cover consists of a simple precut piece of reflective-foil bubble insulation that's held to the vent via hook-and-loop fasteners. The Dual Vent Cover adds a specially shaped piece of plastic that reduces draft. Both Camco RV Vent Insulators include a 3-inch-thick foam pad wrapped in a zippered synthetic fleece cover, and one includes a sewn-in piece of reflective-foil bubble insulation on one side. Camco vent covers range in price from about \$6.49 to \$14.15.

Camco Manufacturing, 800-334-2004, www.camco.net



Nifty Nesters

When outfitting a motorhome, the wonders of collapsing and nesting goodies always come to mind. Succeeding at both, the Origami RSB-01 storage box set consists of three pleated plastic containers (two with handles) that collapse and conveniently store within the largest container, which comes with a lid. When needed, simply grab a compressed container and expand it by pulling the top from the bottom. The Origami storage box set is available for around \$15 on www.amazon.com.

Origami, www.origamirack.com

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Good Sam Announces Top-Rated RV Parks for 2015

The following parks received perfect 10/10*/10 ratings from the Good Sam RV Travel & Savings Guide in three categories: environment, cleanliness and facilities.



ALABAMA: Heritage Motorcoach Resort & Marina, Lake Osprey RV Resort, Sugar Sands RV Resort, Windemere Cove RV Resort

ARIZONA: Black Canyon Ranch RV Resort, Del Pueblo RV Park and Tennis Resort, Desert Shadows RV Resort, Desert's Edge RV-The Purple Park, Distant Drums RV Resort, Far Horizons Tucson Village RV Resort, Gold Canyon RV & Golf Resort, Mesa Spirit RV Resort, Moon River RV Resort, Palm Creek Golf & RV Resort, Pueblo El Mirage Golf & RV Resort, Rincon Country East RV Resort, Rincon Country West RV Resort, Shangri-La RV Resort, Sundance 1 RV Resort, Superstition Lookout RV Resort, Superstition Sunrise RV Resort, The Refuge Golf & Country Club, Westwind RV & Golf Resort

ARKANSAS: Catherine's Landing, Ozarks RV Resort on Table Rock Lake

CALIFORNIA: Coyote Valley RV Resort, Indian Waters RV Resort & Cottages, Jackson Rancheria RV Park, Motorcoach Country Club, Outdoor Resort Indio, Outdoor Resort Palm Springs, Redding Premier RV Resort, Californian RV Resort, The Lakes RV & Golf Resort, The Springs At Borrego RV Resort

COLORADO: Mesa Verde RV Resort, Pueblo South/Colorado City KOA, Tiger Run RV Resort

CONNECTICUT: Aces High RV Park

FLORIDA: Cross Creek RV Resort, Crystal Lake RV Resort, Cypress Trail RV Resort, Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground, Emerald Coast RV Beach Resort, Gulf Waters RV Resort, Naples Motorcoach Resort, Outdoor Resorts/Chokoloskee Island, Riverbend Motorcoach Resort, The Great Outdoors RV, Treasure Coast RV Resort, Vacation Inn Resort of the Palm Beaches, Williston Crossings RV Resort

KANSAS: Deer Creek Valley RV Park LLC

LOUISIANA: A+ Motel & RV Park, Cajun Palms RV Resort, Paragon Casino RV Resort, Red Shoes Park at Coushatta Casino

MARYLAND: Castaways RV Resort & Campground

MASSACHUSETTS: Beach Rose RV Park, Cape Cod Campresort & Cabins, Normandy Farms Family Camping Resort, Pine Acres Family Camping Resort

MICHIGAN: Harbortown RV Resort, Hearthside Grove Motorcoach Resort, Little River Casino RV Park, Petoskey KOA RV & Cabin Resort, Petoskey RV Resort, Silver Creek RV Resort, Soaring Eagle Hideaway RV Park, South Haven Sunny Brook RV Resort, Traverse Bay RV Resort, Vacation Station RV Resort

MINNESOTA: Grand Casino Hinckley, Prairie View RV Park & Campground

MISSOURI: Mark Twain Landing, Polson Motorcoach & RV Resort

NEVADA: Lakeside Casino & RV Resort, Las Vegas RV Resort, LVM Resort, Nevada Treasure RV Resort, Sparks Marina RV Park, Wine Ridge RV Resort & Cottages

NEW YORK: Chautauqua Lake KOA, Lake George RV Park, Skyway (continued on pg. 72)

NEWS BRIEFS

RV Vacation Cost Study

▶ A new study by PKF Consulting USA shows that RV vacations cost less than other forms of vacation travel, even when factoring in fuel prices and the cost of RV ownership. The study used two sets of hypothetical travel parties: a four-person party of two adults and two children, and a two-person party of two adults.

PKF factored in major costs the travelers would incur on vacations to nine popular destinations. For each destination, researchers analyzed 3-, 7- and 14-day vacations. Class A's were compared to flying first class, renting a premium car, staying in resorts and eating in restaurants.

RVing showed an economic advantage. A four-person party in a Class B or C could expect to save 27 to 48 percent, while the same party traveling in a Class A could expect to save 38 percent. A two-person party in a Class B could expect to save 19 to 32 percent, 15 to 28 percent in a Class C and 14 percent in a Class A.

RV Employee Foundation

▶ Elkhart, Indiana-based Forest River and Thor Industries have announced the establishment of a foundation set up to benefit the 15,000-plus employees of the two companies and their families during times of need. The Forest River/Thor Community Foundation will provide grants of up to \$20,000 per qualifying employee or family to help cover emergency financial needs incurred in a variety of unforeseen family crises such as acute illnesses, natural disasters, fires or other hardships.

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3 For information about the rates, fees, other costs, and the reward program rules (including point accrual rate, bonus point awards, etc.) and benefits associated with the use of this credit card program please visit www.comenity.net/goodsamcampingworld for complete terms and conditions.

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The Mast General Store Annex in Valle Crucis, North Carolina, is true heaven for those with a yen for the candy of the "good old days." Smiling adults and eager children peruse the narrow candy-laden aisles dropping their personal favorites into their plastic baskets. Black licorice pipes, wax bottles filled with sweet-colored liquids, wax fangs, and other candies and treats that haven't been seen by some of us for decades. Old standbys like Charleston Chews and candy necklaces and more fill barrels and cases, as well as ones I've never heard of — Cow Tales, anyone? Buy a few pieces, or a couple of pounds. All candy is sold by weight at \$6.99 a pound.

If that isn't enough, there are old-time toys and lunch boxes spilling over the shelves.

Just when you thought your sweet tooth couldn't be tempted any further, out back is Dutch Creek Ice Cream, a wooden shack on Dutch Creek that's open seasonally and features Hershey's Ice Cream. Oddly enough, this ice cream company, founded by Jacob Hershey and four of his brothers in 1894, has no relationship to the Hershey who founded The Hershey Co. known for its chocolate.

There are several Mast General Stores throughout North Carolina, including the Original Mast General Store just down the road, but if you can't make it to North Carolina, orders can be made over the Internet.

For more information, call 828-963-6511, or visit www.mastgeneralstore.com/candy — Neala McCarten

Fort Smith, Arkansas

Fort Smith, Arkansas — Loaded with History



Fort Smith, the second-largest city in Arkansas, lies on the Arkansas-Oklahoma state border. The city's most prominent landmark, Fort Smith National Historic Site, includes the remains of the original 1817 fort and the restored courtroom of the famed "Hangin' Judge" Isaac C. Parker. The city's visitor center is housed in Miss Laura's Social Club, the only former brothel in the National Register of Historic Places.

Fort Smith is a true Old-West town made notable in the movie "True Grit," which was based on a real place. In 2013, Fort Smith Regional Art Museum opened and the city is the future home of the U.S. Marshals Museum. The city has plenty to offer, so instead of just passing through on Interstate 40, stop for a visit.

For more information, call 800-637-1477, or visit www.fortsmith.org — James Richardson





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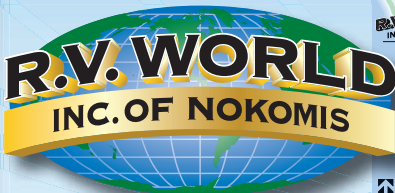
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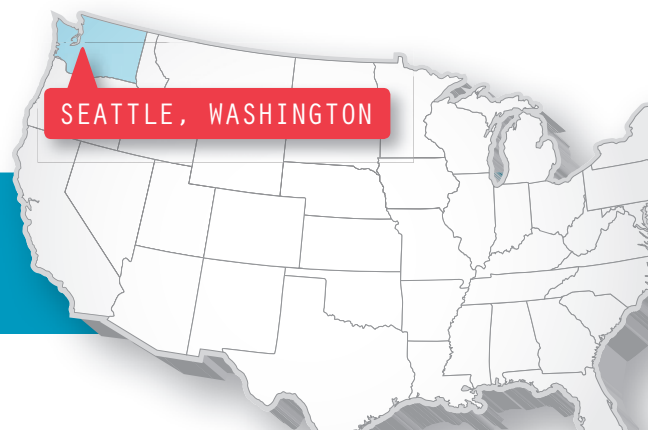
By Mary Zalmanek

My husband, Jim, and I set off for Seattle, Washington, for two reasons: Jim wanted to learn how to build a kayak and I wanted to visit my niece, Dr. Caley Coulson. We arrived the day before Jim's boat-building session began at the Skin Boat School in Anacortes, Washington. After setting up the motorhome with an electric hookup in a field at the school, we drove our dinghy to Seattle to see Caley. We knew she would be a great tour guide. In the first year of her residency, she won the University of Washington's "Get a Life!" Challenge. Interns were encouraged to enjoy Seattle's many attractions in their spare time. Of the 101 activities on the list, Caley completed 97 of them. She and her boyfriend, Bob Copeland, offered to show us their favorites.

Since Caley and Bob are cycling enthusiasts, it wasn't surprising that the first stop on our agenda was Duthie Hill Mountain Bike Park in Issaquah. The 120-acre park in a lush evergreen forest contains 6

miles of well-maintained cross-country mountain bike trails to satisfy people like me who like to ride with both wheels on the ground. For riders like Bob who want to go airborne, there are plenty of jumps, drops and skinnies (narrow above-ground boards) on the free-ride trails. Optional technical features on the cross-country trails allowed me to snap photos of Bob doing stunts I'd previously seen only on YouTube.

On our way home, we stopped to watch the Snoqualmie River take an awe-inspiring 270-foot plunge off a ledge of volcanic rock. When Charles Hinckley Baker, a 23-year-old civil engineer, saw this same sight in the 1890s, he was inspired to build the world's first fully underground hydropower plant. The facility is still producing electricity more than a century later. The picturesque Salish Lodge and Spa, a resort with 84



Getting Around ➔ Interstate 5 is the main highway running north to south through Seattle, and Interstate 90 runs east to west. When touring the downtown area, or taking the ferry to San Juan Island, it's best to use your dinghy vehicle.

GETAWAY

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

rooms, sits above Snoqualmie Falls.

That night, Jim returned to Anacortes to start building the kayak; I settled in with Caley.

The next day we explored the city via bicycle. Since I've never been fond of biking that requires me to share the road with cars, I rode behind Bob on a tandem. From Caley's apartment on Lake Washington, we rode downtown to the Seattle Aquarium, which sits on the waterfront. We arrived during one of three daily dive shows in the Windows on Washington Waters, a 120,000-gallon exhibit. The reactions of the group of children watching the divers was almost as entertaining as watching the 800 fish and invertebrates on the wet side of the glass. Around the corner, we touched sea cucumbers and sea anemones in the Life on the Edge exhibit that mimics the coastal tide pools in the Puget Sound. In other parts of the aquarium, I was mesmerized by the graceful, almost hypnotic movements of the moon jellyfish. I learned more about the arduous journey salmon make from ocean to river, which made me vow not to complain about biking up Seattle's hills.

Before resuming our bike tour, we went to the nearby Pike Place Market, a 9-acre neighborhood market famous for fish, flowers and farm-fresh produce. Established in 1907 as one



Above left: Caley Coulson rides through a lush evergreen forest in Duthie Hill Mountain Bike Park in Issaquah. Above right: The Snoqualmie River takes an awe-inspiring 270-foot plunge off a ledge of volcanic rock, site of the world's first fully underground hydropower plant.

of the nation's first farmers markets, it has expanded to offer locally made artisanal and specialty foods, and products imported from around the world. We paused to watch fishmongers throw the catch of the day, then browsed the craft market with works of art from 225 craftspeople. While eating lunch at one of the restaurants overlooking Elliott Bay, we watched buskers entertain passersby on sidewalks, and boats coming and going on the water.

Boats that go from the Puget Sound to Lake Washington must pass through the Hiram M. Chittenden Locks, nicknamed the Ballard Locks. Built in 1911, they provide a passage from the salt water of Puget Sound to the fresh water of Lake Union and Lake Washington. I was impressed with the fish ladder that allows salmon to pass between fresh and salt water. Through glass panels below the water line, we watched the fish swim through the ladder.

Kerry Park provides a spectacular view of downtown Seattle and the Space Needle.





From top: Mary and Jim Zalmanek take the baidarka for its maiden voyage on Lake Washington. Jim builds the frame of his double baidarka (Aleutian kayak) at the Skin Boat School in Anacortes. Visitors watch salmon at the Ballard Locks fish ladder, which allows fish to pass between fresh and salt water.

Since we'd worked up an appetite biking around Seattle, we decided to reward ourselves with a nice dinner. We swapped the bikes for a car, and headed to FareStart Restaurant, a nonprofit that trains people who are down on their luck for jobs in the food service industry. It was Guest Chef Night at the restaurant and graduation for six of the people who had gone through the demanding 16-week training. While we were eating the delicious three-course meal designed by a local chef and prepared by the students, each graduate addressed the audience. One woman said, "Not only did FareStart teach me culinary arts skills, it taught me to be a better me." Soon tears were dripping into my soup.

The next morning, back at the Skin Boat School, Corey Freedman was teaching Jim and the other students how to build baidarkas (Aleutian kayaks) with techniques he's mastered during the last 20-plus years. Arctic natives developed and refined skin-on-frame boats over thousands of years. After Freedman studied authentic Aleutian methods and historically documented designs, he helped resurrect this lost art using modern materials. Since opening the Skin Boat School in 1990, he has helped students build more than 1,500 kayaks — fewer

than 15 have been tandems. To my delight, Jim decided to build one with room for me. The frame is made of red-and-yellow cedar, bound together with ties of artificial sinew (waxed nylon), covered with ballistic nylon and coated with urethane.

My knowledge of woodworking starts and ends with sandpaper, so I didn't expect to be much use to Jim in boat building, but I offered my unskilled labor. Soon I found myself engrossed in the process. After the last urethane coat was applied, we needed to wait 48 hours to let it dry.

We passed the afternoon in Deception Pass State Park. The pass is a narrow strait separating Whidbey Island from Fidalgo Island, where Anacortes is located. A picturesque bridge, 976 feet in length and 180 feet above the water, connects the two. The beach was crowded with fishermen, all of them happy with their catches, and for good reason. The 2013 estimate for pink humpy salmon returning to the Skagit River to spawn was 1.2 million.

We took an early ferry to Friday Harbor to visit Jim's brother, Charlie, and his wife, Roxanna, on San Juan Island. As longtime residents of this island paradise, they helped us make the most of our visit. Our first stop was South Beach in San Juan Island

National Historical Park. We walked along the pebble beach, admiring the piles of driftwood and listening to the sounds of sea gulls and waves lapping the shore. Next they took us to Lime Kiln Point State Park, a popular whale watching spot. The kayakers gliding by the lighthouse made us even more

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The beach at Deception Pass State Park is crowded with fishermen hoping to catch some of the 1.2 million pink humpy salmon returning to the Skagit River to spawn.

eager to get ours in the water.

The next morning we had a leisurely breakfast at Roche Harbor, a resort community on the northwest side of the island, and Jim and Charlie played bocce ball while Roxanna and I browsed the local artisans' booths. It was soon time for the early afternoon ferry to return us to the mainland.

Back at the Skin Boat School, we picked up Jim's beautiful, eye-catching kayak (I lost count of all the people who asked him about it in RV parks and parking lots). The next morning we were up at daybreak and eager to try out the kayak. We moved the motorhome to an RV park near Seattle, and launched the kayak from a beach on Lake Washington. Caley and Bob were there to cheer and snap photos. We soon found a comfortable rhythm and rowed along the shore, surprising nesting birds and waving to people on land. Our maiden voyage was a great success.

We couldn't leave Seattle without seeing three of the area's most famous attractions. The Future of Flight Aviation Center and Boeing Tour offers the only public tour of a commercial jet assembly plant in North America. Even the building itself is impressive, the largest in the world by volume. We saw numerous airplanes (747s, 777s, and 787 Dreamliners) in various stages of assembly.

The Space Needle is the symbol of Seattle. Built for the 1962 World's Fair, the tower stands 605 feet high. Our elevator ride to the observation deck took 41 seconds. The must-see view from the top showcases many of the city's best features: the downtown skyline, the Olympic and Cascade mountains, Elliott Bay and the surrounding islands.

Chihuly Garden and Glass sits next to the Space Needle. Dale Chihuly is a well-known glass sculptor. His large-scale blown-glass sculptures are exhibited in museums and hotels around the world. This facility includes the Exhibition Hall with eight unique galleries, the Glasshouse with a 100-foot-long suspended sculpture, and the Garden with four huge sculptures and several installations nestled among the plants and flowers.

Of the 101 items on the "Get a Life" List, we did 15. We included most of Caley's favorites, with one notable exception — flying trapeze lessons at Emerald City Trapeze Arts. We'll leave that to the younger generation. But we do look forward to knocking off another 15 on our next visit to Seattle. **M**

📍 WHERE TO STAY

Lakeside RV Park

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FORT MYERS

An RV-friendly destination in southwest Florida with untouched beaches, unparalleled wildlife

It's no secret that Florida is a favorite motorhome destination, especially for snowbirds escaping wintery weather. But much of Florida has been over-developed, leaving this tropical paradise smothered in high-rises and strip malls. One place where much of natural Florida is still intact is Fort Myers, an RV-friendly destination in southwest Florida that boasts unspoiled mangrove forests, saltwater wetlands, wildlife refuges, tropical gardens, nature trails, miles of winding canals and waterways and some fascinating history — and we've come to take a look.

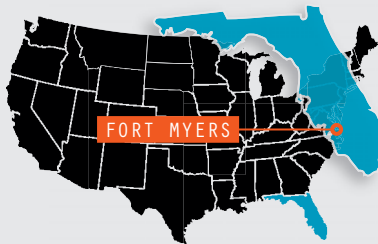
Bordered by the Gulf of Mexico to the west and the wide Caloosahatchee River to the north, the area encompasses a little less than 50 square miles (9 square miles under water). The land is flat, with elevation gains of 10 feet or less, and the roads are wide and well-paved, making it a breeze to drive a motorhome. All around are expansive stretches of pines, saw palmettos, woody shrubs, wild grasses and wildflowers; freshwater marshes and mangroves; and coastal areas covered in hardy, salt- and wind-resistant succulents and sea grasses.

While there are dozens of great places to camp in Fort Myers, we choose Red Coconut RV Park, the only beachside RV park in the area, as our home base. Like many RV parks in Florida, Red Coconut offers full-time and transient sites. The park is cut into beachside and non-beachside campsites by Estero Boulevard, the main road traversing narrow, 6-mile-long Estero Island. It's the 450 feet of pristine beachfront that draws RVers year after year to Red Coconut. The park offers 60 full-hookup sites with Wi-Fi, as well as shower and laundry facilities on the beachside and additional RV sites across the boulevard.

While we didn't secure a front-row beach site (folks can wait years for

those), we're just a few rows back in a space with a concrete-pad patio and picnic table. Best of all are the Gulf breezes and broad swath of white sand just a few steps away.

Because Estero Island is a main beach access point for the peninsula and has only one road, traffic can back up, especially on weekends. While most of Fort Myers is easy to navigate by motorhome, a dinghy is the best idea on the island. We use ours every morning to zip up to Heavenly Biscuit, a hole-in-the-wall café serving delightful biscuit sandwiches and addictive cinnamon rolls; stock up on groceries at the local supermarket; and shop super-cool, outdoorsy Times Square mall for colorful beach towels and hooded sweatshirts (some days it's unseasonably cool).



Getting Here

Interstate 75 and U.S. Highway 41, which run north-south, are the major roads that traverse the Fort Myers area.

Into the Wild

With its shops, white-sand beaches and easy-going lifestyle, it's tempting to hang out on Estero Island. But we've come for the wilder side of Fort Myers. We head south 5 miles on Estero Boulevard and over Bonita Beach Causeway to Lovers Key State Park. Before the causeway was built, Lovers Key gained a reputation as a romantic place for couples that boated to the island to picnic. Today, Lovers Key is part of 1,616 acres of undeveloped barrier islands with native landscape and plenty of flat biking and hiking trails and sheltered waters for fishing, canoeing and kayaking (rentals available). Park rangers give guided tours and teach everything from birding to cast-net throwing.

While I wish we'd brought our bikes, (they're back at the



WILD

viewing and fascinating history

motorhome), we opt for hiking Black Island Trail, a twisty dirt path that wends through the scrub and occasionally skirts the water, and enjoy the informative signs about local plants and wildlife.

For an even wilder look at this area, we scoot over to Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, a 13,000-acre swamp operated by the Audubon Society that contains the largest remaining stand of old-growth bald cypress in North America. When we walk into the sanctuary's education center, there's a buzz in the air because endangered wood storks, one of the largest of the magnificent stork family, are nesting here for the first time since 2009. We head out, cameras at-the-ready, on the 2.25-mile boardwalk that meanders through pine flatwoods, wet prairie, around a marsh and finally into the old-growth bald cypress forest. These

impressive trees, relatives of the redwood, tower 130 feet, have a girth of 25 feet and their massive branches are heavy with ferns, mosses, lichens and colorful bromeliads. It's a sight that makes us feel humbled by nature's beauty and diversity.

Halfway through the boardwalk, we climb onto a raised viewing platform and peer through the scope at the wood stork rookery. We're disappointed that the big birds and their nests are pretty far away, but this is, after all, a sanctuary. This perfect environment is why this place has supported 100,000 of the big birds since monitoring started in 1958.

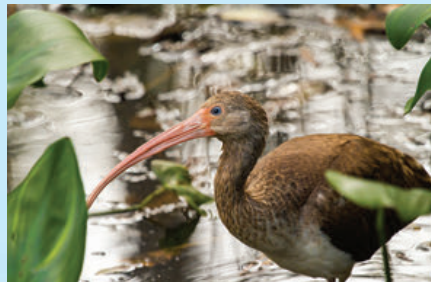
On our way back to the education center, there's a sign that says "water moccasin." And, sure enough, there's a thick curled up snake snoozing in the

crook of a tree next to the walkway. It sends a shiver up my spine and I'm grateful there's a thick plexiglass barrier between this venomous water snake and me.

The next morning, we're up early to meet Captain Ryan Kane with Southern Instinct Fishing Charters for a half-day saltwater fishing trip. Kane, a gregarious guy with a raccoon-eyed sunburn, has been fishing the salt and fresh waters around Fort Myers his entire life. We scramble aboard his small, open-air Proline Flatback, a once-rotting derelict that he and his buddies restored and turned into a boat that can easily cruise the shallow Gulf waters.

Kane fires up the engine and motors through dozens of tiny islands into open water. Southwest

A juvenile white ibis (its feathers haven't molted to white) in Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary south of Fort Myers, stalks the water for prey. The sign at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary identified this snake as a water moccasin, a poisonous viper that lives in the swamp.



White pelicans stand guard on a small island in Pine Island Sound; civilization far in the distance.

The Intracoastal Waterway offers calm waters and great fishing. It's a keeper! This brown trout caught in Pine Island Sound just off Fort Myers, Florida, was big enough to enjoy for dinner.



Florida waters are renowned for fish, especially snook, redfish, speckled trout and the famous fighter, the tarpon. Our prize today is speckled trout and it doesn't take long once Kane baits our lines to start reeling in these little beauties. Unfortunately, most are too little and we toss them back. We do bag a couple and, at dinner in our rig, enjoy some of the freshest fish we've ever eaten.

The next morning, on our way to Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve, we stop at Sun Harvest, a popular citrus company that offers free (and unlimited) samples of uber-fresh orange, grapefruit, and other fruits and juices. We get hooked on the orange juice and buy a gallon as well as some oranges and grapefruit.

With lakes and swamps filled with gators and cypress trees dripping with epiphytes like orchids and bromeliads and Spanish moss, Six Mile Slough is an otherworldly Jurassic Park. Despite a low din from nearby traffic, the place is so peaceful we find ourselves whispering. At one time, wetlands like Six Mile were considered a nuisance to progress. Fortunately, scientists now

know that marshlands provide flood control, water storage and purification, and naturally recharge aquifers.

We'd planned to spend only an hour or so walking the 1.2-mile boardwalk that traverses this 2,500-acre preserve, but the white ibis, snake-like anhingas, and great blue and little green herons have us snapping photos for hours.

The next day it's chilly and despite all the preserves and natural areas we have visited, we have yet to encounter manatees, the area's legendary "sea cows." I ask a fellow RVer at Red Coconut RV Park and he tells us that when the water temperatures drop below 68 degrees Fahrenheit, the big animals head for warm waters like those found in Lee County Manatee Park.

Located just off Palm Beach Boulevard (FL 80), Manatee Park is a small park next to the Orange River and the outflow canal from an electric power plant. It's the warm outflow water that attracts the manatees and the dozens of residents and visitors who cram spots overlooking the canal. A dozen or so of the 1,000-pound,

grayish mammals, including some babies, float in the water, rising and sinking like gigantic dirigibles. The naturalist tells us that manatees, despite their size, have little body fat, which is why they can't fend off the cold. Today's temperature in the Orange River is 64 degrees Fahrenheit; in the canal it's a toasty 72 degrees Fahrenheit.

Inventions, Historic Homes and Juicy Burgers

For a change of pace, we head to historic downtown Fort Myers, a walkable town that's home to the Edison & Ford Winter Estates. The city is known as the City of Palms for the many palm trees that Thomas Edison (and later others) planted along the streets.

In 1885, inventor Thomas Edison purchased land along the Caloosahatchee River and built a vacation home he called "Seminole Lodge." The house served as his winter retreat until his death in 1931. His good friend Henry Ford purchased the adjoining property, "The Mangoes," in 1916. Today, the 17 acres that include the historic homes, gardens, museum and Edison's labo-



Thomas Edison's lab at Edison & Ford Winter Estates still contains many of his machines and lab equipment. An early film projector at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates Museum is one of Edison's thousands of inventions.

ratories, give visitors a rare look at the slower pace of Old Florida and insights into the lives of two famous men who shaped modern America.

We walk beneath a 400-foot-tall banyan tree (planted in 1927 as a 4-foot sapling) into the Edison Museum where artifacts and photographs tell the story of the great inventor's many projects. We learn that Edison invented the light bulb, phonograph, and the motion picture camera and hundreds of other innovations. In fact, he held 1,093 patents and filed patents every year for 65 years.

Edison's laboratory, located just outside the museum, is where the self-taught scientist searched for a replacement for natural rubber to fill America's growing demand for tires. The intact workshop is filled with pipettes, test tubes and all manner of heavy machines.

We meet Nadia, a historian and our guide for a 75-minute guided tour. We cross the palm-lined street to Seminole Lodge and peer through the windows of Edison's clapboard house. When Mrs. Nina Edison, his second wife, donated the home and land, Nadia tells us, she also donated all the furnishings and artifacts, too. Next door, at Ford's home, we check out

the 1917 Ford Model-T truck and 1929 Model-A sedan in the carriage house.

The grounds and gardens are fascinating as well. Our guide points out unusual plants from all over the world, like allspice, banana trees and royal palms from Cuba that Edison planted along the city's streets.

By the time we end our tour, we're famished and wander downtown to a local eatery appropriately called Ford's Garage. Decorated with garage memorabilia, including tire sinks and gas-pump-nozzle faucets, this theme restaurant is buzzing with locals and visitors. As we sit outside at a small umbrella table and tuck into big, juicy burgers, we know Fort Myers is worth visiting more than once. **M**

For More Information

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

239-348-9151, www.corkscrew.audubon.org

Edison & Ford Winter Estates

239-334-7419,
www.edisonfordwinterestates.org

Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau

800-237-6444, www.fortmyers-sanibel.com

Lovers Key State Park

239-463-4588,
www.floridastateparks.org/loverskey

Red Coconut RV Park

239-463-7200, www.redcoconut.com



Bald cypress, a deciduous conifer that loses its vibrant green color in the winter, stand in the swamps at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. Raised boardwalks provide a 2.25-mile-loop trail through the sanctuary.



Viewing platforms fill with young and old alike hoping to see manatees at Manatee Park.



NORTH TO ALASKA: A 5,000-MILE JOURNEY TO THE LAST FRONTIER

The Second Leg – Dawson City, Yukon Territory, to Homer, Alaska

Alaska, here we come! After 10 days on the road (from Mile 0 of the Alaska Highway in British Columbia to Dawson City, Yukon Territory), my husband, Arjun, and I can't wait to cross the border and see some of Alaska's most iconic locations: Fairbanks, Denali, Anchorage and Homer.

Day 11: Dawson City, Yukon Territory, to Chicken, Alaska (109 miles)

It's a 30-minute ride on the George Black Ferry across the Yukon River, and once we're across it, we're on the road said to be the roughest and toughest of the trip. Going to Chicken is not for the chicken-hearted. Devoid of any services, we filled up before leaving Dawson City, and start climbing a long and winding, dusty gravel road known as the Sixty Mile region. Gold was discovered here in 1896. Starting as a pack trail in 1902, it then became a wagon trail and in 1951 rebuilt as the Top of the World Highway (also known as Taylor Highway and Yukon Highway 9).

We have 109 miles to go and most of the road is rough dirt with mud, loose gravel, pot holes, washboard surfaces, frost heaves, hairpin bends

and steep grades — a real challenge for motorhome drivers. Our speed drops to a slow 5 mph to 25 mph.

The landscape is tundra-like, almost treeless, with mountains and rolling hills. A sense of isolation exists here and the possibility of a flat tire or damaged suspension is worrisome. Barely two lanes wide, the road is under constant repair. Occasionally, huge multiwheeler trucks carrying heavy loads of rock pass us at high speed, uncomfortably close. Unfortunately, a large stone breaks loose from one, hits and badly cracks our windshield.

Passing several abandoned cabins along this lonely road, we arrive at the Little Gold Creek border station. The border crossing is open 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. from May 15 until late September or October, depending on the weather.

There's no phone service here, so check before leaving Dawson City.

We've crossed into Alaska at last! Our total miles covered since Mile 0 is 1,272 miles. We set our watches back one hour. A cold, gusty wind blows and we take a short lunch break inside our motorhome and admire the breathtaking "top-of-the-world" views stretching out forever in every direction.

The road continues to be challenging. Seventy miles after the border crossing, we pass an old log cabin, Boundary Lodge, one of the first roadhouses in Alaska. Nearing Chicken, the road narrows, deteriorating rapidly as we negotiate several hairpin bends, pass tiny downtown Chicken, before entering Chicken Gold Camp (520-413-1480, www.chickengold.com). Well laid out with full hookups, a restaurant and gift shop, Mike and Lou Busby have been the owners for 35 years.

A huge, gray dredge is the central attraction. At an outdoor pavilion near the dredge, Mike tells us about Old Pedro Dredge, built in 1938. He



bought it in 1998 for \$1, and moved the giant here in one piece. It's now in the National Register of Historic Places. Although not used anymore, the Busbys insist there's still plenty of gold in the area, and have gold-panning facilities for anyone wanting to try their luck.

Gold was discovered here in 1886, and the town grew rapidly. With food being sometimes scarce, the residents hunted a bird called ptarmigan, which tasted like chicken. In 1902, the town was ready to be incorporated, but didn't have a name. The town's people wanted to call it Ptarmigan, but couldn't agree on the spelling, so eventually, they settled on Chicken. Today, fewer than 10 residents live here year-round and brave the winter.

Day 12: Chicken to Tok (78.3 miles)

On the road again, and still on the Taylor/Top of the World Highway, we head west to Tok. Not unexpectedly, we encounter broken blacktop, pot holes and steep, winding grades, but we're amply compensated with majestic views of the Alaska Range.

We cross Mosquito Fork Bridge and Fortymile Wild and Scenic River. Signs alert us that we have entered one of the largest caribou crossing areas. The Taylor Highway ends at a T-junction and we turn west (right), to rejoin the Alaska Highway, (now Route 2).

Entering Tok, called "the gateway to Alaska," we fill up with fuel, happily noting the cheaper U.S. gas prices and check in at Tok RV Village, (800-478-5878, www.tokrv.net). Our gas receipt



Visitors learn about the Alaskan mushing lifestyle at Trail Breaker Kennels in Fairbanks.

allows for a free wash of our coach and dinghy, and it becomes a party as the entire Adventure Caravans group washes each other's rigs.

Tok RV Village has a high Good Sam rating of 9/10/9.5, with 161 partially wooded, full-service sites. The park will hold mail if you're reserved here, and a packet from home awaits us. It's time to relax and the group gathers for dinner next door at Fast Eddy's.

Day 13: Tok to Fairbanks (206 miles)

Leaving the RV park and turning onto Alaska Highway Route 2, feels like we're back in the Lower 48 — this is a real road! Crossing the Johnson River Bridge, we're treated to a marvelous view of Mount McKinley.

Delta Junction, at historic Mile 1422, is situated near the confluence of the Delta and Tanana rivers, and is the official end of the Alaska Highway. (The Richardson Highway to Fairbanks begins here.) The Tourist Information Center is the perfect place to take photos that say, "We did it!" We buy souvenirs and postcards to send home, and a sticker that reads, "I Survived the End of the Alaska Highway!" to proudly paste on our motorhome.

On the Richardson Highway heading southeast to Fairbanks, we pass a cow

moose feeding in a roadside pond.

It's lunchtime, so we stop at the 1910 Rika's Landing Roadhouse on the banks of the Tanana River. We order a soup and sandwich at the Packhouse Restaurant, then tour the gardens and house (now a museum). There's a great view of the Big Delta Bridge and the Trans-Alaska Pipeline from here.

Fourteen miles southeast of Fairbanks, we take a detour to the town of North Pole, with streets named Santa Claus Lane and St. Nicholas Drive. A colossal Santa stands visible from the road. Decked out year-round for Christmas, Santa Claus House (www.santaclaushouse.com) sells a marvelous assortment of Christmas ornaments, apparel and collectibles. Letters from children around the world are on display; their hopes, wishes and sometimes-long lists of presents asked from Santa, are touching. One said, "Dear Mrs. Claus, thank you for having such an awesome husband."

Reaching Fairbanks, we check in at River's Edge RV Park (800-770-3343, www.riversedge.net/fairbanks-rv-park), a highly rated full-service campground.

Fairbanks is a good place to have some problems fixed on our rig. We need to replace two front tires, which were damaged while traveling the



Part II Overview

We logged 971.5 miles on our two-week journey from Dawson City, Yukon Territory, to Homer, Alaska, including multiday stays in Fairbanks, Denali and Anchorage.



Top of the World Highway, and a front suspension alignment. The cracked windshield will have to wait.

next door, for a sumptuous lunch. Back on the bus, we're off for an up-close look at the Trans-Alaska Pipeline.

Day 14: Fairbanks

Early the next day we're bussed to Steamboat Landing, a replica gold-rush-era port on the Chena River. We board the sternwheeler Discovery III (www.riverboatdiscovery.com), a period-style vessel owned and operated by the Binkley family for five generations.

We watch a floatplane demonstration as the sternwheeler takes us on a leisurely three-hour cruise. Pausing at Trail Breaker Kennels, home of the late internationally acclaimed Susan Butcher, her husband Dave Monson tells the touching story of Granite, the runt of the litter. With Susan's loving care, he became an Iditarod champion. Susan was a four-time winner of the 1,100-mile Iditarod, and the first person to reach Mount McKinley's summit with a dog team.

Stopping at the Chena Indian Village, we learn about the ancient Athabascan culture and lifestyle. We take a tour of a typical native village with spruce log cabins and an authentic birch canoe. Animal pelts are used to make warm clothing, and our guide, Janessa, models a beautiful, ultra-warm winter parka.

Farther downstream, we see the "wedding of the rivers." The clear Chena's waters, and the silt-laden, grayish glacial-melt waters of the Tanana, called Glacial Flower, join and flow alongside for some distance before merging into one.

Back at Steamboat Landing, the group returns to the RV park and then heads to the Pump House Restaurant,

Boarding a replica narrow-gauge Tanana Valley Railroad car, we ride to Gold Dredge 8 while the conductor entertains us with gold-rush stories. After a review of how the dredge works, we try our hand at panning and find tiny slivers of gold. When weighed, we're \$24 richer — enough to buy a couple of bags of food for our dog Reggie! After complimentary coffee and fresh-baked cookies, we reboard the rail cars back to the bus and the campground.

Day 15: Fairbanks

Day two in Fairbanks, and the bus takes us to the University of Alaska Museum of the North. Its displays focus on the Arctic people's history, animals and lifestyle, including the geological and archaeological past.

At the Ice Museum, we watch an ice-carving demonstration. In a large room (kept below freezing and lit with colored lights), there are ice-carving displays: Eskimos, a log cabin, dog sleds with dogs, bears and more. It's cold and we're glad to get outside into the sun.

In the evening, we're booked at Pioneer Park for its famous Alaska Salmon Bake buffet dinner. Salmon, prime rib and beer-battered Bering Sea cod are all cooked to perfection. After strolling through gift shops, at 8:15 p.m. we attend a show at the Palace Theatre. The "Golden Heart Revue" entertains us with hilarious stories about the colorful characters of the early gold-rush era.

Day 16: Fairbanks to Coldfoot (day trip)

At 8 a.m., Arjun and I board a small

Motorhomes and cars are only allowed on the first 15 miles into Denali National Park. Visitors who want to go deep into the park, for views like this, need to take a shuttle or tour bus.

Air Arctic plane and fly about 250 miles north along the Brooks Range to Coldfoot, 63.5 miles north of the Arctic Circle. Then a van takes us from the tiny airport to Wiseman, a community of about 14 people. Local resident Jack Reakoff welcomes us into his solar-powered log home and describes their self-reliant lifestyle. They hunt for meat and grow vegetables during the long days of short summers, then store them for winter in their basement freezer, dug deep into the permafrost. Outhouses and pit toilets are the norm. Imagine using them during the bitterly cold minus-70-degree winters!

After our tour of Wiseman, we return to Coldfoot Airport and board the plane back to Fairbanks.

Day 17: Fairbanks

Today we head 62 miles northeast to the famous Chena Hot Springs Resort (www.chenahotsprings.com). Fed by its own geothermal system, the water circulates 3,000 feet or more, deep underground, and sucks up the earth's heat and minerals. It resurfaces through cracks and fractures. This is a great place to relax in the warm, soothing waters.

Day 18: Fairbanks to Denali (110 miles)

Leaving the RV park early, we drive through steeply graded terrain, then

cross the Tanana River Bridge. At 3,300 feet, it's the longest bridge in Alaska. When the weather changes, the bridge squeaks as it expands and contracts.

The road runs along the picturesque Nenana River Valley, and we see rubber rafts negotiating the swift rapids through the deep gorge. We enter Denali RV Park (907-683-1500, www.denalirvpark.com), a full-service campground and our home for the next two nights. Unhooking our dinghy, we visit the National Park and then dine at the Lucky Miss Saloon, a cozy fireside restaurant in Denali Village.

Day 19: Denali National Park and Preserve (bus tour)

At 6:30 a.m. we board the bus for a 13-hour, 92-mile tour deep into the heart of Denali National Park and Preserve. Embracing 6 million acres, it is huge. It's also cloudy, rainy and foggy, and the chance of seeing Mount McKinley isn't very good. McKinley's two summits rise above the Denali Fault. This colossal granite mass, pushed up about 60 million years ago, has its own weather, so most of the time there's only a 30 percent chance of seeing it.

Regardless of the bad weather, visitors line up to enter the park. Only the first 15 miles are drivable for private vehicles. Shuttle or tour buses can go deep into the park. Wet and foggy, with steep gorges on either side, the road is narrow and intimidating. Our windows get caked with mud, and our driver, David, stops frequently to wash them.

The rain eases and we disembark for an incredible view of Polychrome Pass from the Mile 46 overlook. The mountain, sculpted with layers of multicolored rock and soil, resembles a painting. Reaching the Eielson Visitor Center at Mile 66, we stop for a tour

At Chena Indian Village, our guide, Janessa, shows us a typical cold-weather parka and headdress used by native Alaskans.



and movie, "Climbing Mount McKinley." The 2014 climbing season saw 1,204 attempts with a summit rate of 36 percent.

Originally a tent facility, the center is named after pioneer Alaskan aviator Carl Ben Eielson, a bush pilot who flew the first airmail service from Fairbanks to McGrath in four hours, a distance that took dog sleds 20 days to cover.

Deep inside the park, at Mile 92, the road ends at Kantishna, a former gold-mining town. After lunch at the Denali Backcountry Lodge, the bus takes us back on the same road. An expert spotter, David stops often, and points out grizzlies with cubs and caribou, including a bull with enormous antlers.

Day 20: Denali

Today we're going white-water rafting on the Nenana River. At the Denali Outdoor Center we don cold-water survival suits, zip up from toe to neck, put on helmets and attend a safety orientation. Then off we go! Down at the river we get into the raft and strap up for a tumbling 11-mile ride along the rapids. Dwarfed by lofty canyon walls, the turbulent water rushes us along. It's an unforgettable experience!

Day 21: Denali to Anchorage (242.1 miles)

As we head to Anchorage, we turn right onto the Parks Highway 3 south and the weather clears, giving way to cobalt blue skies. We pass Hurricane Gulch Bridge and then stop at a double-ended pullout on the right for awesome views of Mount McKinley.

By afternoon, the scene has

changed. We're back in civilization and its traffic lights, road repairs and people. At Mile 199, we drive through Wasilla, on to a divided four-lane highway and merge onto Alaska Highway 1 to Anchorage and check in at the spacious, full-service Golden Nugget RV Park (800-449-2012, www.goldennuggetcamperpark.com)

Day 22: Anchorage

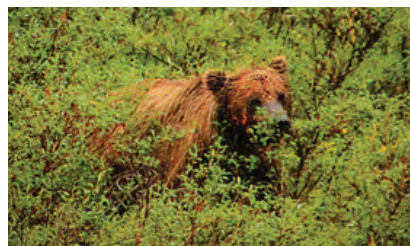
Anchorage is the state's largest city. We visit the Alaska Native Heritage Center, a showcase of Alaska's tribal history and artifacts from the Alutiiq, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian and Athabaskan cultures. Artists skillfully create traditional crafts and jewelry. The fine-art gallery features displays of native artwork unique to their culture.

The world-class Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, located downtown, is one of Alaska's Top 10 visitor attractions. Exhibits include the Alaska Gallery, Alaska Native Culture, the Imaginarium Discovery Center and 600 rare Alaskan artifacts on loan from the Smithsonian Institution.

An evening dinner and show is arranged for us at the Alaska Wild Berry Park and Theater. Inside the Wild Berry Store, a chocolate fountain cascades 20 feet into a chocolate pool. The company also makes jams, jellies, candy and other goodies, which customers can watch through large viewing windows.

Next door is the Sourdough Mining

Some of the wildlife we encountered on this leg of our journey included a cow (female) moose, an eagle in its nest and a grizzly bear.





White-water rafting on the Nenana River was an unforgettable and exhilarating experience. In Fairbanks, we watched a floatplane demonstration along the Chena River.

Alaska and on the west by the Cook Inlet. Our destination is Homer Spit, an ancient glacial moraine. Fierce winter storms and violent waves would have washed this fragile land strip away eons ago if humans hadn't intervened by constructing protective, sturdy rock fortifications. The deep-water harbor provides safe anchorage during turbulent weather.

Turning right onto Sterling Highway Route 1, toward Homer, bright purple fireweeds and white cow parsnips grow profusely along the roadside. Reaching Ninilchik Village, which means "peaceful settlement by a river," we park our coach at the overlook and drive our dinghy to the Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary Russian Orthodox Church. (The road is narrow, so do not take the RV.) Built in 1895, the church with traditional Russian onion-shaped domes is a national historic landmark.

Anchor Point, Mile 206.7, is the most westerly point in the North American Highway system. We stop for a view of the Aleutian Range and Homer Spit. Homer's scenery, relaxed atmosphere and many activities draw visitors from around the world here. Fishing and boating tops most people's list.

Homer is known as the halibut fishing capital of the world, and catching a big one is every fisherman's dream. This large, flat, bottom-feeder, with both its eyes on the same side of its head, is prized for its size and tasty flesh. Charter boats with experienced guides make this an unforgettable adventure, with thrilling fishing tales to take home.

After an incredibly scenic drive, we arrive at Oceanview RV Park (907-235-3951, www.oceanview-rv.com) and settle in to our site.

Day 24: Homer

Today it's lunch at the Saltry Restaurant in Halibut Cove. To get there, we're booked on the Danny J ferry, and arrive

Co. Restaurant. Resembling an old mill house, it's decorated with historic mining photos and mounted wildlife. Seated at long wooden tables, we're served Alaskan chowder, barbecued ribs, steak and chicken. Finally, there's an unlimited ice-cream bar.

Dinner done, we walk to a rustic cabin next door where Dusty Sourdough entertains us with songs, recites poetry and tells stories about the pioneer days.

Day 23: Anchorage to Homer (226.1 miles)

On Seward Highway 1 South, (Alaska Routes 1 and 9), we're heading to the Kenai Peninsula and Homer. The road along Turnagain Arm and Cook Inlet extends from Anchorage to Portage Glacier, and is considered one of the world's most scenic drives. Flanked by the 3,000-foot-high Chugach Mountains on the left, and the 4-mile-wide Cook Inlet on the right, it is an unforgettable driving experience.

We take time to enjoy the drive and views of the Kenai Mountains. The scenery is a feast for the eyes.

At Girdwood Junction, a 60-passenger tram transports visitors to the summit of Mount Alyeska and the Alyeska Resort, a premier ski resort. At 2,300 feet, views from the observation deck are incredible. The vastness seems to go on forever.

This is beauty at a price! It's a high-risk earthquake region. During the severe 9.2 magnitude 1964 Good Friday earthquake, Girdwood dropped about 8 feet and was later relocated to its present location.

About 47 miles south of Anchorage, the 140-acre Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center provides treatment for injured and orphaned wildlife. The wood bison, once thought to be extinct, are a major attraction here.

From the Kenai Information Center, we turn toward Portage Glacier and Whittier Tunnel, then cross the isthmus separating Kenai Peninsula from the rest of south-central Alaska.

Surrounded by unspoiled forests and lakes, we continue along the 150-mile-long, 70-mile-wide peninsula, bordered on the east by the Gulf of



at 11:30 a.m. First we must descend down a steep floating ramp. It's low tide, but the ramp will rise 25 to 30 feet at high tide. The sea is slightly choppy and fortunately I remembered to take my motion-sickness pill. Our boat crew is Elsa and Sydney.

The Danny J, an exclusive ferry service for the Saltry Restaurant, starts up and we chug through Kachemak Bay into Halibut Cove, for a 6-mile trip. Halibut Cove evolved from a sleepy fishing village into a delightful community with attractive homes clinging to the wooded hillside. Peaceful and inviting, it's a magnet for artists who have built galleries along the water, connected by a boardwalk.

In the lagoon, we spot seals, sea otters and puffins. On several rocky outcrops, thousands of nesting gulls squabble and feed their young.

In the horizon, we see a line of glaciated active volcanoes, and our guides tell us that Mount Redoubt could blow any time. Docking at Saltry Restaurant, we climb another ramp to an outdoor seating area. Open only during summer, reservations are essential. For starters, we order a seafood sampler tray, then Arjun has a buffalo burger and I have the halibut.

After lunch, we stroll along the boardwalk to the artist's colony.

Day 25: Homer

Taking a 14-mile drive along North Fork Road Loop, we climb high into the hills for a view of the spit, the volcanic mountain range and the glaciers. Then we explore the Pratt Museum and Homer's historic town center.

It's time to head back to Oceanview RV Park for an expertly prepared Adventure Caravans cookout. At 10 p.m., it's still sunny, so we head back into town. High up in a tree, we spot an eagle's nest and snap photos of this magnificent bird.

It's time to say goodbye Homer, but we're still only about halfway through our great journey in days and miles (23 days and roughly 2,200 miles). Tomorrow we head for Seward, Alaska, and Part III of our adventure. **M**

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Dutch Star 4369

With a good floorplan, quality construction, attractive décor and the ability to custom select many of the options and accessories, this Newmar coach targets discerning buyers **By Mark Quasius**

The Dutch Star has always been one of Newmar's best-selling coaches, offering a selection of features at an attractive price. This year, the coachbuilder has stepped it up with a restyled Dutch Star packed with features and amenities. There are 13 floorplans in this lineup, ranging from 37-foot single rear-axle designs up through 43-foot-plus tag-axle coaches. The model 4369 we tested is one of the longest, with high-line livability in a bath-and-a-half configuration.

Exterior

The Seville MasterPiece full-body paint on this Dutch Star is fitted with Diamond Shield front cap film to protect the paint from stone chips and other damage.

Polished aluminum wheels and chrome trim panels help accent the beautiful paint. Frameless tinted flush windows and a Girard G2000 power awning built into the roof fascia make for a streamlined appearance with minimal wind noise. Side-hinged basement compartment doors give easy access to the cargo area and a keyless entry system handles the electric locks on the entry and basement compartment doors. An outside entertainment center places a 40-inch Sony LED TV and sound bar in the slideout, and a large Dometic portable refrigerator/freezer is mounted on a slide tray in the patio area to ensure that cold beverages are always handy.

The redesigned rear cap sports LED taillights and a flip-up engine access

cover with an LED third brakelight. A chrome-accented stone guard is hung below the 10,000-pound-rated hitch receiver to help protect a dinghy vehicle from stone chips. A spoiler diverts airflow passing over the roof down to the rear cap, helping to reduce the dust buildup common to diesel pushers. A rearview camera is placed beneath the deflector to provide a feed to the color monitor on the instrument panel, and a pair of front cowl-mounted sideview cameras are also connected to that monitor and are automatically actuated via the turn signals.

Cockpit Area

The cockpit is well-designed for ease of access to the controls when driving. The instrument panel is laid out in the traditional three-gauge cluster fashion

ABOVE: Polished aluminum wheels and frameless windows complement the full-body paint. Clear film protects the front cap from stone damage.

and the left-side console contains the transmission interface panel and rocker switches essential for vehicle control while driving. The parking brake is placed on the dash to the left of the instrument cluster. This is an easy-to-access location for the driver, yet prevents pets from accidentally stepping on it and releasing the brake if it were mounted on the side console, like many are. All of the rocker switches that control the shades, lights and other accessories are placed in a row at the bottom of the dash to the right of the driver. This allows easy access by either the driver or copilot. Immediately above these switches are the rear and sideview camera monitor and the entertainment and GPS navigation system. The Smart Wheel contains push-button controls for the windshield wipers, cruise control and the ICC and headlight flasher. The heated, six-way power cockpit seats swivel to face the interior for extra seating when in camp.

Living Area

The 4369 has a large full-wall slide that extends along the driver's side. There are also two opposing slides on the passenger side. The interior is finished in the Cordova décor package with Carmel Glazed Cherry cabinets. The glazed-tile floor is a perfect complement to the woodwork and cabinetry and adds an attractive look. The soft-touch vinyl ceiling is fitted with hardwood ceiling treatments that contain the air-conditioning discharge and return vents. These louvered panels are hinged to allow access to the intake filters for cleaning and allow for whisper-quiet airflow. Additional louvered panels are placed over the Fan-Tastic Vent ceiling fans to dress them up. Recessed LED fixtures in the ceiling provide bountiful light with less power draw and heat compared to quartz incandescent lighting.

The slideout ends are fitted with recessed mood lighting, which is placed behind translucent panels within the woodwork. MCD power daytime and privacy shades are used throughout the living areas and a wireless remote

BELOW: A pantry with pullout drawers is next to the 22-cubic-foot residential refrigerator/freezer. The king-size bed, mounted in a curbside slide, graces the bedroom. The front salon offers seating on a pair of recliners opposite a couch in front of a structure housing the TV.

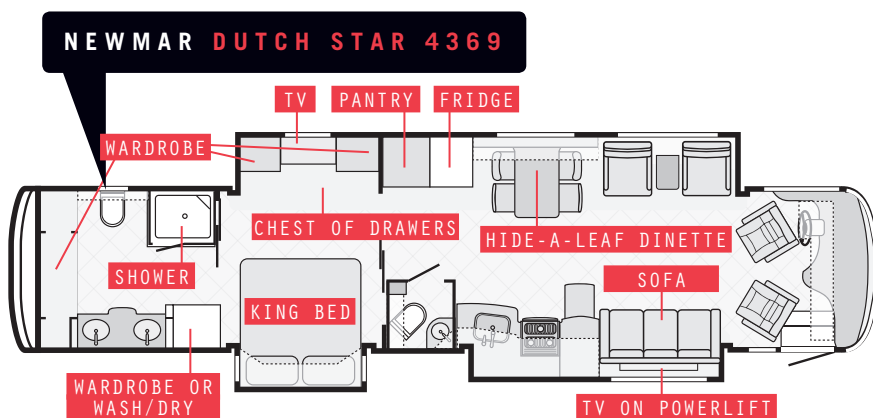


controller is attached to the wall via hook-and-loop fasteners so it can be removed and used as a handheld remote if desired.

The main salon is equipped with a pair of comfortable recliners and a moveable end table. On the driver's side, a large sofa bed is positioned in front of the 48-inch Sony LED TV, which is mounted on a powered lift. When raised, the TV is in perfect viewing position for the two opposing recliners. A Winegard TRAVLER automatic dish mounted to the roof provides satellite TV reception with the appropriate receivers or DVRs. This is a nice arrangement when the slides are out, but the extended curved couch cushion, combined with the TV behind the couch, makes for a very narrow aisle when the slides are retracted.

The galley area is well-appointed. A solid-surface Corian countertop features a flush induction cooktop, although a standard Kenyon glass cooktop is also available. Removable covers expose a dual-basin stainless-steel sink with extra-tall gooseneck faucet and removable sprayer head. The convection microwave oven is located above the cooktop and a ceramic tile backsplash adorns the wall to protect it from splatters. A large pullout workstation provides additional workspace and is also fitted with a solid-surface top. A drawer-type dishwasher is located beneath the cooktop.

On the opposite wall, a large pantry with pullout storage bins handles food storage needs and is located next to the 22-cubic-foot Maytag residential refrigerator with dual doors, a bottom freezer



PHOTOS: MARK QUASLIUS



drawer plus water and ice dispensers.

You can choose from either an optional booth dinette with large storage drawers built into the seating, or a hide-a-leaf dinette. An extension board for the solid-surface table serves up additional space, and two folding chairs provide additional seating.

Overhead cabinets extend the length of the galley and living area on both sides.

Immediately aft of the galley is the guest bath. Newmar designed a unique center pivot door that splits the difference when open, placing half in the bathroom and half in the hall. This offers more room in the hall, which is a plus when the slides are retracted. However, it does cramp the space in this midbath, given its small size. The

bed, at the rear of the large full-wall slide, is a large storage center filled with wardrobe cabinet and drawers. A Sony 40-inch LED TV is located in the overhead cabinetry, which also holds a second Blu-ray player and space for a second satellite receiver.

The rear bath is an attractive feature that is very functional. Solid-surface shower walls are fitted with a rectangular glass shower surround. A fold-down teak wood seat provides room to sit or to place items on, although there are pockets in the shower walls for that as well. The macerator toilet is located next to the shower. On the opposite wall, a tall, vented enclosure contains a stackable washer and dryer, located next to the vanity. The vanity contains

WHAT'S HOT

Spacious rear bath, roomy full-wall slide, whisper-quiet ducted air conditioning, Comfort Drive

WHAT'S NOT

Narrow aisle when slides are in, small guest bath, voice commands from GPS



the right, a series of shelves can be accessed from within the wardrobe or from hinged doors from the bath area, and a wall safe is also located in this area and can be accessed in the same manner. Cubbyholes in the rear wall of the wardrobe can be used for storage of shoes or other similar-sized items.

Utilities

This Dutch Star is an all-electric coach. Heating and hot water needs are met by an Oasis hydronic heating system, which can be powered by electricity or by a diesel burner. Warm air is distributed throughout the coach by a series of heat exchangers located in cabinets and other strategic locations. Hot water is delivered on demand so you'll never run out of water when taking long showers. Optional electric tile-floor heating is available.

Electrical needs are met by a 50-amp shorepower service and an Onan 10-kW generator. The generator is mounted on a slide tray that allows easy service access. The shorepower cord is equipped with a power retract reel, but the fixed-feed roller design



The attractive shower, enclosed in glass, has solid-surface walls and a fold-down teak wood seat. A wardrobe with cubbyhole shelving is along the rear wall of the master bathroom.

bathroom includes a solid-surface vanity with classy raised-vessel sink.

Next in line is the bedroom. A 72-by-80-inch king bed is mounted in the curbside slide, tucked between a pair of nightstands. Overhead cabinetry holds multiplex control panels for the lighting as well as a generator start-stop switch. A Sleep Number Premier mattress is equipped with dual controls to adjust the inflation levels for each side. Directly opposite the

dual basin flush-mounted sinks facing a large mirror and medicine cabinets on each side. A stack of deep drawers is placed in the center of the vanity and is flanked by two large cabinet doors. Overhead vanity lighting provides illumination for primping and preening.

The rear wall of the bathroom contains a wardrobe. A pair of hinged center doors open to expose the clothes hanging area, which extends to the left, behind the medicine cabinet. To



ADA-Compliant Option

Newmar recently released a wheelchair-accessible floorplan in a diesel pusher. The Dutch Star 4311 is a 43-foot, tag-axle coach with a triple slide configuration that allows full wheelchair access throughout the coach. The power dinette is designed to be raised or lowered via fingertip control switches and all light switches, drawers, countertops and the convection microwave oven are designed to be accessible from a wheelchair. The bath area features a wheelchair-height sink, grab rails and an extra-deep roll-in 62-by-36-inch shower. A BraunAbility wheelchair lift is installed midcoach on the patio side.

Specifications

Chassis

Model	Freightliner XCR tag axle
Engine	Cummins ISL 8.9-liter
SAE Hp	450 @ 2,100 rpm
Torque	1,250 lb-ft @ 1,400 rpm
Transmission	Allison 3000 six speed
Axle Ratio	4.63:1
Tires (Front/Rear)	315/80R22.5 LR L
Wheelbase	288"
Brakes	Air, front disc, rear drum
Suspension	Air spring, front ZF Independent, Neway Tag Axle
Fuel Capacity	150 gal
Warranty	Three years, 50,000 miles; five years, 100,000 miles engine; five years, 200,000 miles transmission

Coach

Exterior Length	43' 9"
Exterior Width	8' 5.5"
Exterior Height	12' 10"
Interior Width	7' 11.5"
Interior Height	7'
Construction	Aluminum-frame side walls and roof, laminated side walls and roof, fiberglass roof, 5/8-inch foam insulation
Freshwater Capacity	105 gal
Black-Water Capacity	45 gal
Gray-Water Capacity	65 gal
Water-Heater Capacity	On Demand
LP-Gas Capacity	32 gal
Air Conditioner	(3) 15,000 Btu
Furnace	50,000 Btu, Diesel/electric hydronic
Refrigerator	22 cu-ft
Inverter	2,800 watt
Battery (8)	6-volt chassis, two 12-volt coach
AC Generator	10 kW
Base MSRP	\$361,471
MSRP as Tested	\$405,622
Warranty	One year, unlimited miles; five years structural

Wet Weight

(Water & Heater, Fuel, No Supplies or Passengers)	
Front Axle	15,360 lbs
Rear Axle	16,320 lbs
Tag Axle	7,140 lbs
Total	38,820 lbs

Chassis Ratings

GAWR, F/R	17,000/21,000 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	44,600/54,600 lbs
ROCCC	5,780 lbs (deduct weight of passengers for net cargo capacity)
GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combination Weight Rating
ROCCC	Realistic Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity (full water, no passengers)



The induction cooktop is flush-mounted in the Corian countertop; the dishwasher is in a drawer below. The kitchen is well-appointed with plenty of cabinetry and a contrasting backsplash.

tends to bunch up the cord in the middle rather than allow it to spool evenly across the reel. A Precision Circuits energy management system monitors available power and demands and can shed loads as needed to prevent tripping pedestal breakers. It also interfaces with the Magnum 2,800-watt true sine wave inverter to allow power assist prior to shedding loads.

The utility bay houses the usual freshwater control valves, water pump and holding-tank dump valves. A whole-house water filter, exterior shower, winterization kit and power hose reel finish out the bay. Unlike the power cord reel, this one allowed the hose to wind up evenly across the spool. The holding tanks are equipped with heat pads to prevent freezing in cold weather.

There is plenty of basement storage space in this coach. One of two large pass-through storage bays is equipped with a full-extension slide tray that can be accessed from either side of the coach. Bay doors allow access to the hydronic heating system, power cord reel, chassis batteries and DEF tank, as well as the house batteries, which were mounted on a slide-out battery tray.

Newmar incorporates Comfort Drive on all of its diesel pushers. This allows the user to dial in the level of power assist given to the steering. In a stiff crosswind the system compensates

so that the driver doesn't have to hold the wheel and fight the wind. Drivers may lose some feeling for the road with the system set to maximum assist, but fortunately it can be dialed down to suit individual taste. Once you drop down to a few miles per hour, the system goes into full assist to allow the driver to spin the wheel around with ease for tight maneuvers. The system also automatically straightens the wheels once the ignition key is switched off. The ZF front axle has a 56-degree wheel cut.

Driving the Dutch Star is a good experience. The Freightliner tag-axle chassis does a commendable job of driving straight in brisk crosswinds and that was with the Comfort Drive set to full stiffness. It maneuvered well pulling into a tight campground and was easy to navigate through a crowded truck stop and scale platform. The GPS system tracked accurately, but the voice commands are annoying. Wind noise and ride comfort were what one would expect in a diesel pusher of this caliber.

All in all, the Dutch Star is an attractive package. The combination of performance, good floorplans, quality construction, attractive décor and the ability to custom select options make this motorhome a good choice. **M**

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By Chris Hemer

TOP THIS

Installing new slide-topper fabric isn't difficult, and costs just a fraction of a new hardware assembly

The humble slide-topper awning is the unsung hero of our RVing experiences. Just think of all the work they do: They keep the sun off the slideout roofs, which helps prevent UV damage, and in the winter months, they deflect rain and snow and prevent leaves, pine needles and other debris from landing

on the slideout roof, which reduces your cleaning efforts and extends the life of seals and the slide mechanism. But as faithful a friend as they may be, they don't last forever — eventually the sun and environmental foes like acid rain and ozone take their toll on the awning material, causing it to fade, split and crack. At some point, a re-

placement will be necessary; the good news is, you don't have to install the entire assembly — just the material itself.

Dometic offers replacement fabric that can be ordered in a wide selection of fabrics, sizes and colors to suit most motorhomes. The process isn't very difficult, but you must be able to accurately measure the size of the fabric to make sure the new material fits the slide-topper assembly properly. You'll also need some hand tools, some DIY know-how and some basic knowledge of how the assembly works. The fabric is under spring pressure, so it is imperative that the assembly be handled with extreme care to prevent injury. Also, bear in mind that the material can be quite



Photos: Chris Hemer



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SLIDE-TOPPER FABRIC REPLACEMENT

1



2



[1] The old fabric had been subjected to the elements for years, and was practically disintegrating. [2] Rather than slide the old fabric out of the rail, the easiest way is to just cut it with a knife. The slideout was deployed a few inches to create tension in the fabric, after which it was very easy to cut.

cumbersome to handle on your own, so it's probably a good idea to ask an adventurous friend for some help with this one.

We recently installed new slideout-topper fabric on a 2005 Itasca motorhome that has spent its life in Southern California and was stored outdoors. The fabric had deteriorated to the point that it was no longer functional, which naturally put a damper on any camping trips last summer. We ordered three rolls of material for the varying sizes on the coach, which were installed in about two hours per awning.

If an installation such as this one is beyond the scope of your abilities, have no fear — a qualified RV repair center or Camping World can do the work for you. And the good news is, you won't have to wait for a special-order size to arrive; Dometic recently began offering bulk SlideTopper fabric to its dealers, which comes in a dispenser box and can be rolled out and cut to the desired width. The material comes with pre-installed poly cords and is available in black and white. So unless you need a special color, make sure to contact your dealer first before ordering custom fabric if you plan to have the replacement material installed for you. Figure around \$400 for the fabric and labor for each slide-out topper. **M**



[3, 4] Next, loosen the screws that secure the fabric to the roof rail, and slide the remaining piece of fragment out.



[5] The roller tube arms are secured to the mounting bracket by a 3/16-by-1/2-inch aluminum rivet, which must be drilled out. [6] With help from a friend, the tube assembly can now be removed. Even with the rivets drilled out, it might take some wiggling to get the tube free. Hold the tube arm tightly and carefully unwind it, counting the number of revolutions until there is no more tension in the spring. Make sure you mark the direction before unwinding. You'll have to wind the new material on with roughly the same number of revolutions.



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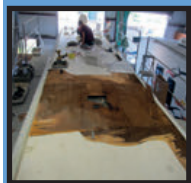
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[7] With the assembly safely on the ground, the old material can be removed from the slot in the tube. [8] Lay the tube on top of the old material to keep it clean, then feed the material into the slot in the tube. [9] Wind the arm the same number of revolutions as when it came off (in this case, about eight revolutions) then reinstall it on the octagonal bracket. It might be useful to add one or two more winds because the springs get weaker over a period of time. [10] Once properly centered on the rod, the pop rivets are reinstalled.

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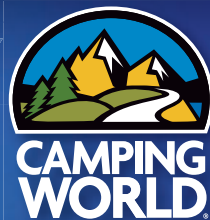
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By E. Don Smith

MOISTURE-FREE AIR

This often-overlooked project is relatively simple and helps to prevent water from getting into the brake lines and suspension system

Most every coach owner knows that a motorhome has an air filter, oil filter and fuel filters, but they may not be familiar with the air-dryer canister and its required service. Because most diesel motorhome brakes and suspension operate off compressed air, that means there is a built-in air compressor. For those of you who have air compressors at home or work, you are no doubt familiar with what happens when you compress air. There is an accumulation of water inside the storage tank. Since the process of compressing air to 120 psi requires taking a large volume of air and pressing it into a small tank, it also means that with the extra air comes extra water. Luckily for us, the motorhome comes with an air dryer to take care of this problem. Otherwise, that water would find its way into the brake lines and suspension system and result in early failure.

These air-dryer canisters are actually desiccant cartridges that help trap the water before it ever gets into the air lines or tanks. Not only is this process important, it is critical to ensure reliable braking and helps prevent problems from water and corrosion. The desiccant cartridge and the air dryer work together to capture the water and then eject it from the bottom of the dryer during operation.

While driving, you may hear the familiar burst



sound from the air compressor. That sound occurs because the compressor runs constantly anytime the main coach engine is running. Once the set pressure is reached, it simply opens a valve to release some air, along with the water and other debris that has accumulated in the bowl. The dryer also has a heater that runs off a thermostat. The purpose of the heater

[1] After setting the air brakes, you need to chock the wheels to prevent the coach from rolling or moving. [2] To make access easier under the motorhome, you can drive the rear wheels on to large wooden planks. Just make sure they are wide enough to cover the entire width of the dual tires. Then you can also place some homemade jack pads under each jack. This enables the motorhome to be lifted without extending the jacks all the way and placing unneeded strain on them. Do not lift the rear wheels off the ground. [3] The use of high-quality safety jacks with enough weight capacity is a requirement. These are rated at 24,000 pounds total and we placed them directly under the frame rails. If the coach jacks fail, we are now safe, knowing they support the entire rear axle weight of the motorhome. [4] Another tip we have discovered is that if you open the basement doors it gives you another 2 to 3 inches of clearance since the bottom of the door extends below the basement frame rails. This will give you a little more wiggle room.

is to warm the dryer assembly in freezing weather where the water accumulates before it is discharged.

Depending on your coach manufacturer, you can have one of several types of air dryers and the cartridge that gets changed will vary as well. This particular coach rides on a Freightliner chassis and it uses a Haldex PURest air dryer and a replaceable filter that resides inside a metal canister. Other units may have a spin-on filter that simply comes off — similar to an oil filter without a separate canister. This particular chassis requires the cartridge to be replaced every 36 months, but check your owner's manual, because some have shorter intervals, such as 24 months.

You only need some basic tools and the replacement cartridge kit to perform this service. We bought the DQ6050 kit for this motorhome at the local Freightliner service center, but many online sources also carry these parts. The price for this kit is \$152, which includes the desiccant cartridge, four replacement bolts as well as an O-ring and assembly grease. If your motorhome uses a one-piece canister cartridge, you will likely need a large strap wrench capable of wrapping around the entire unit. In our case, the only hand tool needed was a 3/8-inch ratchet and a 15mm socket.



🔧 SAFETY REVIEW ITEMS

1. Activate air brakes
2. Drain air completely from tanks
3. Chock wheels
4. Raise coach for access, then use correctly rated safety jack stands

When working under a coach, safety is the most important aspect of the job, so before you even start, there are a few precautions that need to be followed. First, set the brake and chock the wheels so the coach can't move. Then, dump the air from the entire system. You may have a manual dump valve or lanyards under the coach near the air tanks. Consult the owner's manual if you don't know where the dump valve is. One simple way to rapidly deplete the air system (or double check to ensure it is empty) is to activate the brakes repeatedly until the dash air gauge shows zero. This is done with the key on, but the engine off.

You may use the leveling jacks to raise the coach to allow easier access to the work area, but you should never use ONLY these jacks. You will also need stationary jack stands capable of supporting the coach. If there is anything you need to follow closely, it is these safety procedures, as the rear of a normal Class A diesel motorhome weighs between 20,000-30,000 pounds, so this is not the place for shortcuts. **M**



[5] The location of the air dryer on this coach was just behind the driver's side rear wheels. Although it is not a requirement, a rolling mechanics creeper will help you get in and out a bit easier, assuming its added height doesn't make you too high when rolling past the transmission, which is usually the lowest obstacle. [6] The cartridge kit came with four bolts, assembly grease, a new desiccant cartridge and a new O-ring. A pair of gloves is a good idea, too.



[7] This is what the dryer looks like mounted on the chassis. Here you can clearly see the discharge spout on the bottom and at the top is the metal cover that houses the air dryer cartridge. In some cases it may be necessary to remove a few of the mounting bolts to allow the dryer to pivot to a better location, but we were able to access this one as is. [8] Using a 15mm socket and ratchet we removed all four of the bolts holding the housing on, then removed the housing and cartridge from the dryer. If the area is dirty or greasy, as this one was, special care needs to be taken to ensure that no debris gets into the dryer. [9] After removing the entire canister you may have to search for the old O-ring. It will usually be stuck to the dryer housing or the old cartridge. Notice the exposed side of the cartridge is marked with OPEN and CLOSED. [10] To unlock and remove the cartridge, you will need to press down and turn at the same time in the direction marked OPEN. This will unlock it and allow you to turn the entire unit upside down to release the old cartridge. [11] Since the canister was so dirty we took this opportunity to clean it inside and out and completely dry it before reinstallation. [12] The tip of the cartridge has a built-in spring that holds it securely once locked inside the canister.

[13] To start the reassembly process, slide the new cartridge inside the canister. Then press down and turn in the direction marked CLOSED. [14] Use the supplied grease to completely coat the new O-ring. This preserves, protects and helps installation and seals between the dryer housing and the new dryer cartridge. Each cartridge type uses its own form of sealing, so yours could be different from this unit. For example, some O-rings are built into the filter. [15] If your dryer housing does not look clean, wipe it down to remove any debris before installing the new dryer cartridge. After it is clean, install the O-ring, then carefully lower the housing to ensure it stays in the right location. Follow the instructions supplied with your kit exactly to ensure the proper location of the O-ring during installation. [16] After lowering the canister in place, tighten the bolts to 35-40 ft-lbs in a diagonal cross pattern. After you are sure everything is tightened properly, start the coach engine and allow the air system to come up to 100 psi. Then shut down the engine and listen carefully for any air leaks around the dryer. If not, then restart the engine and allow it to reach full pressure. After you hear the dryer discharge air, shut down the engine again and check for leaks once more. If you make a mistake that causes leaking, it is most likely poor positioning of the O-ring or improper greasing of it at the time of installation. Another way to check for leaks is to allow the coach to sit for several hours then recheck the dash air-pressure gauge without starting the engine. If it is still at full pressure, you have completed the job properly. Make sure you make a notation in your maintenance log of the date of the change and pat yourself on the back for doing it yourself and saving money, too.



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LOST GROUND CONNECTIONS

SIMPLE PROCEDURES FOR IDENTIFYING ELECTRICAL WIRING PROBLEMS WILL HELP KEEP APPLIANCES AND ACCESSORIES RUNNING SMOOTHLY

There is nothing more frustrating to a motorhome owner than having the 12-volt DC equipment such as headlights, turn signals and clearance lights fail when you want to be on the road again. It is equally problematic when hooked up at a campground and the furnace, coach lights or DSI water heater doesn't function. Often, a common source for this device or light failure is a faulty ground connection. Low-voltage motorhome wiring usually relies on connections to the vehicle's metal framework to provide the path from the battery to complete the circuit.

One clue the problem may be related to a ground connection failure is when the light bulb doesn't light but tests OK with an ohmmeter and 12-volt DC power is present in the socket. This is a sign that a to-ground connection may be faulty. These ground faults occur naturally at points of connection because any time two different metals come in contact with each other in the presence of moisture, corrosion occurs, increasing the resistance of the connection until there is virtually no connection at all.

Some environments we love to visit with our motorhomes become a contributing factor to corrosion in DC electrical connections. Parking by the ocean, lakes, ponds and streams provides a nonstop source of water vapor that condenses on metal framework in the motorhome. This condensation on chassis ground connections provides the moisture that acts as an electrolyte resulting in corrosion of the connection. A multimeter (volt-ohm-amp meter) is the best test tool to easily check for faulty ground connections.

A motorhome may often have two circuits to control power to one device: one light-duty wire through a switch powering a relay and the relay in turn controlling heavy-duty wires to power the load. Examples include the slideout motors in the coach and the starter motor on the chassis engine.

All direct-current circuits are fairly simple and conform to the simple diagram or pattern shown in photo 6. The same steps are followed to troubleshoot any light, device, motor or appliance. To visualize connections to a variety of loads merely substitute the light bulb shown in the diagram with whatever light, appliance, relay, motor or device is failing. The colors used for ground wires in 12-volt DC electrical systems will typically be white, black or green.

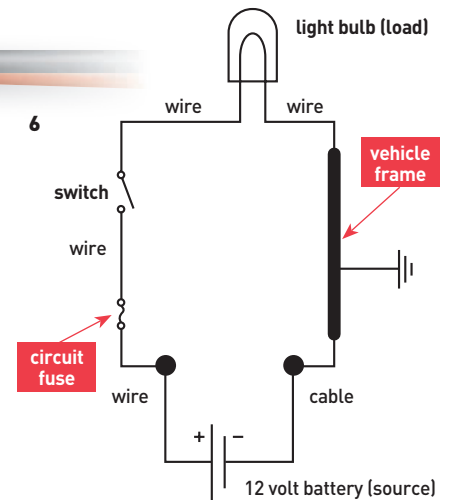
Using electron flow notation the actual moving electrons in a DC circuit flow from the negative post (smaller post) of the battery where a surplus of



[1] A 10-watt bulb should read about 0.8 ohms resistance. [2] With the negative probe grounded, a fuse should read 12 volts DC on both sides. In this case, the fuse is blown so the meter reads 0 volts on the downstream side. [3] Along with a multimeter, a long wire with alligator clips on both ends is needed for testing ground connections.



[4] A 12-volt DC circuit breaker should read about 0 ohms. [5] The heavy negative battery cable should be properly grounded to the frame. Oxidized or frayed connections like this one should be repaired even if they test OK to prevent troubles down the road. [6] (illustration) An example of a simple direct-current circuit.



electrons are found along the vehicle frame and then through a ground wire to the load (light bulb, fan, appliance or electric device). Then, they pass through an on/off switch or relay along the positive wire to a fuse on the fuse block, and then to the positive post on the battery where a shortage of electrons exist.

Fortunately both the chassis and the coach DC wiring share a common ground point, the motorhome chassis frame and anything metal physically connected or wired to it. The chassis battery and the coach batteries are both connected to the metal framework.

Troubleshooting for Poor or Lost Grounds

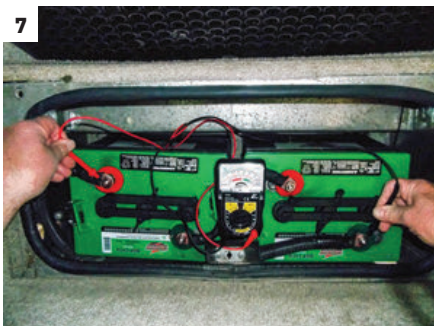
Checking for the most obvious is often overlooked when something fails. Ask these questions as you begin your DC troubleshooting.

- Has only one light or appliance failed? If not, then the battery cables or battery discharge is the cause.
- Is the device's switch or main switch turned on? If no, make sure the device is turned on or battery disconnects are set to power on.
- If it is a plug-in device, is it plugged

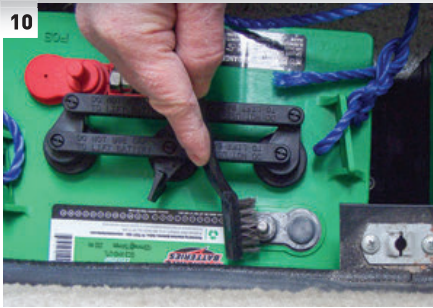
in properly? If no, push in the power (cigarette lighter) plug or check for a built-in fuse that failed.

- Is the fuse OK or is the circuit breaker on? (Not tripped) If no, change the fuse or reset the breaker.
- Do other similar lights or devices that share the same fuse still work? If no, a branch wire, main fuse or fusible link failed.
- Do I know or can I find out where the switches, fuses, relays and wires are located? If no, find a diagram or check where the wires run.

[7] Use the voltmeter function of the multimeter to verify that the battery or bank of two 6-volt batteries (shown) is charged; a fully charged battery will test at 12.7 volts. [8] Check the battery negative (-) post-to-cable connection by using the ohmmeter function of the meter, with one lead on the battery post and the other on the cable connector. [9] At the beginning of every season, detach the connection cables and clean with a wire brush.



BATTERY BASICS ➔ A charged battery works to provide electrical power because the chemical actions inside the batteries cause the anode (negative plates) to collect an excess of electrons and cause the cathode (positive plates) to be short of electrons. When the circuit is connected (turned on), the current flows to restore balance on the plates. When this balance point is nearly reached (about 10.5 volts), a 12-volt battery is said to be discharged and will no longer provide sufficient current to the circuit to power device loads. When a battery is recharged, the electrons are pushed back to create an imbalance and the voltage is again a nominal 12 volts.



[10] While the cables are disconnected, clean the terminals with a wire brush as well. **[11]** In addition to preventing corrosion, felt terminal pads like this one are color coded, which makes it easier to discern the positive and negative terminals. **[12]** Once you've thoroughly cleaned the terminals and cables, apply a sparing amount of battery terminal protector spray or dielectric grease to prevent oxidation from forming on the bare metal.

A multimeter (volt/ohm/amp meter) is an essential tool for troubleshooting DC circuits. Along with the meter, a long wire with alligator clips on both ends to use for testing the ground connections is needed. One piece of 14-gauge stranded wire like the one shown with the meter in photo 3 will handle a 2-amp load up to 42 feet, so it is of sufficient size to use with the meter for checking lost ground connections.

Use the voltmeter feature to verify that the battery or bank of two 6-volt batteries is charged and tests at 12-plus volts.

Check the battery negative (-) post-to-cable connection by using the ohmmeter function of the meter (on the X1 or times one scale) with one lead on the battery post and the other on the cable connector; the reading should be very close to zero ohms. If near zero ohms, the next test would be the cable-to-chassis ground connection.

Place the alligator clip on the test wire on the negative post and the other clip on the other meter probe, then follow the heavy negative battery cable-to-ground connection on the chassis. (An example of a cable-to-frame connection is shown in photo 5. The second probe is touched on a bare part of the frame to test the resistance from the battery post to the frame. Here, readings should be 1 to 3 ohms because of the cable and test wire resistance. Readings higher than that require attention by cleaning the posts and re-connecting the cable connections.

With the battery voltage and

the basic battery-to-frame ground connection verified as OK the troubleshooting steps move to whatever light or device failed. Connect the alligator-clipped test wire to the negative probe on the meter and reset the meter for testing DC volts on a scale near 12 volts. Connect the other clip end of the test wire to the battery negative post. Make sure the circuit is turned on; for example, let's say it is the running light switch because one of the running lights has failed. With a firm ground connection from the meter to the negative post, you can now begin checking for 12-volt DC readings at all connection points along the circuit.

The running light bulb is removed from the socket. The red positive test probe is touched to the connection points and a 12-volt DC reading was achieved indicating a ground connection failure for our example. It is quickly verified by connecting one alligator clip to the battery negative post or shiny metal on the frame and touching the base of the light socket with the other clip after reinstalling the light bulb. The bulb should light.

If a 12-volt DC reading was not found at the light socket, the next test would be at the switch. If a 12-volt DC reading is not achieved at the switch (when turned on), move to the next step.

Test the circuit fuse. If you have a 12-volt DC reading on one side and not the other, the fuse has failed. If a 12-volt DC reading is not present on both sides, trace the fuse block supply wire back to its source connection to find the fault,

working your way along the supply wiring right back to the positive post on the battery, if necessary.

This same set of steps, in order, would be used to test any light or device failure. Once the failure point is discovered make the repair to fix the problem and eliminate the probability of similar failures in the future. Clean and reattach the connections and replace any damaged section of wiring.

Preventive Measures

Now, let's look at some things that can be done to reduce the risk of poor ground connections.

At least annually, clean all connection cables with a wire brush to ensure a firm metal-to-metal mechanical connection at all battery joints as shown in photo 9.

Clean the battery posts with a wire brush as well as shown in photo 10.

Use an anti-corrosion pad at all battery cable connection points as shown in photo 11.

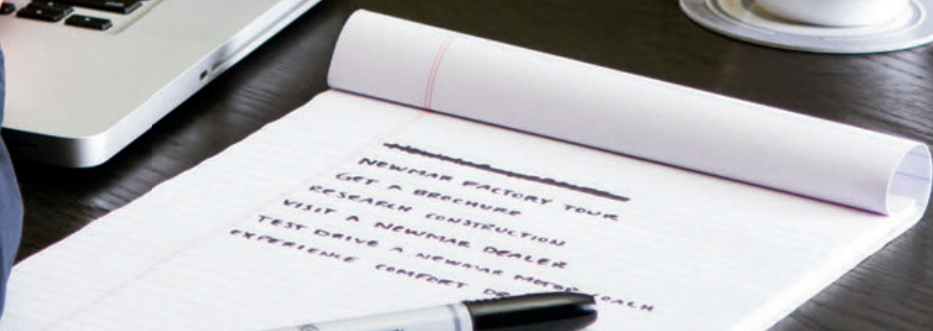
Use an anti-corrosion coating such as the one shown in photo 12. Spray on all exposed battery and ground connections following the instructions on the can and renew the spray every 90 days.

Should you find yourself cleaning and repairing to-chassis ground connections, use anti-corrosion spray there also, covering an area about 1.5 inches in diameter around the point of connection.

The above maintenance steps will help keep your rig well-grounded, allowing you to enjoy your travels. **M**

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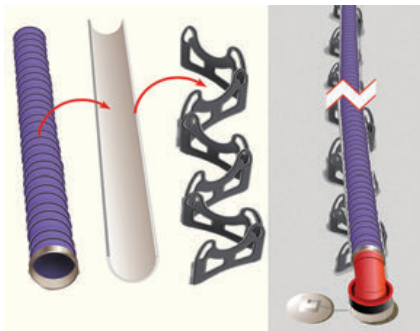
A few years ago I had a startling surprise when I opened my electric cord access compartment and a chipmunk bailed out! If you have creepy crawlers, spiders, ants, rodents, etc., secure your electrical cord and water hose access compartments by cutting matching holes in the plastic threaded access covers. Also, purchase a separate cover (without drilling the holes) for use when on the road or in storage.

First, remove the source of electrical power and be sure the generator is shut down. Next, disconnect the 30- or 50-amp cord from its attachment terminals in the transfer switch. Then measure the diameter of the cord.

Drill a hole in the center of a plastic access cover to match the cord diameter; make it tight, but still loose enough to adjust the cord length as needed. Then reconnect the electrical cord in the transfer switch.

Repeat similarly for your water hose access cover.

Doug Warnecke | Harwood, North Dakota



Hold That Hose

You set up camp, make all your attachments and assume things will be fine. But hot weather and repeated dumping of the tanks causes the sewer hose to slump even though you use one of those slinky-like devices.

My solution: Purchase 8 feet of 4-inch PVC drainpipe. Cut into 2- to 4-foot sections and then rip each section lengthwise. You can now create a perfect channel for your sewer hose to lie in while using the slinky for a proper slope. Any length from 4 to 16 feet is possible.

Jim Stroh | Loveland, Colorado



A Better Grip

While RVing in the mountains last summer I had the doors open a lot and used the screen. There was no grab bar to pull the door shut behind me. Stores do sell them, but they are sort of bulky. I bought a handle off the shelf at Lowe's that was large enough for my hand to fit in. The screws that came with the new handle were too long, so before installing, I put nuts on and then drilled the two holes. After installing, I tightened the nuts down and cut the ends of the screws off, then filed down the rough edges. I added a drop of super glue to keep the nuts tight.

Marilyn Hughes | Leeds, Alabama



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Cold-Food Storage

Dometic's new CFX35 portable refrigerator/freezer keeps perishables safe in two temperature zones

By Kevin Livingston



Dometic's Fridge Freezer has a smart-looking gray-and-blue casing.

APPLIANCES

Cost: \$685⁰⁰

Time: 15 minutes

Difficulty: 1/10

All motorhomes have a refrigerator and freezer; some have two doors, some have four doors. The size of the refrigerator is definitely a selling point when choosing a motorhome as buyers assess their needs to store food for their

type of travel. It's probably safe to assume that most RVers can manage their available refrigerator/freezer space and pack accordingly. But what happens when a local big-box store is having a great sale on items frequently used for meal preparation? Or what about that fishing trip when limits were filled each day? Storage of cold and frozen foods can easily become an issue when on the road. Ice chests will work for a short period of time, but it's a pain to keep adding ice and dealing with water that disintegrates packaging and dilutes the food stored in poorly sealed containers.

Portable refrigerators are a great option to supplement cold-food storage. Longtime RV appliance manufacturer Dometic has redesigned its line of portable refrigerator/freezers, and the introduction of the CFX35 makes a perfect companion when RV refrigerator shelves start overflowing. Beyond the nicer look of the redesigned box, the CFX series Fridge Freezers have a new compressor from a major European manufacturer that uses new technology to improve energy efficiency and general cooling performance. It has a low-maintenance refrigerant circuit and the strong and reliable compressor runs off of 120-volt AC or 12-volt DC power.

The CFX35 is nicely packaged in a rugged gray-and-blue-striped plastic casing filled with generous portions

of insulation in every place it could possibly go. Building the CFX35 in this manner allows the unit to reach desired temperatures in a very short amount of time, while not completely draining batteries when operating on 12-volt DC power. In fact, in about one hour, the temperature inside the CFX35 was down to the chosen temperature of 42 degrees Fahrenheit. The unit has a temperature range from 50 degrees Fahrenheit to minus 8 degrees Fahrenheit.

Where the CFX35 really shines is in its two-zone capability, which provides independent temperatures in two zones, allowing one section to serve as a refrigerator and the other as a freezer. There is a 10-12-degree differential between the sections. Aside from the basics you would expect from a refrigerator or freezer, the CFX35 has an LED display for temperature readings in both Celsius and Fahrenheit and an LED to illuminate the interior. The control panel monitors the vehicle's battery levels and even supplies a USB charging port for phones and small electronics. The battery monitor is designed to shut off the CFX35 automatically once the supply voltage falls below a certain point, when the ignition is switched off.

Obviously, due to the nature of the beast, there really isn't any type of installation involved other than finding a suitable location for the CFX35's 24.8-by-15.7-by-16.2-inch dimensions and selecting the appropriate power supply cable, depending on location and type of voltage. The only remaining operation from here is to depress the "Set" button twice followed by opting to press "Up" or "Down" until reaching the desired temperature reading.

The CFX35 is a perfect accessory for those who shop for a lot of food. Yes, the CFX35 is on the pricey side at \$685 (Camping World price as of press time), but if the idea of keeping extra chilled or frozen foods for long periods of time in a portable refrigerator/freezer that runs nearly silently is appealing, the new Dometic unit will fit the bill nicely. **M**



Two compartment zones allow a temperature differential of 10-12 degrees, so the CFX35 can serve as a refrigerator and freezer. Controls are clearly displayed on the side of the unit; there's even a USB port for charging portable electronic devices.

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No. 1 in specialty RV insurance from 2013 Millward Brown national survey data.

Measure Twice, Order Once

Involvement in an ordering dispute with an online company, a reader asked Hot Line to intercede on his behalf. He wrote:



“ We have a 1994 Fleetwood Southwind that has many items that are worn out and need to be replaced. One such item was the outside dome over the bathroom shower. I contacted RV supply stores, but they didn't carry the replacement dome. Then, I searched the Internet, looking for someone who could make a replacement. I came across A.I.A. Industries and sent the company an email on what I needed. I also sent photos of the cracked dome. They gave me a price of \$125 and I placed my order.

When the package arrived, the dome didn't fit. I called the company and told them so, but they said if the size is right, then I bought it. I'm willing to send it back if I can get a refund. Can Hot Line help me out? After all of this, I did contact Fleetwood and the company had a replacement dome in stock. Lesson learned: Call the coach manufacturer first.

Ralph Hilkowski | Naples, Florida

In most cases, when ordering anything specifically made to order, it is the buyer's responsibility to get the information right the first time. That means following ordering instructions and ensuring the measurements are correct, if not, then the buyer is responsible for absorbing the cost. Although Hot Line was unable to assist Hilkowski in this case, we have published his dilemma to caution others who might be contemplating such a purchase. A.I.A. Industries responded to our inquiry as follows:

A.I.A. Industries Inc. is a custom skylight manufacturer. We manufacture whole curb-mount skylights for residential and commercial use, as well as replacement domes for those skylights. Since we make all of our skylights and replacement domes to order, we get called on to make replacement domes for older RVs where the original RV or dome manufacturer is no longer in business.

Our online worksheet, which was filled out by Hilkowski, specifically states, "Custom skylights are non-

returnable. Be sure to double check measurements for accuracy." I relied on Hilkowski's ability to accurately measure his existing unit and use the worksheet and detail drawing to make sure the replacement dome would fit.

If Hilkowski had ordered a replacement dome that measured 26-3/4 by 26-3/4 inches tip to tip with a standard 6-inch dome height and standard 1-1/2-inch-wide flange, which could be used in a standard curb-mount skylight, I would gladly give him back his purchase price minus shipping.

Plain and simple, they are made to order and are not returnable if they do not fit because of inaccurate measurements.

Larry Barr, Project Manager

A.I.A. Industries Inc. | Denver, Colorado

Premature Failure

Struggling to resolve a warranty dispute on his own, a reader asked Hot Line for help. He wrote:

“ We purchased a new 2013 Forest River Forester in April 2013, and have had issues with the Onan generator since September 2013. It would run for a few minutes and then shut off and not restart. We took it to an RV repair center and were told that it needed to go to an Onan dealer for repairs. We took the motorhome to Cummins Southern Plains in San Antonio, Texas. The service supervisor there, Josh Veith, told us that after only 76 hours on the generator, it had ran out of oil and froze up. He took photos and sent them to Onan for warranty replacement of the generator, but the company refused to warrant the generator because it had run out of oil.

I am asking for Onan to reconsider its decision.

Mike Bethell | Waxahachie, Texas

Hot Line corresponded with Cummins Southern Plains in hopes that we could draw attention to Bethell's plight. Some time later, we heard from Bethell with an update on his situation. He wrote:

“ I don't know if Hot Line's letter prompted a response, or if my diligence paid off, but my generator has been repaired at no cost to me. Many thanks to Hot Line, and a big thank you to Cummins Southern Plains for covering the cost of labor and parts that Onan did not want to cover.

M.B. M

Take Action Contact Hot Line for Help

Hot Line assists in mediating conflicts between consumers and RV dealers and manufacturers, accessories suppliers and service providers. After exhausting all other resources, send typed letters to *MotorHome* Hot Line, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036 and enclose copies of appropriate bills and correspondence, plus a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Selected letters will be edited and published unless otherwise requested.

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GENERATOR

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By Ken Freund

Motorhome Cab Heater Issue

Q I have a 2011 Damon Astoria 40KT. The issue is the dash heater; it seems insufficient to provide adequate comfort heating when traveling down the highway. When I first took possession of the coach, I noticed this and my local service technician said the baffles were not completely open, so he corrected it. But, it still does not seem to heat sufficiently. All this leads to my question: Can I safely run the motorhome furnace while traveling down the road for increased comfort?

W. Craig Adams | Fenton, Michigan

A First, check the engine coolant temperature to make sure the thermostat is keeping the temperature up to specification. This should be around 190-195 degrees Fahrenheit. If that checks out OK, then yes, you can safely run the coach furnace. Obviously, you must remember to turn it off when refueling. Another option is an auxiliary cab heater. Just search "cab heater" on the Internet for a list of choices.

In really cold weather I have rigged up a clear plastic tarp that keeps heat in the cab area.



One Drip at a Time

Q Here is a perplexing problem. I have a GM 454 TBI engine installed in a 1994 Class A Winnebago 34-foot Vectra. It is an original installation with 27,300 miles on the clock. It runs like a fine watch, no malfunction indicator lights (MIL) or other known maladies. No overheating or abnormal temp or oil pressure; not even leaking exhaust headers.

Last spring, I found a small drip of antifreeze on the parking pad. Then I noticed that the drip seemed to occur every time the outside temperature fluctuated a few degrees. The reservoir level fluctuates normally between cold and hot levels.

The coach was parked for a week or two and I loosened the pressure cap. Having released all the pressure, and with the reservoir at the cold mark and the antifreeze at the throat of the radiator, I capped it again. It sat another week, again with fluctuating outside temperatures and outside barometric pressure changes, and a drip appeared. I got my camera and noted the only drip I could find was from the vent hole in the flex plate cover and, with the

cover removed, between the oil pan and flywheel. There is no evidence of a leak from the intake or cylinder head gaskets from the top of the engine. The oil level is normal and there is no evidence of contamination.

Is there a frost plug or other exit point on the back of the engine above the pan and between the flex plate/transmission? Is it possible to have a cracked block without it having been frozen or overheated? Is there some way to fix whatever, wherever it is, without pulling the engine or transmission out?

Why is the cooling system under pressure after being relieved and not run again for an extended period? (I thought these engines were sealed at least from outside pressure changes.) Also, no additives or chemicals have been added to the antifreeze other than the 45 to 50 percent distilled water.

Doug Warnecke | Harwood, North Dakota

A It is, indeed, unusual for the pressure to be maintained for such a long time. Typically, after the engine cools off, the pressure goes away. You might try a different pressure cap. Keeping pressure in the system will help the coolant find

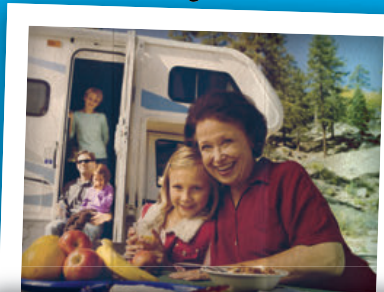
any tiny pinholes to leak through. It is unlikely, but possible, that the block has a tiny crack even if it wasn't frozen. However, the more likely possibilities are that a core plug is rusting through or otherwise leaking.

With a 20-year-old engine I'd suspect rust, particularly based on the photo you sent showing so much rust in the area. There are several holes in the back of the block that have press-fit or threaded plugs. Often the press-fit plugs start to rust through. I've also seen blocks with porosity in the metal that results in a leak from a water passage. I had one of these and we drilled the block and welded it up. Screw-in or press-in plugs can be replaced fairly easily (once the transmission is removed). In any of these cases, the transmission has to come out to access the back of the block.

You could put a coolant pressure tester on it and subject the system to increased pressure to see if you can trigger a leak. Coolant dye and a black light can be used to help spot the source. Make certain it's not running down from above.

I'm not a fan of stop-leak products, because they tend to clog heater cores

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and radiator tubes, etc. However, if you understand the risks, and are trying to postpone the need for a fairly expensive repair, you might try that first.

Auxiliary Cooling Fan

Q We have a 1991 Fleetwood Searcher 23-foot Class C on a Chevrolet G30 van chassis. There's an electric cooling fan in front of the radiator that does not power up when the A/C is on. My regular repair technician used my factory GM electrical manual only to realize that it's useless in regard to the fan. He applied power to it externally and the fan does work. It has a factory connector, but there's no power going to the fan from anyplace he can find.

My question is, is it supposed to come on when the A/C is engaged, or does it only come on when the engine/coolant temperature goes way above normal, and where does it get power from? The dealer techs at GM are clueless. I took it to an auto electrical shop to no avail, and the Fleetwood techs weren't helpful either. Any ideas?

Mike and Carol DeCastra
Homewood, Alabama

A As I recall, the auxiliary fan on these models is controlled by a relay that is triggered by high coolant temperatures and/or when the air conditioning is on (this helps cool the condenser that is in front of the radiator, to help improve air-conditioning performance). If you can't find a wiring diagram, follow the wiring back and try to find the relay and test it. Then test its inputs from the coolant sensor and A/C circuits. Alternatively, you could wire in your own continuous duty 30A relay to power the fan. The wire that powers the compressor clutch can be used to trigger the relay when the A/C is on. Power for the relay comes from the fuse box. You could also install a toggle switch under the dash and run wiring to operate the fan if the engine gets hot (the overheat circuit may still be working, but you don't know). Put a diode in the wire so that power from the toggle switch

doesn't feed back and apply the compressor clutch.

Hard To Find 8.00 x 16.5 Tires

Q My 1989 Cobra Passport motorhome is 25 years old. It has a GMC chassis with a V-8 engine and is about 21 feet long. The tires are size 8.00 x 16.5 and are no longer available — unless I buy used tires. I already have used tires on my motorhome that I had installed about eight years ago, brand new. I called several local motorhome dealers in western New York state and nobody could help. I will need new wheels (rims) and new tires. Where do I find wheels (new or used)? I called a few auto wreckers/junk yards and they said they do not have any motorhome parts. Where can I get 16-inch wheels that will fit?

David F. Quagliana | Williamsville, New York

A You are right, they are getting hard to find, but not impossible. A quick search on eBay brought up several new 8.00 x 16.5 tires for less than \$130 with shipping. You might also find some locally by calling around to tire dealers. You should be able to use 8.75 x 16.5 tires, which are more readily available, but you will have to change all tires at once. I found them online at www.thetirerack.com. If you decide to bite the bullet and change your wheels, 16 inchers should be easy to find in salvage yards. Instead of asking for motorhome wheels, look for wheels from a GM (Chevy) dually G30 or GMC G35 chassis.

Allison Angst

Q I have a 1997 Coachman Catalina with transmission problems. I just got the motorhome and I need advice on where to start. As I drove it home, I noticed that when the coach downshifted, the service light on the transmission gear selector came on. It also downshifted really hard going from fifth to fourth gear. I haven't pulled the codes yet from the strip panel. It has an Allison 3060 transmission. I am going to service the motorhome, but

want to know if there's something else I need to keep an eye on.

Brandon Robicheaux | Via email

A Initially my response was to read the trouble codes to get an idea where to start. Soon, Robicheaux sent another email saying, "I think I have figured it out. The linkage on the injector pump for the tranny throttle position sensor (TPS) was worn out, so I built another bracket and installed it on the injector fuel linkage and reinstalled the TPS. I took a test drive and everything seems to be working fine now. No codes or hard downshifting."

It is likely that other readers may encounter a similar problem, so I am passing along the solution, which may save a lot of time and money.

Dual Tire Pressure Equalization

Q I recently purchased a 2014 Fleetwood Southwind 32VS. It has dually tires and I have purchased a Crossfire Dual Tire Pressure Equalization System rated 100 psi. Is that the correct device for my tires? I have not installed it yet and wonder if it should remain on the tire when traveling?

Mike DeCastris | Homewood, Alabama

A Your first step before ordering should have been to determine what the correct tire pressure in your rear tires should be. With the coach loaded for a trip and fueled, the axles should be weighed on a truck scale and the weights divided by the number of tires on each respective axle. Then look up the recommended tire pressure, using a load-inflation chart provided by the tire manufacturer. These are available on their websites. Crossfire TPMS valves are available for desired air pressure of 50 to 150 psi, in 5-psi increments.

This system was designed primarily for over-the-road trucks, to be used when traveling, and should be fairly reliable. The main concern I have is that whenever you install hoses connecting to the tire valves, you introduce a potential for an air leak and a flat tire. Installation is critical,

and you will have to decide if you want to run them or not.

For more information see: www.crossfirecomponents.co.nz/part-numbers-replacement-parts/#sthash.PCE33pzy.dpuf and www.crossfirecomponents.co.nz/contact-us-2.

Dinghy Towing Question

Q We are towing a car four-wheels-down with a Brake Buddy. What position should the ignition key in the car be in?

Jodi Moretz | Via email

A You did not say what model vehicle you have. Hopefully it is towable. Normally it is the first click that unlocks the steering. Just a reminder to you and others, this information should be in the owner's manual of all vehicles that have been approved by the manufacturer for flat towing, along with any other towing procedures required by the manufacturer.

Removing Sap

Q What is the best way to remove pine pitch from an RV? We parked under a pine tree and didn't realize what a mess we were in for.

Marvin Fessemott | Elkton, Florida

A When removing sap from a rubber roof, avoid petroleum-based chemicals. If it is just a few spots, you can put ice on them and peel the sap right off. For larger areas, you can use rubbing alcohol and a cloth. Let it soak in and wipe it off. Hand-sanitizing gel (which contains alcohol) works well because it doesn't evaporate as fast, but it's more expensive.

For removing sap from fiberglass or aluminum, use mineral spirits on a dampened soft cloth. For small areas, WD-40 can be sprayed on the sap, then let it sit for a while and wipe with a soft cloth. Use the least amount of pressure possible to reduce the risk of scratching the finish. After removal, wash the surfaces and apply polish or wax to the affected areas. Test the

method in an inconspicuous place before applying to a visible area.

Slideout ... Won't

Q I am having trouble with my slideout: It won't extend. It makes a clicking noise at the switch, and nothing happens. The same thing happened to the steps. I got underneath, pulled a connector apart and snapped it back together, and then the steps worked. Is this a coincidence? There is not much on troubleshooting in the slideout manual.

Lori Bertolucci | Via email

A Both of these items use electric motors, which draw a fair amount of current. This requires that the electrical connections be clean, tight and corrosion-free. Voltage going to the motor should not drop precipitously under load. I would check the battery terminals first. If problems continue, measure the voltage at the battery when there is no load and when the slideout motor is activated. A fully charged battery should read about 12.6 volts; it shouldn't drop below about 10 volts under heavy load. Then trace the source of the voltage drop.

Interference Noise from AM Radio

Q I discovered that, while using the AM radio, I can hear a high-frequency buzz while plugged into shorepower. The tone of sound changes as I turn on lights, pumps or fans. This occurs even if everything except the radio is turned off. The noise disappears when the shorepower is disconnected. Is the inverter malfunctioning?

John Connell | Via email

A AM radios are very susceptible to radio frequency interference (RFI). That is one of the main reasons for FM radio. Power converters and inverters give off various amounts of RFI and noise. You can reduce this effect by installing an outside antenna, by moving the radio away from RFI

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While every effort is made to maintain accuracy and completeness, last-minute changes may occasionally result in omissions or errors.

sources, and by adding RFI filters and shielding. Try the easy stuff first. Check with an electronics store for RFI filters, etc.

Hot-Oil Smell — Use Recirculating Mode

In the December 2014 issue, Howard Scott asked about a hot-oil smell on his dinghy vehicles where he couldn't find any oil leaks. Could he be confusing hot-oil smell with exhaust smell? In the owner's manual of some "toads" (dinghy vehicles) it says to put the fresh air on the "recirculating" setting, thus shutting the inside of the toad off from any outside odors. If he has fresh air coming into the toad from outside he could be getting exhaust smells on the inside of his toad.

Shorty Young | Prairie Du Sac, Wisconsin

Although we received a lot of responses to this problem, yours was the only one suggesting this solution, which may help in some cases.

Hot-Oil Smell Cause

This is in response to "Hot-Oil Smell." I have a 2012 33-foot Winnebago Adventurer and my towed vehicle is a 2013 Jeep Wrangler. I noticed a smell, off and on, every time I drove the Jeep after it had been towed. To me, the smell was like burning brake linings, but the Jeep rolled smoothly with no hint of a brake problem. I did some Internet research and found people complaining about the same problem. The common explanation was that the smell comes from road debris (oil, rubber particles, etc.) that is thrown up as the RV travels down the road. Some of the debris sticks to the underside of the towed vehicle's exhaust system. When the towed vehicle is driven, the debris burns off, and thus the smell. I think this is a credible explanation because I only noticed the smell the first time I drove my Jeep any distance after towing it behind the RV and after that, no smell.

John Groom | Via email

Thanks for writing. Your explanation seems to be the most common one we've received from readers, and it makes sense if no leaks are present.

Removing the Hot-Oil Smell

This is regarding the hot-oil smell coming from the dinghy vehicle after being towed. I found the problem to be bits of rubber being thrown up into the hot transmission cooler and radiator. When I get to my destination, I simply use a water hose with the nozzle set to "jet" position to rinse out the coils, and that has always eliminated the smell.

Mack Henderson | Via email

Thanks for sharing your solution.

Towing an Edge — Comment

Regarding the August 2014 letter, "Towing an Edge," I have a Lincoln MKT that is made at the same plant as the Ford Edge, and I make sure that all the automatic items are turned off before towing, and I've never had a battery issue. Be sure to turn off the lights, radio, air, windshield wipers and, if you have it, the refrigerator. I have towed for more than two years with no issues.

Bob Pease | Indio, California

That is good advice when towing any dinghy vehicle. However, if you run an auxiliary braking system (and you should), most require a considerable amount of current to operate. That's why I'm an advocate of installing a battery charge line for all dinghy vehicles. **M**

Have a Tech Question?

Contact our experts:

Email tech@motorhomemagazine.com or write to *MotorHome*, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036 (please include your name, city and state). Selected letters will be answered in the magazine, but time does not permit individual replies.

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(continued from pg. 18)

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OREGON: Bend/Sisters Garden RV Resort, Casey's Riverside RV Park, Olde Stone Village RV Park, Pacific Shores Motorcoach Resort, Pheasant Ridge RV Resort, Seven Feathers RV Resort

PENNSYLVANIA: Lake-In-Wood Resort, Shenango Valley RV Park

SOUTH CAROLINA: Cypress Camping Resort, Hart Ranch Camping Resort Club, Hilton Head Harbor RV Resort & Marina, Hilton Head Island Motorcoach Resort/Outdoor Resorts Hilton Head Island, Ocean Lakes Family Campground, Willowtree RV Resort & Campground

TENNESSEE: Anchor Down RV Resort, Smoky Bear Campground, Twin Creek RV Resort

TEXAS: Advanced RV Resort, Alsatian Resort & Golf Club, Bentsen Palm Village RV Resort, Buckhorn Lake Resort, Fernbrook Park, Forest Retreat RV Park, Jamaica Beach RV Park, Johnson Creek RV Resort & Park, KE Bushman's Camp, Llano Grande Lake Park Resort & Country Club MHP, Mill Creek Ranch Resort, Northshore RV Resort, Oak Creek RV Park, Rayford Crossing RV Resort, San Jacinto Riverfront RV Park, Shallow Creek RV Resort

UTAH: Mountain Valley RV Resort

VIRGINIA: American Heritage RV Park, Williamsburg KOA

WASHINGTON: Columbia Sun RV Resort

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QUEBEC: Camping Alouette (Parkbridge), Camping La Cle Des Champs RV Resort

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Have Heart, Will Travel

A new approach to Valentine's Day brings gifts that last for years to come

By Alan Rider

Yes, I realize I'm going out on a limb here. But I'm willing to wager that, if we took a poll, Americans' most-loathed holiday would be Valentine's Day. To back up my assertion, I'd encourage you to remember the stress involved in selecting all those V-Day gifts you've given over the years and, more importantly, what ultimately happened to them. After that futile exercise, allow me to suggest you try something new this February 14th: If you truly care for someone, do not buy him or her any of the sparkly baubles or As-Seen-On-TV inventions you've watched being hawked on cable shopping channels or late-night infomercials.

Though this contrarian notion may seem targeted at those already engaged in some form of couple-hood, the same philosophy applies equally to all those folks out there whom the romantic in me prefers to think of not as single, but simply as between significant others. In other words, whether you're married or just a couple of good friends in need of an old-school road trip, allow me to suggest you load up your motorhome and hit the highway for what I personally guarantee will be a Valentine's Day that will be downright unforgettable.

Now if you've read to this point and my plan still seems a little fuzzy, let me simplify it for you: Get in your rig and go somewhere. See a place you've always wanted to visit, or make a beeline to one of your all-time favorite RVing destinations. In fact, I'll go as far as suggesting that where you actually end up matters less than the time you spend getting there with someone

whose company is far more valuable than anything a shop clerk could ever tie a bow on.

Because it's these relationships — with our spouse, significant other, good friends, whatever — that enrich an RV journey in innumerable ways. For couples, watching the sunrise out of the Atlantic from the top of a dune on North Carolina's Outer Banks (877-629-4386, www.outerbanks.org) while nibbling on bagels and grapes from a wicker basket filled with spur-of-the-moment breakfast fixings is bound to create a fond memory that will mean more and last longer than any of those

tchotchkes we traditionally exchange. For friends traveling together or even solo RVers, I can guarantee you that a bottle of wine, a thin-sliced baguette and warm wedge of Camembert cheese consumed while watching the sunset over Napa Valley's (855-847-6272, www.visitnapavalley.com) endless rows of fragrant grapevines will feed your soul far longer than it takes your digestive tract to process said snack.

One crucial bit of advice here, though: The key is to completely let go of any ideas about trying to create the perfect moment, as such attempts inevitably lead to disappointment. Give up your expectations, on the other hand, and a whole world of serendipitous possibilities will open up to you.

In fact, this is a perfect time to let spontaneity be your guide. Throw out that detailed itinerary, and you're guaranteed to discover quasi-magical spots you would have driven right by had you remained fixated on reaching Amarillo, Texas, before the RV park's office closed.

As is always the case, a motorhome journey cannot solve all of life's vexing annoyances. But I'll tell you one thing for certain: I'm a firm believer in the fact that the true gifts of Valentine's Day are a lot more likely to be found out there on The Road Ahead than they are in a velour-covered jewelry box. **M**

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Fig. 1 Saturn



Fig. 3 Asteroid Gaspra



Fig. 5 Mercury

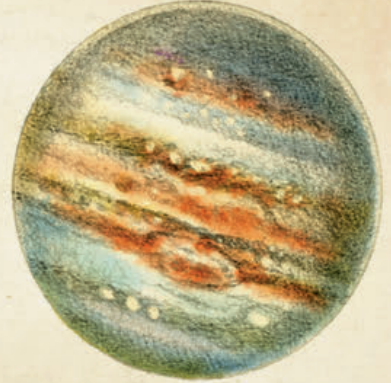


Fig. 7 Jupiter

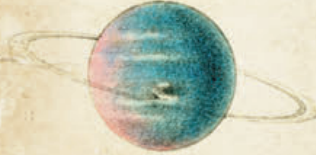


Fig. 2 Neptune

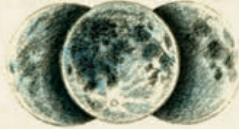


Fig. 4 Phases of the Moon



Fig. 6 Mars

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