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APRIL 2009

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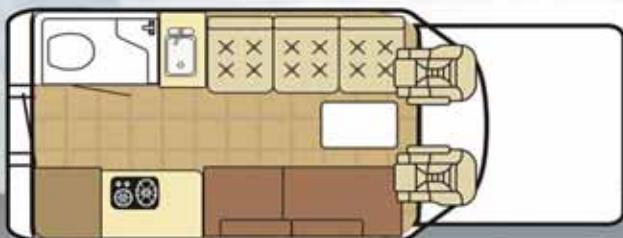


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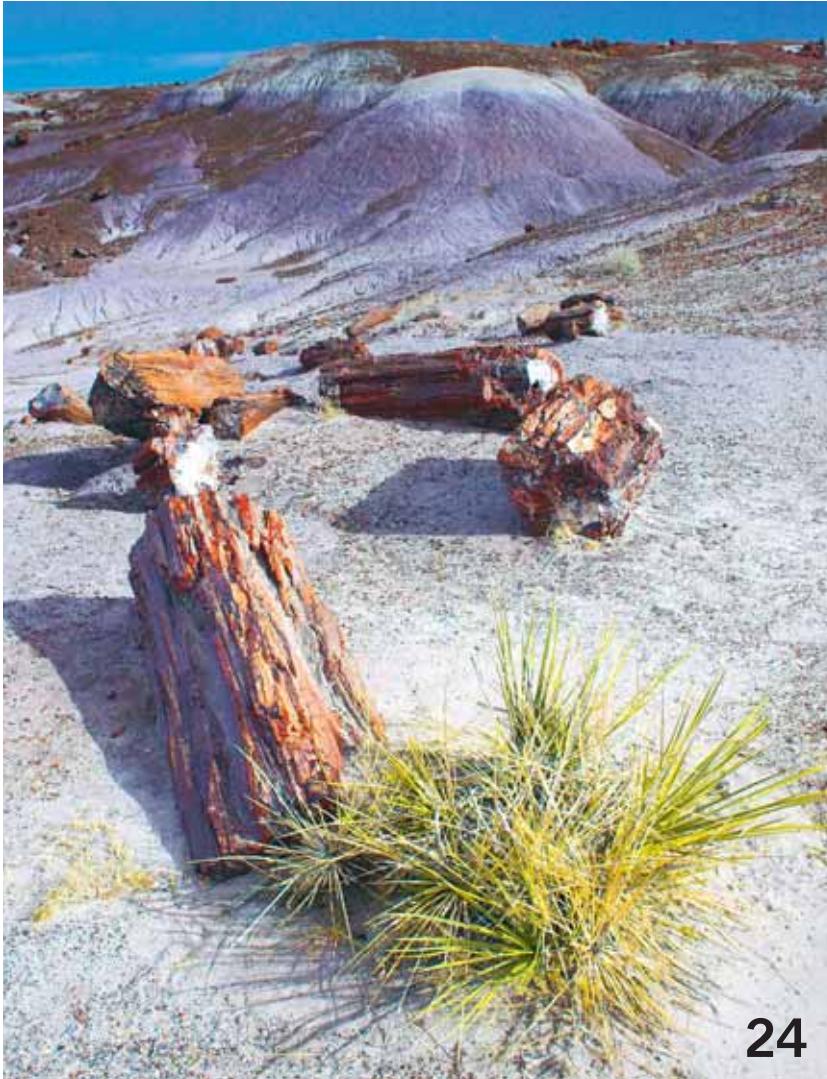


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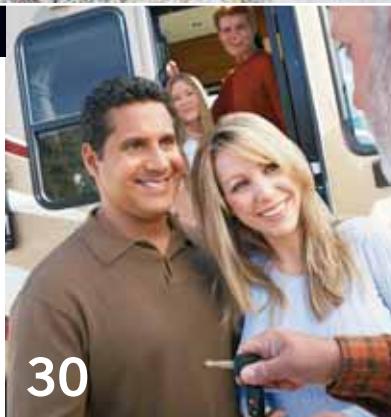
Sleek lines, European-inspired styling and a compact yet roomy interior characterize this new Class A rig

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This dual-slide Class C features one-piece fiberglass construction, upscale appointments and first-class accommodations

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On The Cover: European influences abound in Damon Motor Coach's new Avanti 3106, with its aerodynamic exterior and yacht-like interior (see page 38). Photo by Gary Bohinc.

HEY, GRANDPA!

When we were assembling the December 2008 issue a few months back, I was planning on writing a column about my son's wedding last summer (which I mentioned in that issue's test report of the Fleetwood Discovery). That idea was put on hold, though, when I received word that my good friend — and *MotorHome* columnist — Gaylord Maxwell passed away. I ended up devoting that column to reminiscing about how great it was to know and work with Gaylord over a period of 34 years.

So allow me to backtrack: My son, Mark, and his fiancée, Jamie, had already been “joined at the hip” for quite some time when my wife, Lynne, and I received a surprise phone call that launched the next chapter of our lives. “Hey Dad,” my son quipped, “you’re going to be a grandfather.” While recovering from the emotion of such great news, I responded in fatherly fashion, “Does that mean you’re going to get married?” (Let’s face it: young people today are a lot more cavalier about matrimony than our generation.) “Of course,” my son answered. “Jamie wants an outdoor wedding — so we’re going to get married in a campground.” Shock number two!

The kids found a beautiful meadow in the Sycamore Ranch RV Park in Northern California for the ceremony. We figured that they would pick a place close to their home, but we never imagined that we’d be having a wedding in an RV park, although it’s certainly apropos to our family’s lifestyle — our boys started traveling in an RV when they were 2 months old.

So we loaded up the Discovery 40-footer and multitasked our way through the wedding, evaluating the coach for publication and using it as the official dressing room for the bride and her entourage. We were delighted to call the RV park and the Fleetwood “headquarters” for the big occasion, always preferring to stay in a mo-



torhome versus a hotel. And the rehearsal party, outside our rig, was a huge success.

Fast forward to January 7.

We officially became grandparents for the first time. The original intent was to hang out in another test rig during the end-of-the-year holidays, waiting for the baby to be born. But while the due date was during our visit, nature had other plans. Sure enough, we drove home two days before Chase Livingston was born — only to immediately fly back to be part of the birthing process and witness our grandson’s entrance into this world.

We’ve been empty nesters for a long time, with only great memories of all the RV trips we took with our kids. Both our boys are now RV enthusiasts and have joined us on a number of road trips. We just can’t wait to take little Chase on a motorhome trip.

No doubt Chase will be spoiled, something I’m sure many of you can relate to. He will be exposed to the RV lifestyle early in life, just like his parents. While we live 500 miles away, the motorhome is the catalyst that allows us to stay connected. We have already blocked out a number of dates on the calendar so that we can visit our grandson and become a big part of his life. My son’s house has plenty of room to park (and live in) the rig, and we plan on adding a 30-amp outlet so we can run at least one A/C unit during the summer.

But parking on the side of the house and visiting the family are just a small part of the picture. The real fun starts when his mom and dad are willing to send Chase off with his grandparents to see the country as only an RV enthusiast can.

We can’t wait! ♦

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Canada and Mexico, add \$12 per year.

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MotorHome (ISSN #0744-074X) is
published monthly by Affinity Media
from editorial and business offices at
2575 Vista Del Mar, Ventura, CA 93001.

Printed in the United States.

Periodical postage paid at Ventura,
CA 93001 and additional mailing
offices. POSTMASTER: Send all
change of address and subscription
inquiries to: *MotorHome*, P.O.
Box 445, Mt. Morris, IL 61054-0445.
Publication Sales Agreement
No. 1488163; Canadian Post
Sales Agreement No. 40012332.
Canadian return address: Affinity
Group, Inc., 4960-2 Walker Road,
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KEEPING UP WITH THE TIMES

To my knowledge, neither *MotorHome* nor *Highways* has acknowledged the fact that several RV manufacturers have gone out of business because of the recent economic downturn. This situation has a profound effect on many RV owners, dealers and potential new owners. Manufacturer warranties and customer support are the issue. Please give your readers information on this subject in a future article.

DON PEARSON | LOVELAND, COLORADO

MotorHome's "News Briefs" section includes information on manufacturer closings as it becomes available. For a more in-depth feature on this topic, see "Purchasing Peace of Mind" on page 30.

LIGHT IT UP

I recently replaced some of the interior lights in my motorhome with LEDs. They use less electricity, have a longer life than regular bulbs and the color is much whiter, which offers a more natural appearance. LEDs also give off less heat. I was able to specify the brightness in each fixture by using single or multiple LED strips. They came with replacement bases to hold the light strips and pop into the existing incandescent sockets.

**SUSAN SHANKLE
SAN MATEO, CALIFORNIA**

DINGHY VEHICLE TOW RATINGS

I use a dinghy vehicle to tow a boat. Prior to purchasing the vehicle, I read your 2008 *Guide to Dinghy Towing*, and did some Internet research. I wanted to know if the Jeep I was considering was flat towable and what it was rated to tow, but your guide was missing tow rating information for dinghies.

**JAMES KENNEDY
HAMMOND, LOUISIANA**

Our sister publication, *Trailer Life*, issues an annual *Guide to Towing* that includes tow ratings. The guides are available online at www.trailerlife.com.

SINK WOES

My wife and I own a 35-foot 2000 Aerbus. Last summer after a rough ride, my wife opened the bathroom cabinet and a bottle

fell out and broke the sink into a spider-web pattern. Our particular sink has been discontinued, but we'd like to find one in the same shape so that we don't have to replace the countertop. Do you know of any avenues we could try, possibly an Aerbus graveyard?

**JOHN WARNER
EVERETT, WASHINGTON**

You could try the *Parts and Accessories* section of *eBay Motors* (www.motors.ebay.com), or visit www.RV.net. You'll find a listing of locations to find obsolete motorhome parts at www.rv.net/obsolete/index.cfm.



A BOONDOCKING SPOT WITH A VIEW

You had a great article on boondocking in your January issue ("Boondocking Basics"). Where was that awesome spot in Northern California on page 37? I'd love to stop there.

**TOM DUNCAN
ROSEDALE, BRITISH COLUMBIA**

The location is Westport-Union Landing State Beach, 19 miles north of Fort Bragg on State Highway 1 in Northern California.

Question:

Got a secret camping location you'd like to share? Tell us your favorite boondocking locations. Write to us at letters@motorhomemagazine.com. ♦



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escapes

by DENISE SANTOYO

EVENTS | WHEELS & GEAR | NEWS BRIEFS | CROSSROADS

Although 2,810-acre Honeymoon Island — of which all but 400 acres are “submerged” — has been a state park for more than 30 years, it is, like Florida’s other barrier islands, still relatively primitive, much as it was when Spanish explorers arrived more than 400 years ago.

Graceful palms and slash pines statue the island, a slender crescent located just offshore in the Gulf of Mexico near Tampa Bay. Wading birds abound, as do migrating warblers, ospreys, several types of egrets and herons, great horned owls and gorgeous fuchsia-colored roseate spoonbills, among many others.

The generous beach, with sand the color of buttermilk and nearly as smooth, is

one of the finest anywhere. Dune walks have been built to allow visitors over the fragile sand dunes to the beach.

The island doesn’t lack for exciting things to do. Fishing and kayaking are popular pastimes, picnic facilities are available and the park sports some of the most enjoyable hiking and bird-watching trails around. Dog owners have been delighted by the one-mile-long Pet Beach at the island’s south end.

Honeymoon Island is a day-use park; campgrounds are available in the nearby towns of Dunedin and Palm Harbor. For more information, call (850) 245-2157, or visit www.floridastateparks.org.

— Pamela Selbert

**HONEYMOON ISLAND
STATE PARK**
A LITTLE PIECE OF
PARADISE

APRIL | Celebrate spring with a full month of activities at the **Dogwood Festival** in the Lewis-Clark Valley in Idaho. The colorful blossoms of the plant provide a backdrop for events such as the Dogwood Show and Shine car show and Twilight 5K; www.lcsc.edu/dogwood.

APRIL 4 | Bookworms and food lovers should go to Hays, Kansas, for the **International Edible Book Festival**. Contestants create edible art that, in form or content, represents a book. Taster's Choice and Eye Candy awards are presented and then the eating begins; (785) 625-9014, www.hayspublib.org.

APRIL 4 | Enjoy one last winter day at the **Pole Pedal Paddle** at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort in Wyoming. Held on the last Saturday of the ski season,



APRIL 17-20

The "greatest RV Rally in the World" celebrates its 10th anniversary at its annual gathering this month in Albuquerque, New Mexico. **The Rally** — hosted by *MotorHome*, *Trailer Life*, Woodalls, the Good Sam Club, Coast to Coast Resorts, Camping World President's Club and Camp Club USA — features live entertainment, seminars and more. Early bird days are April 15 and 16; (877) 749-7122, www.therally.com.

the four-event race includes both competitor and open classes for individuals and teams alike; (307) 733-6433, www.polepedalpaddle.com.

APRIL 11 | Head to Fort Fairfield, Maine, for the **Northern Maine Golf Expo**. Representatives from golf courses and golf vendors come from all over the state to showcase their courses and new products; (207) 472-3802, www.fortcc.org.

APRIL 18 | If you've ever wondered what it's like to be an archaeologist, you'll want to visit the Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum in St. Leonard, Maryland, for **Discovering Archaeology**. The event includes tours of the conservation laboratory, hands-on activities, the opening of the new

permanent exhibit "Archaeology FAQs" and more; (410) 586-8501, www.jefpat.org.

APRIL 21-25 | Come to the **Historic New Harmony Heritage Artisans Week** in New Harmony, Indiana, for a festival featuring authentic 19th-century arts and crafts. The festival will also include demonstrations and information on life from 1814 to 1860 in New Harmony; (812) 682-4488, www.newharmony.org.

APRIL 22-26 | Visit Carlisle, Pennsylvania, for the **Spring Carlisle Collector Car Swap Meet and Corral**. The event features vendors selling accessories, parts and memorabilia. The new Spring Cruise-In will showcase collector, classic, custom and perform-

ance cars; (717) 243-7855, www.carlisleevents.com.

APRIL 23-25 | Experience the "best in jazz" at the **Reno Jazz Festival** in Reno, Nevada. The festival hosts some of the best jazz students, musicians and educators around, and will feature Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache Band. Participate in workshops or an after-hours jam session; www.unr.edu/rjf.

APRIL 25 | Head to Claytor Lake State Park in Dublin, Virginia, for an **Earth Day Celebration**. Nature hikes, plantings, flower-arranging programs and more help promote awareness of the environment. Camping is available at the park; (540) 643-2500, www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/cla.shtml.

RV SHOWS

APRIL 3-5

Kitchener RV Show
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada
(888) 331-8885

APRIL 17-19

Fort Lauderdale RV Show
Fort Lauderdale, Fla.
(813) 741-0488

APRIL 17-19

Southeastern RV SuperShow
Hampton, Ga.
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APRIL 23-26

Pomona RV & Travel Show
Pomona, Calif.
(805) 290-2203

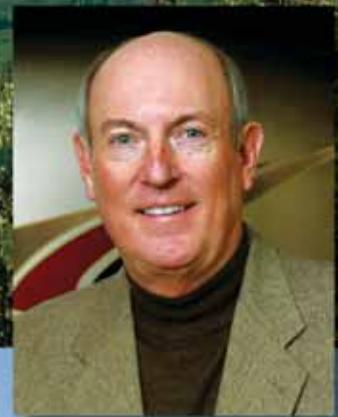
APRIL 29-MAY 3

Puyallup Home & RV Show
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NEW ALLEGRO DIESEL-PUSHER

Tiffin Motorhomes has introduced a 36-foot diesel-pusher

to its Allegro Class A lineup. The quad-slide 36QSA coach is built on the Freightliner XCR raised-rail chassis with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 31,500 pounds and is powered by a 6.7-L, 340-HP Cummins ISB diesel engine. Tiffin also offers this motorhome on a Spartan chassis.

Standard amenities, previously only available on the company's more expensive coaches, include a one-piece windshield, air brakes, side-view cameras, 7-foot ceilings, solid-surface countertops and full-tile floors. Tiffin's revamped Allegro has a base MSRP of \$183,855.

For more information, call (256) 356-8661, or go to www.tiffinmotorhomes.com.



APRIL SHOWERS BRING MAY FLOWERS

Fresh flowers brighten up a living space, and while traveling, it's easy to find inexpensive, beautiful selections of seasonal blossoms at the local farmers markets and roadside produce stands. If you're an RVer who enjoys the rainbow of colors, but doesn't want to pack bulky and breakable vases, there's a new product for you.

The Vazu — a flat, paper-thin, reusable, expandable vase — is perfect for travel in your motorhome. It's made of thin layers of polyethylene and polyester, packs flat so that it takes up a fraction of the space a traditional glass vase would, and expands when you fill it with water, forming a base that enables you to stand it on any flat surface, just as you would a glass vase. Before you set out on the road to your next destination, pour out the water, fold it up and put it away.

The Vazu comes in a wide range of fun colors and patterns, and is priced at \$4.99 to \$9.99. Available at select retailers nationwide, or online at www.vasuusa.com.



News Briefs

RV manufacturer **Forest River Inc.** has acquired the assets of **Coachmen Industries** for \$42 million, which includes brands, product lines and manufacturing operations in Middlebury, Indiana. Coachmen's modular housing and specialty vehicle operations were not part of the transaction. Coachmen reported that of the \$42 million purchase price, \$10 million will be put into an escrow fund to pay for warranty claims. Forest River, a subsidiary of **Berkshire Hathaway Inc.**, agreed to retain the majority of Coachmen's RV workforce.

In addition to legendary Neil Sedaka, **The Rally** — being held this month in **Albuquerque, New Mexico**, April 17-20 — has announced an exciting entertainment lineup for the annual event: Rita Coolidge, Papa Doo Run Run and The Osmond Brothers — Wayne, Jay and Jimmy. The Osmond Brothers have sold more than 80 million albums and have 47 gold and platinum records to their credit. For more information about The Rally, go to www.therally.com.

The **Good Sam Club** has elected its first ever "Good Sam RVer of the Year" — RVing dog rescuer Richard Daniels of Waynesboro, Georgia. In 2005, Daniels and his wife, Sue, spotted an old stray dog at a South Carolina campground. He asked park management about the thin, skittish labrador retriever mix and learned that the dog had been living at the park for three years, dependent on the kindness of park guests for scraps of food to get by. Haunted by the plight of the homeless animal, Daniels returned to the campground and adopted the dog, whom he named Old Fella. Inspired by the dog's spirit, Daniels founded the **Old Fella Burke County Animal Rescue**, which currently consists of a group of volunteers who foster elderly stray dogs. Daniels will be honored this April at **The Rally** in Albuquerque, New Mexico. For Daniels, the honor is bittersweet: Old Fella passed away last June, though Daniels is committed to keeping his memory alive. Thanks to donations from Old Fella supporters, a memorial will be erected and plans are under way for building a permanent Old Fella shelter, both in Waynesboro.



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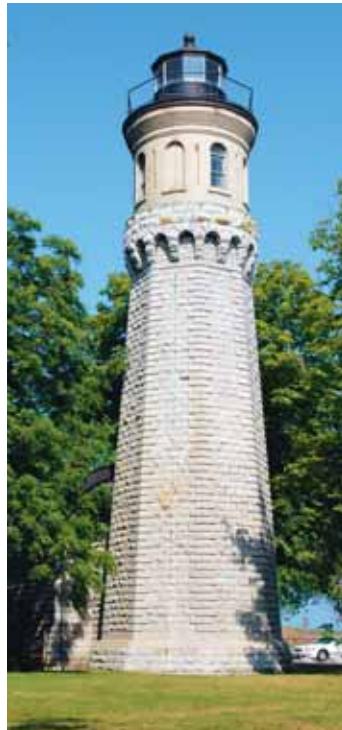
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FORT NIAGARA LIGHTHOUSE



Built by the French in 1726 at the mouth of the Niagara River on Lake Ontario, Old Fort Niagara looks more like a castle you'd find in the Loire region of France. The 61-foot octagonal limestone tower lighthouse was added to the fort in 1872. Today the Youngstown, New York, fort and lighthouse are part of Fort Niagara State Park, and a gift shop and museum are on the grounds. In the summer, historic re-enactments take place.

No longer a working lighthouse, Fort Niagara Light was designated a *National Historic Landmark* when the Coast Guard decommissioned it in 1993. A visit to the fort and lighthouse today is like a step back in time, and well worth the detour if you are in the area visiting nearby Niagara Falls.

There are numerous campgrounds and RV parks in the Niagara Falls area, with Niagara Falls North KOA 12 miles from the falls — 87 sites, full hookups and a swimming pool make this a convenient place to stop over when visiting.

For more information, call (716) 745-7611, or visit www.oldfortniagara.org.

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EVERYTHING'S COMING UP CHERRIES

There's a place in Northern Michigan where life isn't rosy — it's cherry. With the carefree motto "Life, Liberty, Beaches and Pie," Cherry Republic in Glen Arbor, Michigan — the largest tart cherry-growing region in the world — is serious when it comes to the notion that life really is a bowl of cherries.

Ironically, Cherry Republic began not with the sale of cherries or cherry-flavored edibles, but with the enterprising idea of company founder Bob Sutherland: he sold T-shirts, emblazoned with what would become the company's motto, out of his car during tourist season 20 years ago. From there, he grew the business into the entity it is today: a charming little complex of buildings that consists of the Cherry Café and Bakery, the Cherry Republic Winery and Tasting Room and the Great Hall of the Republic, which sells more than 170



cherry products, including cherry salsa, cherry fudge sauce, cherry butter and the wildly popular Boomchunka Cookie.

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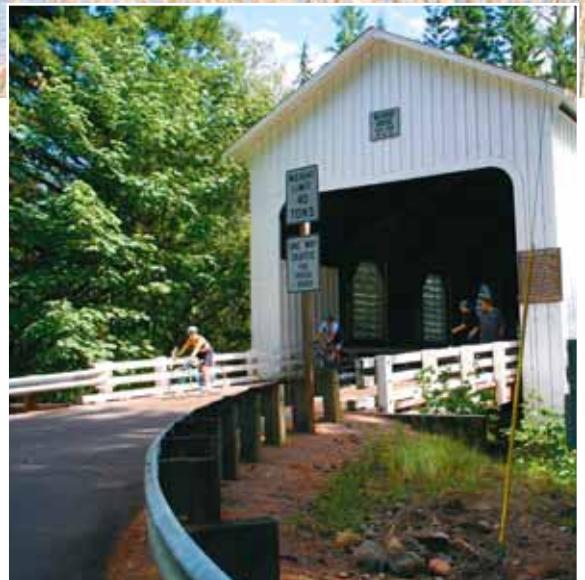
Doesn't this sound enticing? "Fishing and Game Licenses on the Main McKenzie River. Hot Mineral Springs. Warm Open-Air Swimming Pool. Good Roads. Scenic Highways. Modern Lodge, Restful Beds and Good Food." And the best part? Camping spaces with "electric light and water: \$1 daily, \$6 weekly."

Thus read an ad from the 1930s for Oregon's Belknap Hot Springs Resort. Named for the Belknap family — among the earliest settlers of the McKenzie River region — Belknap Hot Springs had been popular since the 1870s with tourists who journeyed east through the McKenzie River Valley for 16 hours by stagecoach from Eugene.

By the 1920s, motor coaches traveled the route between Eugene and Belknap Hot Springs daily; famous visitors to the resort included Herbert Hoover and Clark Gable.

Today, there are 42 RV spaces at the Belknap Springs Lodge — many by the river, all with electricity and water — though the rates have risen a bit.

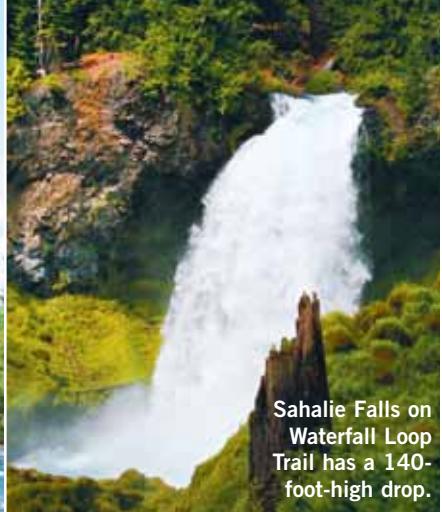
Natural hot springs are among the many attractions



Top: Clear Lake, the source of the McKenzie River, gets its name and its cold, deep clarity from spring water that filters through volcanic rock. **Above:** Belknap Covered Bridge, spanning 120 feet of the McKenzie River, lies along a popular route for walking and biking.



Belknap Hot Springs has been a popular tourist destination since the 1870s.



Sahalie Falls on Waterfall Loop Trail has a 140-foot-high drop.



Lava flow from Little Nash Crater formed Clear Lake.

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**MCKENZIE RIVER/
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Delta Campground, in Willamette National Forest, is situated along the McKenzie in a grove of ancient trees.

that draw visitors to the McKenzie River on the western slope of Oregon's Cascade Mountains. Stretching from the headwaters of the McKenzie River at Clear Lake — near the State Highway 126 and U.S. Highway 20 intersection — to the river's merger with the Willamette River in Eugene near Interstate 5, the McKenzie River region offers something for everyone: picnic areas in old growth forests, covered bridges, world-class fishing, rafting, camping, biking, hiking, golf, scenic drives and, of course, a spectacular white-water river.

Highway 126, the western leg of the main route from Eugene to Sisters and Bend, parallels the McKenzie River for most of its course, crossing the river at the small community of McKenzie Bridge. Downstream, the river runs east-west, while upstream it runs north-south. Highway 126 is open year-round, though restrictions may apply during winter at higher elevations. The 14 U.S. Forest Service campgrounds in the McKenzie District of the Willamette National Forest operate seasonally, closing in late October and reopening in mid-spring.

In 1988, the 12-mile-long upper section of the McKenzie River from Clear Lake to Scott Creek was designated a "Wild and Scenic River" — one of 47 Oregon river sections included in the National Wild and Scenic River System established by Congress in 1968. In the same year, Congress also passed the National Trail System Act, creating a network of National Recreation

Trails, National Scenic Trails and National Historic Trails. The McKenzie River National Recreation Trail stretches for 26 miles along the upper McKenzie River and is popular with hikers and bikers. The trail begins just north of Clear Lake, at the Old Santiam Wagon Road; the southern trailhead is one-and-a-half miles east of McKenzie Bridge. Many additional access points along Highway 126, including the McKenzie River Ranger Station, make it easy to hike or bike short segments of the trail, and the lower half of the trail, through moss-carpeted stands of ancient Douglas firs and hemlocks, is well-suited for young families. The upper section of the trail, passing through 3,000-year-old volcanic formations, is steeper and more challenging. Note that parking for large rigs is limited at most trail access points.

Before you begin your exploration of the McKenzie River region, stop at the Willamette National Forest's McKenzie River Ranger Station, near McKenzie Bridge, to pick up maps and brochures. From there, the best place to start your journey is at the source of the McKenzie River itself: Clear Lake.

Formed when a three-mile-long lava flow from nearby Little Nash Crater blocked spring-fed mountain streams, Clear Lake is deep and cold — nearly 200 feet deep at its deepest point, with an average temperature of 38°F. The lake's clarity is astonishing, a result of the spring water filtering

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through thousands of feet of volcanic rock before entering the lake. No motorized boats are allowed on the lake, but you can rent a rowboat at Clear Lake Resort and head to the lake's north end, where a forest of trees, trapped many feet underwater when the lake was formed and preserved by the lake's near-freezing water, can easily be seen. Carbon-dating studies put the trees' age at nearly 3,000 years.

Clear Lake Loop Trail circles the lake, winding through forests, past the Great Springs and across the lava flow that created the lake. The five-mile trail can be accessed from Clear Lake Resort or from the Forest Service campground, Cold Water Cove, on the other side of the lake. Trail maps and brochures are available at both locations. The trail is open spring through fall, though sections on the west side are sometimes closed to protect nesting bald eagles.

The lava flows that formed Clear Lake define the topography to the south as well, creating black basalt cliffs over which the McKenzie River cascades in spectacular waterfalls — rushing 140-foot-high Sahalie Falls and, half-a-mile downstream, broader 70-foot-high Koosah Falls near Ice Cap Campground. Both falls have clearly marked parking areas on Highway 126 and short paths to observation areas, and the viewpoint at Sahalie Falls is fully accessible.

If you're ready for another hike, try the three-mile-long Waterfall Loop Trail. The trail can be accessed from the parking area for either of the falls or downriver at Carmen Reservoir. Waterfall Loop Trail follows the McKenzie River National Recreation Trail along the east side of the river, past Sahalie and Koosah falls, and downstream to Carmen Reservoir. If you're looking for a midday picnic, hike or bike ride, this trail — or just the short section of the trail between Sahalie and Koosah falls — is ideal.

Farther downstream — beyond the lava flow, waterfalls and reservoirs — the rushing river tumbles in Class II and III rapids. The McKenzie River is the home of world-class fishing for spring Chinook salmon; winter steelhead; and rainbow, cutthroat and brown trout. It's also the birthplace of the McKenzie River drift boat, designed to meet the demands of the swift and shallow river. The boat had to be maneuverable in rapids, able to traverse shallow water and yet stable enough to stand

in while fishing.

The modern McKenzie River drift boat is elegant, resembling a long, wide rowboat with high sides and a curved bottom that raises the bow, and perhaps the stern, above the water. In the hands of a skilled oarsman — who faces the bow of the boat — the McKenzie River drift boat is stable in Class IV and V rapids. Widely admired for its versatile and stable design, the McKenzie River drift boat can be found on white-water rivers throughout North America. Many local outfitters offer drift boat trips — for fishing or wildlife viewing — on the McKenzie.

Below McKenzie Bridge, the river gentles and broadens. Three miles west of McKenzie Bridge you'll find Tokatee Golf Course, consistently rated among the best public golf courses in Oregon. McKenzie River Drive, a short loop road off Highway 126, curves past Belknap Covered Bridge and through the tiny community of Rainbow, home of Hoodoo's Patio RV Park, open year-round with full hookups. Goodpasture Covered Bridge is about 20 miles downriver, near Vida — at 165 feet, it's the second-longest covered bridge in Oregon. The half-mile-long Delta Old Growth Grove Nature Trail begins and ends in Delta Campground, at the junction of Highway 126 and State Road 19, just west of Rainbow. The many Lane County Parks scattered along the lower McKenzie provide shaded picnic areas and easy access to the river.

Farther down the valley the landscape changes from forest to farm. Filberts, apples and cherries grow in the valley, as do marionberries (an Oregon blackberry variety), blueberries and raspberries. And where there are berries, there is pie: A visit to the McKenzie River Valley isn't complete without savoring the local pie, or if you prefer, cobbler. Many folks favor the pies at the Nelson family's Vida Café in Vida, while others are loyal fans of the pies at the Rustic Skillet, 20 miles upriver. For visitors, a taste comparison is clearly warranted.

Whether for a few hours or a few days, a journey along Highway 126 and the McKenzie River will never disappoint you. Hiking or biking, fishing or picnicking, rafting or golfing, or simply relaxing in your campsite along the McKenzie, watching the river and listening to its roar — you'll discover why the magical McKenzie River is one of the many gems in the Oregon Cascades. ♦

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REDISCOVERING THE MOTHER ROAD

TAKE A **NOSTALGIC JOURNEY**
THROUGH ARIZONA
ALONG HISTORIC ROUTE 66

by PATRICK BORDERS



Petrified Forest National Park is a popular stop along the Arizona stretch of Route 66.

In 1985, cross-country adventurers lost a loved one when the federal government officially decommissioned Route 66, consigning the Mother Road to the graveyard of inefficient highways.

The iconic Route 66, which ran approximately 2,400 miles from Chicago to Texas and then west to Los Angeles, captured the imagination of travelers for decades. In the 1930s, Dust Bowl farmers followed the route's dirt, gravel and paved paths, seeking promises of a better future in California, and author John Steinbeck immortalized the road in his classic 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. In the 1940s, returning GIs traveled America's Main Street, caught up in the postwar optimism. Then, in the '50s and '60s, growing numbers of middle-class vacationers explored 66, inspiring roadside attractions such as teepee motels, neon-signed cafes and tourist oddities.

But the good times didn't roll forever. As vacationers motored the Mother Road, President Eisenhower championed a new interstate system. The interstate eventually took over Route 66 and bypassed the now-abandoned towns along its edges.

But nostalgia has renewed an interest in the old icon. Americans, plus many foreign visitors, are seeking vestiges of that postwar era when the journey mattered as much as the destination. Rejecting the get-there-now allure of the interstate, they trace the remaining portions of Route 66. As shown in *Cars*, Disney/Pixar's animated movie set along Route 66, many of the old towns and sites are still out there, waiting to be rediscovered.

To explore Route 66 today, guidebooks — for example, Jerry McClanahan's *Route 66: EZ66 Guide for Travelers* — offer advice on orchestrating a turn-by-turn tour. You can take off on a cross-country adventure or focus on a specific area — such as the section of Route 66 that runs through the state of Arizona. Arizona offers the longest remaining continuous section of 66, many attractions from its heyday and stunning views of mesas and desert landscapes.

In Arizona, portions of 66 no longer exist, so you'll be dependent on Interstate 40 at times. Starting in the east side of the state, Route 66 remains as a collection of



Clockwise from top, left: One of the quirky shops in Seligman, Arizona, is the Rusty Bolt, a popular tourist draw. The definitive symbol of the Mother Road is the iconic Route 66 road sign. Hackberry General Store is a treasure-trove of memorabilia from the Main Street of America. Be sure to see the vintage cars and teepee accommodations at the Wigwam Motel in Holbrook — it's listed in the *National Register of Historic Places*.



frontage and local roads. There, you can visit old 66 towns such as Lupton, Houck, Sanders, Chambers and Navajo. Or you can head straight to Petrified Forest National Park, once the first major stop along 66 in Arizona, to find the ghosts of travelers past.

Once upon a time, the national park was one of the most popular destinations for weary Route 66 travelers. It's actually two parks rolled into one — with multihued badlands of the Painted Desert in its northern section and desert fields of fascinating 225-million-year-old petrified logs to the south.

You can spend several hours exploring the park's wonders along its scenic drive, but be sure to stop where a 1932 Studebaker sits just off a pull out. There, a line of telephone poles eerily mark where Route 66 once cut through the park. Hop out of your coach, read the roadside exhibit, listen to the wind and imagine those ghosts of a bygone motoring day.

From the park, you can head to the nearby town of Holbrook and pick up 66 as it runs through town. On the left, check out the teepees of the Wigwam Motel — one of the few remaining relics from a chain of Wigwam Motels that once invited travelers to spend a night in a teepee. Even with your motorhome, you'll want to pull into the large parking lot and check out the teepees and vintage cars. Or better yet, you can leave the rig for a night and experience one of the cone-shaped rooms for yourself.

After Holbrook, follow I-40 to Joseph City and the Jack Rabbit Trading Post, a

fixture on Route 66 since 1949. Just look for its famous "Here It Is" billboard. This region offers many trading posts, but the Jack Rabbit is one of the most famous.

From Joseph City, continue on the interstate to Route 66 and the town of Winslow. If you're an Eagles fan, then you'll recognize "Winslow, Arizona," from their 1972 hit, *Take it Easy*. There's an actual corner in the town with a small park that commemorates the song, offering a slice of hallowed ground for Eagles fans. At the same intersection, there's a visitor center, plus a few shops offering plenty of Route 66, Eagles and Winslow souvenirs.

Moving on, you can take I-40 for another 20 miles to Exit 233. There, visit Meteor Crater — another popular destination for Route 66 travelers. Approximately 50,000 years ago, a meteorite weighing several hundred thousand tons crashed into the Arizona desert. With a force greater than 20 million tons of TNT, it blasted a hole 4,000 feet across and 700 feet deep. You can visit the crater and let your mind be blown away by the thought of the collision that once took place here.

Current-day Route 66 catches its stride in Flagstaff, where it serves as the town's main street. With about 60,000 residents, Flagstaff is northern Arizona's largest city and sits at the base of the San Francisco Peaks, the state's highest mountain range. At 7,000 feet, it's bordered by large ponderosa pine forests.

Along 66, you'll find plenty of vintage

motels, diners and the famous Museum Club, a roadhouse built in 1931. You can also visit one of Flagstaff's most popular attractions — the Lowell Observatory. One of the oldest observatories in the country, it was founded in 1894 by Percival Lowell, an astronomer who studied Mars. The observatory offers guided tours, exhibits and a space theater, but the highlight comes at night, when visitors can view the universe through the observatory's telescopes — including the telescope Lowell used to view Mars.

Sedona — with its red sandstone formations — and Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument are also within 30 miles of Flagstaff.

West of Flagstaff, Williams offers many vestiges of Route 66, but it's best known as the gateway to the Grand Canyon, which lies just 60 miles north. Williams also serves as the departing depot for the famous Grand Canyon Railway, which takes visitors into the heart of the park.

After Williams, you can kiss the interstate goodbye as you pull onto the longest remaining section of Route 66. An early stop along the continuous portion, and a must-see for Route 66 enthusiasts, is the town of Seligman. There, you should get a hamburger or an ice-cream cone at the Snow Cap Drive-In, built from scrap lumber by Juan Delgadillo in 1953. Today, his grown children continue Juan's tradition of serving up antics and jokes along with their food, making it a popular draw along the route.

Another famous stop is a block away:

Angel and Vilma Delgadillo's Route 66 Gift Shop and Visitor Center. Angel, known as the "Guardian Angel of Route 66," spearheaded efforts to preserve the road in Arizona as a historic highway. For decades, Angel ran a barbershop in the building, but his business eventually evolved into one of the best gift shops along the route. The building's décor stands as it did 50 years ago.

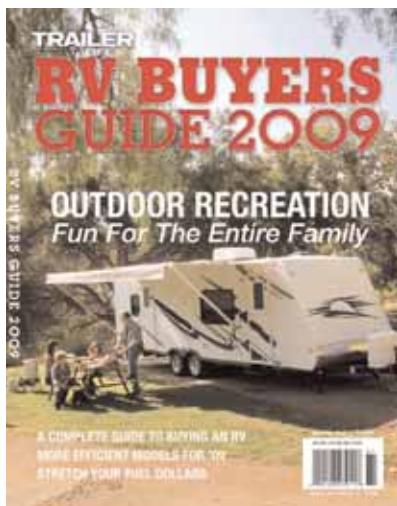
Thirty minutes down the road, a large roadside dinosaur will welcome you to the Grand Canyon Caverns. The limestone formations, creating the largest dry cavern in the nation, are found more than 200 feet underground. Daily tours take visitors down elevators and along lighted trails to view the rooms, passages and fascinating crystals.

Near the caverns, the Native Americans of the Hualapai Nation offer visitors several Grand Canyon experiences, including river rafting and the Skywalk — a glass-bottom bridge that extends 70 feet over the canyon.

Another 35 minutes farther, you can stop at the Hackberry General Store. Like Angel Delgadillo's shop, this place offers plenty of Route 66 souvenirs, but the outside



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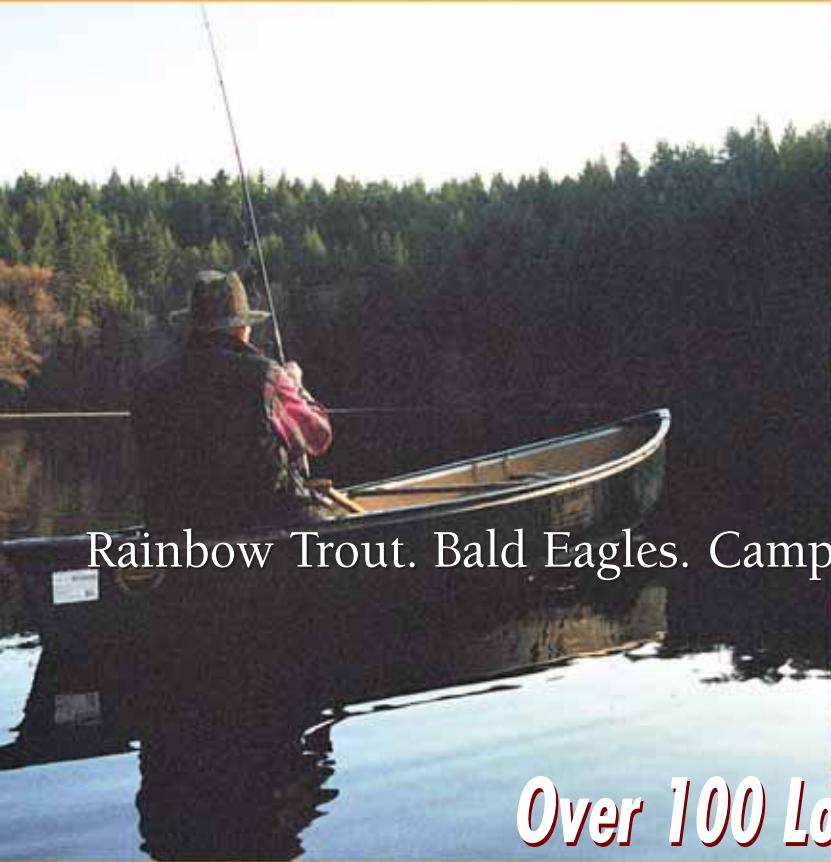
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Top: The Route 66 Gift Shop and Visitor's Center in Seligman is a collector's dream. Above: Winslow, Arizona, was made famous by the Eagles' song, *Take it Easy*.

of the store is a sight to see as well. There, you'll find vintage gas pumps, classic-era signs, and a candy-cane-red '56 Corvette — reminding travelers of the iconic car driven in the 1960s television series, *Route 66*.

After Hackberry, the Mother Road intersects I-40 at the town of Kingman. Because of the interstate, Kingman isn't sleepy like many Route 66 towns. For Route 66 aficionados, the town's highlight is the Powerhouse Visitor Center, home of the Historic Route 66 Association of Arizona — the association Angel Delgadillo helped form to save the highway.

The large, converted powerhouse, located a block from the Mohave Museum of History and Arts, contains a Route 66 Museum with exhibits depicting the evolution of travel along the road. The visitor center's staff is available to answer questions about any segment of the Mother Road.

From Kingman, you can head to the ghost town of Oatman, but first you'll need to choose which way to travel. If you're seeking adventure and driving a smaller size mo-

REDISCOVERING THE MOTHER ROAD

torhome, you can travel Route 66 through the lonely Mojave Desert and over Sitgreaves Pass. The pass crosses the Black Mountains, and in the early days of 66, Model T travelers had to drive backward over the pass to keep the fuel flowing to the engine.

Not for the faint of heart or long of carriage, the winding road has no guardrails and is limited to vehicles less than 40 feet long. But it is beautiful and offers that authentic middle-of-the-desert experience. The alternate route is to take I-40 to Topock and backtrack to Oatman.

Half a million people make it to Oatman each year, drawn by the Old West buildings, the gun fights and shotgun weddings, and the wild burros. The burros are descendants of burros once used (and then abandoned) by the nearby gold mine operations. They saunter into Oatman during the day looking for easy food — usually provided by tourists who buy carrots for them in town — then lope back to the hills in the evening. Oatman offers plenty of unique shops, plus the historic Oatman Hotel where Clark Gable and Carole Lombard stayed during their honeymoon.

From Oatman, continue on Route 66, through the towns of Golden Shores and Topock, to I-40 just before the California border.

RVers have an inherent desire for independence and a drive to explore the vast, sometimes lonely stretches of our country. By seeking the remaining sections of the old Mother Road, they can rediscover the spirit that helped start the auto tourist movement. ♦

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What do you do if the manufacturer of your RV closes its doors? An extended service contract may be the answer

by JEFF CRIDER

Eager to become a full-time RVer, James Fetzer often goes to RV shows to see the latest products the industry has to offer, and to ask questions of dealers and other RVers.

But Fetzer learned a lot more than he bargained for when he visited the Pennsylvania RV & Camping Show last September. While speaking with a dealer, Fetzer learned that Weekend Warrior, the Perris, California-based company that manufactured his 40-foot fifth-wheel, had gone out of business. Fetzer had just bought the vehicle in May.

"I checked on the Internet and found out it was true," said Fetzer, 55, adding that he was miffed that the dealer who sold him his unit didn't call to tell him about it or to let him know

that the manufacturer's warranty on his Weekend Warrior unit was no longer worth the paper it was written on.

Sixty-four-year-old Woodrow Webster was similarly stunned when he learned in late November 2007, that National RV, the maker of his 41-foot Pacifica motorhome, had gone out of business. "We drove the coach off the lot on the 28th and the company went out of business on the 30th," he said, adding that he learned about National RV's demise from a friend who saw a report on the Internet. "We were really, really shocked, and really sad," Webster said.

In the past 14 months, at least 10 RV manufacturers have gone out of business, leaving thousands of consumers without the RV manufacturer's warranty

coverage on their vehicles.

Of course, RVers who wind up in this situation aren't necessarily as bad off as they might think because many of the individual components of the RV — such as the appliances, the chassis and certain engine components — may still be covered under separate warranties provided by the manufacturers of those components.

And, as Fetzer and Webster have since learned, owners of orphaned RVs can still purchase extended service coverage on their vehicles through independent providers. Both Fetzer and Webster purchased extended service policies through the Good Sam Club.

"We can provide some peace of mind to the owners of these vehicles," said Tim Mackenna, sales manager

for the Good Sam Club's Continued Service Plan. In fact, Good Sam's Continued Service Plan (CSP) — which is underwritten by Lloyds of London and QBE Europe — can be purchased on RVs under 12 years of age and 80,000 miles and renewed every year until the vehicle is 16 years old or reaches 150,000 miles.

"Our insurance is strictly for mechanical breakdowns, including drivetrain components, slideouts, power steps, engines and most all mechanical breakdowns, as opposed to being damaged in an accident," Mackenna said.

The Good Sam Club has been contacting club members who own vehicles manufactured by now-defunct companies to let them know about the CSP insurance plan. But Mackenna suspects there are many other RV enthusiasts who are not Good Sam Club members who wouldn't necessarily know about the CSP program or how it can benefit them.

Other extended service contract providers, such as Birmingham, Alabama-based Protective Life Corporation, which markets XtraRide extended service contracts, and Norcross, Georgia-based Automobile Protection Corporation (APCO), which markets coverage using the EasyCare brand name, are also reaching out to consumers, either through relationships they have with RV dealers or through other marketing efforts.

Some RV dealers also sell their own extended service contracts. But, as with any product, consumers need to understand what they're buying before they sign on the dotted line.

"Vehicle service contracts do not normally cover items that an RV manufacturer would normally cover," said Kurt Harbeke, APCO's national RV business development manager. "In a car, the customer has one manufacturer responsible for the car's warranty, from engine to transmission to the radio and electric seats and so on."

In an RV, however, there can be multiple warranties involved, largely because RV manufacturers are assemblers more than actual manufacturers. "In most cases, the RV manufacturer builds the 'house' or 'box' portion and not the chassis," Harbeke said. "Most RV manufacturers purchase the components from other manufacturers or suppliers that will supply separate

'limited' parts and labor warranties for each of the components. So, when an RV manufacturer closes down for whatever reason and ceases to provide an 'RV factory warranty,' what they are really doing is saying, 'We will not provide warranty for what we built' — such as side walls, roofs, floors, cabinets and all the other items that were built by the RV manufacturer. Now, in most cases that I am aware of, vehicle service contracts do not cover those items. The only items that the RV manufacturer builds that the contract might cover would be plumbing, holding tanks and wiring in some cases."

However, extended service contracts do cover mechanical breakdowns involving the engine and other components that would not typically be covered even by specialty RV insurance. Extended service contracts can also be purchased after most other warranty coverages expire, with prices reflecting mileage and the age of the vehicle.

Mackenna said some RVers opt to purchase the Good Sam Club's CSP coverage even when their manufacturer's warranty

is still in place. As coverages expire from the manufacturer's warranty, CSP will pick those up, so long as they are covered components. CSP will also pay the deductible of the manufacturer warranty on a covered repair if the customer has Good Sam coverage in force.

Both Good Sam and EasyCare also sell other perks, such as roadside assistance and trip interruption insurance, which can be helpful in the event of a breakdown.

With many options available, Harbeke said it behooves consumers to do their homework to make sure they fully understand the kind of coverage they are buying, since there may be some items that are not covered by extended service contracts.

"One of the easiest ways to see how reputable an extended service contract company is," says Harbeke, "would be to go into an RV dealership service department and ask the service manager, 'Do they pay claims?' 'Are they pretty easy to work with?' 'Will I have any problems when I'm out traveling?'"

CONTINUED ON PAGE 57

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GULF STREAM MONTAJ 29A

This new downsized
Class A could be a
sign of things to come

RV manufacturers are responding to the new marketplace conditions with amazing speed. As a good example of the new breed of motorhomes aimed at today's economic times, Gulf Stream Coach introduced its Montaj at the recent National RV Trade Show in Louisville, Kentucky.

The Montaj is modest sized (about 31 feet long), has a fairly low profile (just higher than 10 feet tall), and is powered by a small-block Ford engine — the 5.4-L V-8 that's been a standard engine in Ford light trucks for many years. While the engine has been available in the Ford Class A chassis all along, most manufacturers have opted for the larger 6.8-L V-10 to accommodate the load-bearing requirements of a larger coach. According to Gulf Stream, the Montaj package may deliver as much as 13 MPG, which is a significant jump from the usual single-digit MPG figures delivered by gas-powered Class A motorhomes.

Gulf Stream builds the Montaj with fiberglass skin and roof coverings vacuum-laminated to an aluminum frame with polystyrene insulation throughout. A steel I-beam floor truss system provides chassis strength, and galvanized steel forms the storage compartments for durability.

While the Montaj we viewed at the show was the first prototype — which means details are subject to change as manufacturing ramps up for the production models — our tour gave us a good feel for its possibilities. Externally, the bodywork is simple but appealing and the coach's steeply raked front end is consistent with its improved aerodynamics.



Despite its qualifications, the Montaj doesn't call for a lot of the living-area compromises present in some other fuel-efficient motorhomes. For example, it still features generous exterior storage compartments and a large pass-through compartment toward the rear.

Inside, the Montaj 29A uses a forward lounge opposing a curbside kitchen, midcoach bathroom and aft main bedroom. Dual slideout rooms up front and in the bedroom provide welcome additional floor space.

The low floor height means climbing into the Montaj is easy. Once inside you can't help but notice the dash area. Many lower-priced motorhomes have dashboards that are about 15 years out of style, but the Montaj dash includes simulated molded woodwork surrounding instruments and controls sensibly grouped in three pods. The colors nicely complement the gray dash background and lighter earth-shade carpet.

The balance of the interior appointments is a cut above average. Streetside, the main slideout houses a sofa bed with an air-pressurized mattress, and a removable table makes the area double as the dinette. Opposite, the galley is surrounded by contemporary-styled partially curved surface cabinets and includes a round single-bowl sink and low-profile stovetop set in a laminated countertop. The refrigerator is conveniently close by.

Farther back, the bath is set up in two sections, with the toilet and washbasin in an enclosure curbside and the shower with curved-glass enclosure streetside. A look in the bath-



SPECIFICATIONS

CHASSIS: FORD	WHEELBASE: 196"
ENGINE: FORD 5.4-L V-8 GASOLINE	FRESHWATER CAP: 47 GAL
GVWR: 14,040 LBS	BLACK/GRAY-WATER CAP: 60 GAL
LENGTH: 30' 10"	LP-GAS CAP: 11.5 GAL
WIDTH: 8'	MSRP: \$111,900 (BASE)
HEIGHT: 10' 4"	

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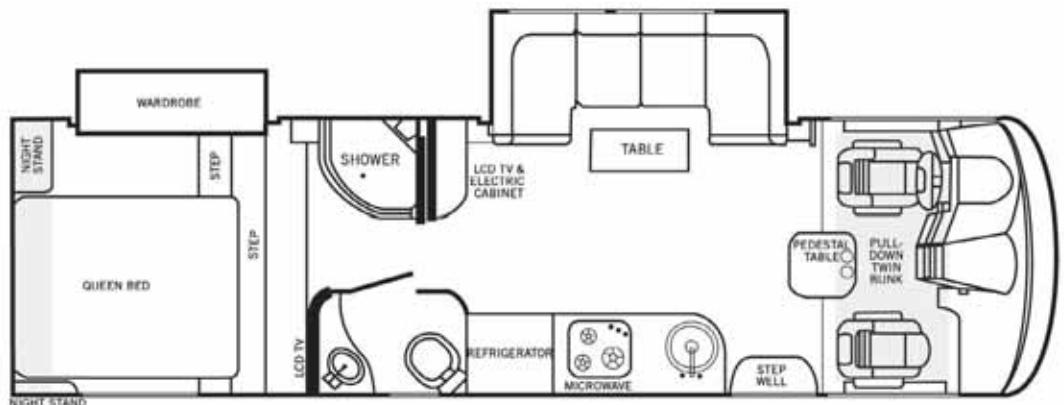
room reveals this is no ordinary setup, with its curved-front countertop, freestanding-style bowl serviced by a residential-style faucet and contemporary-style cabinetry. There's enough room therein to maneuver, as well, and that's a plus.

The queen-size bed is tucked against the aft and curbside walls out back. A narrow carpeted shelf abuts the curbside of the bed, and a larger raised area that's part of the lower pass-through storage compartment fills the broader streetside bedside area that's topped by a small nightstand. Also streetside, the wardrobe is housed in a slideout that creates some open floor space when deployed. This further adds elbowroom in front of the upscale-image shower enclosure.

Modest but adequate fluid capacities ensure those who follow sensible dry-camp conservation practices should have enough showers and such to go around.

Overall, the Montaj offers living space and accommodations to match those of the best mid-sized Class A motorhomes.

The Montaj has a base price of \$111,900 and its features and potential capabilities will be interesting to explore further. ♦



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WEATHER WATCHING

A GUIDE TO ROAD-TESTED GADGETS YOU CAN USE
IN YOUR MOTORHOME TO KEEP AN EYE ON THE ELEMENTS

by E. DON SMITH

One of the pleasures of being an RVer is not having to be cooped up in a hotel or condo when we travel. While there are many advantages to spending time outside, those advantages also make us more vulnerable to weather conditions than our non-motorhoming counterparts. Even driving a motorhome in heavy winds and rain is more difficult than navigating the same weather in a car, so to many of us weather watching becomes a bit of a hobby.

If you share this interest in weather, you may have already noticed the wide variety of ways to stay informed while on the road. Of course, there are traditional local TV, radio news and Internet Web sites, as well as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Weather Service and its broadcasted weather information. But there are also specific tools you can add to your weather-watching repertoire if you really want to know exact weather conditions. These products fall

under a broad category known as weather-monitoring stations and include anything from indoor/outdoor thermometers to more complicated devices that monitor many environmental conditions.

After searching the Internet, we found several products that are available; of course, we couldn't test all of them, but we picked one main weather station, an indoor/outdoor thermometer and a weather radio. These particular products were chosen because they are easy to set up and use while traveling in an RV and offer functionality that is suited to life on the road.

All of our products came from the Web site www.weathershack.com. There are numerous suppliers and models in each of these categories, but the sample products tested here represent a midlevel device for these three types. Another good source is Camping World, which carries several different thermometers and weather stations as well.



The Oregon Scientific WMR100 weather station comes with an LCD monitor and outdoor gauges. The rain gauge never needs to be emptied and the combination temperature/humidity/wind speed/wind direction sensor is easy to set up in camp. An updated version of this unit was recently released, which features separate sensors for rain, temperature/humidity and wind speed/wind direction.

WEATHER STATIONS

Weather stations have come a long way over the last few years. Where they were once bulky and complicated, they are now small and easy to use; most have handy built-in features available, depending on your budget. Temperature, humidity, barometric pressure, wind speed, rainfall, dew point, wind chill and heat index are some of the conditions that weather stations measure. Depending on the type of system you select, you can spend from less than \$100 to more than \$1,000 for full-featured models.

We selected an Oregon Scientific WMR100 wireless weather station with an MSRP of \$229.99. It collects weather data while you are camped at your destination, and the kit includes outdoor gauges and an LCD monitor that operates on AC or DC power. One sensor is a combination device that includes temperature/humidity/wind speed/wind direction (a newly released version splits the unit into two sensors: one for temperature/humidity, the other for wind speed/wind direction). Another sensor is a rain gauge that never needs to be emptied — it automatically collects and measures the water as it dumps. Once you place it on a flat and secure surface, it doesn't need any further attention (other than an occasional battery). The station does require outdoor sensors, so that limits weather monitoring while on the road, but the main display will continue to monitor indoor temperature and barometric pressure even while traveling.

The weather station sensors are battery powered and transmit their signal to the main display wirelessly with a range of 330 feet. We placed our combo sensor in an open area away from the motorhome and mounted the rain sensor on a flat surface (we used a jack pad placed on the campsite just behind our coach); both performed well during our evaluation. Depending on the layout of each campground, finding a good spot for the external gauges could prove to be a challenge, but most parks should have enough room around you to find a suitable place for such a small item. The LCD monitor can be placed anywhere you like as long as it is out of the rain. We found it most useful near the front

of the coach in the sitting area or on the front dash.

Once located and plugged into any AC power outlet in the motorhome, the LCD monitor displays a whole host of data — including dew point, heat index, wind chill, temperature both indoors and out, and wind speed and direction. All data is easily accessed at the touch of one large multifunction button. Rainfall and barometric pressure data is also logged and can be reviewed via an LCD graph to show a history of the last 24 hours. A memory function that records minimum and maximum temperatures, rainfall, wind and humidity is also an added feature. For those who favor perfect time and date, the device has a built-in atomic clock receiver. However, you will need to adjust the time zone manually as you drive to different areas.

The top of the LCD screen features a display with a 12- to 24-hour forecast icon. While not the same as listening to a full weather forecast, the screen gives you some idea of the upcoming weather (sunny, partly cloudy, cloudy, rain, snow). The unit can also interface with a computer (supplied by you) via a USB port, which allows for more options and functions, such as weather alerts and custom displays of history. Getting started is not difficult, but allow about an hour for initial setup. Most of the setup is spent installing batteries in each gauge and then establishing communication between the gauge and the receiver via pushbuttons built into each device. After that, moving it from one location to the next is very easy and doesn't require any additional configuration due to the battery backup in the main display. However, if you remove the batteries or allow them to discharge, then a reconfiguration will be required.

This station is a great tool for looking at current and historical data during a 24-hour period. Camping World has a wireless Professional Weather Center with nearly identical features (Catalog Item #35411) from The Weather Channel that retails for \$211, with a President's Club price of \$189.99. Instead of one large control knob, it has separate buttons for each function that some may find easier to use.



The La Crosse Technology Indoor/Outdoor Thermometer, model WS-9029U-IT, has an outdoor range of 330 feet and includes an external thermometer (left) and LCD display (right).



A weather alert radio, such as the Oregon Scientific Weather Radio, model WR601, is one of the most important devices to have when you travel.

INDOOR/OUTDOOR THERMOMETERS

We also tested an indoor/outdoor thermometer made by La Crosse Technology (model WS-9029U-IT; MSRP \$34.95). Rather than the traditional wired outdoor thermometer, this one has an open-air range of up to 330 feet and features a wireless device that also has its own LCD display. This display means you can locate the sensor outside on a picnic table or under your awning and still see the temperature via its built-in display or while inside the coach using the main display. The main screen also shows humidity as well as minimum and maximum conditions and it has a manual clock. One advantage of this model is that it allows for up to three external thermometers (one is included); you could use one thermometer outside and one in the refrigerator, with the main display inside the coach. This would give you three points of measurement at a glance. (If you do opt to use the display in the refrigerator you'll want to use lithium batteries instead of standard alkaline batteries, due to the decreased performance of the latter at those temperatures.)

If your main goal is monitoring the interior refrigerator temperature, you may decide it's easier to select from one of the several manual thermometers sold at Camping World for that exact purpose. Or you may want to look at its Catalog Item #29386 — also from The Weather Channel — available for the \$35.99 President's Club price. It features remote and built-in temperature sensors, an atomic clock and a humidity sensor. One other feature we really liked on this model is the logging of humidity and temperature highs and lows with a time stamp so you know exactly when the event occurred.

WEATHER RADIOS

Finally, we also looked at a modern weather radio. The unit we tested was an Oregon Scientific Emergency Portable Weather Radio WR601, which has an MSRP of \$59.99. Of course the radio receives the National Weather Service broadcasts on all seven of the NOAA channels and has a special code function known as specific area message encoding (SAME). After entering a SAME code into the receiver, it allows the radio to receive weather alerts for your exact area. Area codes can be obtained from the Internet or via a toll-free telephone number; you can also print the code list from the Internet and take it with you as you travel. This radio can hold up to six different codes for areas you frequent and, using the easy-to-navigate menu, you can choose to hear alerts for one of the SAME code areas or all of them. When an alert for your area is issued, the radio responds with a 100dB tone and the detailed weather information is transmitted. The radio includes an AC adapter and cradle but can also operate on AA batteries for portable use. It also has a built-in two-alarm clock and calendar.

If you are a weather bug you may find it entertaining and informative to use one or more of the devices we tested. In particular we think a weather alert radio is perhaps the most important device to have when you travel. Even when you don't have access to phones, the Internet, radio or TV, you can usually get NOAA radio and receive weather forecasts and emergency alerts. Having unlimited access to this information could save you a lot of expense and/or personal injury and help you weather the storm. ♦

PRODUCT	WIRELESS WEATHER STATION WMR100	PROFESSIONAL WEATHER CENTER WS-2310	INDOOR-OUTDOOR THERMOMETER WS-9029U-IT	EMERGENCY PORTABLE WEATHER RADIO WR601
MANUFACTURER	Oregon Scientific	The Weather Channel	La Crosse Technology	Oregon Scientific
TYPE	Wireless, full-featured weather station	Wireless, full-featured weather station	Wireless thermometer/wireless weather station	Public alert weather radio
MSRP	\$229.99	\$211	\$34.95	\$59.99
FEATURES	All major atmospheric conditions monitored	All major atmospheric conditions monitored	Temperature, humidity, 330-foot range	Programmable alerts for your area
CONTACT	(800) 853-8883, www2.oregonscientific.com	(888) 626-7576, www.campingworld.com	(608) 782-1610, www.lacrossetechnology.com	(800) 853-8883, www2.oregonscientific.com

DAMON AVANTI 3106

A EUROPEAN-INSPIRED CLASS A
WITH AN AERODYNAMIC DESIGN

The first thing you might notice about the Avanti front-diesel Class A from Damon Motor Coach is that it doesn't look like most motorhomes on the highway. The Avanti's sloping front cap is sleek with a one-piece wraparound windshield, the name "Avanti" is inlaid in silver above the aluminum grille and the coach sports an angled cat's-eye-like headlight array.

It's all very eye catching. But there's more that sets the Avanti apart from many other Class A's: it's size.

The 31-foot, 10-inch Avanti is equipped with a 200-hp International MaxxForce 5 V-6 diesel engine that turned in fuel economy figures up to 14.4 mpg. It's the first motorhome built on the new Workhorse W16D chassis, which boasts a 16,000-pound gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR), and is pretty nimble on the road or in camp.

Though overall it's small for a Class A, it houses 122 cubic feet of exterior storage, including a rear 90-cubic-



foot rear pass-through compartment to carry large items such as a barbecue grill and/or bicycles.

As you enter the midcoach door, a 26-inch LCD TV sits on a countertop to the left, angled toward the cockpit, where swivel driver and passenger seats serve the dual function of seating for the living area.

The automotive cockpit is equipped with a color monitor and controls the three-camera backup system, the living area's air conditioner and 5.1 surround-sound DVD/home-theater system. A spring-assisted queen-size bed drops down from the ceiling above the cockpit with access via a small ladder that stores in an open compartment in the ceiling.

Ceilings are 6 feet, 6 inches in the living area. Several radius cherry cabinets are located in Avanti's midsection and L-shaped kitchen — over and under the LCD TV, above the dinette and above and below the sink and three-burner stove-top with its smoked-glass cover. Kitchen drawers slide easily on ball-bearing guides.

The U-shaped leather-style dinette opposite the curbside entry doorway is situated in the Avanti's single slideout. Initially designed to seat two or three people, the dinette is equipped with a fliptop extension that allows a fourth person to be seated on the chaise lounge opposite the dinette.

The bath contains a stainless-steel sink, curved medicine cabinet and more storage. A shower is across the aisle on the driver's side of the coach in a separate compartment.

Moving into the rear bedroom, two lighted steps lead to the hinged north-south queen bed with storage beneath that also holds his-and-hers clothes hampers and a small shelf to hold personal items. There are more radius cabinets over the bed and a small wardrobe sits on top of a passenger-side nightstand. For entertainment, a 17-inch LCD TV that operates on 12-volt DC flips down from the ceiling.

Damon has done a great job of utilizing all of the available space in this coach, making it live like a much larger motorhome. With its luxurious interior, European-inspired design and plenty of storage, the Avanti is leading the field in a new wave of smaller Class A's. ♦



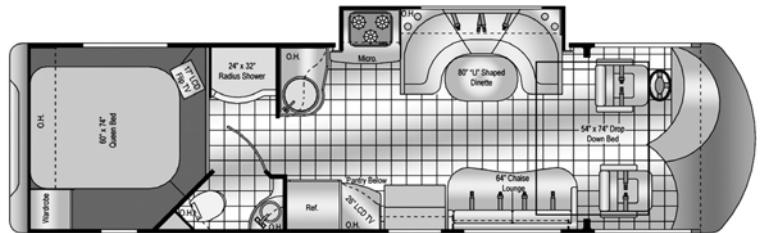
SPECIFICATIONS

CHASSIS: WORKHORSE W16D	HEIGHT WITH A/C: 10' 11"
ENGINE: INTERNATIONAL MAXXFORCE 5 V-6, 200-HP DIESEL	INTERIOR HEIGHT: 6' 6"
FUEL: 40 GAL	WHEELBASE: 208"
GVWR: 16,000 LBS	FRESHWATER CAP: 50 GAL
LENGTH: 31' 10"	GRAY-WATER CAP: 40 GAL
WIDTH: 7' 10"	BLACK-WATER CAP: 40 GAL
	LP-GAS CAP: 19 GAL
	BASE MSRP: \$144,060-\$146,580

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COACH HOUSE PLATINUM 272XL FS

A UNIQUE,
ONE-PIECE
FIBERGLASS BODY
HIGHLIGHTS
THIS SLEEK
LAND-YACHT
FOR 2009



The Coach House Platinum line caters to those RVers wanting to move up to a smaller luxury coach as well as those seeking a more manageable footprint. The Class C Platinum 272XL FS that we toured combines unique construction with upscale appointments to provide first-class accommodations in a midsize, twin-slide design.

Using fiberglass construction techniques found most notably in boatbuilding, Coach House has patented a one-piece fiberglass body shell that is said to eliminate leaks, be resistant to hail-damage and avoid potential failure points in wall or roof joints. The use of fiberglass molds allows the company's designers to create a striking streamlined body with

improved strength, not unlike a tortoise shell, but with the obvious aerodynamic improvements that can also translate into desirable fuel efficiency.

Built on the venerable Ford E-450 chassis with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 14,500 pounds, the 272XL is available with a Triton 6.8-L V-10 gas or optional Power Stroke 6.0-L V-8 diesel, both spinning Ford's TorqShift five-speed transmission. The chassis receives additional attention with its two HWH hydraulic slides and an HWH automatic hydraulic leveling system; an Onan 4.0 kW AC generator on gas models (or optional Onan 3.6 kW LP-gas unit with diesels); a concealed 16-gallon LP-gas tank protected be-

tween the frame rails; and a Firestone Ride-Rite air suspension system with compressor, all as standard equipment. Ample power is supplied by two coach batteries with room for a third mounted in a sturdy roll-out tray, making maintenance clean and simple.

A 1½-inch-square tube aluminum floor frame on extended frame rails supports the body shell, further strengthened by a composite stringer system that adds additional rigidity to the body structure — much like the ribs of a ship's hull. Coach House claims an R-28 insulation rating for its body using 1½-inch foil-lined batts, and maintains its all-weather construction approach with Thermopane four-season windows and by routing all plumbing lines inside heated body cavities. Color-coded wiring is also labeled for easy-to-trace troubleshooting.

Inside, the Platinum continues to impress with a long list of standard equipment, tight-fitting solid-wood cabinetry that features a lifetime warranty and three interior décor and three exterior paint packages. A mix-and-match option is available on ordered units.

The 272XL FS front sofa floorplan is one of two available in the 272 line that offers a choice of a 54-inch by 72-inch power sofa bed in the forward streetside slide, or a traditional booth-





SPECIFICATIONS

CHASSIS: FORD E-450	HEIGHT WITH A/C: 10' 5"
ENGINE: TRITON 6.8-L V-10 OR OPTIONAL POWER STROKE 6.0-L V-8 DIESEL	INTERIOR HEIGHT: 6' 3"
FUEL: 55 GAL	WHEELBASE: 176"
GVWR: 14,500 LBS	FRESHWATER CAP: 38 GAL
LENGTH: 26' 10"	GRAY-WATER CAP: 25 GAL
WIDTH: 8'	BLACK-WATER CAP: 20 GAL
	LP-GAS CAP: 16 GAL
	BASE PRICE: \$164,160

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CIRCLE 214 ON READER SERVICE CARD.

style dinette and fold-down bed in the front dinette plan.

Immediately across from the forward slide is a swivel easy chair for comfortable viewing of the standard 26-inch LCD high-definition swing-arm TV and DVD player with the optional (\$1,365) Bose 3-2-1 surround sound, all mounted in the streamlined cab cap along with the leveling and air-suspension controls.

Cooks can prepare meals and not miss a minute of the fun from the curbside galley that provides a recessed three-burner cooktop with a hood-mounted systems monitor panel, along with a convection/microwave oven, 6-cubic-foot double-door refrigerator and residential-style double-basin sink and faucet, all set in solid-surface countertops. A full-height pull-out pantry with additional storage cabinetry and a built-in coffeemaker round out the galley's amenities, making mealtimes easy for the busy touring family.

The highly efficient street-side bath features a roomy stall shower for a rig of this length, as well as a china toilet and small lav and storage cabinet. The adjacent bedroom in the 64-inch curbside rear slide holds the queen-size bed, set in a beautiful wood tone bedroom. Additional storage for oversized items is located under the bed. A combination

vanity-and-spacious-wardrobe module in matching hardwood spans the street-side bedroom wall and houses the optional (\$1,115) 19-inch high-definition LCD TV.

Coach House, a family-owned and -operated builder, certainly understands

the benefits of a compact luxury tourer and has created a robust, feature-rich, luxury coach that resonates with the appointments and craftsmanship of a much larger custom rig, yet rescaled for today's needs for those looking to experience the open road in grand style. ♦





▲ SAFER WINE GLASS STORAGE

In order to prevent wine glasses from tinkling while traveling, I devised a method to keep them upside down and slightly apart.

I took a piece of ¾-inch plywood and traced a large “W” across it, with the four straight lines slightly longer than twice the width of the glass. Next, I drilled a ¾-inch hole halfway through the plywood in five locations, at the ends of all the straight lines. With a sabre saw, I enlarged the end hole to accept the wine glass base. I then cut a narrow channel to connect it to the center of the remaining ¾-inch holes, just allowing room to pass the stems through.

To store inverted wine glasses, simply feed them up through the large hole on the end and pass them to the far locations that have the ¾-inch recess along the top surface, thereby spacing each one along the zigzag slot.

Now the glasses stay clean, safe, and don't make any noise en route.

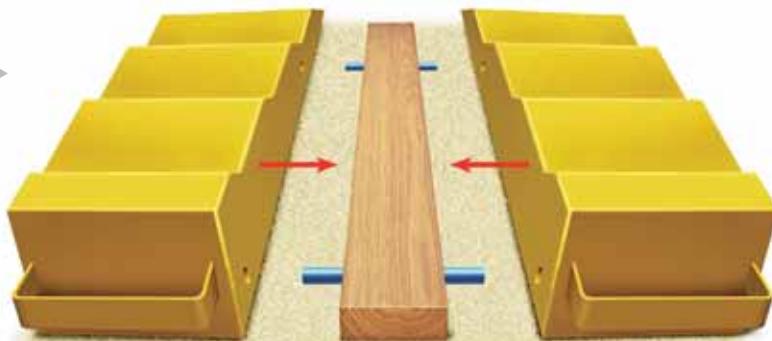
FRANK WOYTHAL | ANDOVER, NEW YORK

CHOCK COUPLER ▶

For positioning leveling blocks under the rear dual tires of my motorhome, I made a spacer that makes centering the blocks quick and easy.

I drilled holes and glued aluminum dowels into an appropriately sized piece of wood. I also drilled holes in the sides of the plastic leveler blocks. When the levelers are needed for the rear dual tires, I simply slide the aluminum dowel pins into each leveler. The levelers can now be placed behind the dual tires so they are correctly centered under each tire.

KEN MARTIN | EUGENE, OREGON ♦



BOOK NOOK ▲

My wife likes to take along lots of paperback books when we travel on long trips. We didn't have a storage area for books, so I built a 5½-inch-deep shelf between the two cabinets above our bed. The back of the motorhome is not square, so it took lots of sanding to conform to the back wall. I used a ½-inch × ¾-inch strip on both sides and the back, then screwed it into the wall and anchored the shelf to the supports.

SAMUEL WILSON | OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON

▼ AIR-TIGHT STORAGE



To prevent dishes and other items in overhead cubbies from bouncing around too much while we travel in our motorhome, I inflate a balloon and place it in the cabinet. I tie it off in a way so that it can be opened, deflated

and reused. Balloons are inexpensive and take up very little space when deflated. I also use them in the refrigerator, so that items don't fall out when the fridge is opened.

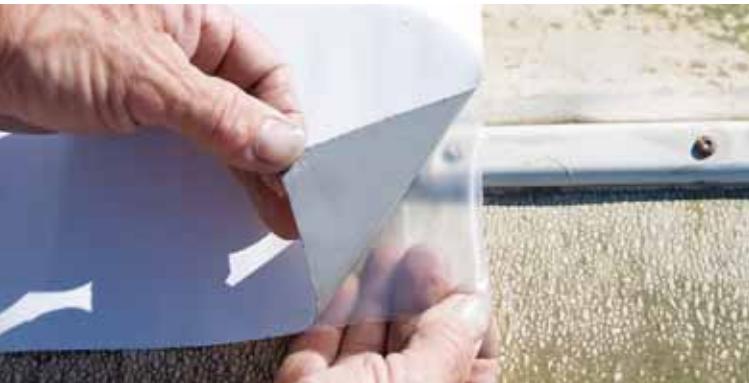
JAMES & NORMA SCISM | KINGSTON, NEW YORK

Quick Tips,

MotorHome's monthly column of useful, handy and simple tips by fellow RVers, is looking for submissions. Please send your favorite do-it-yourself ideas to: *MotorHome* Quick Tips, 2575 Vista Del Mar Drive, Ventura, Calif., 93001. Be sure to include any photos, illustrations or drawings, if necessary. If your tip is selected for publication, you'll receive \$35.

techsavvy

HANDS-ON | HOT LINE | COACH & CHASSIS | POWERTRAIN



HANDS-ON | by BOB LIVINGSTON

STICKY REPAIRS

Eternabond's sealing tape has never met a leak it didn't like

When I first learned about a new kind of tape that was designed to seal difficult leaks 10 years ago, Chris Margarites, the president of the company, was proud to announce that his new tape was able to seal pipes under the ocean. With those credentials, I figured this stuff was going to be able to handle just about anything a motorhome can throw at it.

Eternabond sealing tape was designed to stick for a very

long time — and that's an understatement. The tape comes in a number of configurations and will adhere to just about any surface. So it's perfect for fixing roof (and slideout) leaks.

Because the tape uses a MicroSealant that sticks on contact, you have to carefully plan any repair job. In most cases you only get one chance to apply the tape, and once you spread the sealant using your hand or a roller, it's there virtually forever. To apply, the user has to first remove the protective layer over the sealant side. It's best to only roll out a small section at a time, and if necessary, cut the tape into smaller working lengths. It does take some patience to peel off the protective layer, but once you get the hang of it, the process goes smoothly. While the application process may present some frustrating moments if the directions are not followed, the end result is the total elimination of leaks.

It's usually not necessary to prepare the surface, other than to clean the area being repaired. The tape will stick when applied to minus 20°F, and moisture is not a problem. Eternabond offers a cleaner and primer (EternaClean and EternaPrime, respectively) that can be used to improve the bonding on badly soiled surfaces.

There are countless uses for this tape, including the aforementioned roof repairs, window installations, awning repairs and sealing roof accessories, like vents. It comes in white, black, tan, grey colors, fabric backing and 4-mil aluminum. You can use the double stick version to make gaskets or even roll up in a ball and seal gaps — or hang a picture for eternity.

The company offers a plethora of size and combo options for just about any type of repair. As a pricing example, 5 feet of the 4-inch-wide roof seal sells for \$16.

Don't be afraid to call the company with questions on how to make repairs. Eternabond epitomizes friendly, honest customer service.

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Window Pain

EXPERIENCING PROBLEMS WITH COMPONENTS ON HIS MOTORHOME THAT BEGAN WHEN THE PARTS WERE STILL UNDER WARRANTY, A READER ASKED FOR *HOT LINE'S* ASSISTANCE. HE WROTE:

Several years ago, I bought a new Airstream XC 35-foot motorhome. After owning the coach for 11 months, one of the Se-Gi dual-pane windows on the driver's side went bad. I reported this incident to Airstream, and the window was replaced by my dealer under warranty.

Some time later, one of the curbside windows on the unit failed. Because of the long drive it would have taken to get this situation fixed, I elected not to pursue the issue at that time (I believe the windows were still under warranty). Since then, all the curbside windows on the coach progressively failed.

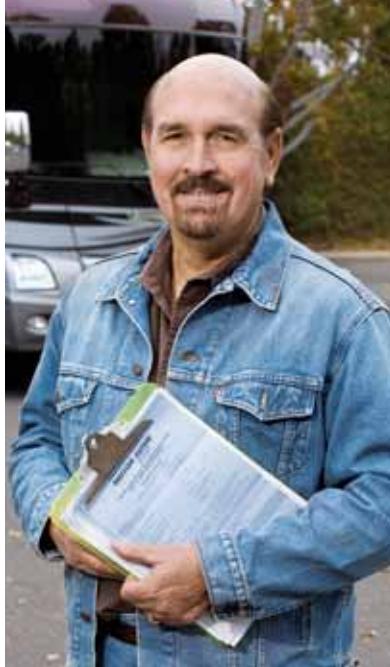
When I contacted Airstream the second time, the company advised me that I was now outside of the two-year warranty on the windows.

It is obvious to me that there was something inherently wrong with the window assemblies on my coach from the time it was manufactured. Any help that *Hot Line* might offer on this matter would be greatly appreciated.

DONALD E. BEAN
SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA

Although Bean's warranty on his windows had expired, there seemed to be a problematic connection with these components that existed while they were still under warranty.

Hot Line passed Bean's explanation of events along to Airstream. Both an Airstream company representative



“THE FIRST RULE OF OBTAINING ANY WARRANTY HELP FROM THE OEM OF A PRODUCT IS: DON'T HAVE THE ITEM REPLACED BY ANOTHER SOURCE BEFORE FIRST GIVING THE OEM AN OPPORTUNITY TO HELP.”

and Bean provided input on the final outcome.

Airstream:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Mr. Bean's request for assistance with his Se-Gi windows. We certainly understand his concerns.

Airstream will contact Se-Gi, and explain his situation concerning the previous problems he experienced with his windows. We will also see if there is any assistance for him, since he has exceeded his warranty coverage from both Airstream and Se-Gi.

We will contact Mr. Bean once we have discussed his circumstances with Se-Gi, and they have made a decision. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to respond.

DAVE SCHUMANN, GM
CUSTOMER RELATIONS GROUP
AIRSTREAM
JACKSON CENTER, OHIO

Bean:

Please be advised that Airstream has agreed to cover the cost to replace the defective windows on my motorhome, if I pay for the labor. This is agreeable to me, and I have informed the company of my answer.

I am now awaiting delivery of the new windows to the shop that I have chosen to do the work. Thank you for your help.

D.E.B.

COOLER MISFORTUNE

Believing that he was due partial warranty compensation for an appliance that was just outside its coverage limits, a reader turned to Hot Line as a last resort. He explained:

Late last summer, I began experiencing problems with what I thought was the AC generator on my 2006 Winnebago Sightseer. When I ran the air conditioner (A/C) with the generator on, the generator would begin cutting out and eventually quit.

I continued to work around this situation until a recent trip to Tennessee, accompanied by my 3-year-old granddaughter. The A/C again began to act up when powered by the generator, so I called a mobile technician to check things out. He advised me that the A/C and not the generator was the source of my problem. Because of what I felt were exigent circumstances, I told the tech to go ahead and replace the A/C. He did so, and the appliance continues to work well to this day.

When I returned home, I contacted the dealer of my coach who in turn called RV Products (RVP), the supplier of the A/C. RVP offered to repair the original A/C, but no more. They said that by the time I called them, the unit was out of warranty.

I did not imagine that RVP would reimburse me fully to replace the defective A/C. However, I did expect something. I believe that the original A/C was defective before my warranty ran out. I just went off track in trying to define the problem because it

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HOT LINE

appeared to be a generator issue.

Hot Line's assistance would be greatly appreciated.

EDWARD C. PRADY
THORSBY, ALABAMA

The first rule of obtaining any possible warranty help from the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) of a product is: Don't have the item replaced by another source before first giving the OEM an opportunity to help.

In Prady's case, he had his A/C changed out by an independent repair technician because of personal reasons facing him at the time. Granted, waiting to work through the issue with RVP may have taken longer. However, in bypassing the OEM, Prady put himself beyond any help the company was willing to offer.

Though Hot Line was unable to secure any further assistance for Prady, we are publishing his case to help others facing like circumstances avoid making a similar mistake.

RV Products responded to Hot Line's inquiry as follows:

Mr. Prady accurately describes his situation involving the unauthorized replacement of his A/C. With no prior RVP contact or involvement, he authorized S & H Mobile RV Service to replace his A/C, an original equipment appliance on his Winnebago.

RVP air conditioners are covered by a two-year, service repair-type warranty against defects in material and factory workmanship. For those remote occasions that RVP technical personnel might consider the complete replacement of an A/C unit as the only path to problem resolution, it is essential that our established guidelines are observed.

I believe our offer to repair Mr. Prady's out-of-warranty A/C at no charge is a fair consideration in this matter. I understand he does not have an immediate need for multiple air conditioners. However, that condition now exists because Mr. Prady elected to purchase a new air condi-

tioner of his own volition.

JOHN JONES
DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICE
MARKETING
RV PRODUCTS
WICHITA, KANSAS

DELAYED ADVENTURE

Having difficulty in obtaining what they believed to be a justifiable reimbursement from the chassis manufacturer of their motorhome, a couple asked Hot Line to get involved. They wrote:

Last spring, my wife and I purchased a 2008 Forest River Class C motorhome, built on a Ford E-450 chassis. As retired folks, we planned on living the great adventure by traveling throughout the U.S. in our coach. We bought a new rig because we thought that by doing so we wouldn't have to deal with mechanical mishaps along the way.

While driving through Arizona, our radiator sprung a leak and we put in at Wickensburg for repair. To our disappointment,

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the local Ford dealer advised us that they didn't work on motorhomes, but we found a local repair shop, Craig's Motor Crafts, that agreed to work on our rig.

We called Ford customer service concerning our situation, and were advised that our warranty would cover everything as long as genuine Ford parts were used. The downside was that we would have to pay for the repairs up front, and mail all information to Ford for later reimbursement, which we did.

We have now contacted Ford's Motorhome Division on numerous occasions during the last four months, with no results. As retirees on a fixed income, a \$721 bill to repair a motorhome that is still under warranty has a definite impact on our finances. We sincerely hope that *Hot Line* can help us receive the attention we deserve from Ford. Thank you.

**CLAYTON & ELSIE NELSON
VANCOUVER, WASHINGTON**

Whenever possible, and even if it's an inconvenience at the time, do whatever you

can to make it to a manufacturer's authorized service center for warranty repairs. Even if you have verbal approval to deviate from this path by a manufacturer's representative and you elect to have the work done elsewhere, the end result is often a situation similar to the one the Nelsons found themselves in.

We contacted Ford's Motorhome Division in our attempt to assist the Nelsons. Ford did not reply directly to our inquiry, but we did hear from the Nelsons as to the conclusion of their case. They wrote:

Thank you for helping us resolve our problem with Ford. It was amazing how quickly they responded after receiving *Hot Line's* letter. Within two days of receipt, a Ford representative called to advise us that a check for our reimbursement had been placed in the mail. A couple of days later, we received our money.

C. & E.N. ♦

TO CONTRIBUTE TO *HOT LINE*, please refer to *Contact MotorHome*, page 60.

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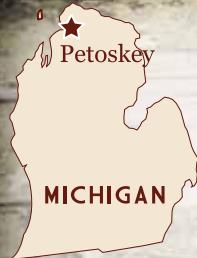
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Boondock Battery Charging

My motorhome has a gasoline engine and an auxiliary generator. I have one 12-volt chassis battery, and two six-volt house batteries. I boondock for a week in cold weather and use the LP-gas furnace every night.

Which is more efficient — recharging the batteries with the auxiliary generator, or with the engine's alternator while idling the motorhome engine? I've done both, using the motorhome engine's alternator to top them off. The generator uses the house batteries to start it, which means additional charging time, and it is also noisier.

FRED JOHNSON
RIDGE MANOR, FLORIDA

**“THE MOTORHOME
ENGINE’S ALTERNATOR
IS THE BEST OPTION
FOR RECHARGING YOUR
COACH’S BATTERIES.**

**RUN THE ENGINE
AROUND 1,000–1,200
RPM TO GET THE
ALTERNATOR UP TO
FULL CAPACITY.”**



The motorhome engine's alternator is by far the best alternative, Fred, but not at engine idle. You need to run the engine around 1,000–1,200 RPM to get the alternator up to full capacity, which is usually plus or minus 100 amps.

I've advocated this approach for boondockers for years. The occasional boondocker strategically places a rock on the motorhome accelerator pedal to slightly increase engine RPM. The more sophisticated boondocker buys a clamp-on ammeter and a throttle cable that can control engine speed. The engine speed for maximum alternator output can be set with the throttle cable using the clamp-on ammeter to measure alternator output.

This assumes you don't have a relatively large inverter in your motorhome that has a sophisticated, high-amperage, three-stage battery charger. If you do, using the auxiliary generator to provide it with 120 volts AC would be the best alternative. Using the auxiliary generator to provide the motorhome converter with 120 volts AC is a waste of time and money. The converter will only provide a low voltage trickle charge of a few amps.

If you use the engine alternator approach in a campground, some of your neighbors will think you are nuts. When they knock on your door to tell you your motorhome engine is running, simply thank them. You know something they don't, and explaining it would probably not convince them.

At 1,000 RPM the motorhome engine uses about the same amount of gas as the auxiliary generator. So, fuel consumption is a toss up if you have a sophisticated, high-amperage, three-stage charger.

LP-GAS CONSERVATION

When using LP-gas to heat water, is it best to leave the water heater on all the time or turn it on only when I need it? I am looking to conserve LP-gas when boondocking. When I have a full hookup, I have a 120-volt AC Hott Rod installed.

I.J. DIXSON
SUN CITY, CALIFORNIA

It depends on how frequently you use hot water. If you just use it in the morn-

ing, and not again until after dinner, shutting the water heater off during the day will conserve LP-gas. If you are housebound in bad weather and in the motorhome all day making occasional uses of hot water, leaving the water heater on all the time will give you the added convenience of not having to wait for hot water, but will probably use a small additional amount of LP-gas over multiple heatings of six gallons to get a small amount of hot water.

DIGITAL TV

I've been waiting for an article and diagrams relating to hooking up a converter box in a motorhome. Of concern and interest to me is where the converter box goes as it relates to and integrates with nondigital VCRs, switch boxes, hard wiring for park cable, satellite TV, the TV in the bedroom, etc.

I realize these questions could likely be the subject of a multipage article, but I have to start somewhere. I thought you would be the best place to start.

TOM MOSHER | MESA, ARIZONA

I appreciate your confidence, Tom, and believe I can add a little clarity to the article we ran in our October 2008 issue (“Stay Tuned: Answers on How RVers Can Prepare for the Upcoming Analog-to-Digital TV Transition”). Let's keep it simple.

For all practical purposes, the converter box is a new tuner for your old TV and/or old VCR. It comes with its own remote control. You choose your channels with the converter box remote control, not your old remote controls. The converter box feeds the digital channels to your TV or VCR in analog format using their analog Channel 3 or 4 just like most VCRs. For that reason, you need a converter box for every analog TV and/or VCR that has an analog tuner you currently use for antenna reception.

Every motorhome antenna system is wired differently. Keeping the new tuner function in mind, you should be able to convert your motorhome. Switches to select the satellite receiver (which is also a converter box) or the antenna converter box will be required.

As we go to press, there is some doubt that the digital conversion on February 17 will actually take place. For some time, Consumer's Union, publishers of Consumer Reports, has lobbied for a delay, claiming that many lower-income people have not obtained converter boxes. That is coupled with the fact that the agency providing the coupons has stopped sending them out because the program has reached its funding ceiling. The new Obama administration reportedly will ask Congress to consider postponing the conversion. I suspect it will be postponed for an indefinite period of time.

LCD TV OPERATING TEMPERATURE

To prepare for the upcoming digital transition, I am replacing the front TV in my 2001 Winnebago with a 26-inch LCD flat-panel TV. When I told the retailer where it was going, he said I would have to remove it when not in use. He said winter storage temperatures could be below freezing, and in summer it can get above 110°F inside a motorhome, which is true.

I have seen new motorhomes with LCD TVs, but have not heard anything about having to take a TV out during cold or heat extremes. Can you help with this issue?

**RICK AUSTERSCHMIDT
FENTON, MISSOURI**

Read the specs on the LCD TV you plan to purchase, Rick. Those that are made for mobile installations appear to have a broader temperature operating range than those made for indoor installations. A typical mobile LCD TV temperature operating range is minus 4°F to more than 158°F (minus 20°C to more than 70°C), which is more than adequate for any motorhome installation.

The specs are in the owner's manual, and/or in the fine print on labels on most products. The temperature operating range is usually grouped with power requirements and weight figures.

MINIMUM HOUSE DC VOLTAGE

I have a 1999 Class A motorhome on a Ford chassis. On a recent trip I let the house batteries almost completely discharge. There was barely enough power to start the AC generator. After starting the generator it would not output 120 volts AC, so I was unable to charge the house batter-

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ies. Also, the motorhome alternator would not charge the house batteries.

After returning home and charging the house batteries using shorepower, I started the generator, and everything worked fine. Will the low battery voltage prevent the generator from outputting 120 volts AC, and not allow the motorhome alternator to charge the house batteries?

MIKE BURKETT
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

Modern-day motorhomes have a number of electronic switches that depend on a minimum house DC voltage to function, Mike. That voltage is usually 10.5 volts DC.

When house voltage goes below 10.5 volts, furnaces don't run, refrigerators quit, transfer switches may not function and solenoid relays that connect batteries together for charging won't work. I suspect your house DC voltage went below 10.5 volts, and low DC voltage caused both of your problems.

Get a wiring diagram for your motorhome and trace your generator and alternator outputs. I suspect the generator

output goes to a transfer switch that defaults to shorepower, and minimum house DC voltage is involved in switching to generator power.

Your motorhome engine alternator should have charged the batteries. Minimum house DC voltage must be involved in connecting the chassis and house batteries together for alternator charging.

Some motorhomes have power distribution systems that are controlled by solid-state devices. These devices depend on minimum house DC voltage to function, just like the solid-state devices that control modern-day motorhome refrigerators running on LP-gas. Most modern-day motorhomes cannot function without minimum house DC voltage, which again is usually 10.5 volts DC.

SENSITIVE DETECTOR

I have a 2005 Fleetwood Pace Arrow that had an erratic carbon monoxide (CO) detector. It would go off when driving, in the middle of the night and even when the coach was unoccupied. It drove me crazy

until I removed it and called the company that was identified on the back. I was told that heat and time degrade the unit, and make it very sensitive. I bought another one and installed it. I now have a quiet CO detector. The technical assistance person said four years is about the time limit; then the detector will become very sensitive.

RUSS TOLLES
SOUTHBURY, CONNECTICUT

Thanks for the information, Russ. LP-gas and carbon monoxide sensors are initially calibrated for their specific gases. Over time that calibration deteriorates. Replacing these detectors along with the smoke detector every five years is a very good investment.

TIRE WIDTH

My Class C motorhome came from the manufacturer with Firestone LT225/70R16 Steelex tires. Recently, due to age, I replaced all the Firestones with Cooper SRM tires of the same size and load range.

When I stand in front of the vehicle and look at the front tires, it is obvious that



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the new tires are not as wide as the original tires. Measuring both brands, (mounted) from inner rim edge to outer rim edge, across the tread face, I find that the Firestone tire is approximately one inch wider than the Cooper. I assumed that all tires of the same specifications would measure the same. What's going on here?

DAVID DRAGON
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

Tire width is not measured from the edges of the rim, David. Tire width is the maximum width of a fully inflated tire. Tread width is less, and is something that is unique to each tire brand and style.

In your case, the 225 stands for 225 millimeters, which is about 8.86 inches at the widest point of the tire. It is called the Section Width. You will find that both the Firestone and the Cooper tires measure the same at that point. ♦

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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.

RECALL 06E-076, 08E-032

www.Dometic.com/Recall
Recall Hotline: 1-888-446-5157



Shotgun Approach to Repair

I purchased a 1993 motorhome on a Ford F53 chassis with a fuel-injected 7.5-L engine with 39,000 miles. The coach drives well until the engine warms up; then I lose power as if it's vapor locking. If I downshift or accelerate, the engine bogs down so much that I have to pull off the road. The engine idles normally and rewinding the engine while stopped is also normal. If I turn off the engine for a few minutes, it will accelerate and run about 75 percent of its capacity for a few miles and then it will start losing power again. The temperature stays in the normal range, and after sitting overnight it runs great for a couple of hours.

I've been to four shops — two of them were Ford dealers. The fuel pump was replaced with an OEM pump; the gas tank was removed and cleaned inside thoroughly; the fuel pressure regulator, fuel filter, air cleaner, ignition module, throttle position sensor, catalytic converter and the muffler were also replaced. In addition, the tailpipe was replaced with 3-inch pipe outlets that exit in front of the rear wheel. All this with no solution. Do you have any ideas?

TOM W. JOHNSON
ARNOLDS PARK, IOWA

It sounds like they simply replaced parts that might have some affect on the problem (and many that couldn't) without doing any real diagnosis or troubleshooting. Unfortunately, I see this all too often. Your description sounds like the classic fuel-starvation symptoms these models had with in-tank fuel pumps, which slow down and may stop working when they get warmed up fully, then work normally when they cool down. There's a redesigned pump update kit with wire harness available from Ford for this

problem and it may not have been used back when your pump was changed; check the records and receipts.

I recommend that you have a fuel pressure tester put on and test drive the coach until it malfunctions. I'm almost sure you will find fuel starvation to the engine. If it falters without a drop in fuel pressure, have a portable scope attached to monitor ignition function, or find a shop that has a chassis dyno on rollers so it can be load tested in the shop with an engine analyzer attached.

MOUNTAIN DRIVING CONCERNS

I'm planning a trip from Michigan across U.S. Highway 2 to the West Coast. I have a 2003 32-foot Georgetown motorhome with two slides and a Triton V-10 Ford engine. I'll be towing a Jeep Cherokee and have been told that I could burn up the engine going through the mountains — that I'd need a diesel to make the trip, as a gas engine could not handle the grades. Please let me know what you think.

JAMES LINCOLN
LEXINGTON, MICHIGAN

“OVERHEATED TRANSMISSION FLUID LEADS TO MORE BREAKDOWNS THAN ENGINE FAILURES DO. I RECOMMEND ADDING A TEMPERATURE GAUGE AND KEEPING THE MAXIMUM PAN TEMPERATURE LOWER THAN 275°F.”



People drive that route all the time in rigs with that engine. However, weigh your loaded coach and dinghy to make sure your combination is within the factory-rated gross combination weight rating.

In addition, make sure that all factory-recommended services, including tire and brake inspections, are done before you set out on your trip, that the brake fluid has been flushed, and that fresh, heavy-duty Ford brake fluid is used along with a brake bleed.

Overheated transmission fluid leads to more breakdowns than engine failures, especially when towing a heavy dinghy vehicle. I recommend adding a temperature gauge and keeping the maximum pan temperature lower than 275°F. Downshift to help maintain safe downhill speeds on steep mountain roads and use an auxiliary braking device in your dinghy.

DRIVEBELT DISTRACTION DEUX

In response to “Drivebelt Distraction” in the January issue, I have a 2004 Fleetwood Bounder on a Workhorse chassis with 15,000 miles. I also experience belt noise (a chirping sound) on cold start-ups that disappears when the engine warms up. My mechanic told me this is typical for this generation chassis. I have yet to replace the belt, because it's still in good condition. I don't see a need to chase this intermittent condition, since it appears there is nothing technically wrong.

COREY WALLACE
MURRIETA, CALIFORNIA

When the engine first starts, the alternator tries to put a charge back into the battery quickly, which puts a heavy load on the belt. The amount of noise that drivebelts produce varies considerably between vehicles. Also, after years in the service business I learned that the amount of tolerance people have for such noise varies greatly. I'm glad you are at peace with your coach and thanks for the comments.

OVER-REWVED TRACKER

I have a Geo Tracker 4x4 five-speed that I tow behind my motorhome. I drove a leg of 85 miles and discovered the transmission was in third gear and the transfer case was in 4x4 mode. The engine was

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POWERTRAIN

three quarts down. After refilling, it started right up and ran OK until it got warm and then a lot of smoke came from the tailpipe. Could you please tell me what damage I have done and the best way to fix it?

BILL GRIFFITHS
SANTA CLARA, CALIFORNIA

It's only human to make mistakes; this is why I recommend using top gear to limit revs in case of a goof, rather than a lower gear (as suggested in owner's manuals) along with neutral in the transfer case. Since the engine seems to run normally, you may have gotten lucky. Change the oil and filter and try driving it for a while. The oil in the exhaust should burn away, as the smoke tapers off and stops. However, oil may ruin the catalytic converter, so it may not pass a smog check; you can have this checked by a local smog shop.

VACUUM VEXATION

We've had a problem with our 32-foot Winnebago Class A motorhome for several years. The dashboard air conditioner in the front of the cab refuses to work in the MAX setting except if the coach is operating in fourth gear (overdrive). If at any time the transmission downshifts to third gear, the A/C stops coming out of the vents. (It sounds like it's still operating, but no air is coming out.) After that, it won't go on again, unless I turn it off, get the rig running in fourth gear again, and switch it on. In a short time, with occasionally shifting into passing gear or downshifting while going up a hill, it's off again.

However, if I set the A/C to NORMAL instead of MAX, it will kick into operating mode once I get into fourth gear, and after that, it seems to work fine. But, of course, NORMAL isn't nearly as cold as MAX, and when we drive from Tucson to California in the summer, it's just not doing the job for us.

On a related note, I've noticed at times that the engine wants to downshift to third gear, somewhat unnecessarily, when we're riding down the road at 60 MPH. I don't know whether or not this has anything to do with the problem. I've had one mechanic tell me the problem with the A/C was in our vacuum system and he recommended expanding the vacuum system somehow, and another mechanic suggested replacing the ON/OFF switch on the A/C (which we did,

to no avail). Any thoughts on this problem?
DAN & GINA KRUSE | TUCSON, ARIZONA

The dash air is vacuum dependent; the air distribution defaults to the defrost mode without a good vacuum source from either the engine (gas) or the vacuum pump (on diesels). The vacuum diaphragm for the recirculate door inside the dash air unit can't pull to the maximum A/C position without sufficient vacuum. Have an air-conditioning technician use a hand vacuum pump with gauge to check the system downstream from the vacuum reservoir and then verify the source vacuum to/through the reservoir.

Many of these coaches are fixed by adding a larger vacuum reservoir; Ford issued a TSB on this. Your shifting issue and engine performance may be related to a vacuum leak. I would fix the A/C problem first and see if it cures the engine problems.

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POWERTRAIN

The coach has had regular maintenance, including spark plugs, it runs great and the CHECK ENGINE light is not on. The only problem I have is when I try to start the engine at high altitudes (such as 7,000 feet) when the weather is cold — around 40°F. This happened to me last May. The engine will try to start, but it will not fully run; it sounds like it's coughing. When I try again, it will catch and run after a couple of seconds of cranking. If I start it again, after it is warm, it will run without a problem. Could there be a component that needs replacing?

EDWIN BURROWS
AGOURA HILLS, CALIFORNIA

The fact that it occurred in May means that summer-blend gasoline was being sold, yet you were encountering winter conditions. The summer gas is required by law to have lower volatility, which means that when you try to start a cold engine it may not catch right away. After it runs, even briefly for a minute or so, heat in the combustion chamber will help atomize and ignite the fuel more readily. Therefore, if this is the only problem you are having with the way it runs, I'd leave it alone.

DINGHY MODIFICATIONS

There are very few 4WD automatic vehicles that are dinghy towable with a 5,000-pound towing capacity. Are there kits or dealers where you can have 4WD automatic vehicles converted to dinghy towing?

VICTOR KULISKA | VIA E-MAIL

I think you may have all-wheel drive (AWD) confused with four-wheel drive (4WD). Four-wheel-drive systems typically have high and low ranges in 4WD, and many 4WD models with a neutral position in the transfer case are towable. Many of the larger 4WD models, including SUVs and pickups, have tow ratings of 5,000 pounds or more. Take a look at MotorHome's 2009 Guide to Dinghy Towing, also available online at www.motorhomemagazine.com.

Virtually all AWD models do not have a transfer case with a neutral position, which means they can't be flat towed for long distances without damage. It would be very expensive to modify an AWD for flat towing; most owners trailer them. ♦

TO CONTRIBUTE TO *POWERTRAIN*, please refer to *Contact MotorHome*, page 60.

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Harbeke also said it's worthwhile for consumers to check a company's financial solvency. "The Internet is a great place to start. See if the company is insured by a licensed insurance carrier and see what the A.M. Best rating is for that carrier. I would suggest that they have an A or better. Check and see who else they do business with. The partners that a company has can tell you a lot. Do you know who they are?"

RVers need to be willing to take the time to check out the extended service contract providers that are of interest to them. Sometimes, Harbeke said, that can be done simply by calling them on the phone. "Check and see how easy it is to speak with someone at the company. Can you even get to a person? If the customer has problems trying to contact the company while they are home where they are safe and comfortable, how easy will it be when they are broken down on the side of the road needing help?"

While this may sound like a lot of work initially, it can pay off in the long run.

Webster and Fetzer, for their part, say they are relieved to have their vehicles under extended service warranty with a company they trust.

Fetzer paid \$750 for a three-year policy covering his Weekend Warrior fifth-wheel. "I'm not one to buy extended warranties," he said. "But this is a small price to pay for peace of mind with a vehicle."

Webster, for his part, says he hasn't had any trouble with his 41-foot National RV Pacifica, but he likes having extended service coverage just in case. "If your coach is one that was made by a manufacturer that is now defunct, I would say it is absolutely, positively something you should invest in," he said. ♦

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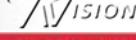
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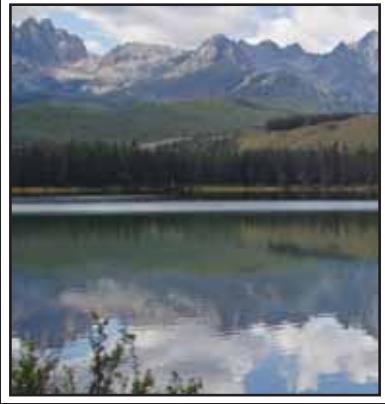
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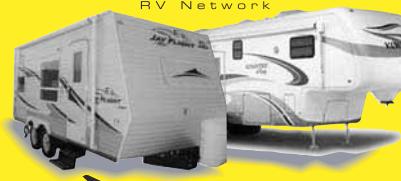


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A ONE-POT SQUASH STEW CALABACITAS

- 3 large zucchini squash
- 4 medium tomatoes
- 1 small brown onion
- 1 cup frozen corn kernels
- ½ cup vegetable or chicken broth
- 1 teaspoon bottled minced garlic
- Salt, pepper to taste
- 4 oz. each sharp cheddar and pepper jack cheese

- Slice the zucchini into rounds; quarter the tomatoes; dice the onion coarsely.
- Cut the cheese into ½-inch cubes. Set aside.
- Pour ¼ cup broth into a medium-size saucepan. Add the garlic, stir to mix.
- Add all the vegetables to the saucepan and season with salt and pepper to taste. Drizzle with remaining broth; stir to mix.
- Cover and simmer on medium-low heat for 15 minutes, until squash is tender but still slightly firm.
- Remove from heat. Sprinkle the cheese over the top; do not stir into the stew. Cover and let sit for 5 minutes or until cheese has melted. Serve immediately.

Tip: This recipe, a traditional favorite in many Hispanic households, can easily be prepared in the motorhome galley. Keep a bag of frozen corn in the freezer, and visit the local farmers market to pick out the freshest vegetables.

GOT A RECIPE FROM THE ROAD YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE?

Know of any helpful tips that save time or space in the traveling kitchen? Let us know! Send us your recipes and hints to letters@motorhomemagazine.com. Selected e-mails will be edited and published. ♦

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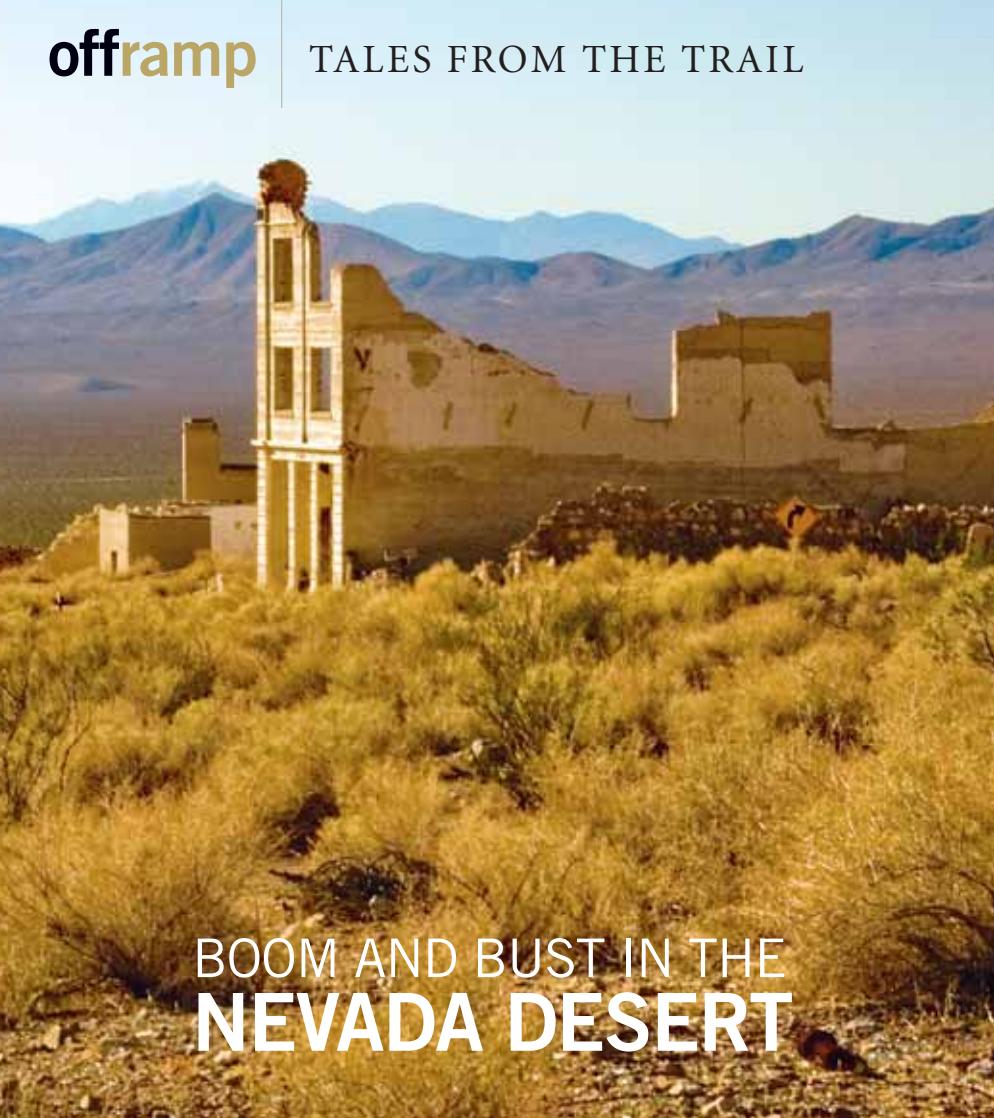
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BOOM AND BUST IN THE NEVADA DESERT

Rhyolite, Nevada — Nearly a century ago Tom Kelly built his three-room house out of bottles, mostly Adolphus Busch (today's Budweiser) beer bottles — somewhere between 30,000 and 50,000 of them. In a mining boomtown filled with saloons, Kelly later said beer bottles were the only plentiful building material available.

Rebuilt twice in the last century, the bottle house is in pretty good shape. Two other buildings in this ghost town that have also withstood the rigors of time fairly well are the Las Vegas and Tonopah Railroad Depot and one of the bordellos. An appropriate red roof tops the latter and plans are afoot to turn the depot into a visitors center.

Following a 1904 gold discovery, Rhyolite sprang seemingly overnight from the desert, briefly glowed with vitality, and faded to ruin in 20 years. In 1908 it was the third-largest city in

Nevada, with 8,000 to 10,000 people, 45 saloons, an opera house, a slaughter house, two railroad depots, three public swimming pools and a booming red-light district. By 1910, just a few hundred people remained. By 1920, only 14 people lived in Rhyolite. In 1924, the last resident died, and, in 1972, the \$20,000 school bond from 1909 was paid off. By the time the school opened in 1910, most of the prospective students had already moved away.

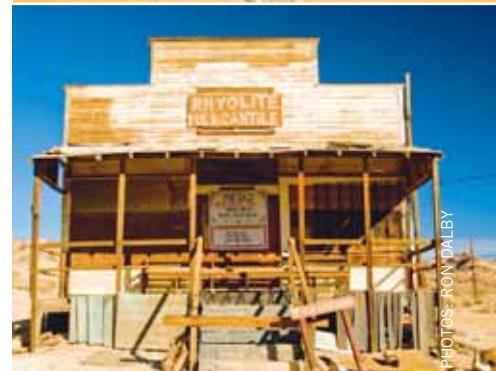
Historical photographs depict closely spaced wooden houses mixed with stone and masonry buildings spread across a gentle hillside. Remnants of stone and masonry buildings remain, but there's little evidence of the wooden structures. According to the on-site Bureau of Land Management caretaker, when people left town they tore down their houses and carted away the lumber, a precious commodity in a treeless desert.

Rhyolite's demise stemmed from a

financial panic that gripped the nation in 1907, which filtered out to the desert the following year. At the height of the town's prominence, financing dried up in 1908 and the mines closed in 1909. Though considerable gold came out of the area, local mines were considered marginal performers at best, too much risk for overextended investors from back East. Within a year from the time that the mines had closed, 90 percent of the townspeople had moved on.

We visited this ghost town on a sunny day. In the space of several hours we explored the remains of the Cook Bank, Nevada's most photographed ruin, which once boasted marble floors, mahogany woodwork and indoor plumbing; we peered through the bars into the jail; and my wife Jennifer, wearing a red shirt, stood in the doorway of the red-roofed bordello and mugged for the camera.

Rhyolite's remains, four miles west of Beatty, Nevada, and about 100 miles north of Las Vegas, offer a glimpse into our past, a time when personal fortunes in Nevada often rose and fell on the turn of a spade. Today's Nevada fortunes often rest on the turn of a different kind of spade — at the blackjack tables. ♦



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