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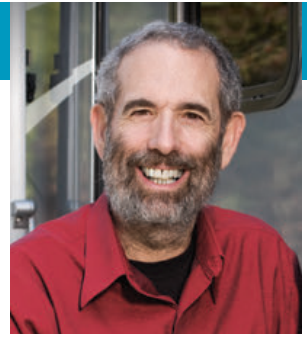
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The Holiday Rambler Endeavor 40FX during a stop at Indiana Dunes State Park along Lake Michigan's southern shore (see test on page 64). Photo by Shawn Spence Photography.





By Bob Livingston

# Looking Ahead

It's truly amazing to see what's going on in the motorized segment of the RV industry. New models, floorplans and interior décor in particular are driving the development of motorhomes into the next generation. It was clear that the offerings standing proud in displays at the annual industry trade events in Elkhart, Indiana, and Louisville, Kentucky, last fall (see page 96) are designed to attract new customers into the lifestyle while inducing veterans to trade up.

At the top end of the food chain, manufacturers have always injected new levels of luxury and technology, but high-end amenities are no longer exclusive to Class A's; Class B and C motorhomes are also taking on luxury status. New models on Sprinter, ProMaster and Ford Transit chassis are popping up everywhere, and these motorhomes are surprisingly roomy and fully featured. European-style interiors with clever multipurpose use of space are making these compact RVs not so compact when it comes to livability. And now that German giant Hymer is moving into the U.S. and Canadian markets, look for competition to heat up and smaller-profile motorhomes to become even more versatile.

While the more maneuverable motorhomes are earmarked toward millennials who will eventually displace the baby boomers as the most likely target for RV manufacturers, there was also plenty of activity in the moderately

high to upper-end Class A market. We were thrilled to hear that Country Coach will be resurrected under the auspices of Winnebago and that Junction City, Oregon, will once again be alive and well with motorhome production. This is a bold move for Winnebago and one that will likely resonate with Country Coach fans who pretty much made the nameplate an icon.

Luxury diesel pushers always seem to get more than their fair share of the buzz at any show or event, and for good reason — they are the most exotic and beautiful. But the reality is that Class A motorhomes perched on the Ford chassis are much more popular and affordable. In many cases it's hard to tell the difference between gas-powered and diesel-pusher motorhome interiors. And once you get over the \$200,000 threshold for a gasser, the lines between the two levels become even more blurred. But dissimilarities in handling and ride comfort are

evident. Ford has always been slow to improve the suspension componentry and for the most part, the ride hasn't changed much for the better. Fortunately major strides in Ford's engine/transmission performance and reliability have overshadowed the less-than-stellar ride and owners have looked to the aftermarket for solutions. Years ago we tested SumoSprings offered by SuperSprings, a company that specializes in automotive suspension products, and we did see some improvement. Fast-forward to 2016 and the product has undergone significant development that makes it a game changer for the Ford chassis. As you can read in the evaluation on page 72, this time we installed the new and improved SumoSprings on a motorhome where the handling dynamics changed when loaded to capacity. The ride may not be equal to an air-suspended diesel pusher, but it's definitely better.

It's easy to get swept away by all the fancy accessories and motorhomes that are on the market and the resortlike travel that drives the lifestyle, but it's important not to forget our roots. The article on saving money while camping, page 37, keeps motorhome travel in perspective by reminding us that getting away from it all can be exactly that — and far less expensive. **M**

## Contributors | March



**Kristopher Bunker**, the former editor of *Trailer Life* magazine, is an avid camper and has been RVing for more than a decade. He is currently a freelance writer living in the central Texas area.



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

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

**Canadian Return Address** GS Media & Events, 4960-2 Walker Road, Windsor, Ontario N9A 6J3. Publication Sales Agreement #40012332.

Printed in the United States.

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## Does your motorhome have a residential refrigerator and, if so, what are the pros and cons — especially when dry camping?

That's the question we asked in our December 2015 issue, and here are some of the replies we received.

### Experience Dictates Use

Our new 2015 Class A has a residential refrigerator that runs on 120-volt AC only. The 120 volts comes from three sources: shorepower, the generator or the inverter. When on shorepower, 120-volt AC is provided to the refrigerator. While traveling, the alternator on the engine provides 12-volt DC to the inverter that provides the 120 volts to the refrigerator. While dry camping, there are four batteries that provide 12-volt DC to the inverter that provides the 120-volt AC to the refrigerator.

Of course, while dry camping, there is a limited amount of time until the batteries drain down to where the inverter can no longer provide the correct 120-volt AC power. There is a great deal of technical data concerning charge times, consumption rates, applied loads, efficiency losses and the

like, of the deep-cell house batteries that are required to operate the inverter for dry camping.

To us, the bottom line is how your particular Class A operates. That's because the modern motorhome has many other electrical gadgets that draw "parasitic electrical loads" when you normally think they are off. When you turn your flat-screen TV off with the remote, it is not totally off. While it is still plugged in to an AC wall socket (most all TVs are connected to sockets supplied by the inverter), the instant-on feature of the TV is drawing power. All the HDMI amplifiers connected to the TVs are still powered up. Multiply that by the number of TVs you have in your rig and that power drain increases. Anything else that is plugged into a wall socket that is powered up by the inverter may also

be drawing power. Things like portable phone stands, any type of cellphone charger that is plugged into the wall socket (even when your phone is not connected to the charger), your laptop power supply and some rigs have the microwave connected to the inverter wall-socket plug system so that the clock does not go off. All those things and more are draining the batteries while dry camping because the inverter is still providing them 120-volt AC.

Our rule of thumb is to never allow the house batteries on our Holiday Rambler Ambassador to fall below the 11.8-volt DC threshold. When they approach that level while dry camping, we turn on the generator and charge the batteries up to 14.5 volts. We do have an automatic generator start (AGS) system that can be programmed to start the generator when the batteries drain

### Featured Letter

## Solar Solution

In response to Russell and Linda Houk's question about residential refrigerators, we have a diesel pusher with this type of refrigerator. It keeps food consistently cold, even in hot weather (unlike our former LP-gas models). These refrigerators only run on 120-volt AC, so unless you're plugged into shorepower, or have the generator running, the refrigerator and inverter will drain your four house batteries in a day. Our solution was to install solar panels that will replenish the battery supply while the sun is out. We can run the satellite TV as well during the day strictly off the inverter. At night we need to finally engage the generator.

**Casey and Kimberly Callender | Via email**



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down to a certain voltage, or if the inside temperature falls to a certain level, and there are programmed run times and other options concerning start time and quiet hours, to name a few.

This year we spent three weeks dry camping outside Turn 1 at the Daytona Speedway for Speed Weeks and the Daytona 500. We went through a learning curve on how to turn many of our parasitic draws off and back

on, how long it took to drain down the batteries, how long it took the generator to fully charge the batteries, etc. I wish I could tell everyone how long their fridge will run on a single charge, how long to run the generator and such, but each rig is different depending on what electronic options you have, how you manage those electrical options and what other items are connected to wall sockets operated

by your inverter system.

Experience will dictate how these things will work for you while dry camping. The important thing is to read your manuals, operate your systems correctly, use common sense and enjoy your rig to the fullest.

**Dick and Sandy | near Buffalo, New York**

### Good for the Night

Last summer we traded in our motorhome for one that has a residential refrigerator. Our new Winnebago Forza has four 12-volt house batteries with a 2,000-watt inverter. It has more than enough power to run the refrigerator all night without the need for generator power. We keep the generator set to auto start programmed to observe quiet hours where applicable. Part of the auto-start feature is to allow for battery tophoff, which means that the generator will automatically kick on prior to quiet hours and bring the house batteries up to full charge. This gives us more than enough power for the night.

**Tom and Denise Nunley | Uniontown, Ohio**

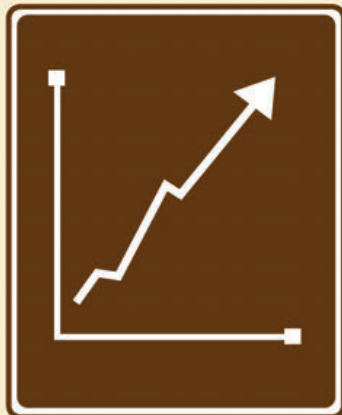
### Advantages Outweigh Disadvantages

My wife and I have a 2013 Georgetown XL360 with a residential Frigidaire Gallery refrigerator. This model is a double-door unit with the freezer on the bottom, along with water and ice in the door. Although we don't dry camp, we have found this refrigerator to be a very nice addition to our rig. When not plugged in to shorepower, it runs off an inverter. It must be started and allowed to cool down on shorepower, but once cool it will run for 50 hours off of the inverter and coach batteries. Obviously, it runs off our generator when in operation on the road, but we usually don't run the genset when traveling unless we need the roof air. Another advantage is that we don't need to use the LP-gas while traveling to keep the refrigerator running.

A residential refrigerator offers many advantages over standard RV models. It cools much more quickly and has an internal fan that keeps the whole interior evenly cold. It also cools down faster because of the

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fan, especially in really hot weather. This refrigerator is not affected by outside temperatures because it is not dependent on absorption to cool down and stay cold. Another advantage is that there is no roof stack or outside grill needed for this refrigerator. The increased capacity is also a nice addition. The individually adjustable shelves that this refrigerator offers allow us to customize the interior to fit different-size containers, which was always a problem with our other rigs.

One slight drawback to a residential refrigerator is that unlike RV refrigerators, securing the doors during travel can be a problem. The method used by Forest River in our coach was OK, but after seeing another RVer's solution to this problem in a recent issue of *MotorHome*, I duplicated the solution and it works much better and is easier to use and more secure.

**Michael and Eileen Daling**  
Middletown, Connecticut

#### Don't Miss the Old One

Highly, highly, highly recommend a residential refrigerator. All the extra room and superior cooling is well worth it, but it comes with some work. I have a 38-foot Monaco Diplomat that had the double-door Norcold. I did some research and bought a Frigidaire stainless-steel model from the Sears outlet for \$700, and did all the work myself. I did hook up a switch to shut off the fridge when switching power sources, so that the compressor can circulate right and not overdraw amperage on startup, especially if converting over to the inverter/battery side. Must have at least a minimum 2,000-watt inverter for the coach. If running a separate inverter, then a maximum of 1,000-watt inverter will work fine, and from what I understand, a sine-wave inverter. I have four Trojan 150-amp-hour batteries and installed a 300-watt solar panel. For dry camping, I can get about three or four days out of batteries before firing up the generator for three or four hours to charge up all the batteries again. You will not miss your old one. I guarantee it.

**Ron Malcolm | Via email**

#### Happy with Residential

We have had our residential refrigerator for three years and have been very happy with it. Pros would be all the space inside and not having to use LP-gas while on the road. The only con I can think of is the problem we would have if it ever had to be replaced. It will never fit through the narrow front entrance. We dry camped for two nights last summer and only ran

the generator for an hour to charge the four 6-volt batteries. I'm not sure I had to run it at all, but I wanted to make sure we were OK. We do have an automatic switch that will start the generator if the voltage gets below a certain point. This system is completely adjustable. With a 2,000-watt inverter we can run just about anything we want, except the air conditioner.

**Terry and Marty Hart | Troy, Michigan**

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**Made the Conversion**

We own a 2003 Beaver Motorhome and I did a refrigerator swap-out three years ago. It has a 2,000-watt inverter. I used a Samsung RF-197 unit because it is a counter-depth refrigerator and fit in the existing space. Driving down the road, the alternator on the engine will keep your house batteries charged so there's no problem. We don't do any dry camping but will spend a night

in a parking lot when traveling. I start the generator for a while to charge the batteries before we go to bed. In the morning there is very little change in the state of charge. The Samsung draws less current operating than the old unit did on LP-gas.

I wouldn't even consider a motorhome, new or used, without a residential refrigerator. Buying new, there is a considerable cost savings.

When buying used the conversion is not that difficult. I did mine myself except for help actually putting the unit in place. There are many articles on the Internet with pictures, measurements, etc., to help you out.

**Terry Cole | Turlock, California**

**All Pros, No Cons**

Our 2014 Winnebago Journey came with a three-door KitchenAid. We love it! Its efficiency is super — amp draw is about 1 amp. Pros: It keeps ice cream cold on long driving days (without running the generator). Cons: None.

**Paige and Bob Riewe  
Sioux Falls, South Dakota**

**Never Going Back**

I replaced our Norcold with a Samsung residential refrigerator two years ago. It was one of the best decisions I ever made. I will never go back to a gas-absorption refrigerator!

**Craig Post | Via email**

**Sold on Solar?**

We subscribe to *MotorHome* and always look forward to reading the responses when you post a "Question of the Month." If possible, I would like to know what other RVers have to say about solar systems — portable and/or rooftop. The more I research, the more confused I get. We plan to become full-timers in the next three years and think that a rooftop system is the way to go. Now we are wondering if we should also get a portable system, as we currently camp in the Northeast where there are a lot of shade trees. Any insight other RVers can share would be appreciated.

**Laura Bellis | Odessa, New York**



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**Question of the Month**

Do you have a solar-energy system installed on your motorhome, and if so, what type is it and would you recommend it to fellow RVers?

---

**Send your comments to:**  
MotorHome, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036; or email [letters@motorhomemagazine.com](mailto:letters@motorhomemagazine.com)

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# ESCAPES

## Screen Stream

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## Down by the Old Mill

What appears to be an abandoned stone-and-wood gristmill is actually a detailed piece of concrete art in North Little Rock, Arkansas

By Arline Chandler

If you've seen the classic movie "Gone with the Wind," you may recognize the Old Mill from the film's opening credits. Built and dedicated only six years before the movie debuted in 1939, the two-story reproduction of an old water-powered mill — tucked in a hollow of T.R. Pugh Memorial Park's rough terrain in North Little Rock, Arkansas — fits the 1800s date inscribed above its door. A step back in time, the park is perfect for picnics, strolls and imagination.

Dionicio Rodriguez, a Mexican artist commissioned

by the developer, created the mill's hand railings, bridge, waterwheel, benches, tables, windowsills and downspouts out of dyed concrete to emulate weather-beaten wood. Details of peeling bark, broken tree branches and bird-pecked holes shape the park's character.

The Old Mill is a worthy stop for travelers passing by on Interstate 40 or 30. It is located at Lakeshore Drive and Fairway Avenue in North Little Rock. For more information, call 501-758-1424.

By Bobbie Hasselbring

## Say Cheese!

**A**h, cheese. That delectable food made from the milk of cows, buffalo, goats or sheep, may be the perfect travel food. It comes in a wide range of forms, flavors and textures and can be used in everything from appetizers to entrees and desserts.

Many cheeses keep well for a long time without refrigeration, making it terrific for picnics, as a road food snack, or (heaven forbid) in those rare instances when you're out of fuel/power to run your motorhome's fridge. Cheeses that keep best without refrigeration include aged Goudas, Parmesan and grana padano; drier goat cheeses like chevrot and Vermont couple; and drier, semi-firm cheeses like aged pecorinos and manchego. Cheeses that need refrigeration include fresh cheeses like ricotta, semi-soft rind cheeses like Brie and washed-rind varieties.

Some worry that cheese is a source of saturated fat (found in meats, eggs, butter, whole-fat dairy products, lard and some oils), which was considered a cause of heart disease. However, newer research indicates saturated fat may have little impact on heart health.

Cheese is loaded with healthful nutrients like calcium, protein, phosphorus, zinc, vitamin A and vitamin B12. It's also a great source of protein, especially important for strong muscles.

Cheese can also help control weight by increasing satiety. Because cheese is protein-rich and contains fat, it helps steady blood sugar and makes you feel full. For me, cheese with apple slices is a great road food snack because, unlike carbohydrate-rich chips or bread, cheese staves off hunger for hours.

If you are lactose-intolerant, many cheeses, particularly aged cheeses such as Cheddar and Swiss, contain little or no lactose.

With more than 300 varieties of cheese, there's a cheese for nearly every taste and many cheese shops and factories offer tours and/or free tastings. And many cheeses come packaged in individual servings for easy road snacking.

**Got a favorite cheese shop or factory you'd like to share?**

Email [bobbie@realfoodtraveler.com](mailto:bobbie@realfoodtraveler.com) with "Road Foodie Cheese" in the subject line.



From top: Most cheese shops offer free samples. Some cheese is aged for months or even years.

### CHEDDAR DIJON BÉCHAMEL SAUCE



This recipe is adapted from "The Tillamook Cheese Book," a cookbook produced by the Tillamook County Creamery Association in beautiful Tillamook, Oregon. Travelers can visit the Tillamook Cheese Factory, a place I affectionately call the "Disneyland of Cheese," which hosts more than a million visitors a year for free factory tours, cheese samples and terrific ice cream.

This creamy and tangy cheese sauce recipe is easy to make and can be used on everything from veggies to meats. (Try it out on grandkids who don't like veggies!)

- 1½ cups whole milk or half-and-half
- ¼ cup Dijon mustard (or to taste)
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 1 large egg yolk
- 1 cup Tillamook Vintage Extra Sharp Cheddar Cheese (or other aged cheddar), shredded or cubed
- Pinch of salt and pepper

► Combine milk, mustard, flour and egg yolk in a small saucepan. Whisk to blend, and cook over medium heat, whisking gently and constantly, until the mixture just begins to bubble (about 5 minutes). Remove from heat and add the cheese. Stir until the cheese melts. Season with salt and pepper.

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## The Hot List

Comfort heat and hot water are two of the main things that separate campers from RVers, and with an Aqua-Hot heating system, both are accomplished on demand. And, Aqua-Hot reports that its popular 600 Series is now approved by the California Air Resources Board (CARB), making the Aqua-Hot 600 Series the first and only CARB-accepted heating system for diesel-fueled motorhomes. The new 600 Series, which includes the 600D and 675D models, is available as a replacement for existing Aqua-Hot systems. Both models have been designed with fewer components, making installation easier and improving serviceability, according to the company. The Aqua-Hot uses what the company calls TribridHot, which is three sources of energy for heating (engine, shorepower and diesel fuel). Featuring owner-friendly diagnostics, an in-cabin operation switch now has simplified blink codes for system service requirements. A nozzle preheater is standard, automatically preheating fuel starting at minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit and igniting the burner at minus 40 degrees.

**Aqua-Hot, 800-685-4298, [www.aquahot.com](http://www.aquahot.com)**



## Light Up the Dance Floor

If you want to take the party outside but don't have exterior speakers for your favorite tunes, KING offers a new RV Bluetooth weatherproof speaker and patio light. The speaker light replaces your exterior above-door patio light with energy-efficient, long-lasting LEDs and premium Bluetooth speakers, all simply connected with two wires. Using a Bluetooth-enabled MP3 player, smartphone or tablet, users can stream their digital music collections directly to the speakers. Basic and premium models are available in black or white. The premium units can be controlled wirelessly via a free downloadable app from a smartphone or tablet. The app includes features like a music equalizer; light power, dimming and color control; and a bug-light feature. MSRP: \$199 basic, \$249 premium.

**KING, 952-922-6889, [www.kingconnect.com](http://www.kingconnect.com)**



## A Dashing Display

Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp. (FCCC) is set to begin outfitting its chassis with the OptiView, the first fully integrated, all-digital LCD instrument cluster in the RV industry. Designed in collaboration with Mercedes-Benz, OptiView features fully integrated gauges and an easy-to-read interface. OptiView is a user-friendly system offering a number of features designed to increase driver safety and comfort, including an anti-glare display with bright graphics, clear fonts and a streamlined menu structure; 360-degree, high-resolution camera system capability, which would eliminate blind spots and allow for total coach monitoring while on the road; Bluetooth mobile connectivity for hands-free phone use; and an intuitive touchscreen menu. The OptiView's core driving instrument cluster will be available as an option beginning this month (March).

**FCCC, 864-487-1700, [www.freightlinerchassis.com](http://www.freightlinerchassis.com)**

## Screen Stream



If you're looking for a way to stream your digital music library through your motorhome's speaker system, the all-new Jensen JDVD1500 Bluetooth DVD player will have you dancing in no time. The single-DIN player features Bluetooth capability that allows users to wirelessly stream their music directly from a Bluetooth-enabled smart device, such as a tablet or a phone. And when the music is over, the JDVD1500 delivers a sharp picture and crisp audio for enhanced campsite viewing parties. The JDVD1500 includes 30-second skip protection, last-position memory scan, MP3 support and large, backlit buttons for ease of use and visibility. A credit card-sized remote control is also included. The DVD player has been specifically designed and tested to endure vibrations, humidity and temperature fluctuations commonly encountered during travel and storage, according to the company. MSRP: \$199.99.

**ASA Electronics, 877-305-0445, [www.ASAElectronics.com](http://www.ASAElectronics.com)**

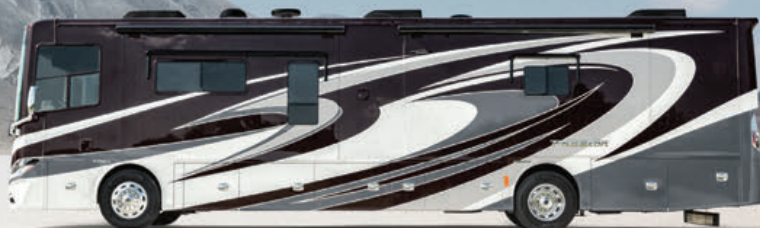




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Blowing Rock, North Carolina

## Crown of the Blue Ridge

Derived from a Native American legend, Blowing Rock is both a landmark and a town in western North Carolina. The Blowing Rock is an immense cliff 4,000 feet above sea level, overhanging Johns River Gorge. The landmark gets its name from the rocky walls of its gorge that cause wind to sweep upward with such force that light objects cast into the gorge are blown back up.

Located 2 miles away, the mountain village of Blowing Rock, near the Blue Ridge Parkway, has plenty of amenities for visitors, and RV parks are located in nearby Boone. Other area attractions include the Tweetsie Railroad and the Blowing Rock Art and History Museum.

The Blowing Rock landmark is open daily — weather permitting — April through December; and Thursday through Monday, January through March.

**For more information,** call 828-295-7111 or go to [www.theblowingrock.com](http://www.theblowingrock.com) — *James and Dorothy Richardson*

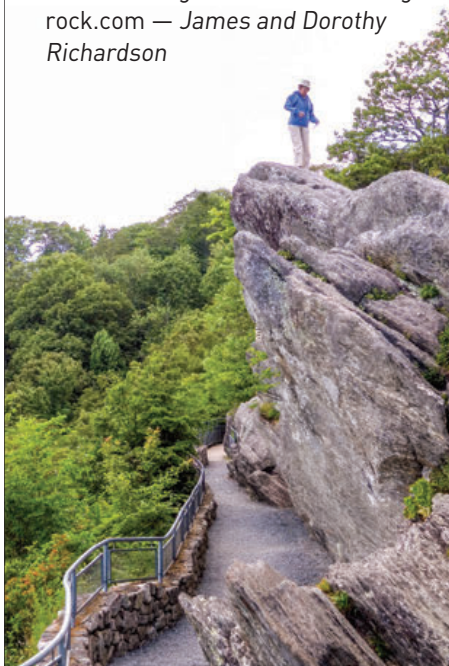


Photo: James Richardson

Weott, California

## A Real Travel Log

This unique travel log is not a diary of RV journeys, it is one of the very first motorhomes ... and it was constructed from a single redwood tree.

In 1917, Charles Kellogg, a naturalist, embarked on a campaign to save the redwood forests of Northern California. With a donated quad truck chassis from Nash, and a fallen redwood log almost 5,000 years old, Kellogg constructed his Travel Log. He toured in his “motorhome” from 1917 to 1921 — crisscrossing the nation four times — raising awareness for redwood conservation.

This “treehouse-on-wheels” was then stored for 75 years before being put on display at the Humboldt Redwoods State Park Visitor Center. The Kellogg Travel Log weighs 6,950 pounds and includes a bed, kitchenette, small bathroom and storage cabinets. It is also fully wired for electrical appliances.

Humboldt Redwoods State Park is located on the Avenue of the Giants in Northern California between the towns of Weott and Myers Flat. The park’s campgrounds do not have hookups or a dump station. Burlington Campground is the closest to the visitor center. It accommodates RVs up to 33 feet in length, but watch out for the tall trees throughout the campground!

**For more information,** call 707-946-2263 or visit <http://humboldtreedwoods.org> — *Morey Edelman*



Photo: Morey Edelman

Rapid City, South Dakota

## A Reptilian Wonderland

The brochure for Reptile Gardens in Rapid City, South Dakota, claims to make memories that will last a lifetime, and it’s true! My parents took me there when I was 7 years old. It was a favorite destination for my younger brother and me. Today it has the world’s largest reptile collection, which includes snakes, lizards, alligators, crocodiles, turtles and tortoises. Many of the world’s most dangerous snakes are housed here. The “most dangerous” title is bestowed based upon six factors, including the toxicity of venom and the number of deaths per year from each species.

The dangerous snakes are kept safely behind glass, but the Aldabra tortoises love company. Kids and adults enjoy cozying up to these gentle giants for photos or just to give them some love. In the Sky Dome, there’s a replica skeleton from the largest known turtle that ever existed. It weighed about 4,500 pounds and was 15 feet long and 16.5 feet wide from flipper to flipper.

The snakes have been there for decades, but the botanical gardens are a new addition, making for a delightful combination. There are more than 40,000 flowers and perennials intermixed with finely pruned trees and shrubs. Reptile Gardens is closed December through February.

**For more information,** call 800-335-0275 or visit [www.reptilegardens.com](http://www.reptilegardens.com) — *Mary Zalmanek* 



Photo: Courtesy Reptile Gardens



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## A Day at the Beach

Sun, fun and outdoor adventure await visitors to southeastern Virginia's coastal region

By Pam Windsor

If you're looking for a place to visit with relaxing and scenic beaches, a little bit of history and some unique attractions, head to the resort city of Virginia Beach, Virginia. Located on the Atlantic Ocean at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, Virginia Beach is home to three main beaches — Resort Beach, Chesapeake Bay Beach and Sandbridge Beach.

Resort Beach is known for its 3-mile boardwalk that goes all the way from First to 40th streets. Tourists and locals alike walk the concrete stretch not far from the water, morning, noon and night. It offers breathtaking ocean views and takes you past seafood restaurants, food vendors and stages often featuring evening entertainment. Boardwalk attractions include the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage

Virginia Beach has a 3 mile-long boardwalk with a separate bike path, and plenty of sand for sun worshippers.

Museum, the Old Coast Guard Station and a 34-foot-tall cast bronze statue of King Neptune. There is also a bike path for those with bikes, skates and skateboards. It's a great spot for a morning walk to start the day or a relaxing stroll to cap off the night.

Chesapeake Bay Beach, also known as Chick's Beach, is a quieter 2-mile stretch of oceanfront along the Chesapeake Bay ideal for splashing and swimming in the surf. Spend the day here building sand castles, collecting seashells or simply lounging under an umbrella. The water is calm, the atmosphere more relaxed, and you'll find locals mixing with tourists on the beach and in local businesses and restaurants. Due to the beach's unique location, visitors can catch both the sunset and sunrise from the same shore. Chesapeake Bay Beach is also home to the Cape Henry Lighthouse and First Landing State Park.

Sandbridge Beach, the southernmost beach, stretches all the way to the North Carolina border and offers a much more secluded, island-type experience. For RVers, there's the scenic Outdoor



VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

### Getting There

The main routes are Interstate 64 from the northwest and Interstate 264 from the west. If approaching from Virginia's Eastern Shore (U.S. Highway 13) via the 17-mile-long Chesapeake Bay-Bridge Tunnel, overhead clearance is 13 feet, 6 inches. LP-gas is restricted to a maximum capacity of 15 gallons, and the LP-gas tank valve must be closed while crossing the bridge/tunnel.

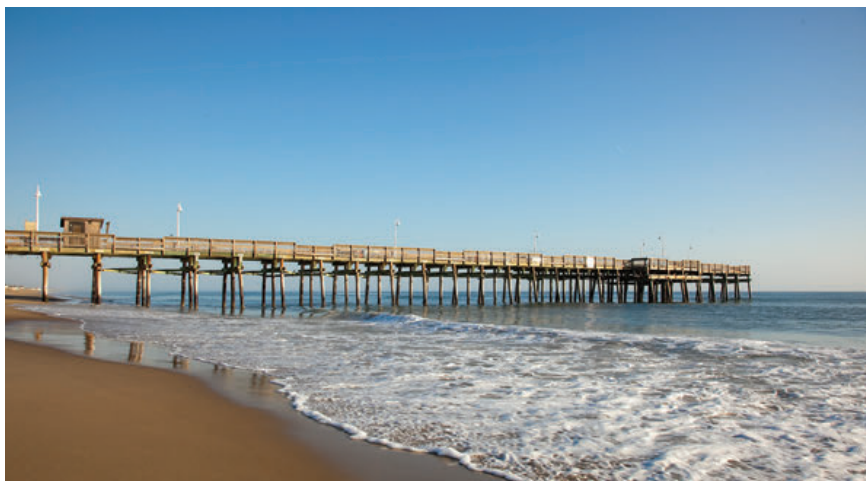
Resorts RV park facing Virginia's Back Bay, just minutes from the Atlantic Ocean. If you enjoy nature, explore the trails and marshes in nearby Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Biking and kayaking excursions are also available.

When you want a break from the water, you'll find a number of sights and attractions to suit a variety of interests.

Virginia Beach has a special place in America's history. The first English settlers sailed into the Chesapeake Bay and landed at Cape Henry on April 26, 1607. They stayed a few days, interacted with the Native Americans and then headed up the James River, where they established Jamestown, the first permanent English colony. The Cape Henry Memorial Cross marks the site of that first landing.

Not far from the first landing, you can see America's first government-constructed lighthouse. Built in 1792, the Cape Henry Lighthouse guarded the shores of the Chesapeake Bay for many years. If you're up for it, a trip up 165 steps to the top offers an amazing 360-degree view. The newer lighthouse, built in 1881, sits approximately 350 feet from the first lighthouse.

If you plan to visit the memorial marking the first landing or to see the lighthouses, it's important to note they are all located at the Little Creek/Fort Story Joint Expeditionary Base. This is an active U.S. military base, so all visitors over the age of 16 have to show



Sandbridge Pier (also known as Little Island Pier) is a favorite fishing spot for locals and visitors alike and is located 15 miles south of the Virginia Beach resort area.

Photo: Bill Crabtree Jr., Virginia Tourism Corp.

identification to get on the property, and vehicles may be subject to search.

Virginia Beach is home to a number of different military facilities, including Naval Air Station Oceana. You will see and hear that early on in your visit with the frequent flyovers of military aircraft — sometimes so loud you'll have to pause in midconversation. You get used to it, though, and may likely come to appreciate seeing them overhead. There is a deep respect for the military here. Along the boardwalk, you'll notice the Naval Aviation Monument honoring the Navy, Marines and Coast Guard.

There are several historic homes in the Virginia Beach area, including the Adam Thoroughgood House. It's believed to be the oldest surviving

Colonial home in Virginia Beach and features a collection of 17th- and 18th-century furniture, as well as spectacular gardens and a picturesque landscape. It might surprise you to find the house sits right in the middle of a standard residential section.

The Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center — the state's largest aquarium — ranks as one of the nation's finest, with more than 800,000 gallons of aquariums, nearly 300 hands-on exhibits, an outdoor aviary and a nature trail. It also connects to The Adventure Park at Virginia

Outdoor Resorts Virginia Beach is situated on Back Bay in Sandbridge. The ocean is just across the street.



Photo: Pam Windsor

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Photos: Pam Windsor

Above from left: The Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center has an Adventure Park with zip lines and an underwater exhibit of loggerhead turtles. One of the attractions at Resort Beach is the 34-foot-tall cast bronze statue of the mythological sea god Neptune.

Aquarium that offers a range of aboveground obstacle courses to test your skill and flexibility. The courses are open to ages 5 and up, ranked from beginning to advanced, and as the park's Eric Bratke explained, offer a little something for everybody.

"We have zip lines, ladders, bridge elements, hanging elements, nets, tunnels and more." The obstacles are set up at different heights in the trees, allowing members of the same group tackling different-level courses to keep each other in their line of sight.

Mount Trashmore Park remains one of Virginia Beach's most unique sights. You won't be able to miss it — it's marked



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Sandbridge Beach is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the east and by the protected marshes of the Back Bay Wildlife Sanctuary to the south and west, giving it an islandlike feel.

by a big green mountain. This world-renowned city park, built on the site of a former landfill, is an environmental feat, comprised of layers of compacted waste and clean soil. It covers 165 acres and is open to people who want to skate, play volleyball, run or take a walk.

Are you familiar with Edgar Cayce? Cayce, who died in 1945, lived in Virginia Beach and remains the most documented psychic of the 20th century. He's known as the father of holistic medicine and was called the "sleeping prophet" because his readings or "predictions" came to him during a trancelike state. Cayce's Association for Research and Enlightenment (A.R.E.) is open to the public and has one of the most extensive metaphysical libraries in the world, as well as 14,000 transcripts of his readings. There is also a visitors center, health center and spa, and a gift and book store.

One of the things you'll enjoy most at Virginia Beach will likely be the fresh seafood and the number of restaurants that prepare it. As always, when you're this close to the water, you can't go wrong with the many seafood entrees. If you're in the Sandbridge Beach area you might want to try Baja Restaurant; Lynnhaven Fish House is a popular stop in the Chick's Beach area; and Waterman's Surfside Grille, Mahi Mahs and Big Sam's Raw Bar promise great seafood dishes in the Virginia Beach

resort area.

When it comes to deciding where to stay, you'll find a number of campground options, including Holiday Trav-L-Park (the closest campground to the resort area). It offers 340 full-hookup sites and 364 sites with partial hookups all



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Photo: Pam Windsor

Holiday Trav-L-Park is the closest campground to Virginia Beach's resort area.

within a wooded, 100-acre setting. The campground features four playgrounds, a miniature-golf course, basketball and volleyball courts, and horseshoe pits.

Farther north is First Landing State Park, which has 107 partial-hookup sites and 75 dry-camping sites with picnic tables and a fire ring/grill. All sites are located just steps from the Chesapeake Bay, offering RVers close water access. The 2,888-acre

state park features 1.25 miles of beachfront and more than 19 miles of interpretive trails through protected salt-marsh habitat, freshwater ponds, beach, dunes, forest, tidal marsh and cypress swamp. A registered National Natural Landmark, First Landing is the most-visited state park in Virginia and contains one of the most endangered habitat types in the world, the maritime forest community.

With so many water sports, outdoor activities, attractions and places to see, you won't run out of things to do in Virginia Beach. In fact, it's quite likely that even before you leave, you'll be making plans to come back again soon. **M**

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

**The Adventure Park at Virginia Aquarium**  
757-385-4947,  
[www.virginiabeachadventurepark.com](http://www.virginiabeachadventurepark.com)

**Edgar Cayce A.R.E.**  
757-428-3588, [www.edgarcayce.org](http://www.edgarcayce.org)

**First Landing State Park**  
757-412-2300, [www.virginiastateparks.gov](http://www.virginiastateparks.gov)

**Holiday Trav-L-Park**  
866-849-8860, [www.campingvb.com](http://www.campingvb.com)

**Outer Resorts Virginia Beach**  
800-333-7515, [www.sandbridgebeachcottages-outdoorresorts.com](http://www.sandbridgebeachcottages-outdoorresorts.com)

**Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center**  
757-385-3474, [www.virginiaaquarium.com](http://www.virginiaaquarium.com)

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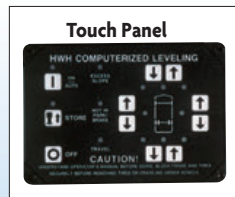


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Members who are unfamiliar with the club's Pilot Flying J perks should know that they can save 3 cents per gallon on gas and diesel (1 cent per liter in Canada), 5 cents per gallon on LP-gas and \$2.50 on dump-station fees when swiping their membership card before paying at most Pilot and Flying J locations. When using Pilot Flying J's RV Plus charge card, members can save from 4 to 7 cents per gallon on gas and 6 to 9 cents per gallon on diesel (1 to 2 cents per liter on gas and diesel in Canada), depending on their membership level. Savings on LP-gas are 10 cents per gallon when paying with the RV Plus card, and dump-station fees are discounted by \$5.

Pilot Flying J is North America's largest chain of travel centers, and the majority of Flying J locations and about 40 Pilot locations provide dedicated RV fuel lanes. Most travel centers also offer quick-service restaurants, showers, laundry facilities and free overnight parking. Note that Good Sam's Pilot Flying J benefits are not available in Wisconsin and at some "dealer" locations.

For more information and to view the *Pilot Flying J RV Location Guide* and apply for the RV Plus card, go to [www.goodsamclub.com/pfj](http://www.goodsamclub.com/pfj).



## Ramping Up for the RV Season

Spring savings at Camping World and Good Sam RV shows

**RV GEAR:** Good Sam members can stock up for the coming travel season and save during Good Sam Days, April 14 through 17, at Camping World's more than 115 U.S. locations. Throughout the four-day sales event, Good Sam shoppers enjoy members-only savings on a wide assortment of popular RV and outdoor accessories, as well as RV service and installation specials. [www.campingworld.com](http://www.campingworld.com)

**RV FUEL:** Year-round, members save 25 percent on up to 40 gallons of LP-gas every Tuesday and Wednesday at Camping World. The discount is taken off the regular retail price at locations where LP-gas is available. [www.campingworld.com/stores](http://www.campingworld.com/stores)

**RV SHOWS:** At Good Sam-sponsored RV shows — including upcoming March events in Rhode Island, Georgia and Virginia — members save 50 percent on admission tickets for up to two adults. [www.goodsamclub.com/rvshows](http://www.goodsamclub.com/rvshows)

## Phoenix Fling

Pedal-to-the-metal in Arizona's Valley of the Sun

On March 13, Phoenix International Raceway revs up its 2016 season with the Good Sam 500 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race, the auto-racing association's first short-track event of the year. "We take pride in hosting thousands of campers at every race," says the racetrack's president, Bryan R. Sperber, "and partnering with the world's largest RV owners' association makes perfect sense."

For legions of stock-car racing fans, RV camping is an essential part of the experience, and the warm spring weather in Arizona's Valley of the Sun raises the stakes. Phoenix is a particularly attractive destination for RVing families this March because the Good Sam 500 takes place when many students are on spring break and spring training for 15 Major League Baseball teams is in full swing at local ballparks.

Tickets to the Good Sam 500 are available by calling 866-408-7223 or visiting [www.phoenixraceway.com](http://www.phoenixraceway.com).

Find more Good Sam Club events at [www.goodsamclub.com/events](http://www.goodsamclub.com/events).



**GOOD SAM TURNS 50** In 1966, 23-year-old Pat Brantley saw a coupon in *Trail-R-News* for the just-launched Good Sam Club. He promptly joined and received a card with membership number 376. Half a century later, the Texas member is wondering if anyone still in the club has a lower number than his. Let us know at [50years@goodsamclub.com](mailto:50years@goodsamclub.com).



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# THE FAIREST OF THEM ALL

With a rich history, sweeping views, abundant wildlife and scenic beauty, Fairbanks, Alaska, may be the RV trip of a lifetime you've

**W**ith its breathtaking scenery, Alaska is high on the must-do list for many RVers. We go for the state's coastal riches, its nearly vertical fjords and its stunning mountains but, too often, we ignore interior Alaska. Central Alaska, including history-rich Fairbanks, may just be the unrecognized princess, the Cinderella that's the fairest of them all.

On a recent trip to Alaska, we flew into Anchorage and rented a 24-foot Class C from Alaska Motorhome Rentals. We took along "The Milepost: Alaska Travel Planner," our road bible, which gave us rest stops and waysides, places to gas up and interesting mile-by-mile information.

Our first stop was Denali National Park. The George Parks Highway (Alaska 3, aka "the Parks") is a 362-mile-long paved road that stretches between Anchorage and Fairbanks. It's the road that most travelers take to reach Denali National Park and the great Denali, at 20,310 feet, the highest mountain in North America. After enjoying Denali, we note that it's only a couple of hours north to Fairbanks.

We wake early to partially cloudy skies and head north on the Parks Highway. We're following the glacial Nenana River and, at milepost 215.8, cross the first impressively high Nenana River bridge. We gas up in the little berg of Healy, since fuel is 30 cents per gallon less expensive than elsewhere.

We pass 49th State Brewing Co. where the bus from the cult movie "Into the Wild" is on display. The film was about young Christopher McCandless, who in May 1992 set

up camp in an abandoned bus to experience living in the wild. When he became disillusioned with his adventure, he tried to hike out, but couldn't cross a deep and violent stream. He returned to the bus, mistakenly ate a poisoned plant and died alone in the wilderness. Today, people come to the brewery to see the movie bus and some even hike out to the original bus rusting in the wilderness.

Just outside Healy, we're stopped for 10 minutes by road construction and it takes another 15 bumping along a gravel road to be free of it. Since weather is harsh and summers are short, summer road construction is common in Alaska and it's a good idea to keep your itinerary flexible.

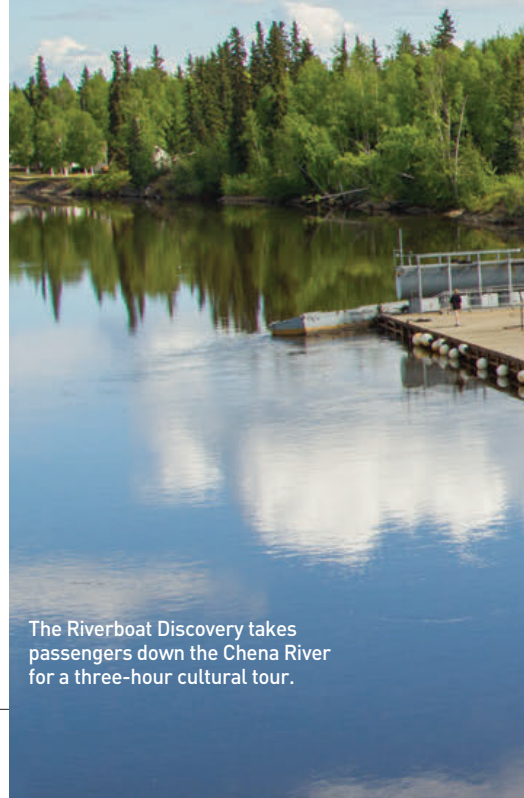


## Getting There

Fairbanks sits at the confluence of the Richardson, George Parks, Steese and Elliott highways. If traveling from Anchorage, Fairbanks is about 362 miles north on the Parks Highway.

All around us are dwarf spruce and aspen forests, their growth stunted by cold winters and permafrost. We cross the Nenana River again, stretched out and looking mild compared to the fast, frothy river a few miles back.

Occasional breaks in the trees give us sweeping views of broad, flat plains dotted with evergreens and lakes. This is wild country, with few businesses and little traffic. Our GPS routinely gets lost, suggesting turns



The Riverboat Discovery takes passengers down the Chena River for a three-hour cultural tour.

# EM ALL

world-class seafood,  
been looking for

that would take us hopelessly off course. Fortunately, we also carry a good map and a compass, and use our common sense.

We're only 24 miles outside of Fairbanks, passing through taiga (boreal forest) that covers most of inland Alaska. Taiga is the largest biome, making up 29 percent of the world's forest cover. In Alaska, the boreal forest consists of spruce (black and white), birch, alder, willow and poplar. Because of the



The scenery along the Parks Highway heading toward Fairbanks is stunning.

difficult winter weather, low precipitation and poor soil, these aren't the lushest or prettiest forests, but they support a wide range of wildlife from caribou to black bear.

At milepost 344, we pull off at the George Parks Monument turnout, a great place for expansive views of the

Tanana Valley, the Nenana River and, weather permitting, the grand Alaska Range. It gives us a glimmer of the vastness of this landscape.

## **Fairbanks: Alaska's Golden Heart**

We pull into Fairbanks and the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center





From far left: Otto, an Alaskan brown bear, stands more than 8 feet tall in an exhibit at the Museum of the North. Also at the museum is a display of bones from early mammals that shows how the area was once temperate.

where we're introduced to Fairbanks' colorful gold rush history. In 1902, prospector Felix Pedro struck gold about 16 miles from what is now Fairbanks. Entrepreneur and con man Capt. E.T. Barnette called the area "Fairbanks" to lure would-be prospectors to his area trading post. Today, Fairbanks, on the banks of the Chena River, is Alaska's second largest city.

At Morris Thompson Center, we pick up maps and brochures and enjoy the many displays, including "How We Live: The People and the Land," a motion-activated diorama about interior Alaska's weather, industry and native culture. We meet an Alaska Native beadmaker who allows us to try on an amazing \$30,000 coat made of skins of wolf, marten, wolverine and moose hide with intricate beadwork.

Next, we drive to the Riverboat Discovery, a family-owned attraction that makes twice-daily three-hour cruises in the summer down the Chena River. We board the Discovery II, a 1,000-passenger sternwheeler that was the last to haul freight in Alaska and we slowly edge down the muddy river listening to stories about the area's history. We watch a small pontoon plane show off river takeoffs and landings right next to our boat. Then, we pull alongside the home and kennel of the

The University of Alaska Museum of the North building is as impressive as its many exhibits.



late four-time Iditarod champion, Susan Butcher. Susan's husband, Dave Monson, talks about sled dogs and we watch a dog team tear around the yard pulling a wheeled sled. We also stop and tour a replica Athabascan Indian village where two young native guides tell us about curing hides, smoking salmon and activities of daily life in the Alaskan bush. As we sail homeward, we enjoy tasty smoked salmon snacks.

Then we motor to River's Edge RV Park (open May 15-September 15), our home-away-from-home for a few days. This 180-site, full-service RV park, the nicest we've found in Alaska, is right along the Chena River and offers 30- and 50-amp service, level gravel pull-through sites, a dump station, and laundry and shower house. Best of all, there's a riverside walking path that leads to Chena's Alaskan Grill, where we meet our friend, Bill, for a luscious meal of fettuccine loaded with Alaska salmon, scallops, king crab, fat shrimp and artichoke hearts.

We awake to blue skies and balmy weather and park in the generous lot at the University of Alaska Museum of the North. The gleaming, 84,000-square-foot white building with dramatic, curving forms that replicate shapes found on Alaska's coast, mountains and glaciers is almost as wonderful as the exhibits. There's a 3,550-pound jade boulder and an exhibition of Alaskan folk art. The Gallery of Alaska explores wildlife, including Otto, an 8-foot, 9-inch-tall Alaskan brown bear. The museum also tells the story



At the University of Alaska's Large Animal Research Station, Pee Wee, a 2-year-old musk ox, greets visitors.





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THE FAIREST OF **THEM ALL**

of early exploration and the state's natural history. There's a special exhibit that explores the 100th anniversary of the first people to climb Denali and we learn that friends and relatives of those first explorers are climbing the mountain as we read about the first climb.

We could spend hours at this world-class museum, but hunger catches up with us. We stop at a farmers market and pick up a couple of reindeer sausages on our way to the university's Large Animal Research Station. In the summer, it offers guided tours of its musk ox, caribou and reindeer enclosures. Amy, our tour guide, takes us on a walking tour and introduces us to Pee Wee, a 2-year-old musk ox, who happily munches on leaves she offers. Musk ox, one of the only true Arctic mammals, were driven to extinction in Alaska, but efforts by people at the research center are bringing them back.

In the evening, we head for



Above from left: A young Alaska Native shows off a fur coat during the Riverboat Discovery cultural tour. Cruisers pass by a fish wheel, which Alaska Natives use to scoop up salmon.

Pioneer Park, a fun, city-owned historical park that celebrates the area's historic highlights — river sternwheelers, early aviation and the gold rush era. They've built an entire town from old cabins and transplanted buildings. There is even a 1904 rail car that President Warren

G. Harding rode in when he drove the Golden Spike for the Alaska Railroad in 1923. In the old-time Palace Theatre, we enjoy a fun musical about the early days and then gorge on a surprisingly delicious all-you-can-eat salmon bake. RVers can boondock at Pioneer Park for \$12 per night.



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## Cranes and Antique Cars

After a restful evening beside the Chena River at River's Edge, we stop by Creamer's Field, a former dairy farm that's now a wildlife refuge. Owned by the state of Alaska, it's a wayside for migrating ducks, swans, geese and cranes. In August, they hold a festival to celebrate the nearly 100,000 sandhill cranes that descend on the fields during the month. As we stretch our legs on the walking paths and snap photos of dozens of cranes and other birds feeding on the grassy fields, it's hard to believe this amazing bird refuge is right in the middle of Fairbanks.

The final stop of our Fairbanks journey is Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum, a real gem even for people who aren't car buffs. The museum specializes in early and rare automobiles and all but three of these restored-to-show-room-condition beauties run. There's the only existing 1899 Hertel, reputedly the car that created the transition from horse and buggy to automobile; a 1903 Columbia, the earliest electric car; a 1910 Stanley Steamer that took 45 minutes to be ready to drive; even a "ladies car" that featured a backseat for the female driver that inspired the term "backseat driver."



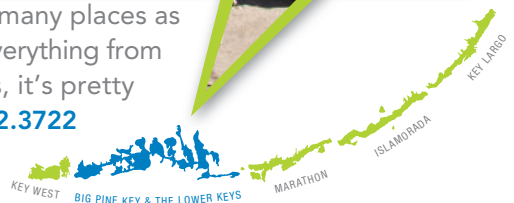
From top right: In Pioneer Park, a fun and historical park in Fairbanks, you can pan for real gold. A guest gears up for the delicious all-you-can-eat salmon bake at the park.



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Above from left: Most of the antique cars on display at the Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum have been restored to showroom quality. One of the perks of setting up camp at River's Edge RV Park is the riverside walking path that leads to Chena's Alaskan Grill.

Fountainhead has also coupled the cars with the fashions of each era. It displays the largest collection of vintage clothing and other artifacts in the West used during the time the cars were driven. One exhibit of feathered hats, all made with colorful feathers of endangered species of birds from around the world, makes us glad these feather toppers are no longer popular.

We expected to spend an hour at the Fountainhead Auto Museum, but the museum is so fascinating,

the hours slip by. Before we know it, it's early evening and we're starving. Following our friend, Bill's, recommendation, we stop at The Pump House restaurant. Housed in a former pump house that sucked river water into gold dredges in the early days, the restaurant is decorated with historic photos, gold mining equipment and other artifacts.

Tomorrow we'll head an hour or so out of town to explore Chena Hot Springs' natural mineral springs

and experience Chena Hot Springs Resort's amazing ice hotel and ice sculpture museum. But, tonight, we dive into The Pump House's creamy, thick seafood chowder and agree that Fairbanks is, indeed, the fairest of them all. **M**

### For More Information

#### Alaska Motorhome Rentals

800-323-5757, [www.bestofalaskatravel.com/alaska\\_motorhome\\_rentals/alaska\\_motorhome.htm](http://www.bestofalaskatravel.com/alaska_motorhome_rentals/alaska_motorhome.htm)

#### Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum

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

#### Pioneer Park

907-459-1087, [www.co.fairbanks.ak.us/pioneerpark](http://www.co.fairbanks.ak.us/pioneerpark)

#### Riverboat Discovery

866-479-6673, [riverboatdiscovery.com](http://riverboatdiscovery.com)

#### River's Edge RV Park

907-474-0286, [www.riversedge.net](http://www.riversedge.net)

#### Travel Alaska

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

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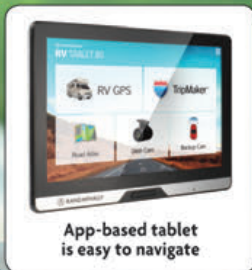
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# PRIMITIVE & PROPER

CAMPING ON PUBLIC LANDS IS A GREAT WAY TO GET BACK TO THE BASICS

**M**ost RVers love America's national and state parks. Few locations on earth can match the majestic beauty of these destination-worthy public lands but, unfortunately, the RVing opportunities within their boundaries are usually of the primitive variety. Plus, the majority of the campsites at these parks can only accommodate small- to medium-size motorhomes, meaning that if you want to stay at one of these campgrounds, you'll need to make some adjustments to your RVing routine. And in spite of the fact that many of us have become accustomed to the seemingly never-ending amenities and conveniences afforded

by privately owned campgrounds, all one needs to do is change their habits a small amount to make the occasional trip to a more primitive campsite possible.

We were tent campers for 25 years before we purchased our first motorhome. We enjoyed \$10-\$15 tent site prices in state and national parks and traveled without reservations, as we could usually find a primitive site with little trouble. Resort-style amenities would have been wasted on us, as our trips were often short and focused on hiking or sightseeing.

The transition to our motorhome allowed us to take longer trips and travel during heat, cold, rain and even snow, but all of our electric

gadgets and luxuries still needed power to perform their tasks. After a few stays in private campgrounds enjoying unlimited water and electricity, we decided we wanted to try to get back to our roots and return to camping in national and state parks. But could we really go back?

Camping in public parks without amenities is not exactly boondocking, in the narrow definition of the term, as there is easy access to a bathhouse (often cold water only), water and a dump station, but we wondered if these limited amenities would be enough to keep us comfortable. After a few experimental trips, we are happy to report that it is, indeed, possible.

Above: After setting up camp at a primitive site, the author and her dog enjoy relaxing by the motorhome.

We discovered that we can camp without services for four to five days with almost no major adjustments to our routine, or up to seven days with a few more adjustments. To the right are some tips that we found to help manage the use of the tanks and power supply, without making any costly changes to the motorhome.

Now that we've covered the basics, it's time to hit the road. According to the National Park Service, the No. 1 park for RV camping in 2014 was Yosemite, followed by Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Gulf Islands National Seashore, Great Smoky Mountains and Glacier National Park. Our favorite, Cape Hatteras National Seashore in North Carolina, ranked 29th in 2014. We like to set up camp on Ocracoke Island in one of the national seashore's four campgrounds. With its remote location (a free ferry trip is required) and its lack of amenities (no water or electric), sites are almost always available without a reservation (although reservations can be made at least three days in advance). The camping area is tucked behind the sand dunes and only 10 minutes from town. The ample beauty, along with nearby sightseeing, takes us back to our camping roots. Sites cost \$28 a night.

Camping at the beach is just one option in the national

## TIPS FOR 'ROUGHING' IT

- Mentally prepare for "roughing it," as there may be some trade-offs.
- Plan meals that use the grill and require minimal cleanup.
- Use paper plates and bowls — try to be thrifty and eco-conscious, and use as little as possible and use real silverware — it only requires a little bit of water to wash the day's utensils.
- Wash dishes only once a day — heat a little water on the stove while you eat dinner and you won't have to run your LP-gas water heater.
- When in hot places and where cold water is all that is available, shower in the afternoon, when that cool shower will feel great! Alternatively, when it's not so warm outside, consider a solar shower that you can use at the shower house, or use your LP-gas water heater and take a quick navy shower in your rig.
- Use that old coffee percolator you had from your tenting days or one of the varieties of other coffee mechanisms for the stovetop. Metal toasting racks are also available for LP-gas stovetops to keep breakfasts complete.
- Hand-washing can use a lot of water — do it at the bathhouse or keep wipes nearby.
- If you are really trying to conserve gray-water space, wash dishes in a basin that fits inside your sink and dump it in the bathhouse dish sink when finished.
- Use a pair of gallon water jugs for drinking and cooking water that you can fill at the bathhouse — keep them in rotation and fill them as needed when you are going to the bathhouse anyway.
- Run your generator once a day for an hour or two as needed — watch your battery levels! Plan strategically — use it in the afternoon, if air conditioning is needed or if you plan on using appliances or a blow dryer.
- Want to stay even longer? Consider a midvacation trip to the dump station and water-fill area. It really only takes a little time and effort and you'll be back to having fun in an hour at most.

park. Destinations include the sea, mountains, urban locations and forests. As you make your travel plans, consider the climate and temperatures from north to south. Every area has an ideal time when it's not too hot or too cold.

This is important if you plan on not using your generator for the majority of the time and want to stay comfortable.

Another one of our favorite parks is Prince William Forest Park in northern Virginia, 30 miles south of



Above from left: Grilling a simple meal for dinner requires only minimal cleanup. Skyland Resort, in Shenandoah National Park at mile 41.7, has a restaurant and gift store. The author heads for the showerhouse in Prince William Forest Park to reduce gray-water usage.



Big Meadow Campground in Shenandoah National Park doesn't have hookups, but it does have pull-through and deep back-in sites that can accommodate a motorhome and dinghy vehicle.

Washington, D.C. The park's Oak Ridge Campground has 100 dry-camping sites. The campground is shaded, but try to time your visit so you avoid midsummer when the area can be very hot and humid. Two loops accept reservations and one loop is for walk-in stays. We have always been able to get a walk-in site at this location, but for holidays, reservations are recommended. A great day can be spent touring the famous monuments in Washington, D.C., cycling a portion or all of the 18-mile Mount Vernon Trail that follows along the Potomac River and leads to George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate. And don't forget the beautiful park where you've parked your motorhome, offering ample space for some down time. Enjoy the 37 miles of hiking trails, biking, ranger-led programs or peaceful nature after


busy days of sightseeing. When a lot of time is spent away from the rig touring the local area, amenities are missed even less. Breakfast can be simple cereal or oatmeal on the stove and dinner can be on the grill.

Traveling in fall can be a real joy after a hot summer, and if mountains are what you crave, consider Shenandoah National Park during leaf-peeping season. Be sure to make reservations well in advance during this busy time of year. Temperatures will be cool, so again, plan ahead. Some extra clothing layers during the day will keep you comfortable and, with strategic generator use, a brief period of running the furnace and enjoying a movie can be enough to cast off the chill before bed. (Of course a warm campfire in the evening is the preferred method in such a

Surf fishing and relaxing on the beach are popular ways to spend the day on Ocracoke Island.



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### PRIMITIVE AND PROPER

beautiful setting, but be sure to run your generator in the morning to keep your batteries fully charged and maybe enjoy some coffee from your electric coffemaker.) Four campgrounds are available in this park — Mathews Arm (\$15/night) in the north, Big Meadows (\$20) and Lewis Mountain (\$15) in the central region and Loft Mountain (\$15) in the south. Hot showers can be enjoyed at Big Meadows Campground for a dollar, a relatively inexpensive convenience that will save some gray-water space. Hiking, ranger programs and exploration along Skyline Drive allow for your level of activity. Classic dining facilities provide relaxing meals in traditional lodges at Big Meadows and Skyland locations.

Being an RVer in the national parks allows for the best of both worlds — enjoying nature and all it has to offer — but also the benefit of moving inside when nature is offering a bit too much, like too many bugs, too much heat or too much rain. So, try following these three basic guidelines: Consider climate (both hot and cold) when selecting travel dates; plan ahead for easy food prep and cleanup; and keep your utilities in mind, daily.

After returning to our roots for some enjoyable primitive-camping adventures, we think the trade-off for the occasional stay in public sites at some of America's most beautiful locations is well worth a little planning and a few trips to the showerhouse. **M**

#### For More Information

**Cape Hatteras National Seashore Campgrounds**  
[www.nps.gov/caha/planyourvisit/campgrounds.htm](http://www.nps.gov/caha/planyourvisit/campgrounds.htm)

**Hatteras to Ocracoke Ferry Information**  
[www.ncdot.gov/travel/ferryroutes](http://www.ncdot.gov/travel/ferryroutes)

**National Park Campground Reservations**  
877-444-6777, [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov)

**Prince William Forest Park, Oak Ridge Campground**  
[www.nps.gov/prwi/planyourvisit/oakridge.htm](http://www.nps.gov/prwi/planyourvisit/oakridge.htm)

**Shenandoah National Park Campgrounds**  
[www.nps.gov/shen/planyourvisit/campgrounds.htm](http://www.nps.gov/shen/planyourvisit/campgrounds.htm)



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# SPACE SHUTTLES, SURFBOARDS & SEAFOOD

Having a blast on Florida's historic Space Coast

**G**rowing up in the Orlando-Winter Park area of central Florida during the 1950s and '60s was exciting and a little dangerous, or so some of us thought at the time. One evening in 1960, my family watched a television adaptation of the best-selling novel "Alas, Babylon," which dealt with the aftermath of a nuclear war in Florida. One of the first cities destroyed was Orlando. It was just fiction, but the Cold War around us was very real.

In October 1962, during the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, B-52 bombers flew low over my junior high school for an entire day. They were headed for McCoy Air Force Base, just south of Orlando, to prepare for

possible combat missions to Cuba. We practiced "duck and cover" drills under our desks almost every day.

Fifty miles directly east was the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, where missile- and rocket-launch

complexes were springing up like mushrooms. A year earlier, President John F. Kennedy had delivered his famous moon speech to Congress declaring that, "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the Earth." Following Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, the NASA Launch Operations Center was renamed the John F. Kennedy Space Center. The Space Race was on and, combined with the development of many different missile systems, "The Cape" was literally booming with activity.

It was a privilege to share in so much of it. My father was an engineer with the Glenn L. Martin Co. (today Lockheed-Martin Co.) and was a project engineer and chief test conductor for the Titan I intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) system. Our family spent a lot of time on the Canaveral National Seashore or on Cocoa Beach watching the spectacular launches of Titan, Atlas and other rockets during those early days of the missile program. But it was not all just rocket launches. There was the beach,





Opposite page: Visitors are nose-to-nose with the shuttle orbiter Atlantis, an incredible icon of American space travel. This page above: Cocoa Beach has a wide shoreline that's perfect for swimming, surfing, building sand castles or simply relaxing and soaking up the sun.

there was surfing and boating and fishing, and there were girls in bikinis. It was a remarkable time that came and went much too quickly. The final launch of the space shuttle Atlantis in July 2011 signaled the end of one era, but this area, known as Florida's Space Coast, continues on with great future expectations.

It was pure joy to recently spend several days revisiting some of the places that make this area historic and special. Our journey began when we arrived at Port Canaveral's Jetty Park Campground.

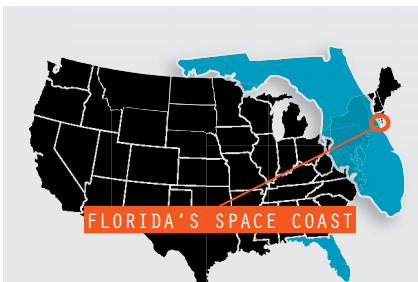
From Interstate 95, travel east for 15 miles on State Road 528 (Beachline Expressway-Bennett Causeway) to the port and follow the signs. Jetty Park is located at the end of King George Blvd. This campground, owned by Brevard

County, was remodeled several years ago and is today a very popular camping destination. There are 157 RV sites, many with full hookups, as well as eight cabins. You can walk or drive to the 4.5-acre beach overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. The 1,200-foot Malcolm E. McLouth Fishing Pier stretches along the port's channel. It is fully accessible and has cleaning tables and running water. Next to it is the remodeled two-story beach pavilion that contains a snack bar and a bait-and-tackle shop.

While we were on the pier, Disney Cruise Line's impressive cruise ship Dream sailed out of the port on a four-day excursion to the Bahamas. Port Canaveral is one of the busiest

cruise ports in the world, with more than 2.8 million cruise passengers passing through each year. Four cruise lines — Disney, Carnival, Norwegian and Royal Caribbean — offer memorable trips to the Bahamas, eastern, western and southern Caribbean, and other tropical destinations. Victory Casino Cruises also sails from the port if you are interested in a five-hour junket to nowhere. On the north side of the port, directly across from Jetty Park, is the Trident Turning Basin, where several Trident ballistic missile nuclear submarines are berthed.

Interestingly, the digging of the port, beginning in 1951, was to support the development of the Cape's missile test range. The lack of rail lines in the area impeded delivery of supplies and



## Getting There

The Space Coast is located 35 miles and about 45 minutes east of Orlando. Interstate 95 runs north and south through the area. The Beachline Expressway (State Route 528) connects from Orlando to the west.



Above from left: Many of the RV sites at Jetty Park Campground in Cape Canaveral have concrete pads; the park also has eight new cabins. Disney Cruise Line's magnificent cruise ship Dream sets sail for the Bahamas from Port Canaveral, one of the busiest cruise ports in the world.



From far left: The capsule "Kitty Hawk" from the Apollo 14 moon mission splashed down in the Pacific Ocean on Feb. 9, 1971, with astronauts Alan Shepard, Edgar Mitchell and Stuart Roosa. Space Shuttle astronauts traveled in style to the launch pad in this Astrovan, a converted 1983 Airstream Excella.

building materials to the base. The new port provided the means to deliver by sea the concrete, structural steel and other materials necessary for the rapid construction of multiple launch complexes and operations centers.

From Jetty Park it is less than 2 miles to "The Cove" at Port Canaveral, where a number of shops and restaurants are located, several overlooking the port. We had a late lunch at Milliken's Reef restaurant. The food and the view are both outstanding. Next door to Milliken's is Wild Ocean Seafood Market, which claims to have provided the freshest seafood in the area since 1940. We decided to get 5 pounds of the fresh whole white Canaveral shrimp

and several pounds of large scallops. The market's claim is legitimate, as the shrimp and scallops were delicious.

The next day, our first stop turned out to be a very special one. The 3,200-square-foot Air Force Space and Missile History Center is located at 100 Spaceport Way. This is on the north side of the port off Highway 401 just before the Cape's Gate 1 entrance. Free to the public, it contains a variety of exhibits and artifacts that detail all that went on here from the beginning in 1950 to the present. At its peak, the Cape had more than 40 separate launch complexes used by the Army, Navy, Air Force and NASA to develop a number of short-, medium- and long-range missile systems — and to send Americans into space. Alan Shepard was the first to go on May 5, 1961. It was a suborbital flight on a Redstone rocket from Launch Complex 5 as part of the Mercury program. Next was the Gemini program. On June 3, 1965, Ed White and Jim McDivitt rode a powerful Titan II rocket into Earth's orbit from Launch Complex 19. During the flight, White took the first walk in space by an American. And then, on July 16, 1969, Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins blasted off from Pad A, Launch Complex 39, on the most powerful heavy-lift rocket ever built, the Saturn V. Their destination — the moon! The Apollo 11 mission was the prize President Kennedy wanted but would tragically never live to see. At 10:56 p.m. EDT on July 20 the lunar module "Eagle" touched down on the surface of the moon and Neil Armstrong took, "One small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." An American was the first human to walk on the moon.

The History Center provides information on almost all of the launch complexes. The display on Launch Complex 15 is especially exciting. This is where the Martin Co. conducted its testing of the Titan I and Titan II missile systems. The display includes a photo of the launch team inside the blockhouse on launch day. Sure enough, there was my father sitting at the end of a test console. Seeing his broad shoulders and receding hairline were a dead giveaway. That was a real treat!

The History Center is open 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. on Saturday and noon-4 p.m. on Sunday. There

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The space shuttle's massive solid rocket boosters and external fuel tank serve as a gateway to the exhibit housing the orbiter Atlantis.





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Clockwise from above: The 52,000-square-foot Ron Jon Surf Shop in Cocoa Beach is the largest surfing store in the world. The beautiful new entrance sign at historic Cocoa Beach Pier welcomes visitors to its restaurants, bars and specialty shops. The pier hosts special events and surf competitions throughout the year.



is plenty of parking suitable for RVs.

Because of traffic and parking considerations, we used our dinghy vehicle for our next destinations. We traveled south for 5 miles on North Atlantic Avenue (Highway A1A) and turned left on Meade Avenue, which dead ends at the historic Cocoa Beach Pier overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. We were back at “The Pier” where so many of us grew up on the beach listening to Jan and Dean and The Beach Boys on our transistor radios, surfing on ankle busters while waiting for some bigger waves to roll in, checking out the girls and wishing summer would never end. I had returned to hallowed ground!

But like many treasured places, the passage of more than 50 years has changed the landscape quite a bit. Originally called the Canaveral Pier, the 800-foot-long pier was built just for fishing in 1962 for a mere \$150,000. There wasn’t much to it back then. It had a bait shop and a small grill and you could even drive your car on it. But the pier was destined to be much more than just a place to catch fish. It would become an enterprise housing new businesses, a surfer’s mecca and a bandstand for great rock ‘n’ roll music. In 1963 Ron DiMenna arrived in town with a truckload of beach merchandise

and plans to open his second surf shop (the first was in New Jersey). With just \$5,000 he opened Ron Jon Surf Shop on the pier, stocking it with Levi’s, Rainbow sandals, a rack of bikinis and baggies, and, of course, surfboards. He lived at the shop for the first two years until business started to improve, which it certainly did. Today, Ron Jon Surf Shop has multiple locations in five states. DiMenna moved his Cocoa Beach shop from the Pier many years ago to its current location on the corner of Highway A1A and State Road. 520. This 52,000-square-foot “shop” is the largest surfing store in the world.

Back then many of us bought our first boards from Ron Jon. They were heavy 10-footers that came from California but that changed later in the ‘60s with the short-board revolution. These surfboards were lightweight and less than 7 feet in length. And there were plenty of them. Cocoa Beach became known as the “Surfing Capital of the East Coast,” and the Pier was the center of it all.

Today the Cocoa Beach Pier draws more than a million visitors annually to bars and restaurants and several gift shops and boutiques. It also remains the site of annual surfing competitions and social events. Time-share

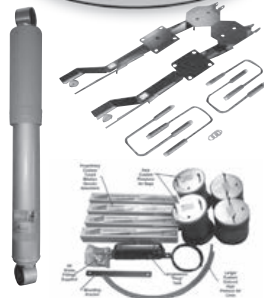
giant Westgate Resorts purchased the pier in 2014, and a \$4 million project is underway to make it a destination tourist attraction.

After spending time in Ron Jon Surf Shop we walked next door to the water sports building where the Florida Surf Museum is located. Founded in 1999, this museum highlights the surfing history and surfing culture of Florida. Featured exhibits include beautiful surfboards made along the Space Coast during the '70s and '80s and an entire wall of photos titled, "The Florida Women of the Waves." It provides information about the state's top women surfers through the years. There is no admission fee.

Next we headed west for 7 miles on State Road 520 (Merritt Island Causeway), passing over the Banana River, then Merritt Island and finally over the Indian River to our last destination of the day — Historic Cocoa Village. After coming off the bridge we made a left on Brevard Avenue and traveled one block to the village. Before we stopped, we detoured back a couple of blocks to the west bank of the Indian River to get a look at the old Cocoa fishing pier, which has been closed for many years. It was a long time ago, but it seems like yesterday that our family would pile into our 1963 Plymouth station wagon — loaded with fishing tackle, soft drinks and sandwiches — and spend the evening on this old pier. It is actually part of the old bridge that once crossed the Indian River to Merritt Island. There has recently been talk about reopening it. That would be nice!

Cocoa Village dates back to the 1860s. It was a little rundown back in the early 1960s but not so today. The streets are delightfully landscaped and a number of the historic buildings have been successfully restored. There are several dozen boutiques and gift shops, antique stores, art galleries, sidewalk cafes and good restaurants as well as the still-active 1924 Cocoa Village Playhouse. It is definitely a pleasant place to spend an afternoon or evening.

Our destination the following day was the Kennedy Space Center (KSC)



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Visitor Complex. We were in luck because this was a "launch day." It is 18 miles from Jetty Park to the Center. We traveled west 8 miles on State Road 528 (Beachline Expressway-Bennett Causeway) to State Road 3 (Courtenay Parkway) and then north for 10 miles on S.R. 3 to the NASA Parkway (State Road 405). The visitors center is on this road. RV parking is readily available for \$15; automobile parking is \$10.

This is truly a special attraction that provides a wonderful opportunity to learn firsthand about America's journey into space. After entering the center we boarded a bus for a 15-minute narrated trip to the Apollo/Saturn V Center. We traveled through part of the 140,000-acre Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge that is overlaid by the KSC. Because this is a restricted area, only 9 percent of the land has been developed. Bald eagles, American alligators, Florida panthers, eastern diamondback rattlesnakes, manatees and hundreds of species of birds inhabit this untouched wilderness.

When you enter the Apollo/Saturn V Center you are immediately standing under the largest rocket ever flown. At 363 feet in length and 33 feet in diameter, this three-stage Saturn V rocket is stunning to see for the first time. The center is loaded with displays and artifacts from all 11 of the manned Apollo missions including moon rocks, the Apollo 14 command module, an unused lunar module, a lunar rover replica and even the special Astrovan used to take the Apollo astronauts to the launch pad.

Outside on the lawn of the center a crowd was forming to watch the launch of an Atlas V rocket from historic Launch Pad 39A located 5 miles to the east. Carrying an Air Force Global Positioning System (GPS) satellite into orbit, the launch was the work of the United Launch Alliance, one of several private companies under contract with the government to put payloads into space. The launch was perfect and when the sound waves reached us from across the lagoon, the cheer from



The 1,200-foot-long Malcolm E. McLouth fishing pier stretches along the Port Canaveral channel next to Jetty Park. It is equipped with fish-cleaning tables and running water.

the crowd was equally as loud. It never fails to give me goosebumps to see and hear one of these incredible machines blast off.

We took the bus back to the KSC Visitor Center and got in line to see the newest exhibit, the space shuttle orbiter Atlantis. The solid rocket boosters and massive external fuel-tank components of the shuttle serve as a gateway to the exhibit's entrance. At launch the external fuel tank held 535,000 gallons of liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen. It was all burned in less than nine minutes.

Inside the exhibit a film on the origin and history of the shuttle program was shown on a giant screen. Following a countdown from T-minus 10 seconds, Atlantis was revealed. There were gasps, loud applause and even a few tears from some in the audience. This is truly a must-see exhibit!

The Atlantis orbiter is displayed on its side with the cargo bay doors open. After 33 missions, including the very last one for the shuttle program, and 126 million miles of space travel we were now nose-to-nose with this incredible American icon. In addition to the orbiter there are more than 60 other exhibits and simulators around and below Atlantis.

One day at the visitor complex is not enough as there are so many exhibits, IMAX theater presentations, tours and opportunities to interact with astronauts. But it was time for us to go.

Private companies, including United Launch Alliance and SpaceX,

are today handling most of the launch work at the Cape. Things have slowed down in the area considerably since the last shuttle mission of Atlantis more than four years ago. Many of the launch complexes from the '50s, '60s and '70s are gone. The launch pads were dismantled and the concrete blockhouses reduced to rubble and trucked away. However, the future of Florida's Space Coast is bright. The Kennedy Space Center is being transformed into a 21st-century multiuser spaceport capable of supporting launches of all sizes and classes. And then there is NASA's Orion program that will one day put Americans on Mars. Yes, I said Mars! **M**

### For More Information

**Air Force Space and Missile History Center**  
321-853-1919, [www.afspacemuseum.org/historycenter](http://www.afspacemuseum.org/historycenter)

**Cocoa Beach Pier**  
321-783-7549, [www.westgatedestinations.com/florida/cocoa-beach/cocoa-beach-pier](http://www.westgatedestinations.com/florida/cocoa-beach/cocoa-beach-pier)

**Historic Cocoa Village**  
321-631-9075, [www.visitcocoavillage.com](http://www.visitcocoavillage.com)

**Jetty Park Campground**  
321-783-7111, [www.jettyparkbeachandcampground.com](http://www.jettyparkbeachandcampground.com)

**Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex**  
866-737-5235, [www.kennedyspacecenter.com](http://www.kennedyspacecenter.com)

**Port Canaveral**  
321-783-7831 (Port Authority), [www.portcanaveral.com](http://www.portcanaveral.com)

**Ron Jon Surf Shop**  
321-799-8888, [www.ronjonsurfshop.com](http://www.ronjonsurfshop.com)

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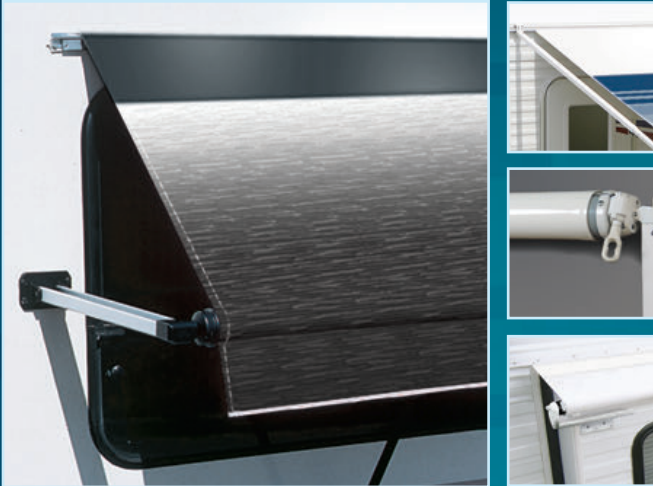


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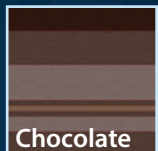
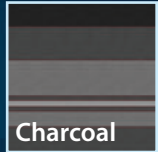
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## **I**n Jules Verne's classic

"Journey to the Center of the Earth," the story's heroes leave the planet's sunlit surface behind, only to enter an alien world where they must fight off giant insects and dodge underground lightning storms just to stay alive.

While it's true that they don't make stories like they used to, modern-day motorhome travelers can still have a similar adventure — minus the melodramatic perils, of course — on their

own voyage of subterranean discovery at south-central Kentucky's Mammoth Cave National Park.

## **More Than Just Big**

Perhaps the most difficult thing about visiting Mammoth Cave is simply comprehending the immense scope of this underground world. By any measure you can name, the adjective "mammoth" is something of an understatement.

Take length, for example. With more



Right: This flowstone is one of the sites along the Frozen Niagara Tour, which is short and doesn't require a lot of walking or climbing staircases. The tour is recommended for children, the elderly, those who have trouble walking long distances and people who do not like close spaces.

# THE DARK

at Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky



The Historic Tour leads visitors through Broadway, or the Main Cave. This 2-mile, two-hour tour has an elevation change of 300 feet.

than 400 miles of mapped passages, Mammoth Cave is the longest cave system in the world. In fact, it is longer than the combined lengths of the next two runners-up, Mexico's Sistema Sac Actun and South Dakota's Jewel Cave National Monument.

Mammoth Cave is equally impressive in terms of cave features known collectively as speleothems. Dripstone formations including stalactites, stalagmites and columns decorate the ceilings and floors in some parts of the cave, set off by flowstone formations known as draperies that cascade down the walls. In other areas, delicate soda straws form iciclelike decorations, while gypsum crystals sparkle like diamonds in the beam from the tour guide's flashlight.

All of these fanciful features

were formed over thousands of years by slow trickles of rainwater and snowmelt filtering down from the surface. On its journey the water dissolves the limestone bedrock and deposits it inside the cave as calcium carbonate, the material that keeps these formations growing even today.

Rushing water has also played an important role in Mammoth Cave. High stream flows have carved grand passageways and a number of large open rooms, the biggest of which — known as Mammoth Dome — rises more than 19 stories from floor to ceiling. Underground waterways with names like the River Styx and Echo River continue to carve the lower levels of the cave system, adding to this underground world's length and depth with every passing year.

## A Powerful Pull

While it may be tempting to think of Mammoth Cave as a relatively modern attraction, the truth is that it has been drawing people here for millennia.

As many as 4,000 years ago, prehistoric peoples used the cave for shelter. They also appear to



## Getting There

Mammoth Cave National Park is located in south-central Kentucky. From the north, take Interstate 65 to exit 53 and turn right on state Route 70/255. From the south, take I-65 to exit 48 and turn left onto state Route 255.



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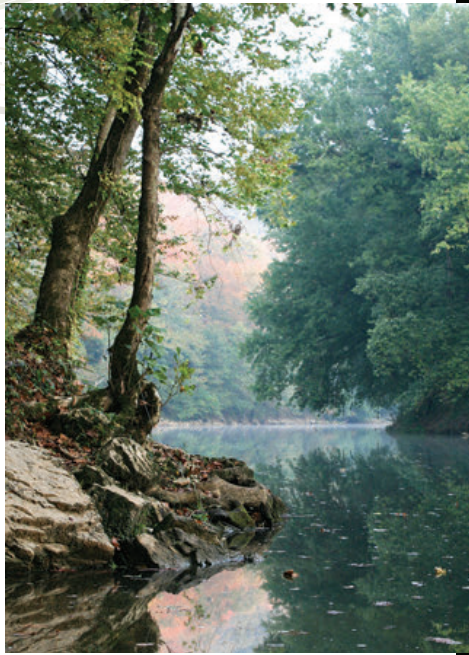
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Clockwise from above: The Green River flows 26 miles through Mammoth Cave National Park. Outside, visitors descend the stairs to the cave's entrance. Inside, the Mammoth Dome tower and stairs provide amazing views.

have mined its mineral content, as evidenced by the clothing, woven sandals and human bones they left behind in the cave. From these artifacts, archaeologists have determined that these individuals ventured as much as 6 miles into the cave using nothing but the light from fragile reed torches.

European Americans rediscovered the cave at the beginning of the 19th century. Mammoth Cave served as a source of the saltpeter needed to make gunpowder during the War of 1812, and later housed tuberculosis patients hoping the constant temperature and humidity would provide a cure for the disease.

Tours have been conducted here for 200 years, making this one of the oldest tourist attractions in the United States. Early visitors experienced the cave by lamplight and used the space for everything from concerts to wedding ceremonies.

Today more than 2 million people visit Mammoth Cave National Park each year and nearly 600,000 of them take tours of the cave. That works out to as many as 4,000 a day during the peak summer season, making

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advanced tour reservations a must.

## Something For Everyone

As far as those tours go, there are more than a dozen to choose from, though not all tours are offered all of the time.

This means there's an outing that's a good match for almost anyone's interest and fitness level. They include relatively easy jaunts like the Frozen Niagara Tour that visits one of the most heavily decorated parts of the cave. It covers a quarter-mile and has just a handful of stair steps, so it's suitable for families with younger children in tow.

While Mammoth Cave forgoes the multihued floodlights common to many commercial show caves, there are specialty tours here that do without electric lighting altogether. The 2½-hour Star Chamber Tour is a good example, as it equips visitors with old-fashioned candle lanterns for an experience not unlike that of the cave's earliest visitors.

For those who'd like a broader experience of Mammoth Cave, there are a number of tours that are considered "Moderate," like the popular Gothic Avenue Tour. On this two-hour excursion you can see one of the most historically significant cave passages, which includes the names of dozens of early tourists written on the ceiling in the soot from candle smoke.

Visitors who are up for a more challenging underground hike can sign up for several tours that fall into the "Difficult" category. Take the strenuous four-hour Grand Avenue Tour for example, which requires traversing 670 stair steps along with several steep hills.

A highlight of most every tour is when the guide flips a switch that plunges the entire group into a darkness so complete it's literally not possible to see your hand in front of your face. Suffice it to say it's an experience you'll remember long after you've returned to the sunny world above.

## Walk on the Wild Side

Let's face it: A big part of the allure of visiting Mammoth Cave National Park



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## A WALK IN THE DARK



is the chance to see an unfamiliar world you might not have known existed had you remained on the surface.

Take that idea to the next level and you have Mammoth Cave's two off-the-beaten-path tours — outings designed to give you a taste of what actual cavers do when they're exploring new and unmapped passages at the farthest known reaches of this 400-plus-mile cave system.

The Introduction to Caving Tour is a 3½-hour, 1-mile excursion that gives you a taste of the spelunker's world without a serious commitment. The tour is rated as Difficult, but is suitable for families with older kids and adventurous folks who are not sure they're ready for the park's other off-trail romp.

That would be the very strenuous six-hour, 5-mile Wild Cave Tour. Think of it as the Intro to Caving Tour on steroids, with lengthy belly crawls

### IF YOU GO

- Because many of the most popular tours can sell out quickly, be sure to make reservations early.
- When choosing a tour, don't overestimate your physical abilities or let others talk you into doing a tour you feel uncomfortable about.
- Temperatures in the cave often hover around 54 degrees Fahrenheit, so a light jacket or sweatshirt is recommended.
- Wear sturdy footwear with good tread (over-the-ankle lace-up boots are required for the Intro to Caving and Wild Cave tours).
- Do not touch cave formations, as the oils from your hand can damage them and/or impede their continued growth.
- The park's Mammoth Cave Campground has 105 dry-camping sites (on a first-come, first-served basis), a dump station and restrooms with showers.

through passages as tight as 9 inches and free-climbing up and down 10-foot ledges. Needless to say those who suffer from claustrophobia or a fear of

Mammoth Cave ranks as the longest known cave system, with more than 400 miles explored.

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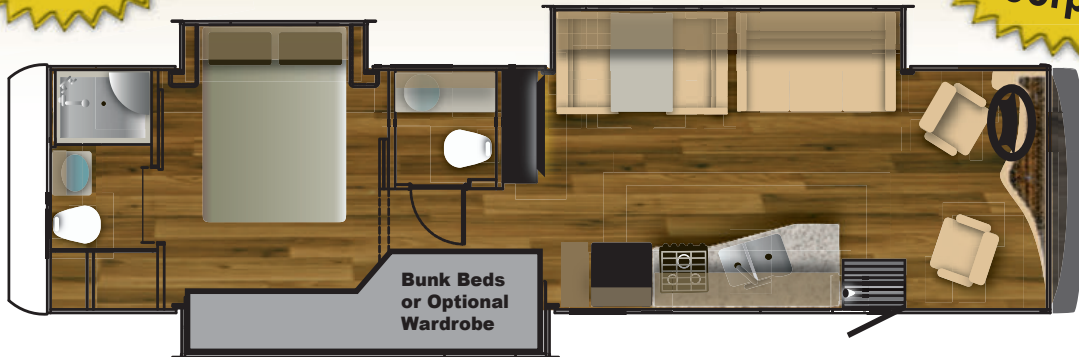


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# What's Your Sign?



When it comes to maneuvering into tight spaces, hand signals make for happy campers

**W**e pulled in front of our RV site and immediately understood why it was the only vacancy in the otherwise full North Carolina campground. It was a skinny sliver of sand and grass barely wider than our motorhome, bordered on the left by a large fifth-wheel that had every inch of its site occupied by tables, chairs, grills and assorted lawn ornaments. A telephone pole, access road, street sign and utilities crowded the right side, and a wide, scruffy pine took up the rear quarter. Our neighbor came out, eyeing his pink flamingoes a little nervously as I slid into the driver's seat. My husband, Eric, stood beside the RV and began giving directions as he always does — wordlessly, using hand signals. As I maneuvered slowly, several more couples came out to watch, apparently captivated by the sight of a silent husband and wife. In spite of having an audience, we managed to back in on our first try, and within a few minutes our 30-foot Winnebago Minnie Winnie was nestled snugly between obstacles. As I turned off the engine, I actually heard a smattering of applause.

"See, Harry," I heard one woman say, "I told you that you don't have to yell all of the time!"

Our docking technique was not always so harmonious. Before we became RV enthusiasts, we were boaters, and our sailing trips invariably began and ended with hurt feelings. Wind, waves and engine noise conspired to make conversation difficult, and raised voices and miscommunication usually resulted. We finally hit on the concept of hand signals, an epiphany that saved my

husband from spending his nights sleeping on the sofa. When we bought our motorhome two years ago, we

quickly realized that the same kind of scenario was as likely to play out on our "land yacht" as it had on our sailboat.

Many of the campgrounds we visited were designed decades ago with smaller RVs in mind, and state and national parks sites, while more secluded, are often overgrown. This made parking our motorhome every bit as challenging as docking a boat between narrow posts. And while waves and wind may not be a factor in backing a motorhome onto a pad, engine noise, blind spots and distractions are. Modern dashboards often contain myriad useful but noisy electronics, and we often forget that we can turn them off. Have you ever tried backing your motorhome



This is the signal to back up just a foot — important in tight spaces and when leveling the motorhome.

Signaling the shift to "park" so that leveling blocks can be safely placed.

down a windy loop with your spouse shouting directions, the radio playing and the GPS insistently informing you that you need to make a U-turn? And do you remember the moment when you realized that all of it — including your muttered mutinous comments — was captured for posterity on the dashboard webcam? Eliminating unnecessary noise — both electronic and human — makes maneuvering a big rig much less stressful. In addition to making it a habit to turn off all of our toys, we developed a set of hand signals specifically for getting our Winnebago in and out of every possible situation.

We began with the basics. There are three main pieces of information the driver needs to know when his or her visibility is limited or insufficient



to maneuver without assistance: whether to go forward or to reverse, right or left, and how far. In our case, I usually take the wheel and my husband provides directions, but

it can work either way — the only essential here is that one person is giving directions and one person is following them. As long as nothing is dented in the process, differences

Directions for turning the wheel left.



Directions for turning right.



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WHAT'S YOUR SIGN?



Happy campers at the end of the day!

of opinion on technique should be saved for discussion over cocktails, when they may be a little easier to swallow.

The guide should position himself where he can be clearly seen by the driver, and should first signal for forward or reverse. To designate a turn, point right or left with one hand to indicate direction, and make a circular motion with the other hand to indicate how far the driver should turn the wheel. To indicate that the driver should straighten the wheel, place both hands straight up and parallel to each other. A single raised palm is, of course, the universal signal for STOP!

Our motorhome is not self-leveling, and since we have seldom found the "flat, level site" that was advertised in the campground brochure, it usually must be put up on blocks. For this maneuver, the distance that the tires need to move is designated by the space between the guide's hands, with the understanding that the brake

must be applied at the precise moment when the two hands come together. The same signaling technique is used when backing into a site with obstructions or a steep drop-off at the rear. We also have a signal for putting the motorhome in park and another for turning off the engine, and it is only when that final signal is given that conversation resumes.

If you are considering making the switch to silent communication, you may want to modify these hand signals or create a set of your own. As long as the gestures you use are agreed upon by the driver and guide and are easily recognizable in a mirror or at a distance, they will work. And while you may occasionally be tempted to throw in a gesture that is less than appropriate, remember that the goal of using hand signals is to preserve both your motorhome and your relationship. With a little practice, and a lot less shouting, you can end each day as happy campers. **M**



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# Quite an Endeavor

Holiday Rambler's 40FX is designed for couples who like to spread out and take advantage of creature comforts

By Bob Livingston

**T**he Holiday Rambler logo is one of the oldest, most recognized and respected monikers in the RV industry. For years, the company has wowed owners with quality coaches — stemming from its original towable division — and generally became a household name among RV fraternity brothers and sisters. After all, how many motorhome makers can claim they were once owned and operated by a company that built Harley-Davidson motorcycles? Holiday Rambler's colorful history faded away while under the auspices of Monaco when the company fell into hard times during the economic crunch that hit the country and RV industry. And now the

Holiday Rambler division of the newly named REV RV Group (formerly Allied Recreation Group), the company that also took over the Fleetwood brand, is on its way to rebuilding its reputation as a world-class diesel-pusher motorhome. We spent time in a 2016 Endeavor FX40 and the takeaway was pretty positive.

Right from the get-go we noticed that the motorhome was assembled with more finesse than before. Fit and finish were good and the décor was upscale and tasteful. While we were very comfortable with the company's choices of interior materials, in the few months since we lived in the Endeavor, the interior has been further upgraded with a number of very pleasant

touches. We like the new look even better.

The layout of the 40FX is galley-centric up front, although the seating, dining and entertainment components in the general area help make the floorplan more versatile. It's the kind of floorplan that takes some time to grow on you. The galley shares the larger of the two slideouts on the patio side and is positioned between a dual-recliner couch on one end and the residential refrigerator, located behind the front passenger seat, on the other. Since the dinette and the main couch are mounted in the curbside slide across from the galley, the area in the front of the motorhome is open and roomy. That's a good benefit and we liked the spaciousness up front, but thought the refrigerator interrupted the visual continuity of the seating area, especially when the cockpit seats were swiveled toward the living area. Obviously, floorplans are subjective, and that's why Holiday Rambler offers

**ABOVE:** Dark-tinted windows, aluminum wheels and full-body paint contribute to a bold exterior appearance.



**BELOW:** Stainless-steel appliances and well-finished cabinetry support the galley counter; faux brick backsplash and window are nice touches. Opposing seating in living area is comfortable, but not optimum for viewing the 50-inch LED TV.



two other configurations in the 40-foot category.

Interestingly, we found the 40FX floorplan much more to our liking after a few days. Preparing meals in the galley was uneventful (in a good way) and the striking cherry-glazed cabinetry contrasted nicely with the stainless-steel appliances and light-color solid-surface countertop. There's not an extraordinary amount of space to create complicated meals, but the generous selection of cabinets and drawers is well-organized and capable of absorbing a large assortment of foodstuffs. There are a number of nice touches that make the galley area even more functional, while adding to the visual aesthetics. The brick-backsplash treatment behind the stove and the window between the deep overhead

cabinets and countertop were very appealing. Large, dual stainless-steel sinks and the quality high-rise faucet (with sprayer) made cleanup a breeze. And after a day or two of acclimation, we really enjoyed the ease of popping in the front entry and pulling out a cold one from the nearby refrigerator.

When it comes time for eating or working on a computer, the dinette works perfectly. The expandable table is attached to a large hutch, which is a great catchall for serving dishes or office paraphernalia. Pulling out the table is effortless, and it's served comfortably by two chairs when in the retracted position; two additional chairs are stored in the bedroom closet. Large windows and LED fixtures supply plenty of light for any project or dining experience. And you can stash a lot of stuff in the overhead cabinets.

Sharing the slideout is the leatherette couch in a solid-brown color that contrasts nicely against the lighter color porcelain-tile floor, which is carried throughout the interior but stops at the rear bedroom. The 90-inch sofa is big and comfy, and it can be transformed into a bed with an air mattress when company stays over. The cushions are supportive while allowing for easy relaxing and the upholstery matches the opposing dual-

recliner couch. For lounging, reading or visiting with guests, these couches are comfortable, but they are not that conducive for watching TV. That's sort of ironic, since there's a wonderful 50-inch TV built into a beautiful cabinet that doubles as the wall for the bathroom and divider for the side hallway. There's really no way to watch this LED TV from the couches without craning your neck, and it's the same situation for watching the optional TV mounted above the cockpit seats. The only way to watch comfortably is to position the dinette chairs in the center of the floor or lay down on the couches. On the upside, the TV is connected to a home-theater system for an enhanced audio/visual experience.

Having a streetside hallway creates a distinct separation between the front and rear portions of the interior. Before reaching the rear bedroom you'll pass the only bathroom. Inside this area, the components that fill the space are perfectly dimensioned. The garden shower with its curved glass doors has plenty of room to wash without crashing into the molded-wall surround and there are good accommodations for holding large bottles of soap and shampoo. A built-in seat adds to the comfort and the gigantic round skylight admits a great amount of ambient light. We struggled a bit with



Corner shower with huge skylight is roomy and efficient. Lavatory counter has plenty of room for toiletries while the linen closet holds a large assortment of bath items.



From above: Dining table can be pulled out and two chairs added to accommodate four people. Slide-out storage tray facilitates access to front compartment.

**WHAT'S HOT**

Handsome, roomy cabinetry; porcelain floor, dining table and hutch; right-size bathroom

**WHAT'S NOT**

Awkward TV viewing angles from couch and recliners; limited space around bed; heavy exterior graphics



water pressure to the shower wand and ended up using the demand pump to boost the water flow when hooked up, but that's something that can usually be rectified at the dealer level. We would, however, opt for a higher-quality mixer valve.

There's plenty of room around the oval lavatory sink and the cabinets above and below are large and can handle a whole lot of toiletry supplies. On the opposite wall is the roomy linen closet and porcelain toilet. In a nutshell, the bathroom here is right-sized for a motorhome of this caliber and length.

Moving into the bedroom, the flooring transitions from porcelain to carpet. Here, the king-size bed occupies most of the space that's expanded by the slideout. The 72-by-80-inch premium memory foam mattress promotes sound sleeping, and the surrounding cabinets and windows are positioned symmetrically to make the occupants feel good about lounging in the bedroom. Smallish shelves on both sides of the bed give way to the large mattress, so placing

common bedtime items close by is really out of the question. Reading is supported by excellent lighting, and the TV mounted on the dresser shelf can be viewed easily from bed. Within this dresser is a good assortment of cabinets and drawers for clothes.

An optional stackable washer/dryer is mounted behind louvered doors on the back wall, next to the wardrobe closet. Mirrored sliding doors add visual depth to the bedroom and allow access to a generous amount of space for hang-ups, shoes and other bulky items.

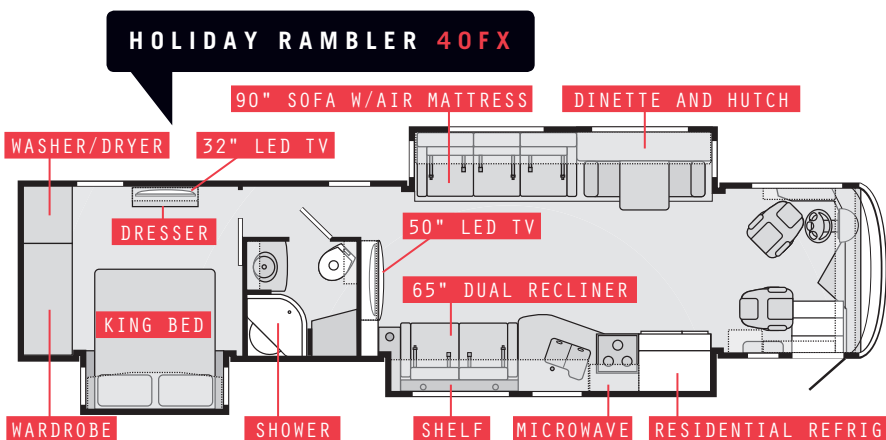
While the bedroom, like the bathroom, seems to be the right size, the use of a king bed restricts walk-around space. The space between the closet and mattress is very limited and foot traffic is further impeded by a carpeted extrusion that's attached to the floor. It's still possible to make the bed, but it does take some gymnastics to get it done.

When outfitting a 40-foot motorhome in this price range, the support systems that make the interior livable are important to potential buyers. In this department

the planners and designers did not disappoint. We can attest to the efficiency of the three roof air conditioners [one is optional] while living in hot, humid conditions. An 8-kW generator handles power when hookups aren't available, and the robust battery bank keeps the inverter powered for running the refrigerator while on the road, or for a while when hookups are not available. Switches are clearly marked and there's an abundant assortment of LED lighting throughout the interior. The optional central-vacuum system makes cleanup a breeze.

Outside, the City Loft full-body paint scheme is appealing but has a few too many swirls and stripes for our tastes. It definitely looks like a higher-end product, especially with the use of the polished wheels, dark-tinted windows and the extensive array of patio awnings, slideout toppers and window awnings.

All the storage and utility compartments are accessed via side-hinged doors with slam latches and are lighted. The slide-out tray mounted in one of the front pass-through compartments made access to stored items painless, and there's even a gravity-feed water filler concealed behind one of the doors — something that's not too common these days and can be sorely missed by those of us who like to spend time in primitive locations.





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## Chassis

Model	Roadmaster B
Engine	Cummins ISL9
SAE hp	380 @ 2,000 rpm
Torque	1,150 lb-ft @ 1,400 rpm
Transmission	Allison 3000MH
Axle ratio	4.78:1
Front tires	275/70R22.5
Rear tires	275/70R22.5
Wheelbase	276"
Brakes	Front disc/rear drum air/ABS
Suspension	Front Neway air/rear V-Ride air
Fuel cap	100 gal
Fuel economy	8.3 mpg
Warranty	3 years/50,000 miles

## Coach

Exterior length	41' 4"
Exterior width	8' 6"
Exterior height	12' 10" with A/C
Interior width	8' 0"
Interior height	7'
Construction	Aluminum walls, floor, roof structure, block-foam insulation, fiberglass exterior, Tuff-Roof
Freshwater cap	100 gal
Black-water cap	50 gal
Gray-water cap	75 gal
Water-heater cap	10 gal
LP-gas cap	38.7 gal
Air conditioner (3; one optional)	15,000 Btu
Furnace (2)	20,000/30,000 Btu
Refrigerator	22 cu-ft residential
Inverter/charger	2,800 watts/125 amps
Batteries (2) 12-volt chassis, (6) 6-volt coach	
AC generator	8 kW
MSRP	\$273,215
MSRP as tested	\$283,940
Warranty	12 months/24,000 mile basic; 5 years/50,000 mile structure

## Wet Weight

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

Front axle	10,220 lbs
Rear axle	20,000 lbs
Total	30,220 lbs.

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GVWR/GCWR	33,400/43,400 lbs
ROCCC	3,180 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)



King-size mattress is comfortable but limits access to rear wardrobe. Stacked washer/dryer fit neatly in closet with louvered doors.

Other compartment doors provide easy access to the battery banks, inverter and utility center. All the valves and connections in the utility center are clearly marked, which neutralizes the potential for making mistakes when hooking up hoses for the city water and holding-tank rinse, for example. A cleanup spigot can be neatly tucked into its storage space and there's even a dedicated location of the whole-house water filter, which is installed by the factory. The 50-amp umbilical cord is rolled on a power reel in a separate compartment, and the 120-volt AC electrical system is surge-protected.

Excellent storage capacity is attributed to the configuration of the chassis, which is built on the proprietary Roadmaster B platform. The rail system is modified using a Freightliner XCM chassis as the base and accommodations are made for the larger compartments, big holding tanks and integrated raceway for easier access to the wiring and plumbing. A Neway air ride in front and a V-Ride air suspension system in the rear smooth out the bumps, and power is provided by a 380-horsepower Cummins ISL9 diesel.

Overall, the driving experience was pleasant and is testament to three major features: the performance of the Freightliner underpinnings; the integrity of the aluminum structure

that connects the walls, floor and roof; and the well laid out cockpit. Handling was predictable and noise levels inside the motorhome were controlled by tight fit-and-finish qualities. Only the usual rattles from the stove and microwave and a little wind noise broke the relative silence.

Drivers will find the dashboard clean and the controls ergonomically placed. There's really nothing fancy here, but the judicious use of gauges and controls — including those in the steering wheel — help shorten the time needed for driver acclimation. Visibility is good and the side/rear cameras and navigation screen keep the driver informed. Like the driver, the co-pilot will enjoy the comfort of a power captain's chair and the retractable floor keeps the passenger's feet from dangling.

The Holiday Rambler Endeavor has a lot going for it. Long stints behind the wheel are comfortable, and getting to one's destination is only half the fun. The other half of the fun belongs to the interior appointments and supportive systems that make this motorhome live up to its expectations, and of course, its long history as a major figure in the RV industry. **M**

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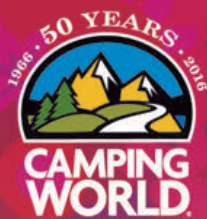


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By Owen Mitchell

# SUMOSPINGS

Installing closed-cell polyurethane supplemental springs results in a smoother and quieter ride for the Ford F53 chassis

**M**anufacturers of gasoline-powered Class A motorhomes have a tough assignment: Build nice, comfortable living quarters on a chassis that, for cost reasons, shares suspension componentry found on commercial-truck platforms equipped with four stacks of steel leaf springs — and then make it ride and handle well.

It's a tall order. Diesel-pusher coaches with full air-bag suspensions may approach luxury road manners, but motorhomes built on chassis equipped with steel leaf springs often need help.

While some owners of Ford F53-based motorhomes may be satisfied, others wish for a smoother ride on rough pavement, and more control of body roll (lean) on curves with the larger, taller profiles — especially if they are loaded to the

gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) or beyond. Front and rear stabilizer (sway) bars are helpful with the body-roll issue, but smoothing out the rough ride has been largely out of reach despite the use of excellent Bilstein shock absorbers.

SuperSprings International of Carpinteria, California, has brought supplemental springs made of closed-cell polyurethane to the RV aftermarket, and they're relatively easy to install. Products made of open-cell and closed-cell polyurethane are everywhere — sealants, coatings, egg crates,

SumoSprings were installed on an Itasca built on a 2007 Ford F53 chassis that exhibited body roll after loading the high-profile motorhome to capacity. After the installation, improvements in ride quality and body roll were noticeable.





insulation, car bumpers, seat cushions and thousands more, but using this material for cushioning the ride of Ford's F53 chassis is a game changer.

In the SumoSprings application, varying amounts of nitrogen gas are combined with closed-cell polyurethane to create different compression rates. The outcome is progressive, supplementary springs with a parabolic rate; stiffness that begins moderately as load is added, then grows more rapidly when the springs are compressed by changes in the road surface.

Our installation involved a 2008 Itasca Sunrise (2007 Ford F53 chassis with 22,000-pound GVWR) and the SumoSprings Maxim, the highest-rated spring in the line. The kit part numbers are SSF-180-40-1 front (blue) and SSR-180-54-1 rear (yellow). The springs are bolted onto the motorhome frame and axles, centered above the stock leaf springs.

In preparation for the installation, road height was measured front and rear, chocks were placed fore and aft of the tires, and the motorhome was elevated one end at a time via its onboard hydraulic jacks to provide sufficient access to the frame and axle without having to remove the tires. Heavy-duty jack stands were placed under the frame for safety before the work was started.

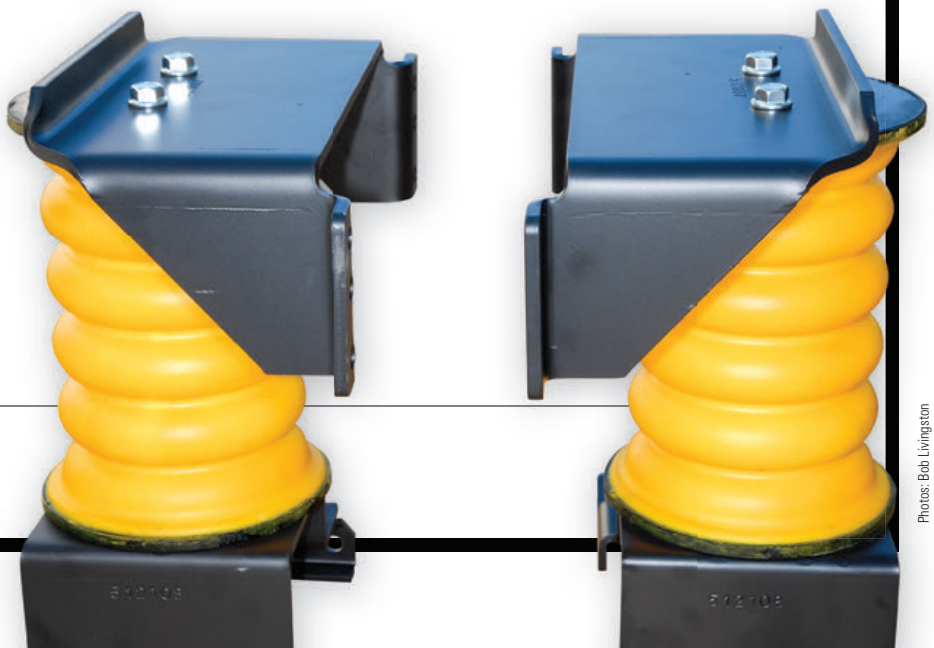
The SumoSprings kits include brackets for attachment to the chassis frame and to the axles. The installation required drilling 3/8-inch holes in the frame above the axles, then assembling the necessary brackets with bolts/nuts (supplied) to install the upper and lower brackets on each side, front and rear. The brackets are bolted to the top and bottom of the SumoSprings, and the bottom bracket is bolted to the stock steel spring stack just above and in front of the axle.

The installation involves working in close quarters between the frame

Maxim SumoSprings have the highest rating, which was necessary for the test F53 chassis with a 22,000-pound GVWR. Yellow is used in the rear; blue springs are installed up front.



[1] Brackets are bolted to the polyurethane springs before mounting on the motorhome's frame and leaf springs. [2] Existing holes in the frame were used initially to bolt the rear springs into place tightly so the additional holes in the frame could be drilled.





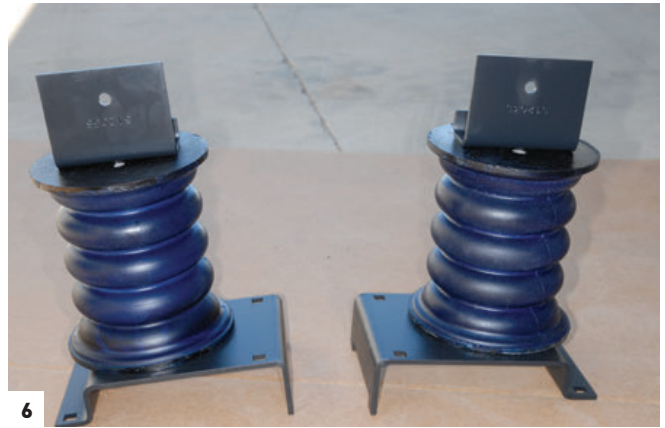
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5



6

[3] The rear springs can be installed without removing the wheels/tires, but working space is limited. An angle-head cordless tool is used to drill the necessary holes through the bracket, which is used as a template. [4] It takes two people to bolt the SumoSprings in place. The job is not especially difficult, but working in close quarters makes it hard to reach both sides of the frame. Once installed, there's plenty of clearance between the new springs and tires. [5] Long bolts are used to secure the bottom bracket to the top of the rear spring pack. A deep socket and impact driver will make this process easier, but it can be done with a ratchet wrench. [6] Once the brackets are in place, the blue springs are ready to be installed in the front.

and tires, as well as a sharp drill bit to get through the hardened-steel frame.

After lowering the motorhome, road height was remeasured, showing that the SumoSprings had created an additional inch of road height front and rear due to partial compression under static load (motorhome parked).

Prior to the installation, the test motorhome was relatively level, not riding low on its suspension, and it didn't need the additional road height created by the SumoSprings. However, partial compression of the springs without any dynamic

loading allowed them to stabilize the ride and handling even on slightly rough pavement.

For a good before-and-after road test, we chose a couple of contrasting routes: the first, a two-lane asphalt road with moderate curves, undulations and patches in the pavement, along with strong crosswinds, and the second, a 150-mile highway that included periodic stretches of broken pavement and rough repairs from having been subjected to heavy commercial truck traffic — a road that we have driven on many times.

While driving the first section



7



8

[7] Front stock spring bumpers are removed from the frame before starting the process of installing the SumoSprings. [8] Holes are drilled in the frame to accommodate the top brackets of the SumoSprings. Location of the holes to be drilled must be carefully determined by using the top bracket as a template.

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[9] Top spring bracket is bolted to the frame, which can take some finesse, depending on the year of the chassis. Here, access was pretty good, but two people made the process easier. [10] Bottom bracket is bolted to the front spring pack using the same style long bolts and hardware. Once the bolts are tightened, the motorhome is ready to roll.

with the SumoSprings in place, the effect of the springs was apparent right from the start. Ride quality was noticeably more quiet and controlled, both in terms of road shock felt by driver and passenger as well as the decibel level of squeaks and rattles. We felt less lean to one side or the other (body roll) on curves taken at highway speeds and in driveways, and more predictable handling in strong crosswinds.

On the second test route, our “before” test run had produced a rough and noisy experience on the

rougher stretches of this highway. With the SumoSprings in place, it was still rough and noisy, although less so. While the SumoSprings cannot transform the ride and handling of a Ford F53-based motorhome into that of an air-bag-equipped diesel-pusher coach, they were capable in this situation of creating a very noticeable — and welcome — improvement in ride quality and stability.

The springs are available for a variety of Class A, B and C motorhomes; Tiffin Motorhomes of

Red Bay, Alabama, offers SumoSprings as an option on the company’s gas-oline-powered motorhomes.

The spring kits for the F53 chassis are listed at \$589.50 front and \$625.50 rear; installation by a competent mechanic can be expected to take three to four hours. The product’s limited warranty covers 3 years. **M**

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# CLEAN UP YOUR ACT!



A sparkling motorhome, inside and out, protects your investment while showing pride of ownership

**O**f all the things that most mothers (and fathers) harp on while we're growing up, keeping our room clean has to be near the top of the list. And it should be. Your immediate surroundings are often a direct reflection of your attitude and disposition, and a filthy room with dirty dishes, an unmade bed and empty pizza boxes can speak volumes about one's true colors.

The same is true for your motorhome. Just because it stays outside doesn't necessarily mean it should look like it came from a monthlong trek through the Dust Bowl. A little dirt here and there is fine from time to time, but if left unchecked, that unsightly mess can also break down the fiberglass, chrome, aluminum, rubber and other materials that comprise the exterior of your rig. And that's not even mentioning the interior.

So, whether you're waking up your motorhome from a long winter's nap or just continuing your perennial RVing season, there really is no time like the spring to give your ride a thorough scrubbing, inside and out. Not only will it keep things looking good, but it will extend the life of the



Dometic's RV Roof Cleaner and Sealer products help prevent drying, cracking and oxidation. Available separately or as a bundle, the all-weather formulas are designed to offer protection from the elements.

components and even help with resale value when you're looking to trade up.

I generally begin the cleanup process with the exterior (you could go either way). The first thing you need to do is get the large chunks of grit and grime off the exterior. Although there are a few "waterless" washes available for when you're at a campground that doesn't allow traditional RV hose-downs, I've found the best way is in the driveway with an old reliable garden hose. Though this classic method of simply spraying the exterior remains effective, companies like Thetford, Camco and Carrand all offer devices that can be attached to the hose for additional washing power (with the added benefit of a cleaning



◀ Adding a wash system, such as the Suds-N-Spray, to your garden hose is a great way to ensure your motorhome gets cleaner, faster. The rotating tip works to gently lift away debris.

solution in the mix).

If it's a sunny day, try to find a shady area that won't promote quick drying. Wear proper shoes (as you'll likely need to scale a ladder to access the roof) and rinse the exterior, beginning with the roof so that any debris trickling down the side walls will then be rinsed away by subsequent spray-downs.

Once the majority of the gunk has been washed away, be certain the roof is suitable for walking and proceed with extreme caution. It's also a good idea to have a helper standing by, just in case. When it comes to scrubbing the roof, there's little substitute for elbow grease. Using a brush (or other cleaning tool) like the ones from Camco, Rain-X or Carrand, is a must. You could also opt for an all-in-one kit, such as the Love Bug Eraser RV Roof Cleaning Kit. And depending on the type of roof (fiberglass, TPO or rubber), there's a cleaner available designed for this type of use. Because the roof is so exposed to the elements, you'd be surprised at the amount of



Rubber roofs can have an adverse reaction to some detergents and cleaners; it's always best to select a cleaner that's designed specifically for this purpose.

broadcast antennas and air conditioners. Now is a good time to scrape and reseal, if necessary.

Once the roof is bright and shiny, hose down the exterior again, and it's time for another tried-and-true

exterior. There is no shortage of RV-specific washes and waxes on the market, including those from Dometic, Protect All, Thetford, Voom!, Wallex, et al. And, when using a cleaning product for the first time, be sure to try it out

## WHEN IT COMES TO SCRUBBING THE ROOF, THERE'S LITTLE SUBSTITUTE FOR ELBOW GREASE.

soil, leaves, bugs and bird droppings that have taken up residence just above your head. Take your time, and be sure to check the sealant condition around roof vents, satellite and

method: the old soap and bucket. But not just any soap, as many of the products available contain detergents that can strip any wax you've previously applied, or even harm the



Above left: Love Bug Eraser products are reusable and increase cleaning efficiency of the roof and side walls. Exterior cleaning kits are available from the company. Using a cleaner and wax combination is a good way to save time without sacrificing too much in terms of overall shine.





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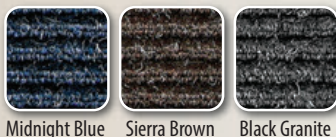
## Outrigger RV Step Rugs

- Micro-ribbed texture provides better traction
- Easy to install, fitting manual and electric steps
- Easy-to-clean UV-protected olefin for all-weather durability



## Ruggids RV Step Rugs

- Deep treads trap dirt at the door
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- Heavy-duty UV-protected olefin for all-weather durability



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CLEAN UP YOUR ACT!



From above: Black-streak cleaner, like this one from Protect All, helps combat those unsightly streaks that run down the sides of the coach. There is also a variety of cleaners specifically formulated for awning materials.



on a small, inconspicuous area of the exterior to make sure it won't harm the skin. Buckets are available from many RV cleaning suppliers, and Camco makes a collapsible bucket that's great for space saving.

The best method of this phase of the washing process is to do one section at a time (front, left, right, back), working from top to bottom. Motorhomes are big, and applying a washing solution to the whole motorhome before rinsing is a surefire recipe for streaks and water spots, dull finishes and swirl marks. Doing one section at a time also allows for any unexpected events that always seem to occur once a project like this has begun, such as grocery store trips, visits from relatives or neighbors, playoff games, etc. It's good to have an

"out" should the need arise.

Again, elbow grease is the best method, and be sure to use caution when scrubbing around decals, as overzealous hands might damage the large stickers. Specialized RV awning cleaners are available from companies like Camco and Star brite.

After the washing is complete, you should immediately use a microfiber cloth or chamois to wipe off excess water. These are available at most RV accessories stores and most big-box retailers as well.

Once it's all clean and dry, you may wish to add an additional "shine" product, such as one from Poli Glow, or a coat of wax from manufacturers such as Camco, Dometic, Star brite and Thetford. In many cases, the wax is mixed in with the washing solution,

► Camco's 18-inch-wide XL Collapsible Bucket has 5 gallons of capacity and compresses to less than 3 inches tall, minimizing valuable storage space.



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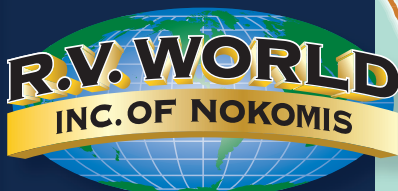
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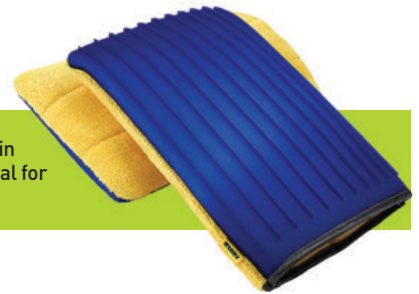
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and could save you a considerable amount of time (but in our opinion, there's no substitute for a separate, post-wash wax). Waxes can be applied by hand or with orbital buffers (we recommend some practice on small areas before going crazy). For even more sheen, Protect All makes an effective oxidation remover and restorer.

Glass cleaning comes next;

► The Rain-X Swiper Drying Mitt features built-in soft squeegee blades and soft microfiber material for streak-free drying, detailing and polishing.



completely cleaning a large motorhome windshield will likely require use of a ladder. Meguiar's and Carrand's Rain-X make good glass-cleaning solutions but, absent of those, an everyday residential glass

cleaner should do the trick.

Finishing off the wheels and tires is a great way to make any motorhome look even cleaner. A stiff-bristled brush is generally the best way to remove brake dust, grit and road grime on the wheels. Pay special attention to the type of wheels (alloy, aluminum, etc.) and select a cleaner that is suitable for that particular finish (many wheel and tire cleaners and even some RV multipurpose cleaners should do the trick). When it comes to protecting tires, the main thing is to avoid any solution that includes petroleum distillates, as they can break down the compounds in the rubber over time and reduce the lifespan of your tires.

Stepping up into your rig, cleanup



Poli Glow clear coat contains UV inhibitors to help restore shine to faded fiberglass. The kit pictured here contains a mitt and scrub pad, plus enough prep and Poli Glow for up to a 32-foot RV.

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is likely a bit more familiar, as many of the methods mirror those of life in a stationary home. Begin with wiping down all the surfaces to remove any dust or solid materials. We like to save vacuuming for last so that we can remove any of the debris that may be dislodged during cleanup.

We start in the cockpit, and again the surfaces dictate the methods. If your motorhome has leather seats, it's best to use leather cleaner and conditioner, which generally takes a bit longer but is necessary to keep the leather from cracking over time. Glass and dash cleaning will likely bring up familiar automotive names like Turtle Wax and Meguiar's, in addition to RV-specific products from Drop-Off, Dometic and Thetford.

When it comes to countertops and cabinets, consult with the manufacturer as to which types of cleaners are acceptable. Multipurpose cleaners, like those from Drop-Off, Dometic, Thetford, Voom! and others should be



All your cleaning may be for naught if foul odors persist inside the motorhome; a simple air freshener from Star brite eliminates stubborn odors. Cleaning your RV's holding tanks from the inside out with Travel Jon's drop-ins also helps keep things smelling fresh.



used in small, inconspicuous areas (much like on the exterior) before total application to ensure they don't damage the surface. Thetford's Aqua-Clean has always worked well for us to remove hard-water and rust stains from countertops and sinks.

Appliances and furniture are often handled in exactly the same fashion as they are at home; just be sure to use the correct materials on their corresponding surfaces. There's a neat

product called the Fridge Coaster that acts as a liner on the refrigerator's shelves, combating stains and nasty buildup before it sets in.

The lavatory should always be kept clean, and products like Dometic's Toilet Bowl & Seal Cleaner help condition the delicate seals on the toilet and holding tank while it cleans. Multipurpose cleaners, or residential bathroom foams, are a good bet for the sink and counters. Spring

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CLEAN UP YOUR ACT!

cleaning time is also a great opportunity to clean your black tank from the inside. Using a product like Travel Jon Holding Tank Deodorizer/Cleaner helps eliminate odors while it cleans the tank. And you can finish off the interior with a fresh air-deodorizing spray, available from companies like Dometic, Monochem, Star brite and Walex.

Once your motorhome is spic-and-span, you'll not only feel a sense of pride in that it looks as good as can be and the components are more likely to last longer, but other RVers will definitely notice your efforts. Cleaning up your act is a good way to show everybody you care, and is some of the best advice your mother ever gave you. **M**

## Sources

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By E. Don Smith



# CLEARING THE AIR

Replacing the engine coalescing filter on a diesel motorhome results in lower emissions and a cleaner dinghy vehicle

**A** modern diesel motorhome is truly a marvel of technology, power and convenience that allows us owners to enjoy luxury on the road that surpasses any other form of travel. In order to maintain that level of luxury, there is some maintenance that is required to keep your coach in top condition. A big part of that maintenance is changing the fluids and filters. If you have been a reader of *MotorHome* magazine for a while, you have likely read many of our technical articles on how to change engine, transmission and generator filters. But depending on the coach that you own, there may be another filter that you don't know about: the engine coalescing filter.

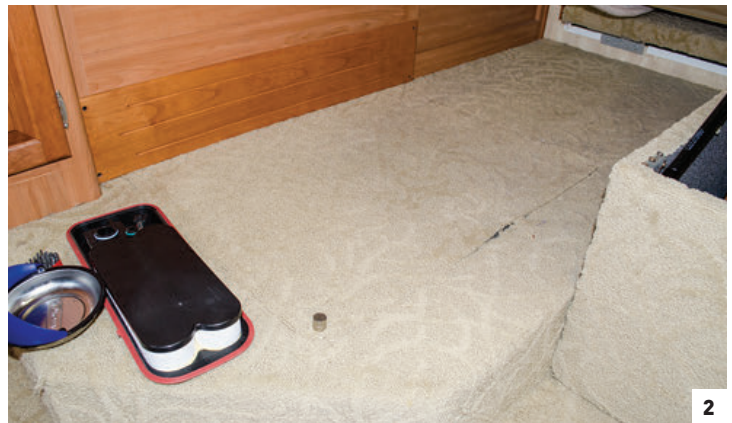
This filter is part of the engine crankcase-ventilation system used on newer diesel engines and some older ones, too. These filters are most common on EPA-07 and newer engines, but their use can vary from one engine producer to another and from one engine model to another.

The basic function of crankcase-ventilation filter systems, and more specifically the coalescing filter, is to prevent engine "blow-by" (engine vapors that get past the piston rings)

from escaping into the atmosphere. In addition to lower emissions, another major advantage of that system to those who tow a dinghy vehicle is that you no longer get your dinghy sprayed with tiny droplets of oil from the vent tube that was used on older engines. In years past, this was a common problem that motorhome owners faced and in many cases was solved by homemade catch cans designed to capture the oil that often escaped through the engine vent tube.

The engine we are working on here is a Cummins ISC 8.3-liter (EPA-07 compliant), and the mounting location for the filter is on top of the engine. Unfortunately, the only way to access it is through the floor of the coach bedroom. Your particular engine may be different than ours, so first make sure your engine or chassis owner's manual to determine the correct change interval and the correct part number. For this application, we used a Fleetguard filter (part No. CV50628). These filters can be purchased at a local Freightliner service center or ordered online from a variety of parts suppliers.

Even though this filter replacement is a little more difficult due to its location, there is no reason that you can't change yours on the road or at home, just like we did, using a few simple hand tools. Let's get started.



[1] In order to complete this job, you will need a few basic hand tools, gloves, a replacement filter and a torque wrench that reads in inch-pounds. We also used a magnetic screw-holder tray to make sure we didn't lose any parts along the way. A strong magnet will also help you locate the screws that may get buried in the bedroom carpet.

[2] After raising the bed, the next step is to locate and remove the engine cover located in the rear of the coach. Depending on your floor-covering type, you should see a seam around the opening. In this coach with carpet, the outline of the opening is easy to locate.



[3] Next, we used the small magnet and went around the edge of the carpet seam that outlines the access panel. As the magnet reaches the retaining screws underneath the carpet, you will feel the magnetic pull as the magnet will be attracted to the top of the screw through the carpet.

[4] We then pulled back the carpet to reveal the hidden screw. We used a cordless drill and bit to remove it. Repeat this process all the way around the cover until all the screws are removed.

[5] On this coach, the engine access panel is curved up behind the wood trim piece below the closet door, so we removed that piece of wood trim to allow access to the remaining screws at the back side of the cover.

[6] Once the wood trim was removed, we could easily locate the remaining screws with the magnet and remove them with the cordless drill.

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[7] After all the screws were removed, we lifted the engine cover out of the way. You may have to use a flathead screwdriver to carefully pry the cover up. These covers usually fit very snugly to reduce engine noise and ensure an airtight seal.



[8] Shown here is the plastic cover that needs to be removed to access the filter. Using a standard socket wrench and an extension with a 5/16-inch socket, we loosened all the bolts around the cover. These bolts are captured — meaning they do not come out of the cover — but yours may be different, so make sure you keep up with the bolts and don't drop them into the engine bay or engine.



[9] Once the cover is removed, place it aside. This allows you to access the coalescing filter. Usually it can be lifted up by hand and removed. Since it is oily, place it into a trash bag or other suitable container so you do not soil the inside of the coach as you dispose of it.



[10] Shown here is a photo of the new and old filters side by side. It's pretty easy to see why this filter needs to be changed on a regular basis.



[11] Place the new filter into the housing and press firmly to ensure it is seated properly before reinstalling the cover.



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[12] Since the cover is plastic, it is very easy to damage it or overtighten the bolts upon reassembly. We suggest you start all the bolts by hand first before using a wrench.

[13] Now you will need a torque wrench to tighten the cover to 45 inch-pounds in a crisscross pattern. Please note that is inch-pounds, not foot-pounds, of torque.

[14] Finally, you can reinstall the cover and the wood trim piece and you are finished. **M**



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# Pulling Out All the

New motorhomes introduced at the last two RV industry trade events are destined to be exci

Summer has always been the “busy season” for RVs — for a lot of reasons. It’s the prime camping time for enthusiasts who already own an RV, and prime buying time for folks finally finding their way to local RV dealerships. Behind the scenes, it can be just as hectic.

There, in design studios stuffed with wood and fabric samples, and in engineering offices filled with wallboards and sometimes even sections of full-size mockups of proposed models, RV manufacturers finalize designs for the coming year. Unlike the automotive industry, which can take years to bring a new design to market, RV builders are a relatively nimble bunch capable of tapping into trends as they develop or working overtime to capitalize on a new chassis design.

Fleetwood RV’s resurrected Pace Arrow is a perfect example. One of the brands acquired when Allied Recreation Group (ARG) purchased certain assets of Fleetwood Enterprises a half-dozen years ago, the high-end gas coach hadn’t been in production since 2010. When Jim Jacobs assumed the presidency of Decatur, Indiana-based ARG (now REV Recreation Group) last year, however, it quickly became a focus.

“When I got here, the Pace Arrow brand wasn’t even on the table — and

to me, growing up in the industry, Pace Arrow was an iconic brand,” Jacobs told editors of the trade journal *RV Business*. “So the first thing we did out of the chute was put a product development team together that focused on developing the new Pace Arrow.”

The now-diesel-powered 2016 Pace Arrow LXE had its coming-out party at last September’s Elkhart County RV Open House in Indiana.

In fact, between the Elkhart County program and the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association’s National RV Trade Show in Louisville, Kentucky, last December — two extraordinary trade events that are, unfortunately, closed to the public — an argument can be made that



Just 17 weeks after Jim Jacobs joined ARG/REV Group, the now-diesel-powered 2016 Pace Arrow LXE made its debut in Elkhart, Indiana.



# Stops

ting entries to the marketplace

in late 2015, motorized RV manufacturers unveiled perhaps their most impressive lineups of new and updated models since the recession.

In Elkhart, for example, not only did ARG/REV Group unveil the Pace Arrow, but also a 30th Anniversary Edition Fleetwood Bounder gas Class A and an Admiral XE gas Class A that, said Mike Snell, president of Monaco and Holiday Rambler, would be “our lowest-price-point Holiday Rambler, with an MSRP under \$100,000.” The company followed that up by reintroducing the upscale American Dream diesel pusher at the Louisville show.

Impressive? Absolutely, but consider, too, the performance of Thor Industries’ motorized division, Thor Motor Coach (TMC). The Elkhart, Indiana-based builder unveiled five completely new brands at Open House. Not five floorplans. Not even five new models. Five new brands!

Among TMC’s new offerings are the Class C Quantum, a line of Ford E-450-based motorhomes that come in at a price point just above the company’s Four Winds and Chateau lines, as well as the Synergy SD24, a downsized Class C based upon the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis with one or two slides. At the other end of the spectrum, physically speaking, TMC debuted the Venetian, a 40-foot, triple-slide Class A diesel built on Freightliner’s raised XCR chassis. At Louisville, the line was increased to three floorplans.

For TMC, however, the star of the Elkhart event was its new Gemini/Compass sister ships. Expanding upon TMC’s lineup of Recreational Utility Vehicle (RUV) motorhomes initiated

by the Ford-based Vegas and Axis Class A’s introduced in 2014, the two new motorhomes are built on Ford’s Transit 350HD diesel chassis.

For the dealers in attendance, it was the first time anyone had seen a builder utilize Ford’s replacement chassis for the venerable Econoline series — unless, of course, they started their day at Forest River’s mammoth display at its Dynamax facility, where Coachmen RV revealed its Transit-based Orion. Then, too, Winnebago executives were seen around town driving the company’s own version of a Transit-based Class C. Available in two floorplans, Winnebago’s new Fuse officially debuted at Louisville — as did the Forest River TS.

There was a lot more, to be sure, including the American debut of the Hymercar Grand Canyon Class B from the Erwin Hymer Group, Coachmen RV’s new Sprinter-based Galleria, Tiffin’s new Allegro Breeze Class A, the significantly redesigned Entegra Coach luxury diesel lineup and Gulf Stream Coach’s re-entry into the motorized market. Many are profiled on these pages, while others will be presented in coming months. All are virtually guaranteed to cause a stir as they begin showing up on dealer lots.



## AMERICAN COACH Dream

REV Recreation Group reintroduced the American Coach Dream Class A brand at the Louisville Show, showing both 42- and 45-foot models of the upscale coach built on the company’s customized Liberty Bridge Freightliner chassis. The two new Dream models have MSRPs of \$464,235 and \$531,735, respectively.

“We took that (Dream) name out

of the marketplace when the economy faltered a few years ago,” explained Lenny Razo, vice president of American Coach and Fleetwood. “So, we felt like now was a great time to reintroduce the product and put it into a more affordable price point for high-end consumers.”

The 45N American Dream has a 600-horsepower engine mated to a 4000 series transmission and features high-gloss cabinets, heated porcelain-tile floors, a side radiator, steerable tag axle and name-brand appliances.

Also part of the Dream package are Sony electronics, a large Whirlpool residential refrigerator and an expansive rear bedroom with a king bed, behind which is a rear master bath with double sinks, shower and walk-in closet.



## COACHMEN Galleria

“The Coachmen Galleria, built on the 170-inch wheelbase Mercedes-Benz 3500 Sprinter platform, is the first true Class B in all of Forest River,” said General Manager Mark Steele. “Debuting with three floorplans and two decors, the Galleria is loaded with cutting-edge technology,” Steele said, singling out the Truma Combi Plus hot water/furnace system.

Available in four 24-foot, 3-inch floorplans, the Galleria features an Onan Microlite 2.5-kW generator, handcrafted maple cabinetry, 100-watt solar panel (with independent charging of system and chassis batteries), 13-foot Carefree armless awning, Winegard RoadStar Omnidirectional antenna, Corian countertops and dual TVs — a 19-inch LED unit up front and a 24-inch LED screen in the rear. The MSRP is around \$127,000 and the entire entertainment system runs on 12-volt DC power.

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## Pulling Out All the Stops



### FLEETWOOD Pace Arrow LXE

Built on a Freightliner Bridge chassis with a 32,400-pound gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) and powered by a 340-horsepower Cummins, the Pace Arrow is available in two 38-foot, 7-inch floorplans, the 38B and 38K, with MSRPs starting at \$228,000. Both offer a full-wall slide, and the 38K has a bath-and-a-half floorplan with the main facilities amidships. Additional features include solid-surface countertops, hardwood cabinetry, a 19-cubic-foot residential refrigerator, a convection microwave and (in the 38K) four TVs.

"Everything is standard, such as auto-gen start, an exterior 32-inch TV with stereo, full pass-through storage and awnings with LED lights," said Lenny Razo, vice president of sales for REV's American Coach and Fleetwood brands. "We also added two luxurious new interiors with wood plank-style flooring, hardwood valances, upgraded countertop surfaces and new furniture."



### FOREST RIVER Diesel Berkshire XLT

With an MSRP of \$380,000, Forest River's Berkshire XLT 43B Class A motorhome hits a sweet spot in the market, according to Michael Peterson, sales manager with the Forest River diesel division. "It's the

best equipped side-radiator, 43-foot 450 ISL diesel on the market," he noted.

Built on a Freightliner XCR raised-rail chassis equipped with a Cummins ISL9 diesel, Allison 3000 series six-speed automatic transmission, V-Ride suspension and UltraSteer tag axle, the newest member of the Berkshire family also features a two-stage Jacobs braking system and adjustable pedals for driver comfort. In development for a year and positioned just below the division's flagship Charleston, the XLT is available in two four-slide out floorplans, the 43A and 43B; the biggest difference is the addition of bunks in the 43B. Both units are 42 feet, 10 inches with a 44,320-pound GVWR, 150-gallon fuel tank, 8-kW Onan generator and 15,000-pound towing capacity. Other features include full-body paint, electric induction cooktop, Corian countertops, Quiet A/C system, side-by-side residential-style refrigerator and ceramic-tile floors.



### GULF STREAM BT Cruiser and Conquest

Gulf Stream Coach debuted two Class C's bearing familiar brand names that the manufacturer hadn't utilized since stepping away from the motorized arena in 2012. Gulf Stream's entries (each with five floorplans) consist of two moderately priced lines, including a lower profile 21- to 28-foot BT Cruiser Class C built on E-350 or E-450 Ford Super Duty commercial cutaway chassis and retailing for a base MSRP of \$67,200. The 24- to 32-foot Conquest, also available on the E-350 or E-450, is a conventional, high-storage C-body with MSRPs in the \$64,400 range.



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**Pulling Out All the Stops**



**HYMERCAR  
Grand Canyon**

Germany-based Erwin Hymer Group AG & Co. continued its push into the U.S. market by displaying two models at the Louisville show. The manufacturer also announced that it had signed a cooperation agreement with Roadtrek Motorhomes in which Kitchener, Ontario-based Roadtrek would build Class B motorhomes under the Hymer brand for the North American market. According to Jacqueline Casini, who heads up corporate communications for Erwin Hymer Group, the company will enlist its own sales, distribution and service force in North America, adding that response for the Hymercar Grand Canyon and Yellowstone Class B's has been excellent.

Built on the ProMaster chassis, the premium-priced models (MSRP is TBD) feature a unique modular component construction. Basically, the interior components, such as the kitchen, can be removed, shifting its purpose from an RV for the weekends to a family transport vehicle during the week. Additionally, the motorhomes can be outfitted with accessories for outdoor recreational pursuits, such as kayaking.



**LEISURE TRAVEL VANS  
Unity U24FX Flex**

The nice thing about a Class B is its maneuverability. The downside is

that coachbuilders sometimes have to compromise on space when fitting everything inside a smaller profile. Leisure Travel Vans, a division of Winkler, Manitoba-based Triple E Recreational Vehicles, has taken downsizing to an art form. Its 2016 Unity U24FX Flex — technically a B-Plus because of its overhead compartment full of drawers and componentry — features plenty of out-of-the-box creative design elements.

The crux of the Unity FX's design is a midway Leisure Lounge System that converts for daytime use to a couch, lounge, chaise and dinette. At night, the \$126,750 (starting price) FX transforms into a 68-by-76-inch Murphy bed with an adjustable headrest for reading or watching a movie on the optional 28-inch LED TV. In back is a second living space offering more options for relaxing and entertaining with a residential-style sectional sofa and an integrated ottoman that functions as a footrest, coffee table or work desk. A three-stop door around the bathroom (equipped with a standup shower) provides more floor space when needed.

Built on a Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 3500 cutaway chassis powered by a 188-horsepower, 3.0-liter V-6 BlueTEC turbodiesel engine, the new 25-footer also features an optional German-built, Truma AquaGo Comfort Plus on-demand 60,000-Btu hot-water system, and Italian-designed, matte-finish upper cabinet doors with soft-close technology. The galley comes with Corian countertops, a pullout pantry, built-in trash can and three solid-wood cabinet options.



**RENEGADE RV  
Verona LE 40LTS**

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Super C, Renegade RV introduced an upscale version called the Verona LE. The Bristol, Indiana-based manufacturer showcased the 40LTS model in Louisville, and officials said a second floorplan, the 40LRB, was in production.

The 40-foot, triple-slide 40LTS (\$319,000-\$335,000 MSRP) is built on the same Freightliner M2 chassis as the Verona, but offers a variety of upgrades including an Aqua-Hot diesel-fired hydronic heating system, a roof-mounted lateral-arm awning, porcelain-tile floor, multiplex electrical and lighting system, remote-lock outside compartment doors, docking lights on the sides and rear of the coach, Ultraleather furniture and dual-pane windows.



### THOR MOTOR COACH Gemini/Compass

Thor Motor Coach introduced an array of new brands at Open House, but the real buzz surrounded the Gemini and Compass, Class C sister ships built on the Ford Transit 350HD chassis.

"We chose the Transit over the ProMaster because you get almost 1,000 pounds more capacity — it has a 10,360-pound GVWR," noted Jon Krider, TMC director of marketing. "Plus, we went with the Ford diesel engine, which has 185 horsepower and 350 LB-FT of torque."

The Gemini/Compass, which Krider said will retail for "around \$90,000," also features an automotive-style windshield with power shade in the front cap, European-style cabinetry and a rotating front passenger seat. Developed in conjunction with a European design firm known for its upscale yacht interiors, the motorhome also features a unique rear bed that pivots to reveal a seating area.



### Venetian T42

While TMC's Venetian debuted at Elkhart's Open House, TMC was already adding floorplans by the time the luxury motorcoach went on display at Louisville — and the new T42 configuration, the first Venetian on a Freightliner XCR chassis with tag axle, also is TMC's first diesel pusher to offer an optional drop-down overhead bunk in the cockpit. The Italian-made "Project 2000" bunk, actuated by the push of a button, affords an extra 54-by-80-inch sleeping area.

"There's lots of storage, one of the biggest master bathrooms in the industry," said David Jones, district manager for the company's diesel division. "The stackable washer and dryer's going to be standard, along with the whisper-quiet A/C system."

There's also a half-bath forward of the bedroom in the T42, the third floorplan in the Venetian line, following September's introduction of the M37 and A40. MSRP on the Venetian T42 is just shy of \$380,000.



### TIFFIN MOTORHOMES Allegro Breeze

The updated and comparatively narrow Tiffin Allegro Breeze is the first motorhome equipped with the relatively small ISV5.0 V-8 developed by global engine builder Cummins as a fuel-efficient alternative to gas engines.

"It has 275 horsepower and 520 to 560 LB-FT of torque," said Bob Tiffin,

president of Tiffin Motorhomes. "It does a fabulous job with this little 32-foot Breeze — the only diesel of this size in the U.S. market today."

Riding on a modified version of Tiffin's proprietary PowerGlide chassis, the company also raised the floor 6 inches so that it's flat all the way across. "Beyond that," said Tiffin, "we made the storage compartments 6 inches taller. It has a residential refrigerator now and we put four batteries on it with a nice-size inverter. We've got two air conditioners and an 8-kW diesel generator. It's a miniature Allegro Bus, but we call it Allegro Breeze."



### WINNEBAGO Fuse

Although Winnebago showed a lot of its lineup at the Elkhart RV Open House, the Iowa-based RV builder kept its cards close to its vest when it came to its most intriguing new motorized product: a 24-foot Class C mounted on a new-to-the-U.S. Ford Transit van chassis with the 3.2-liter five-cylinder diesel engine and six-speed automatic transmission. The Winnebago Fuse officially debuted at the Louisville Show.

"It's a segment-buster because it's a brand-new look," said Russ Garfin, product manager for Class B and C motorhomes for Winnebago. "It takes everything that we've learned about compact coaches from Mercedes-Benz and from the Dodge ProMaster and combines all of that into the next generation of compact coaches for Winnebago," added Garfin.

The Fuse, with MSRPs starting at \$93,880, is available in two floorplans, one (23T) with a rear bedroom slide that houses a queen walk-around bed and another (23A) with a slide up front and twin beds and a bathroom in back. **M**

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## The Ties that Bind

I have a Winnebago View on a Sprinter chassis and have experienced a particular problem with the wheel simulators staying on the rear outside wheels. Removing and replacing them seems to round off the sharp grips that are supposed to hold them in place.

After losing one, and luckily finding it, I came up with a solution that works for me.

I used two heavy-duty black cable ties and fed them through both the wheel and the simulator and brought them back out, fastened them and then trimmed off the excess. I used two of them 180 degrees apart.

The heavy-duty cable ties have a rating of 175 pounds tensile strength and I found them on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

These have been on my motorhome for several thousand miles with no problem. They also keep the simulator from rotating on the rim during travel. I have air valve extensions that allow me to check tire pressure on both inside and outside wheels without removing the simulator.

**Gary Yeater | Salisbury, North Carolina**



## Hang On, Stay On

Here's an idea for keeping hangers on the rod so clothes don't fall off during travel. I have been using a tension curtain rod in our RV's wardrobe closet for years. It's a quick fix that only cost \$5. Buy a rod that is a bit longer than the closet rod and roll it out so that it fits snugly above the existing rod in the closet. The hangers are pinned between the rods so that clothes stay in place. Close the closet doors and away you go!

**Nancy Bradshaw | Irmo, South Carolina**



## Get a Grip

With no handle on the cap that covers the hole where the sewer hose passes through the floor of the utility compartment — only two recessed areas, meant for fingers — the cap was difficult to unscrew. My simple solution: I glued a scrap of wood onto the cap to provide a better grip when locking in place or removing.

**Barry Glunts | Burlington, Massachusetts**



## Start With a Clean Spigot

Water-service contamination at RV parks is always a concern of mine. Some campgrounds have the water service next to the sewer outlet. Being an engineer, I can't understand why this is legal. To sanitize the water-service hose bib at all parks I carry a bottle of bleach and water solution (1 tablespoon of unscented bleach to 1 gallon of water) and flush the hose bib and open the water valve prior to connecting my service hose and filter.

**Don Callahan | Anchorage, Alaska**



**Have an Idea?** Quick Tips is looking for submissions. Please send your DIY ideas to: *MotorHome* Quick Tips, 2750 Park View Ct., Ste. 240, Oxnard, CA 93036, or email [letters@motorhomemagazine.com](mailto:letters@motorhomemagazine.com). Be sure to include any photos, illustrations or drawings. If your tip is selected for publication, you will receive \$35. All payments require an FEIN or SSN.



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**Falcon 2** 6000 lb. weight rating



**Falcon All-Terrain Tow Bar** 6000 lb. weight rating



**Stowmaster All-Terrain** 6000 lb. weight rating



# Replacing an Obsolete Part

Finding it difficult to acquire a necessary part for the jacks on his motorhome, a reader asked for a bit of help from Hot Line. He wrote:



“ In August 2008, I purchased a new Tiffin Allegro Bay Class A motorhome that was equipped with four factory-installed Atwood Level Leg jacks. In May 2010, while still under warranty by Atwood, one of the jacks failed. Atwood replaced it and I paid for the removal and installation costs.

In October 2011, a second jack failed and I paid for a replacement jack, as well as the related labor costs.

In September 2014, a third jack failed. Two bolts that held the electric motor had unscrewed (they were not stripped). Once they were reinstalled, the unit did not function properly. I then removed the top cover of the gear drive/electric motor unit and saw that one of the many small gears had suffered the loss of multiple teeth. I called Atwood and was sent a replacement gear. Unfortunately, it was not at all like the broken part and I returned the replacement part as well as the failed gear and requested the correct part.

That was four months ago, and I haven't heard anything from Atwood even though I have made several follow-up calls. Can Hot Line please assist me?

**Robert Winters | La Crescenta, California**

In an effort to help Winters with his dilemma, Atwood was petitioned on his behalf. Winters responded with the following letter:

“ I finally heard from someone at Atwood who advised me that the broken gear was no longer available and that the remedy was to replace the entire top unit of the jack. Atwood agreed to send this part to me directly, at no cost, and I received the replacement a few days later. I have since installed the new part and it fits properly. My sincere thanks for the efforts of Hot Line in resolving this issue.

**RW**

## The Wait is Over

Wondering when his extended-warranty refund would ever arrive, a reader requested the assistance of Hot Line when he felt his case had been ignored. He wrote:

“ I would like Hot Line's assistance

in securing cancellation of two extended warranties that I purchased last March when I bought my 2015 Jayco Redhawk Class C motorhome from World Wide RV in Mesa, Arizona. After the purchase, as I was driving the coach home to Washington, I started reconsidering buying the extended warranties, and once I got home I decided to cancel both of them. I have been trying since April to get this resolved. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

**Mark Martinek | Vancouver, Washington**

Hot Line sent letters of inquiry to American Guardian Warranty Services Inc. (AGWS) and World Wide RV on Martinek's behalf. Our initial correspondence resulted in a refund of \$5,627.95 to Martinek who then alerted us to a shortage of \$276.05. Further correspondence led to a positive conclusion for Martinek, as attested to in the following letter from World Wide RV.

We received Hot Line's letter regarding Mark Martinek's shortage on his refund. There were cancellation fees from AGWS in the amount of \$276.05. I reached out to AGWS for clarification on the breakdown of those fees as well as the reason why, and AGWS subsequently waived the fees. Martinek has been issued a check for \$276.05. We thank Martinek for his patience and understanding.

**Ben Wolfe**

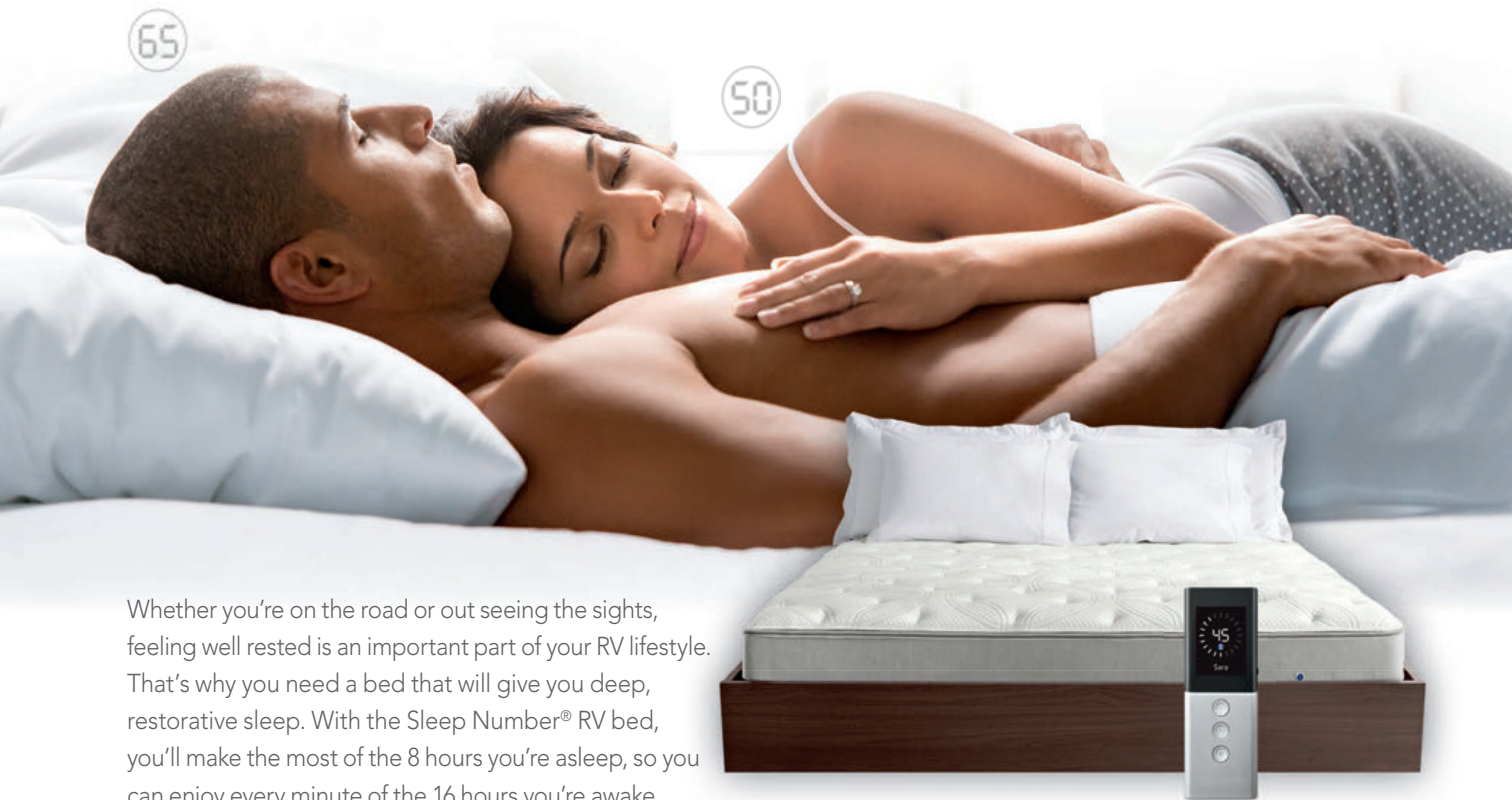
**Business Manager, World Wide RV  
Mesa, Arizona**

## 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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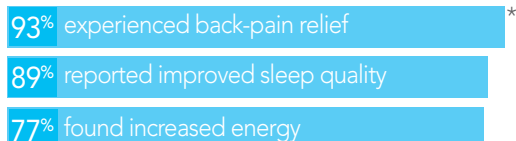
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# Storage Solutions

Installing stretch netting in RV compartments and cabinets is just the beginning of an adventure to keep stuff under control

By Kevin Livingston

## STORAGE

Cost: \$18-\$75

Time: 30 minutes

Difficulty: 1/10

It's no surprise that just about every RVer out there concocts ways to manipulate, modify or add space for storage, even if there really isn't anywhere left to go. Unfortunately, while packing a motorhome, most owners find that they run out of space much sooner than anticipated. While owners end up scratching their heads for solutions, sometimes it's best to turn to companies that specialize in storage organization, like Organized Obie.

The company has created a huge line of organization products that allow RVers to either take advantage of nooks and crannies for stashing stuff or simply keep the items from flying around on bumpy roads. Many of the items found on the [www.organizedobie.com](http://www.organizedobie.com) website use stretch netting in a number of configurations to keep stored items in control and easily accessible. Some of the items that work for motorhomes include presized Barrier Stretch Nets, Gear Nets, Framed Nets, and mesh TXT Pockets with quick and easy adhesive mounting.

All of the Obie items are do-it-yourself-friendly, meaning the products allow for a lot of freedom and creativity when determining which ones are best and how to affix them for your individual needs. To get a good feel for the storage netting, I installed a 12-by-16-inch Framed Net (\$17.90) and a 24-by-60-inch Gear Net (\$74.80) in an exterior compartment. A 10-by-10-inch TXT Pocket (\$27.95) and a 20-by-24-inch Barrier Net (\$24.50) were installed in an interior cabinet.

To install the netting, simply determine the best location for the chosen product and mark the area to be predrilled

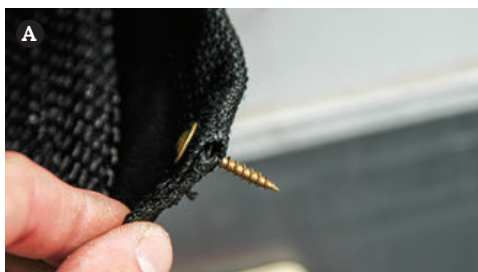
Organized Obie offers a number of products designed to keep gear in specific places that are accessible, even after being rattled on the road. Netting organizers like this one take advantage of wasted space.

for the included screws. It is worth mentioning that pre-drilling makes installation cleaner, since lower grades of woods found in many motorhomes will splinter when driving screws. Once the area is predrilled, all that's left to do is screw in the included J-hooks or the small plastic clamps (depending on the product), being careful not to overtighten. Since the Gear Net didn't come with hardware, I used 1-inch cabinet screws with a big flangelike head to cover the hole. Using this kind of screw also helps with mounting strength and support, plus it eliminates the need for washers.

All in all, I was able to install four different types of Obie organizers in about half an hour. Quite possibly the best part of the Obie products is that, if you think out the situation, you'll be able to take advantage of otherwise wasted space for storage, not to mention the ability to keep the items tidy. Using a wall in the compartment to hang the Gear Net resulted in a place to stash easily accessible items where the real estate was normally wasted. On the opposite side, the Framed Net was used to keep small, loose objects at bay, rather than being scattered all over the compartment while on the road.

The best way to plan for improving storage is to spend some time on the company's website. You'll be amazed at the number of products that can be adapted for motorhome use, beyond the net-type storage items. **M**

**Organized Obie**, 574-266-1809, [www.organizedobie.com](http://www.organizedobie.com)



**[A]** To install the netting, screws are pushed through the eyelets in the ends and driven into the wood surface using a screw gun and Phillips bit. **[B]** Holes were predrilled to prevent splintering while driving the screws.



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By Ken Freund

# Tire-Inflation Temperature

**Q** I have a question about tires. Please define “cold,” as the temperature where I live can vary from freezing to 100 degrees plus. Depending on when I set the pressure can have quite an effect on the tires as I drive long distances.

**Benjamin Looman | Como, Mississippi**

**A** “Cold” as it is used in this situation is the ambient temperature at the

time that the tire is inflated. Cold refers more to the fact that the tire should be inflated before it is run on the road, such as first thing in the morning before you begin to drive. That’s why I recommend carrying a portable 12-volt DC compressor, so you don’t have to drive to a gas station to inflate your tires, which will be warm by then unless the motorhome is driven a mile or less.



## Freightliner Air-Gauge Frustration

**Q** I need your help locating the problem with the rear air-pressure gauge on my 2001 Fleetwood Bouncer diesel pusher on a Freightliner chassis. I took the motorhome to two garages, and the last one told me that, after switching the rear pressure to the front air-pressure gauge, it appeared the gauge was bad as the rear gauge shows zero air pressure after traveling for a short distance. Sometimes the air-pressure-gauge buzzer stays on for quite a while, with the gauge showing zero air pressure when in fact the air pressure is fine, with no loss of air and no leaks. The last garage told me the gauge governing the air pressure should be replaced, as it is electric and must be the problem, as the motorhome has no air leaks in the rear and the gauge keeps fault-indicating. I spent another \$260 for a new rear air gauge but the problem recurred. Can you help me fix this?

**Lawrence Kuhns | Dauphin Pennsylvania**

**A** This is an odd one, so I checked with Freightliner technical services. It recognized the problem

and suggested replacing the vehicle data computer (VDC) at the rear of the coach because the pressure transducer is malfunctioning. A malfunctioning pressure transducer will show no air pressure when there is plenty, and may set off the low-air alarm when there is still adequate air pressure. When you replace the VDC you may lose the odometer mileage (it goes back to zero), but the engine computer will always maintain the mileage. If a Freightliner dealer performs the replacement, you will have paperwork showing the actual mileage. Get a statement from them to satisfy the DMV and future buyers.

## Refrigerator Power Source

**Q** I have a 2008 Fleetwood Discovery motorhome with a Dometic side-by-side refrigerator. I usually operate the refrigerator in propane mode while on the road until we stop for the night. Recently, I noticed the temperature in both refrigerator and freezer compartments rise several degrees while traveling. I attributed some of this to outside temperatures. Is it better to operate the unit with the inverter using the 120-volt AC setting, and will it

operate more efficiently, reducing the temperature gain?

**Steve Richards | Lawrence, Kansas**

**A** This answer may open a can of worms. Most owners report that their refrigerators stay colder and recover faster on LP-gas than when running on electricity. Absorption-type refrigerators use heat to “make” cold, so it is more efficient to simply burn LP-gas to get that heat. Some electrical systems have the capacity to keep up with the demand of a refrigerator on 120-volt AC power; others do not. You can try it to find out which way works best for you by experimenting. The advantage to using electricity instead of LP-gas on the road is that you don’t have to worry about shutting it off before refueling, when on certain bridges, tunnels and other restricted areas, and there’s less fire hazard in the event of a crash.

## New Shocks for a P-Chassis

**Q** I have a 1998 Chevrolet P30 chassis with a 7.4-liter V-8 under the hood of my Winnebago 36-foot Chieftain. I recently asked my mechanic to replace the shocks. He looked at

the Bilstein website and ordered some shocks, but when they arrived they were about half the size of the ones on my RV. He was having issues speaking to Bilstein, so I'm turning to you. I have read that Bilstein or Koni shocks can replace factory shocks, so can you provide me with the correct part numbers? Do you have an opinion as to which one is better?

**Glenn Cannon | Waco, Texas**

**A** The part numbers for the Bilstein shocks for 1973 through 2000 model year GM P30 and P32 chassis are front 24-011730 (old no. F4-B46-1173-H4) and rear 24-015875 (old no. F4-B-46-1587-H3). This information is available online at Bilstein's website at <http://cart.bilsteinus.com/pdfs/motorhome.pdf>. Koni part numbers for your chassis are front 8805-1006 and rear 8805-1007. Koni's website is [www.koni.com](http://www.koni.com). I prefer to stay neutral in the brand matter; both are quality products.

the seals ride over, and slightly bent shafts. The shaft should be cleaned and lubed with silicone spray and inspected for dings and other damage. That fact that the jack retracts when you open the hydraulic line indicates that a likely cause in your case is a faulty jack solenoid. You should be able to get it repaired at most RV service centers.

### Tire Concern

**Q** Do I need new tires? I have Michelin size 255/80R22.5 manufactured in the 22nd week of 2011. I know that only makes them 4½ years old, but they are developing visible cracks in the sidewalls. Can I get another year or two out of them?

**Al Johnson | Lyons, Colorado**

**A** Your tires are within the age range that is considered usable. Shallow surface cracks can be acceptable. However, if you can see the internal cords or belts in the cracks,

### Retractable Jack ... Doesn't

**Q** I have a 2004 Damon Challenger 348 motorhome on a Ford F53 chassis with a V-10 gas engine. I have had repeated trouble with the right rear leveling jack going up and down. The other three work fine. When I touch the pad on the right, it makes a growling noise and it goes down very slowly. This is a Power Gear semi-automatic system. When I am ready to leave the campsite I turn the key on, push the ON pad, then the ALL JACKS RETRACT pad. Three jacks retract, but the right rear does not. I have to crawl underneath the coach, loosen up the hydraulic hose and let fluid out, and then the spring will pull it up. The fluid level in the tank is always full. Can you please help?

**Ray Bowen | Perrysville, Texas**

**A** The two major categories of causes when a jack will not retract are mechanical and hydraulic. Examples of mechanical problems include dirty or corroded surfaces that

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it's time for replacement. I suggest you take the motorhome to a Michelin dealer for inspection and its opinion. If you feel like company representatives are being too pushy to sell you tires, get a second opinion elsewhere.

**Ghost Slideout Tip**

I have a 2003 Winnebago Adventurer and had the same problem as Joe Russell with my slide extending ("Ghost Slideout," November 2015). After having it fixed, it would still come out sometimes. The bed did not have a long enough space and it put a lot of pressure on the slide mechanism. The coach has a headboard with three rolls of padding on it. The bottom roll was pushing against the bed, which pushed against the slide. I took the bottom roll out and it relieved pressure on the slideout. No more problems!

**Bob Hatherill | Prineville, Oregon**

It's very likely that other similar

**“ I always recommend using an auxiliary braking device to activate the brakes in your towed vehicle for safety. ”**

motorhomes will have the same problem and this could cure it easily and inexpensively. Thanks for writing.

**Cargo Compartment Condensation Idea**

This is in regard to Dot Benak's "Cargo Compartment Condensation" letter in December 2015. I wonder if she has a clothes dryer that is improperly venting into the cargo bay. I suggest she look for some type of contributing source of moisture such as this.

**Lawrence "Larry" LeJeune  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

Just about anything is possible, and I never heard back if she solved the problem. It's easy and worth checking

if there is a clothes dryer onboard.

**Cargo Compartment Condensation Tip**

Some advice for Dot Benak. In 2007 we bought a Winnebago Sightseer and right away had cargo compartment condensation problems. I called the dealer and Winnebago and neither heard of the problem in my part of the country. I bought some very thin outdoor carpet and glued it to the walls and roof inside of the compartments and have not had a problem since. I think the heat from the outside and cool inside create the problem and the carpet keeps the temperature more constant. Worked for me.

**Dick Kelly | Milford, Delaware**

(continued on page 115)

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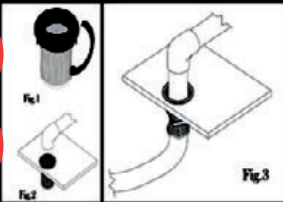
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(continued from page 112)

Thanks for sharing that inexpensive, simple tip. It makes sense that if you can reduce the temperature swings you can reduce or eliminate condensation "sweating" in the compartment.

**Towing a Suzuki Vitara**

**Q** I have a 1998 Fleetwood Flair 25-foot motorhome with a GM 454-cubic-inch engine, and I want to tow a 2004 Suzuki Vitara 4WD. Are there any issues with braking or towing this vehicle?

**James Woolsey | Via email**

**A** According to our 2004 dinghy-towing guide, the Vitara and Grand Vitara 4WD models are factory-approved for towing with either the manual or automatic transmissions. Instructions should be in the owner's manual; always follow them. For example, the manufacturer recommends a speed limit of 55 MPH and every 200 miles the engine should be run. Base curb weight is said to be 3,020 pounds for the Vitara, and 3,230 for the Grand Vitara.

I always recommend using an auxiliary braking device to activate the brakes in your towed vehicle for safety. Your motorhome should have sufficient capacity to tow the Vitara, but you should always weigh it when fully loaded for a trip with cargo, fuel, water and passengers, and then subtract this actual weight from the chassis' rated gross combination weight rating (GCWR) to determine if you are within the maximum weight rating.

**Power Problems**

**Q** I own a 1993 Allegro Bay motorhome with an Onan 7000 generator. The generator works fine and the shorepower works fine. When I disconnect from shorepower there is no 12-volt DC power in the coach. The batteries show to be fully charged. What is likely to be the cause?

**Stan Ellis | Via email**

**A** The likely culprit in your case is a faulty battery disconnect solenoid relay, or the wires or connections to it.

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**A Couple of Tips**

After reading your column in the October 2015 issue, a couple of comments came to mind. The first one addresses gasoline generator issues and the fact that they can sit for long periods of time without being run. When an RV is not going to be used for a known extended period of time, it might be wise to add gasoline stabilizer to the gas tank before the vehicle is stored. Then, fire up the genset and run it for a long enough period of time to cycle the treated gasoline through the fuel system and carburetor. If the genset was running properly before being shut down for the storage cycle, with the treated fuel, then it should run properly when the RV is put back into use, assuming nothing else failed while in storage (this was prompted by Joe Brennan's letter.)

Now, I work on the International Space Station program and live in my 35-year-old Higgins-Delta Class C RV. Folks who own older RVs — particularly the ones built on chassis produced by GM, Ford or Chrysler — might find new parts available for their RVs at Rock Auto (www.rockauto.com). For example, the ignition switch in my RV just failed (I was shocked that it had lasted for 35 years) but found an exact AC-Delco replacement on this website for \$20.79, plus shipping. The automotive parts on this site are drop-shipped from locations all over the U.S., so it's possible that you might order a part that might be drop-shipped from a location that is very close to you and you'll receive it in just a day or two. No, this won't happen every time, but it is nice when it does (prompted by Joe Mangles' letter).

**Bill Drevo Jr. | Houston, Texas**

Thanks for the tips, Bill. I use gasoline stabilizer during storage and recommend it. I've also used Rock Auto and found its prices very competitive and service fast (continued on page 119)

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(continued from page 116)  
for common replacement items.

**Jeep Cherokee Wobble**

**Q** We have a 2008 Jayco Seneca 37FS motorhome and a 2014 Jeep Cherokee Latitude that I flat tow. Three times the Jeep has wobbled back and forth from side to side violently. The first time it happened I hit a dip in the road and the Jeep started going side to side until I was able to slow it to a stop. I thought the steering wheel was whipping from side to side. This also happened after I drove onto the shoulder of the road, and then again after going through a construction zone where I had to swing off to the shoulder and then back on the road. The first two times this happened I was driving about 50 MPH. I used to tow a 2005 Jeep Grand Cherokee and I never had this kind of problem. I have a Blue Ox tow bar rated for 10,000 pounds and I also just installed new Koni shocks this summer before this last trip.

**Rick Hadley | Creston, Iowa**

**A** Some vehicles are more prone to this problem than others. An Internet search found one other owner complaining of the same symptoms. It occurs when a sudden force such as rough pavement starts the front wheels oscillating back and forth when it hits a natural frequency of the vehicle. Looseness, or "play," in the steering mechanism and oversized or unbalanced tires can exacerbate it, but even stock new vehicles can have the problem. I suggest you install an aftermarket hydraulic-steering damper. Any 4x4 shop that works on Jeeps and other off-road vehicles should be able to install it. **M**

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# In Celebration of Anticipation

On Route 66, expecting the unexpected is a big part of the fun

By Alan Rider

**W**hether you're on the road full-time or travel just a few weeks a year, owning a motorhome means there's always something to look forward to. Naturally, this preoccupation with future adventures peaks as spring approaches and you sit at the kitchen table hunched over your road atlas. Because, after all, planning where to go next is half the fun.

The other half, of course, is the trip itself. Or more accurately, the memorable moments from each new journey that we string together like pearls on a thread.

When you really stop to think about it though, it's that thread itself — the tingling feeling of expecting the unexpected around every bend in the road — that's really responsible for our happiest miles of happy motoring. In other words, when it comes to motorhome travel, it's all about the anticipation.

While I've experienced this feeling on roads from coast to coast, nowhere I've ever been has made me more keenly aware of this sense of anticipation than when a couple of friends and I traveled the length of Route 66 a few years back. That's because, mile for mile, no other stretch of asphalt contains more unforgettable experiences than the route that's come to be known as America's Mother Road.

You see, somewhere along the 2,400-odd miles of pavement connecting Chicago and Los Angeles,

your motorhome will turn into a time machine. The local diners and drive-in movie theaters that you might have assumed had faded into the mists of history are right there along the route and going as strong as ever.

Of course, the flip side of that coin is all the other establishments — even entire towns — that offer only the slightest hints of their former glory. That said, look past the peeling paint and overgrown parking lots — squint a little if you have to — and you can still see the young newlyweds sitting outside a hamburger stand sharing a milkshake with two straws or the youngsters pleading with their parents to buy them the rubber tomahawk they just saw in a roadside tchotchke shop.

No matter what part of Route 66 you decide to travel, I can also

guarantee you'll run into your share of oddities. We climbed into the belly of a giant blue whale at a long-defunct swimming hole outside of Catoosa, Oklahoma, and posed for photos beneath the two humongous arrows in a place called, coincidentally enough, Twin Arrows, Arizona. On other roads these sightings might be anomalies; traveling Route 66, they're an everyday occurrence.

Based on our experience you're also likely to bounce from one unforgettable chow call to another. From the Cozy Dog Drive In in Springfield, Illinois, where we met the man whose father invented the corn dog, to the small town MidPoint Cafe in Adrian, Texas — the midpoint of Route 66 — where I wolfed down the best breakfast I've had before or since.

Then there are the sublime moments when your path will surely lead you to unforgettable encounters with the natural world. Like a Technicolor sunset over the Great Plains or the heady scent of wet sage after a New Mexico thunderstorm. Experiences all those folks rushing along the nearby interstate will either never fully appreciate or will miss altogether.

While all these Route 66 reminiscences are still vivid years later, they're not what keep me traveling the two-lane highways of this great country. Rather, it's the anticipation of memories yet to be made that fuels my travels on The Road Ahead. **M**

“ ... mile for mile, no other stretch of asphalt contains more unforgettable experiences ... ”

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At the route's midpoint in Adrian, Texas, the MidPoint Cafe claims, "When you're here, you're halfway there!" Iconic roadside attractions include this one in Twin Arrows, Arizona.



Photos: Alan Rider

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