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Visitors to Redwood National and State Parks in California are rewarded with opportunities for reflection among the fabled coastal giants (see page 20).



Regency RV's 2TB Xalta bursts onto the Class B scene with high-end appointments and smooth handling. Pg. 48

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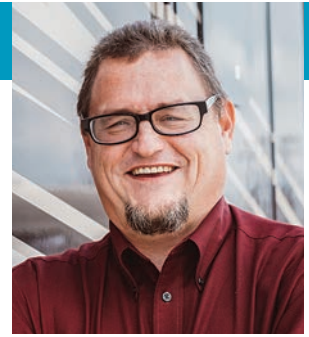
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ON THE COVER

Clean exterior lines and a penthouse-like interior make the Fleetwood Discovery LXE 44H great for extended stays at upscale locations like Outdoor Resort Palm Springs (see test page 36). Photo by Scott Hirko.





By Kristopher Bunker

Moving Right Along

As the height of the summer travel season progresses, we are treated to bright sunlight, warmer temperatures and longer daylight hours. So, while we head toward what to many is the pinnacle of enjoyment in the motorhome lifestyle — lazy days on the beach or at the lake, evenings around the campfire and stargazing at night — it's the perfect time to appreciate the forward march the motorhome industry has made over the years, in terms of technology, amenities and even outdoor opportunity.

We begin with the latter: This year marks the 50th anniversary of Redwood National and State Parks in California. In "Redwood Goes Gold," beginning on page 20, we visit the solitude and natural splendor of the Northern California national park with a peculiar name. Such a unique title is well deserved, however, as the entire area is linked by the majestic coastal redwoods that are unique themselves to the area.

Civilizations have been harnessing the power of the sun since the dawn of time, but it wasn't until over the last 175 years or so that we discovered it was possible to turn exposure to the bright star's energy into electricity. It should come as no surprise then that RVs and solar power seamlessly blend together, as motorhomes are constantly kissed by the sunlight, whether on the road or in camp. "Watt Do You Need," beginning on page 30, explores the different components of a motorhome solar-power system,

describing in detail the installation and functions of the same. Using Mother Nature to power up your motorhome is progress indeed.

From a new-model standpoint, the progression of Fleetwood's popular Discovery motorhome has been something to behold. Today's Discovery LXE is the flagship Class A diesel pusher of the popular manufacturer, and has been outfitted not only with residential style and comfort, but with all the latest in today's technology, from the electronic system's monitoring panel to four HDTVs to side- and rearview cameras that double as security monitors. Plus, its open floorplan allows owners to progress to next-level entertainment while in camp. Check out "Road to Discovery" on page 36 to learn more.

“The future of motorhomes has never looked brighter, and good times are ahead as we progress down the road.”

The motorhome showering experience has always been more of a function-over-form experience. That is, until companies like Ecocamel decided to jump aboard the carousel of progress to manufacture products that are more user-friendly and residential-oriented. Ecocamel's Orbit SoftWater showerhead softens water by utilizing metals in the showerhead that cause a catalytic reaction, neutralizing the calcium in the water. The design of the Orbit also increases pressure and aerates the water, resulting in a pleasant bathing experience. "Singing in the Shower," beginning on page 44, will explain the rest.

And finally, Class B motorhomes have made quite a leap in livability features in recent years. Regency RV's 2TB Xalta displays its "royal pedigree" beginning on page 48, offering versatile sleeping arrangements, a work station and a well-designed shower enclosure.

Of course, progress can be defined differently by different people. But I think we can all agree that the future of motorhomes has never looked brighter, and good times are ahead as we progress down the road. **M**

Contributors | August



Rhonda Ostertag, a freelance writer of guidebooks and articles and frequent contributor to *MotorHome*, travels and collaborates with her husband, photographer George Ostertag.



Bruce W. Smith has had a long, respected career as an automotive/RV journalist. He started contributing to *MotorHome* nearly 30 years ago, and sees his home state of Oregon as a paradise for outdoor adventurers.



Mary Zalmanek, and her husband, Jim, enjoy traveling in their 2019 Winnebago Vista LX when they are not at home in Monument, Colo. Mary is the author of *The Art of the Spark* (www.adventuresoftheheart.com).

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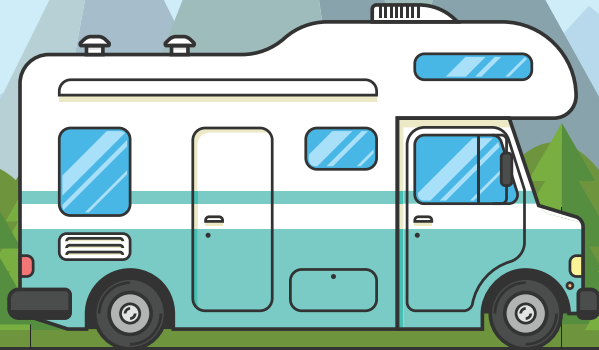
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How do you stay fit while traveling in your motorhome? What different types of exercises do you do while in the motorhome, and also while in camp?

Those are the questions we asked in the May issue, and here are some of the responses we received.

SilverSneakers

When we get to a new camping spot, we unhook the dinghy and I check my phone for the closest gym that takes SilverSneakers members (www.silversneakers.com). I go to the gym every morning, seven days a week, at 5 a.m. I am 70 years old and it is the bravest thing I do at this time in my life. It is always dark at that time of the morning, and sometimes I need to take a few freeways to get there, but rain or shine I always get there. It is just a habit, and one that can be continued even if you travel.

Just for your information, SilverSneakers is a program through Medicare providers. My secondary insurance, Anthem Blue Cross, pays the gyms I go to for each visit. They have more than 14,000 gyms in the U.S., so no excuses.

"Move or Die" is my motto, but of course, my better half is in bed, snoring, the entire time I am gone.

Georgene Waterman | Roseville, California

Optimum Circulation

I have no problem staying fit while camping, between biking and walking the dogs, but sitting for extended periods of time, if it's not my turn to drive, is tough. I got some pedals for floor (legs) or tabletop use (arms). It's compact and easy to store, and great to use during bad weather at the campgrounds. But more important is pedaling away while my hubby is driving. It's great for the circulation.

Susan Payne | Via email

Stretch Out

Hubby and I choose to travel to places where we can hike and/or bike. In addition, I bring DVDs of my favorite stretching routine, Classical Stretch (www.classicalstretch.com). I play the DVDs on a portable DVD player that I position on a tree stump or a picnic table. On the rare occasions when [weather has] been inclement, I play the DVDs on the player inside our motorhome, which is a 24-foot Minnie Winnie. Since there's not much exercising room inside, I remove the

dining table and post for a bit more legroom while exercising.

Marianna Cochran | Via email

PowerBlock Up

While on the road I bring along a set of PowerBlock weights and a heavy-duty, collapsible PowerBlock bench. The sturdy legs on the bench fold and I place it on the backseat of our toad [with the weights on the backseat floor] while traveling. When we are parked, I bring them inside the motorhome for my workout, or I exercise outdoors during good weather. We hike and bike for cardio fitness. This has worked well for 15 years of traveling.

Steve Wadecki | Via email

Crowd Control

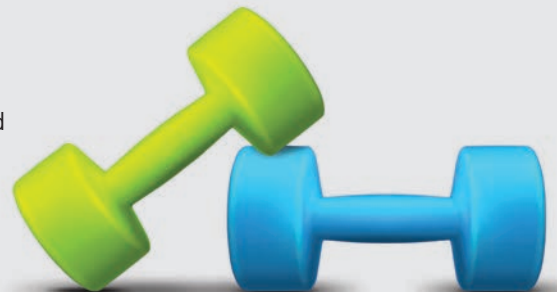
Alan Rider's excellent piece on the EAA AirVenture in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, ("The Road Ahead," May) was spot-on, but failed to mention getting to the campsite early and leaving early as being of critical importance. As a loyal AirVenture fan, I learned the hard way about camping at AirVenture.

Featured Letter

Don't Skip Leg Day

Here's how I stay fit while traveling in our 38-foot Class A motorhome or at home. I have two 10-pound ankle weights for leg lifts, two 4-pound ankle weights for leg lifts while in motion, two 8-pound dumbbells for arm curls, two 2-pound hand weights for walking around the RV park/campground, and a yoga mat. I do a 90-minute workout with weights and the same amount of time walking. Of course, I do stretches for 10 minutes before and after each workout, and I'm 67 years old.

Dee Griffin | Rancho Cordova, California





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Those of us who go to Quartzsite, Arizona, each year, will understand what mass camping looks like. Quartzsite is spread out, while Oshkosh is concentrated camping with row after row of motorhomes, with even a long row of high-end Prevost coaches.

The show(s) run every day with spectacular re-enactments of aerial dog fights and live bombing runs of WWII bombers making low-level flybys with exploding 50-gallon barrels of diesel fuel that simulate a real bombing run — even with P-51 Mustang fighter escorts making strafing runs.

The Wednesday and Saturday night air shows are not to be missed, as the fireworks are launched both from aircraft and from the ground in an unforgettable world-class exhibition.

The shuttle tractors and trailers will also take you onto the flight line and right up to the aircraft on display. But get there at least two or three days early for a better campsite (read, closer-in) and plan on leaving early as well — exiting on Thursday or Friday will save frustration and facilitate easy exiting!

Marty Ahlman | Via email

Combo Deal

If we stay someplace for more than a couple of weeks, we go to a club or a YMCA, which usually gives a special rate if you're a member back home. We also pack a set of adjustable dumbbells from 5- to 50 pounds, and a folding rack that turns my bicycle into a stationary bike with adjustable tension. We're both 69 years old, by the way.

Robert Wilson | Via email

Corporate Camping

My husband and I own a Class C motorhome and enjoy staying in the beautiful national and state parks whenever possible, or in a family-owned campground when those parks are filled. While traveling recently to the Florida Keys, we noticed more and more campsites are becoming corporate-owned, especially after hurricane restorations. We wanted to look at these sites for future trips, but were told only registered campers

could be on the grounds, and we were handed a rule book on "What you can't do/bring to the 'resort' RV park." The don'ts included kayaks, trailers, etc., and I wanted to add, "Can't have fun, either!" I hope this is not a trend to go corporate, especially since the rates are approaching equivalent hotel/motel rates in the area. And in those cases, you don't need to bring your own bed!

Paula Van Aken | Philipstown, New York

Question of the Month

Do you prefer staying at a corporate-style resort campground with expanded activities and amenities, or are you more likely to seek out a quiet mom-and-pop location for your motorhome travels?

Send your comments to:

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ESCAPES

Flame On! 
Portable Renegade Gas Fire Pit Table is lightweight and easy to set up. Included case makes storage easy. **pg. 14**



14 WHEELS & GEAR | 16 CROSSROADS



Coastal Charms

Maine's Kennebunkport delights with beaches, museums and famous summer residents

By James Richardson

Kennebunkport, a town with an unusual name, is about 30 miles southwest of Portland, Maine. But there is nothing unusual about the attractions of this small town; it's full of beauty, culture and wonder. Located on Maine's coast, Kennebunkport is popular for its beaches and the Bushes (not the garden variety, but the Presidential variety). The Bush family has used the town as a summer home since the early 1980s. Their compound is located on Walker's Point, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.

Among the area's other attractions are the Seashore

Trolley Museum, Blowing Cave Park, the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge, the First Families Kennebunkport Museum and, of course, numerous beaches.

Getting to Kennebunkport is either via Interstate 95 or U.S. Highway 1. Exit at Kennebunk and follow state Route 35 to Kennebunkport. Dock Square is the center of town and has many shops and restaurants.

Local options for camping are Red Apple Campground (207-967-4927, www.redapplecampground.com), with 38 full-hookup sites and a Good Sam RV Travel & Savings Guide rating of 10/10*/10; and Sandy Pines Campground (207-967-2483, <http://sandypinescamping.com>), with 70 full-hookup sites.

For more information, call 207-967-0857 or go to www.visitthekennebunks.com



Dock Square is a great place to indulge in shopping and dining; the roads can accommodate compact motorhomes, but those with larger rigs should rely on a dinghy vehicle. With boats of all sizes, the city's maritime heritage is evident year-round.



Fire to Go

To most, the campfire is a quintessential part of the motorhome experience. However, many campgrounds have rules prohibiting wood fires, and some neighboring RVers may not appreciate plumes of smoke invading their campsite. The Outdoor GreatRoom Co. introduces the portable Renegade Gas Fire Pit Table that's manufactured to set up and take down quickly. At only 37 pounds, its compact size fits in most storage compartments, and setup is a one-person job. The Renegade features a 16-inch stainless-steel UL-listed gas burner with an adjustable LP-gas valve, resulting in a flame with a realistic pattern that produces up to 55,000 Btu on a bed of tempered fire glass. The top is a black powder-coated metal featuring a diamond-plate pattern that matches the burner cover, while the base is black powder-coated metal with removable legs for easy packing. The Renegade comes with a convenient carrying case for packing and transporting. MSRP: \$499.

Outdoor GreatRoom Co. | 866-303-4028, www.outdoorrooms.com



Bug Stopper

The small sliding door on a motorhome's entry screen is convenient for opening and closing the door, or even to pass small items to somebody outside the RV. However, forgetting to slide it back into place can lead to an insect invasion, as flies, mosquitoes and wasps use the opening for quick access to the motorhome's interior. The R.V. Bug Stop is designed to stop the bugs from entering the motorhome by self-closing the small sliding access door after each use. The spring-loaded R.V. Bug Stop is said to install in less than 2 minutes, with no tools needed. Simply clean the rail beneath the slider before removing the backing, exposing the self-adhesive strip and pressing firmly into place, approximately 1/8 inch above and 2 inches to the right of the rail. R.V. Bug Stop offers just enough resistance to self-close the slider, while still allowing for easy opening. R.V. Bug Stop is made of anodized aluminum and is available online and at Camping World. MSRP: \$24.95.

R.V. Bug Stop | 435-313-5259, www.rvbugstop.com

Hold Everything

We all enjoy a beverage while on the road or at the beach, and most of us carry along our phones as well. The problem is, it can be difficult to keep the phone safe from the dreaded space between the seat and the console, or either object out of the dirt once you've arrived at your destination.



The STAND-Bi phone and beverage holder is designed to keep your cellphone and drink safe and secure in one convenient location. Each STAND-Bi comes with a snap-on sand spike, a detachable foot for a desk or a table, a built-in bottom that fits almost any vehicle cup-holder and a foam insert for the cup-holder (if necessary). Each STAND-Bi is made of durable ABS plastic and is dishwasher-safe, UV-protected and made in the USA. The cellphone slot has been designed to accommodate most phones, while the cup-holder is manufactured to hold cups, glasses and bottles of various shapes and sizes. The STAND-Bi comes in a variety of colors and can even be customized. MSRP: \$15.95.

Stand-Bi | 833-782-6324, www.stand-bi.com

Monitor Wizard

Monitoring the levels of a motorhome's battery banks is a critical part of the motorhome lifestyle, especially while boondocking. To make the process easy, Thornwave offers the BT-DCPM power manager/battery monitor that allows for a handy user interface via Bluetooth on the user's smart device. The BT-DCPM features a battery fuel-gauge function (keeps track of the battery state-of-charge in percentage) and a low-voltage disconnect (if the battery voltage drops below a specified threshold), among other functions. Additional benefits include password protection, at-a-glance battery levels and battery fuel gauge statistics, including discharge in amp-hours and number of full cycles. More functions are being added via firmware upgrades that users can apply from their smart devices over Bluetooth. MSRP: \$89.99.

Thornwave Labs | 888-399-9283, www.thornwave.com/products-btdcpm





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Todd Mission, Texas

Faire Thee Well!

Magic, merriment and majesty take center stage at this year's Texas Renaissance Festival in Todd Mission, located 50 miles northwest of Houston, Texas. The event runs for nine themed weekends, from September 29 to November 25, and attracts more than half a million visitors to its 55-acre re-creation of a 16th century European village. Enjoy live entertainment, works by master artists and craftspeople, award-winning food and drink, hand-powered rides and games and more than 100 interactive characters. Adult admission starts at \$24.95 per person when purchased online or via phone (\$32 at the gate); senior rates (\$20/per person) are available only at the gate.

The fun of the Texas Renaissance Festival continues all weekend at the Fields of New Market Campground, a natural, 230-acre site with two areas from which to choose: "family" camping for those who prefer a more relaxed setting, and "revels" camping for the more adventurous who like to party into the night. The campground offers potable water and dump stations. Cost is \$25 per vehicle when ordered online (\$30 at the gate).

For more information, call 800-458-3435 or visit www.texrenfest.com.



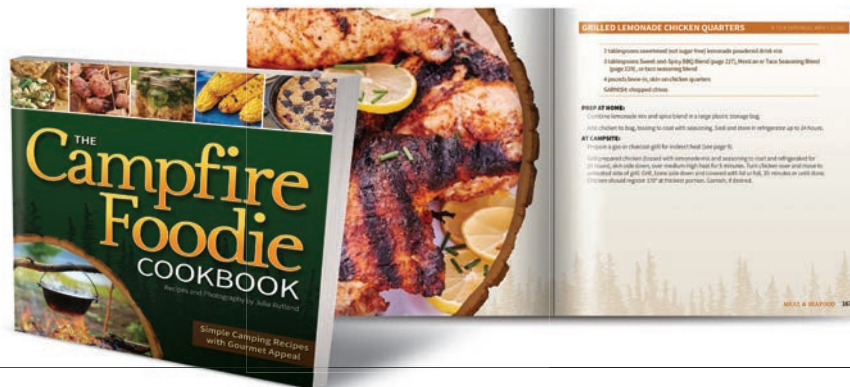
Photo: courtesy Texas Renaissance Festival

Bookmobile

Get Your Grill On

Whether you're a seasoned grill master or aspiring chef, you're sure to find something to whet your appetite in Julia Rutland's "The Campfire Foodie Cookbook: Simple Camping Recipes with Gourmet Appeal." This 256-page paperback features more than 100 tasty and simple recipes with full-color photographs for every delicious dish. Some of Rutland's favorite recipes include English Muffuletta, Vegetarian Campfire Chili, Southwestern Chicken and Lime

Soup, and Mini Grilled Blackberry Cobbler. Each recipe has timesaving prep instructions that can be done at home or in the galley. The book also includes information on different cooking equipment and styles, grill types, tips on charcoal and gas grilling, how to build a proper fire pit, cooking in an RV and how to properly use a Dutch oven. With summer in full swing, it's the perfect time to check out some of these gourmet recipes. The Campfire Foodie Cookbook (MSRP \$14.95) is available through the publisher (www.adventurepublications.net) and at online retailers such as Amazon and Barnes & Noble. — Ashley Venzon **M**



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Pages From the Past

Retracing *MotorHome's* August issues over the years

The emergence of *MotorHome Life* in the summer of 1968 marked the beginning of a new era in recreational vehicles. Though motorized RVs had been popular for years among certain segments, the debut issue acted as a declaration that a new culture had truly arrived. So, it's only fitting that the following year, when *MotorHome Life* would be upgraded to a quarterly publication, a similar breakthrough would occur within society's counterculture movement. In August 1969, more than 300,000 people — many in buses that were a precursor to motorhomes of the future — descended upon Yasgur's field in Bethel, New York, for the music festival known as Woodstock. And, although the three-day event would become a symbol of a much more social-conscious movement on a grander scale than the introduction of our favorite RV magazine, both events would prove that these previously ignored populations could no longer be denied.

With such notoriety comes public notice. As *MotorHome Life* gained traction, it began attracting celebrities to share their stories, including Graham Kerr, TV's famous "Galloping Gourmet," who in the August 1971 issue discussed cooking in a motorhome and offered tips on maximizing the small galley in an RV. More well-known personalities would

follow in subsequent years, from John Wayne to Gale Sayers to Andy Griffith.

But *MotorHome* has always been about much more than celebrity chefs and TV actors subscribing to the lifestyle we so love; the magazine has always prided itself on providing focused content for motorhome enthusiasts.

The August '73 issue shares a list of bad habits to avoid while driving. See

if any of these still apply: overusage of brakes, neglecting proper tire inflation, ignoring electrical problems and issues with campground power supplies. Throw in texting while driving, and that list could just as easily have appeared today.

What could not have appeared today: an "extensive" Buyers Guide of 39 Class A motorhomes as trumpeted on the cover of the 1979 edition. (The *2018 RV Buyers Guide* features almost twice that amount, in addition to nearly 500 additional RVs of all types).

In 1984, rocker Sammy Hagar declared "I Can't Drive 55," a sentiment *MotorHome* agreed with the following year, opening up a discussion on whether the national speed limit of 55 mph should be reconsidered. In '86, a motorhome makeover featuring a Dodge Travco was highlighted; "The Classic Ride" follows the same premise each month.

The 1990s would become the decade of the RV slideout, and the '97 issue included the Jayco Designer 3230S, which was that company's first motorhome so equipped.

The turn of the century continued *MotorHome's* close examinations of fuel costs, with an August 2001 headline screaming "Pump Prices Skyrocket!" The story would compare costs based on prices of \$2, \$2.50 and \$3 per gallon; keep in mind those were considered exorbitant figures at the time.

The 2003 issue would see a test on a Fleetwood Discovery Class A. Turn to page 36 in this issue for a look at the new Discovery. And, with the rig's luxury appointments and room for entertaining guests, we imagine those who attended Woodstock back in '69 would have had an even more memorable experience had they stayed in the Discovery ... provided they remember it at all. **M**



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Redwood Goes Gold

'Wagons Ho!' for Northern California's Redwood National and State Parks, which turns 50 this year

By Rhonda Ostertag

The year 2018 rolls out two solid reasons for visiting Northern California and its Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP): This year marks the 100th anniversary of the citizen/nonprofit Save the Redwoods League and the 50th anniversary for the national park.

The park and the preservation group own a locked story. League purchases saved the old-growth redwood groves that ultimately became Jedediah Smith, Del Norte Coast and Prairie Creek redwoods state parks. Then, in 1968, the national park protected the critical lands encompassing those state parks. Not coincidentally, the birth of the national park was timed with the League's 50th anniversary.

The first push to establish a national redwoods park was put forth in 1919, by none other than Stephen Mather — the first director of the National Park Service, and an early founder and supporter of Save the Redwoods League (fun fact: the NPS logo includes a redwood tree). But the political climate for action didn't fall into place until 1968, when an environmental awakening of sorts swept the nation.

The League

The rapid, wholesale logging of coastal redwoods in the early 1900s prompted a trio of distinguished paleontologists to form Save the Redwoods League in 1918. Their mission was simply that: Save the redwoods, which is a mission that has equal urgency today. Modern threats include not only the cut of the saw, but also government budgets, which steal funds from the oversight and protection of the magnificent trees that have survived millennia. Through donations and matching funds, the League continues its mission, purchasing critical redwood stands. But the League was not the lone, or even the first, crusader. In 1902, the Sempervirens Club (coast redwoods are *sequoia sempervirens*) led a spirited campaign that resulted in the formation of Big Basin Redwoods State Park, California's oldest state park.

Visitors to RNSP and other redwood parks and reserves will witness memorial redwood groves and dedication benches that hint at the League's footprint. The League started its memorial grove program in 1921. The current count sits at more than 1,000 honor groves, dedicated to individuals and organizations like women's and garden clubs. Park interpretive boards acknowledge

the League's role in the creation and growth of parks. Because of the League, this and future generations can wander and wonder among the giants.

The Park

Redwood National Park hit the map in 1968, and first lady Lady Bird Johnson attended its dedication. Because California opted to continue its legacy with the three state parks, RNSP holds a unique management structure of co-operation — and a rather long name.

RNSP is recognized as a UNESCO-World Heritage Site and International Biosphere Reserve. The park protects 45 percent of California's remaining old-growth redwoods; only Oregon, at the northern edge of the tree's growing range, has any other coastal redwoods, and only two small groves at that.

The protective lariat of the federal park also enfolds areas of second-growth redwoods. These areas stand as a buffer between domain lost and the old-growth splendor. Because of its reach, RNSP serves as a living laboratory for studying and perfecting practices of restoration and for monitoring forest health. While second growth helps preserve the health and longevity of the old-growth trees, it also banks on the future.

Coastal sections complete the park's mosaic. What would a redwood forest be without its coastal influence of clouds, fog and mist? Besides the nurturing those conditions bring, they lend to a mystical aura to the church of the big trees. No matter if it's the first visit or the 100th, each audience holds the freshness and magic of first sight.

When Visiting

California's Redwood Highway, U.S. Highway 101, stitches together the far-flung units of this national park, stretched from Crescent City to Orick (a distance of 42 miles), and covering 132,000 acres (federal and state).

Five visitor centers serve the park: Crescent City at the northern gateway, Hiouchi on U.S. Highway 199 and Kuchel (at Orick) is the southern gateway. The two others sit within

The elevation of Lady Bird Johnson Grove allows for more sunlight to shine on the trees.



Coast Redwoods Facts

(courtesy of Save the Redwoods League)

Oldest tree	2,200 years old
Tallest tree in RNSP	380 feet
Widest tree in RNSP	29.2 feet
Amount of old-growth remaining	5 percent

REDWOOD NATIONAL AND STATE PARKS





Jedediah Smith Redwoods and Prairie Creek Redwoods. Be sure to pick up brochures for trails and drives, and to ask about current closures and seasonal footbridges. Park brochures indicate roads considered unsuitable for motorhomes.

Four developed campgrounds within the state parks serve visitors. Jedediah Smith has sites suitable for 36-foot motorhomes, Mill Creek (open seasonally) 31-footers, Elk Prairie 27-footers and Gold Bluffs Beach can

accommodate RVs up to 24 feet. None of the campgrounds have hookups, and reservations are recommended (800-444-7275, www.reservecalifornia.com).

At the park's northern extreme, Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park serves up wondrous dark, magical redwood groves along the Smith River.

Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park offers fantastic flora and fauna sightings. Above: A heavy mist shrouds these coast redwoods along Ossagon Trail. Left: A majestic Roosevelt elk hams it up for a photo op.



The Smith is the longest major free-flowing river left in California, and an attraction unto itself.

Accessed by rutted road or by foot trail when summer hiker bridges are in place, magnificent Stout Memorial Grove laid the cornerstone to this park. Whatever challenges stand between you and Stout Grove are worth overcoming. This hall of giants stands supreme. Heads tilt, fingers point and words of awe fall short.

Other named groves sit just off U.S. 199 and offer short hikes in grand company. Giant trees and snags and logs, burls and rootballs, eruptions of fern, carpets of tiny redwood sorrel and the enveloping shadow and rich earthy smell contribute to the overall spell. Banana slugs and true salamanders may slip among the fallen

Western trillium can be spotted along Lady Bird Johnson Grove Trail in Redwood National Park. Banana slugs, like this one resting on a sword fern along Prairie Creek Trail, secrete a mucus coating capable of numbing the tongues of potential predators.



redwood needles, decaying wood and moss. And, shafts of sunlight add to the reverence.

South on U.S. 101, Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park straddles the highway. Visitors to this park find much of it cloaked in pleasant, decades-untouched second-growth redwood forest and punctuated by big-tree memorial stands.

These younger redwood forests have their own feel and discovery. While they lack the deep darkness and imposing command of the old-growth forests, they still present remarkable towering trees, rich red trunks, reproduction tree rings (sometimes dubbed “fairy rings”) and more sunbeams for more rhododendron. Plus, they offer soft footfalls, dripping canopies and invitations to stand silent for a moment.

A shining star in the alignment, Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park — threaded by Newton B. Drury Scenic Parkway and skirted by U.S. 101 — offers a host of trails, elk viewing meadows, coastal access and big trees.

By this point, park visitors may have noticed a lack of named trees. In redwood management, there’s a movement away from naming and pointing out record-size trees because each redwood has merit, and bringing attention can also bring threat to the trees. Although record-setters are still noted, precise locations are no longer

broadcast.

Prairie Creek Redwoods offers up two established exceptions, Big Tree and Corkscrew Tree. At an esteemed age of 1,500 years old, Big Tree measures 304 feet tall, 21.6 feet in diameter and 68 feet in circumference. Corkscrew Tree owns its name. Propagated from the burl root, the tree’s ring of like-size, new-growth trees grew and matured, wrapping in a loose braid that twisted skyward.

For exploring, any of the named trails off Newton B. Drury Scenic Parkway will satisfy with glorious big trees. Simply pick a trail, as each holds a mini wonderland. Some follow streams, others lead to fern canyons. One need not walk far, and many big trees face off right along the Parkway. For safety, use turnouts when ogling.

Deer and elk frequent the open meadow that lent its name to Elk Prairie Campground (no hookups or dump station). Motorhome parking for elk viewing is roadside along the Parkway, adjacent the meadow.

Despite the peaceful demeanor of the elk as they feed, the animals are wild. A few have charged guests and rangers, so keep behind fences.

In the southern extent of RNSP, Lady Bird Johnson Grove — the dedication site for the national park — proves a popular draw. Paved Bald Hill Road accesses the grove’s trailhead. Because this road leads to working forest beyond the park and logging trucks are common, travel no farther than the trailhead in a motorhome.

The elevation of Lady Bird Johnson Grove and its proximity to second-growth redwood forest introduce more sunlight to the grove, creating a different emotional feel here from elsewhere in the park. Grand trees inspire, as do the seasonal rhododendron blooms and the tiny blooms of redwood sorrel, redwood violet and trillium. Eyes dance from floor to sky.

All redwood forests serve up wonders of scale, wonders of wonder — a recipe for unhurried viewing. Hats off, Redwood National and State Parks. Happy 50th! **M**

James Irvine Trail offers a scenic 4.5-mile (one-way) hike through Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park to the beach at Fern Canyon. Campgrounds in Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park are surrounded by tranquil, natural beauty; motorhomes are restricted to 27 feet or less in length.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

California Redwoods State Parks

(Jedediah Smith and Del Norte Coast: 707-465-7335, Prairie Creek: 707-488-2039), www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=24723

California Tourism

877-225-4367, www.visitcalifornia.com

Redwood National and State Parks

707-465-7335, www.nps.gov/redw

Save the Redwoods League

888-836-0005, www.savetheredwoods.org

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ARIZONA'S WILD SIDE

Go on safari in the Grand Canyon State with a trip to these four wildlife parks in the Sedona area



Getting There

Sedona, Arizona, is located about 115 miles north of Phoenix. From the capital city, take Interstate 17 North 98.4 miles toward Flagstaff, then take Exit 298 and turn left onto State Route 179. Continue 14.2 miles on SR 179 to State Route 89A. This intersection is known as the "Y."

Several years ago, my husband, Jim, and I saw a billboard for Bearizona, a "drive-thru wildlife adventure" in Williams, Arizona, 25 miles west of Flagstaff. I loved the idea; it reminded me of an African safari, which we've never done, or a drive through Yellowstone National Park, which we've done numerous times. Once I picked up a brochure for Out of Africa, a wildlife park near Sedona, we decided it was time to check out a few of Arizona's wildlife parks on our next visit to the Grand Canyon State.

Since all four of the wildlife parks we planned to visit were within a two-hour drive from Sedona, we decided to stay there for a week. Sedona is one of the prettiest cities I've ever visited. As luck would have it, the Sedona Film Festival (February through March) coincided with our visit. When we weren't wandering through wildlife parks, we were hiking or seeing films.

Safari Rules

Out of Africa in Camp Verde, 30 miles south of Sedona, was the first stop on our itinerary. While many of the mammals, birds and reptiles are natives of Africa, the 104-acre wildlife sanctuary is also home to animals from Asia, and North and South America. On the African Bush Safari Tour, we encountered free-roaming giraffes, zebras and

antelope. Everyone on the tour was given a treat to feed the giraffes. We could either offer this food in our outstretched hands or held in our teeth. Those of us who were willing to get up close and personal with the giraffe's 15- to 18-inch prehensile tongue were rewarded with a kiss.

That afternoon, a large crowd gathered at Tiger Splash Arena to see Bengal and Siberian tigers and their caretakers romping and diving in a large pool. The animals are not trained or coerced to perform. "We don't train them. They train us," the emcee said. A caretaker ran around the pool holding a pole with an inflatable pool toy at the end. A tiger was in hot pursuit, eager to get his claws into the toy. Often one of the human handlers would jump

Chalet, a white Bengal tiger, relaxes in the sun at Out of Africa in Camp Verde, south of Sedona.





in the pool, followed by a predator, making an even bigger splash. I'm not sure who had more fun: the two predators, the four caretakers or the numerous spectators. When the show ended, a line formed of people who wanted to feed the tigers. Each person got two bite-sized pieces of meat to feed the animals through a protective fence using tongs.

At the Predator Feed, we saw animals eating with natural gusto. Three days a week, members of the feeding crew toss large hunks of raw meat over a high chain-link fence to the hungry lions and tigers. Their diet includes beef, chicken, salmon and turkey. As we followed along on this walking tour, we saw the predators devour 18- to 22-pound turkeys and heard the crunch of turkey bones. The caretakers fed the hyenas through the fence. The crowd seemed to be especially entertained by hearing the hyenas "laugh" in eager anticipation of each bite. At the

Above, from left: On the Skyride at Wildlife World Zoo, Aquarium and Safari Park, the chairlift took us by giraffe, Arabian oryx, kangaroo and other animals on a leisurely 15-minute round trip. The hyenas laugh in eager anticipation of each bite during the Predator Feed at Out of Africa.

grizzly bear enclosure, the bear named Cypress waited at the fence, displaying her powerful paws with long, curved claws.

Caretakers in the Giant Snake Show revealed the gentler side of these often-feared reptiles. The park's anacondas, pythons and boas are accustomed to being handled by people. Brave members in the audience volunteered to participate in the show. They were invited into the enclosure. It took five adults and one child to hold the 3-year-old yellow reticulated python.

Zoo from Above

Located in Litchfield Park east of Phoenix, Wildlife World Zoo, Aquarium and Safari Park is a two-hour drive

from Sedona. It was well worth the drive since it has Arizona's largest collection of exotic and endangered animals. More than 600 separate species, and between 5,000 and 6,000 individual animals — it's challenging to count all those little fish — reside here. Started in 1975 as a breeding center for rare wildlife, it opened to the public in 1984. The park covers 215 acres.

With so much variety, we took advantage of some of the zoo's rides to see things from a different perspective. On the Skyride, a chairlift took us by giraffe, Arabian oryx, kangaroo and other animals on our leisurely 15-minute round trip. The 650-foot-long Soaring Eagle Zip Line was over in a flash, but we got a bird's-eye view of

Left: Free-roaming zebra, giraffe and antelope are the highlights of the African Bush Safari Tour. Below: A tiger gets his claws into an inflatable pool toy at Tiger Splash Arena.



the park and the deer below us. In the 15-acre Safari Park, we traveled through animal exhibits by tram to see ostriches standing guard over recently laid eggs, and wildebeests and springbok antelope relaxing in the shade. We caught the African Train for a 5/8-mile-long ride past gazelles, crowned cranes and the Kids' Petting Zoo.

Throughout the zoo, we noticed the wide variety of birds. We admired the Vulturine guinea, lory parrots, crowned cranes, flamingos and Mandarin ducks, to name a few. It's not surprising that the facility would have an impressive collection since Mickey Ollson, the owner, initially used the property as a breeding farm for exotic birds in the mid 1960s.

Since the aquarium stays open three hours after the zoo closes, we saved that for last. The aquarium consists of four buildings housing hundreds of fish, amphibians, invertebrates and reptiles. We made our way to The Wild and the Wonderful building in time for the Sea Lion Show at Shipwreck Cove. The stars of the show were the California sea lions. These highly intelligent marine mammals were playful and hungry. On land they awkwardly waddled around on their flippers, but in open water those flippers on their torpedo-shaped bodies help them swim in a burst of speed up to 20 mph and dive to depths of up to 900 feet.

At the Stingray Touch Tank in the Predators building, we were able to feel those slimy, gentle creatures. There's

no need to worry about getting stung since aquariums remove the barbed tips, called spines, before the rays are placed in the touch tank. I liked touching the rays, but enjoyed watching the wide-eyed reactions of the children doing the same thing even more.

Rescue Me

Heritage Park Zoological Sanctuary is in Prescott, about 70 miles south of Sedona. The 10-acre facility was the smallest of the four we visited, but it has a powerful mission. Animal residents have been rescued from

other locations. Signs on enclosures introduce the animals by name, range, habitat, diet, general information and the circumstances that brought them to the sanctuary. Shash, an American black bear, was abandoned when his mother was killed by a hunter. The collection of four ring-tailed lemurs, an endangered species native to Madagascar, began when another zoo no longer had room to keep them. Fabio and Maverick, a pair of pronghorns, were rescued from the wild after one was injured and the other was orphaned.

Clockwise, below from left: Five adults and one child hold the 3-year-old yellow reticulated python during Out of Africa's Giant Snake Show. From the African Train, visitors see ostriches stand guard over recently laid eggs. Bearizona's bighorn sheep have space to roam in the park's drive-through area. Parrots and flamingos mingle in the bird exhibit at Wildlife World.



They care for animals that have been injured or neglected, ensure the survival of species with breeding programs and instill a respect for animals.

A spider monkey crosses the rope strung between trees on an island in Wildlife World.



The Tarantula Grotto is home to one of the largest collections of tarantulas in the Southwest, plus some scorpions and roaches. Tarantulas may look scary, but most of the 900 species are harmless to humans. The same claims can be made about scorpions — scary yet harmless — but stings can be quite painful. Even so, scorpion stings rarely require medical attention.

Heritage Park offers several opportunities for children and adults to interact directly with friendly animals. In a central area, we saw a group of volunteers and visitors admiring a miniature horse. The goats in the Kiwanis Korner Animal Encounter seemed to enjoy having their coats gently brushed by curious children.

Mexican gray wolves were hunted to the brink of extinction in the late 1800s through the mid 1900s. They were declared endangered in 1976. Heritage Park participates in the Association of Zoos & Aquariums Association's Species Survival Plan. According to www.heritageparkzoo.org, "After a 20-year absence in the wild, this animal is being reintroduced to its former range following a successful captive breeding program. The sanctuary is a housing facility for wolves not yet ready for release."



Bearizona's black bears have plenty of space to roam in the drive-through area of the park. Wearing a blindfold and Mickey Mouse ears, Jim Zalmanek tried to hear the Eurasian eagle owl in flight, to no avail.



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Bears, Raptors and one Wild Ride

We ended the week at Bearizona. This 160-acre park featuring North American wildlife opened in May 2010. More than half of the animals in the park are rescued or rehabilitated. We began our tour in Fort Bearizona, a 20-acre walk-through area that houses smaller and baby animals on exhibit. We arrived just in time for the river otter feeding. These playful creatures delighted the kids in the audience. Dave O'Connell, one of the animal keepers, convinced a few spectators to toss fish to the eager otters, Louie and Isaac, which further excited the kids.

At the High Country Raptor show, we learned interesting facts about hawks, owls and falcons. When the animal handler asked for a volunteer, Jim raised his hand (with a little encouragement from me). To demonstrate the silent flight of the owl, the handler placed a blindfold and Mickey Mouse ears on Jim. She told him to raise his hand when he heard Malaki,

the Eurasian eagle owl, fly overhead. He never heard the owl in flight, only when he landed on the perch directly above his head.

After exploring the walk-through area, we headed to the Wild Ride Bus, a 50-passenger bus without glass in the windows. On the 3-mile drive through the ponderosa forest, a Bearizona staff member entertained us with stories about Bearizona's history and some fun facts about the animals and the habitats in which they live. For example, the horns on a bighorn sheep weigh more than all their other bones combined, and a bear cub is the size of a stick of butter when it is born.

Visitors can drive their own cars or motorhomes through the animal habitats. For people who arrive by bicycles, motorcycles or convertibles, Bearizona provides courtesy cars, free of charge. After the bus ride, we drove our dinghy vehicle through to get some more photographs. In addition to 38

black bears, we saw bighorn sheep, bison, wolves and mountain goats.

When we ended our zoo-hopping adventure, I had a deeper respect for these facilities. They care for animals that have been injured or neglected, ensure the survival of species with breeding programs and instill a respect for animals in future generations. Not only that, it's a wonderful way for people of all ages to experience Arizona's wild side. **M**

For More Information

Bearizona

928-635-2289, <http://bearizona.com>

Heritage Park Zoological Sanctuary

928-778-4242, www.heritageparkzoo.org

Out of Africa Wildlife Park

928-567-2840, <http://outofafricapark.com>

Rancho Sedona RV Park

888-641-4261, <http://ranchosedona.com>

Wildlife World Zoo, Aquarium and Safari Park

623-935-9453, www.wildlifeworld.com

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WATT DO YOU NEED?

How to take advantage of solar power to be free from constantly being tethered to generators and power grids

Harnessing solar power has been around since 1839, when French scientist Alexandre Edmond Becquerel discovered one could turn the sun's energy into electricity if he/she used the right materials. In the race for space during the 1950s, Bell Laboratories helped the quest for solar energy take another giant leap when it invented the first solar panels.

Today, 179 years after the rays of the sun first helped generate an electrical current, solar power is used to provide electricity for everything from cellphones to the space station — and everything in between,

including RVs. You just need the right components.

A lot of people mistakenly see RVers who use solar power as environmental activists making a political statement. While “being green” is a

nice benefit of utilizing solar power, reducing one's existing dependency on shorepower and generators means having the ability to dry camp for extended periods of time without spending money on fuel to run a generator.

“Employing solar power in an RV is freedom. Freedom to camp wherever you want, regardless if there're hookups or not,” says Garret Towne, president of AM Solar in Springfield, Oregon, one of the leading RV-oriented solar companies in the U.S. AM Solar installs complete solar-power systems on everything from small Class B motorhomes to multimillion-dollar Class A coaches. “Investing in a solar system really comes down to just having all the electrical comforts of home in your RV using the most efficient, economical and silent way to power them,” says Towne, who is also an electrical engineer.



A good choice in solar panels for RV use are the monocrystalline type show here. The standard mono panels have all the wire traces showing. Back-contact mono panels (on far left) have clean black squares. Back-contact mono panels are slightly more efficient; thus, they have a smaller footprint for the equivalent output.

Watts Up

Getting to the point of having freedom from the need to be connected to shorepower, or from cranking up a generator for hours at a time when boondocking, requires taking a close look at one's energy needs. The first step toward installing solar power is doing a power-consumption survey of your motorhome; figuring out the cumulative amp-hours (Ah) or watts

[1] Monitoring/calculating the daily total wattage is critical in setting up a solar-charging system. Monitors come in a variety of sizes and prices, from ones that plug directly into an appliance to ones that are permanently mounted in the RV. [2] Solar panels can be mounted to the roof by either drilling into the roof, or by using industrial-strength adhesive tapes (on flat, smooth surfaces). Most solar panels for RV use come with mounting hardware and cabling to the combiner box. [3] Selecting the proper batteries for the battery bank is the key to the entire solar charging system. Either AGM or Lithium batteries can be used, with the latter the most efficient. Here AM Solar installed two Lifeline 6-volt 300Ah AGM batteries in series to store the power from three 100-watt solar panels. [4] Charge controllers, such as this Samlex SCC-30AB, are one of the essentials of an RV solar-charging system. They take the 21-plus volts DC produced by the panels and regulate it down to the 10.5-14.6 volts DC, depending on the needs of the battery bank.



being used during a typical outing, or over an extended period of time. The most accurate and easiest method to measure daily power consumption is employing a built-in kilowatt meter such as the Victron BMV-712 (Amazon ASIN BAM030712000, \$218.99), which connects to your smartphone via Bluetooth and lets you monitor the complete battery system. Less expensive meters, such as the Lanmu Power Meter (Amazon ASIN B0789B1QQC; \$18.99) can monitor the kilowatt hours (kWh) of whatever appliance is plugged into them.

If a meter isn't available, there's always the old-fashioned route: figure it out yourself. Take the watts rating listed on each appliance/accessory you use and multiply that number by how many hours it's used per day to get the daily watt hours. Then, divide this by 12 (volts DC) to get your daily Ah consumption. For residential refrigerators with compressors that aren't on all day, you can refer to the FTC EnergyGuide label, which provides the annual power consumption in kWh. Take that number, multiply it by 1,000 to convert it to watts, divide it by 365 (number of days) to get a daily consumption and then divide that by 12 (volts DC) to get a daily Ah consumption. For instance,

a typical residential-size refrigerator uses about 90 Ah per day, while a 40-inch LED TV could consume 150 watts. Watch TV four hours a day, that's 50 Ah a day ($4 \times 150 / 12 = 50$), according to Towne.

Be sure to include items such as the water pump, stereo, lights, fans, inverters and even chargers for phones, tablets and laptops. Anything that consumes electricity needs to be in the tally.

For example, a single-cup coffee-maker might be rated at 1,420 watts, so dividing by 12 (volts DC) equals about 118 amps. If the coffeemaker is only used 20 minutes a day, that equates to about 40 Ah per day.

Money in the Bank

Once daily power consumption is determined, the next step — which is the most critical of a solar system's performance — is deciding how many batteries are needed to provide an adequate bank of power, and the number of solar panels needed to recharge the batteries.

There are two types of batteries used in RV solar systems: lead-acid and Lithium-Iron Phosphate, or LiFePO₄ (Lithium). Lead-acid come in either wet-cell (flooded), gel or absorbed glass mat (AGM.) Flooded

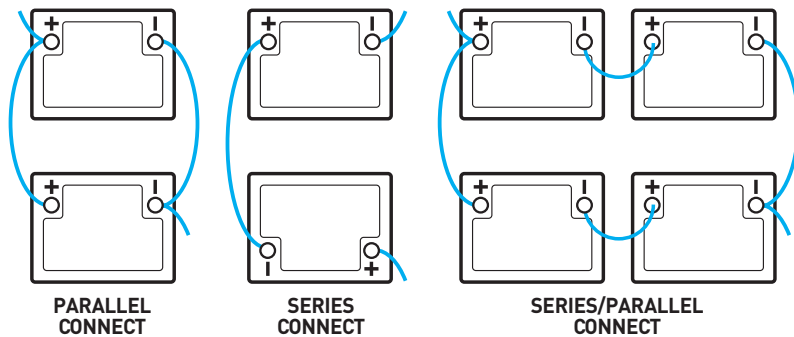
batteries are maintained by adding distilled water, while the latter two are sealed, requiring no maintenance. AGMs are the best of the three lead-acid types because they withstand deep-cycling better than wet-cells or gel batteries, and AGMs endure more recharge cycles, so they typically have twice the lifespan of the other two.

Lithium batteries are by far the best, although the batteries and their charging and regulation systems are very expensive. Even though they cost several times more than the best AGMs, Lithium batteries typically last seven to 10 years and, unlike flooded batteries, their output level remains constant right up to total discharge. When charge cycle lifespan is taken into consideration, Lithium batteries become the most economical.

Regardless of the battery type, the most important consideration when choosing batteries is what combination of batteries will serve your power requirements. The higher the Ah capacity, the longer the battery or bank can supply the motorhome's electrical needs before it requires a recharge from the solar panels, generator, the motorhome's alternator or from plugging into shorepower.

MAXIMIZING RESERVE CAPACITY

Two 12-volt batteries can be connected in parallel (positive to positive, negative to negative) so the output voltage remains the same, but the Ah capacity doubles. Using high-amp-hour 12-volt batteries in parallel is often the most cost-effective per Ah. Another common combination is connecting four six-volt batteries in series/parallel. To do so, connect each pair in series (negative of one battery to the positive of the other) to make a single “12-volt” battery. Then connect the outgoing positive cable of each pair together, and the outgoing negative cable of each pair together (parallel). For example, four 6-volt 120 Ah batteries connected in series/parallel would produce 12 volts at 240 Ah. Note: Keep connecting cables between the batteries the same size and length to achieve the proper voltage and amperage capacity.



Poly or Mono?

Solar snobs and high-pressure solar sales folks put a lot of emphasis on how solar panels are built and which types are the best. Truth is, there's not much difference in solar-panel efficiency as far as the motorhome owner is concerned. Polycrystalline solar panels are not quite as efficient as monocrystalline solar panels because they use a less-pure silicon in the manufacturing process. But experts at companies that specialize in both the manufacturing and installation of solar components for motorhomes claim that variances in weather far outweigh the 5 percent difference in the per-square-foot of energy production.

That said, if you are going to invest in a solar installation, monocrystalline panels are the way to go because they maximize the energy production for the limited roof space that's available. There are two types of monocrystalline panels: conventional and back-contact. Conventional monocrystalline panels

have all the little wires showing on the front, while the front of back-contact monocrystalline panels look like clean, black squares.

Back-contact monocrystalline solar panels are slightly more efficient, slightly more expensive and have a slightly smaller footprint for the same output as their conventional counterpart. For example, a 100-watt back-contact monocrystalline panel measures about 20 by 40 inches, whereas a conventional version of the same rating measures about 22 by 48 inches — and costs about \$100 less. Let the electrical demand and the roof space dictate which panels are best for your particular installation.

Taking Charge

Once the power needs and storage issues have been figured out, it's time to get the current they produce regulated before it gets to the batteries for charging. The charge controller regulates the voltage and current to the batteries.

Solar charge controllers come in two varieties: pulse width modulation (PWM) and maximum power point tracking (MPPT). A PWM controller checks the battery charge status, and then sends a series of pulses modulated in power and duration depending on the battery charge. PWM is a post-direct connection from the panels to the battery. MPPT, using high-end state-of-the-art technology, has a transformer that allows the panels to operate at the most efficient voltage and temperature, and then it steps that voltage down and boosts the current to safely feed the battery bank. The downside: while MPPT controllers are about 20 percent more efficient at power conversion, they can cost twice as much as a PWM controller of the same rating.

According to Towne, AM Solar recommends customers on a tighter budget go with PWM controllers if the solar panel output is 200 watts or less. Outputs greater than 400 watts



THE ROOF PUZZLE

When deciding on how much the solar panels are going to cost for your solar system, get up on the roof. Scope out the layout, and then make cardboard cutouts the same size/shape as the solar panels you are contemplating using. Expert installers suggest leaving at least 2 inches between the panel edges and any vents, A/C units, roof edge or other obstructions. This gives space to run connecting cables and install the panel's mounting hardware. It's also important to leave room to walk around once the panels are in position. Once templates are set, record the number and size of cutouts to make it easy when price shopping.



BATTERY HEALTH

Lead-acid batteries need to be regularly brought up to a full charge to maximize longevity. To do that, RV solar experts recommend the solar-panel output to battery Ah ratio stay between .5:1 to 2:1. That's the equivalent of a 100-watt to 400-watt solar charging array feeding into a 240 Ah battery bank, for example. Charging efficiency increases with the bigger solar array.

Maximizing roof space results in meeting the electrical demands required when boondocking. Having such a system professionally designed and installed also maximizes the highest return on the investment, which can be sizable.



should always use MPPT technology. “MPPT charge controllers are going to last a lot longer and provide precision programming to match the charging profiles of the batteries.”

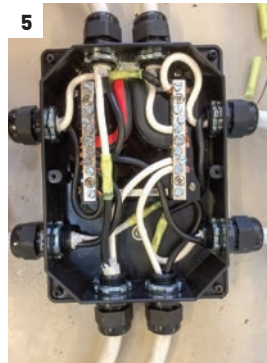
Making the Connections

The last element of a solar-charging system on a motorhome is wiring. It’s a critical element, and the one area where hands-on DIY installers may mess up the most. If you are contemplating installing a solar system yourself, be aware that routing the cabling from the combiner box on the roof to the battery bay can be super complicated unless there’s already a conduit to use for such purposes. Holes need to be bored through the roof and through cabinetry, and wiring must be routed through weird angles. Expert installers have seen it all and know all the tricks and techniques to make a solar installation successful. For best results, consider leaving these tasks to the pros if your budget allows.

The next biggest challenge in a motorhome installation is to minimize the voltage drop between the panels, the charge controller and the batteries. Voltage loss is proportional to the gauge of wire and distance of the run. “Total voltage drop should be limited to a maximum of 5 percent (calculated from panels to battery),” says Steve Bouton, technical manager of Grape Solar Inc. “This is especially important to consider when using multiple panels in parallel, as is typical for RV systems.”

Ideally, installers try to keep the reading around 2 percent. If there’s

[5] A combiner box is required to route the cables from the rooftop panel array into a single cable running down into the charge controller that’s usually mounted inside the battery bay. [6] The charge controller is critical for optimum performance of any solar system. The type and size of the charge controller should be chosen to accommodate future expansion. Here is a dual 30/40-amp Blue Sky MPPT charge controller just for that purpose.

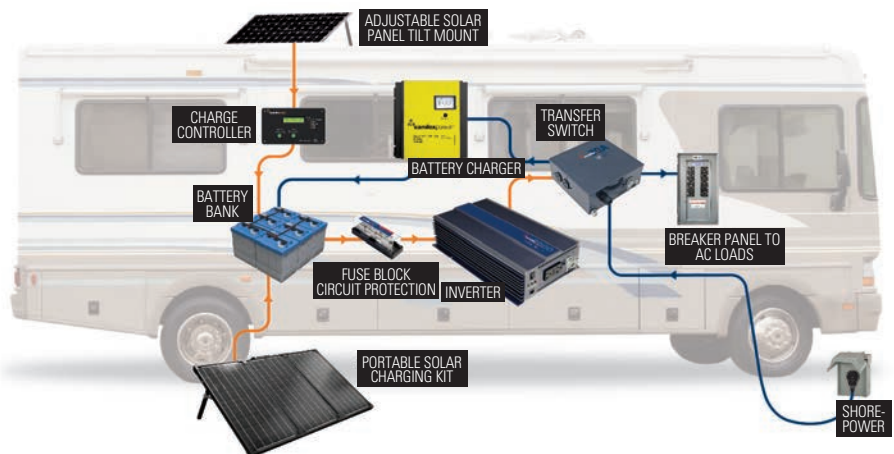


more than a 5 percent voltage drop, then there won’t be enough voltage differential between the charge-controller input from the solar array and the output to the battery bank to push current properly from the panels to the batteries.

That’s why solar installers recommend using at least 10-gauge wire to connect the solar panels to the combiner box, and heavier (6-

4- or even 2-gauge) for the run down to the charge controller and on to the batteries. “There’s nothing wrong going too big on cabling, it’s just more expensive and a little bit more difficult to work with,” says Bouton.

Many RV owners ask if having an RV pre-wired for solar from the factory helps cut down installation costs. Surprisingly, no, according to solar installers. The typical factory



The basic solar-charging system consists of roof-mounted solar panels running through a combiner box, then dropping down to the charge controller and on to the batteries. Solar is typically a supplement that works seamlessly with shorepower or generator (if so equipped).

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WHAT DO YOU NEED?



CHOOSING AN INVERTER

If you are going to be using any AC-powered appliances, electronics or power tools, an inverter will be necessary to convert 12-volt DC from the battery bank to 120-volt AC. The size of inverter is dependent on how many watts are consumed by the item(s) you need to power. Total up those numbers, add 15 percent for a little safety margin and choose the inverter that has that rating — or a little larger.

Power inverters come in two basic types: modified sine wave and pure sine wave. Without getting into the details, modified-sine-wave inverters are less expensive, but pure-sine-wave inverters, such as Xantrex's Freedom X Series, are the ones to buy if you're going to be powering laptops/computers, TVs, appliances and/or any digital devices. Compare inverter power consumption for the most efficiency, and pay attention to "peak" capacity, which is needed for operating items such as microwaves, refrigerators and power tools. Other must-have features for an RV-solar application include automatic overload and shut-off, thermal protection, multiple AC outlets, short-circuit and low-voltage protection, and built-in AC-to-DC battery charging (including Lithium, which cannot be connected to a charger designed for typical lead-acid batteries).

pre-wiring uses 8-gauge or smaller wiring, which is too small for use with multiple panel installations. If anything, having an empty conduit installed to run cabling from the roof to the battery bay would be a far better factory alternative.

Cost of Watts

RV solar-charging systems run the gamut in pricing. It all depends on need, the quality of the components used, and whether or not the install is professionally done. A basic DIY 150-watt, 10-amp system with a 200Ah AGM battery for a small Class B or Class C motorhome could be done for less than \$600. Stepping up to a multi-panel 200-watt, 30-amp kit could easily double the price. To

get a 200-400-watt system professionally installed, plan on spending \$3,000-\$5,000, while a 600-watt or bigger solar system typically costs \$7,000-\$15,000. Price depends on the application, components, battery type and labor involved. "On the high end of the solar spectrum, a top-tier professional installation on a big quad-slide coach could top \$50,000 with a roof full of solar panels, bay full of Lithium batteries, the best cabling, multiple charge controllers and inverters in a system capable of powering everything in the coach along with a couple nearby houses," Towne says.

Big system or little, taking advantage of the sun's free energy makes a lot of sense. Solar power isn't for everyone, but if you spend more time in your RV than your house, or enjoy weekends and extended camping off the grid, it makes sense. Solar-power systems are nearly maintenance-free, they run silent and they reduce operating expenses because there's little need to use fuel or pay electrical hook-up fees if the system is installed and sized correctly. **M**

Sources

AM Solar

541-726-1091, www.amsolar.com

EEZ RV Products

928-317-8899, www.eezrvproducts.com

Go Power!

866-247-6527, www.gpelectric.com/applications/rv-marine-power

Grape Solar Inc.

877-264-1014, www.grapesolar.com

Lifeline Batteries

909-599-7816, www.lifelinebatteries.com

Nature Power

800-588-0590, www.naturepowerproducts.com

Renogy

800-330-8678, www.renogy.com

Samlex Solar

800-561-5885, www.samlexsolar.com

Solarland USA

800-605-9718, www.solarlandusa.com

Sunforce Products

888-478-6435, www.sunforceproducts.com

Wholesale Solar

800-472-1142, www.wholesalesolar.com

Xantrex

800-670-0707, www.xantrex.com

Zamp Solar

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Road to Discovery

Fleetwood's top line LXE 44H diesel pusher features residential-style living with luxury amenities and lots of space to move about **By Donya Carlson**

Like many RVers, I suspect, I am “solar-powered” and seek out sunshine whenever I can get away for a spell. Even though I live where there already is lots of sunshine, when Fleetwood offered us the Discovery LXE 44H for testing this past spring, off we went to Palm Springs, California, which boasts “360 days of sun-kissed weather,” according to one website. For this trip we luxuriated in the LXE 44H, Fleetwood’s top-of-the-line Class A diesel pusher, built on a Freightliner XCM Series Power Bridge chassis and powered by a 450-hp Cummins ISL9 diesel engine.

There’s little doubt that the quad-slide LXE 44H, pictured in Champagne with deluxe exterior graphics, is set up for the good life with an abundance of luxury features that include remote keyless entry, four-point automatic leveling system, four TVs (including a 48-inch Sony in the exterior entertainment center), frameless dual-pane windows and an

Aqua-Hot hydronic heating system. A lateral-arm 20-foot Girard power awning with LED lights and wind sensor is integrated into the exterior’s sleek design.

Outside storage is plentiful — and with more than 7,000 pounds of realistic occupant and cargo carrying capacity (ROCCC), the three pass-through storage compartments can

be packed with virtual abandon. Two of the pass-throughs incorporate MORryde sliding trays, each with an 800-pound capacity. All exterior compartments have large side-opening baggage doors with gas struts, though with the slides extended, you’ll have to crouch (the slideout undersides are about 41 inches up from the ground) to access much of the storage.

On the driver’s side, access to the 50-amp power cord reel is under a slide, but water and waste hookups are conveniently located between the two driver’s-side room extensions. A power hose reel, KING Jack OTA antenna, Winegard satellite dish and 100-watt solar panel add to the Discovery’s upscale features. And our

ABOVE: Four friends, four slideouts and four TVs — basking in the Palm Springs, California, sunshine with the 44-foot Fleetwood Discovery.

favorites: the blue undercarriage lights that added just enough illumination to guide us when coming back to our site at night, and the entry-door awning that shaded the door from the hot desert sun.

When the vehicle isn't in driving mode, the swiveling captain's chairs with two temperature settings make excellent recliners, though the armrests were set a tad high for our taste. While underway, we appreciated the large 10-inch touch screen display, Magnadyne DVD multimedia internet receiver with built-in navigation and Bluetooth and, of course, the panoramic view you get through the expansive glass windows. An electric solar screen and privacy shade for the windshield are just a button away. There's limited space for the passenger to keep items within reach; a handy cup-holder is set in the narrow shelf, but a cellphone, for instance, could slide off during hard braking. The storage pockets behind the seats work for stowing magazines and larger items.

The spacious living area, with its opposing slides, is warm and inviting. Beautiful polished solid-surface radius-edge countertops blend nicely with the hardwood Nottingham Cherry High Gloss cabinetry. Matching hardwood crown molding is used on the ceiling in the living area and for framing numerous vents. The heavy, ornate wood framing the slideouts, decorative backsplash in brown shades and the tan-colored faux leather seating lead to a relaxed atmosphere.

Lightening up the space is cream-and-tan swirled polished tile flooring throughout. The tile is beautiful and



The efficient kitchen's pullout galley extension makes a handy place to keep snacks when entertaining and subtly divides the kitchen from the living area so guests aren't bumping into the cook.

easy to clean, though it is slick when wet, which we discovered when a friend came in with a dripping bathing suit. If this were our coach, the first investment would be a nonskid rug which, depending on the size, may have to be put away when retracting the slides for travel.

During the days, with temperatures in the mid-90s and up to 102 degrees Fahrenheit, the three air conditioners worked harmoniously, keeping the 44H at a comfy temperature. When it cooled off in the evenings, however, we opened the dual-pane windows that crank outward 3½ to 8½ inches (varies by window) and switched to the three powered Fan-Tastic Vent fans, which did a good job circulating air.

The three air conditioners are programmed via the 44H's Firefly Integrations electronic systems monitoring panel with LCD touch screen, centrally

located in the galley. Tap on what you want (Climate, for instance) to adjust the settings in each zone. The Firefly system also controls the holding-tank levels, battery voltage, interior lighting and the aforementioned Fan-Tastic Vent fans. There's also a Dirt Devil Maximizer Deluxe central vacuum with a 7-foot hose that stretches to 35 feet.

The 75-inch-long-by-22-inch-wide sofa bed (with three belted positions) in the living area is outfitted with an air mattress and provides comfortable seating and sleeping. Across from the sofa, an entertainment center with a 48-inch LED HDTV, Bose sound bar and a 23-inch curved electric fireplace with two heat settings — which was not necessary in Palm Springs — can all be operated via remote control. Completing the system are a Blu-ray DVD player and DVD multimedia



Far left: Freestanding Euro chair, placed here between the galley's entertainment center and electric fireplace and the table-for-two dinette, adds seating versatility. Left: King-size Dream Easy Series mattress is pure relaxation, there is abundant cabinetry for storage, and sliding doors close the bedroom off from the living area and master bathroom.



Spacious master bath carries the open feel with a glass-enclosed shower and excellent lighting. A step up leads to toilet and large closet housing washer and dryer. There's no shortage of space on the Cherry High Gloss vanity's radius-edge counter and shelf incorporated over the backsplash.

internet receiver. The curved countertop below the TV was a good place to keep remotes handy, and to charge cellphones with the nearby 120-volt AC outlet and USB port.

For the ultimate in comfort, the freestanding Euro chair allows you to put your feet up, recline and settle in for a comfortable stay, though it does need to be moved away from the wall when in relaxation mode (which takes some strength), and it occupies quite a bit of floor space. Not that there isn't enough space to scoot around, but the tendency was for someone walking past to either put their hand on the back of the chair, thereby tilting it

back, or wanting to spin it ... just when you're ready to doze off. The second issue with the Euro chair was that there was one of it and two of us.

A cute and useful 14½-by-20-inch pullout desk on glides and set at 24 inches high is next to the two-seat, fixed-table dinette. Sitting at the desk, you're facing the windows for an outside view, and there's a 120-volt AC outlet placed under the cabinet as well as inside where the desk pulls out. Two additional folding chairs, housed in the large closet with the stackable washer and dryer, extend the dinette seating to four people, albeit elbow-to-elbow at the two-person table. There's

WHAT'S HOT 👍

Solid-wood cabinetry throughout, three air conditioners, induction cooktop, electronic systems monitoring panel with LCD touch screen, dreamy king mattress

WHAT'S NOT ☹️

Toilet paper holder left its post during travel, misadjusted living room slideout, need to move the Euro chair

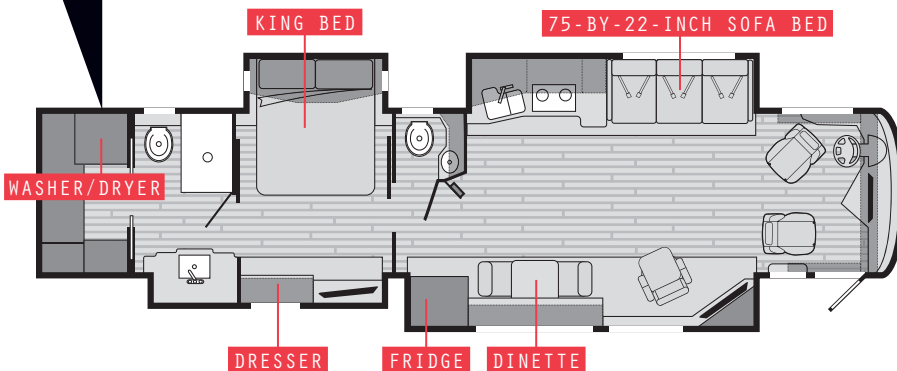


additional counterspace around the dinette as well as adjustable shelves and abundant cabinets, with a few not-so-conveniently located under the table.

A pullout galley extension, which houses three drawers, subtly separates the kitchen from the living area and adds a convenient place to keep drinks and snacks handy, while at the same time giving the cook more elbowroom. The counter cutout around the two-burner induction cooktop adds to the kitchen's classy look, plus it's cleverly engineered to add more walk-by space around the table when the slides are retracted.

While standing at the double-basin solid-surface sink and cooktop, my feet were half-on and half-off the carpet that covers the slideout floor. A throw rug would be good here, if only to keep the carpet from getting soiled from cooking splatters. With the sink covers in place there's plenty of chopping and prep space. The deep countertop provides lots of room behind the range and sink for stowing items you need handy — paper towels, olive oil and a bowl of fruit, in our case. Above the cooktop is a 1.5-cubic-foot stainless High Pointe microwave/convection oven, and a deep cabinet on the left. Below the induction cooktop is a top-loading Fisher & Paykel dishwasher, and the 44H has a whole-house water filtration system.

FLEETWOOD DISCOVERY LXE 44H



A small food pantry lives in the wall space separating the galley from the half-bath and has four spice racks and a couple of 2-foot-long by 4-inch-wide sturdy drawers that pull out on glides. Since the top drawer was set high at just under 6 feet, we stored tall items, like cereal boxes here where we could read the labels; with canned goods, only the top portions were visible so it was a guess as to what was in some of the cans. The 22-cubic-foot residential double-door stainless-steel refrigerator with bottom freezer has simple-to-use travel locks.

A half-bath, fitted with a porcelain macerator toilet, a corner cabinet and sink housed in the solid-surface counter, is handily located in the living area so guests won't need to tromp through the bedroom. Creating more privacy, sliding wood pocket doors section off the bedroom from the galley and the bedroom from the master bathroom.

The master bedroom boasts a 72-by-80-inch king-sized bed with an 11-inch-thick Dream Easy Series mattress, which I was reluctant to give up after the need to return the coach. Framed in Cherry High Gloss wood, the luxurious bed is outfitted with a black-and-gold bedspread and throw pillows, and offers a cozy 9½ inches of walk-around space. There's under-bed storage via gas struts, and small nightstands — perfectly sized to hold a cellphone and a bottle of water — bookend the bed and feature 120-volt AC outlets and USB ports. It was lovely leaning up against the padded headboard before lights out, reading and enjoying a nice cross-breeze that came through the opposing windows situated in the sides of the slideout.

A 43-inch LED HDTV is mounted in the top portion of a large three-drawer dresser with tinted-glass doors concealing shelves. We barely made a dent in all the space available for clothing that includes an additional six-drawer dresser next to the tall one, plus overhead cabinets on each side of the bedroom. The dressers are housed in a slideout with a 2-inch step up where the carpet meets tile, which

took some toe-stubs to get used to when accessing the drawers. Located under the overhead cabinetry above the bed are switches for lighting and the coach's Safe-T-Vision monitoring system. With the Safe-T-Vision, if you hear a noise outside, you can view the goings-on via the 44H's side-mirror cameras and rear-facing camera from the bedroom and living room TVs.

The master bathroom at the rear of the 44H is open and spacious, clearly set up for the RVer who wants a residential-style experience. The glass-enclosed shower, full-length mirror and an additional mirror over the vanity that's framed in cherry wood add to the airy feel; a porcelain macerator toilet is around the corner. The large, ornate vanity is the centerpiece, accented with a radius-edge counter, LED lighting and a wide shelf incorporated over the backsplash that coordinates beautifully with the wood. If that's not enough space to stow things, take a step up to reach the large rear closet, which houses a wardrobe, organizer cubes, a hanging rod and shelving. Also here is a compact Whirlpool stackable washer and dryer, and the closet can be closed off with sliding pocket doors.

The uncluttered feel extends to the 28-by-52-inch Granicoat shower enclosure, framed on two sides with glass, with 6 feet 3 inches of headroom, plus an additional 5 inches at the peak of the sloped skylight. There's a soap dish, but no shelves for shampoo bottles, so we kept those on the floor where there was plenty of room. The showerhead did not have a shut-off valve, which would have been appreciated had we not been connected to city water. The previously mentioned large mirror in the vanity happens to be across from the shower, and the bathroom lighting is fabulous ... so, umm, the naked truth is that, when you're standing in the glass-enclosed shower, there's no avoiding seeing yourself, unless you hang a large towel from the top of the enclosure. A nonskid bath rug would be a wise investment since the floor is slick when it's wet and when stepping out of the shower there's an 11-inch drop.

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While on the road, the slides come together in the living area to allow enough walk space to visit the half-bath and refrigerator without stepping on the carpet, which covers the hardware for the slideouts. Neither the refrigerator nor the bathroom door open fully, but there's room to access both with the bathroom door opening about 16 inches before bumping into the fridge. The bedroom slides close off walk space, but you can crawl over the bed to get to the rear of the coach if needed. Slideout controls are easy to access, but the driver's-side front room needed adjusting to avoid rubbing against the wood ceiling molding and scratching the finish while underway.

During travel, under the category of "How in the world?!" the wall-mounted, brushed-nickel C-shaped toilet paper holder in the master bath somehow left its post, took a left at the shower, traveled through the bathroom, through the bedroom, presumably under the bed, and then wedged itself under the slide below the refrigerator. Thankfully, we noticed this before opening the slide. Crazy, it happened a second time, traveling not quite as far — but after that, the TP and holder were stored in the drawer behind the toilet for travel.

The 44H is luxurious and inviting, and the dark wood décor lends itself to a soothing and calming ambiance, especially when we stepped inside to escape the midday heat. We were impressed with the amount of storage, inside and out, and the comfortable seating and sleeping arrangements. Scoring extra points are the oversized master bathroom — no traffic jams here — and the gorgeous kitchen, which was a joy to cook in with its smart design and appliances intuitively located, efficient induction cooktop and deep countertops.

For long-term stays or full-timing, the Fleetwood Discovery LXE 44H makes for comfortable travel and luxurious accommodations. **M**

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Specifications

Chassis

Model	Freightliner XCM Series Power Bridge
Engine	Cummins ISL9
SAE Hp	450 @ 2,100 rpm
Torque	1,250 lb-ft @ 1,400 rpm
Transmission	Allison 3000MH 6-speed
Axle Ratio	4.78:1
Front Tires	275/70R 22.5
Rear Tires	275/70R 22.5
Wheelbase	309"
Brakes Front/Rear/Tag	17-inch air disc/ Air S-cam drum/Air S-cam drum
Suspension Front/Rear/Tag	ZF independent front air/V-Ride/Neway air
Fuel Capacity	100 gal
Fuel Economy	8.48 mpg
Warranty	Chassis: 3 years or 50,000 miles from original date of purchase/Engine: 5 years

Coach

Exterior Length	44'
Exterior Width	8' 6"
Exterior Height with A/C	12' 10"
Interior Width	8'
Interior Height	7'
Construction	Five-layer Vacu-Bond walls; welded-aluminum side-wall frame; bead-foam panel insulation; fiberglass siding; aluminum frame walls, floor and ceiling
Freshwater Capacity	100 gal
Black-water Capacity	50 gal
Gray-water Capacity	75 gal
Water-heater Capacity	Aqua-Hot instantaneous
LP-gas Capacity	N/A
Air Conditioner (3)	13,000 Btu
Furnace	65,600 Btu
Refrigerator	22-cubic-foot residential
Inverter/Charger	2,800-watt pure sine wave/100 amp
Batteries	(2) 12-volt chassis, (6) 6-volt deep-cycle house
AC Generator	8 kW
MSRP	\$388,244
MSRP as Tested	\$399,860
Warranty	Included RV Ownercare Warranty with limited 1-year/15,000-mile coach and 3-year/45,000-mile structural, whichever occurs first. Fully transferable for first 12 months.

Wet Weight

(Water and water heater, fuel, LP-gas tanks full; no supplies or passengers)

Front Axle	12,120 lbs
Rear Axle	15,440 lbs
Tag Axle	8,520 lbs
Total	36,080 lbs

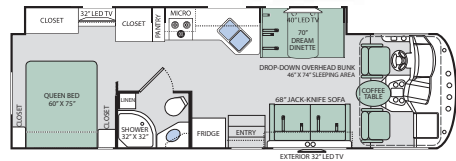
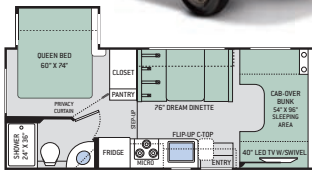
Chassis Ratings

GAWR, F/R/Tag	13,200/20,000/10,000 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	43,200/58,880 lbs
ROCCC	7,120 lbs (deduct weight of passengers for net cargo capacity)

GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combination Weight Rating
ROCCC	Realistic Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity (Full Water, No Passengers)



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By Bob Livingston

SINGING IN THE SHOWER

Ecocamel's Orbit showerhead reduces consumption while pushing out a stronger stream of softer water — and can be fitted with an optional massaging feature

Most people take showering for granted. It's one of those tasks that can be less than exotic — unless, of course, the shower stall is fitted with multiple showerheads that simulate a rainforest with massaging benefits. But that luxury is normally relegated to custom homes with spacious shower stalls, not the limited confines of a motorhome shower. Throw in mediocre RV showerheads, and the experience is easy to forget. Ecocamel, based in London, England, offers showerhead products that bring a tingle back into an otherwise lackluster experience.

Years ago, I had an opportunity to test one of the company's first showerhead models brought into the U.S., and have enjoyed fantastic showers ever since. The latest model, the Orbit SoftWater, takes showering to a higher level, bringing smiles to those who relish skin stimulation and dislike the maladies associated with hard water.

Hard water is our nemesis. The buildup of calcium and other minerals over a shorter-than-expected period of time clogs faucets, leaves unsightly — and almost impossible to remove — streaks on glass, and makes lathering up in the shower more difficult. Ecocamel, recognizing that dry, itchy skin and frizzy

hair is no fun, has built a water softener feature into the handle of its Orbit SoftWater showerhead that is designed to increase the solubility of hard water by altering the crystal structure of calcium carbonate, which prevents hard scale deposits. My first reaction to all this scientific mumbo-jumbo met with skepticism, since softening water usually requires an inline device that relies on salt and is a much more sizeable operation. After the first showering experience, though, I was hooked on the new Orbit SoftWater and knew Ecocamel was on to something.

From the outside, it's hard to distinguish the difference between the Orbit with and without the soft-water

[1] Ecocamel's Orbit SoftWater showerhead has a unique design, with jets positioned in a ring configuration. The jets can be easily cleaned with your fingers or a towel.



[2, 3] Air is injected through the handle, spinning the water and creating turbulence that produces a forceful spray. It also helps reduce water consumption to 2.1 gallons per minute at maximum flow.

feature. The SoftWater model is a little heavier, but that has very little impact during actual use.

Ecocamel makes the Orbit SoftWater work by placing metals in the handle that cause an electro-chemical catalytic reaction, which neutralizes the calcium so it cannot form limescale. The configuration of the unique alloy increases water velocity and turbulence, preventing the minerals from building up. The hard minerals are removed from the solution, becoming insoluble crystals, which wash down the drain.

The second part of the design increases the pressure through the jets in the ring at the end of the handle. This is the feature that has made the Ecocamel showerhead so successful. Air is forced through the handle, spinning the water at high speed and building turbulence to create a dreamy stream of water. Flow is regulated to a maximum of 2.1 gallons per minute; an optional



Shut Off Valve can be ordered for additional water conservation.

Rubber nozzles in the ring portion are spaced perfectly to provide a nice water pattern that covers the body effectively. These nozzles can easily be wiped clean with a finger or towel, so even if the standard (non-water-softening) showerhead is used with hard water, any deposits can be removed before a buildup becomes problematic.

From a subjective point of view, the softer water felt smoother on the skin, and it was definitely easier to wash long hair. It takes a little

longer to rinse off the soap, but there was no slimy feeling, which is a common complaint from some people who don't care for over-softened water. When the water from the showerhead was tested with a meter, we discovered that there was a 20 percent reduction in total dissolved solids compared to the water flowing out of the other faucets, which confirmed that the water was indeed softer, even after months of daily use.

The combination of softer water and the powerful spray puts the Orbit at the top of the list of best show-



[4] ORB SPA sonic massager pops right into the hole created by the ring of jets. It fits snugly, but is easy to remove. Massaging effect is soothing, removing dead cells and promoting skin cell regeneration. [5] Rubber "fingers" are very flexible, but rigid enough to produce the desired massaging effect. [6] Sonic massager can also be used independently of the Orbit showerhead. It fits easily in a hand. [7] Internal motor in the sonic massager has three speeds and is powered by three AAA batteries. Access cover to battery compartment provides a waterproof seal. [8] Ecocamel's stainless-steel, chrome-plated Flexi Hose (\$14.50) is very pliable and durable. This one has been in service for more than three years.

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EVALUATION: ECOCAMEL ORBIT SOFTWATER

erheads available for motorhomes. But it gets even better. Ecocamel has recently introduced the ORB SPA sonic massager, a handheld, waterproof attachment that operates on three AAA batteries. The ORB SPA snaps into the Orbit ring and offers three speeds for managing the desired massaging effect on your skin. It fits into the hole created by the ring for the jets, transforming the Orbit showerhead into a multifunction tool that delivers the ultimate showering experience.

Medical-grade, non-porous rubber “fingers” are positioned strategically on both ends of the device, which exfoliate the skin while showering. The skin can be massaged with or without water, and the device can even be used without the Orbit showerhead. When placed against the skin, the vibrations offered by the internal motor are designed to deep clean the skin, removing dead cells and promoting tissue regeneration.

The massaging fingers are easily cleaned with running water and a towel.

Adding the sonic massaging unit makes the showerhead a little top heavy, but that weight helps deliver the desired pressure and sensation to the skin. The feeling is not overpowering, and some might even think nothing is happening at first, but the end result is very refreshing, especially after finding the sweet spots offered by the ORB SPA.

Using the Ecocamel Orbit and ORB SPA will positively change the way people perceive taking showers in a motorhome. The cost of upgrading to the Orbit SoftWater showerhead is \$99.95; add the massaging option (\$39 for the ORB SPA or \$128 for both; available online) and you’ll be singing in the shower. **M**

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A Royal Pedigree

REGENCY RV'S XALTA CLASS B HAS A DISTINCTIVE TOUCH OF LUXURY

By Chris Dougherty

The Regency period in Great Britain was notable for a couple of reasons. First, upon the incapacity of King George III, his son, Prince George Augustus Frederick, assumed the crown as a regent until his father's passing (he would then become king). Second, the Regency period ushered in a time of refinement and distinctive advancements in English culture. Regency is a relative newcomer to the RV world, having been in the van conversion business for more than 50 years; Prince George was about that old when he became regent. Xalta is a name that means "with a life path," and this luxurious and well-made Class B certainly has a royal life path ahead of it.

As with many other Class B manufacturers, Regency starts the 2TB Xalta with the Mercedes-Benz 3500 Sprinter 170E chassis, which has a substantial pedigree thanks to the 3.0-liter BlueTec V-6 turbodiesel and five-speed automatic transmission. The unloaded Xalta has plenty of power, and handling is relatively tight, considering its high profile. On the exterior, Regency added an attractive and stately two-tone paint

treatment, separated by a body-length chrome strip. Fiberglass custom running boards and rear lower trim panels give this motorhome a sleek appearance. The front of the unit has an updated, custom chrome grille, emblazoned with the large, center-mounted Mercedes badge, and a laser-cut Regency logo, adding a touch of sophistication. Deeply tinted, vehicle-length side windows are sleek and classy. Finished off with bright

aluminum Alcoa 16-inch wheels, this motorhome looks great on the road and feels right at home by the lake or in front of the country club.

Entering the Xalta from the side door reveals a finely appointed interior with a limousine-like atmosphere. The beechwood cabinetry has a strong, quality feel; drawers are solid and feature self-closing slides; cabinet doors feature spring-loaded residential-style hinges. The 2TB model has a workstation directly behind the black "leather touch"-clad driver's seat, which is a unique interior feature, and perfect for creative occupants who want to travel in a small motorhome. By rotating the driver's seat, a small office is at the ready, with a Corian work surface, an LCD TV/monitor and a window to the right to view the outside surroundings. A removable



Right: The solid-surface countertop in the galley features a single-burner induction cooktop and large stainless sink with pullout sprayer faucet. Far right: Behind the workstation is a convection microwave, Norcold AC/DC refrigerator/freezer and a sizable pantry.

pedestal table adds to the working space, or can be used as a dining table to share with the passenger's seat. Both are then facing the TV/monitor. This could also be a good place for a remote meeting to share a presentation with a client, or even using a computer's camera for a mobile conference or vlog post.

To power this all-electric motorhome, it comes equipped with a Powertech 3kW diesel generator, in addition to the 30-amp shorepower connection and 2,000-watt pure-sine-wave inverter.

The interior is comfortable, and everything is convenient to reach except the under-bed storage. Access is a bit cumbersome, but acceptable because of the tight form factor in a Class B. Directly aft of the workstation is a Contoure microwave convection oven above a Norcold 3.2-cubic-foot



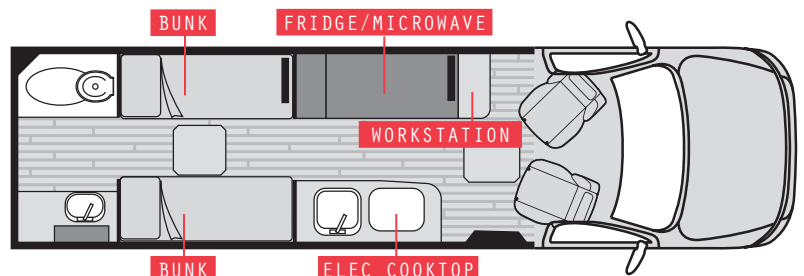
AC/DC refrigerator/freezer. A large pantry and two storage drawers sit just behind that. The opposing kitchen counter/island includes a single-burner induction cooktop and single-bowl stainless sink with pull-out sprayer faucet. While the available counterspace is a bit tight, the front and rear tables and the workstation

can be used as additional prep space, if needed. The sink is big and deep enough to even hold a spaghetti pot. Storage in the galley is plentiful. All in all, we like this kitchen layout for a Class B.

The interior décor is high-end and attractive, with padded Ultrasuede walls, fabric-covered trim with various



Above, left: The Xalta's driver's compartment is all class and all Mercedes, with a leather-wrapped steering wheel with a wood appliqué that carries on across the dash. Above, right: The driver's seat rotates 180 degrees to service the workstation, which is a comfortable and practical space. The workstation can even be used as an additional meal-prep area when needed.



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available colors and patterns, and a durable planked oak vinyl floor. All the cabinets and trim are neatly assembled.

The sleeping area has an interesting, if not easily workable, design. The two "bunks" on opposite sides of the rig have a relatively comfortable mattress but are unusable individually by any person of size. The bunk mattress is wider than the cabinet upon which it sits; inside the left-side bunk cabinet are wooden slats designed to allow the mattresses and back pillows to become one large bed. While we had the opportunity to test the process, we couldn't manage to put the bed together in the brief time we had with the motorhome. We were assured that the pieces would be adjusted during a predelivery inspection. Were this the case, we're sure the bed would be a comfortable place to sleep. Custom-made linens and pillow tops are included.

The 2TB's bathroom is in the very rear and consists of a wet shower/toilet enclosure on the driver's side, and a sink and vanity across the aisle, which consists of a Corian counter and backsplash with a stainless oval sink. The vanity and mirror are large and have plenty of space for all essentials. As with most motorhomes this size, the toilet/shower room is compact; linebackers and the occasional kicker will have trouble in here. It is, however, a well-designed custom-made shower enclosure with a porcelain bowl commode, pop-up powered roof vent and wall-mounted RV showerhead.

The Xalta has some nice tech, too, featuring two HDTVs on articulating arms; one at the workstation, which also serves as a monitor for a laptop, and one in the rear that is attached to the pantry cabinet. A Blu-ray/DVD player serves both units. The 15,000-Btu Dometic air conditioner



Top: The two opposing couches make for a comfortable space, with an LED TV on an articulating mount, solid-wood valances and cabinetry. Above: On the curbside is a nicely appointed vanity, with plenty of space for grooming necessities and a large mirror with additional storage above.

with heat pump is served by its digital thermostat, and the optional Warm Waves in-floor heating system (\$1,945) features a fully programmable independent thermostat.

Lighting is controlled by a multiplex switching system, with panels conveniently placed throughout the motorhome. The Xalta is also prewired for satellite TV, and cable TV is connected to a port inside the driver's-side running board. USB charging ports and 120-volt AC outlets are



Tech Power

The Xalta features all LED lighting, including reading lamps like this one. Multiple 12-volt DC charging stations ensure technology stays powered up, keeping occupants connected.

located throughout the motorhome.

Optional retractable screen doors on the passenger's side and rear doors (\$1,295) allow fresh air to circulate through the interior while keeping the dreaded mosquitos at bay. Outside of the side screen door, the patio area is covered by a Carefree 13-foot electric awning, which is controlled by switches on the passenger's seat base, hidden behind the seat skirt. It took some time to locate, but once we did, we were OK with the placement. The awning and grab handle LED light switches are also located in that same location.

The test motorhome was equipped with the 2018 Model Year Kick-Off Package (\$3,770), which included a number of the company's popular options, including the lighted entry handle, 24-inch LED smart TV upgrade, lighted countertops, power-operated MCD window shades with remote control, power awning, executive leather upgrade, luxury vinyl flooring and the luxury steering wheel group, the latter of which upgrades the Mercedes steering wheel and shifter knob to wood and leather versions.

The executive leather front seats are comfortable and feature an attractive diamond pattern sewn into the fabric. As with all Sprinter-based motorhomes, Mercedes requires the outfitter to use the Mercedes seats for safety reasons, but manufacturers are free to reupholster the seats to taste. The remainder of the driver's compartment is primarily Mercedes, with black carpet and padded door panels thrown in for good measure.

The exterior of the Xalta has most of the features you'd expect, including an outside outlet, shower and utility connections. A potential issue is the positioning of the holding tanks, dump valves and generator. Since these unprotected items hang only a few inches from the ground in the very rear, it's possible they could be damaged by road debris or when bottoming out while driving into a parking lot or unlevel campsite. Also, the tanks and plumbing are exposed and uninsulated, suggesting that the Xalta is a

Manufacturer's Specifications

Chassis

Manufacturer	Mercedes-Benz
Model	Sprinter 3500 DRW
Engine	BlueTEC 3.0-L V-6 DOHC turbodiesel
SAE Hp	188 @ 3,800 rpm
Torque	325 lb-ft @ 1,400-2,400 rpm
Transmission	5-speed automatic
Tires	LT216/85R16
Wheelbase	170.3"
Brakes Front/Rear	Ventilated disc
Suspension Front/Rear	Strut/leaf
Fuel Capacity	24.5 gal
Warranty	3 years/36,000 miles, powertrain

Coach

Exterior Length	24' 8"
Exterior Width	6' 8"
Exterior Height	9' 8"
Interior Width	5' 8"
Interior Height	6' 3"
Construction	Steel van body, composite floor, foil insulation in roof
Freshwater Capacity	24 gal
Black-water Capacity	24 gal
Gray-water Capacity	23 gal
Air Conditioner	15,000 Btu with heat pump
Refrigerator	3.1-cubic-foot
Inverter/Charger	2,000 watt
Batteries	(1) 12-volt chassis, (2) 12-volt AGM house
AC Generator	3-kW diesel
MSRP	\$150,145
MSRP as Tested	\$157,155
Warranty	limited 3 years/36,000 miles

Chassis Ratings

GAWR, F/R	4,080/7,720 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	11,030/15,250 lbs
GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combination Weight Rating

fair-weather motorhome. But for folks living in Texas or Florida, none of these things matter much. The motorhome has some LED ground-effect lighting, and the driver's-side running board lifts to expose the aforementioned cable TV connection and a sewer hose storage tube.

If you're looking for a first-class touring motorhome with impressive amenities that will work nicely as a luxury "second" car, then the Regency Xalta should be on your list. **M**

Regency RV

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SAFARI PRIDE

THREE TIGER MURALS, A FREE-FLOWING INTERIOR AND EXTENSIVE BOONDOCKING APPOINTMENTS MAKE THIS 1991 IVORY CLASS A THE PERFECT CHOICE FOR THE BARKERS

Ken Barker still fondly remembers his introduction to Safari motorhomes. He and his wife, Billie Ann, were at a Good Sam rally with their fifth-wheel in 2001 when he saw a group of women clad almost solely in safari and lion-related gear — hats, shirts, jackets and more. With no jungle nearby and unsure of what they were celebrating, he turned to a fellow camper.

"What's that all about?" Ken asked.

"Oh, that's just a group of Safari owners. They're crazy about their brand."

In fact, if a brand can be judged by its avid followers, then everyone in the market for a used motorhome should be taking a look at a Safari. With one of the largest international RV clubs, Safari owners and enthusiasts form a close-knit support group that covers seven regions

throughout the United States and Canada.

Impressed by the quality of its coaches and the fervency of its members, the Barkers became Safari fans. So, it was only natural that the Missouri couple took a closer look when they saw a used 1991 Safari Ivory 36 at a local Ford dealership five years later. Ken was immediately sold on the Oshkosh chassis with an 8.3-liter Cummins engine and Allison transmission.

And while some elements of the living space were worn or outdated, Billie Ann loved the floorplan and storage space.

"You can always redo the interior," she observes.



Billie Ann and Ken Barker became fans of the Safari Class A after viewing its loyal following first hand.





Unfortunately, the initial asking price was steep, and the dealer rejected the Barkers' much lower offer. Still, Ken sensed that the car dealer wasn't quite sure what to do with an RV. A few weeks later the dealer called to see if Ken would meet him halfway. He refused, though he did mention that cold weather was on the way.

"I said, 'You know, pretty soon you're going to have to winterize,' and I think that did it," Ken laughs, because a few weeks later the dealership accepted Ken's original offer of \$28,000.

In 2006 the Barkers joined the ranks of proud Safari owners. The first thing they did was drive to a Freightliner Truck Center in Illinois, where Ken had the technicians "go over everything."

"I came away a whole bunch lighter in my pocketbook," he says, but emphasizes that he would much rather spend money on keeping his coach

Wildlife murals, like these three tiger-themed masterpieces by artist Randy Nagle, are synonymous with the Safari brand.

maintained than on doing emergency repairs.

Once the Safari was declared mechanically sound, the Barkers turned their attention to upgrades. They added a Banks Power engine-performance package boosting the 8.3-liter 250-hp engine to 325 hp. They also had a new RV Armor roof installed.

In terms of outward appearance, their Ivory was stunning, with three Randy Nagle custom murals commissioned by the original owner. In keeping with the Safari theme, these include a white-and-black adult Bengal tiger on the right, an adult orange-striped Siberian tiger on the back and two adorable tiger cubs on the left side of the motorhome. All are captured in amazing detail.

But while the murals were in excellent condition,



The Classic Ride

the pinstripes were decaying, and the front cap needed repainting. The total project, including removal of the old pinstripes and a three-coat clearcoat to preserve the murals, took about 17 days. The result is a classic coach that looks showroom-new and is likely to stay that way. When they are not traveling, the Barkers keep their Safari in an equipment barn on their farm or under the RV port at their “wintering over” spot in Mission, Texas. And when they are on the road, they are used to getting noticed.

“You’d be surprised at the number of people who come up to us at Flying

J’s and ask if they can take pictures,” Billie Ann says with a smile.

As for the interior, the Barkers made changes “to fit our needs, our personalities.” Though the Ivory has no slides, it has an open, roomy feel accentuated by the couple’s addition of laminate bamboo flooring and their bright, neutral choice of color scheme. The sleek, solid alderwood cabinetry is offset by a new white leather sofa, recliner and reupholstered pilot and co-pilot captain’s chairs. In the galley, the counters have been replaced with seamless white solid-surface counter-tops and the backsplash upgraded

with tile. The couple kept the original refrigerator but removed the four-burner stove (they primarily grill outside), replacing it with a portable induction cooktop. They’ve also found they seldom dine inside with guests, preferring to be outdoors, so they cut the table down to fit two comfortably, giving them more floorspace.

“I love the simplicity. It’s just perfect for us,” Billie Ann says.

The Barkers’ Ivory makes optimal use of every square foot. The walk-through floorplan has a split bath with a freshly carpeted rear bedroom with a queen bed and ample closet space.



THE RIGHT STRIPES

Safari Motor Coach Corp. was founded in the 1980s and produced both diesel- and gas-powered Class A motorhomes. The last Safaris were made in 2009 following a 2002 buyout by Monaco and that company’s subsequent bankruptcy. On today’s used market they sell quickly, still popular among RV enthusiasts for their quality and, of course, their iconic murals. If you can find a 1990s Safari Ivory, expect to pay between \$30,000-\$40,000. Comparable Safari diesels, like the Serengeti, can be found in the same price range. For larger models, like a 40-foot Continental, expect to pay an additional \$10,000.

► Renovation of the exterior of the Barkers’ Safari included clearcoat and repainting the front cap.





Billie Ann has also kept decorating to a few select pieces that accentuate the coach's modern look, so the long, uncluttered view from the front of the coach to the rear makes the Ivory feel much bigger than its 36 feet.

As an integral part of their optimization, the Barkers also removed the furnace, opting instead for two Olympian Wave catalytic heaters.

"We just never used it," Ken explains.

For entertainment, the Barkers replaced the original TVs with new HDTVs, adding a Winegard Slimline satellite system and Bose sound system. Other upgrades include engine- and refrigerator-fire suppression systems as well as an electrical surge and monitoring system for shorepower protection.

If they do spend time dry camping, the Safari is up to the task. They upgraded to a Magnum 2,000-watt pure-sine-wave inverter mated to a 600-watt, 30-amp six-panel solar array charging four Lifeline AGM batteries, providing a total of 600 amp hours of storage. In addition to their Honda 6,600-watt radiator-water-cooled generator, and the replacement of all existing lights with LEDs, these modifications make the Safari well-equipped for boondocking.

So far, the Safari Ivory has taken the Barkers from California to Florida and the Carolinas and across the central United States. They hope to include the northeast region in future trips. But for now, they are gearing up for the Safari International Club's 30th Anniversary Rally August 27-

This Safari sports a new HDTV and Bose sound system. The new, white recliner and sofa, along with the reupholstered captain's chairs, brighten the coach's interior. New solid-surface counters and tile backsplash, along with a laminate bamboo floor, update the Ivory's galley.

September 1 in Shawnee, Oklahoma — and they can't wait to bring along a copy of *MotorHome* magazine. The president of their club encouraged Ken and Billie Ann to contact us about their beautifully restored RV after it was featured in "Safari Trails," the club's news magazine, back in 2016.

Of course, upgrades have continued since then, in what Ken refers to as "an ongoing labor of love," and he credits the advice and support of the Safari community as instrumental in the renovation of this classic ride.

As Ken says proudly, "They've helped us 'Keep the Lion Alive.'" **M**

Brazel's RV Performance, Circle 101 on Reader Service Card

WINNEBAGO PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

In this, the final installment of our series on the history of Winnebago, we cover the company's sixth decade, including last year's launch of four products that are changing the way people look at RVs.

▶ THE SIXTH DECADE: 2008-PRESENT

In 2008, Winnebago celebrated its 50th anniversary in style, rolling its 400,000th unit off the line.

The next year, the company shook up the B-van market just as it had transformed the Class C market a decade earlier—again with a coach based on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis. The all-new Era cemented Winnebago's leadership in fuel-efficient RVs just as gas prices started inching upward again.

In 2010, the company purchased Sunnybrook RV in Middlebury, Indiana. Sunnybrook evolved into Winnebago Towables, marking a return to the company's roots as a travel trailer manufacturer.

The Sprinter-based Era was followed in 2014 by the Travato, based on the Ram ProMaster chassis. Together these two models catapulted Winnebago to the top of the B-van market.

In 2015, as the RV industry put the recession in the rear-view

mirror, Winnebago purchased the assets of Country Coach in Junction City, Oregon to add badly needed production capacity. Today, Junction City is the home of Winnebago Class A diesel production.

The following year, Winnebago jumpstarted its presence in the towables market with the \$500 million purchase of Grand Design RV, winding up its sixth decade with a bang, and bringing annual sales to \$1.55 billion.



Grand Design Imagine

Winnebago enters its seventh decade just after introducing four game-changing models for a growing and diverse customer base—the rugged 4x4 Class B Revel, the contemporary Horizon diesel pusher, the user-friendly Class A Intent, and the lightweight Minnie Plus fifth wheel.

As the next chapter dawns, enthusiasts can be certain that RVs will continue to evolve, and that Winnebago will continue to lead the way.

➤ This concludes our six-part series on Winnebago's remarkable history.

Winnebago
Travato



A NEW VIBE ON THE HORIZON



Horizon 40A Galley



Horizon 40A Floorplan



THE HORIZON

The Winnebago Horizon is available in two floorplans and nine different interior decor combinations. To learn more about the Horizon visit WinnebagoInd.com.

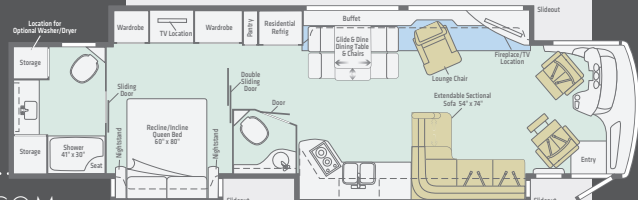
EXTERIOR LENGTH:	41'1" - 43'3"
EXTERIOR WIDTH:	8'5.5"
EXTERIOR HEIGHT:	12'9"
INTERIOR HEIGHT:	7'
SEATING CAPACITY:	4
GVWR:	38,700 LBS
MSRP STARTING AT:	\$385,214

THE DESIGN BRIEF CALLED FOR A COACH THAT STOOD OUT FROM THE "SEA OF SAMENESS"—THE DARK WOODS, HEAVY FABRICS AND THICK CARPETING THAT DOMINATED THE DIESEL PUSHER CATEGORY. THE WINNEBAGO HORIZON DELIVERED IN SPADES. NAMED "RV OF THE YEAR" BY *RVBUSINESS* MAGAZINE AS WELL AS "BEST OF SHOW" BY *RV PRO* MAGAZINE, THE HORIZON TURNS HEADS EVERYWHERE IT GOES.

The Horizon's identity to me would be sleek, sophisticated, fresh, functional and contemporary. Some would call it European styling," noted Ryan Roske, Director, Product Management of Motorhomes with Winnebago, who collaborated with Italian cabinet maker Tecnoform SpA on the aesthetic design.

Built on the Maxum Chassis, the Horizon offers excellent road manners, massive storage, and power to spare, thanks to its Cummins ISL 400- to 450-hp engine. And premium amenities abound:

- Luxurious Villa furnishings
- Spacious master bedroom with available walkaround recline/incline king bed
- Versatile Glide & Dine dining table and chairs
- Electric fireplace
- Home theater entertainment system
- Corian countertops and apron-front stainless steel sink
- Residential stainless steel French door refrigerator
- Dual-pane, frameless tinted windows with MCD solar/blackout shades





Dinghy Bumper

Parking in my area is pretty tight, and when I'm not on the road, I park my dinghy vehicle in front of my motorhome. However, I have a hard time judging the distance, and backed into the motorhome's front bumper a couple of times. To solve the problem, I tied one of the rubber bumpers from my boat to the grille on the motorhome. Now, if I go too far back, all I hit is the boat bumper.

Tony Trimarco | Greenwood Lake, New York



Hang 'Em High

We didn't have any place to hang small items outside our motorhome, so we got an over-the-door-hanger at Dollar Tree and fitted it over the rail of our slideout room. It makes a handy place for hanging odds and ends, such as drying clothes (if the campground permits).

John Speicher | Ravenel, South Carolina

FLEX for Me

I know there are several types of tapes to repair RV covers. I have found over the years that most don't last long in the subzero and high-wind Iowa winters. Last fall, when covering my RV, the cover tore at the seams in a couple of places. I used 4-inch-wide white FLEX TAPE to fix a 3-foot tear, and a separate 1-foot tear. The tape (commercials frequently run on television) has made it through the Iowa winter, and is still holding together as well as it did the day I made the repair. I used clamps to hold the two halves together, but it would work better if someone was holding the cover while someone else placed the tape. Once the tape is placed there is no repositioning it. I carry a roll in the RV for emergency repairs.

Ron Holte | Ogden, Iowa



Abracadabra!

I have found a convenient way to store my toilet wand. If you have a pool, you're familiar with the pool vacuum hoses used with automatic pool cleaners. Just stop by any pool-supply store and pick up a 4-foot hose, slide the toilet wand inside and snap the ends of the hose together for a clean, airtight seal.

Bill Ellis | Orlando, Florida 



Have an Idea? Quick Tips is looking for submissions. Please send your ideas to: *MotorHome* Quick Tips, 2750 Park View Ct., Ste. 240, Oxnard, CA 93036, or email letters@motorhomemagazine.com. Photos must be high-resolution, at a minimum of 1,400 by 1,400 pixels. If your tip is published, you will receive \$35. All payments require an FEIN or SSN.

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Dish Network, Circle 124 on Reader Service Card

Tire Troubles

Upset that an extended-service contract provider paid less in reimbursement than it originally agreed to, a reader turned to Hot Line for help. He wrote:



“When we bought our 2005 Gulf Stream Scenic Cruiser motorhome, we also purchased insurance from Safe-Guard Products International. On September 25, 2017, we experienced a tire blowout on the freeway. I pulled over and called Safe-Guard and requested they send someone out to fix the flat. I was told they don't do that; I'd have to find somebody, pay the bill and then send the paperwork to Safe-Guard for reimbursement. I called Transit Pros Tire Service to replace the tire, which cost \$912.32.

When we got home, I called Safe-Guard and a representative gave me a claim number and e-mailed me a letter of the approved amount, which was \$663. The rep asked me to fax the paperwork showing the breakdown of the costs, claim number and include the letter he sent us so they would know what was approved for payment. All of this was faxed on October 11, 2017.

After several weeks, I called Safe-Guard and was told they couldn't read the breakdown of the costs. The claim was resubmitted for payment.

I finally received a check, but it was for \$370, and there was a letter stating the claim was paid in full and that Safe-Guard would not offer any further reimbursement. I feel the company owes me a total of \$663.

Michael R. Brock | Winter Haven, Florida

Brock appeared to have done everything correctly in this situation and, most importantly, he got it in writing. Though we never heard from Safe-Guard, Brock contacted us with an update.

“After Safe-Guard received Hot Line's letter, a man named Victor called and said he'd send payment in full. The check arrived a week later.”
M.R.B.

Button-Hooked

Looking for help with their warranty company on policy exclusions, a couple asked Hot Line to intervene.

“In April 2016 we purchased a new 2017 Forest River Georgetown. We also paid almost \$5,400 for a five-year warranty, which was described by the dealer's finance director as “bumper-to bumper.”

The warranty is through American Guardian Warranty Services (AGWS).

Ten months later, the knob that controls the fan speed of the A/C and heating equipment broke off. I called AGWS and was advised to select a repair facility and have the facility contact AGWS. I took the coach to JW Truck Sales (in Oakwood, Georgia) for repair. It was determined the entire dash climate control unit had to be replaced — at a cost of \$552.05. The service manager at JW Truck Sales contacted AGWS and was advised that the repairs would not be covered under warranty, due to an exclusion in the warranty contract for “knobs, buttons


and handles.” We subsequently paid the \$552.05. I called AGWS and spoke with a customer service supervisor who confirmed the claim was denied due to an exclusion in the warranty contract for “knobs, buttons and handles” being interpreted to include any unit failure caused by a knob, button or handle as a noncovered item. We think AGWS should be responsible for this repair.

Oscar and Patricia Wiltse
Flowery Branch, Georgia

Following the letter of the law, AGWS does not have to honor the warranty based on the specific language in the contract. However, we felt it was in the company's best interest to reconsider. We heard back a short time later.

Our records show that the consumer purchased a USA TravelCare service agreement for a 2017 Forest River Georgetown. American Guardian Warranty Services Inc. (AG) is the administrator and obligor under this service contract. The consumer's letter describes his purchase transaction as the seller representation of the service contract as “bumper to bumper,” which is an exaggeration and not represented as such in any contract or sales material originating from AG.

AG remains adamant that it specifically excludes knobs and buttons from coverage. In order to offer the consumer some goodwill for their purchase decision, AG has agreed to honor the repair and waive the consumer deductible obligation. AG will issue payment for \$552.05.

John Wendt | VP Claims and Underwriting,
AGWS, Warrenville, Illinois 

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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3500 WATT SUPER QUIET INVERTER GENERATOR

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12" DOUBLE-BEVEL SLIDING COMPOUND MITER SAW

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30", 4 DRAWER TECH CART

- 12,600 cu. in. of storage
- 580 lb. capacity
- Heavy duty gas struts hold lid open at 90 degrees

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BADLAND **Battle Tested** **SUPER COUPON**

2500 LB. ELECTRIC WINCH WITH WIRELESS REMOTE CONTROL

- Weights 14.3 lbs.
- 11-1/8" L x 4-1/2" H

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ITEM 61840/61297/63476/61258 shown

293043320

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29 PIECE TITANIUM DRILL BIT SET

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COVER PRO **SUPER COUPON**

10 FT. x 10 FT. PORTABLE SHED

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18" x 12" MOVER'S DOLLY

- 1000 lb. capacity

NOW \$7.99 Customer Rating ★★★★★

~~\$10.99~~ **SAVE 54%**

COMPARE TO **\$17.65** **BUFFALO TOOLS** MODEL: HFDOLLY

ITEM 61899/63095/63096 63098/63097/93888 shown

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SUPER COUPON

7 FT. 4" x 9 FT. 6" ALL PURPOSE/WEATHER RESISTANT TARP

NOW \$2.99 Customer Rating ★★★★★

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COMPARE TO **\$9.98** **BLUE HAWK** MODEL: BG8X10-Y

ITEM 69249/69115/69137/69129/69121/877 shown

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CENTECH **SUPER COUPON**

2/10/50 AMP, 12 VOLT BATTERY CHARGER/ENGINE STARTER

NOW \$29.99 Customer Rating ★★★★★

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ITEM 60581 60653 shown

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NOW \$12.99 Customer Rating ★★★★★

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ATV/LAWN MOWER LIFT

- 300 lb. capacity
- Weights 72.5 lbs.

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COMPARE TO **\$142.08** **MAX LOAD** MODEL: 38828

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29398223

LIMIT 2 - Coupon valid through 11/12/18*

PITTSBURGH **SUPER COUPON**

40 PIECE, 3/8" DRIVE SAE AND METRIC SOCKET SET

NOW \$3.99 Customer Rating ★★★★★

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COMPARE TO **\$19.97** **KOBALT** MODEL: 88889

ITEM 63015/61328/47902/62843 shown

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drill master **SUPER COUPON**

80 PIECE ROTARY TOOL KIT

NOW \$6.99 Customer Rating ★★★★★

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COMPARE TO **\$26.35** **PROFESSIONAL WOODWORKER** MODEL: 51832

ITEM 63292/63235/68986/69451/97626 shown

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By Ken Freund

Mileage Recording During Dinghy Towing

Q We are planning to purchase our first motorhome in the next few months. We plan to tow a dinghy vehicle. We have just purchased a Jeep for this. Does the mileage increase on the towed vehicle as it is being towed? The sales staff at Jeep could not answer this question.
Rick Poe | Via email

A You didn't mention year, model or powertrain of the Jeep, so hopefully you checked carefully to determine if it was approved by the manufacturer for flat towing. Older vehicles had mechanical speedometers and odometers, and therefore registered miles when flat towed. However, more recent models (from



the last few decades) have electronic speedometers, which don't register when the ignition is off. Make sure any motorhome you buy has a sufficient tow rating for the weight of the Jeep, and obtain an auxiliary dinghy braking system so that the motorhome brakes won't be overstressed.

Loose Tiles

Q We have a 2005 Winnebago Adventurer. There are very few miles on the coach, but a couple of floor tiles in the interior are lifting a bit. Can you tell us what to use, and if there is an easy way to do it without removing them completely?

Ron and Nita Graham
 Santa Clarita, California

A Your best bet is to do this in hot weather, when the tiles are more flexible, and heat them up further with a hair dryer to make them even more pliable. Pry up the loose edges a little and put some tile adhesive or a product such as Liquid Nails on a long thin blade; be sure to get it into the spots that have come loose. Place a heavy object on the tiles to hold them down during the drying process.

Dinghy Disconnect — Tip

In regard to the "Dinghy Disconnect" letter in the May

issue, the reason that the battery on newer 2015-18 Chevrolet Colorado/GMC Canyon pickups must be disconnected is you'll damage the electric assist steering if you tow with the battery connected. The steering is not hydraulic. There was a very long discussion about this among RVers who wanted to use them as dinghy vehicles when the current generation of the Colorado and Canyon appeared on the market. GM says to disconnect the negative cable because they don't want you to do anything that will damage the electronics while removing the positive cable, but it really doesn't matter. I use a manual disconnect on the negative side of the battery that I purchased from an auto parts supplier because it was the easiest to install, is trouble-free and has a minimal cost. It takes about 30 seconds to undo. As the response in the May issue stated, this is also to prevent the battery from becoming discharged during towing.

Craig Roberts | Apple Valley, California

Thanks for writing, Craig. The new electric power steering systems have created a whole new set of benefits — along with problems. Owners should follow instructions in the owner's manual regarding dinghy towing. It is a good idea to disconnect a battery at the negative terminal because you won't create a short circuit to ground with any tools you use, which could happen if working on the positive post. Keep in mind that when you disconnect the battery, you'll need to run a charge line from the motorhome to run auxiliary braking systems, and presets for radio, etc.

Vibration Solved

We have a 2008 30-foot Class C Fleetwood Tioga on the Ford E-450 chassis that always had a high-speed vibration under normal power between 60 and 65 mph. I figured it was coming from the driveshaft, and it was. There was a bulletin on driveshaft angles, but you needed an angle finder, which I didn't have. This

is a three-piece driveshaft with two support bearings. The rear support already had a 1½-inch drop welded in, but it didn't look like enough, so I made a ¾-inch shim (now 2¼-inches total) of hardwood — and with longer bolts — for a trial, and sure enough the vibration was gone. It's now 5,000 miles later, now with a steel shim, and it's as smooth as can be.

C.P. Schremp | Westminster, California

Thanks for sharing your solution. Angle finders are readily available for a few dollars from Harbor Freight. Often, folks have difficulty discerning where vibrations are coming from. Here's a tip. Typically, driveline vibrations can be felt more strongly through the seat and floor, and the shift lever, etc., more toward the back of the vehicle. Front-wheel and tire vibrations are typically felt more strongly through the steering wheel, and often begin around 45 mph and faster.

Gas-tank Filling Problem — Comment

This is in regard to the "Gas-tank Filling Problem" letter in the March issue. There are many videos on YouTube describing solutions to gas-tank filling shut-off problems other than what you described. Please direct readers to YouTube videos listed under the heading "Gas pump keeps shutting off when filling." Most of the videos suggest the problem is related to a clogged gas evaporative system. This could be either a dirty/clogged evap charcoal filter, solenoid or tubing. This would not be an issue if the vehicle mentioned was new, but could be if the vehicle travels on dusty roads or has a lot of miles on it.

Stan Pine | Astoria, Oregon

Closed tank venting with evaporative canisters are not used on diesel models, only on gas models. Yet many of the vehicles reporting problems are diesels. The evaporative systems do not begin to work until after the fuel-filler cap is reinstalled following refueling. Rather, tank filler vents

allow air pressure to be relieved as the tank is filled with fuel. Therefore, I have reservations about the expertise of these folks claiming it's a cure for slow filling. Generally, the charcoal-filled evap canisters become fuel-soaked when tanks are overfilled, and in some cases due to fuel expansion from heat. This can lead to operational problems related to overly rich air-fuel mixtures, but not slow filling.

Slow Refueling Finally Solved

Reading the "Gas-tank Filling Problem" letter in the March issue, it occurred to me that I should share my own experience. We have a 2007 Bigfoot "Super C" on a diesel GMC C5500 chassis that was a nightmare to fuel. The fuel kickback was so severe I could end up having a diesel shower if not careful. Sometimes I

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could hear the fuel coming back up the fill tube; most of the time I could not, especially if another diesel was running nearby. After three times in various shops to try to rectify the problem, the root cause was finally found. The breather tube where it attaches to the top of the fuel tank was plugged with silicone (90 percent). This vent line had been tested before, but just enough air could pass through the tube with compressed air that it seemed OK. The only way to locate the blockage was to totally remove the vent tube. It looked like sabotage on the production line to me: a perfect crime, as everything works except the owner will hate his truck because it can only be fueled up painfully slowly or splash a lot of fuel on the ground/yourself. I did contact GMC about this issue and various GMC people contacted me. At no point did they offer any compensation for me, as by this point it had cost me

lots of money to finally figure out the problem. Every time I come across a C5500 chassis, I ask the owner if they have trouble fueling; so far, I have found four others who have the same issue. There may be hundreds of other C5500s out there with the same problem. Before I solved this fueling issue, we had to always stand by with paper towels to mop up the mess at every fuel stop.

Jeff Creed

Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada

Thanks for sharing this most unusual cause of slow refueling and the solution. It's an interesting theory; a disgruntled employee could have caused a lot of grief!

Escape Windows

Q I have owned three motorhomes and a trailer. All had escape windows operated by using red handles to open them. I have never

opened one of these windows. Other windows and vents in my rigs could become seriously stuck when left unopened for several months. Should escape windows be opened occasionally, and is it difficult to reclose them and obtain a watertight seal after they have been opened?

Joe McDaniel | Cottonwood, Arizona

A Opening them occasionally is a good idea and can familiarize you with their operation, which is good when you need to use one in a hurry in the middle of the night. The sun is very strong in your area and can literally bake the window seal gaskets, which makes them stick. I suggest cleaning and inspecting the seals and replacing any, if needed. Apply a protectant such as 303 to help keep the seals supple and prevent sticking. If you can't store your motorhome under a roof, you may also want to consider an RV cover to reduce sun damage.

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

Genset Quits

Q We have a 5-kW Onan generator in our RV. Our major use for it is to run our roof air conditioners while driving — or it was our major use. For the past two years the generator shuts down — sometimes after running about 15 minutes and sometimes after running about 45 minutes. Once it shuts down I cannot get it restarted immediately, or even on the same day. It will generally restart the next day, but with the same results. I have had five RV techs look at it. The last guy took the generator out and to his shop — where he had it for more than four months. He brought it back, reinstalled it and said he could find nothing wrong (no bad parts). We've replaced the fuel pump a couple of times, fuel filters and done general servicing numerous times. I have talked with fellow RVers who describe similar issues with their generators, and who also have not had a solution. I've conversed with Onan via email and its personnel say they cannot help without knowing error codes. During the described shutdowns there are generally no error codes displayed. Sometimes, when I've tried a restart within a few minutes of the shutdown, an error code displays, but seems to not relate to anything. The generator came new with our 2004 Newmar and ran fine for a number of years. Do they just get old and die?

Bo Johnson | Aberdeen, North Carolina

A There are a number of things that can make this happen, Bo. Error codes are a big help, and you can make the system blink the two-, three- or four-blink error codes by rapidly pressing the STOP button three times within five seconds. Two blinks means low oil pressure, three indicates a service fault. If you get three, press STOP one more time, and it will blink the fault codes. You may be able to find the service manual online for your specific genset, and the owner's manual may have the troubleshooting

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codes in it. Next, when it shuts down, recheck fuel and battery level. Do you have automatic gen-start? If so, check the settings.

If all that is OK, I would have a tech disconnect the remote-control wiring harness and try running the genset using the switch on the unit itself. Sometimes a short in this harness can cause the symptoms you're describing. You always want to make sure the oil is up to the full line, and that the fuel level in the tank is above one-quarter full. Since the gas and LP-gas powered units are air-cooled, this usually isn't a concern, but it's worth noting what is happening when the unit shuts down (i.e., are you driving, and at what speed, etc.). Last, it is possible the control board has a defect that only rears its head when the generator gets hot, so this might be worth considering also.

Removing Protective Paint Film

Q I am an avid reader of *MotorHome*, and the "Plastic Road Armor" article in the January issue was very interesting. I need advice concerning my 2014 Forest River Forester Class C. The motorhome is a 31-footer with a special full-body paint job, which also includes protective film on the cabover and a strip on the front portion of the hood. Both of these protective film pieces are clear plastic, intended to protect the paint from damage by rocks, bugs and other road damage. It's a wonderful idea designed to work very similarly to the Road Armor described in the article.

Both portions of the protective clear-plastic armor have become clouded or stained on the underside of the film, with a moldy or mildew-like growth that's brown and cannot be cleaned off. I removed a small square (with great difficulty) of the plastic film and where it was removed, the brown stain came with the plastic — the paint is still untarnished.

I contacted Forest River for advice and was told that this is only the second time that the company has heard of this issue and cannot recommend what to do or the best way

to proceed. I was told that the company that installed the protective plastic film is Coach Guard in Elkhart, Indiana. I called Coach Guard and explained the issue to a man named Will, who said he had never seen this before and could not help me. He told me to "just peel it off."

So, essentially nobody I've spoken with has a clue on how to help me or is willing to take any responsibility for resolving the issue. I had been very encouraged by your article. It appears Xpel Technologies stands out by offering a warranty and has professional people helping customers with repair/replacement of what they refer to as Road Armor.

Is there anyone who can offer a reasonable solution without destroying the paint job and becoming a labor-intensive nightmare? The cabover portion is a very large piece, about 8 feet by 5 feet, and is not easily accessible.

Daniel Walters | Elkton, Florida

A First of all, I want to say it's not fun, and can be a very tedious job. That's probably why nobody stepped up to offer to do it. I have removed films like this using a hair dryer to heat up the area I'm working on. This softens the film and makes it more flexible, so it can be peeled off using a soft plastic scraper. Remaining adhesive can usually be removed with a soft cloth, wet with 3M adhesive remover, rubbed vigorously. For an area like the cabover, you may need a scaffold or a bucket lift for a safe working position. Last, you may be able to get a local Xpel or Diamond Shield technician to remove and install a new guard, but that will be on the expensive side. Good luck. **M**

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The Yellow Brick Road

Discovering what's really over the rainbow in Kansas

By Alan Rider

“I’ll get you my pretty — and your little dog too!” Now, I’ve never been over the rainbow, but those 10 words (and the spine-tingling cackle that followed) still bring back a flood of Technicolor memories from my childhood. And I’m guessing I’m not alone.

I bring it up because this month marks the 79th anniversary of the release of the classic film, “The Wizard of Oz.” I missed attending the premiere at Grauman’s Chinese Theatre in Hollywood by a few decades, but to this day I remember how the movie was a tradition around our house, as my little sister and I waited patiently for the one time each year it would be shown on network television.

I love everything about the film, but nothing more than the bits where it switches from dull black-and-white to eye-popping color and back, as Dorothy Gale leaves and returns to Kansas. In fact, it wasn’t until I made my first trip to the state a few years ago that I realized everything there was not rendered in grayscale.

While I’ve never called Kansas home, that visit showed me why Dorothy was so eager to get back. For a state that counts Mount Sunflower, an imperceptible rise near the Colorado border, as its loftiest summit, Kansas has a surprising number of pop-culture high points.

Start your explorations with a visit to the Oz Museum (866-458-8686, www.ozmuseum.com) in the tiny town

of Wamego, 45 miles northwest of Topeka. There you’ll find more than 2,000 Oz-related relics, from first-edition copies of L. Frank Baum’s book “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz” to original movie posters to memorabilia from Broadway musicals like “The Wiz” and “Wicked.” To re-create the film’s aforementioned magical moments, there’s even a chance to step from a sepia-toned re-creation of Auntie Em’s front porch into the museum’s exhibits, done up in the movie’s vibrant hues.

If you need still more Oz immersion, you’ll want to skip over (figuratively speaking) to Dorothy’s House and Coronado Museum (620-624-7624, www.dorothyshouse.com) in Liberal. There you’ll find a 1907 farmhouse fixed up to look like our heroine’s old home-place. From there, your gingham-clad faux Dorothy tour guide will take you along the Yellow

Brick Road as it winds through a 5,000-square-foot warehouse filled with exhibits dedicated to the major characters in the film. Admittedly, it’s slightly cheesy — but that’s half the fun.

While the farm was the center of Dorothy’s universe, the state of Kansas figures prominently in our world as well. That’s because the geographic center of the contiguous United States is located about 2 miles northwest of Lebanon. While the small stone pyramid and bronze plaque that marks the spot lack the grandeur of some memorials, in my opinion it’s worth a stop just to say you’ve been there. You know, something to gloat about to your Facebook friends.

As it turns out, the state is filled with those kinds of quirky only-in-Kansas attractions. From the World’s Largest Ball of Twine (www.kansas.travel.org/balloftwine.htm) in Cawker City to Salina’s Rolling Hills Zoo (www.rollinghillzoo.org), where you can have your own encounter with lions and tigers and bears (Oh, my!), there’s no shortage of places that will give you some definite bragging rights.

Ultimately though, I suspect a visit here will give you a better understanding of why Dorothy repeated that immortal phrase, “There’s no place like home, there’s no place like home.” Even if, in our case, that home happens to be on wheels rolling down The Road Ahead. **M**

“‘There’s no place like home.’ Even if, in our case, that home happens to be on wheels ...”

Off to See the Wizard ☺

Movie buffs can delight in Oz memorabilia throughout the area, including the famous ruby red slippers. At 4,039 feet above sea level, Mount Sunflower is the highest point in Kansas.



Photos: Kansas State Tourism and Doug Stremel

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