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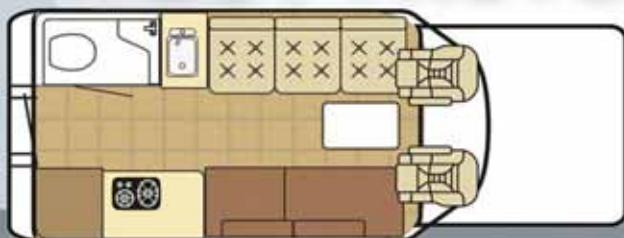
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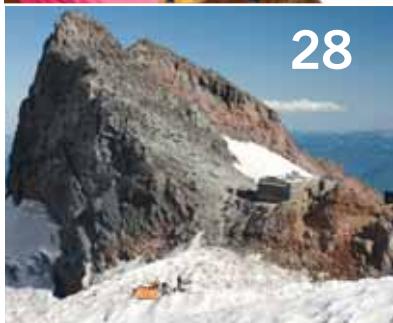
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On The Cover: The 2009 Honda CR-V (towed by a 2009 Fleetwood Southwind), seen here at picturesque Lake Casitas Recreation Area in Central California, is one of the popular vehicles qualifying for inclusion in our annually updated dinghy towing guide (see page 42). Photo by Gary Bohinc.

DINGHY TOWING

I'll never forget the trip my family and I took to Durango, Colorado, during the year-end holiday break many years ago. We were traveling in a new Beaver diesel-pusher and pulling one of the few dinghy-ready vehicles then on the market: a Suzuki Samurai. It was a spectacular time to be on the road. The trees were shimmering from a fresh coat of snow replenished every day, the landscape was brilliantly white and the roads — well, the roads were questionable.

After enjoying five days in one of Colorado's winter playgrounds, we headed home on the coldest day of the trip. The big Beaver handled the diminutive Suzuki effortlessly, even with the anemic-by-today's-standards 250-HP diesel engine. As we climbed the first grade out of Durango, heading to sunny California, the engine chugged, coughed and then died. I soon realized that we had filled our fuel tank in Arizona the day before we hit the snow line ... and the unwinterized fuel had gelled and stopped flowing. We should have gauged our trip better, run the tank close to empty and bought fuel at higher elevations where it's treated for cold weather.

So there we sat, running the engine block heater and hoping the fuel would "thaw" enough to get us going again, when along came a Good Samaritan (a Good Sam member and fellow RVer) who graciously offered assistance — even though it was freezing cold. I thanked him for stopping and said, "I'm going to try to heat the fuel enough to get started again, but if you don't mind, could you hang around just in case I need a ride into town to get help?" (Cell phones were rare 20-plus years ago, and certainly not usable in sparsely populated areas.) With a very puzzled look he said, "Sure, I'll stay as long as you need me."

Then it hit me. I completely forgot that I had my own transportation out back. We had a good laugh and the Good Samaritan was on his way.

Granted, I felt pretty silly for my momentary brain fade, but in those days, dinghy towing was not as popular. Tow



bars and baseplates were evolving, but the choice of vehicles that could be towed on all four wheels was limited. It's a whole new dinghy-towing world today. As you can see by perusing our annual survey of cars, trucks and SUVs, the number of vehicles that can be towed without drivetrain modifications is very extensive — more than 100 to choose from.

Many vehicle manufacturers now recognize that recreational towing is a major consideration for motorhome enthusiasts looking to buy daily drivers that can also be dinghy towed. And the number of lightweight cars is growing, which is good for owners of smaller motorhomes with limited capacity. The Honda Fit is a good example. It weighs only 2,500 pounds, has a surprising amount of room inside — and it sells for just \$15,000.

Another factor driving the explosive growth of dinghy towing is the development of suitable hardware. Tow bars are sleek, easy to handle (and hook up), and boast stout ratings. Manufacturers like Roadmaster and Blue Ox have made a science out of concealing baseplates, so that the addition of towing hardware does not detract from the aesthetics of the dinghy vehicles. And, of course, braking devices (which I highly recommend) are more efficient than ever. Tips and towing equipment are part of our complete online *2009 Guide to Dinghy Towing*; you can access this booklet by logging on to www.motorhomemagazine.com.

As you might surmise, we got the Beaver rolling again after about an hour of sipping coffee and a few snowball fights. The whole experience was much less stressful because we had alternative transportation right behind us.

I just can't imagine motorhoming without a dinghy vehicle tracking closely behind. ♦

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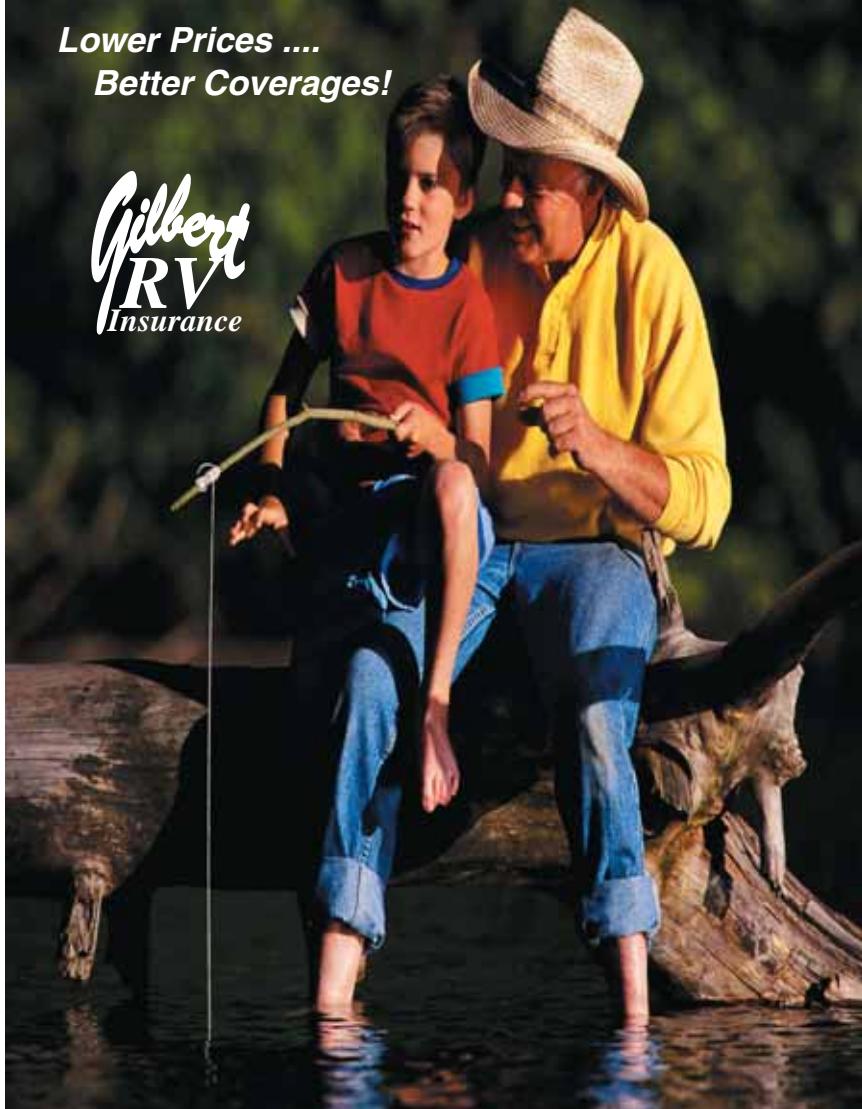
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YOU'VE LOST THAT LOVIN' FEELING

We have been following the letters about travelers' pet peeves in campgrounds. The more we read, the more we feel that people have somehow lost the "camping experience." We all have to remember that we are visitors wherever we end up.

People travel to get away from it all and to obtain a part of freedom that may be lacking in their lives back home. They want to party, act like fools, get sunburned, and eat or drink too much. They also want to be part of nature — with all of the smells, noises and friendships that they develop along the way. The loud entertainment centers, outdoor lanterns and joyous laughter are all a part of the experience. Get used to it!

Campgrounds have rules that each camper receives upon entering. If you stay in a park that allows the noise to continue after normal hours you need to contact the management. If that doesn't work, write down the name of that campground and spread the word not to camp there.

We stop in campgrounds for the trip back to nature, the smell of the burning wood, the smell of the wet forest floor in the morning, the clean air after a thunderstorm. It seems we may have lost that "feeling" somewhere on the road with our motorized homes. Remember, at night, we are all just campers. Get the feeling again!

**BRUCE & JOYCE BRENNAN
LANSING, MICHIGAN**

ANOTHER MILEAGE MAXIMIZER

Thank you for the November 2008 feature, "Mileage Maximizers," about smaller, lighter, more fuel-efficient motorhomes. I enjoyed the article, but I was amazed that you left out the wonderful Phoenix Cruiser made by Phoenix USA out of Elkhart, Indiana. I have a Phoenix Cruiser and absolutely love it, but I think it's one of the best kept secrets, because I never see it featured in your articles on smaller units.

**MARY ELLEN JONES
JOHNSBURG, ILLINOIS**



DOLLARS AND SENSE

The feature about smaller, lighter, more fuel-efficient motorhomes in the November 2008 issue, "Mileage Maximizers," was a topic needing to be addressed. However, take a closer look.

Just last week my wife and I spent a lot of time looking at a Winnebago View (which was pictured on the cover of the November magazine) and a Fleetwood Icon — both built on the Sprinter chassis and both 25 feet long.

However, we wound up making a deal on a Fleetwood Tioga Ranger. The 26-foot-long motorhome has a queen-size bed, microwave, conventional oven, AC generator, patio awning, electric entry step, large storage compartments and a single slideout. We will get only 10 MPG instead of 16 MPG, but the MSRP was \$73,000 compared to \$105,000 for the View.

Thirty-two thousand dollars will buy a lot of gasoline, which is still selling at a substantial discount to diesel.

BILL BUTLER | DEWEY, ARIZONA ♦

Question:

What factors affect your decision when purchasing a new motorhome?

Write to us at letters@motorhome-magazine.com.



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escapes

by DENISE SANTOYO

EVENTS | WHEELS & GEAR | NOTEWORTHY | CROSSROADS

HOME ON THE RANGE

Living history is on display at the Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia

If you've ever been curious about the rural life of yesteryear, then the Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia, located in Staunton in the fertile Shenandoah Valley, is the place for you. Though traffic whizzes by unseen on the nearby interstate, the museum's 120 acres harks back to a time when life was simpler, slower and more peaceful.

The museum contains several working farms from different eras and countries, as well as an emerging West African exhibit. There are homesteads from 18th-century Germany and Ireland and American farms from Virginia. Also included is an Irish forge from 18th-century Ulster.

The museum employs about 25 "interpreters" who perform the daily routines of inhabitants at the various locations. On any given day you can see them churning butter, working in the fields or spinning cloth — all in period dress authentic to the times.

The nearby Shenandoah Valley KOA and Walnut Hills Campground and RV Park have full hookups and dump stations, and offer a wide range of activities — from stocked fishing lakes to river tubing and hay wagon rides.

The museum is open year-round. For more information, call (540) 332-7850, or visit www.frontiermuseum.org. — *Pamela Selbert*

PHOTO: THE FRONTIER CULTURE MUSEUM OF VIRGINIA



FEBRUARY 6-8 | See the migration of more than 1 million shorebirds, geese and hawks through the San Francisco Bay Estuary during the **Flyway Festival**. The event features a Wildlife Exploration and Birding Expo as well as other outdoor activities, tours and classes; (707) 649-WING, www.sfbayflywayfestival.com.

FEBRUARY 7 | Celebrate Valentine's Day a week early with a bit of history. **The Valentine Faire — A Colonial Celebration** in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, teaches about the symbols and traditions of love in the 18th century while also

offering a sampling of sweet treats; (252) 335-1453, www.museumofthealbemarle.com.

FEBRUARY 7 | Visit with the **Tuskegee Airmen** at Roosevelt's Little White House Historic Site in Warm Springs, Georgia. This educational program, with opportunities for photos, will allow you to meet the men who flew 15,553 sorties and completed 1,578 missions without losing one bomber in World War II; (706) 655-5870, www.georgia.stateparks.org/LittleWhiteHouse.

FEBRUARY 12 | Become an armchair traveler on the road at the **Arts Center of the Ozarks Passport to Adventure** travel film series. The series, in Springdale, Arkansas, features professional, personally narrated motion pictures as well as a social hour before; (479) 751-5441, www.artscenteroftheozarks.org.

FEBRUARY 13 | Enjoy a free

concert at **A Day With the Mississippi Symphony** in Vicksburg, Mississippi. The symphony will perform a concert at the Vicksburg Convention Center and Auditorium that will feature a variety of music styles that are sure to please the whole family; (866) 822-6338, www.vccmeet.com.

FEBRUARY 20-22 | Visit Santa Fe, New Mexico, as its galleries turn into banquet halls with **ART-feast**. This "moveable feast of art cuisine" combines the food of the city's best chefs, restaurants and vintners with the galleries, unique homes and artists of the area. The event benefits ARTsmart, a volunteer organization that funds art programs for children in the area; (505) 603-4643, www.artfeast.com.

FEBRUARY 22-27 | Be adventurous at **Elderhostel's Suwannee River Adventure: Canoeing, Hiking and Folklore in Florida**.

The program takes place at Stephen Foster Folk Cultural Center State Park in Lake City, Florida, and features moderate hikes, canoeing trips and more. Camping is available on-site with an RV discount option; (386) 397-2733, www.elderhostel.org.

FEBRUARY 23 | Start celebrating Mardi Gras early at the **Lundi Gras Celebration** in Gretna, Louisiana. This community event features music, dancing, and local "royalty" in a family friendly setting; (504) 363-1580, www.gretnala.com.

FEBRUARY 28 | Try out your best chili recipe, or just give your taste buds a treat, at the **Arizona State Chili Cookoff and Salsa Championship** in Quartzsite, Arizona. With official prizes and a People's Choice category, everyone can participate in this tasty event; (928) 927-9321, www.quartzsitebusinesschamber.com.

RV SHOWS

February 2-8

Montgomery RV Super Show
Montgomery, Ala.; (256) 509-3574

February 5-8

Flint Camper & RV Show
Flint, Mo.; (517) 349-8881

February 5-8

Minneapolis/St. Paul RV, Vacation & Camping Show
Minneapolis, Minn.; (763) 383-4400

February 5-8

Ocala RV Show; Ocala, Fla.; (813) 741-0488

February 5-8

RV, Camping & Powersport Spectacular
Erie, Pa.; (814) 725-3856

February 5-8

Seattle RV & Outdoor Recreation Show
Seattle, Wash.; (425) 277-8132

February 5-8

Valley Forge RV Show
Valley Forge, Pa.; (717) 303-0295

February 5-8

West Palm Beach RV Show
West Palm Beach, Fla.; (813) 741-0488

February 6-8

Arkansas RV Show
Little Rock, Ark.; (501) 225-6177

February 6-8

Cincinnati RV Supershow
Mason, Ohio; (941) 827-7144

February 6-8

New England Camping & RV Show
Foxborough, Mass.; (617) 472-1442

February 11-15

Detroit Camper & RV Show
Novi, Mich.; (517) 349-8881

February 11-15

Houston RV Show
Houston, Texas; (361) 749-4436

February 13-15, 20-22

Mid-America RV Show
Kansas City, Mo.; (816) 931-4686

February 13-15

North Carolina RV & Camping Show
Charlotte, N.C.; (804) 425-6556

February 13-15

Richmond Camping RV Expo
Richmond, Va.; (804) 425-6556

February 13-16

Northeast RV Show
Suffern, N.Y.; (845) 343-2772

February 13-16

Sacramento Sports, Boat & RV Show
Sacramento, Calif.; (916) 965-9653

February 13-16

Springfield RV Camping & Outdoor Show
West Springfield, Mass.; (413) 781-2267

February 19-22

Central Florida RV Show
DeLand, Fla.; (813) 741-0488

February 19-22

Jackson Boat & RV Supershow
Jackson, Tenn.; (731) 584-7880

February 19-22

Salem Spring RV Show
Salem, Ore.; (206) 783-5957

February 19-22

St. Louis RV Vacation & Travel Show
St. Louis, Mo.; (314) 355-1236

February 20-22

Fredericksburg RV & Camping Expo
Fredericksburg, Va.; (610) 336-9100

February 27-March 1

Birmingham RV Super Show
Birmingham, Ala.; (256) 509-3574

February 27-March 1

New Hampshire Camping & RV Expo
Manchester, N.H.; (603) 736-5540

February 27-March 1

North Carolina RV & Camping Show-Raleigh
Raleigh, N.C.; (804) 425-6556

February 27-March 1

Rhode Island RV & Camping Show
Providence, R.I.; (800) 332-3976



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A MOTORHOME WITH SWAGGERING RIGHTS

Australian-based Swagman Motorhomes

has begun production of a new line of Class A's designed to meet the growing demand for more fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly motorhomes. The company plans to bring its 28-foot-long rear-diesel-pusher RV2801 model to the North American market this year.

According to the company, the RV2801 has a patented "Armour-shell" one-piece carbon fiber/Kevlar body construction, which is lighter and eight times stronger than traditional construction, and achieves an estimated 15–17 MPG. The motorhome rides on the company's Space Frame chassis and uses a rear-mounted International MaxxForce 5 V-6 diesel and five-speed Allison transmission.

Additional features include a six air-bag suspension and ABS, panoramic windshield and wraparound dash, electrically operated leather seats, integrated full-color touch GPS and backup camera, queen-size bed and a uniquely designed bathroom with a full-size shower. The RV2801, as built for the U.S. market, has a projected base MSRP of \$120,000.

Swagman Motorhomes, www.swagman.com.au. — *Joe Bohn*



News Briefs

Following the passing of founder Gaylord Maxwell on September 20, 2008, the **Life on Wheels** RV education program has been discontinued. The conference that was scheduled for March 16 in Tucson, Arizona, was canceled and no future classes are planned.

According to a new study by PKF Consulting comparing total carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions or carbon footprints, RV vacations are more environmentally friendly than fly/drive/hotel vacations. "RV vacations are not only fun, affordable and comfortable for families," says Richard Coon, president of the **Recreation Vehicle Industry Association**, "this study shows that they're also more green than vacations that include flying." Using a carbon calculator methodology developed by Conservation International, an organization that promotes biodiversity conservation, PKF found that RV vacations had a softer environmental impact than the typical airline/rental car/hotel vacations. The RV vacations analyzed included trailers, Class C's and Class A (diesel) motorhomes.

Bel-Aire LLC in Mishawaka, Indiana, has developed a new Class A diesel-pusher chassis in partnership with custom truck-chassis builder **Diamond Heavy Solutions**. Bel-Aire plans to build a new 27- to 32-foot fuel-efficient "cruiser" motorhome on the platform that is projected to achieve 15–20 MPG. The new 23,880-pound GVWR chassis has only 10 inches of ground clearance, and will be powered by a 230-HP International MaxxForce 7 V-8 diesel engine, equipped with independent front suspension and an Allison five-speed automatic transmission. Bel-Aire expects to have a 27-foot prototype built on the new chassis completed soon, and full production to be underway this year. The yet-to-be-named coach is expected to retail for \$150,000–160,000.

Newport Dunes Waterfront Resort and Marina, in Newport Beach, California, celebrated its 50th anniversary last year with a series of special prices, giveaways and events — culminating in the \$1.5 million remodel and subsequent reopening of its Back Bay Bistro. Overlooking the resort's marina, the Back Bay Bistro has received a total facelift — complete with remodeled dining and patio areas, an overhauled menu and a fully retractable roof that allows for an alfresco dining experience at any time.



TAC PROVIDES ANSWERS

If you've got questions about your Allison

transmission, the company's Technical Assistance Call Center (TAC) can help. Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the TAC was established to answer distributor and dealer service questions and to build a database that allows for quick, on-target answers and early detection of service issues. While most calls are from distributor and dealer service personnel, the hot line also fields calls from end-users. The call center can help troubleshoot questions about all Allison on-highway transmissions, including the 1000/2000/2400/3000/4000 series transmissions.

The hot line is staffed with experienced, ASE-certified technicians who can provide answers to general questions, and may refer more complex issues to a distributor or dealer near the caller's location. **For more information**, call the hot line at (800) 252-5283.

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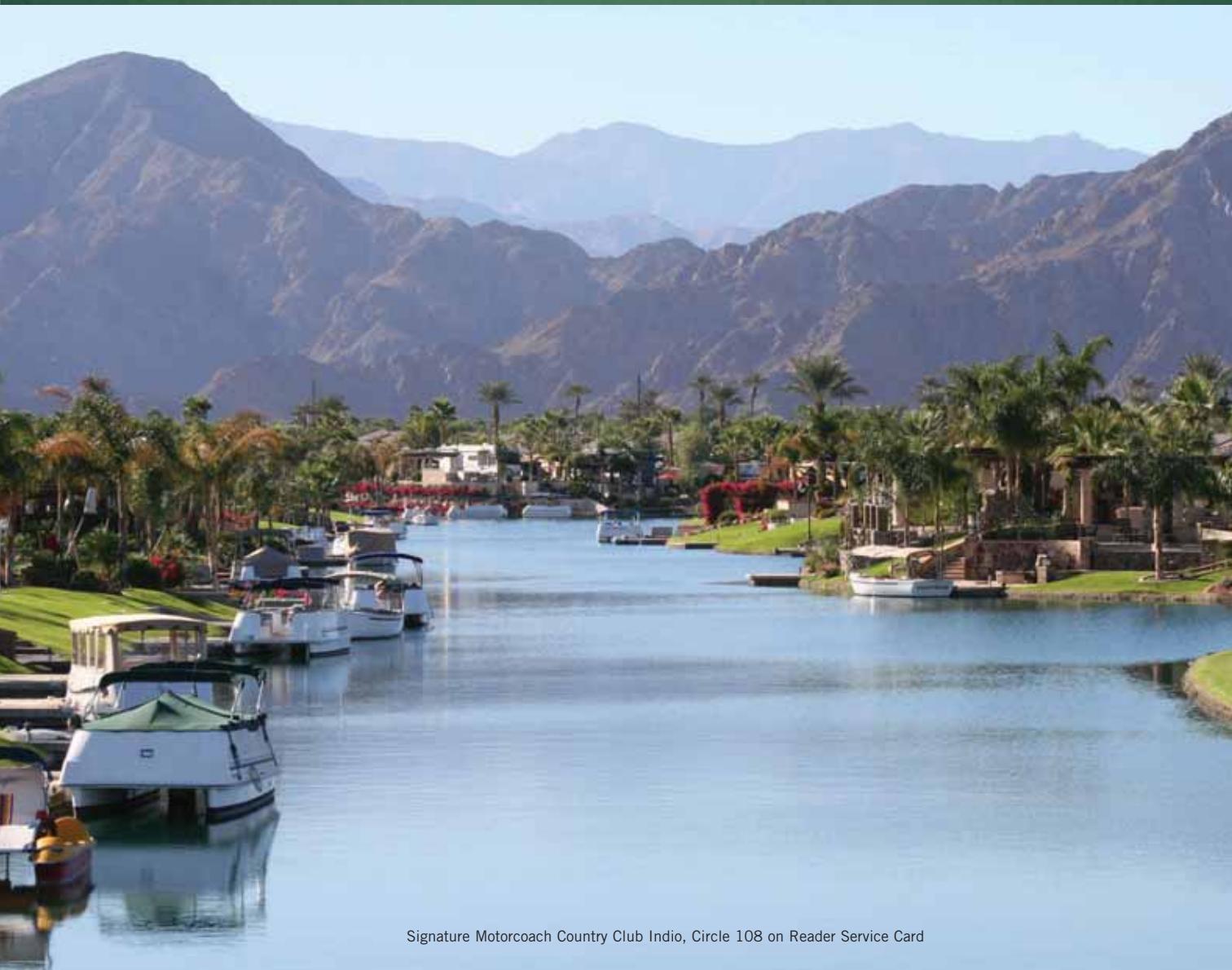


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CELEBRATING LATINO CULTURE

In April 2007, San Antonio, Texas, celebrated the opening of the nation's largest Latino museum, the Museo Alameda del Smithsonian. The first formal affiliate museum of the Smithsonian Institution, the Museo enables visitors to explore 20,000 square feet of exhibit space filled with a variety of ever-changing exhibitions, as well as traveling national and international installations. The Museo has exclusive access to more than 1.5 million Smithsonian artifacts.

One of the Museo Alameda's permanent installations is Franco Mondini-Ruiz's re-creation of a *botanica* — a Mexican folk healing shop — overflowing with trinkets, religious figurines, healing potions and herbs. The building's unique façade is constructed of stainless steel and cast aluminum, and the lace-like exterior wall resembles the punched tin of a *luminaria* — a Mexican lantern used for celebrations. It is also a permanent art installation that boasts kinetic lighting, with 22,000 continually changing color combinations, synchronized to an original music score.

For more information, call (210) 299-4300, or go to www.thealameda.org.

— Joanne S. Liu

SPAM-A-LOT

What inspired an award-winning Broadway musical and attracts thousands annually at a Waikiki festival? What did Nikita Khrushchev credit for the survival of the Russian Army during World War II? SPAM. Despite its glorious past, SPAM's reputation has suffered in recent years, but a visit to the interactive SPAM Museum in Austin, Minnesota, will leave you singing its praises.

In the museum's theater, join the Spamettes in their rendition of "Mr. Spam-Man" and "Stand by Your SPAM." KSPAM, a fully operational radio studio, airs old SPAM commercials and occasionally hosts live broadcasts. Get cooking tips from internationally famous chefs as they



prepare exotic recipes at Chez SPAM. You can even compete in the SPAM Exam.

Admission to the 16,500-square-foot museum is free, and RV parking is available.

For more information, call (800) LUV-SPAM, or visit www.spam.com.

— Mary Zalmanek ♦

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Crossing the Mexican-American border is a fun experience, with vendors working the aisles between vehicles.



It's not uncommon to see caravanning RV groups traveling the highway through Mexico's towns, countryside and seascapes routes.



**BAJA CALIFORNIA,
MEXICO, OFFERS
THE OPPORTUNITY
TO RELAX AND
DO THINGS AT
YOUR OWN PACE**

by JIM COUPER

The coast of Baja California, Mexico, is a popular destination for many outdoor activities, including fishing, kayaking, swimming, surfing and beachcombing.



The tourist town of San Felipe, with its numerous RV parks and campgrounds, shops, restaurants and hotels, is an excellent place to set up home base, with a wide variety of activities available all year round.

The long, narrow desert in Mexico known as Baja California stretches over 1,000 miles from Tijuana in the north to Cabo San Lucas at the southern tip. On the west, the Pacific Ocean offers sand and surf while the warmer and more tranquil Sea of Cortez forms the eastern boundary.

The U-shaped route that I recommend, and that I have taken many times in many RVs, includes both coasts, features reasonably good roads and requires no Spanish — although it is a courtesy to learn a least a few phrases. American dollars are also readily accepted, although change is likely to be in pesos — the Mexican currency. Baja has very few highways and generally the ones marked on the maps are adequate for large motorhomes.

Be sure you have the correct travel documents packed before you depart. Passport laws pertaining to re-entry into the United States have changed and you want to make sure you are compliant. The U.S. Department of State Web site

(www.travel.state.gov) has more information, but the thing to keep in mind is that currently, U.S. citizens need to produce either a passport (or the new passport card), a Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative-compliant document or a government-issued ID *with* proof of citizenship. Keep in mind that after June 1, all entry into the United States will require a passport or passport card — without exception.

There are a number of easy precautions you can take before traveling to any country, but the most important may be to check that your auto insurance is valid. If not, add the extra coverage before you leave (if possible), or purchase travel insurance as soon as you reach your destination, before you start traveling extensively. (See the sidebar for helpful tips on traveling to Baja.)

Thus prepared, you'll be ready to start off. My own preference is to begin with the relatively easy entry point at Mexicali, just south of El Centro, California, and head

SUN AND SURF





La Bufadora (The Blowhole) sprays water up to 70 feet in the air and is a popular tourist stop near Ensenada.

BAJA TRAVEL TIPS

■ Check Your Insurance.

If you plan on driving in Mexico, be certain you have the appropriate insurance coverage. Check with your insurance company to see if it offers a pre-approved policy in Mexico. If not, visit a Mexican insurance proprietor (these are available on both sides of the border) to purchase a policy that will cover you while you travel.

■ Bring Appropriate Documentation.

Owners must accompany their vehicles while traveling, so make it a practice to have the motorhome and/or dinghy owner present on all excursions, and be sure to pack all appropriate documentation for the dinghy and the RV. Be sure to carry your driver's license, as well — it's valid in Mexico.

■ Don't Use Your Cell Phone While Driving.

It's a traffic violation to use a cell phone while driving in Baja.

■ Be Prepared.

In Baja, an FMT tourist visa is required for trips lasting longer than three days, and a non-immigrant fee is required for trips lasting longer than a week. — *Denise Santoyo*

directly south 125 miles on Mexico Highway 5 to San Felipe on the Sea of Cortez. Autos with nothing to declare can drive right through the border while motorhomes will undergo a perfunctory examination. Mexicali is a lively, chaotic place but you should do just fine — drive slowly and cautiously through the city and a well-signed, divided road will take you out of town, where traffic will quickly diminish. Highway 5 becomes a two-laner that is not especially wide, but has a bit of shoulder and is straight. Two hours down the road the border search will be repeated at an inspection station before you reach San Felipe.

There is no disputing that San Felipe is a tourist town and is not typical of the “real” Mexico — a fact that has its good points and bad. The good is that campgrounds start appearing about eight miles north of town and extend an equal distance south. The bad is that the campground rates are usually not bargains, ranging up to \$40 a day for a prime spot next to the beach in the height of the summer tourist season.

My wife, Lian, and I stayed at Ruben's RV Park Camp, slightly north of San Felipe's lighthouse and for \$20 a day it was just fine, and quite similar to the campgrounds on either side. Nearly all sites come with a ramada for shade and many have a two-story structure with a spot on top to dine at a picnic table. Sites close to town encourage walks along the beach into the center of the city. However, even if you don't go anywhere, the town will likely come to you as the campground is often visited by a host of entrepreneuring locals, which could include children selling gum, adults selling hammocks, teens selling carvings, women selling hot tamales, men selling silver jewelry and musicians offering to serenade you. The place is positively alive and dull moments are rare.



Valle de los Cirios, in central Baja south of San Quintín, is rich in indigenous wildlife and desert vegetation, including the cactus seen here.

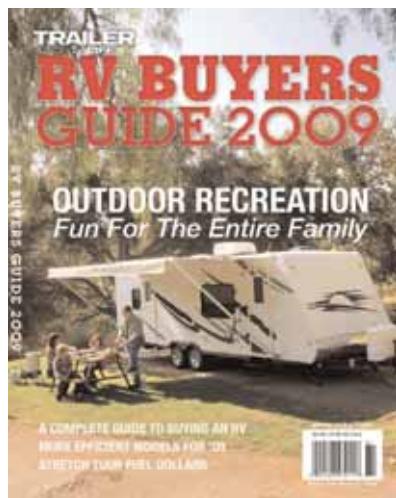
The main tourist activities in San Felipe are shopping, beachcombing, boating, dining out and hiking the hills. The town center consists of restaurants and souvenir stalls that overhang the sidewalks and spill onto the main street. If you wander the side streets, authentic shops that sell bread, meat and vegetables to locals are easily found. We started every day with a loaf of bread hot from the oven.

Located within easy distance — about

10 miles south — of downtown San Felipe, and well worth a visit on its own, is Valle de los Gigantes. This area is known for its numerous *cardones*, a type of cactus native only to this area. Popular with photographers, the natural beauty of this location is not to be missed. Valle de los Gigantes is also near the popular tourist camp Punta Estrella, which is well known to dune-buggy enthusiasts, kayakers and surfers, among others. It's also an excellent spot to watch grunion-running

in the spring months, March through June. A fellow traveler told us about hot springs with bathing pools etched into the hillside above the sea in the town of Puertecitos, 24 miles south of San Felipe via a newly paved road. We arrived in the village at high tide and learned that we had to wait for the water to recede before the springs would be available for bathing, so keep this in mind before making the trek. There are a number of seaside camping areas nearby that will enable you to stay and enjoy the springs at your leisure.

The road to the Pacific coast from San Felipe requires backtracking about 40 miles to the inspection station and then taking a turn west on Highway 3 to Ensenada. The arid countryside is moderately hilly and the road quietly winds through 122 miles of rural countryside. Ensenada is a large, congested city with very little in the way of signage, but don't panic. Keep heading southwest and you will reach either the Pacific Ocean or Highway 1, which is what you want. If you miss the highway keep going south and eventually you will find it as it is the only route south.



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Just a few miles south of Ensenada are signs for La Bufadora (the blowhole), which is at the end of a short, scenic drive along the Punta Banda peninsula. This tourist attraction consists of an underwater cave that blows the ocean, geyser-like, out of a hole in its top. The attraction is a popular one with tourists and photographers alike, so be prepared to pay for parking.

You are now entering the central portion of Baja, and continuing on brings a

change of scenery from rocky cliffs to sandy dunes. The 132-mile trip to San Quintín gives a taste of what compels many motorhomers to continue south all the way to Baja's southern tip — sunny skies, sandy shores and magnificent, peaceful isolation.

Just 22 miles south of Ensenada we saw signs for *aguas termales* (mineral springs). As lovers of hot outdoor bathing we quickly turned east and into the village of Uruapan. Signs for the springs are diffi-

cult to follow, and the road is unpaved, so caution is necessary. Luckily we found a guide who kindly showed us the way. After a few turns on dusty roads the signs reappeared and pointed us down the lane to the mineral springs. The owner gave us a guided tour, showing us each of the 10 tiled bathing tubs — we had our choice, and a hot bath cost just a dollar.

As soon as the highway abuts the Pacific at Santa Maria, just south of San Quintín, campgrounds again appear. The first two have the same name — Pabellon — and both have extensive ocean frontage with dunes. Immediately noticeable is a temperature drop of as much as 20 degrees at the shore. Rows of trees provide shelter from the brisk breeze.

For the novice traveler this is a probably a good spot for a U-turn. The return trip is via the same road to Ensenada where good signage leads drivers onto a toll road heading north. This divided highway curves majestically above the ocean and provides first-rate scenery for the homeward drive. There are beautiful campgrounds below, and if you wish to linger, these are excellent sites.

The border crossing is unlike anything you might have imagined and quite a lot of fun. Vendors with carts work the aisles between the rows of vehicles selling tacos, candies, tamales and all kinds of snacks and drinks. You place a food order and then watch the vendor recede into the distance as the line snakes forward. Then, 200 yards later, the vendor reappears with the order and lopes along beside your vehicle making change and adding seasonings. The border is the place to get rid of extra pesos no matter how you choose to spend them — buying peanuts, having your windshield cleaned or purchasing a last-minute souvenir.

A few weeks after your return home may find you planning for your next trip to Mexico. Perhaps this time you'll venture into the downtowns of the bigger cities, see the Yucatán or visit Mazatlán and Acapulco. One thing you can be sure of is an interesting trip to a beautiful land. ♦

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40 FREE FACTORY TOURS

GO BEHIND THE SCENES TO SEE HOW SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE PRODUCTS ARE MADE

by TERRI BLAZELL

If you've ever been curious about how your everyday products are created, many companies offer factory tours for an up-close and personal look at the manufacturing process. These tours offer a fascinating glimpse into the making of everything from candy to Tabasco to tractors, and — best of all — the ones listed here won't cost you a cent.

When you embark on a tour of a manufacturing plant or factory, you're in for a real treat, and we don't just mean the free samples. Some tours are self-guided, others are interactive, and most of the food and beverage companies offer free samples — the better to tempt you with.

Health and safety regulations may mean that you don't get to be quite as up close as you might like — especially where food or heavy equipment are concerned. Some factories may require that you wear goggles, ear protection or even hairnets. It's best to wear rubber-soled, closed-toe shoes — some tours require it, most recommend it. Factories are serious about these requirements; to be on the safe side, plan ahead and wear the proper footwear.

Tour information is subject to change, so check ahead for tour times and days before you go. Many tours are popular with school groups on field trips; to avoid these, a visit on a Monday, if available, is recommended. Keep in mind that most factories are closed on major holidays as well.

Where possible, we have included information about wheelchair accessibility. However, if you are in a wheelchair or have trouble walking, it's best to check with the factory first. Most can accommodate you for at least part of the tour.

Remember, factories were built to do business. Most factory tours were added as an afterthought as they became popular. Don't expect the glitz of an amusement-park attraction. Some factory tours may be located in crowded downtown areas where





Celestial Seasonings



Jelly Belly Candy Factory

parking can be limited, so check ahead of time or use a dinghy vehicle.

The tours listed here are free to the public; for a more comprehensive (but by no means complete) list of tours — both free and available for an admission fee — go to www.motorhomemagazine.com.

ALABAMA

Bud's Best Cookies, Hoover. This cookie factory tour is available mid-September through mid-May, Mondays and Tuesdays by appointment; (800) 548-1504, www.budsbestcookies.com.

ALASKA

Alaskan Brewing Company, Juneau. Enjoy free beer tasting — if you're age 21 or older. This tour is wheelchair accessible; (907) 780-5866, www.alaskanbeer.com.

ARIZONA

The Peanut Patch, Yuma. Watch how peanuts are roasted and made into candy. The tour is wheelchair accessible; (800) USA-PNUT, www.thepeanutpatch.com.

ARKANSAS

Terra Studios (pottery and glass), Fayetteville. The grounds feature a sculpture garden, pond and picnic tables. It has its own RV park within walking distance; (800) 255-8995, www.terrastudios.com.

CALIFORNIA

Jelly Belly Candy Factory, Fairfield. See where the world's most famous gourmet jelly beans are made. The factory includes a chocolate shop, Jelly Belly store and a café; (800) 953-5592, www.jellybelly.com.

Scharffen Berger Chocolate Factory, Berkeley. Learn about cacao and how it's processed into chocolate, then tour the factory in this hour-long excursion. Free samples are offered. Reservations are

required, and no children under 8 years old are allowed; (510) 981-4066, www.scharffenberger.com.

COLORADO

Celestial Seasonings, Boulder. You'll be right out on the floor where 5 million tea bags are produced daily. This tour has great RV parking. Tours are offered daily year-round and are wheelchair accessible. No children under 5 allowed on the tour; (303) 581-1202, www.celestialseasonings.com.

DELAWARE

Dogfish Head Craft Brewery, Milton. The tour includes visits to the new brew house and the cellars. Free tasting (must be age 21 or older). Tours start at 3PM (closed Sundays and Mondays); (888) 836-4347, www.dogfish.com.

GEORGIA

BabyLand General Hospital — Home of the Cabbage Patch Kids, Cleveland. Witness “nurses” and “doctors” “delivering” each Cabbage Patch infant, and learn about the intriguing history of Cabbage Patch Kids. The tour is wheelchair accessible; (706) 865-2171, www.cabbagepatchkids.com.

HAWAII

Big Island Candies, Hilo. This scrumptious sweet factory is particularly well known for its macadamia nut shortbread and Kona coffee. Free samples are available. Call ahead of time to schedule a tour; (800) 935-5510, www.bigislandcandies.com.

ILLINOIS

John Deere Attractions, Moline. The John Deere Pavilion and John Deere Collectors Center have interactive displays of the history of agribusiness, show restorations of vintage equipment, and highlight old and new equipment; (800) 240-5265 or (309) 765-1000, www.johndeereattractions.com.

INDIANA

Workhorse Custom Chassis, Union City. Tours are offered year-round on Tuesdays at 9:15AM with reservations; (765) 964-2284, www.workhorse.com.

Of course, Indiana is the RV capital of the world. Contact your favorite Indiana-based motorhome company; almost all offer factory tours.

IOWA

The Kaleidoscope Factory, Pomeroy. This “one-man show” is located in an old 1890s drugstore. The second Saturday of each month usually features guest artists. Free exotic wood scrap samples. Pre-register; (712) 468-2420, www.kaleidoscopefactory.com.

KANSAS

Cero's Candies, Wichita. Take this free 45-minute tour on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Reservations are required; (316) 264-5002 ext. 0, www.ceroscandy.com.

The Old Muffin Factory, McPherson. This 15-minute tour takes you on the factory floor to view the process of creating baking mixes by hand from scratch, then packaging them in adorable cloth bags shaped like blueberries, carrots or even candy kisses. Tours are offered Tuesday through Friday, year-round; (800) 697-0385, www.oldmuffinfactory.com.

KENTUCKY

Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky Plant, Georgetown. Watch as huge coils of steel are transformed into cars such as the Camry and Avalon. This tram-driven tour takes approximately 1½ hours. Visitors must present a valid photo ID; (800) TMM-4485, www.toyotageorgetown.com.

LOUISIANA

McIlhenny Company (makers of Tabasco sauce), Avery Island. This is a “don't miss” if you're a Tabasco fan. The experience in-

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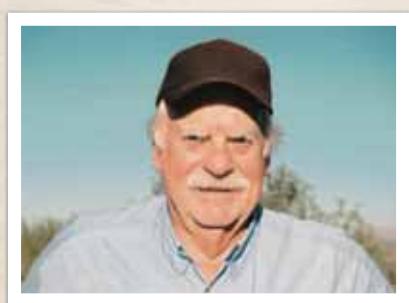
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MAINE

Tom's of Maine, Sanford. The 100,000-square-foot factory is powered by wind-generated energy. There are lots of tastes, smells and experiences, from mixing your own toothpaste to strolling through owner Kate's herb garden. Open mid-June through Labor Day. Reservations are required; (800) 775-2388, www.tomsomaine.com.

MASSACHUSETTS

Cape Cod Potato Chips, Hyannis. The self-guided tour shows the entire chip-making process from humble potato to bagging. Summer is the busiest season; the large parking lot in the back can usually accommodate RVs. Tour hours are Monday to Friday, 9AM to 5PM. Free samples are available; (888) 881-CHIP, www.capecodchips.com.

MISSOURI

Anheuser-Busch Brewery, St. Louis. Guided walking tours include stops at the Budweiser Clydesdale stable, beechwood lager cellars and historic brew house. At the end of the tour, complimentary soft drinks and pretzels are provided and visitors over age 21 may sample a variety of brews; (314) 577-2626, www.budweisertours.com.

NEVADA

Ethel M Chocolate Factory and Botanical Cactus Garden, Las Vegas. While a chocolate factory and cactus garden are an odd combination it makes for a great tour. Free samples are available; (888) 627-0990, www.ethelchocolate.com.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Connor Bottling Works (makers of Squam-

scot soda), Newfields. Stop by this 1863 homestead, family owned and run for five generations, to watch the soda being bottled, then taste the flavor of the day; (877) 4NH-SODA, www.nhsoda.com.

NEW MEXICO

Eagle Ranch Pistachio Nuts, Alamogordo. This 45-minute walking tour takes you from the grove, to sorting, roasting, flavoring and packaging; (800) 432-0999, www.eagleranchpistachios.com.

NEW YORK

Eden Kazoo Factory and Museum, Eden. This is now the only original metal kazoo factory in the world. The self-guided tour includes a visit to see the kazoos being made using original equipment (Wednesday through Friday only) as well as antique kazoos on display; (716) 992-3960, www.edenkazoo.com.

OHIO

Anthony-Thomas Candy Company, Columbus. This is not your usual candy factory. Catwalks take you above the floor where silver foil-wrapped pipes flow with molten chocolate. The tour stops over the kitchen where the creamy centers are made. Guided tours are offered Tuesday and Thursday and the facility is wheelchair accessible; (877) 226-3921, www.anthony-thomas.com.

OKLAHOMA

Keepsake Candles, Bartlesville. Watch demonstrations of handmade candle making; (888) 636-0351, www.keepsakecandles.com.

OREGON

Tillamook Cheese, Tillamook. This self-guided tour includes a video, interactive kiosks and mezzanine for viewing cheese-making and packaging operations. Free samples of Tillamook cheese are available

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and there is RV parking on site; (503) 815-1300, www.tillamookcheese.com.

PENNSYLVANIA

Snyder's of Hanover Pretzel Bakery, Hanover. This one-hour, guided walking tour takes you through the production of Snyder's pretzels and potato chips. You'll also be treated to free samples of freshly made snacks as well as a complimentary bag of pretzels to take with you. Reservations are required; (800) 233-7125 ext. 8592, www.snydersofhanover.com.

Utz Quality Foods, Hanover. Take a "chip trip" at the Utz factory to see, and smell, how the company makes its famous Utz potato chips. Follow the spuds as they're unloaded, peeled, washed, fried, seasoned and vacuum-packed. Visitors receive a small bag of original Utz potato chips; (800) 367-7629, www.utzsnacks.com.

Wilton Armetale, Mount Joy. Tour through the company's foundry and witness first-hand the start-to-finish process of turning molten metal into hand-finished pieces of serveware, grillware, cookware and more. Children must be age 12 or older; (866) 945-8661, www.armetale.com.

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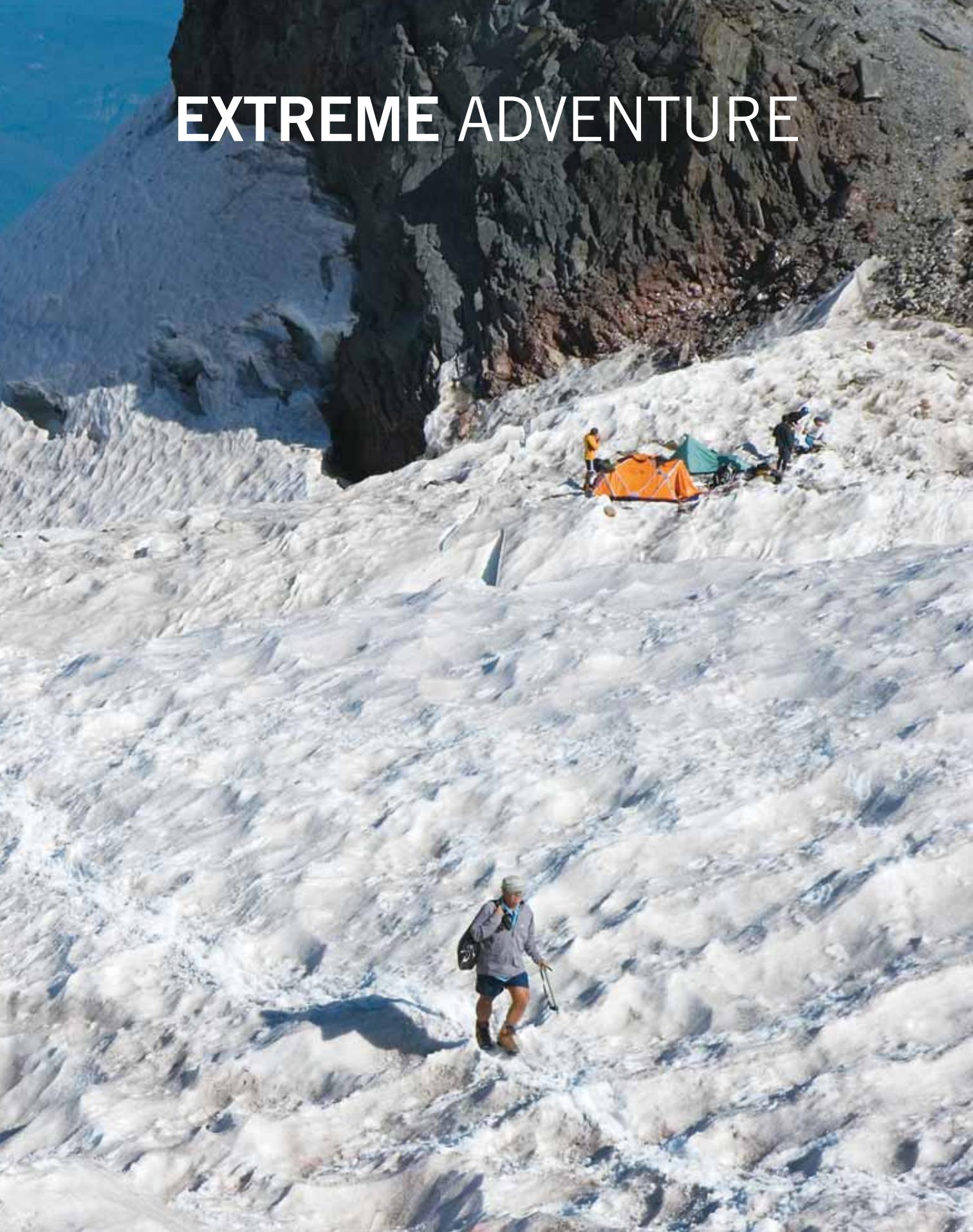


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EXTREME ADVENTURE



CLIMBING THE CENTERPIECE OF MOUNT RAINIER NATIONAL PARK IN WASHINGTON IS A CHALLENGE TO THE BODY AND SOUL

by BERT GILDART

At 14,410 feet Mount Rainier is the tallest mountain in Mount Rainier National Park, and from the cluster of buildings and the parking lot at Paradise to the summit it is almost 10,000 feet. Each year more than 10,000 people attempt the climb, but more than 50 percent turn back — or are turned back — for a variety of reasons, such as the one I encountered.

Our party was on the third and last day of a climb, and we were negotiating a prolonged section that approached a 50-degree incline. Winds were screaming at close to 70 MPH, and at that moment I questioned why I had exchanged the comfort of my RV for three days with a backpack, tent, crampons, plastic climbing boots, winter parka and an ice ax.

Some might think this is irrational behavior regardless of the conditions, and when the winds knocked me to the ground, I wondered once again: Can I really make it? One member of our party — a very competent climber — had turned around because of a pulled hamstring, punctuating the fact that up here, anything can happen, and it can do so at any time.

Indeed, summiting Rainier is a great challenge, though not an impossible one, and there are a variety of reasons climbers don't make it. One reason is a lack of adequate acclimation to the thin air. With the help of our RV I had solved that problem.

One week before the climb, my wife, Janie, and I had driven our rig to the town of Ashford, elevation 3,000 feet, and then, every day thereafter, made the relatively short trip to Paradise, elevation almost 5,000 feet. From there, we'd climbed long distances, and each day, I'd done so with a substantial pack. My theory was that daily excursions at high altitudes would prompt my body to generate more red blood cells, needed for the oxygen-deprived air found above 10,000 feet.

You might ask the obvious question: Why do it? Why confront Rainier and all of its various moods? Apparently other RVers in our campground had resolved that question, as many had come here to climb. My answer is that climbing amid such austere beauty provides a renewal of spirit. It's an adventure that I had to be well prepared for.

And so, almost five months prior to our departure, I began making plans, starting with a thorough medical checkup. After receiving the go ahead, I called International Mountain Guides (IMG) and locked in a mid-August date. Paul Baugher, one of the owners who would also be my guide, emphasized that I should strive to be in "the best shape of my life."

Baugher said cycling was second best for preparation only to



Opposite page: At our Camp Muir base camp, elevation 10,000 feet, we carved back the ice to set up our tents. This page, top: Heavy cloud cover often clings to Rainier. Middle: Our early arrival at Mounthaven Resort gave us time to acclimate to the elevation before the climb. Above: Knox Williams and Jennifer Fogle regroup at the summit.

Along the five-mile-long Skyline Trail, which is accessible from Paradise, are impressive views of Mount Rainier and Myrtle Falls.



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actual climbing. For people like Janie and me, who spend eight months a year traveling in our RV, that meant lots of intense bicycling. No matter where we were, we both rode bikes and did so vigorously. Finally, we were at a 10-day countdown — sending us back into our RV and a journey west from our home in Montana.

Though we've seen Rainier many times in our travels, this time when it came into view — after we ascended from the Columbia River Gorge along Interstate 90 — we saw it with renewed awe. The mountain towered over other lofty ranges and, from a distance of about 75 miles, its white snowy flanks appeared soft and almost inviting.

Our next significant glimpse occurred several hours later, when we descended White Pass, along U.S. Highway 12. There it was again, but now the ridges and slopes and glaciers assumed a different look. Rainier appeared formidable, and its circular summit reminded us that this massive mountain was formed in part by the colossal upheaval of intense volcanic activity. We could also see crevasses, and knew from our reading that these fissures had “swallowed” many a climber — one of the many facts that made hiring a guide a necessary precaution.

Despite tragedies, there are far more successes than failures. In August 1999, former Vice President Al Gore and his 15-year-old son, Albert, ascended Rainier. On August 31, 2002, 5-foot-tall, 77-year-old Bronka Sundstrom of Ashford, Washington, climbed the mountain. Though she remains the oldest woman to have summited, the oldest person to climb Rainier was an 84-year-old man who ascended not only in the summer of 2007 but in each of the two previous summers.

And so legends of the mountain continue to grow, but not from anything I'd do. I simply hoped to climb Rainier, enjoy sunrise and sunset, and then, after three days, return with memories and photographs of vistas that only this fabled mountain can provide. And that's the reason we arrived early, pulling into Mounthaven, a beautiful RV resort located half a mile from the park's Nisqually entrance.

Rainier is an incredible park even if you haven't come to climb. Twenty five glaciers radiate from the mountain's summit and their melt waters create a myriad of waterfalls that on hot days will refresh you with a soft mist. There are variegated meadows to explore that host a pageantry of wildflowers, creating carpets of pinks, yellows, reds and whites. Place a deer or two into these rainbow-colored meadows and watch as they wander through the mists of an early morning fog — the beauty is ever changing. Then there is Rainier, fifth-highest mountain in the continental United States, and containing the largest number of glaciers outside of Alaska — it backdrops everything. It's all part of the mystique of Mount Rainier National Park.

On the final day of our countdown our group received a little mountain education from another one of our two IMG guides, Aaron Mainer. He taught us how to use our ice axes to stop a fall; how to use climbing ropes when passing through dangerous ice fields; how to use the “rest step,” which is, according to Mainer, “the pace that will get you to the top ...” And then we were almost ready to climb.

On the day of the climb, Janie drove me to the IMG compound. I kissed her goodbye, and then loaded my gear into the company van and our group made the hour-long drive to Paradise. Then we all hefted our packs (mine weighed 35 pounds) and took the first steps that we hoped would take us to the summit.

Our group consisted of six people: Paul Baugher, Aaron Mainer and Jennifer Fogle, all from IMG; David Bristol, who last year summited one of the Grand Tetons; Knox Williams, a retired avalanche expert; and me, an outdoor journalist in his mid-60s.

Our first destination was Camp Muir — a distance of about four miles — and, as we climbed the 5,000 feet, we moved along steadily, reaching the historic camp in about five hours. Because Baugher had arranged a private outing for us, we had to camp away from the old stone hut, which we did, hiking about a mile across Cowlitz Glacier toward Cathedral Rocks. There we used shovels and our ice axes to carve back the ice and create a platform for our tents. Our camp was gorgeous and it was backdropped by Mount Adams, Mount Hood and Mount St. Helens.

That night several of us developed headaches from the thin air, something we resolved with aspirin. According to Baugher, some people develop acute cases of

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altitude sickness that include vomiting and even a form of temporary amnesia.

The next day we continued a short distance, ascending Cathedral Rocks which then leveled out onto Ingraham Glacier. Once again IMG had established a seasonal intermediate camp, though this one was at 12,000 feet. The remainder of the day was one of relaxation, and at 5PM, we retired. We needed to rest before we embarked on the most difficult part of our ascent.

At 11PM, Baugher awakened us and we enjoyed a hearty meal. Then, to avoid the avalanches and rock falls that warned snow might trigger, we struck out at 1AM, wearing hard hats to which we'd affixed headlamps. Before we had gone an hour, Bristol had to drop out because of the flare-up of a reoccurring injury. Mainer took him back to our camp on Ingraham Glacier, but before departing, Baugher asked if we all thought we could make it. He said that if, later, any others had to turn around, we'd all have to turn around, for he was obligated to stick by his clients.

The four of us who remained passed

around Disappointment Cleaver and crossed over an ice bridge that peered down into a deep crevasse. Rangers had installed a balance rope and in addition, Baugher inserted an anchor and belayed us over the bridge, providing additional security. The wind had picked up and a glorious sun was breaking the horizon. At this point we had passed from Ingraham Glacier and on to Emmons Glacier, the largest glacier in the United States outside of Alaska. This thick, massive sheet of ice would be our conduit to the top.

From this point the ascent became particularly steep: I think the angle approached 50 degrees. Combine that with winds that were kicking up and our conditions were deteriorating fast. One particularly vicious gust knocked Williams and me flat onto our rears, and did so despite the knife-edge crampons strapped to our boots.

It was 7AM by the time we arrived at the top amid a plume of swirling snow. A wan sun tried to break through the clouds but without much success. I pulled out my camera, took photos of the group, and then,

about 15 minutes later, we began our return — soon descending below the thinning clouds. A huge arc of the world unfolded into a panorama that seemed endless in its sweep. In one area, shafts of light radiated out, while in another direction the volcanic prominences of Mount Hood and Mount Adams stood fast, seeming like old friends.

For a while all in our group enjoyed the sight, but then Baugher said that we should continue on to avoid avalanches. And so, we continued the 10,000-foot descent.

At 5:30PM we reached Paradise, and then, an hour later, I was back at our RV — and my, did it look good! Janie, who was waiting, smiled, kissed me, and then said she wanted to know everything about the climb. I tried my best, but soon fell asleep on our coach's soft sofa, the glass of wine she'd poured almost untouched.

Refreshed now, I find I am still reflecting on Rainier, and — though we have continued on to a new location — am still trying to tell Janie about the climb.

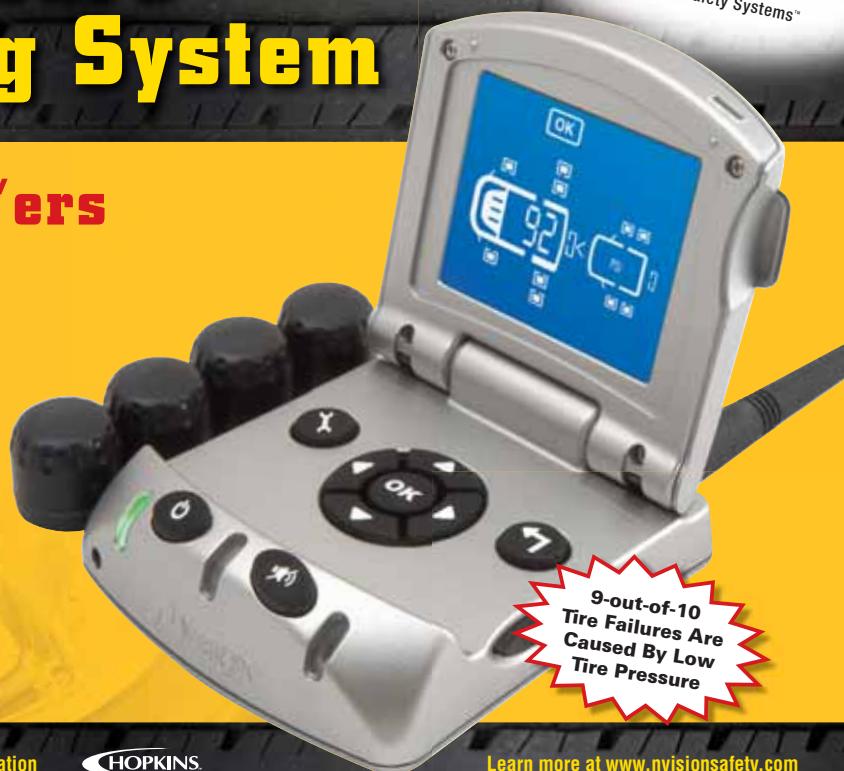
I suspect I'll be doing that as long as I live. ♦

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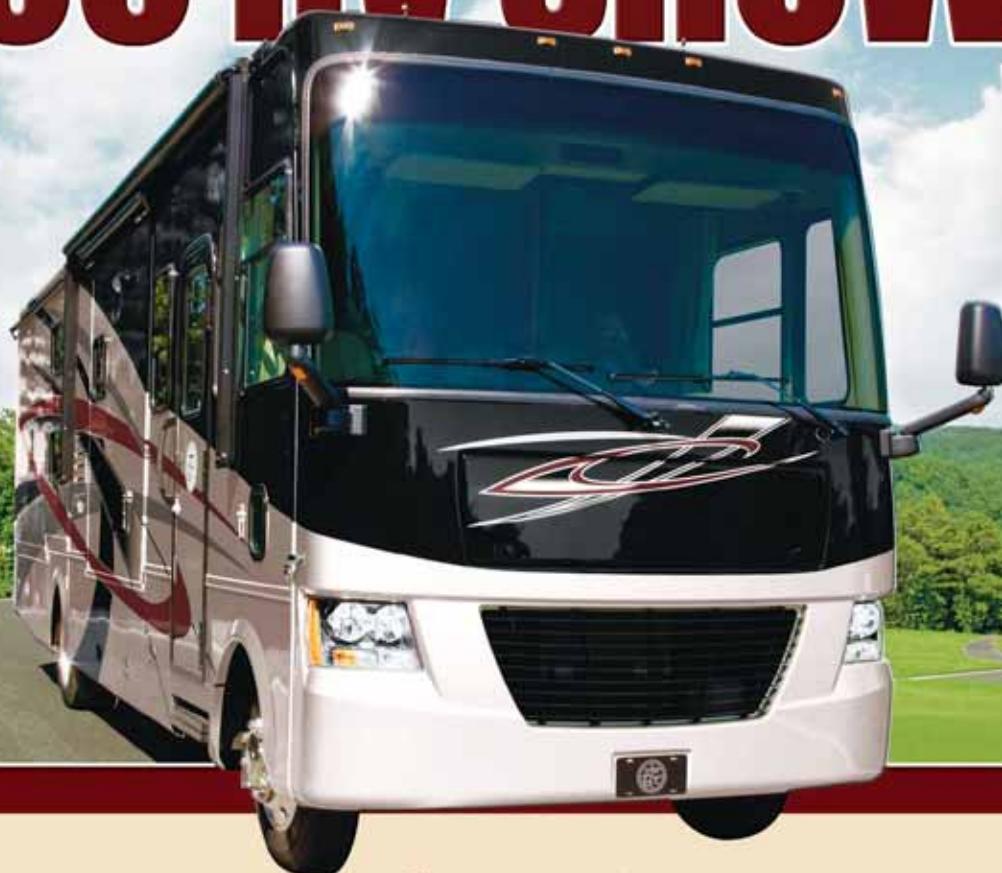
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THE GLOBE

by BOB LIVINGSTON



Every morning huge crowds gathered in the lobby of the Caravan Salon 2008 RV show in Düsseldorf, Germany. When the clock struck 10AM, this great herd of humanity moved quickly through the controlled turnstiles. Clearly the people attending the event were RV enthusiasts — or, at the very least, were serious enough to be considering getting into the lifestyle. What seemed like miles of RVs were stacked like cordwood awaiting the potential buyers.

We recently joined a host of United States' RV industry executives in Düsseldorf, Germany, at the Caravan Salon — the "World's Largest RV Show." The event attracted some 158,000 visitors from 38 nations for the late-summer event, which showcased 585 exhibitors from 22 countries.

You could see (by their animated expressions) and hear (because I learned enough German to eavesdrop a bit) that the Caravan Salon visitors had fuel costs on their minds. Yet, the excitement of the show and the lifestyle kept them moving from coach to coach, looking for the perfect unit. They apparently were determined not to let the fuel prices and a worrisome economy spoil the fun of hitting the road. They're clearly infatuated with the freedom of the open road — even though European roads are not exactly spacious. And, while the camping areas are not anything like those in the U.S., European RV enthusiasts are just as energized about the lifestyle as their American counterparts.

Walking up and down the seemingly endless aisles of the show, it was obvious that the European RV industry has proven that innovation can overcome the lack of interior square footage, held in check by narrow roads and historically high fuel prices.

Throughout the more than 2 million square feet of floor space, spanning 11 exhibition halls and outside areas, were 2,000 RVs from the European manufacturing and supplier communities. In the motorized segment, it seemed like Class C's dominated the offerings, including a display by Great Britain's giant manufacturer, Swift, showing for the first time in Düsseldorf.

Builders of these Class C's excel in zeroing in on potential occupancy when designing floorplans. Rigs earmarked for families typically have a cabover bed and a second fixed bed in the rear. Larger families are accommodated with unique placement of bunk beds. Almost universally, once the sleeping arrangements are implemented, the rest of the interior real estate is split up for the galley, bathroom and living area — all tiny by U.S. standards, but amazingly efficient. Slideouts are virtually nonexistent (mostly due to much more compact campground sites) and huge trunks are commonly built into the rear of the coach where bicycles or other large implements are housed. Towing cars is not big in Europe — yet — although Roadmaster was exhibiting its line of tow bars.

The European builders are masters at space utilization, evident by the innovative use of space within the tight quarters of the



This page, top: The Hymer-Innovision runs on LP-gas and features an awning with solar cells and a cooking area with sink that can be swung to the outside. Middle: At this year's show, manufacturers focused on maximizing living space with smart designs. Above: Bimobil's EX345 4WD expedition vehicle has 24 forward gears and four reverse gears. Opposite page, top: With a price tag of \$227,500, the Globetrotter XXL is German manufacturer Dethleffs' top-of-the-line coach. Bottom: The Italian design firm Technoform specializes in free-flowing interior designs, using modern laminates.

PHOTOS: BOB LIVINGSTON; RENE TILLMANN/WESSE DÜSSELDORF

dozens of Class B motorhomes that were on display — however, when provided with the additional footage afforded by a Class A chassis, livability is expanded remarkably.

Interior design and aesthetics are key elements in carving out floorplans that fight claustrophobia and work well for families. Modern laminates and the use of rounded corners help open up the interior visually while providing excellent storage capabilities. Technoform, an Italian design firm deeply immersed in the European RV industry, is a key player in promoting new materials. The company specializes in cabinet doors, interior doors and countertops. Descriptions of new offerings never use the word “square” as free-flowing lines and rounded corners are clearly the company’s main expertise.

Product Development Manager Alessandro Rossodivita guarded his latest design prototype (see photo on page 36) behind a locked door and allowed only invited guests to take a peek. The new galley structure prototype uses very modernistic-appearing laminates for its seemingly free-floating overhead cabinets and huge drawers designed to handle all kitchen storage needs. Innovative storage systems behind cabinet doors utilize just about every square inch of space and were easy to access without going into back-breaking gyrations. Consideration is given to comfortable counter heights for cooking and washing dishes and features are often designed for more than one use. A computer desk, for example, doubles as a makeup table and uses a “magic mirror” that features a hidden TV screen behind the mirror that can also be used as a computer monitor.

At the show, there were a number of creative exercises in radical design, including a few motorhomes designed for severe service — think adventure and exploration to remote, off-road locations.

The most expensive motorhome at the show, a Class A Volkner designed to accommodate a small roadster in its streetside storage bay on a special platform, retails for \$1.7 million Euros. At current exchange rates, that’s nearly \$2.47 million U.S. dollars.

It was interesting to note that the European RV builders are picking up the pace on amenities, responding to the demand for satellite dishes, flat-screen TVs and lots of wine-glass holders. They’ve focused on lightweight designs, but not on spartan models. Surprisingly, air conditioning is not a priority, but, again, that cuts weight out of rigs.



Above: This \$2.47 million Class A Volkner can transport a small roadster in its side storage bay. Right: Panoramic windows grace the Terrestra Integrated by Eura Mobil. Right, below: The Cross-TEC Taurus by T.E.C., built on a Ford 4 × 4 chassis, made its debut at Caravan Salon.

SWIFT MOTORHOMES

Swift is the largest manufacturer of motorhomes and caravans (travel trailers) in Great Britain. Located outside of Manchester, England, the factory produces an extensive line of motorhomes, including the top-of-the-line Bessacarr (below). Inside, the Bessacarr features beautifully styled cabinetry using handsome laminates and lots of rounded shapes. During a tour of the factory, I was impressed with the company’s modern construction techniques, tightly controlled by computer accuracy. The roof and side walls are made of glass-reinforced plastic to assure water tightness. Plumbing and electrical routing is top notch, and each rig is weighed to assure it meets government regulations.

Bessacarr E769



Bessacarr E765S





FIRST WORLD CONFERENCE ON RVS

After checking out hundreds of RVs, it was time to shift gears and prepare for the First World Conference on RVs, which took place here in conjunction with the show. Entering the meeting room for the World Conference on RVs was like entering the United Nations, but the language diversity was offset by the use of wireless translators. This conference really felt like a world event.

Richard Coon, president of the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association, led things off with a description of how America's trade association works. Attendees were enthralled by the scope of the industry in the U.S. Even with the downturn, no country comes even close to the number of rigs that are sold in the U.S. — and the number of households owning RVs. When Coon said, "There's no doubt in my mind, this industry is moving toward a world business," the mood was set for the day.

Canada's Kevin Betzold, president of the Recreation Vehicle Dealers Association of Canada, followed Coon and presented the audience with some interesting numbers. According to Betzold, about 14 percent of the Canadian population own RVs and they travel 38.5 million miles a year in them. That's certainly good for the economy.

China's RV industry is just getting started, and most likely will move fairly fast, as described by Wang Jidong, CEO of 21st Century RV. With only a few thousand RVs roaming a very undeveloped campground system, China is enthusiastic about developing standards and an RV infrastructure.

South Africa, in turn, has an interesting RV community. Dennis Bouwers, managing director of Motorhome-World (the country's leading motorcoach builder), made it clear that RVs are, realistically, available only to the affluent, though he is enthusiastic about building motorized products and helping the country expand its RV infrastructure. Rigs designed for South Africa have to be able to survive in the rugged outdoors. South Africa, we're told, has few vehicle standards, but lots of wildlife scattered around the county's 900 campgrounds.

Australia had a large contingent in Düsseldorf. Ben Yates, CEO of the Caravan, RV and Accommodation Industry of Australia, spoke on its behalf at the conference. Yates pointed out that Australia is an exciting place to RV, and it attracts lots of tourists. But its RV industry has slowed down. Yates said that the people are buying homes, pulling money out of equity loans and watching the rates go up. Sound familiar?

Australia has a great campground system, with a big sector under the Caravan Holiday Park system (230,000 sites), and a fantastic outback to explore — often by RV. As Yates says, "Caravaning used to be for those who couldn't afford something else; today it's the preferred way to travel."

Japan has 43 domestic RV manufacturers and 40 RV dealers. It also has 870 Roadside Stations designed for the traveler on the go. These are more than just places to pull over for the night, but locations at which visitors can also swim and stock up on supplies. Keike Inomata, overseas information director of the Japan Recreational Vehicle Association, entertained us with Japanese ingenuity: pocket-size RVs. These tiny rigs, called minis in Japan, are small enough to go anywhere — and each rig is supplied with a leaflet, "RVers 10 Clauses of Manners."

As for the domestic German marketplace, Hans-Karl Sternberg, director general of the German Caravanning Industry Association, presented an overview of the bustling European RV market, and wasted no time taking a few digs at England — all in fun, of course. It seems the English have discovered scientific data that the human brain is able to deal with driving on the left better than the right. Most of Europe doesn't buy into that.

The Germans and English are the biggest players in the European RV field, but don't discount the Italians and French. Competition among designers is fierce, with the customers being the ultimate beneficiary, and that fact was not lost on the U.S. contingent.

Europe's RV industry is carefully regulated, and all the players are working on unifying the standards. By the way, Sweden wins the rigs-per-capita contest: 299 RVs for every 10,000 residents. But in 2007 France registered the most motorcaravans. ♦

NEWELL 1281 | Could you ask for anything more in a coach?



It makes more sense to talk about what the Newell

1281 coach doesn't have rather than trying to list all of its features. When you're discussing a top-end motorhome in the million-dollar stratosphere there's very little in the way of materials, accessories and features that are left off.

Newell is known for building high-end motor coaches, and the 45-foot model 1281 is the latest example of the genre. Built on Newell's own bridge-construction-type steel chassis, the coach is topped by an aluminum-framed body that helps keep the center of gravity low. The rig is powered by a Cat 625-HP diesel engine backed by a ZF 12-speed transmission. ZF also supplies the front independent suspension components and an eight air bag support system is standard.

A look at the coach reveals the steerable tag axle that, along with the sharp front-wheel cut angle, adds up to a 37-foot turning radius — pretty amazing for a 45-foot motorhome.

The coach's exterior is high on "wow" factor with a sleek, classy body style with aluminum skin and molded-fiber-composite end caps. Full-body paint adds the high-end automotive touch desired by buyers in this range.

A step inside through the air-operated entry door reveals a stunning and expansive interior. This 1281 model features the optional Ultra Wood cabinetry that is mostly assembled in smooth curving surfaces. A combination of light- and dark-leather upholstery and complementary solid-surface countertops with tasteful but impressive trim further enhance the interior's luxury image.

The effect of the Ultra Wood cabinet surfaces is strik-

ing, and it adds a visual touch unequalled by today's more common woodwork species. The motorhome's flowing, rounded surfaces, including the hallway walls, bedroom vanity cabinets, kitchen counter and cabinets confirm the impression that this coach is something special.

The driver faces an expansive windshield and a SilverLeaf LCD screen dashboard delivers a broad array of vehicle systems and operating information.

This four-slideout coach includes a forward lounge area followed by opposing kitchen and U-shaped dinette sections, a midcoach half bath accessible from the bedroom or the forward living area, large master bedroom and aft-end main bath. Although there are no "catalog" Newell coach designs, floorplans like this one are considered "for reference only" because each Newell is custom built to order.

As an example of the high-end technology in this motorhome, the two front slideouts feature flush floors both deployed and withdrawn for travel. When the slideout retract control is activated, the floor section inboard of the slideout lowers several inches and the slideout moves in smoothly until the space is filled and the flush floor is again intact.

Powered amenities abound in the 1281. Window curtains that open and close at the touch of a button, driver's compartment sunshades and privacy screens, and a main 42-inch TV in a lift that rises from a curbside desk/cabinet alleviate some of the manual chores involved with coach use.

A 20-kW AC generator provides enough power to operate the brace of four rooftop A/C units plus any of the rig's



SPECIFICATIONS

CHASSIS:	WIDTH: 8' 6"
NEWELL CUSTOM BUILT	HEIGHT: 13' 3"
ENGINE: CATERPILLAR	WHEELBASE: 252"
C15, 625-HP	FRESHWATER CAP: 143 GAL
FUEL: 225 GAL	GRAY-WATER CAP: 143 GAL
GVWR: 63,600 LBS	BLACK-WATER CAP: 143 GAL
LENGTH: 45' 8"	MSRP: \$1,407,100

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other electronic goodies. These include the Dolby 5.1 surround receiver, a premium stereo system and a buyer's choice of in-motion or high-def satellite TV systems. For quiet-hours operation there are a pair of Outback 2,800-watt inverters.

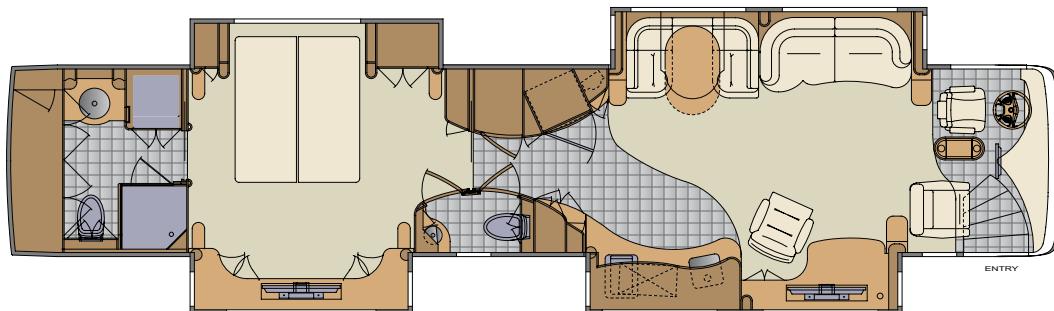
From the flush-mounted refrigerator/freezer with ice-maker to the Gaggenau electric cooktop, the galley abounds with top-end appliances. The inclusion of a panoramic-size window gives the cook a great view to the outside.

The bedroom uses the traditional dual-slideout design, but that's where the resemblance to any other coach ends. The color-coordinated Corian countertop is shaped in a graceful arc that mirrors the curved cabinetry below, and a large picture-size window brings a cheerfulness to the room.

The master bath, a step up from the bedroom floor level, is an array of components suitable for a luxury home. Black granite flooring, a glass-enclosed custom-fitted shower stall, a mirrored aft wall of closet doors, Corian countertops and a

freestanding-style glass bowl sink enhance the room's visual appeal. Naturally, the craftsmanship throughout is superb.

How could you further improve on a motorhome with this much equipment aboard that's assembled in such an exquisite package? The designers at Newell will be happy to help you take on that challenge. ♦



MOTORHOME'S 2009 DINGHY TOWING GUIDE



smart fortwo

FROM PICKUPS TO HYBRIDS, THIS MAY BE THE MOST DIVERSE SELECTION EVER

by CHRIS HEMER

It may finally be happening: Manufacturers may actually be building their new cars with the dinghy-towing motorhome owner in mind. It doesn't seem like that long ago that your only choices were front-wheel-drive, manual-transmission economy cars — but today there are few automobile genres that aren't represented in the dinghy-towing segment. From subcompacts and hybrids to full-size pickups and SUVs, there's something for everyone in this year's guide.

As always, we're only listing those new vehicles that have been officially recognized by the manufacturer as being dinghy towable (along with their specific requirements), and only those that can be towed at a minimum speed of 55 MPH for no less than 200 miles at a time. Bear in mind that, because intro dates vary widely these days, and because much of the information from the manufacturer may be preliminary at press time, some of the facts and figures presented here are subject to change. In fact, some potentially approved vehicles may not be included here because there wasn't enough information on them available at press time.

It is important to conduct your own research before purchasing one of the vehicles listed in this guide. The easiest, most assured way to do this is to visit the dealer and ask to see a copy of the owner's manual. In the index, look for the terms "flat towing" or "recreational towing" to find specifics about the vehicle you are considering. This will not only tell you if the vehicle is, in fact, towable, but what

specific procedures are required to prevent damage to the transmission, drive system, etc.

If the owner's manual doesn't contain information on flat towing, or recommends against it, you may still have options. There are kits and products available to make towing a "non-towable" vehicle possible. However, there is the possibility that the act of flat towing, and/or the installation of a towing product on a nonapproved vehicle can void the vehicle's warranty, so it's best to deal with a reputable aftermarket provider — such as Remco — that can guide you accordingly.

We know that there will be some vehicles that are not listed in this guide that can be towed with success, despite the manufacturer's claims to the contrary. How can that be? Usually, it's because the manufacturer has not officially verified that the vehicle in question is towable or because it does not want to deal with any potential warranty claims that may arise as a result of dinghy towing. But that does not necessarily mean that the vehicle can't be safely dinghy towed. When in doubt, it is probably best to stick with the vehicles that are officially approved, and the list grows longer every year. Happy shopping!

This guide addresses only 2009 vehicles. Guides for earlier model years are available online at www.motorhomemagazine.com.



Honda CR-V



Ford Flex



Ford Escape



Chevy Traverse

CHEVROLET

The much celebrated Malibu was introduced in a hybrid variation late last year, and is available for '09 in limited production. Powered by a 2.4-L Ecotec hybrid engine and four-speed automatic hybrid transmission, it delivers 4 more mpg city and highway than a similarly equipped nonhybrid model, but also costs roughly \$4,000 more.

Following in the footsteps of the GMC Acadia, Buick Enclave and Saturn Outlook, Chevy finally gets its own midsize crossover SUV, the Traverse. All models are powered by an updated version of GM's 3.6-L DOHC V-6, which now features direct injection for an impressive 288 hp. A six-speed automatic transmission and StabiliTrak electronic stability control are standard, and you may choose from either front-wheel-drive or all-wheel-drive configurations, both of which are towable.

DODGE

Motorhome owners love practical, comfortable vehicles, and Dodge's new Journey fits the bill. The Journey is offered in two different trim levels in front-wheel drive, and can seat up to seven. With an available 3.5-L V-6 it should have plenty of spunk, and the front-wheel-drive version is towable with a dealer-installed auxiliary transmission fluid pump.

But the biggest news from Dodge is the all-new Ram 1500. In addition to aggressive new looks and improvements to the available 5.7-L Hemi (with 390 hp and 407 lb-ft of torque), the Ram is now available in a short bed Crew Cab configuration, which can be outfitted with an optional Ram-Box cargo management system. Ram-Box provides lockable, weatherproof, illuminated and drainable storage compartments integrated into the cargo box sides. A new chassis

features a coil-spring, multilink rear suspension for improved ride and handling. Four-wheel-drive models are towable with either a manual or automatic transmission, too.

FORD

The Escape, Explorer and Ranger have long been dinghy favorites, and now Ford adds the new Flex to this mix. Looking like a modern interpretation of a '50s-era Woody (sans the wood), the Flex's 3.5-L V-6 engine and six-speed transmission make for reasonable pep and decent fuel economy — especially for a vehicle that can seat up to seven. It's available in two- or all-wheel drive, and both versions are towable.

A redesigned F-150 is also being launched this year, with hopes it will compete in a tough full-size truck market. Among the many highlights is a stronger frame, standard AdvanceTrac with Roll Stability Control (RSC), trailer sway control, and an available rearview camera assist. The familiar 4.6- and 5.4-L V-8 engines remain, but a new six-speed automatic makes its debut this year. Three cab styles, four box options and seven trim levels provide potential buyers with up to 35 different configurations.

HONDA

Will wonders never cease? For the past three years, the CR-V was the only vehicle in Honda's lineup that the company would officially acknowledge as towable, but this year that changes with the introduction of the subcompact Fit. Towable with either a manual or automatic transmission, the Fit is destined to become a favorite of motorhome enthusiasts. It's light, inexpensive, economical and surprisingly roomy, thanks to a multiconfigurable interior. Standard features in-



Dodge Journey



Saturn VUE 2 Mode Hybrid



Chevy Malibu



Honda Fit

clude air conditioning, an AM/FM/CD audio system with four speakers, auxiliary audio input jack (for iPods and MP3 players), power windows, power mirrors and power door locks. The Fit Sport adds alloy wheels, an underbody aero kit, rear roofline spoiler, fog lights, keyless remote entry, cruise control and a security system.

HUMMER

The Hummer model line grows once again with the introduction of the H3T truck. Bigger than a midsize, but smaller than a full-size, the H3T has the rugged military looks of its brethren and the off-road capability to match. The standard engine is a 3.7-L inline five-cylinder, which can be matched to either a five-speed manual or four-speed automatic; the 5.3-L V-8-powered H3T Alpha comes with the automatic transmission only. The H3T seats five, and can be personalized with an extensive array of Hummer Genuine Accessories. You can even get front- and rear-locking differentials with the available Off Road Adventure package. The best news? All H3T models are dinghy towable.

NISSAN

Introduced late last year, Nissan's economical Versa is a good choice for fuel-conscious RVers. Available in a five-door hatchback or four-door sedan, the Versa starts at \$12,990 and comes standard with a 122-HP 1.8-L engine and six-speed manual transmission — the only towable version. Best-in-class total passenger volume and a long list of standard and optional equipment make the Versa a good value.

SATURN

To motorhome owners, the Saturn name has become almost synonymous with dinghy towing — and this year, there is yet

another model deemed dinghy towable: The VUE 2 Mode Hybrid. Boasting an estimated 50 percent increase in fuel economy over a comparably equipped XR V-6 model without sacrificing performance or capability, this model is the first front-wheel-drive compact SUV powered by GM's two-mode hybrid technology. This system utilizes twin 55-kW electric motors that work in concert with the 2MT70 automatic transmission. Energy to power the motors comes from a 1.8-kWh, 300V nickel-metal hydride battery pack, consisting of 22 nickel metal hydride modules located behind the second-row seat, below the cargo floor. The first mode is for low speeds, and operates in one of three ways: all electric, all engine, or a combination of both. Mode two is designed for highway speeds, providing an electric power boost only under high-demand situations, such as climbing hills. Standard features include ABS, stability control and six air bags.

SMART USA

Do you want to show the world that you are a minimalist despite the fact that you travel in a 40-foot diesel-pusher? The smart fortwo may be just what you're looking for. In contrast to its apparent "back to basics" aspirations, the fortwo is surprisingly well equipped with stability control, anti-lock brakes and driver/front passenger air bags. A diminutive 1.0-L three-cylinder engine musters 71 HP, is connected to an automated five-speed manual transmission and averages 33 city/41 highway MPG. The "smart" part is debatable, however: The base model costs \$12,000, while the nicely equipped passion model commands \$13,990 for the coupe and \$16,990 for the cabriolet. That puts it into the same range as larger, more powerful cars that get up to 35 MPG on the highway. ♦



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-Towing

Pronunciation [toh-ing]

-Verb (used with object)
1. to pull or haul (a car, barge, trailer, etc.) by a rope, chain, or other device: The car was towed by the motor-home.

-Noun

2. an act or instance of towing.
3. something being towed.
4. something, as a boat or truck, that tows.
5. a rope, chain, metal bar, or other device for towing: The trailer is secured to the car by a metal tow.

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V	F	I	B	V	J	T	A	Q	I	N	N	D	R	G
V	M	F	L	M	E	R	L	N	Z	O	F	E	E	N
Q	M	K	F	I	R	N	N	M	I	T	A	I	T	I
M	U	N	Q	E	B	O	B	T	B	V	L	N	S	D
V	R	A	T	W	V	A	R	R	N	C	C	U	A	N
T	P	L	L	A	Q	O	D	D	A	Y	O	S	M	I
Z	L	F	T	I	P	Z	T	N	N	K	N	A	D	B
A	Z	I	T	O	T	D	C	L	E	H	E	N	A	N
V	O	X	R	X	T	Y	F	N	N	P	W	P	O	O
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INNOVATION
ROADMASTER
STERLING
MADE IN USA
NON BINDING
PROPORTIONAL

QUALITY
QUICK DISCONNECT
ALL TERRAIN
CUSTOMER SERVICE
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EVEN BRAKE
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PASSENGER CARS

MAKE	MODEL	BASE CURB WEIGHT	SPEED/DISTANCE LIMITS	TOWABLE WITH MANUAL TRANS.	TOWABLE WITH AUTO TRANS.	MILEAGE CITY/HWY.	APPROX. RETAIL PRICE RANGE
CHEVROLET	Cobalt Coupe/Sedan	2,991	65 MPH/None	Yes	Yes	25/37	\$16,330-\$24,095
	Malibu	3,415	65 MPH/None	NA	Yes	22/30	\$22,275-\$27,550
	Malibu Hybrid	3,502	65 MPH/None	NA	Yes	26/34	\$26,225-\$27,545
CHRYSLER	Aspen 4 x 4 ⁽¹⁾	5,070	None	NA	Yes	13/17	\$35,030-\$38,830
	PT Cruiser	3,070	None	Yes	Yes ⁽²⁾	19/26	\$17,920-\$24,430
	Town & Country	4,335	None	NA	Yes ⁽²⁾	17/25	\$26,500-\$37,300
⁽¹⁾ Only towable with the optional low-speed transfer case that has a NEUTRAL position. ⁽²⁾ With dealer-installed auxiliary transmission fluid pump.							
FORD/MERCURY	Focus	2,588	None	Yes	No	24/35	\$14,995-\$16,180
	Fusion/Milan	3,181	70 MPH/None	Yes	No	20/29	\$19,035-\$27,010
	Taurus (FWD/AWD)	3,741	None	NA	Yes	18/28	\$24,125-\$29,425
HONDA	Fit	2,500	65 MPH/None	Yes	Yes ⁽¹⁾	28/35	\$14,550-\$18,760
⁽¹⁾ May require procedure that includes running the engine for 3 minutes at the beginning of a trip and at least every 8 hours thereafter.							
HYUNDAI	Accent	2,365	None	Yes	No	27/33	\$11,745-\$16,545
	Elantra	2,723	None	Yes	No	24/33	\$14,120-\$17,820
	Sonata	3,292	None	Yes	No	21/32	\$18,795-\$24,645
INFINITI	G37 Sport Coupe	3,662	70 MPH/500 MI ⁽¹⁾	Yes	No	19/26	\$32,000-\$34,000
	G37 Sport Sedan	3,615	70 MPH/500 MI ⁽¹⁾	Yes	No	17/25	\$33,000-\$35,000
⁽¹⁾ Idle engine in NEUTRAL for several minutes every 500 miles.							
KIA	Optima	3,157	None	Yes	No	22/32	\$17,430-\$21,575
	Rio/Rio5	2,365	None	Yes	No	27/33	\$13,975-\$15,920
	Spectra/Spectra5	2,701	None	Yes	No	23/30	\$14,200-\$18,345
	Sportage 2WD	3,230	None	Yes	No	20/25	\$17,035-\$22,380
	Sportage 4WD	3,411	None	Yes	No	19/24	\$20,530-\$23,880
NISSAN	350Z Coupe	3,339	60 MPH/500 MI ⁽¹⁾	Yes	No	20/27	\$28,510-\$38,680
	350Z Roadster	3,580	60 MPH/500 MI ⁽¹⁾	Yes	No	17/24	\$36,870-\$41,570
	Altima	3,107	60 MPH/500 MI ⁽¹⁾	Yes	No	23/32	\$19,900-\$29,380
	Sentra	2,853	60 MPH/500 MI ⁽¹⁾	Yes	No	25/33	\$16,730-\$20,570
	Versa	2,722	60 MPH/500 MI ⁽¹⁾	Yes	No	27/33	\$12,990-\$16,210
⁽¹⁾ Idle engine in NEUTRAL for several minutes every 500 miles.							
PONTIAC	G5	2,991	65 MPH/None	Yes	Yes	25/35	\$17,650-\$20,950
	G6 (all except convertible)	3,305	65 MPH/None	No	Yes	22/30	\$21,160-\$29,250
	Torrent GXP	3,813	65 MPH/None	NA	Yes	16/24	\$30,115-\$32,110
	Vibe	2,700	None	Yes	No	26/32	\$16,735-\$21,510
SATURN	Aura Hybrid	3,529	65 MPH/Unlimited	NA	Yes	26/34	\$26,896
	Aura XE/XR	3,529	65 MPH/Unlimited	NA	Yes	22/33	\$23,100-\$26,595
SCION	tC	2,905	None	Yes	No	20/27	\$17,670
	xB	3,020	None	Yes	No	22/28	\$16,420
	xD	2,625	None	Yes	No	27/33	\$15,320
SMART USA	smart fortwo	1,800	None	NA	Yes	33/41	\$11,990-\$16,990
SUBARU	Impreza	3,075	None	Yes	No	20/27	\$17,495-\$29,995
	Legacy	3,270	None	Yes	No	20/27	\$20,795-\$34,595
	Outback	3,350	None	Yes	No	20/26	\$22,495-\$34,095
SUZUKI	SX4 Sport	2,668	55 MPH/200 MI	Yes	No	22/30	\$15,739-\$17,000
	SX4 Crossover ⁽¹⁾	2,849	55 MPH/200 MI	Yes	No	21/28	\$15,939-\$18,000
⁽¹⁾ Console-mounted selector must be in the 2WD position.							

Longing for a shorter Class A diesel?

— See the new Meridian 34Y at your nearest Itasca dealer today. —



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Full-wall slide. King bed. Theatre Seating. Now you can have your cake and eat it too: The new Meridian 34Y packs the punch of a larger Class A diesel into a compact 34-foot coach. And it's just one of 12 models and 36 floorplans you'll find in our 2009 line-up. From the luxurious 40-foot Horizon to the smart, nimble Navion iQ, the right coach for you is as close as your nearest Itasca dealer.



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Featured Above

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Navion® iQ



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PASSENGER CARS

MAKE	MODEL	BASE CURB WEIGHT	SPEED/DISTANCE LIMITS	TOWABLE WITH MANUAL TRANS.	TOWABLE WITH AUTO TRANS.	MILEAGE CITY/HWY.	APPROX. RETAIL PRICE RANGE
TOYOTA	Camry	3,285	None	Yes	No	21/31	\$19,145-\$21,815
	Camry Solara	3,175	None	Yes	No	21/31	\$20,180-\$22,450
	Corolla 1.8-L	2,767	None	Yes	No	27/35	\$15,350-\$16,420
	Corolla 2.4-L	2,877	None	Yes	No	22/30	\$18,860-\$20,050
	Matrix 1.8-L	2,865	None	Yes	No	26/32	\$16,290-\$18,360
	Matrix 2.4-L	3,140	None	Yes	No	21/28	\$20,760-\$21,950
	Yaris	2,293	None	Yes	No	29/36	\$12,205-\$13,925

TRUCKS/SUVS

MAKE	MODEL	BASE CURB WEIGHT	SPEED/DISTANCE LIMITS	TOWABLE WITH MANUAL TRANS.	TOWABLE WITH AUTO TRANS.	MILEAGE CITY/HWY.	APPROX. RETAIL PRICE RANGE
BUICK	Enclave 2WD CX/CXL	4,780	65 MPH/None	NA	Yes	17/24	\$34,865-\$37,175
	Enclave 4WD CX/CXL	4,985	65 MPH/None	NA	Yes	16/22	\$36,865-\$39,175
CHEVROLET/ GMC	Avalanche 1500 4WD	5,767	None	NA	Yes	14/20	\$38,960-\$47,150
	Colorado/Canyon 4WD	3,754	None	Yes	Yes	17/23	\$18,555-\$24,900
	Equinox Sport 2WD	3,818	65 MPH/None	NA	Yes	17/24	\$30,140
	Equinox Sport AWD	3,915	65 MPH/None	NA	Yes	16/24	\$32,135
	HHR	3,155	65 MPH/None	Yes	Yes	22/30	\$19,380-\$25,280
	Sierra 1500 4WD	4,687	None	NA	Yes	14/20	\$21,185-\$39,525
	Silverado 1500 4WD	4,798	None	NA	Yes	14/18	\$22,970-\$37,985
	Silverado 2500 4WD	5,556	None	NA	Yes	NR	\$29,570-\$40,865
	Suburban/Yukon XL 1500 4WD	5,743	None	NA	Yes	14/20	\$41,790-\$53,910
	Suburban/Yukon XL 2500 4WD	6,327	None	NA	Yes	NR	\$43,190-\$48,790
	Tahoe/Yukon 4WD	5,524	None	NA	Yes	14/20	\$39,490-\$51,850
	Trailblazer/Envoy 4WD	4,663	None	NA	Yes	14/20	\$28,900-\$40,075
	Traverse/Acadia	5,066	None	NA	Yes	17/24	\$28,990-\$39,760

Note: Some weights may be higher, depending on model.
NR = No rating.

DODGE	Dakota 4WD	4,376	None	Yes	Yes	15/19	\$24,825-\$29,995
	Durango 4WD	4,940	None	NA	Yes (1)	13/19	\$30,910-\$45,340
	Grand Caravan	4,321	None	NA	Yes (1)	17/25	\$23,295-\$31,510
	Journey FWD	3,801	None	NA	Yes (1)	19/25	\$21,300-\$27,960
	Ram 1500 4WD	4,893	None	Yes	Yes	13/18	\$25,725-\$44,935
	Ram 2500 4WD	5,792	None	Yes	Yes	NR	\$31,390-\$44,945
	Ram 3500 4WD	6,481	None	Yes	Yes	NR	\$33,500-\$56,915

(1) With dealer-installed auxiliary transmission fluid pump.
NR = No rating.

FORD/ MERCURY	Edge (FWD/AWD)	4,078	TBD	NA	Yes	17/24	\$26,130-\$31,790
	Escape/Mariner Hybrid	3,669	75 MPH/None	NA	Yes	34/31	\$29,305-\$32,225
	Escape/Tribute I-4	3,299	70 MPH/None	Yes	Yes	22/28	\$20,100-\$24,580
	Escape V-6	3,421	75 MPH/None	NA	Yes	19/25	\$23,115-\$24,580
	Explorer 4WD V-6	4,628	None	NA	Yes (c)	13/19	\$29,315
	Explorer 4WD V-8	4,719	None	NA	Yes (c)	14/19	\$30,625
	F-150 4WD	4,971	55 MPH/None	NA	Yes (d)	14/18	\$25,240-\$32,365
	F-250/F-350/F-450						
	Super Duty 4WD	6,976	None	No	Yes (d)	NR	\$36,255-\$56,235
	Flex (FWD/AWD)	4,468	TBD	NA	Yes	17/24	\$28,295-\$36,555
	Mariner	3,341	75 MPH/None	NA	Yes	18/26	\$23,035-\$27,900
	Mountaineer	4,615	None	NA	Yes (c)	14/20	\$28,035-\$34,370
	Ranger	TBD	55 MPH/None	Yes (a,b)	Yes (c)	21/26	\$16,170-\$25,235
	Sport Trac 4WD V-6	5,080	None	NA	Yes (c)	13/19	\$28,510-\$32,360
	Sport Trac 4WD V-8	6,990	None	NA	Yes (c)	14/19	\$29,820-\$33,670
Taurus X (FWD/AWD)	4,033	TBD	NA	Yes	16/24	\$27,575	

Note: Actual weight may vary depending on brand, model, and equipment.

(a) Electronic Shift-on-the-Fly rotary control in 2-high position and transmission in NEUTRAL (with 4 x 4 only).

(b) Manual transmission in NEUTRAL (with 4 x 2 or 4 x 4).

(c) Only 4 x 4 with dealer-installed Neutral Tow Kit.

(d) Only with manual shift 4 x 4 vehicles, not Electronic Shift-on-the-Fly or 4 x 2 vehicles. Transfer case must be shifted to NEUTRAL.

NR = No rating.

BLUE OX



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\$17,999 New Model! **Freedom Roads Harrisburg, PA**



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Jeep Wrangler



Suzuki Grand Vitara

TRUCKS/SUVS

MAKE	MODEL	BASE CURB WEIGHT	SPEED/DISTANCE LIMITS	TOWABLE WITH MANUAL TRANS.	TOWABLE WITH AUTO TRANS.	MILEAGE CITY/HWY.	APPROX. RETAIL PRICE RANGE
HONDA	CR-V FWD/AWD	3,500	65 MPH/None	Yes	Yes ⁽¹⁾	20/27	\$21,095-\$28,795
⁽¹⁾ May require procedure that includes running the engine for 3 minutes at the beginning of a trip and at least every 8 hours thereafter.							
HUMMER	H2	6,614	None	NA	Yes	NR	\$59,395
	H2 SUT	6,614	None	NA	Yes	NR	\$60,900
	H3	4,698	None	Yes	Yes	14/18	\$32,345
	H3 Alpha	4,849	None	NA	Yes	13/16	\$40,660
	H3T	4,934	None	Yes	Yes	14/18	\$36,015
	H3T Alpha	5,069	None	NA	Yes	13/16	\$30,750
NR = No rating.							
HYUNDAI	Santa Fe GLS 2WD	3,727	Legal/None	Yes	No	17/24	\$21,495-\$28,872
	Tucson GLS 2WD	3,240	Legal/None	Yes	No	20/26	\$18,070-\$23,920
JEEP	Commander Sport U 4WD ⁽¹⁾	4,866	None	NA	Yes	13/18	\$31,210-\$35,625
	Grand Cherokee Laredo X 4WD ⁽¹⁾	4,640	None	NA	Yes	14/19	\$32,500-\$36,565
	Liberty Limited/Sport 4WD ⁽²⁾	4,222	None	NA	Yes	15/21	\$24,520-\$27,625
	Wrangler 4WD	3,760	None	Yes	Yes	15/19	\$19,320-\$30,195
⁽¹⁾ With 4.7-L engine and NV245 transfer case (Quadra-Trac II/Quadra-Drive II option).							
⁽²⁾ With 3.7-L engine and standard Command-Trac or optional Selec-Trac transfer case.							
NISSAN	Frontier 2WD I-4	3,675	60 MPH/500 MI ⁽¹⁾	Yes	No	19/23	\$17,460-\$19,560
	Frontier 2WD V6	4,139	60 MPH/500 MI ⁽¹⁾	Yes	No	16/20	\$20,360-\$24,930
	Frontier 4WD V6	4,307	60 MPH/500 MI ⁽¹⁾	Yes	No	15/19	\$23,060-\$27,630
	Xterra 2WD	4,150	60 MPH/500 MI ⁽¹⁾	Yes	No	16/20	\$22,060-\$27,560
	Xterra 4WD	4,360	60 MPH/500 MI ⁽¹⁾	Yes	No	16/20	\$24,110-\$29,560
⁽¹⁾ Idle engine in NEUTRAL for several minutes every 500 miles.							
SATURN	VUE FWD	3,825	65 MPH/Unlimited	NA	Yes	19/26	\$22,770-\$26,095
	VUE AWD	4,325	65 MPH/Unlimited	NA	Yes	16/23	\$23,615-\$28,095
	VUE Hybrid	3,789	65 MPH/Unlimited	NA	Yes	25/32	\$27,690
	VUE 2 Mode Hybrid	4,265	TBD	NA	Yes	TBD	TBD
	Outlook FWD	4,700	65 MPH/Unlimited	NA	Yes	17/24	\$30,115-\$33,940
	Outlook AWD	4,905	65 MPH/Unlimited	NA	Yes	16/23	\$32,115-\$35,940
SUBARU	Forester 2.5X	3,250	None	Yes	No	20/26	\$19,995-\$29,995
SUZUKI	Grand Vitara ⁽¹⁾	3,600	55 MPH/None	Yes	Yes	17/23	\$20,000-\$24,000

⁽¹⁾ Only Grand Vitara models equipped with 4WD and transfer switch are recommended for flat-towing. Automatic transmission models: flat tow with transfer case in NEUTRAL and transmission in PARK. Manual transmission models: flat-tow with transfer case in NEUTRAL and transmission in SECOND gear.

FORETRAVEL NIMBUS SE 40

Twenty-one new standard features should pique the curiosity of buyers searching for a luxury coach



Foretravel, an originator and innovator in custom-coach building since 1967 under the guidance of founder C.M. Fore, has continued its significant presence in high-end motorhome construction with the latest version of the Nimbus SE Caspian floorplan. Built on Foretravel's proprietary TravelRide air-ride semi-monocoque chassis with improved frame and suspension geometry — and offered with an optional independent front suspension (\$10,450) and standard ABS air discs on all axles — this motorhome creates the solid, comfortable ride discriminating owners often seek. Power comes from the standard

Cummins 500 HP ISM engine and Allison six-speed 4000MH transmission with automatic traction control and retarder, making travel to any elevation of the U.S. an effortless experience.

Outside, the 2009 Nimbus has a new face that recesses all forward lighting, creating a clean, sleek look that caught our eye from a distance and is offered in a choice of four exterior full-body paint schemes.

The Nimbus offers the ample cargo storage expected in a motorhome of this caliber and provides easy access to compartments below the slides with unique horizontal pantograph doors. With an Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity of 7,200 pounds, there's ample capability for handling heavy packing, and the chassis is rated sufficiently to accommodate the standard 18,000-pound rated hitch receiver.

Maintenance access for checking engine and coach systems is well thought out from years of experience and customer feedback. Both are placed within safe and easy reach. The utility bay with cleanup station protects all external coach connections along with new-for-2009 standard electric dump

valves and gray-water bypass of the single holding tank, allowing for direct-connect sink and shower discharge.

Inside, the Caspian floorplan is a four-slide design wrapped in beautiful clear cherry wood cabinetry. Three other woods and six fabric choices are available with Silestone solid-surface countertops throughout.

The semi-wraparound cockpit places all gauges and controls in clear view and easy reach of the driver seated in the comfortable air-ride leather chair with six-way power adjustments. Copilot amenities include a swivel chair with six-way power, foot and head rests, and his/her own A/C dash controls for adjustable temperatures on the right side. The 2009 model features a motorized backup camera with dash control as well as MP3 audio connections.

The streetside pantry with forward entertainment center — which includes a 37-inch LCD TV or optional 42-inch LCD TV (\$680) — and dinette lounge faces the curbside galley and sofa bed in dual opposing, pneumatically sealed slides, creating a spacious yet intimate feeling. The living area is enhanced by the addition of the Intellitex multiplex





SPECIFICATIONS

CHASSIS: FORETRAVEL SEMIMONOCOQUE TRAVELRIDE	WHEELBASE: 247.5"
ENGINE: CUMMINS ISM 500 HP	FRESHWATER CAP: 135 GAL
FUEL: 150 GAL	BLACK-WATER & GRAY-WATER CAP: COMBINED SINGLE 145 GAL TANK W/GRAY-WATER BYPASS
GVWR: 46,800 LBS	LP-GAS CAP: 17 GAL
LENGTH: 40'	MSRP: \$576,000
WIDTH: 8' 6"	
INTERIOR HEIGHT: 7'	
HEIGHT WITH A/C: 12' 3"	

FORETRAVEL MOTORCOACH, (800) 955-6226, WWW.FORETRAVEL.COM.

CIRCLE 212 ON READER SERVICE CARD.

lighting control system with dimmers. Additional accent lighting is also new for 2009.

Chefs can remain a part of social gatherings while preparing meals in the roomy and well-equipped galley. A 12-cubic-foot residential side-by-side refrigerator, aided by the two-burner cooktop and GE Advantium microwave, makes mealtimes quick and convenient.

Pocket doors create versatile privacy for the full-width, amidships lavatory at both ends. The spacious bath area sports a large corner shower with sliding showerhead and skylight. The sink and medicine cabinet share the shower wall, creating an open dressing area with vanity for the bedroom.

A second sink and medicine cabinet are installed in the streetside enclosed toilet room.

The queen-size bed and matching nightstands are set into the streetside slide. The overhead storage cabinets, as well as the full width

of the rear wall, is devoted to wardrobe space. A louvered storage cabinet is already plumbed for an optional washer/dryer combo (\$2,020). The fourth slide contains a built-in dresser with four large clothing drawers and more storage cabinetry to house the rear 23-inch LCD TV.

Meticulously crafted cabinetry with tight fit and beautiful finish is evident throughout the coach and Foretravel's attention to detail is obvious. Using design cues that carry from exterior paint to interior design, one prospective client summed up her appraisal of the Nimbus SE 40 — simple elegance. We agree. ♦





MAKING A STAND

After reading Ron Whiteside's tip ("Ladder Cubby") in the August 2008 issue, I found that the 12 inches of PVC 5-inch x 5-inch fence post remaining after cutting the folding ladder was the perfect size for use as a water-filter stand.

BOB MCLEAN | LIVINGSTON, TEXAS



CUSHION CORRAL

My husband I were tired of the cushions in our motorhome sliding off the dinette bench, so we came up with a solution. Our coach's cabinets are oak, so we bought a piece of 1 x 6 oak and cut it the length of the board that holds the table when making the dinette into a bed. We rounded the edges and finished it off with a coat of polyurethane. We used three bolts with wing nuts so that the board can be easily removed when we want to use the dinette as a bed. Depending on the depth of your cushions, be sure to keep the board below the top level of the cushions because they will sink when you sit on them.

PATRICIA COLLINS | ORINDA, CALIFORNIA



FINDING A LOOPHOLE

The loop on my awning pull-down strap kept closing up, which made it difficult to get the hook on the pull-down rod to insert. I looked around my workshop and found a cable tie, connected it to the loop and now it's easy to insert the rod end into my awning strap.

**DON CONSTABLE
ROANOKE, VIRGINIA ♦**

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IMPROVING WATER FLOW

Adjustable pressure regulators can make a noticeable difference

How many times have you stepped into your motorhome shower only to be disappointed by anemic water flow? Typically, this scenario presents itself when hooking up to campground water. Although most campgrounds have good water pressure, the use of a regulator in front of the hookup hose ensures that excessive pressure won't damage the motorhome's lines and fittings. And that's the rub: The use of a common pressure regulator — while reducing campground water pressure to around 45 PSI — restricts flow too much.

Standard-type, inline regulators generally sell for \$10 and are available at almost all RV stores and campgrounds; they are designed to reduce pressure from 40 to 50 psi. Even though they can restrict water flow, technically they work as designed — at least for a while. There are other options, including the use of a freer flowing, adjustable water regulator that allows the user to dial in suitable pressure (although it's usually preset to 45 psi).

A quick visual inspection will tell you why the flow is re-

stricted in the standard regulator: The holes are tiny compared to those in the adjustable version. To find out just how restricted these regulators are, we performed back-to-back tests.

For our first test, we hooked up the standard Valterra regulator to the faucet — and attached a gauge that showed it reduced pressure to 38 PSI (lower than its advertised 40-50 PSI range). We then connected a 5/8-inch hose and timed how long it took to fill a bucket with two gallons of water (we premeasured and marked the bucket). After doing the math, the flow rate for the standard regulator was 9.55 gallons per minute (GPM).

Then we performed the same test using a Valterra adjustable regulator, touted to be free flowing. It was set at 45 PSI, and provided a flow rate of 11.39 GPM, or a 19.27 percent improvement in flow.

To find out how that relates to real-life use inside a coach, we hooked up to the city water fill from the same outside water faucet and performed the back-to-back tests, running water from the kitchen faucet. With the standard regulator, the water flowed at 1.78 GPM versus 1.99 GPM using the adjustable regulator. This amounted to an 11.8 percent improvement in water flow.

The adjustable regulator is almost five times as costly as the standard version, but it will probably last longer, and makes a considerable difference in water flow, which relates to better showers — something that was obvious under practical, under-the-showerhead tests. Adjustable regulators with dial gauges are also available in most RV stores, including Camping World.

For more information, visit www.campingworld.com. ♦

Dometic Recall Clarification

GIVEN THE RECENT BOUT OF REFRIGERATOR RECALLS BY DOMETIC AND NORCOLD, RV OWNERS ARE EXPERIENCING CONFUSION IN DEALING WITH THE RULES APPLICABLE TO ABIDING BY A RECALL. ONE DOMETIC OWNER CONTACTED *HOT LINE* WITH THE FOLLOWING PROBLEM:

The Dometic RM2652 refrigerator in my RV sprung a leak recently, and needed to be repaired. This occurred after my warranty had expired.

Dometic issued a recall on March 30, 2007, for refrigerators with cooling units that had gone bad. The company declared that it would replace the defective parts, and would also replace two fuses and install a fire shield around the cooling unit to guard against possible future fire damage.

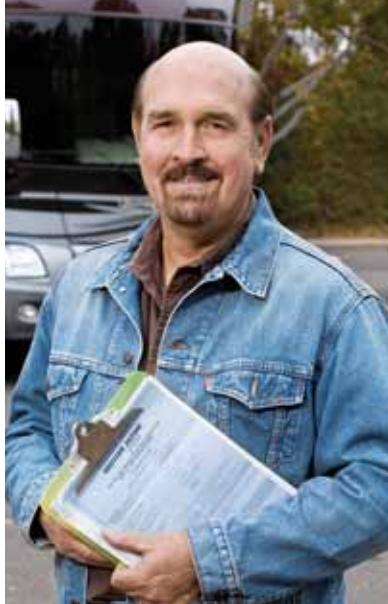
I have paid \$1,397 to replace the cooling unit on my refrigerator, and also had a shield added plus necessary fuses. However, when I filed a claim with Dometic to be compensated for my expenses under its recall program, my claim was rejected because they said that my "post-certification repair occurred later than March 1, 2007."

Surely other owners who have Dometic refrigerators of the same model as mine that were listed in the company's recall have had the same problems as I have.

Any help that you can give me in this matter would be appreciated.

MARVIN IVIE
SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA

Numerous complaints such as Ivie's have been received here at Hot Line



"WHEN MAKING A RESERVATION AT A CAMPGROUND OR RV PARK, REMEMBER THAT FAMILIARITY WITH THE FACILITY'S POLICIES WILL POTENTIALLY SAVE YOU TIME AND MONEY"

since Dometic's recall has been issued. Many motorhome owners have tried unsuccessfully to qualify, even though their particular refrigerators were not specified in the recall.

Though we were unsuccessful in helping Ivie, we thought it might be helpful for other owners of Dometic refrigerators to read the company's response to him, plus its recall criteria. Dometic wrote:

We are in receipt of your letter regarding Mr. Ivie and his questions regarding the Dometic refrigerator recall program and Dometic's effective fix for the recall.

An owner of a vehicle with a recalled refrigerator who incurred cost before this recall to remedy this defect is possibly entitled to reimbursement providing they meet the specific criteria. Dometic will reimburse the dollar amount paid for the remedy provided the owner submits specific required documentation. The owner must be able to meet the specific date parameters to qualify for reimbursement.

This customer has been denied in

his prenotification reimbursement attempt due to the repair occurring later than the program parameters. The program went above and beyond what the federal statutes require.

Also, the Dometic refrigerator recall is to address a potential safety hazard. A second burner housing, which is being retrofitted to affected refrigerators, at Dometic's expense, resolves the safety issue related to the potential defect. Dometic developed and placed a secondary burner housing kit into the field to service centers throughout the United States and Canada to protect any RV and its occupants in the case an affected refrigerator would exhibit signs of the defect.

The secondary burner housing created by Dometic and approved by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has resolved the safety issue with respect to any affected refrigerators. Dometic appreciates that our consumers are having the secondary burner housing installed. Due to this being a safety recall, it is in the best interest of all consumers affected by the recall to get the secondary burner housing kit installed.

Dometic is not replacing cooling units under the recall program. If the unit is within Dometic's original manufacturer's warranty, it is covered as part of the warranty repair. However, if the unit is beyond the standard warranty and the customer has elected not to purchase an extended warranty, or the extended warranty has expired, then all repairs for any failures would be the obligation of the consumer.

We appreciate this opportunity to address Mr. Ivie's concerns and hope all his future travels are trouble free. If he has any further questions regarding the Dometic recall, he can contact the Recall Hot Line at (888) 446-5157.

ERRIK LEMLER
DOMETIC, LLC | ELKHART, INDIANA

CANCELLATION CONCERN

Frustrated in his attempt to obtain a refund from an RV park for campground reservation fees, a reader contacted Hot Line for help. He wrote:

JOIN THE POWER REVOLUTION

"We really like the automatic feature of our Hybrid Quiet Diesel system where you just push the button and don't have to worry about it – it charges the batteries and turns the air on. We went to a rally with no hookups and it was no problem. Other people were running in and out, turning their generator off and on. We said, 'Hmmm, we don't have to do that!'"

Schuyler and Nancy Eubank



"We have a great deal of electronics in our coach, including a 2-way internet satellite dish, that are very sensitive to the quality of the power supply. We used to have problems when using the old inverter but with the new, Hybrid Quiet Diesel those problems are now non-existent."

Gary and Patti Stratford

"We went racing for two weeks recently and saved 290 generator hours with the Hybrid Quiet Diesel system – that's almost \$500 in fuel! We really love it. All you've got to do is go camping with it one weekend and you'll love it too!"

Phil and Donna Simms



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In April 2007, I made a \$1,061.67 reservation deposit at Harbor Lakes RV Resort in Port Charlotte, Florida. The reservation was for a three-month stay from January 1, 2008, through April 1, 2008. On December 26, 2007, while en route to Florida, I experienced mechanical problems. I had the motorhome checked at a local repair

shop in Maryland and decided, due to the vehicle's repair issues, to abort the trip and return home. Two days later I called Harbor Lakes, advised them of the problem and requested a cancellation. I was asked to put my request in writing, which I did.

Three months later I received a new price list from the RV park for its 2008/

2009 season, with my reservation number on it. I called Harbor Lakes and explained that I was expecting a refund, not a reservation for the upcoming season. They said that Harbor Lakes had a 45-day cancellation policy, which was never mentioned to me and was not stated in the confirmation letter I initially received. I was told again to send a written request, along with documentation of the mechanical problems that caused me to cancel the reservation in the first place. I have not yet received a reply. I would greatly appreciate *Hot Line's* assistance in resolving this matter.

GARY SCHULZE
WARETOWN, NEW JERSEY

Though Schulze is correct in that the reservation confirmation letter he received from Harbor Lakes RV Resort did not contain any information about its cancellation policies, the resort's Web site does have a clarification under its "policies" heading that indicates that a cancellation occurring less than 60 days prior to the reservation start date would not be eligible for a refund.

When making a long-term reservation at any campground, RV park or resort, it's best to remember that familiarity with all of the facility's policies — particularly those regarding reservations, fees and refunds — will potentially save you time and money in the long run.

Although Harbor Lakes RV Resort did not respond directly to Hot Line, it did reach a satisfactory conclusion with Schulze, who filled us in on the details:

This is in reference to my letter to *Hot Line* concerning the return of a reservation deposit from Harbor Lakes RV Resort in Florida. Harbor Lakes and I have reached a satisfactory agreement resulting in the return of approximately \$750 of my initial deposit. The difference, approximately \$300, was forfeited to Harbor Lakes as a short-term reservation cancellation penalty. In view of the circumstances I agreed to this as the most expeditious means of settling the matter.

Thank you very much for your help in resolving this issue.

G.S.

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HOT LINE

towing system company, a reader wrote Hot Line hoping to solicit a reply. He explained:

I have a Blue Ox towing system installed on a 2003 Saturn L-Series 300 sedan. Last year, while on a caravan to the Grand Canyon, I discovered my baseplate was loose and had it tightened. I had to take it in for tightening three times on the trip. When I returned home, I called Blue Ox and explained the problem. The company sent me to a repair shop to have it tightened again, and the shop recommended that it be tightened after each trip.

I think there's a problem if I have to keep checking this equipment after each trip. Beyond the time and expense involved, I think there's a safety issue here as well.

I have written to Blue Ox twice and have not yet received a reply. I hope they will respond to *Hot Line*. Thank you.

ROBERT WETHERBIE
ABERDEEN, NORTH CAROLINA

Hot Line passed on Wetherbie's concerns to Blue Ox. A company representative responded as follows:

Thank you for forwarding us Mr. Wetherbie's letter and providing us with an opportunity to respond. As always, Blue Ox is committed to excellence with our product line and to our customers. Unfortunately, the original letter Mr. Wetherbie sent was never received, nor do we show any verification of receipt. Upon receipt of your letter, we took immediate action and called Mr. Wetherbie.

After reviewing his situation, it was determined that the best solution would be to replace his baseplate at no charge to him, though he would assume responsibility for the installation. In addition, we gave him a locking kit for any inconvenience this situation may have caused him.

We appreciate him as a customer and, during our last correspondence, he was happily satisfied. We thank you for bringing this to our attention.

AMANDA HENSEL
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TO CONTRIBUTE TO *HOT LINE*, please refer to *Contact MotorHome*, page 5.

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Battery Maintenance

Last spring, I had my dealer install a Xantrex 1800-watt inverter/charger and three new deep-cycle, 12-volt house batteries. I installed a switch on the converter/charger circuit so I could turn it off when on inverter power.

Shortly thereafter my wife and I took a two-week trip, and dry camped every night. During travel, the gauge on the inverter panel showed a constant 14.4 input voltage from the motorhome's alternator. I was amazed that the batter-

“I DON'T RECOMMEND ROTATING TIRES ON A MOTORHOME BECAUSE OF THE COST AND THE LOW ANNUAL MILES. TIRES GENERALLY AGE OUT AND NEED TO BE REPLACED BEFORE THEY WEAR OUT OR NEED ROTATION”



ies ran the refrigerator all night (on AC power), our 32-inch TV for four to five hours, our coffeemaker in the morning, and all the miscellaneous lighting, LP-gas leak detector, etc.

I stored the motorhome all summer with the 12-volt house disconnect switch in the OFF position, and left the inverter/charger off. I ran the generator two or three times, and turned on the converter/charger during those times.

Then in the fall, we took a four-day trip. The inverter gauge showed 14.4 volts as before when traveling, but the batteries only lasted about three hours running the refrigerator and the TV.

Is there something else I should have done to maintain those batteries during the summer? What should I do about storing it in winter?

**DAVID HYRE
SPENCERVILLE, INDIANA**

I'm assuming you turned on the 12-volt house disconnect switch when you turned on the converter, David. If so, you should have left the converter off, and turned the inverter/charger on.

Converters don't fully charge batteries and never will. They are designed to be plugged in for long periods of time in campgrounds and not boil the batteries. They max out around 13.5 volts, which is nowhere near enough voltage to fully charge batteries. As a result, the batteries become sulfated and derated, as you discovered, unless you drive the motorhome periodically.

In contrast, your inverter more than likely has a sophisticated three-stage battery charger in it that will fully charge your batteries and keep them from becoming sulfated prematurely. In fact, once you had the inverter/charger installed, you no longer needed the converter, and should either get rid of it, or just not use it.

All large Xantrex inverters have a bulk charging stage, an absorption charging stage, and finally a float stage that is suitable for long campground stays. These inverter/chargers are all you need to supply your 12-volt DC requirements, and keep your batteries fully charged.

Now that you have to replace the batteries, I would replace them with six-volt golf cart batteries wired in series for more capacity at a lower price. More important, they won't prey on each other like the parallel-wired 12-volt batteries.

SIDE-VENTED REFRIGERATOR

I have experienced problems with my side-vented refrigerator. The first problem happened when the sensor that turns the fan on went out. A tech suggested I hard wire a switch in until the sensor could be replaced. I left it in as a back-up.

The next problem was that the fan itself went out. I went to an RV dealer and found out it would cost more than \$100 to order a replacement. One of the parts department guys recommended that I go to a computer store and buy a fan.

Those fans are 12-volt DC, and can be purchased for less than \$20. They even bolt right in. I put a second fan in horizontally at the bottom edge of the top vent to suck the hot air out, and then moved the original fan to the center of the vent vertically to eject the hot air.

I was told the sensor could easily accommodate multiple fans. This arrangement has worked well for me; I hope it helps others.

IKE MEDINA | FLORENCE, ARIZONA

The fans induce a steady draft, Ike. Such a draft is difficult to come by in side-vented refrigerators. The parts guy was correct. RadioShack (www.radioshack.com) offers a number of 12-volt DC cooling fans, and none of them cost more than \$20. The first one on the company's Web site is 4¾ inches square, 1½ inches thick, moves 85 CFM of air, and costs only \$19.99. There are others that vary in size and capacity.

SILENT POWER SUCKERS

I've always wondered whether the inverter itself draws much current when left on if there are no 120-volt AC appliances turned on. Rather than turn the inverter on before each use of the microwave or coffeemaker while dry camping, I wonder if I can just leave it

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on between uses and not drain the battery.
JOHN CORBOY
MOLOKAI, HAWAII

It depends on the inverter, John. Some draw a small amount of "standby" current, the more simple ones don't. It's a bit like LP-gas refrigerators. They all draw a small amount of 12-volt DC current when they are running on LP-gas. Modern-day automatic circuitry is the culprit. The specifications on your inverter will answer your question. They will give the standby current, if the inverter uses any.

AIR CONDITIONER LUBRICATION

Referring to "Stuck A/C Fans" in your November 2008 column, WD-40 is not a long-term lubricant. My experience with WD-40 is that it works fine as a penetrating oil to free up a shaft, but after the shaft has been freed up it must then be lubricated with oil.

If a shaft isn't lubricated with oil after using WD-40, it gums up and you're no better off than when you started. The best solution, of course, is to disassemble the motors and clean the shafts (quite often oil will break down and leave a shellac-type coating).

Then, lubricate the shaft and bearings with good quality oil. Without cleaning the shaft and relubricating with oil, the shaft will soon seize again. Unfortunately, most motorhome owners are not technically inclined enough to remove and disassemble the motors.

ROY RITTER | ARCHER, FLORIDA

You are correct, Roy. Disassembling an air conditioner motor for the purpose of cleaning and lubricating the shaft is not really a do-it-yourself project for most motorhome owners. I suspect that's why the WD-40 quick fix was used. It only required removing the shroud.

Any rotating shaft needs good lubrication. A frozen shaft can be freed up with a penetrating oil product such as WD-40. After the shaft is cleaned and freed up, it should be lubricated with 30W engine oil, or the oil used in the motorhome engine.

FAST FILLING

I read the November 2008 *Powertrain* column item, "Filling Phaetons," about filling

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COACH & CHASSIS

a Tiffin Phaeton with diesel fuel. I have a 2008 40-foot Phaeton.

There's no problem here. Simply open the other side and leave it open while filling at a high-volume diesel stop. It fills right to the top in seconds.

ALAN CLARK
CHATHAM, ILLINOIS

That is a fast vent to go with a fast fill, Alan. It is probably not legal in most states, but it is very effective, as you discovered. Sometimes things like this are the quickest solution to a problem as long as it does not adversely affect anyone.

ROOF MATERIAL

I might be buying a new Class C motorhome soon, but I see that the manufacturers have switched to rubber roofs. I presently have a 1983 Citation with an aluminum roof. It's maintenance free, never leaks and still looks like new. I have read that rubber roofs need maintenance, and can tear easily. Why would the manufacturers switch from a maintenance-free roof material to some-

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COACH & CHASSIS

thing that requires maintenance?
RICHARD BARAUSKAS
CALGARY, ALBERTA

The answer is more than likely cost, Richard. The manufacturer doesn't have to pay for the maintenance. However, not all roofs on new Class C's are rubber roofs. There are a number of quality coaches with fiberglass roofs, which are as maintenance free as a metal roof. Go shopping locally, and on the Internet. You may even find another aluminum roof.

REFRIGERATOR FAILURE

Recently my six-year-old, gas/electric refrigerator stopped working. The diagnosis by a local RV dealer was that the cooling unit ruptured. I've called various RV repair shops, and am not sure whether to replace the refrigerator or have the cooling unit repaired. I'd appreciate your suggestion as to which direction I should follow.

ROGER RAIHALA
GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO



NEW! Dometic Recall Information

Dometic Corporation has voluntarily extended the two-door refrigerator recall started in August 2006 by recalling additional refrigerators as part of a continual commitment to maintaining a high level of satisfaction and excellence now and in the future.

Previous Recall Announcement

This recall affects Dometic two-door refrigerators manufactured between April 1997 and May 2003.

Current Recall Announcement

This recall affects Dometic two-door refrigerators manufactured between June 2003 and September 2006.

The well-being of Dometic customers is of highest concern. A serious problem resulting in a fire may occur in an exceptionally small fraction of Dometic two-door refrigerators, but to address that potential risk, **please contact us immediately for more information.**

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It depends on the condition of the refrigerator box and door, Roger. A rebuilt cooling unit will cost less than half what a new refrigerator will cost, but there is an installation cost, which you need to consider. Also, depending on your refrigerator model, a completely new one may have modern electronic features.

If the door isn't warped and the box still looks nice, and you are satisfied with the controls, I would suggest having a rebuilt cooling unit installed. There are a number of companies on the Internet that sell them for your or your technician's installation.

Do a search on the Internet for rebuilt RV refrigerator cooling units. Otherwise, bite the bullet, and buy a new refrigerator with all the modern-day bells and whistles.

CHASSIS MAINTENANCE

I have questions about my new motorhome that was built on a Freightliner chassis.

First, what is the proper tire-rotation pattern for the tires? How often should it be done?

Second, Freightliner lists general-purpose grease for the front axle, but lithium 12-hydroxy stearate grease for the U-joints and slip joint. Can I substitute the more expensive lithium grease for the general-purpose grease on the front axle?

Third, Freightliner also wants the rear axle oil changed initially at 6,000 miles, and annually after that. I only put about 7,000 miles per year on my motorhome. Is this annual requirement necessary after the break-in oil change?

BRUCE TORSNEY
SAN ANTONIO, FLORIDA

Those are all good questions, Bruce, and are all chassis specific. I think your Freightliner owner's manual recommends a tire-rotation pattern. I don't recommend rotating tires on a motorhome, because of the cost and the low annual mileage on most of them. Tires generally age out and need to be replaced before they wear out or need rotation.

With respect to your grease and oil-change interval questions, contact Freightliner directly. Your chassis manufacturer is the best source of answers for lubrication questions. ♦

TO CONTRIBUTE TO COACH & CHASSIS, please refer to *Contact MotorHome*, page 5.



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Parasitic Draws

I'm interested in your reply to "Battery Killer Too" (November 2008) regarding parasitic draws, as it might apply to my 2004 Winnebago Journey, powered by a Caterpillar C7, with 330 HP and a six-speed Allison 3000MH transmission. Although I have a house-battery disconnect switch there is no disconnect switch for the engine (chassis) batteries.

I thought about adding a starter-battery disconnect switch, but was told by a Caterpillar employee that removal of power from the engine computer might eventually allow the engine control module lithium battery to discharge. Will multiple deep discharges eventually cause the battery to fail? What about the ultimate lifespan of this battery?

STEPHEN GRIFFIN
BROOKSVILLE, FLORIDA

Caterpillar maintains a toll-free motorhome help line at (800) 777-3126. A phone call to this line confirmed that the life of the lithium battery will not be shortened or affected by disconnecting engine-starting batteries. Therefore, feel free to do so. The typical life of the lithium cell is about 10 years, according to Caterpillar engineers.

OIL EATER

My 2003 Class A on a Ford chassis with a V-10 engine has a problem with high oil consumption. My Ford dealer checked the engine and found oil in the plenum. They changed the valve cover and replaced the PCV valve and added an oil dye to see if the problem would return. It did. I'm using about one quart per 1,000 miles. Do I have a lemon engine?

RON MOYA SR.
LA VERNE, CALIFORNIA

Motorhome engines work harder than car engines and as a result they tend to use

more oil. However, 1,000 miles per quart is on the high end and these engines don't have a reputation as oil guzzlers. Has your oil consumption increased over time? Is there any external leakage or smoke or a scent of oil in the exhaust?

Oil in the plenum is typically a sign of a faulty PCV system, or excessive blowby past the piston rings. I'd have another shop carefully check the PCV system, and check for blowby. If no PCV problem is found, have a cylinder leakdown test done to determine the condition of the pistons, cylinders, rings and valves.

LOW GAS MILEAGE

I have a 2008 Winnebago 29-foot Outlook that only gets 5–6 MPG. I've had Ford look at it and they say it's OK. Everybody else says it's ridiculous. What can I do?

CAROLE IBARRA
LA HABRA, CALIFORNIA

Fuel mileage varies considerably, depending on how and where a vehicle is driven, how it's loaded and if it's towing anything. If you are driving in the moun-

tains, fully loaded at 65 MPH with gear and passengers and water, towing a dinghy vehicle in a stiff headwind, 5–6 MPG is not bad for this motorhome. If you are driving slowly and steadily on fairly flat roads in good conditions you may see 7–8 MPG, but usually not much more. Oxygenated fuels also reduce mileage.

You didn't mention what Ford did to check the coach out, but my guess is that they looked for trouble codes, found none and declared it OK. If the engine runs and pulls well and the transmission seems to shift properly, and you're driving economically, you might take it to a shop that specializes in diagnosis of computers and drivability problems. Have the technicians check fuel trim values and run an exhaust gas analysis to see how the engine is using its fuel.

SHIFT GUIDELINES

I have a 2002 36-foot Bounder with an 8.1-L engine and I tow a Saturn car. I know I should shift down to a lower gear and keep the RPM up when going up hills, but when should I do it? At what point should I make the shift, or should I just let the automatic transmission do its job?

It seems like if I wait for the transmission I'm already too slow to catch the next gear at the right place and sometimes it will go down two gears. I do go out of overdrive, but don't know when to shift down to a lower gear in anticipation of the upcoming grade. What RPM should I maintain under full load going up hills?

JIM HARTWELL
ANDOVER, MINNESOTA

Your 8.1-L Vortec V-8 engine is rated 340 HP at 4,200 RPM and 455 LB-FT of torque at 3,200 RPM. You will get the best combination of pull and mileage climbing a grade at peak torque, which is the point where the engine does its full-load work most efficiently. Going to a higher RPM will let you go faster but use more fuel. If you find that you can anticipate a downshift and thus prevent an additional downshift, go for it. Also, it's good to downshift to prevent overheated brakes on long downgrades. Otherwise the transmission does a pretty good job of shifting on its own in most conditions.

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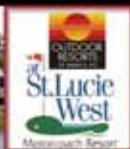
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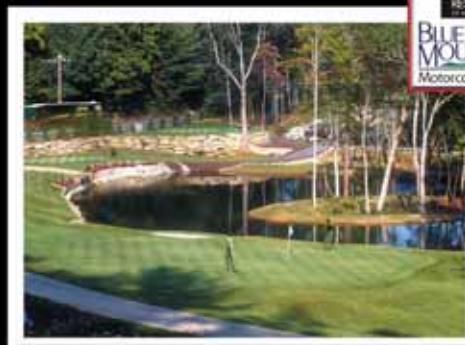
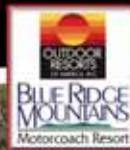
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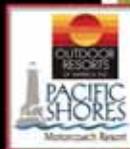
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There was an interesting article in the November 2008 issue about the Gulf Stream Crescendo 324. I have a 2007 Fleetwood Bounder on a 2006 Ford chassis and my gas mileage is not the greatest. Is there an aftermarket axle, or whatever it would take, that would adapt to my Bounder that would be like the Crescendo? If so, then do you think it would be worth the expense?

L. GRANT SCOTT
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

With enough time and money you can make almost anything work, but in this case it's not worth it. The Crescendo is on a Freightliner chassis and you would have problems with mounting, driveshaft compatibility, different-sized wheels and tires, adapting brakes and ABS, etc. The costs would far outweigh any small advantage it might yield. You'd be better off installing a good set of aftermarket headers and exhaust and driving slower.

STICKING AIR BRAKES

I have a 2002 Monaco Diplomat that has an air brake problem — the rear driver's side will not release after being set for an extended period (a month or longer). I think the problem is caused when I have driven in moisture and then set up for extended periods and put my wheel/tire protectors on. I don't drive in conditions with a lot of road salt, but I do winter on the Gulf in Texas, where the salt air is very corrosive. Are there any preventative measures that I can take to keep the brakes working? A tow truck tech told me to move the coach weekly to prevent the seizing.

ROBERT WILLIAMS
EATON RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

That's a tough one. I'm sure the problem is caused by rust forming in the brakes, but you can't spray anything on the bare metal surfaces because it will get on the brake linings. Moving the coach weekly is a good idea. If you store it for much longer, you might consider chocking the wheels securely and then backing off the brakes manually. It requires crawling underneath, but it could save you money on service calls.

COOLANT LOSS

I have a 2003 Fleetwood Flair with a Ford V-10 engine. It uses about one quart of coolant every 100 miles but there are no

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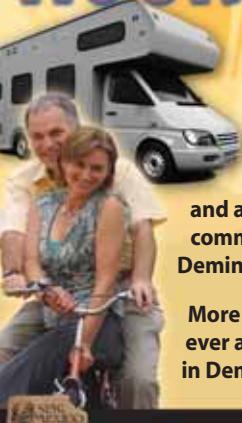
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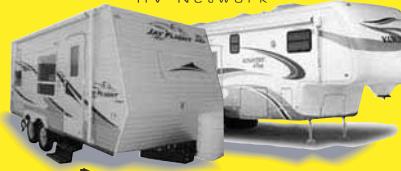
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signs of water in the oil, or external leaks. Where could this be going?

MICK GLUCK
ROWLAND HEIGHTS, CALIFORNIA

It may be leaking onto hot parts and evaporating (likely) or going out the exhaust because of a head gasket leak (less likely). Some of these chassis had faulty hose clamps that cause leaks and you probably have the original hoses, which should be replaced. Have a pressure test done and if no external leaks are found, ask them to do a test for exhaust gases in the coolant when it is warm. Sometimes (rarely) coolant can leak into a combustion chamber without also showing up in the oil.

TIRE VALVE TROUBLE

Last spring I had new tires installed on my 2002 Itasca Horizon at Camping World. Since then I've had repeated instances of leaking tire valves. Each time I check the tire pressure with a gauge one of the valves leaks. On a trip to Alaska I had the valves replaced eight times, and I've replaced them more than a dozen times myself. I saw something about using sand to balance tires. Could this problem be caused by sand in the tires?

JERRY MCDANIEL
BENICIA, CALIFORNIA

If sand was in the tires, it could cause the valves to stick partly open. Initially, I told McDaniel that Camping World doesn't use sand to balance tires and that if they found sand in the tires I am sure they would have removed any traces on the rims before installing new tires. I also recommended that the tire shop use heavy-duty truck valves rather than automotive types.

McDaniel followed up with this reply: "I went to Camping World and complained about the problem. They had sent the tires out to a local tire dealer. The dealer used a sand-like substance to balance the tires and forgot to replace the air valves with a new type that has a sand filter. I took my RV back to the tire dealer and they replaced the valves and put a yellow plastic ring on the valve stem to indicate the new type of valve. Hopefully now the problem is solved. It certainly caused me a lot of grief." ♦

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**CITRUS-STEAMED FISH
WITH VEGGIES**

- 1 medium-size fish fillet, any variety
- 1 small blood orange or tangerine
- 1 each red, yellow, green bell peppers
- 1 small onion
- cooking spray
- 1 teaspoon bottled garlic salt, pepper to taste

- Slice the vegetables lengthwise.
- Take a length of foil about 12" x 12" — depending on fillet size — and coat one side lightly with cooking spray.
- Season fish with pepper, garlic and salt, place diagonally in middle of foil.
- Cut orange in half, set one half aside, and cut second half into quarters.
- Drizzle juice from one quarter over the fillet.
- Cut remaining half of orange into round slices, arrange over the fish.
- Arrange the vegetables around the fish, storing any remaining vegetables not used.
- Squeeze the juice from the reserved 1/4 wedge over the vegetables and fish.
- Draw the sides of the foil up around the fish, sealing the pouch at the top.
- Cook on the barbecue until vegetables are tender and fish is flaky, about 10 minutes (time varies based on fillet size; check often to avoid overcooking). Serve with steamed wild rice or couscous. Serves 2.

Tips: Any flaky fish fillet can be used, but avoid shark, tuna or heavier steak-like fillets; they will not steam quickly. Visit a local fisherman's wharf to determine your catch of the day. For a tangy, less sweet flavor, try a lemon instead of an orange.

**GOT A RECIPE FROM THE ROAD
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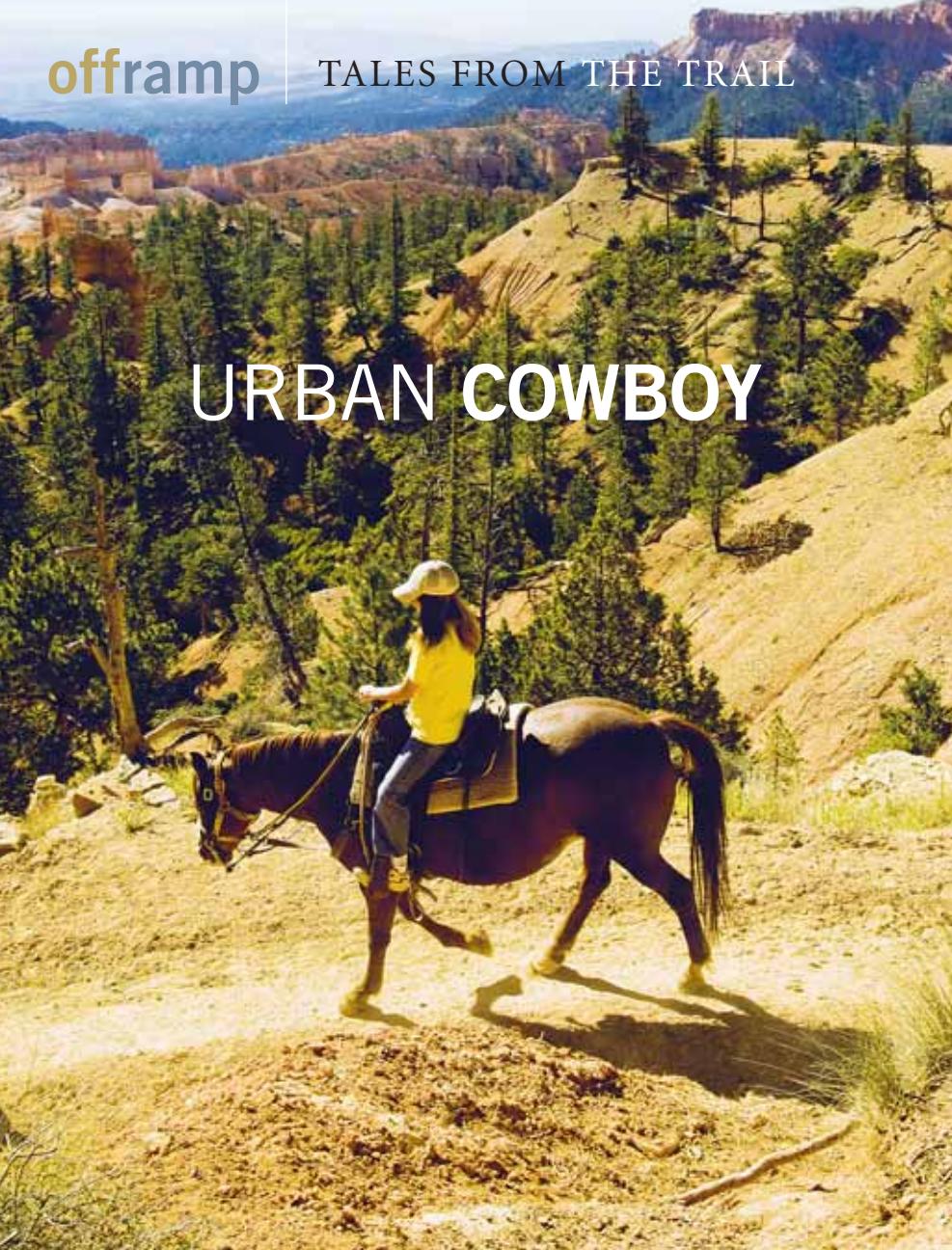
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URBAN COWBOY



Bryce Canyon, Utah — I don't recall who suggested a horseback ride, but considering the absurdity of it, my wife, Jennifer, is the likely culprit. All I know about horses is how to tell the front end from the back end and a couple of good reasons why you should stand near the front.

Camped near Bryce Canyon National Park, we were on the rim of the chasm watching horses and mules carry visitors into the canyon when the idea arose. Those people appeared to be having fun, and I was content to leave it at that. But, no ... we had to ride, too.

So we went to the in-park stables. The guy behind the counter eyed me

suspiciously and then inquired about my weight. Turns out his horses and mules had a 200-pound weight limit, a figure that's a distant memory for me. I breathed a sigh of relief.

Then we picked the wrong spot for lunch. A hotel–restaurant complex just outside the gate had a booth offering tickets for all kinds of local adventures, and my wife had to inquire. The salesman grinned and said, "Sure, we have big-boy horses." Jennifer signed us up for the dawn patrol.

The alarm jangled at what we called "O-dark-30" in the Army. Even my loyal dog wasn't ready for that, cocking an eye with her best "now what?" look. There wasn't even time for coffee.

We reached the corral as the sun broke the horizon and watched a wrangler lead a string of saddled horses into the yard. I knew instantly which one was mine. If you remember the TV show *Bonanza* and recall the size of Hoss' horse compared to Little Joe's, you have some idea of how this steed stood out.

Just to demonstrate its size to everyone, they brought him out first and called my name. I approached from the front.

The wrangler led me closer to the back end on the left side, and said, "Just put your left foot into the stirrup and swing your right leg over the horse." The stirrup was chest high.

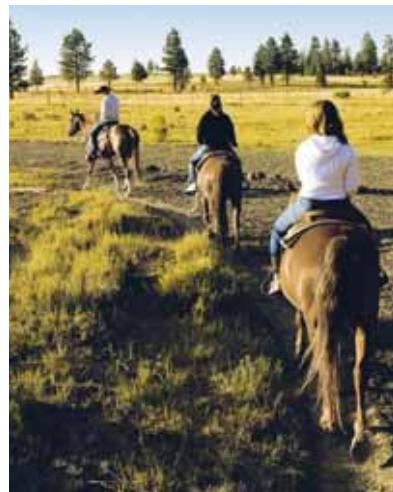
"Right ..."

A short discussion about arthritis and forklifts followed, but the wiry wrangler instead led me to a wooden platform. From it, I got my foot into the stirrup and awkwardly hoisted myself aboard.

The horse wasn't any happier about this than I was. His buddies got all the lightweights and he got me. The wrangler settled him down with a bribe and led us out of the corral.

The timing was perfect. We looked into Bryce Canyon bathed in early morning light, watched feeding mule deer and prancing pronghorns, and reveled in the dawn of a new day. All of us except perhaps my horse. I think all he cared about was getting it over with.

At the end of the two-hour ride, I managed to stop next to the stand, swing down without falling, and stagger off bow-legged for coffee. Roy Rogers I'm not. ♦



PHOTOS: RON DALBY

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