

TRAVEL • TECH • LIFESTYLE

FOR THE RVENTHUSIAST

MOTORHOME

NOVEMBER 2009

MEANDERING IN MINNESOTA

SOUTHERN ROUTE:
AN AUTUMN TREAT

GRAPE ESCAPE
MICHIGAN PENINSULA
YIELDS FINE WINES

ALL-AMERICAN DRIVE
SCENIC AND SERENE
BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY

BUNDLE UP
WINTERIZING
YOUR COACH

BYE-BYE, BURGLAR
HOW TO SAFEGUARD
YOUR MOTORHOME

FOUR WINDS
SERRANO
STYLISH MIDSIZE
DIESEL CLASS A



“Reverse is for motor homes. Not motor home companies.”

— Bob Olson, Chairman, CEO and President, Winnebago Industries

It's full speed ahead here in Forest City, Iowa. Although some big-name RV manufacturers have recently gone bankrupt, we've invested more in research and product development for our 2010 models than at any time in our history. And it shows: with exclusive new floorplans, features and styling choices, our new models are shaping up to be the best we've ever built.

But that's only part of the story. We believe it's more important than ever to consider not just the motor home, but the company that stands behind it. Too many RVers have been left standing by the side of the road when it comes to warranty coverage and service after the sale.

So I'd like to invite you to take a look behind the scenes. See where we're headed, preview our new models, get up to speed and get “In the Know” about Winnebago Industries by visiting www.InTheKnow2010.com.



Learn more about Winnebago Industries and our 2010 models at www.InTheKnow2010.com.





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On The Cover: A canopy of color envelops autumn visitors at Frontenac State Park in southern Minnesota (see feature, page 24). Photo by Mary Zalmanek.

CHALLENGING NATURE

Ask the average motorhome owner about winter travel and he or she will likely respond, "I'm going to follow the snowbirds." But there are a few of us who actually like to travel to wintry destinations.

Winter travel can be spectacular, filled with eye-popping landscapes and quiet campgrounds offering just the right amount of solitude for recharging our senses.

I tend to follow the latter, although my tolerance for masochism has waned somewhat as I've become wiser to the attributes of a warmer clime. Nevertheless, I still can't get winter out of my blood — and find traveling during the cold season tends to pump adrenaline through my body as I feed my quest for adventure.

Venturing into cold destinations, especially those subject to below freezing temperatures, requires preparation and intimate knowledge of our coach's systems. Most rigs are not four-season ready out of the box, although they've come a long way since our experiences in the early years. Dual pane windows are fairly common now, as are larger furnaces with better distribution, improved insulation and water systems that are routed so as not to be susceptible to freeze-ups.

If your water system freezes up in the middle of the night, you'll be wishing for sanctuary elsewhere — and dealing with frozen holding tanks and dump valves is certainly not entertaining. But, if you like to challenge the elements, and can keep your rig — and yourself — comfortable in extremely cold weather, then you'll certainly enjoy the experience.

One of our most memorable winter trips was a cross-country skiing adventure to the eastern Sierra in California. We discovered a nice clearing off U.S. Highway 395, California's scenic route that parallels the east side of the Sierra Nevada. After settling in for the evening, a gigantic snowstorm hit the area and the Highway Patrol eventually closed the road to all traffic. So there we were, two couples in two



rigs parked in a primitive area with no electrical power and no chance of moving anytime soon. Because we are confirmed winter travelers, our coaches were fitted with a number of batteries, storm windows, solar panels, well-insulated water lines and holding tanks, and heated storage areas. Generators were on call to supplement our batteries, but we elected to retain the solitude by running them sparingly.

The next day was filled with exploration, swishing through the dense forest on our skis. When we returned to our rigs, the warmth from the catalytic heaters took the chill out of our fatigued bodies. After a great evening meal, the four of us packed onto a couch in one of the rigs and dozed off watching a movie fed by satellite dish.

That evening, incredibly silent due to the desolate highway, was heavenly. We wished the road could have stayed closed for even longer. Once the snow stopped and the highway reopened, we found ourselves burdened with the arduous task of clearing a path in the snow to provide an exit for the coaches. But it didn't matter; we were still reeling from our enjoyable winter experience — and patting ourselves on the back, boasting about how well we fared throughout the storm.

Recognizing that not everyone wants to be that adventurous, we've compiled a number of recommendations for putting your rig in storage for the winter (see page 40). Even though you won't be living in it while it's in storage, proper precautions must still be taken to keep the coach from succumbing to the elements in winter.

You can always follow the snowbirds rather than store your rig, and, true, you won't have to do much to ensure normal livability — but winter offers many diverse travel possibilities.

Trust me, you won't be disappointed, even if a journey to a snowy landscape becomes somewhat of a challenge. ♦

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“DO YOU THINK GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS DO ENOUGH TO SUPPORT THE RIGHTS OF RVERS?”

That’s the question we asked in our August issue, and here are some of the replies we received.

DIGITAL DISMAY

My husband and I have been full-time RVerS since 1995. There are a lot of businesses, finance companies, motor vehicle departments, postal services, voting poll stations, etc., that do not consider the rights of RVerS. The recent changeover to digital TV and the need for a converter box is just one example — we are not recognized because we do not have a “physical” home.

When I called to get a coupon for the converter box, I was informed that I could not get one because I did not have a physical address. Thank goodness we have a satellite dish, but there are times we would like to hear and see local TV to find out what is happening in the area/community.

Mr. Sabatini (“Full Timers’ Rights,” August) is right in stating that we need to write to the politicians for support in recognizing the needs and issues of the full-time RVer.

ELAINE BRADLEY | RADIUM SPRINGS, N.M.

REACHING OUT TO ELECTED OFFICIALS

In reply to your question in August’s *P.O. Box*, we feel that our government officials do not do enough to support the rights of RVerS. As a matter of fact, we called our bank, which holds the title to our Class A, and asked if we could get our loan modified as it is becoming more difficult to meet our payment each month. We were told, “There is nothing we can do for you.”

Our RV is as much a home to us as a stick-built is to another. Why can’t we get the help we need to modify our home-on-wheels loan as others are able to do? We are senior citizens and feel that there are many more seniors like ourselves who need help from our elected officials for our golden years on wheels.

MARGARET SCHOLL | SOMONAUK, ILL.

WATCHDOG NOT NEEDED

Why would anyone want the government involved in any aspect of full-time RVing? We’ve been full-timing for 17 years and feel very comfortable flying under the government radar — i.e., different laws in states that allow us to easily take care of business and enjoy this lifestyle.

For all our sakes, keep government out of full-timing matters or we will eventually lose all the options we now have. I, for one, do not want them to know what and how I am doing what we love, full-time RVing. We do not feel the need for a political watchdog.

DWAYNE AND BEA WHITTAKER | BOULDER CITY, NEV.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

I read the article “Staying Connected,” in your August issue, and showed it to my local computer guru in hopes he could explain what a “wireless adapter” is. He was not sure,



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so I must ask, what does a wireless adapter do? What do I need to be asking for, and can you give some examples of different wireless adapters for us technologically challenged people?

LLOYD KURTZ | ELLINWOOD, KAN.

A wireless adapter is a small device that plugs into your computer or laptop's USB port and enables it to pick up a wireless signal. Most laptops today have wireless capability built in, but older laptops may not. You can purchase an adapter at national retailers such as Fry's Electronics or RadioShack. Adapters range in price from \$20 to \$80 and brands include Belkin, D-Link, Linksys and Netgear.

A MIS-STEP

In reference to the August article, "Top 10 Mistakes You Don't Want to Make While RVing," No. 4, Forgetting to Retract the Step Before Driving Off, states:

"RVers with motorized steps and auto-retract features that suck in the steps when the engine is fired up needn't worry

about this one." Not so fast!

I've had three experiences to prove the opposite is true. On two occasions with different motorhomes, my steps didn't retract when leaving a campsite. I hadn't noticed and the steps made contact with a large rock, requiring replacement. This was probably due to the sensor not recognizing the door was closed. On another occasion the steps extended when I was driving through a construction zone and they made contact with uneven ground. Diagnosis revealed that the polarity "automatically" switched such that the steps would extend with the door closed and then retract when the door opened.

IVAL SECRET | SIERRA VISTA, ARIZ.

Question:

What is your favorite season for RVing and why?

Send your comments to *MotorHome*, 2575 Vista Del Mar Drive, Ventura, CA 93001; or e-mail letters@motorhome.com. ♦

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Coach House Platinum II
Sprinter chassis

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PLATINUM

escapes

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RUGGED BEAUTY

THE TIMELESS APPEAL OF POINT ARENA LIGHTHOUSE

Located 130 miles north of San Francisco in Northern California, the 115-foot lighthouse at Point Arena, Calif., offers visitors scenic views of the Pacific and the thunderous sound of waves as they crash onto the rocks.

Originally built in the mid-19th century, Point Arena Light was destroyed in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and rebuilt in just 18 months. Functioning ever since, the lighthouse is now owned and preserved by the Point Arena Lighthouse Keepers who, after a recent

renovation, invite guests to venture out on the gallery of the tower to enjoy one of the best views of the coast.

Point Arena Lighthouse is open for tours year-round and RV parking is available. There's a museum in the fog-signal building that displays historical equipment and photos, Coast Guard and shipwreck artifacts, charts and maps. Six miles north is Manchester Beach KOA. For more information, call (877) 725-4448 or visit www.pointarenalighthouse.com. — *Denise Santoyo*



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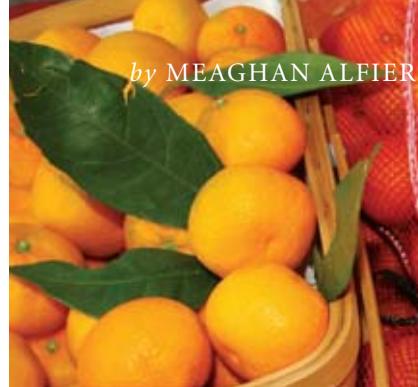
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escapes EVENTS

by MEAGHAN ALFIER



NOV. 20-22

Get your vitamin C fix at the **Mountain Mandarin Festival** in Auburn, Calif., which features more than 200 vendors, cooking demonstrations and a kids activity area. Enjoy an invigorating citrus experience for a small admission fee; (916) 663-1918, www.mandarinfestival.com.

NOV. 26-28 | Experience a Thanksgiving that's truly American at the **Foods and Feasts of Colonial Virginia** at Jamestown Settlement in Williamsburg, Va., and Yorktown Victory Center in Yorktown, Va. Learn how food was gathered and prepared during Colonial times by the Colonists and Powhatan Indians during this three-day event, where you won't have to worry about burning the turkey; (757) 253-4838, www.historyisfun.org.

NOV. 28 | Get in touch with your inner environmentalist at the **Aldo Leopold Centennial Event** at the Sonoita Creek State Natural Area in Patagonia, Ariz. Kayaking, overnight backpacking, horseback riding and nature walks with readings from Leopold's works are just a few of the events that will be celebrating the renowned ecologist, forester and environmentalist; (520) 287-2791, www.azstateparks.com.

RV SHOWS

NOV. 6-9

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

NOV. 13-15

Atlantic City Fall RV Super Sale
Atlantic City, N.J.; (732) 403-1610

NOV. 20-22

Minneapolis/St. Paul Powersports,
RV and Boat Show and Sale
Minneapolis, Minn.; (763) 383-4427

NOV. 4 | Fight off the "chill" of the approaching winter season with the **Winter Magic Kickoff and Chili Cookoff** in Gatlinburg, Tenn. Sample as much chili as your stomach desires while you ooh and aah at the winter-themed LED light displays that include animated exhibits up to 40 feet tall. A negligible admission fee gets you a spoon, a vote for the People's Choice Award for best chili and more; (800) 568-4748, www.eventsgatlinburg.com.

NOV. 6-7 | Lip-smacking Southern barbecue is the main event at the **Pig on the Ridge** festival in Ridgeway, S.C. A classic car show, live entertainment and a street party supplement this annual cook-off; (803) 337-2213, www.ridgewaysc.org.

NOV. 6-7 | Enjoy the bounty of the sea without ever getting your feet wet at the **Florida Seafood Festival** in historic Apalachicola, Fla. Events range from oyster eating and shucking contests and a 3.1-mile race called the Redfish Run for those who want to actively participate, to a parade and blessing of the fleet for those who would rather observe the decked-out floats and boats; (888) 653-8011, www.floridaseafoodfestival.com.

NOV. 12-15 | Spread your wings and fly to the 16th annual **Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival** in Harlingen, Texas. The festival features more than 30 field trips to birding sites as well as seminars and lectures from keynote speakers. There are plenty of fun, educational activities for the kids as well, such as bird walks and a hands-on exhibit with "The American Birdman" Jonathan Wood; (800) 531-7346, www.rgvbirdfestival.com.

NOV. 14 | Immerse yourself in the beauty of a desert oasis on the **Fall Colors Hike** at Oliver Lee Memorial State Park in Alamo-gordo, N.M. On this rigorous hike through Dog Canyon you'll learn about the early settlers who made use of the canyon's resources and the animals and plants that inhabit it today. Camping is available; (575) 437-8284, www.emnrd.state.nm.us/PRD.

Find more events at www.motorhomemagazine.com/calendar.



COPPER-TOP CRUISING

Duracell and East Penn Manufacturing have teamed up to create automotive batteries under the Duracell name.

Extreme Power Duracell batteries with AGM technology have twice the durability and dependability of standard batteries, according to the company. They are designed for vehicles with multiple accessory power demands.

Advanced generation Duracell Extra-Heat Protection (EHP) batteries are designed for maintenance-free performance, with added features that help the batteries withstand extreme temperatures or severe service conditions. A premium RV/marine battery is also in the works.

Duracell, (610) 682-4231, www.driveduracell.com.

— Kaitlyn Voyce

BACK TO THE FUTURE



Fleetwood RV Inc. is returning to its roots with the launch of the 2010 Bounder Classic, a Class A gas motorhome with an MSRP of less than \$100,000. The 2010 Bounder is available in three models: a 30-foot, dual-slide floorplan (30T); a 34-foot, dual-slide amidships TV floorplan (34W); and a 35-foot, dual-slide amidships TV floorplan with bunk beds (35S).

Interior features on the 2010 Bounder Classic include raised panel cabinetry, an “expandable” queen-size bed, recessed stainless-steel galley sink and 8-cubic-foot refrigerator. Exterior highlights include Fleetwood’s exclusive PowerPlatform construction, Dometic patio awning, large exterior pass-through storage compartments and insulated, side-swinging luggage doors.

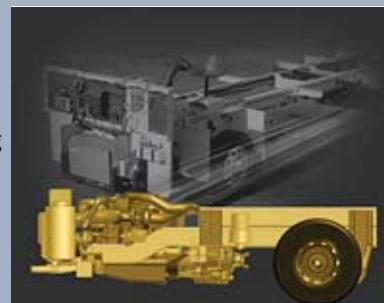
Fleetwood RV Inc., (800) 322-8216, www.fleetwoodrv.com.

News Briefs

Fleetwood Enterprises Inc. has completed the sale of its motorhome assets to private equity firm **American Industrial Partners Capital Fund IV LP** for \$33.2 million. Riverside, Calif.-based Fleetwood, a top producer of motorized RVs and manufactured homes, had terminated about 700 employees related to that part of its business. According to information at press time, New York-based AIP was expected to hire about 650 employees. Fleetwood will remain the owner of two idled motorhome plants in Pennsylvania and California, but AIP will temporarily operate the Riverside plant under license. Included in the sale are two motorhome manufacturing facilities, two motorhome service facilities, and Fleetwood's Gold Shield supply subsidiary, all in Decatur, Ind. Additional information about the reorganization may be found at www.fleetwood.com. In related news, **Fleetwood RV**, a subsidiary of Fleetwood Enterprises, has announced the launch of its new consumer Web site, www.fleetwoodrv.com. “Our new Web site is an interactive platform created to help our customers make educated decisions about their future motorhome purchase,” said John Draheim, president of Fleetwood RV Inc. Features include a video gallery; ability to download brochures; payment calculator; dealer locator; product comparison tool; and a newsroom with the latest product news and images.

Winnebago Industries has announced its **20/20 Vision Winners for 2009**. Dealerships were honored with the award for providing exceptional customer service to Winnebago motorhome owners traveling outside their home areas, and 137 dealerships in the United States and Canada reached this achievement. “The recipients of the 20/20 Vision Award truly put the RV traveler first,” said Steve Evenson, Winnebago’s director of parts and service. The full list of dealers honored with the 20/20 Vision award can be viewed at www.motorhomemagazine.com.

Custom motorhome chassis designer **Jones & Son Chassis Inc.** and **SSC Green** have joined in a venture to produce a hybrid motorhome chassis platform. The All Electric Scalable Powertrain (AESP) manufactured by West Richland, Wash.-based SSC Green will be integrated into the creation of the platform, according to the companies. Union Gap, Wash.-based Jones & Son had met with several companies for more than a year, but “SSC Green’s AESP proved to be the only solution to meet the demanding specifications and capabilities of our motorhome chassis,” Jones & Son said.



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PHOTO: U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

DELAWARE'S NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Northeast of Dover on Delaware Bay, 16,000-acre Bombay Hook

National Wildlife Refuge attracts feathered and binocular-eyed followings to its tidal waters, wetlands and woods habitat. Waders and dabblers, warblers and winged warriors wow onlookers with numbers and behaviors from courtship to chick rearing. In fall and winter, a confetti of snow geese settles on the refuge. White-tailed deer, beavers and river otters add mammal sightings. A stubborn mosquito and biting fly season (June to September) requires an armor of bug repellent, sleeves and netting. Just keep in mind, healthy insect populations fuel healthy birds.

The visitor center has ample parking, and loop sections of the site's 12-mile auto tour are suitable for motorhomes. Foot trails, a boardwalk and three 30-foot observation towers allow you to exit your vehicle and see the refuge on more intimate terms. The refuge is open daily dawn to dusk. State park campgrounds sit south of the refuge near Felton and north near Kirkwood.

For more information, call (302) 653-9345, or visit www.fws.gov/northeast/bombayhook.

— Rhonda Ostertag

THE WILD, WILD MIDWEST

On Oct. 5, 1892, the infamous

Dalton Gang attempted to rob two banks in Coffeyville, Kan. In the bloody shootout that followed, four members of the Gang died, alongside four businessmen known today as The Defenders.

Located in the southeast corner of Kansas, Coffeyville's character is cast in legends of outlaws and brave laymen. Businessman W.P. Brown invested his wealth in a four-story, 16-room mansion built around 1900. Brown Mansion, now listed in the *National Register of Historic Places*, is a vintage testament to Coffeyville's bygone days.

In addition to Brown Mansion, the town offers an aviation museum, 18-hole golf course, the Midland Theater and Dalton Defenders Museum — open year-round. The museum houses memorabilia — guns, saddles and more — from the 1892 shootout.

Walter Johnson Park offers plenty of campsites with full hookups, WiFi, picnic areas and recreational opportunities.

For more information, go to www.coffeyville.com. — Arline Chandler

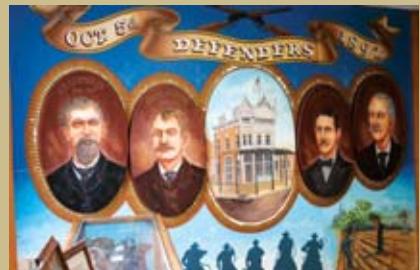


PHOTO: LEE SMITH



WINING AND DINING

NORTHWEST MICHIGAN'S
OLD MISSION PENINSULA
SERVES UP A HEALTHY
CROP OF VINTAGES TO
PLEASE EVEN THE MOST
DISCERNING OF PALATES

by DENISE SANTOYO



PHOTOS: BRY'S ESTATE VINEYARD AND WINERY; STEVE SADLER, JEFF GREENBURG — MICHIGAN WINES; PURE MICHIGAN TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Clockwise from top: An employee of Blackstar Farms explains the qualities of North Michigan wine to a group of wine tasters. More than just a winery, Chateau Chantal offers cooking classes that also instruct on the art of wine pairing with food. Brys Estate Vineyard and Winery has won numerous awards for its complex, flavorful wines.

have to admit, I'm a self-proclaimed wine snob. Living in California, I was weaned on Napa Valley vintages and Sonoma chardonnays. When I went to culinary school, I discovered the joys of French and Italian wines — Bordeaux and Burgundy, pinot noir and pinot grigio, all with a delicate, complex body and flavor that seemed to put my native California varietals to shame. I would drink French or Italian wines, and nothing else.

Happily, all that changed during a recent visit to Michigan's wine country. Michigan, a state I had not even known produced wine until I took a tour of Old Mission Peninsula, turned my ideas of what is "good" wine and where it is grown completely upside down, and I've never been more thrilled to have been proven wrong.

We set out on our tour of Old Mission Peninsula during autumn. The weather was cool and the days were sunny, making it comfortable to drive the long and winding roads from vineyard to vineyard. We set out from Traverse City, our home base, and planned a route that wound its way up and down the Old Mission Peninsula.

Traverse City and the surrounding area are rich in campgrounds, so you shouldn't have a problem finding a full-hookup spot to call home. Traverse Bay RV Resort — rated a 10/10/10 by *Trailer Life Campground Directory* — is an adult-only RV park with 217 big-rig sites with full hookups and 50-amp service, free WiFi and cable, complimentary use of bicycles, a tennis court, library, computer room, fitness center and much more.

OLD MISSION PENINSULA

We decided to follow the Old Mission Peninsula Wine Trail north the length of the peninsula and work our way back to Traverse City. Our first stop was the charming Chateau Chantal. Part winery, part inn, this 65-acre estate overlooks Old Mission



Top: Tours of Chateau Grand Traverse explore the heart of the winemaking tradition. Above: Traverse Bay RV Resort offers luxury amenities and 217 big-rig, full-hookup sites.

Peninsula and West Grand Traverse Bay. The winery is renowned for its top-notch cuisine and award-winning wine. Chateau Chantal also offers an educational experience all its own, ranging from cooking classes to daily Tapas Tours in the summer to Wine Immersion Seminars with exclusive instruction on pairing wine with food. Thursday evenings throughout the summer, the estate hosts Jazz at Sunset.

After soaking up the atmosphere at Chateau Chantal, we headed down the lane to the newest addition to the Old Mission Peninsula circuit: Two Lads Winery. If Chateau Chantal was a study in whole-package hospitality, Two Lads was a study in vibrancy and passion. You could call Cornel Olivier and Chris Baldyga upstarts, given that their fledgling winery is less than five years old and encompasses a relatively small 13 acres of established vineyards, but these guys really know their wine. Two Lads Winery is groundbreaking, introducing gravity-flow processing — a method of transporting wine throughout the winemaking process that preserves the aromatics, colors and flavors of the grapes, while being more energy-efficient than standard pump or filter methods. After sampling their exclusive selection of delicate whites, we chose the 2007 “Off Dry” Pinot Grigio, with its ripe pear and apricot notes and slightly sweet finish, as our favorite.

From Two Lads, we circled around to another vineyard on the peninsula: Brys Estate Vineyard and Winery. Owned and operated by Walt and Eileen Brys, Brys Estate was established in 2003, and now occupies 80 acres of choice peninsula land, perfect for growing their extensive range of wines. The Bryses are a charming couple with a genuine love of the region and their work — but it's their vintner, Coenraad Stassen, who's had a major hand in the success of their vintages. His skill is evident in the depth and variety of the wines at the estate, not to mention the many awards the vineyard has amassed. The estate's smooth, clean and complex gewürztraminer was particularly impressive and it pairs well with spicy food and curries.

From Brys Estate, we embarked on a lightning round of visits that included Black Star Farms, Peninsula Cellars and Bowers Harbor Vineyards before stopping for lunch. Home to the infamous Cooper, a massive

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF AMICAL; TRAVERSE BAY RV RESORT

A FOOD-LOVER'S PARADISE

While touring the peninsula, we visited quite a few one-of-a-kind restaurants in Traverse City and the surrounding countryside. After a day of golf at the Jack Nicklaus-designed Bear golf course at the Grand Traverse Resort and Spa, we headed up to its “top-of-the-world” restaurant, Aerie, to enjoy a 360-degree view of the sun setting over Lake Michigan, paired with some excellent cuisine and wine.

While we were disappointed to learn we'd miss this year's Epicurean Classic — an annual food-lover's event held in late summer at locations all over Traverse City — we were cheered to discover the local bistro, Amical, on a leisurely stroll downtown. The atmosphere is casual and relaxed, with a fireplace midroom and a dessert case that spans the length of the bar area. I particularly enjoyed the tomato bisque soup, and the braised lamb was slow-cooked to perfection. Executive Chef David Denison changes the menu often to take advantage of local offerings, so you're always assured of something special.

The next day we headed out of Traverse City to the charming lakeside town of Charlevoix, about 50 minutes away, to browse the shops. Charlevoix is known for its main street of shops and art galleries, and between browsing the bookstores and tasting Murdick's famous fudge, we discovered Grey Gables Inn. The dress code is casual, the piano bar entertainment relaxing, the cost reasonable and the food excellent. We dined on perfectly prepared filet mignon and even had enough to take back for lunch the next day. Heaven for the inner foodie, indeed. — D.S.



Amical uses fresh, local ingredients, as evident in these tasty olive twists.



From left, at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, “ghost forests” are created by skeletal trees and creeping sands. Leland is the starting point for those taking the two-hour ferry ride from the mainland to South Manitou Island. In the restored logging village of Glen Haven, Jeanne Griffin — a full-time RVer — volunteers her time and skills at the town’s blacksmith forge.

SLEEPING BEAR DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE

by BERT GILDART

Long ago, a forest fire drove two small bear cubs and their mother into the waters of Lake Michigan. Despite the encouragement from their mother, the cubs lagged behind in the vast expanse of water. Time after time the mother bear swam back to her cubs, crying out, trying to help them along, but, tragically, no amount of encouragement helped and the mother bear hauled ashore alone. The Great Spirit, Manitou, created two large islands (now known as North and South Manitou) at the spot where the cubs drowned, and a single dune where the mother bear closed her eyes for the last time.

This is the American Indian legend that inspired the name for the 71,199-acre Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, where my wife, Janie, and I were camped. We were drawn here for the great beauty of the Michigan shore and the history of old logging camps, small village life, and the early island U.S. Coast Guard involvement. We’d also come here to explore the dunes and to fulfill the requirements of another Indian legend, “Climb the high dunes and you will have a long and fruitful life.”

We had planned to camp here for 10 days and knew that the lakeshore offered enough activities to keep us busy for our entire stay. The lakeshore is home to two campgrounds for RVs — rustic D.H. Day (no hookups) and Platte River (electric hookups) — and, just six miles away in Empire, is the private RV park Indigo Bluffs, which is filled with amenities.

The best place to begin learning about this lakeshore park is the park’s main visitor center — the Philip A. Hart Visitor Center in Empire. From the visitor center, we began to get a sense of Lake Michigan and the surrounding area. Scientists say that the islands of North and South Manitou were the result of glaciation and that the Sleeping Bear Dune itself — called so because of its resemblance to a large bear laying on its back — was created by wind-blown sand. The dune is about 2,000 years old and, because it is perched atop a plateau, it is called a “perch dune.”

From the visitor center it’s a short drive to the famous seven-mile-long Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive, which provides a great overview of the area and the Sleeping Bear. Embedded in the dunes are skeletal trees that were once owned by Pierce Stocking but turned over to the Park Service shortly after his death in 1976.

In his youth Pierce Stocking was a logger, and undoubtedly enjoyed the nearby village of Glen Haven, now preserved in a 1920s period. We spent a day visiting the old settlement, with its museum on Coast Guard history, boat shop and general store. We also visited the blacksmith shop and were greeted by Sam Adams and his wife, who live in their motorhome while volunteering at the lakeshore as village blacksmiths. They showed us techniques for heating iron and then pounding it into useful shapes and parts.

The next day we made another short drive, this time to the Dune Climb, which has become an immensely popular activity. The climb requires an hour or so and certainly doesn’t have to be climbed nonstop — so pace yourself. From the top we looked out over the lake at South Manitou and decided to take the ferry from the Fishtown Dock in Leland to the island.

We boarded the ferry with our kayaks and camping gear for a two-hour boat trip to South Manitou. Once we arrived, we attended an orientation on island etiquette, and then loaded our kayaks and paddled about a mile to Bay Campground.

The campground is designated as “an entrance to the wilderness,” and we erected our tent on a site near the shore. We paddled short distances in both directions, enjoying the views of South Manitou Lighthouse. We also enjoyed the water as the day was hot, and cold Lake Michigan refreshed us.

The next day, we decided to explore the island’s history at the Sleeping Bear Point Coast Guard Station Maritime Museum. Tours are offered daily and begin with a climb of 117 steps up a circular staircase to the light station. In addition to the lighthouse tour, the Park Service endorses tours offered by Island Transit of the old farms that once checkered the area. Though you can also walk, on a hot day it’s nice to sit back and relax in the open-air “bus,” listen to the interpreter, and enjoy the many stops, such as one at the old schoolhouse.

Returning to the mainland that evening, exhausted by a day of hiking, exploring and kayaking, we were grateful for our campground. Off in the distance, a crescent moon ascended over the huge expanse of sand that comprises the Sleeping Bear, and we again recalled the legend of the mother and her cubs. How much more fortunate we were to have the luxury of an RV to which to retreat. ♦

PHOTOS: BERT GILDART

Bernese Mountain “wine dog” with a sweet disposition and his own vintage — a subtle blend of Riesling and chardonnay that was dry and crisp — Bowers Harbor Vineyards is an “old school” winery, with rows of grapes, hand-labeled by vintage, growing practically up to the front door. After an affectionate greeting, Cooper trotted off down the rows on his afternoon patrol.

Roadside fruit and veggie stands dot the peninsula, and their produce is amazingly fresh and flavorful, making it easy to stop for a picnic lunch supplemented by the fresh pick of the day. After satiating ourselves on locally grown cherries, we continued on to Chateau Grand Traverse, the largest vineyard in this region. Established in 1974, Chateau Grand Traverse occupies a staggering 174 acres: 117 on site, and 57 contracted vineyards throughout the Old Mission Peninsula. It is the oldest commercial winemaking operation in northern Michigan, is one of the country’s largest producers of Riesling wine and has the most sophisticated winemaking operation of any of the vineyards we visited — bottling more than 75,000 cases of wine

in 2008. It was here at Chateau Grand Traverse that I sampled an ice wine, something the region is famous for.

The climate of Old Mission Peninsula is regulated by the surrounding waters of Grand Traverse Bay, which makes the peninsula optimal for the growing of high-quality *vinifera* (wine) grapes. The soil is sandy, with good drainage, and the temperature, sunlight exposure and precipitation are ideal. Winter damage is minimized due to snow cover, and the grapes are likewise protected from frost. Ice wines are produced when an early hard freeze allows the grapes to be harvested while frozen — something that does not happen every year. They are characterized by their clean, refreshing sweetness (the grapes freeze before fermentation, rather than after, allowing them to retain their sugar content) and make excellent dessert wines.

Of course, our visit would not be complete without sampling some of the region’s cherry wine — which we did at nearly every vineyard we stopped at. Michigan is perhaps even more well known for its cherry production than for its wine, harvesting

more than 200 million pounds of cherries each year. The self-proclaimed “cherry capital of the world,” Traverse City is proud of its cherry culture, hosting an annual National Cherry Festival each July.

And now, months after returning from the wine connoisseur’s paradise that is the Old Mission Peninsula, I find myself still searching for those elusive Michigan vintages — the aromatic gewürztraminer, the crisply sparkling blanc de blanc, the voluptuous pinot noir and the distinctive Riesling ice wine that is the region’s best-kept secret.

They may be difficult to find outside of their home state but, after all, isn’t that part of what makes them priceless? ♦

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- BOWERS HARBOR VINEYARDS**
(800) 616-7615,
www.bowersharbor.com.
- BRYSESTATE VINEYARD AND WINERY**
(231) 223-9303,
www.brysestate.com.
- CHATEAU CHANTAL**
(800) 969-4009,
www.chateauchantal.com.
- CHATEAU GRAND TRAVERSE**
(800) 283-0247, www.cgtwines.com.
- INDIGO BLUFFS**
(800) 224-4488,
www.indigobluffs.com.
- SLEEPING BEAR DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE**
(231) 326-5134, www.nps.gov/slbe.
- TRAVEL MICHIGAN**
(888) 784-7328, www.michigan.org.
- TRAVERSE BAY RV RESORT**
(231) 938-5800,
www.traversebayrv.com.
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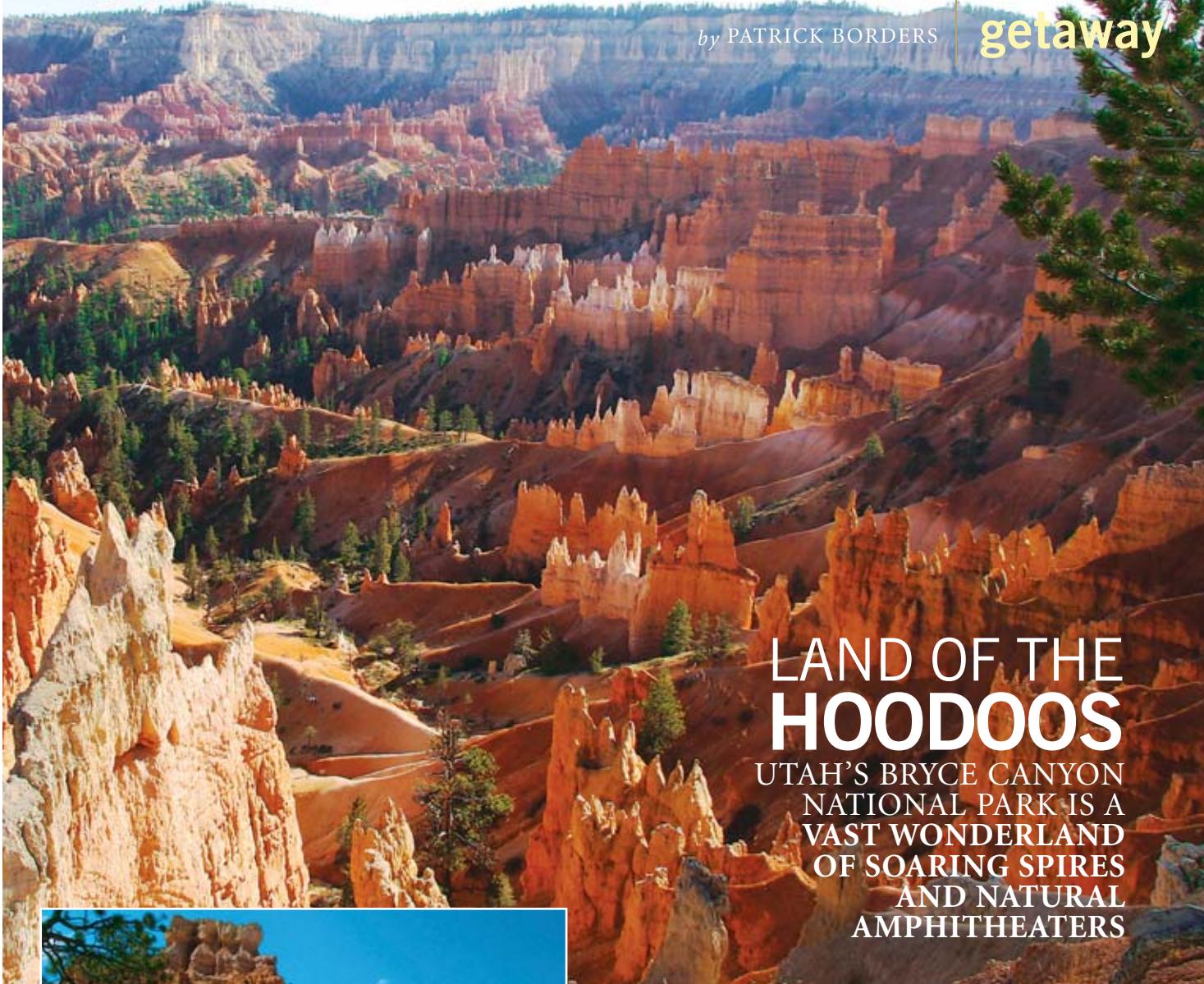
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LAND OF THE HOODOOS

UTAH'S BRYCE CANYON NATIONAL PARK IS A VAST WONDERLAND OF SOARING SPIRES AND NATURAL AMPHITHEATERS



Top: Hoodoos dominate the skyline at Sunset Point. The hoodoos — otherworldly, nature-chiseled fins and pinnacles — provide a dramatic backdrop for hikers in Bryce Canyon National Park.

Mormon pioneer Ebenezer Bryce knew the canyon that now bears his name as “a helluva place to lose a cow.” But the rest of the world, which sends its multitudes of visitors to Utah’s Bryce Canyon National Park, knows the canyon as a vast wonderland of brilliant-colored spires, rising like sentinels into the clear sky above.

At Bryce Canyon, visitors find a series of natural amphitheaters carved out by millions of years of rain, wind and ice. The geologic forces sculpted a wild landscape from the eastern slope of the Paunsaugunt Plateau, creating thousands of nature-chiseled pinnacles and fins called *hoodoos*.

From the rim of the amphitheaters, the pristine air affords distant views of a geological panorama sometimes stretching more than 100 miles. But it’s the natural art forms directly below the rim that capture the imagination. The reds and oranges and purples paint the landscape like a canvas — reflecting an almost glowing brilliance just after sunrise and before sunset. And the



The Bryce Canyon Visitor Center, 1.5 miles inside the park, provides maps, directions, a museum and more.



Among the many hiking options in Bryce Canyon is the Queen's Garden Trail. The trail, which winds up, down and around the hoodoos, meets up with part of the Navajo Loop. The combined trail is 2.9 miles.



A distinctive landmark is the 85-foot Natural Bridge, which is actually an arch formed by erosion from the top.



A great view of the vegetation at Rainbow Point, the park's highest elevation at 9,115 feet, is afforded by taking a one-mile hike on Bristlecone Loop. The bristlecone pine tree is one of the oldest living organisms on Earth and thrives on exposed, barren slopes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

BRYCE CANYON NATIONAL PARK

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BRYCE CANYON
NATIONAL PARK

extraordinary shapes of the hoodoos send visitors on quests of the imagination to determine the rocks' true identities. Are they castles? Steeples? Ancient spirits?

If you're traveling through southern Utah, you'll want to visit the land of the hoodoos. Although you can spend several days exploring the park, you can also easily experience its wonders during an unforgettable day trip.

The only access to Bryce Canyon is via Scenic Byway 12 (an All-American Road and Utah State Scenic Byway), which is a narrow, winding road that climbs to high elevations in spots. Approaching from the east, Highway 12 follows the edge of Boulder Mountain, reaching elevations of almost 9,400 feet, passing viewpoints that overlook Capitol Reef National Park. The highway then drops down into the rugged Escalante Canyons, where it crosses deep chasms and climbs steep-sided plateaus. One section follows "The Hogsback," a narrow ridge barely wider than the two-lane roadway, with cliffs falling away on either side.

The western approach is gentler — the roadway is not as steep or narrow. The entire highway is paved, well-maintained and kept open year-round.

The best place to begin a tour of the park is at the visitor center. Located just 1.5 miles inside the park, the visitor center provides maps and directions, plus information regarding weather, ranger activities and the Junior Ranger program. There's also a 20-minute orientation film and a museum with exhibits that display facets of the park's geology, plants, animals and history.

Hiking is the best way to experience the stunning mazes. Most of the park's trails range from half a mile to 11 miles and take a day or less to complete. But if hiking isn't your thing, you can still enjoy the landscape from the overlooks on the main park road, which heads 18 miles along a winding corridor through forests and meadows to the park's southern end.

The elevation within the park varies by 2,000 feet, and as a result, Bryce Canyon is home

to three plant communities. Along the main road, the trees offer clues to those communities. Before the visitor center, dwarf forests of pinyon and juniper dominate the landscape. But then it changes to ponderosa pines and, finally, to spruce, fir and aspen at the higher elevations. Those communities, plus the barren canyon, foster a fascinating biodiversity of birds, animals and plants — from the California condor to the mountain lion to the bristlecone pine.

Motorhomers can drive the main park road. During peak visitor months, the park shuttle is available to transport visitors to the more popular overlooks. The park's mass transit system was recently developed to ease congestion and pollution, and it's efficient with frequent stops.

The overlooks and canyon trailheads are located on the east side of the road, so if you're going to tour the main road, it's best to drive straight to the south end, then stop at the 13 viewpoints along the return trip.

With its large parking area, Rainbow Point at the southernmost overlook pro-

vides a good first stop for motorhomers. At 9,115 feet, it showcases breathtaking views of southern Utah, and, stretching northward, provides a first glimpse of the unique landscape and rock formations. As ravens overhead follow along, you can view the striking pink cliffs that have provided the medium for the hoodoos below, such as the Poodle, a dog-shaped hoodoo visible from Rainbow Point. The Pink Cliffs of Bryce Canyon comprise one portion of the Grand Staircase — a stepped landscape that extends more than 100 miles to the south. On most days, views stretch as far as Navajo Mountain in Utah, and on very clear days, all the way to New Mexico.

Rainbow Point is located at the park's highest elevation, and you can appreciate the vegetation here by taking a short walk on the one-mile Bristlecone Loop. The bristlecone pine tree is among the oldest living organisms on Earth and ekes out an existence where most plants can't live — thriving, for example, on the barren, exposed slopes of Bryce's amphitheaters.

Heading north, Ponderosa Canyon and

Agua Canyon offer more fantastic views of the Grand Staircase and the cliffs found along the southern portion of the plateau. Ponderosa Canyon is named for the ponderosa pines that populate the canyon floor, some of which have grown to more than 5 feet in diameter. At Agua Canyon, you can look for the two most prominent hoodoos — The Hunter and The Rabbit.

The next stop is Natural Bridge, named after a feature seen from the viewpoint. The 85-foot natural "bridge" is actually an arch (natural bridges are formed from flowing water and arches from erosion acting from the top).

The Bryce Canyon hoodoos are formed from the plateau when frost wedging causes erosion, eventually carving the fins and pinnacles. Bryce Canyon's warm days and cold nights result in more than 200 days a year in which accumulated rainwater completes a freeze-thaw cycle. During the day, water seeps into cracks in the rocks, and then at night, it freezes and expands. As this process repeats, it breaks apart weak rock, and over time, chisels

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the unusual formations.

After Natural Bridge, there are two more primary viewpoints before reaching the park's main attraction. The first, Farview Point, offers another opportunity to lose yourself in the mountains, plateaus and cliffs of the seemingly endless panorama. The next stop, Swamp Canyon, provides a closeup viewpoint above an area where two creeks and a spring sustain grasses and willows. The adjoining 4.3-mile Swamp Canyon Loop Trail passes through several habitats — an especially enjoyable hike for bird-watching enthusiasts.

After Swamp Canyon, it's on to Bryce Amphitheater — one of the most spectacular viewing areas in the national park system. Bryce Amphitheater is the park's largest amphitheater and can be viewed from several points — Bryce, Inspiration, Sunset and Sunrise points.

Traveling northbound, visitors will often catch their first glimpse of the amphitheater from Bryce Point, and here, they'll feel the full visual impact of the vista of spires and mazes.

One of the oft-ignored suggestions from park rangers is that the best way to see beautiful scenery is to set foot on a hiking trail. This suggestion definitely holds true at Bryce Canyon, where trails take you face to face with the fascinating formations. At Bryce Point, the popular but steep 5.5-mile Peek-A-Boo Trail begins. If you're into multiday hikes, the 23-mile Under-the-Rim Trail will take you back south to Rainbow Point.

Farther up the amphitheater, Inspiration Point displays the best panorama of the Silent City, a vast maze of hoodoos that captures the imaginations of onlookers. Against the background of Boat Mesa, Silent City comprises a series of eroded gully walls and secondary walls that branch off to create an intricate labyrinth.

At Sunset Point, in addition to catching another view of Silent City, onlookers can enjoy other favorite features, including Thor's Hammer, which rises high and apart from other hoodoos, and the Wall Street slot canyon — a narrow crevice not much wider than the trail. The point also showcases the amphitheater's brilliant colors as the reds, yellows and other mineral-spawned colors decorate the ancient limestone.

Sunset Point begins the trailhead for

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the popular 1.3-mile Navajo Loop, which descends through Wall Street. There, hikers travel between the narrow 200-foot canyon cliffs, and along the way, pass by a miracle of nature — two 500- to 700-year-old Douglas firs that have managed to grow from the narrow slot canyon floor to reach the sliver of sunlight at the top.

Another hiking option is to follow Sunset Point to Sunrise Point, then connect with the Queen's Garden Trail, which winds up, down and around the otherworldly hoodoos. The Queen's Garden Trail eventually connects to the Wall Street half of the Navajo Loop. The combined trail is 2.9 miles, with a short rim hike back to Sunset Point.

When touring Bryce Canyon's overlooks, you'll gaze downward to view the hoodoos and other features. But after sunset, the heavens will draw your gaze upward. Because of the excellent air quality and the absence of any nearby large light sources, the park's night sky has a limiting magnitude of 7.4. That means on a clear night, visitors can see about 7,500 stars, compared with 2,500 stars in a typical rural U.S. area. The

celestial bodies shine so brightly, the planet Venus can even cast a shadow.

With such exceptional stargazing opportunities, one of the park's most popular ranger activities is the Astronomy Program, in which visitors enjoy an even closer look at the heavens through telescopes. But astronomy is just one of many programs the park offers. The wonder ignited by the landscape provokes many questions and curiosities, especially during the summer months, when the park schedule is loaded with ranger-led talks and hikes that educate and inspire. Topics range from geology to wildlife, and walks include full-moon hikes among the hoodoos and, in the wintertime, snowshoe hikes.

Another popular activity is photography. From the pocket-camera novice to the studied professional, the shutters will work overtime at Bryce Canyon. While many people take their photos during the midday hours, the most dramatic images are captured during the early morning and late afternoon. Then, the long shadows contrast strikingly with the glowing, rich-hued fea-

tures, creating spectacular images that will beg for a frame when you get home.

The park hosts two campgrounds that can accommodate motorhomes; but they do not offer hookups. However, Ruby's Inn Campground and RV Park, located just outside the park, provides 200 shaded sites, including sites with full hookups and motorhome-friendly pull-throughs. Ruby's offers many area activities, such as mountain biking, guided ATV rides, helicopter tours and horseback riding (horseback riding is also available inside the park).

As if the Bryce Canyon wonders weren't enough, the park is located within the park-rich region of southern Utah and northern Arizona. Within a few hours, you can find Capitol Reef National Park, Zion National Park, Cedar Breaks National Monument, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and Grand Canyon National Park.

For the wonders of the hoodoos, however, Bryce Canyon is the place to be. Like pine needles borne by a desert wind, prepare to be blown away by nature's artwork at Bryce Canyon National Park. ♦

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FALLING FOR SOUTHERN MINNESOTA



THE ‘LAND OF 10,000 LAKES’ SOARS AS AN AUTUMN DESTINATION FOR NATURE ENTHUSIASTS

by MARY ZALMANEK

Minnesota, the “Land of 10,000 Lakes,” is also the source of the Mississippi River. Perhaps the best time to visit is in the fall, when bald eagles outnumber the unofficial state bird — the mosquito.

It was autumn when my husband, Jim, and I visited the Twin Cities area and asked some locals to recommend an interesting route for us to follow in our motorhome. After hearing the town of Red Wing mentioned several times, we decided that we’d start our journey there and travel southeast on U.S. Highway 61 following the Mississippi River.

This section of highway is part of the Great River Road National Scenic Byway and the fall colors on the bluffs along the way from Red Wing to Winona are take-your-breath-away beautiful. With daytime temperatures in the 50s to 70s, it promised to be a pleasant journey.

Because many campgrounds close by Oct. 15, we planned our reservations carefully. We stayed at the RV parks at Treasure Island Resort and Casino near Red Wing and Prairie Island Campground in Winona. A few other campgrounds in the area were open, but the water had been turned off for the season.

RED WING

By the time we arrived in Red Wing, we were ready to stretch our legs. Barn Bluff, a heavily treed and brightly colored ridge east of town, seemed like the perfect place for a hike. The small parking lot at the trailhead doesn’t have designated RV parking, but on this weekday there was room for a motorhome. After studying the map, we opted to hike the easiest trail to the top of the 340-foot bluff and come down a more challenging route. From atop the hill, we had a panoramic view of the Mississippi River Valley and the city of Red Wing — famous for its pottery and Red Wing Shoes.

Several centuries-old manufacturing businesses still thrive in this charming town of 16,000. Red Wing’s pride in its footwear heritage is evident everywhere from street corners to the golf course. To celebrate its centennial in 2005, the Red Wing Shoe Company created the world’s largest boot, weighing in at 2,300 pounds and standing 16 feet tall. If the old woman who lived in a shoe wants to upsize for all those children, this is it. The gigantic boot is housed in Red Wing’s newest shoe store.

To further commemorate the first 100 years, local artists painted 36 4-foot-tall concrete sculptures fashioned after Red Wing’s signature work boot. While some of the boots were sold to private collectors, the remaining ones adorn street corners and shopping malls.

Red Wing Shoe’s presence is felt even at the Mississippi National Golf Links. The first hole on the Lowlands course is sponsored by the shoe company. The sign says, “Last time we saw 18 holes this tough, we put laces in ‘em.” The 36-hole



championship public golf course has rolling fairways, spacious greens and magnificent views. On a warm day, it could be one of the best golf finds of the year. The well-maintained course is uncrowded and reasonably priced.

In the mid-1860s, European immigrants settled in the area. Skilled German potters created natural clay containers for processing and storing foods. Red Wing Pottery is a family business that's been operating for more than 140 years. It produces salt-glazed gray or tan stoneware with cobalt blue decorations, and Bristol glazeware with a uniform smooth finish. Visit the Red Wing Pottery Museum, or watch potters hand-turn their creations in the studio. Bowls, crocks and teapots are available for sale in the showroom. Fiestaware fans beware: This is also the single largest U.S. outlet for the popular dinnerware. Better make room in the motorhome.

Cyclists will find bicycling bliss on the 19.7-mile-long Cannon Valley Trail. Formerly a railroad corridor connecting Red Wing and Cannon Falls, the asphalt trail parallels the scenic Cannon River. Keen observers are likely to spot white-tailed deer, eagles, beavers and other wildlife.

South of Red Wing, Frontenac State Park is a birdwatcher's paradise. This jewel lies beside a widening in the river called Lake Pepin. Trees in the park and the nearby town of Old Frontenac flaunted vivid shades of amber, ruby and emerald.

WABASHA

Continuing our drive along the Mississippi, we came to the National Eagle Center in Wabasha. Here, four bald eagles and



Opposite page: The city of Red Wing, located along the banks of the Mississippi River, is known as the home of the famous Red Wing Shoe Company. This page, clockwise from top left: Outdoor enthusiasts bike along the 19-mile Cannon Valley Trail, which parallels the scenic Cannon River. Autumn in Minnesota shows amazing foliage and breathtaking colors, especially in Great River Bluffs State Park 20 miles southeast of Winona. Winona is known for its banks, historic downtown and museums, such as the Minnesota Marine Art Museum, overlooking the Mississippi River.

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To celebrate Red Wing Shoe Company's 100th anniversary, concrete statues of its famous work boot were installed throughout the town of Red Wing.



The National Eagle Center in Wabasha provides a home for rehabilitated eagles that can't be returned to the wild because of their injuries.

one golden eagle reside. These eagles had been injured and rehabilitated, but couldn't be returned to their natural habitat. Countless eagles live year-round outside the center, with hundreds more attracted to the unfrozen feeding grounds in the winter.

Upstairs in the National Eagle Center, flag historian Robert Richardson is passionate about telling America's story through its state flags. His personal collection of antique flags is displayed in the rotunda. If you're a history buff, go on a Wednesday, Saturday or Sunday to hear his stories

about eagles and other symbols used in state flags.

Around the corner is the Wind Whisper West Kimono Gallery. This one-of-a-kind shop specializes in vintage Japanese wedding kimonos. Owner Richard Fuller has 2,500 kimonos in his collection, but only a fraction of them are on display. Most garments are sold to collectors for \$300 to \$900.

KELLOGG

In nearby Kellogg, LARK Toys is a must-see if you're traveling with children, and highly recommended even for adults. Not only is it one of the largest independent toy stores in the U.S., it also has an antique toy museum, an 18-hole miniature golf course and a carousel with hand-carved creatures.

The carousel is the result of a nine-year collaboration of three local artists and craftsmen. Tim Monson joined pieces of basswood to create large blocks. Bill Stark carved intricate, fanciful animals, and Mary Eversman painted each one by hand. Carving was done on-site so people could watch the progress.

WINONA

Even after seeing how excited Minnesotans were about shoes, eagles and kimonos, we still weren't prepared for Winona's passions: banks, museums and a cemetery. It's easy to understand the enthusiasm over eagles or museums, but banks? And a cemetery?

Many of the banks, churches and public buildings in Winona have massive stained-glass windows. An original Tiffany window rises above the entrance to Winona National Bank. With cameras in hand and mouths agape, my husband and I were easily identified as tourists. The receptionist encouraged us to look inside the massive steel vault with a 22.5-ton door, and tour the wildlife museum. Yes, that's right, in a bank we were invited to look at the gun col-

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The carousel at LARK Toys in Kellogg is made up of strange and fantastic creatures, all of them carved by hand.

lection and African safari trophies of the bank's original owners.

On a walking tour of historic downtown Winona, you'll see fine examples of Prairie School and Romanesque architecture. Many of these buildings have art glass windows, but none is more impressive than the Tiffany window at Watkins Inc., makers of baking products and personal care items. The window depicts Winona's famous Sugar Loaf Mountain with the Mississippi River in the foreground.

Tourist literature didn't mention it, but the RV park manager insisted we see Winona's Woodlawn Cemetery. "It's a peaceful place to enjoy the fall colors," he promised. He was right.

Winona also has its share of museums — all offering a unique perspective on the area's history. Overlooking the Mississippi River, the Minnesota Marine Art Museum is not to be missed. Having recently opened its fourth art gallery, it showcases a fine collection of more than 60 paintings from the Impressionism, Hudson River School and Luminist movements. Downtown, you can find the Polish Museum, the Winona County Historical Museum and more.

Great River Bluffs State Park is a relaxing way to end your exploration of Minnesota's Mississippi River Valley. It has a quiet, primitive campground 500 feet above the river. Read a book or grab your binoculars and add a few birds to your life list. The park is along a major flyway for eagles, hawks and waterfowl.

Minnesotans are proud and passionate people, and with good reason. They are proud of those 10,000 lakes and the mighty Mississippi, and passionate about their outdoor recreation. They take pride in their history, whether it's told in shoes or stained glass, and love sharing it with others.

This is a state I'm delighted to have visited. And there wasn't a single mosquito. ♦

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When I started planning my RVing trip along the Blue Ridge Parkway from North Carolina to Virginia, it was enough to know that it ran between two of the most beautiful national parks in our country — Great Smoky Mountains National Park to the south and Shenandoah National Park to the north. I also knew that in 2008 it ranked as the most visited unit in the National Park System. What I couldn't decide was whether I wanted to drive it in the warmer spring and summer months or in the fall during leaf-peeping season. I decided that one of the perks of having a motor-home is that I could do both, so I drove north in the spring, stayed in Virginia for the summer, and drove back south in the fall.

My mother joined me for the northbound portion and we were determined to see every milepost on the Blue Ridge Parkway, which has been called "America's Favorite Drive." We thought we had plenty of time to see it all in a month, but there

RED, WHITE &



were so many worthwhile attractions along the way that we could have made this drive into an odyssey.

One of the first things we noticed about the Parkway is that there were no blaring billboards or huge power lines stretched across the road to distract from the natural beauty. The only signs we saw were the many low-key ones notifying us of a scenic turnout. Another truth in advertising: The distant mountains really do look blue — maybe a bluish gray in places, but it's still an appropriate name for this amazing drive.

There are 26 tunnels on the Blue Ridge Parkway — all but one of which are in Virginia. Most tunnels provide plenty of clearance for motorhomes of all sizes, though three between Maggie Valley and Cherokee have a minimum height of 11 feet or less at the road's edge. Drivers of especially tall vehicles should, to be on the safe side, favor the center line of the road. Minimum tunnel heights are listed at the road's edge and can also be found on the Parkway's National Park Service (NPS) Web site.

'AMERICA'S FAVORITE DRIVE,' THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY SPANS 469 MILES OF RURAL SPLendor AND UNRIVALED BEAUTY

by MALIA LANE

BLUE ROUTE



Clockwise from left: Linn Cove Viaduct is a 1,200-foot suspended segment of the Blue Ridge Parkway designed to wind around the mountains to minimize its effects on the environment. Chimney Rock offers spectacular views. Scenes from "The Last of the Mohicans" were filmed amid the area's sheer cliffs. Mabry Mill (Milepost 176) is one of the Parkway's most popular and most photographed spots.



PHOTOS: MALIA LANE;
NC DIVISION OF TOURISM; HUGH WORTON



Above, left: Crabtree Falls is the reward for a mile-long hike to get to its base. Visitors can set up camp at one of the 22 RV sites at Crabtree Meadows Campground (Milepost 340) before setting off on the hike to the falls. **Above:** Grandfather Mountain has what's called a "mile-high swinging bridge" that connects two of the mountain's peaks. However, the name is a misnomer, as it's no longer a swinging bridge (it's tethered to the ground below) and visitors will only see 80 feet down. **Left below:** The grand Biltmore Estate in Asheville, N.C., completed in 1895, is still America's largest privately owned home.

and shared by the Morse family for more than 100 years before being sold for incorporation into a North Carolina state park. Some of the most fantastic views in the state are here. Scenes from "The Last of the Mohicans" were filmed among the high, sheer cliffs here, and there are several trails to explore.

Farther north is Craggy Gardens. According to the blooming timetable, mid-June is the best time for massive displays of purple rhododendron here. Unfortunately, nature didn't cooperate during our visit because of drought conditions and a late freeze. At least the mountain laurel was still showing off its soft pinkness in style along the roadway.

The Appalachian Trail crosses the Parkway in several places, offering the opportunity to hike parts of this historic trail. And if history is your thing, there are many attractions where you can experience life in Appalachia in the early 19th century.

There are nine park service campgrounds along the Parkway, however with a 36-foot motorhome with two slides, I found some sites were not large enough for my coach. I did find suitable RV sites at Julian Price Park (Milepost 297), Rocky Knob (Milepost 167) and Roanoke Mountain (Milepost 120). Because there are no hookups at these campgrounds, I also stayed at several of the private full-service RV parks that are easily accessible via side roads from the Parkway.

Crabtree Meadows Campground at Milepost 340 was the first national park campground we stayed at. Most of the 22 RV sites here are parallel to the road through the campground. The best part of staying here was the hike to Crabtree Falls. This beauty is a just reward for a mile-long hike to get to the base. Getting to it is certainly well worth it, so I recommend you stay awhile and savor the sights and sounds.

Starting from the southern end of the Parkway in North Carolina, our first stop was Milepost 451 and the visitors center at Waterrock Knob. From here — at an elevation of almost 6,000 feet — we could see the panorama of the Great Smokies. This is a great place to watch the sun rise or set over the mountains.

The Biltmore Estate in Asheville is an easy stop near Milepost 390. This grand estate was completed in 1895 and is still America's largest privately owned home. With 250 rooms and four acres of floor space with views of the Blue Ridge Mountains that may move you to tears, it is one of the most beautiful man-made things I've ever seen. There is a large enough lot with designated parking for RVs, but the estate is definitely the kind of place that takes at least an entire day to see, so don't rush through it and then have to drive afterward.

Nearby is Chimney Rock, a spectacular park that was owned



Our next stop was at Grandfather Mountain. It's best known for the "mile-high swinging bridge" that connects two of the mountain's peaks, though the name is a misnomer. The governor who presided at its opening in 1952 so christened it, but will you see straight down a mile when gazing giddily from the center of the bridge? Nope — however the 80 feet down you do see is pretty daunting. And the bridge is no longer a swinging one — since the opening, cables have been attached that tether the bridge to the ground below. The mile-high claim can be supported if measured from sea level, though, and even if not free-swinging, you can still feel a bit of sway when you cross.

The two-mile-long access road leading up to Grandfather Mountain is not recommended for motorhomes longer than 28 feet, so get settled in a campground and take your dinghy vehicle up to explore this beautiful North Carolina high-country attraction. While the bridge and the expansive views are big attractions, the animal sanctuary offers an added bonus. You can view a cougar, bald and golden eagles, playful otters and graceful deer on relatively easy paths located next to the museum and restaurant.

Linn Cove Viaduct — a 1,200-foot suspended section of the Parkway — is nearby at Milepost 304. This bridge was engineered to wrap around the mountains to minimize the impact on the fragile environment here. There's good RV parking at the Linn Cove Visitor Center. You can also hike down a trail to get a view of the underbelly of the viaduct.

In the area at Milepost 294, Moses H. Cone Memorial Park is the star. In the 1900s Moses Cone bought more than 3,500 acres in this area and started building a "mansion in the sky." Now the facility serves as a crafts center for local artisans and is a perfect place to sit in the front porch rocking chairs and take in the expansive views. There's no entry fee, but there is also no parking area set aside for RVs. We passed by the first time after leaving Julian Price Campground in the motorhome and while the lot is plenty big enough to get through and exit, it was full of cars with no room for even the smallest RV to park. Keep this in mind when planning to visit here.

As we passed into Virginia, we found many worthwhile stops along the road, usually with plenty of parking for motorhomes. We were fascinated by Puckett Cabin (Milepost 190), a very tiny, rustic cabin where Orleana Hawks Puckett, a midwife, lived during

the last years of her long life. She delivered babies until her death in 1939 at age 102.

Mabry Mill (Milepost 176) is one of the most popular stops along the Parkway, and one of the most photographed, too. Beyond the peaceful scene beside the mill itself, there are shady paths and other buildings to explore. During peak season, interpreters will discuss the mill, teach visitors how to prepare wool to spin and explain blacksmithing methods.

After seeing many beautiful pictures of Natural Bridge, I decided it was a must-see, though it's off the official Parkway. I was not prepared for how awestruck I would be after catching a glimpse of what nature and Cedar Creek created here. The stats, though impressive (215 feet high — 55 feet higher than Niagara Falls) do not convey the majesty of the bridge and its surroundings. Its history, while interesting, also does not account for its fascination. Vaguely visible on one of the walls are the initials "G.W.," said to be left by George Washington in 1750 when he surveyed the surrounding area as a young man.

Back on the Parkway, near the northern terminus, is Humpback Rocks (Milepost 5.8). There's a visitor center here as well as a collection of 19th century log buildings put together as a living, working rural Blue Ridge farm. The area also offers access to the Appalachian Trail and hiking to the top of Humpback Mountain for spectacular views.

After I finished my tour north (in the summer) and south (in the fall) along the Parkway, I tried to decide which season was the best time to visit. If I had to pick, I'd have to say that the fall leaves were the most impressive to me, but whichever time of year you go you won't be disappointed. Next year, the Blue Ridge Parkway will mark its 75th anniversary. Celebrations, events and symposia along the Parkway begin Nov. 12–14, 2009, in Cherokee and Asheville, N.C., and culminate with a commemorative weekend Sept. 10–12, 2010, in the Cumberland Knob, N.C., area, where construction of the road began in 1935. For more information on the celebration, visit the Blue Ridge Parkway 75th Anniversary Web site (www.blueridgeparkway75.org).

During our tour of the Parkway I heard some RVers say that the route is not exactly RV friendly. It's true that some overlooks are too small for a large RV, and parts of the road are a bit narrow and winding, but this is exactly the kind of road I started RVing for. So my advice is to take your time and really savor the journey. There are plenty of stops you can make and everywhere you look there's something else amazing to appreciate.

Don't let the 35–45 MPH speed limit be the only thing to slow you down. Picnic at the overlooks to enjoy the amazing views, visit historical sites to step back in time and explore the towns within easy reach. Press some brilliantly colored flowers or leaves into your memory book of magical moments along "America's Favorite Drive." ♦

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Focus on Luxury

Developers of RV resorts are getting the message

RV enthusiasts want increasingly luxurious parks in scenic locations with huge sites and five-star amenities. They want to be close to nature. They want to have a variety of activities, both inside and outside the park. They want to be able to own their own site. And they want value for their money.

It's a tall order, which is why there are relatively few resorts of this caliber across the country. But developers are continuing to build new resorts and upgrade existing ones, not only in well-known Sunbelt destinations along the coast of Florida and the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, but in newer, up and coming destinations, such as Alabama's Gulf Coast and the South Florida interior.

"We've got some of the best fishing in the U.S. and some of the best golf courses," said Mike Plaia, president and owner of Buena Vista on the Beach, an upscale RV resort in Orange Beach, Ala., which is nestled between the white sands of the Gulf Coast and a 6,000-acre state park with hiking and biking trails.

Developer Bill Harvey, for his part, has just completed the first phase of the \$15 million Silver Palms RV Village, which is less than a half mile from the northern tip of Lake Okeechobee, Fla. "We think we've provided the best purchasing value in South Florida," Harvey said, "with RV site prices being offered at literally half the price of comparable RV resorts."

Meanwhile, Harp Development, which built Cypress Woods RV Resort in Fort Myers, has found that demand is so strong for upscale resorts that it is now developing a second resort in that city – Golden Palms RV Resort – which is targeted for opening next year.

At the same time, Rhodes Enterprises Inc. has caught the attention of visitors to Mission, Texas, with Bentsen Palms Village RV Resort and Retama Village, its active adult community, both of which put an emphasis on nature and nature-based activities, including world class birding, butterfly observation, kayaking, hiking and biking.

Existing parks are also upgrading their facilities and amenities, including Fisherman's Cove RV Resort in Tavares, Fla., which recently constructed a fully enclosed 160-slip "high and dry" boat storage facility to accommodate RV enthusiasts who enjoy fishing and boating activities on Lake Harris.

Another Florida park, The Great Outdoors RV Nature and Golf Resort in Titusville, has added new depth to its rich amenity offering with a 2,500-square-foot nature center, which provides a wildlife museum, nature programs and meetings as well as hiking trails.

Of course, the Sunbelt is not the only place where developers are building luxury RV resorts. Some are also building resorts in the cooler climes, from the Rocky Mountains to northern Michigan.

"A lot of our buyers are from Arizona and Texas, but we also have some from Florida

and Louisiana who want to get out of the heat and humidity," said Roland Zimmermann, managing director of Mountain Views at Rivers Edge RV Park & Resort, which is located along the banks of the Rio Grande River in the San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado. "We have beautiful views in every direction," Zimmermann said, adding that the park is less than a mile from the historic mining town of Creede and just minutes from one of the nation's premier golf courses.

Sunbelt residents are impressed by what some of the more northern RV resorts have to offer. "It is stunningly beautiful," said Tom Derzypolski, a Florida native who works as a spokesman for Indigo Bluffs RV Retreat in Leelanau County, Mich. "The waters in Traverse Bay are as blue and clear as we have on the Gulf Coast. And the sands that comprise their beaches are as white as the beaches we have in Florida."

Craig Rose, proprietor of Hearthside Grove Luxury Motorcoach Resort, said residents of more than 20 states have purchased sites at his Petoskey, Mich., resort. Why buy your own RV site, some may ask?

"Because you can personalize it, make it your own and develop your own sense of community," Rose said, adding, "When you purchase your lot, you have your own slice of paradise. So when our owners arrive, we don't say 'Welcome back.' We say 'Welcome home.'"

Here's a closer look at some of the most luxurious RV resorts in the country:



Buena Vista on the Beach

Buena Vista on the Beach is one of the newest luxury RV resorts on Alabama's Gulf Coast. Nestled between the 6,150-acre Gulf State Park and the sugar white sands of Orange Beach, roughly 30 minutes west of the Florida state line, Buena Vista offers 111 beautifully landscaped and spacious lots that have been designed exclusively for Class A motorhomes. Buena Vista's unique location has visitors frequently commenting that the resort is "6,000 acres and a beach."

Lots at Buena Vista, which average 58 x 75 feet, also feature a finely appointed "Coach House" – a penthouse style villa that can be equipped with all the luxuries of home, including a full kitchen with quartz countertops and stainless steel appliances, a living area with a high-definition TV, bathrooms, laundry room, storage areas and the option of one or two bedrooms.

Each lot also features a separate screened-in gazebo, which is perfect for enjoying the outdoors with friends or family.

Resort amenities include a 6,000-square-foot, two-story clubhouse with a large "Grand Room," a commercial kitchen, a state-of-the-art fitness center and four separate private event rooms, while a large, temperature controlled swimming pool, hot tub and kids play area are located outside.

The resort also features two private lakes, which have been stocked with bass and bream. Golf cart trails and bridges over the lake provide easy access to the clubhouse, lakes and beach. Prices range from \$250,000 to \$500,000, which includes the lot and Coach House. The park is restricted to Class A motorhomes that are at least 34 feet long and less than 10 years old. www.buenvistaonthebeach.com.



Cypress Woods RV Resort and Golden Palms Motorcoach Estates

Golden Palms Motorcoach Estates is the newest Fort Myers, Fla. RV Resort offered by Harp Development, which has gained a following among RV enthusiasts with Cypress Woods RV Resort, also in Fort Myers, during the past 12 years.

Targeted for opening in 2010, Golden Palms Motorcoach Estates will feature 75 RV sites that face a 22-acre fishing lake,



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with 22 additional sites located next to a nature preserve. Each site measures 55 x 110 feet, with a 24 x 90-foot brick paver drive and patio. The owner may wish to have their own swimming pool or hot tub (spa) on their patio, as well as an outdoor kitchen. These are optional features.

The extra large RV lots include a 500-square-foot "Casita," whose interior can be custom-designed to suit each owner's needs. A full kitchen, full bath and a laundry and/or golf cart garage can be housed in the Casita. Golden Palms will also offer custom-built

coach homes within the community. These units may accommodate family and friends while they come down to visit southwest Florida during the winter.

Resort amenities include a 6,000-square-foot clubhouse with a grand room, catering kitchen, meeting rooms and fitness center with adjoining locker rooms, shower facilities and saunas. Prices for RV lots with Casitas range from \$170,000 to \$225,000. www.goldenpalmsrv.com.

Cypress Woods RV Resort is an award-winning, luxury RV resort with 477 sites.

Its 46 x 90-foot lots are located both on and off a private fishing lake and come with an old Florida-style 10 x 12-foot storage unit. The interiors of these buildings may be improved at the owners' expense. Each lot is landscaped, but most owners put their own touch with their own landscaping.

The resort has two clubhouses, the newest being a 12,000-square-foot facility with full kitchen facilities, a \$30,000 sound system, a dance floor with stage area, an expanded crafts room, a game room with a large screen television, an extra large heated swimming pool and hot tub, as well as a 24/7 mail facility and a full-time activities director.

The newest phase will have 134 new RV lots, on and off the lake. The 46 x 90 foot lots will include a 10 x 14 foot air-conditioned storage building. Each owner may want to improve the interior. The lots will include a brick paver patio. The resort also plans to line the street with tall royal palm trees. This will create a boulevard look to enhance the phase.

A second clubhouse features a large heated pool, hot tub, exercise room, health spa and massage room, full library and laundry facilities. Residents also enjoy lighted tennis and shuffleboard courts, pro horseshoe pits, a fire ring and lake fishing. Lot prices range from \$80,000 to \$150,000. www.cypresswoodsrv.com.

Fisherman's Cove RV Resort



Boating enthusiasts will enjoy Fisherman's Cove RV Resort, a 200-site RV resort along Lake Harris, a popular 18,000-acre freshwater bass fishing lake in Tavares, Fla., roughly an hour northwest of Orlando.

The resort features a private boat dock and ramp, 120 wet slips that can accommodate boats up to 32 feet as well as a newly constructed, fully enclosed 160-slip "high and dry" boat storage facility.

"Some of our guests leave their boats here year-round," said Trent Comer, market-

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ing director for Tampa-based United American Realty, which owns the resort.

Other amenities include a nine-hole executive golf course, a state-of-the-art gym and heated swimming pool and whirlpool spa as well as a 2,500-square-foot clubhouse with a fireplace, leather furniture and flat-screen televisions. The resort also features

an on-site post office, propane service, dump stations and a Flint Creek Outfitters store, which features marine clothing, fly fishing apparel and boating accessories. The resort also offers kayak rentals as well as classes in kayaking and fly fishing. For reservations, call (800) 254-9993 or visit www.fishermanscoverv.us.

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Hearthside Grove Luxury Motorcoach Resort

Hearthside Grove Luxury Motorcoach Resort in Petoskey, Mich., offers RV enthusiasts a luxurious setting amid the forests of northern Michigan. The \$30 million, 140-acre resort features oversized and beautifully landscaped lots up to 20,000 square feet with 20 x 70 foot brick paver pads, full irrigation and state-of-the-art hookups, including natural gas



for outdoor barbecues, stone-laid hearth fireplaces, fire pits and private swimming pools. Upgrade options include a Craftsman-inspired bungalow for storage, office use or entertaining.

Other amenities include a resort-style pool, Jacuzzi, poolside barbecue and bar, a fully appointed fitness center, laundry facilities, a business center, coffee bar, five-star concierge services and recreational activities. Outside the resort, guests enjoy museums and art galleries. Lake Michigan itself is a mile-and-a-half away, while historic Mackinac Island is just 30 miles up the road. "The longer term guests really enjoy the depth of what the resort and surrounding area has to offer," said proprietor Craig Rose, who developed the resort with his brother, Kirk. Lot prices range from the low \$100,000's to the mid-\$200,000's range. www.hearthsidegrove.com.



Indigo Bluffs RV Retreat

Indigo Bluffs RV Retreat offers a luxury RV resort experience near the shores of Lake Michigan. Minutes from Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and Traverse City, the resort is perfectly located in the rolling hills of Northern Michigan in the heart of Leelanau County.

"Leelanau County is known for its conservation movement, and it is not likely there will ever be another RV resort permitted there," said Tom Derzypolski, a spokesman for the resort. "The people we speak with are excited about this unique ownership opportunity."

The gated resort, which opened this year, offers an amenity village concept with a centrally located fitness center, clubhouse and spa, each of which is housed in a separate building for maximum privacy. The spa also features private soaker tubs. All three buildings surround the main pool, hot tub and outdoor fireplace. Other amenities include a business center, game room with pool and card tables and a general store. Outside the park, guests are just a short drive away from excellent restaurants and shops and Michigan's white sand beaches.

"Indigo Bluffs will truly be a unique experience for all travelers," said proprietor Gary Becker, adding it will be one of only a few destinations in Michigan that blends upscale site ownership with true retreat experience. "Being so close to (Lake Michigan) and (Sleeping Bear Dunes) appeals to those who are looking for a home away from home, a place they can retreat to life's simple pleasures while also having the ability to explore."

Roughly half of the 46 lots in Indigo Bluffs's first phase have been sold at prices ranging from \$85,000 to \$170,000. www.indigobluffs.com.

Mountain Views at Rivers Edge RV Park & Resort

Mountain Views at Rivers Edge RV Park & Resort is located at the 8,800-foot level on the banks of the Rio Grande River in the magnificent San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado. Bordered by the La Garita and Weminuche Wilderness Areas, the resort is approximately a mile from the historic mining town of Creede, one of America's 100 best small art towns, and is minutes away from one of the finest golf courses in the country.



RV lots in the first phase start at 40 x 60 feet, while lots in the second phase will start at 45 x 100 feet. RV enthusiasts can select from several river, pond or terraced sites, and have the option of purchasing additional amenities, such as hot tubs, ponds, special water features, outdoor kitchens, raised flower beds, fire rings and more. The sites can be purchased with renewable 35-year leases at prices ranging from \$35,000 to \$160,000.

"We also have no homeowners association, which is a big draw in today's market," said Roland Zimmermann, the resort's managing owner.

Zimmermann has also developed a 100-site RV park on property next to the resort, which rents sites on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. The RV resort, however, will eventually grow from its current 100 sites to 350 sites as subsequent phases are developed. www.mountainviewsrv.com.

Retama Village



Retama Village is the first active adult community, in Mission, Texas, developed for the new generation of active retirees. It is part of the Bentsen Palm Development, a 2,500-acre Master Planned Community devoted to restoring the once lush native habitat, creating a haven for residents and wildlife to flourish.

Corridors throughout the property allow access to the surrounding 3,000-acre Bentsen Rio Grande Valley State Park, which is home to the World Birding Center Headquarters and the North American Butterfly Association.

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Imagine world-class birding, butterfly observation, kayaking, hiking and biking, right in your community. Retama Village invites RVers age 55-plus to its private, gated community to experience nature at its finest. Retama Village offers RV sites with either a 12 x 20-foot or 12 x 24-foot "Coach House," starting at \$45,000; one and two bedroom Casitas with attached RV ports, starting at \$150,000. The multimillion dollar Retama Club Activity Center is complete with billiard tables, craft room, exercise and weight room, plasma TVs throughout, indoor/outdoor kitchen, lap pool, social pool and spa. This ecological wonderland is an admirable and luxurious addition to the Rio Grande Valley.

The award-winning Bentsen Palm Village RV Resort is located next door to Retama Village. This 245-site rental RV resort offers the traveling RVer both 45 x 80-foot pull-through sites as well as back-in sites and rental cabins.

Other amenities include a clubhouse, pool and spa, fitness center, dog agility course, wood shop and craft room. On-site activity directors also keep guests busy with ice cream socials, pizza and margarita nights as well as craft and game nights. Other activities include guided bird and butterfly tours and riverboating excursions along the Rio Grande. See it all at www.bentsenpalm.com.

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Silver Palms RV Village

Silver Palms RV Village is one of south Florida's newest upscale RV resorts. Less than a half mile from the northern tip of Lake Okeechobee, the \$15 million resort features a private members lounge, a 9,000-square-foot clubhouse, a 300-capacity ballroom, a resort-size pool and hot tub, and a 1,000-square-foot fitness center in addition to tennis, pickleball, volleyball and shuffleboard courts. The resort, which will eventually have 512 sites, is also conveniently located within a mile of Publix, Home Depot, Wal-Mart and numerous restaurants. Tampa, Fort Myers, Orlando, West Palm Beach and Miami are also within easy driving distance of the resort. The Village just opened in March and developer Bill Harvey has already sold nearly one third of the 167 sites in the resort's first phase at prices ranging from \$55,900 to \$77,900. www.silverpalmsrv.com.



The Great Outdoors RV Nature and Golf Resort

The Great Outdoors RV Nature and Golf Resort in Titusville, Fla., is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year.

A pioneer in the RV resort industry, The Great Outdoors is a 24/7 guard-gated community with over 3,000 acres of land with native egrets, deer and quail along with 1,534 sites for towable and motorized RVs, park models, and luxurious custom-built resort homes — each of which are assigned to product specific areas.

"It's like a complete little city here," said Judy Willeke, a director of the resort, which is 30 minutes from the major Orlando attractions, eight miles from the Kennedy Space Center and a short drive from Cape Canaveral, a popular embarkation point for the cruise ship industry.

"We have our own Internet café and fine dining restaurants. We have a beauty and nail salon where our owners can get a massage with an acupuncturist. We also have our own full-service post office and bank with a drive-through golf cart window; our own interdenominational church and Eagle's Pride, an on-site RV parts and repair service," Willeke said.

And the on-site amenities don't stop there. The Great Outdoors also offers a par-71 championship golf course, aqua range, putting green and chipping area; fully stocked fishing lakes with largemouth bass, black crappie, bluegill, perch and catfish; eight lighted shuffleboard courts; four tennis courts; and a 14,000-square-foot clubhouse for parties, dances and barbecues. "We often have big bands and orchestras that we bring in," Willeke said. The resort also features three heated swimming pools, three hot tubs as well as a health club with a bathhouse and exercise/weight room.

And while there is a keen focus on resort amenities, The Great Outdoors also puts a heavy focus on nature, providing habitat areas for numerous land animals and birds, including the colorful "painted bunting," a rare and stunningly beautiful red, blue and green bird whose habitat has been destroyed in many areas of Florida. The Great Outdoors not only preserves habitat for the painted bunting and other species, but recently opened a 2,795-square-foot nature center, which provides a wildlife museum, nature programs and meetings as well as hiking expeditions.

RV sites start at \$55,000, while RV sites with ports and/or 428-square-foot executive suites cost more. Park models start at \$90,000, while homes range from \$180,000 villas to custom-built resort homes, which start at \$250,000.

Monthly dues are only \$188 a month and include water, sewer service, daily trash pickup, 62-channel cable television, lawn maintenance, sprinkler system on each site, and 24-hour security. The resort also offers propane services and dump stations. And while the average age of The Great Outdoors buyer is 59 to 60, the resort is not age restricted. "We welcome children and grandchildren," Willeke said. www.tgoresort.com. ■

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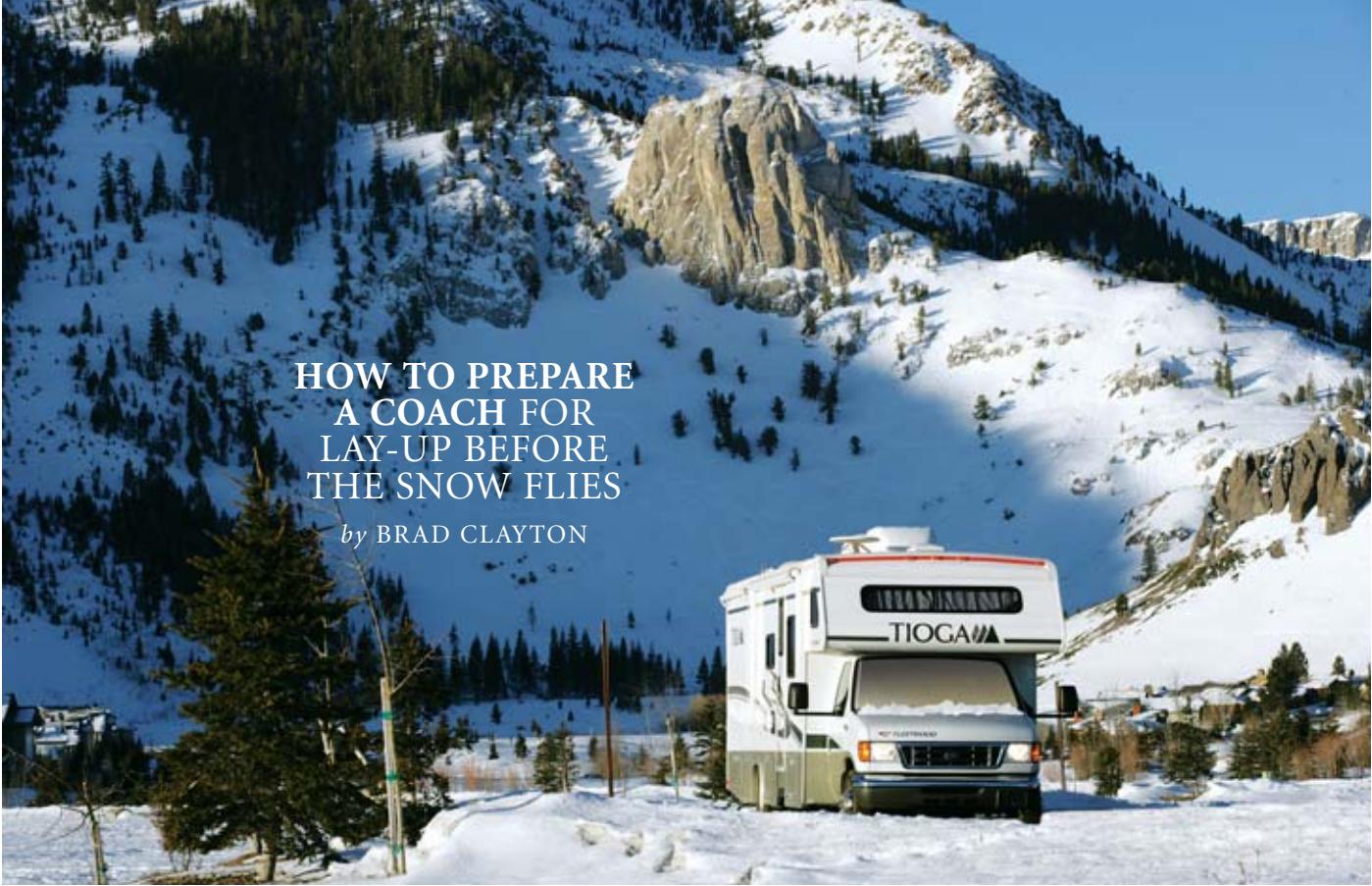
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HOW TO PREPARE A COACH FOR LAY-UP BEFORE THE SNOW FLIES

by BRAD CLAYTON

WINTER SABBATICAL

The fall season can be exhilarating, with leaves that have turned red or golden, air that is so crisp you can taste it and weather that can change from Indian summer days to snow flurries within a few hours. After one last trip through the colors, it may be time for motorhome hibernation.

If your plan is to store your coach rather than travel periodically through the winter months, thorough winter prep is essential because certain items, if ignored, can result in expensive repairs. At the top of the list is prevention of frozen water lines. If you've ever had a serious freeze you know how expensive ruptured pipes can be — especially difficult if lines or joints burst in inaccessible areas.

Heating a coach to prevent freezing can be risky without daily monitoring, even for relatively short periods and even if you're certain of how much heat is necessary, and where. Electrical circuits may shut down unexpectedly, and a motorhome furnace may quit due to a blown fuse or another cause — such as one case (true) in which a mouse got into the furnace blower, unbalanced it and the fuse blew, resulting in no heat. Anyone who has had a freeze vows to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Of course, there's more to winterization than water systems, so let's get started.

CLEANING

Bug splatters, road tar, carpet soils, refrigerator grime ... all are more difficult to clean after sitting through a winter,

so a thorough cleaning is in order, inside and out. Check awnings for mildew. Consider waxing the exterior, especially if it is not painted, to retard deterioration of plastic decals and fiberglass gelcoat.

CHASSIS PREPARATIONS

- Oil change, chassis lubrication
- Coolant change
- Hydraulic jacks
- Tires, batteries, fuel

Before you tackle the water system, chassis service is in order if more than 3,000 miles have elapsed since the last service. Engine oil accumulates contaminants that produce acids. When left to sit for several months in storage, acids in dirty oil can attack bearings and other parts.

Check transmission and rear-axle lube levels, lubricate chassis components with grease fittings and perform any other regular maintenance such as an engine coolant change that is called for in the owners manual.

Fuel tanks containing gasoline should be topped off after adding a fuel preservative such as Sta-bil in amounts recommended on the additive container. Diesel tanks should be topped off after adding a microbiocide. Low-sulfur diesel fuel is particularly vulnerable to water contamination, which can sponsor an invasion of microorganisms. In severe cases they can cause fuel filter plugging and clogged injectors.



Winterization is easy with a built-in system for pumping antifreeze into water lines.



In this coach, antifreeze valve and water heater bypass, right, are side by side.



After bypass valve is set, water drain plug should be removed to empty tank.



Low-point drains are helpful but don't ensure that all water is removed. Antifreeze should be used.



Without an in-tank cleanout fitting, a spray wand should be used via the toilet to flush black tank.



Batteries should be at full charge, with electrolyte filled to proper level using distilled water.



If the engine is due for a coolant change, the best time is before winter lay-up.



Hydraulic jack rams should be lubricated if extended while coach is in storage.



As is the case with motorhome engines, an ideal time to change oil and filter in an AC generator is shortly before winter lay-up.

Windshield washer fluid should be replenished for the anticipated low temperatures.

Clean the rams of hydraulic jacks and lube them with silicone spray or the compound recommended by the system manufacturer — especially important if the coach is to be stored with jacks extended. Also check the level of hydraulic fluid in the reservoir.

Tires should be inflated to recommended pressures for travel, and it is best to park on plastic rather than pavement or dirt — to help prevent deterioration. They should be covered unless the coach is stored indoors.

Batteries should be fully charged be-

fore storage, and they should be disconnected from the chassis to avoid gradual depletion by the power drain from radios and other equipment that draws tiny amounts of power even when turned off. Battery electrolyte should be checked (except sealed batteries), and batteries should be recharged at least every two months — or more often in extremely cold weather. You can also use a battery maintenance charger — such as a Battery Tender — to safely keep the coach batteries up to charge. If recharge is not practical while batteries are in the motorhome, they should be removed to a location where it is possible — preferably one that is kept above freezing.

FRESHWATER AND WASTE SYSTEMS

- Drain water lines and tank
- Drain water heater and bypass water pipe
- Drain and flush holding tanks
- Protect P-traps, tank valves

In most coaches, the water system is fitted with a water heater bypass system that allows pumping of RV antifreeze into the lines without having to fill the water heater, which should be drained. A blow-out plug can be inserted into the city water inlet to use air pressure for clearing the lines, but it's not a guarantee of clearing all water.

After the water tank, lines (using low-point drains) and water heater are drained, turn the water heater bypass valve to

the bypass position and close all low-point drains. Use your antifreeze intake hose (usually connected to a T fitting in the line between water pump and tank) to pump non-toxic RV antifreeze through all lines, turn on one faucet at a time until the pink stuff flows from each, and don't forget the shower heads inside and outside, refrigerator icemaker and washer, if so equipped. A pump diverter kit (merely a T valve and a length of hose) is available

from RV suppliers.

The holding tanks should be filled, dumped, refilled and flushed. For the waste tank, use either a tank flush hose fitting (which is provided on many coaches), or, if not so equipped, a spray wand inserted into the tank via the toilet.

Pour a few ounces of RV antifreeze into all drains, and into the waste tank through the toilet to ensure freeze protection for P-traps and for tank valves.

OTHER SYSTEMS, PRECAUTIONS

- Refrigerator
- Furnace
- Slideouts
- LP-gas
- Roof, awnings
- Mice, insects

With all power sources turned off, the refrigerator should be clean and dry before storage; prop the door open slightly. The exterior furnace openings should be covered to keep out insects, and a commercial rodent repellent may be placed near the refrigerator gas jet to help prevent insect nests (other areas, too). Mice love to nest in motorhomes, and you'll need to make sure all crevices and access points are well sealed. Recheck the coach once a month to look for infestations.

Seals on compartment doors and slideouts may be coated with whatever the motorhome manufacturer recommends, such as petroleum distillate-free protectant, and the slideout mechanism should be lubed if recommended by the manufacturer (commercial products, like the one from Protect All, are available for this task). The LP-gas system requires nothing more than turning off the valve at the tank.

Awnings must be dry before storing. Check the roof closely for cracks in sealant around vents and seams. If the coach is to be stored outside, consider a full cover, which will help prevent deterioration of decals and fiberglass gelcoat. It's less important with full-body paint, but helpful in preserving the surface. The cover should be of breathable fabric, not plastic that will trap moisture in the coach. Do not use blue tarps commonly sold at hardware and discount stores.

DE-WINTERIZATION

When it's time to think of getting back on the road, the coach will be clean and ready after reversing a few winterizing procedures.

To remove the antifreeze from water lines, fill the water tank and use the onboard pump to clear each water line of antifreeze by opening each faucet, hot and cold, one at a time until the water runs clear.

Check tire pressures, make sure batteries are up, turn on LP-gas and test-run all appliances. Check for any signs of water leakage through the roof. If everything checks out, you're set for the next round of great motorhome adventures. ♦

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Unless your resume includes experience as a pilot or 18-wheeler driver, operating a diesel motorhome can be a bit overwhelming at first. With the vast array of engine and transmission conditions to monitor, it takes some experience to keep watch over and navigate the coach at the same time. Most motorhomes come with a decent set of dial gauges that monitor some of the most important conditions, but there are others that are perhaps just as important that the factory gauge set ignores.

With this in mind we took a look at a couple of products available from SilverLeaf Electronics aimed specifically at monitoring diesel motorhome engines. The company offers five monitoring systems. Some motorhome owners may already have SilverLeaf systems installed in their coaches from the factory. Select models from Country Coach, Monaco, Newell, Foretravel and Outlaw Conversions, for example, may already be equipped.

SILVERLEAF VMS 240 CL

The products we chose are two of the company's most popular — the VMS 240 CL and the VMSpc. The 240 CL is a stand-alone unit that can be mounted in your dash or simply on top of your dash (as we did) or another location visible to the driver while in operation. Wiring the 240 CL is easy; it only has one connection to make and it is plug and play. Simply locate your engine diagnostics port (usually under the dash) and plug the supplied cord into the port. The other end connects to the 240 CL.

Once connected, it will be able to receive data offering a detailed window into the operation of your motorhome. After a short setup — including time, engine type and so on — you are ready to start using the system. The unit's functions include trip data, engine diagnostics, maintenance logs and drive screens.

SILVERLEAF MONITORS

THESE AFTERMARKET SYSTEMS HELP TAKE THE GUESSWORK OUT OF DIESEL ENGINE OPERATION

by E. DON SMITH



The SilverLeaf VMS 240 CL, which mounts or simply sits atop your dash, can be set up to scan numerous operations of your motorhome, including fuel level, distance to empty and the cruise set speed.



Among the system's features are a pre-drive checklist, maintenance manager and engine data. Although not meant to replace the factory service log, the maintenance manager helps you keep track of when services were performed and when they are due next.

The primary reason RVers buy the 240 CL is for its easy-to-see drive screen, which is a digital version of every possible engine gauge you can imagine. As configured from SilverLeaf, it is possible to read the accelerator position, battery voltage, cruise control set speed, coolant temperature, engine load, fuel rate, instantaneous miles per gallon, intake manifold temperature, speed, tachometer (RPM) and turbo boost pressure.

Depending on your engine and chassis, some models also read fuel-injection pressure, fuel temperature, oil pressure and oil temperature. The system also displays horsepower output, power factor, torque output and rolling miles per gallon. If you wish to purchase additional sensors, road temperature and fuel levels can be incorporated into the mix as well. The fuel-level sensor is particularly useful because of the benefits it

offers in conjunction with the trip functions.

Using the easy-to-navigate buttons and dial on the face of the unit, it is simple to summon the drive screens. One is a three-gauge version and the other shows six gauges. Another nice feature of the drive screen is that the three-gauge and the six-gauge screens are fully user programmable. So, you can choose from any of the above listed conditions to monitor as you drive.

At the top of both screens is a display of the current transmission status, usually two large numbers showing the current gear and the current available gear. For example, if you are in DRIVE moving up a hill, it may show 6 4, meaning it is in fourth gear of the available six gears. The display also denotes if you are in normal or economy transmission mode. There is also a user-programmable scan mode that allows

a large full-screen display of each condition you select from the menu to scroll by on the screen as you drive. You can also stop the scan, leaving one condition visible. For example, if you are climbing a large hill in hot weather, you may choose to watch the coolant temperature as you climb the grade. Then you can resume the scan by pressing the SCAN button.

Another advantage of digital gauges is their accuracy compared with dial gauges. Because you are reading and displaying the actual data coming from your engine's computer system, it allows you to know the exact oil pressure, or coolant temperature, which is a lot more precise than just looking at a normal factory dial gauge. This could be very important should you ever experience an engine problem on the road.

The next major set of features is the

SILVERLEAF VMSpc



For those with laptops, a less expensive monitoring program is the SilverLeaf VMSpc. Priced at \$395, the system comes with a connection box, cables and software, including lifetime free software upgrades on SilverLeaf's Web site. Data is viewed on the laptop's screen.

If you are looking for a less expensive route, SilverLeaf offers a version of its system that uses your laptop as the screen and interface, and the MSRP is only \$395. This setup is called the VMSpc and is basically a connection box, software (including lifetime free software upgrades on the SilverLeaf Web site) and the necessary cables to connect to your coach.

We installed this unit in our coach just as easily as the 240 CL, and about the only programming that has to be done is to select the correct com port and engine type in the VMSpc software. You will need to find a secure place to mount the laptop and keep it charged or plugged in to a power source during use. Since we were just testing it temporarily, we did not look at mounting devices, but many are on the market for just this purpose.

Once connected to our test coach, we found the VMSpc has the same basic functionality as the VMS 240 CL, except it



One of the advantages of the VMS 240 CL is the better accuracy of its digital gauges when compared with dial gauges. Because the information comes directly from the engine's computer system, the data displayed is more precise than from a factory gauge.

trip computer. By pressing the TRIP button on the unit's front panel, another set of screens becomes available. Pressing CLEAR will start a new trip and allow you to monitor distance, hours, miles per gallon, gallons of fuel used and distance remaining (after you enter the total trip distance). There is also an auxiliary trip that allows you to track a trip within a trip or one segment of a trip. The TRIP menu also stores data on up to 4,000 trips (auxiliary trips are not stored). Items tracked in the history file include end date, miles, fuel, time, speed and miles per gallon.

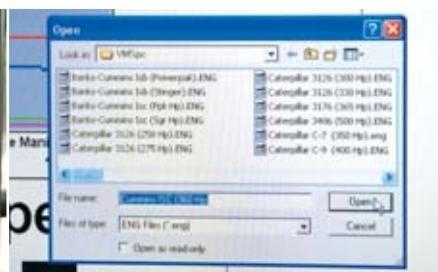
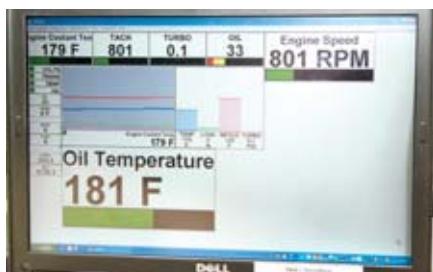
One great feature of the VMS 240 CL is the engine diagnostic screen. Once activated, you can see any engine codes or error messages. Any time the engine generates a code, it is stored in the memory, allowing you to view the message along

with a short text field explaining the code in plain English. Pressing the CLEAR button on the front screen can erase these codes. Also within the engine files is an engine history screen. This screen shows every diagnostic message ever received, along with the date, odometer reading, engine RPM, engine load and temperature at the time the code was received.

This system also includes a maintenance manager section, making it virtually impossible to forget about changing your oil and other maintenance issues. Based on some basic chassis information, you can enter the last time a service was performed and it will track the time until the next service is due. Though not intended to be a replacement for the factory service log, it can be a good reminder if properly set up and monitored.

Finally, there is a built-in pre-trip checklist. This serves as a good reminder of basic items to check before departing on a trip, and could help you remember to check the engine oil or close the door awning, for example.

The 240 CL unit has a night- and daytime mode to make seeing the screen easy, and it also has adjustable brightness at the touch of a front panel button to fine-tune it for your preferences. The user can even define preferred color palettes if desired — including a wide range of colors for text, backgrounds and cursors. At \$1,995, the unit is not inexpensive, but compared with the cost of letting your engine or transmission overheat, it could be a cheap insurance policy. Plus, we found it very useful for its other functions, such as the trip computer and engine diagnostics. ♦



User customization is easy. For example, the size of the type can be adjusted and its location on the screen changed.

offers even more user customization. Everything from the size of each gauge to the location on the screen, as well as the units and titles, are user definable and easily set up on your laptop screen. You can even add histograms or bar graphs for various gauges instead of numerical readouts.

This setup also offers the ability to add alarms for any of the conditions you are monitoring. For example, you can set up either a single or repeating alarm if the oil

The system offers the ability to set up data logging, and files can be exported into spreadsheets for later analysis.

pressure drops below a user-defined level. You can also set up an alarm to alert you if the coolant temperature goes too high or for any other condition you wish. Multiple alarms are possible, too.

In addition, the VMSpc offers trip functions (multiple trips can be enabled) as well as a place for maintenance logs and engine diagnostics.

Because the laptop has the ability to store large amounts of data, you can also set

up data logging and export the files into a spreadsheet for offline analysis.

We found the VMSpc to be extremely easy to use and configure for most any application you may desire. If you love data and want to constantly change the display of your gauges and trip information, you may find the VMSpc to be better suited for you than the VMS 240 CL. Of course, if you don't already have a laptop and mounting system, you will have to figure that into your buying decision. If, on the other hand, you prefer a simple and fully functional unit all in one box, then the 240 CL is the way to go. Either way, you can't go wrong with these products. — E.D.S.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

SILVERLEAF ELECTRONICS
(888) 741-0259,
www.silverleafelectronics.com.



FOUR WINDS SERRANO 31Z

This midsize, front-diesel motorhome has it all — as standard equipment

The all-new Four Winds Serrano is in a perfect place.

At an inch longer than 32 feet, it's a good size for RVers who are looking to venture out for their first Class A experience, and with a long list of standard equipment, they can do it without spending thousands of dollars on options. It's also a perfect size for those who are downsizing from a larger coach but are not ready to surrender the appointments of a Class A.

Built on Workhorse's W20, front-diesel chassis, Four Winds has created two floorplans — the 31V and 31Z — that offer roomy and welcoming, as well as very upscale, environments. We reviewed the 31Z model, which incorporates a single 12-foot streetside slide that holds the Infiniss leather upholstered sofa bed, with integral air mattress, and the contemporary lounge-style dinette, creating very comfortable seating for seven or eight. Armrest-equipped captain's chairs in matching upholstery can be swiveled to add more seating when needed and are augmented by the free-standing swivel lounge chair and ottoman.

Optional (\$350) European-style cherry cabinetry with hidden hinges and brushed-nickel hardware provide generous storage around the soft-touch vinyl ceiling of the cabin and continues through the curbside galley, which is highlighted by the large single-basin Euro-sink and single-lever faucet. Significant drawer and open storage space in the galley is available alongside a separate pull-out pantry rack capable of holding enough menu items for an extended trip. The 8-cubic-foot two-door blacked-out refrigerator and matching convection oven complete the appliance list, creating a very chef-friendly galley. A spacious countertop is always appreciated and this one is broken only by the radius sink and three-burner recessed cooktop. It's bordered by a glass



mosaic tile backsplash, creating an upscale residential appearance to the galley that's enhanced by the halogen lighting embedded in the soffit above.

The amidships bath is split across the hall, but the bath can be isolated for privacy. A marbled gray shower enclosure with skylight is provided with an enclosed toilet room directly opposite. The lav, with storage and upper linen cherry cabinetry, matching countertop and a standard china-bowl toilet combine with the residential-style wall coverings to suggest appointments from a high-end coach.

The master bedroom offers walk-around bed access and a headboard surround of matching cherry wardrobe cabinetry. The tall carpeted "step" on either side of the bed can double as a TV snack tray or maybe a pet's bed and helps to create the oversize exterior trunk storage. An optional (\$805) 19-inch recessed flat-panel TV is located in the bedroom wall shared by the shower.

Outside, the optional (\$1,813) exterior entertainment center mounted in a sealed compartment door backs up to the galley cooktop base cabinet, and is a luxurious option for this generously equipped coach. Twinducted 13,500-BTU roof A/C units are standard, keeping the Serrano cool, and can run off the also-standard equipped Onan 6 kW generator.





SPECIFICATIONS

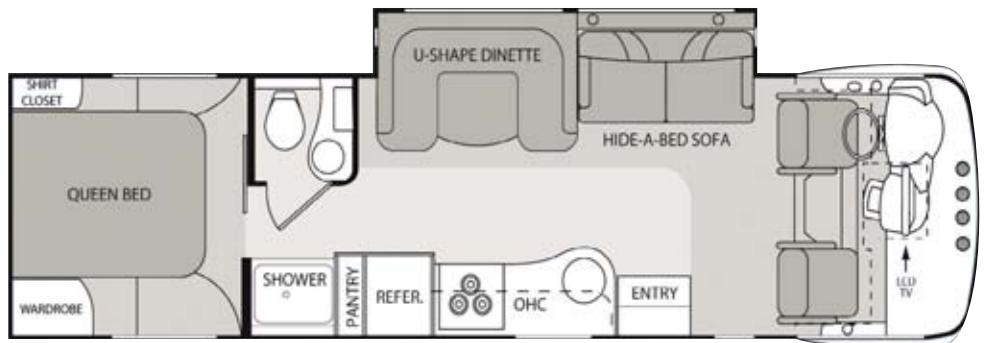
CHASSIS: WORKHORSE W20	INTERIOR HEIGHT: 6' 8"
ENGINE: INTERNATIONAL MAXXFORCE 7 6.4-L V-8 DIESEL	WHEELBASE: 190"
FUEL: 40 GAL	FRESHWATER CAP: 50 GAL
GVWR: 20,500 LBS	GRAY-WATER CAP: 46 GAL
LENGTH: 32' 1"	BLACK-WATER CAP: 39 GAL
WIDTH: 8'	LP-GAS CAP: 22 GAL
HEIGHT WITH A/C: 11' 5" (11' 9" W/DOME SAT DISH)	BASE PRICE: \$137,900
	PRICE AS TESTED: \$145,992, NEARLY FULLY OPTIONED

FOUR WINDS INTERNATIONAL, (574) 266-1111,
WWW.FOURWINDS-RV.COM.

Exterior storage is another strong suit for the Serrano. The entire curbside storage compartment row can hold smaller items, leaving the tall, full-width trunk to handle large or bulky items. The streetside compartment row holds all the coach systems, which are laid out neatly and clearly for easy access and maintenance. Four Winds even provides a picnic table and rack in the trunk to use with your lawn chairs. Three oversize doors make loading and unloading very convenient and will help protect the handsome full-body paint from cargo-loading scratches.

The coach, which features curved side wall aerodynamic body lines and a fuel-efficient International MaxxForce 7 front-diesel with Allison six-speed transmission, was tested by an independent third party at the Bosch proving grounds outside of South Bend, Ind., where it delivered 13.2 MPG at 55 MPH (loaded to its maximum gross vehicle weight rating of 20,500 pounds).

With its long list of standard equipment that encompasses many of the features and benefits of larger, high-end coaches, this smaller fuel-friendly rig does it all with style in just 32 feet. Our thanks to the crew at McMahon's RV in Colton, Calif., for providing the Serrano 31Z for our review. ♦



A man wearing a dark blue hoodie is shown in profile, focused on picking a lock on a motorhome door handle. He is using a thin metal tool to manipulate the lock mechanism. The background shows the side of a light-colored motorhome with a window and a door handle.

ALARMING THOUGHTS

FROM STICKERS TO SECURITY SYSTEMS, LIGHTS TO LOCKS, HERE ARE WAYS TO PROTECT YOUR VALUABLE COACH

by PETER D. DU PRE

Motorhomes are tempting and sometimes easy targets for thieves. They are full of items such as flat-screen TVs, DVD players, stereos, GPS units, tools, sporting goods and generators. Then there is the motorhome itself — worth tens of thousands of dollars or more.

The average motorhome remains parked a good part of the year, unattended in a driveway or storage yard, and even when being used, may be left unlocked in an RV park and in a

ILLUSTRATION: P. DU PRE



A security sticker in the entry-door window of your motorhome can be a big theft deterrent. You can make one yourself.

vulnerable position. What's more, the average motorhome is easy to break into. The thief is in and out long before anyone is aware of the break-in.

BASIC SECURITY

So what can you do, short of getting a junkyard dog and a shotgun to protect your coach?

Start by thinking about where you park. Unless you are a full-timer, odds are your motorhome is kept in your driveway or in a storage yard. Either way, most of the time there is no one around to keep a close eye on the unit, so it is vital to ensure that the motorhome is not an attractive target. That means, if at all possible, park it in a well-lit area where it can easily be seen by others.

At home, install a motion-activated spotlight. At the storage facility, don't park in a dark corner of the yard. Make sure that doors and windows are locked and the curtains are closed so no one can see inside.

It is also a good idea to disconnect the starter battery with a hidden cutoff switch and make sure your fuel fill has a locking cap. (Note: The battery may have to stay connected to power the security system.)

Next, change all the locks. Motorhome manufacturers only use a couple of different locks (CH751 or ES201 — check



A battery disconnect switch, like this one from Hella, can be installed anywhere in the main cable from the starter battery and features a removable key.

your key ring) to secure storage compartments, while doors and deadbolts are more varied. Why lose your possessions because of a \$2 lock?

On the road, keep the coach locked any time you are more than a few feet away from it. This is particularly true at roadside rest areas, food and fuel stops, and even in an RV park when you pop next door for a visit. Don't leave valuables like golf clubs, barbecues or bicycles in the open. Before leaving the motorhome, turn on the radio or TV, lock the windows and close the curtains. At night, when away from your coach, turn on a lamp so it makes it look like someone is home.

Never brag about your gear to strangers. You may be proud of the 42-inch flat-screen TV you just installed, but staying mum will allow you to keep it.

Add visual deterrents such as a flashing LED by the doorway and stickers in the windows saying you have an alarm (even if you don't). Thieves will see these and may move on to easier pickings.

ALARM SYSTEMS

An alarm system isn't a perfect crime deterrent, but it's better than nothing. Some of today's alarms are sophisticated enough to deliver some helpful information beyond



Protect your fuel supply with a locking fuel filler cap. They come in two types — with a key or a user-settable combination.



RV manufacturers use only a couple of different locks for storage compartments. Change out the locks to protect your AC generator and other stored equipment.



Every year thousands of people go metal detecting for fun and dreaming of finding a small fortune... Those in the know use Minelab metal detectors and as a result they go deeper and find more.



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PHOTOS: (LEAD) GARY BOHINC; PETER D. DU PRE

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ALARMING THOUGHTS

intrusions. Motorhome alarm systems can vary from simple audible alarms to sophisticated units that interface with smoke and gas detectors and telephone the user when a problem is detected. Prices range from less than \$100 to several thousand dollars. There's a unit for every budget, but it won't work unless it's turned on. Arm the alarm when locking up.

Although there are too many alarm systems on the market to show them all here, we have listed a few of the more popular units.

GE CHOICE ALERT



The GE Choice Alert Wireless Alarm System from Jasco Products is a customizable alarm system. By using a mix-and-match selection of sensors, sirens/alerts and signal repeaters, users can choose the areas of the motorhome they want covered.

Using an expandable, four-zone alarm/alert center as the hub, users can add up to 16 sensors covering windows/doors, motion, water-leak functions, plus an alarm siren and silent LED alert. A wireless color camera and LCD monitor can also be incorporated into the system. What's more, the system can be built up in a piecemeal fashion, so users on a budget can have basic protection and add to the system later, as needs change. The basic control center lists for \$39.99 with add-on options listing for less than \$50 each. The wireless

camera and LCD monitor are an additional \$179.99.

GLOBAL RV GUARDIAN



Global RV Guardian from Guardian Systems is a wireless satellite security system that builds a virtual fence around a parked motorhome, using wireless sensors to detect unauthorized entry, smoke, heat, high water levels, GPS, loss of power and low battery voltage.

It installs quickly: Simply connect the Global Guardian to a 12-volt DC power supply, peel off the backing tape on the sensors and place them in the designated areas. The unit calls up to three phone number contacts and the user can log on to the Internet to view a history of events and receive status and GPS coordinates for the Global RV Guardian. A user can also arm/disarm the system via the Internet, just in case an unexpected guest arrives when the user is not near the motorhome.

Each Global RV Guardian includes the main unit, one loss-of-power sensor, two intrusion sensors, one key fob and a satellite antenna. Additional parts such as a smoke sensor, a heat sensor and an infrared intrusion can be added. Prices start at \$1,295.

POWERMAXPLUS

Although primarily designed for stationary home use, the PowerMaxPlus (PMP) from Visonic easily adapts to motorhome use with

CHOOSING A STORAGE FACILITY

Make sure the storage yard you choose is surrounded by chain-link fencing at least 7 feet high with razor-wire deterrent at the fence top. The yard should be well-lit, and the RVs should be parked far enough apart so that thieves cannot hide between them. There should be multiple pass-code security gates on the premises, video surveillance, regular security patrols and, if possible, a live-in caretaker.



12-volt DC power hookup. Each PMP has a control panel, two door and window transmitters, a wireless passive infrared (PIR) motion detector, key fob transmitter, transformer and 24-hour battery backup system.

The unit can be programmed for up to 28 wireless supervised zones and two hard-wired zones. An optional GSM cellular module transmits an alarm to private phones and central stations with full system information via SMS text messaging. The unit is available with indoor/outdoor motion detectors, door/window contacts, CO2 detectors, water/flood detectors, smoke detectors, and indoor and outdoor siren/strobes. It arms/disarms via key fobs or user codes (up to eight). Prices vary depending on features and options chosen.

SAFE-T-ALERT



With an MSRP of \$59.99, the Safe-T-Alert SA-5300 from MTI Industries is one of the least expensive units on the market. The portable, battery-operated (9-volt) infrared motion sensor can be permanently mounted or attached with mounting tape. Key features include a two-tone chime, personal security code setting, selectable alarm delay, programmable alarm length, adjustable sensor head, 105-decibel alarm with 110-degree operating range out to 40 feet, adjustable alarm length and emergency panic button.



THE RV NANNY

The RV Nanny from Sensormetrics is a wireless alarm system that installs in less than 10 minutes. Upon alarm activation, it text-messages the user's cell phone or PDA or sends an e-mail. The unit employs a GSM network with no monthly fees and works wherever there is cell phone coverage. Main features of the unit include interior high and low temperature monitoring, intruder motion sensor, AC/DC loss of power monitor that automatically switches the unit to internal battery and notifies the user, a smoke detector alarm that monitors the existing detector and notifies the user of an alarm, plus an audio microphone that allows the user to silently call in and listen to activities in the unit. Suggested retail starts at \$949. ♦

FOR MORE INFORMATION

GUARDIAN SYSTEMS

(800) 330-7413,
www.guardianwireless.com.

JASCO PRODUCTS CO.

(800) 654-8483,
www.jascopeproducts.com.

MTI INDUSTRIES

(800) 383-0269,
www.safe-t-alert.com.

THE RV NANNY/ SENSORMETRICS

(866) 435-3759,
www.rvnanny.com.

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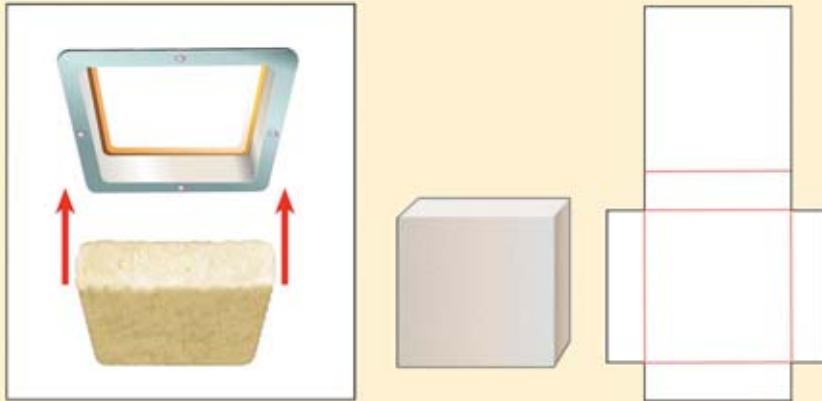
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Doug - Minelab User



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SKYLIGHT STOPPER

In order to block the light and insulate against heat and cold in my motorhome's bathroom, I made an insulating plug for the ceiling shower skylight with 2-inch foam. Because shower skylights seem to be different sizes, you'll need to cut the foam a little smaller than your skylight's opening. Then cover the foam with fabric (I used lamb's-wool-type material) and sew it around the edges. The skylight plug removes easily when you want to take a shower or let the light in.

JOSEPH VOLK | PAHRUMP, NEV.



EXTENSION CORD REPAIR

Over the years, I have replaced the male end of a few 30-amp extension cords quite easily by using the repair ends available from camping supply outlets. If the receptacle end is needed, those stores do not stock it. However, that end is available from Home Depot, Lowe's and electrical supply stores. A plastic receptacle box and blank cover with rubber gasket work nicely. The blank cover simply needs a centered 2 1/8-inch hole to accommodate the flush 30-amp receptacle.

**FRANK WOYTHAL
ANDOVER, N.Y.**



DISAPPEARING INK

With identity theft on the rise, it's important to limit exposure to this crime. I needed a safe way to discard sensitive papers, but I didn't want to sacrifice space in my coach with a shredder (not to mention the cost).

I found that I can toss the unwanted papers into a sink of water. After only a few moments, the papers are saturated and can be wadded up into a tight, twisted ball. The ball can then be tossed into the trash, as it would thwart even the most tenacious thief who attempted to unravel it. ID thieves are all washed up!

JERI WOODS | LIVINGSTON, TEXAS ♦

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

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, CA, 93001. Be sure to include any photos, illustrations or drawings, if necessary. If your tip is selected for publication, you'll receive \$35.

ILLUSTRATIONS: BILL TIPTON

tech savvy

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

Storing a motorhome — and in some cases a dinghy vehicle — requires adequate preparation to keep systems from deteriorating. One of the more problematic issues is battery charging, especially if the rig is confined without electrical power. For these situations, a company immersed in the charging business for more than 10 years, PulseTech, markets a solar charging system that's designed to not only keep batteries charged, but also conditioned enough to prevent sulfation.

The SolarPulse SP-5 is a 5-watt charger using a solar panel that's smaller than 9 × 9 inches and is only 1½ inches thick. It connects to the battery(ies) using a 17-foot cable that plugs into a control box. The control box is connected to the battery lugs using ring terminals at the end of a 3-foot length of wires.

To test the SolarPulse unit, we installed the charger in a Jeep Wrangler that's stored in a garage sans 120-volt AC power (the motorhome is stored in a separate location that has power). It only takes a few minutes to install the box. While it can be attached to any flat surface near the battery using screws, we elected to use industrial-grade two-face tape, which worked perfectly. The wires and plug terminal were then routed to an inconspicuous place in the grille, but easily accessible when connecting to the cable from the solar panel. The panel was installed on the side of the building with the most direct exposure to the sun. Polarity protection prevents system damage should the wires be hooked to the battery incorrectly — although that's hard to do since the wires are color-coded in black and red.

The solar unit puts out 350mA at up to 16.5 volts; pulsing DC current — a process patented as Pulse Technology — is designed to remove sulfation deposits from the battery plates, which increases long-term efficiency and overall battery longevity. Once a battery becomes sulfated, it's virtually impossible for it to accept an adequate charge — and sulfation is the No. 1 reason batteries in stored vehicles fail, and are replaced prematurely.

After two months in storage with the SolarPulse working away, the starting battery in the Jeep maintained 12.5 volts. Considering the parasitic drain of the after-market stereo system, and the fact that sunshine is not the norm where the Jeep is stored, the PulseTech charger worked as promised. You can tell when the unit is charging via the red LED built into the box.

PulseTech publishes a \$180 retail price, but the SP-5 solar charger can be easily found on the Internet for \$162. **For more information**, phone (800) 580-7554, or visit www.pulsetech.net. ♦



HANDS-ON | *by* DAVE RIGGS

SOLAR CHARGING

PulseTech makes a science out of maintaining batteries in motorhomes and dinghy vehicles cooped up in storage





Climate-Control Conundrum

UNABLE TO MAKE HEADWAY IN SECURING A REIMBURSEMENT FOR WORK DONE ON HIS MOTORHOME'S AIR CONDITIONER, A READER ASKED *HOT LINE* TO GET INVOLVED. HE EXPLAINED:

Last August, I was preparing my 2000 Winnebago Adventurer for a trip to the Winnebago factory in Forest City, Iowa, for various repairs, when I found that my air conditioner was not working—it only put out hot air. I took the motorhome to Plains Tire Co. (a local shop in Casper, Wyo.) to have the dash air conditioner repaired. The mechanic at Plains said that he didn't know how much R134 Freon the system should have, so he called the Winnebago factory service department and was told that the system takes two pounds of Freon. The mechanic did the repair, which cost me \$139.90.

The next day, I set off on my trip to Forest City but quickly discovered that the air conditioner was still not working. I didn't want to take the time to go back to Plains Tire, so I decided to have the A/C fixed once I reached the Winnebago factory. A service technician at Winnebago found that the A/C system had been severely overcharged. This fix cost me \$142.50, plus tax.

When I returned home to Casper, I contacted the manager at Plains Tire and told him what happened after his mechanic worked on my motorhome. I gave him copies of my invoice for work done at Winnebago and he sent it on to a higher employee for payment.

Months later I received a check in

OWNERS OF VEHICLES STILL UNDER WARRANTY WHO USE AN INDEPENDENT SHOP MAY FIND THEMSELVES IN A SITUATION SIMILAR TO THE BARTHEL'S — ON THEIR OWN AND BEYOND THE WARRANTY SYSTEM

the amount of \$51.71, which is the charge, plus tax, for the overfilled Freon. The remaining labor and materials charge, plus tax, amounts to \$88.19. I think Plains Tire should reimburse me and simply write off the labor expense. Can you help me recover my money? *Hot Line* does its readers a great service and I look forward to more successful conclusions.

**SCOTT HUTCHINSON
CASPER, WYO.**

Hot Line contacted Plains Tire Co. on Hutchinson's behalf for further consideration of his claim. Some time later, we received the following update from Hutchinson:

Your letter to Plains Tire certainly got positive results! Last week I received a check in the mail in the amount of \$88.19 as the balance of the total \$139.90 in my claim. Thank you very much for your timely action.

S.H.

DINGHY DILEMMA

Having sought repairs to their dinghy vehicle outside the normal warranty process because of what they believed were exigent circumstances, two readers requested Hot Line's help in gaining reimbursement. They wrote:

During a recent summer getaway, the water pump on our 2005 Jeep Grand

Cherokee dinghy vehicle went out. This happened as we were driving the Jeep through a rural part of the Illinois countryside. Luckily, we were able to pull in to a small town just as steam was coming out from under the hood. We found a nearby NAPA Auto Parts store that happened to have a full-service auto repair shop attached.

Before any service was performed, we called Chrysler to make sure that the water pump was a covered item under our service contract. We were told that it definitely was covered. Then we were told that we would have to have the Jeep towed to a local Chrysler-Jeep dealer to have it fixed. I tried to explain that we were virtually in the middle of nowhere and 30 miles from our campground (and motorhome), with no transportation. Unfortunately, they insisted that we call for towing to a Chrysler-Jeep dealer.

It was about 3:30PM on a Friday when I called two local dealerships. Both dealerships told me that they close at 5PM and would not reopen until Monday. By the time the car was towed to the facility there wouldn't be any time to fix the car before the end of the day.

Again, we called the Chrysler service contract customer service number and advised them of our predicament, but they would not authorize the local NAPA shop to fix the car. Because we did not know how we could get back to our campground without our Jeep, we went ahead and had the NAPA station fix our car. We were back on the road in 90 minutes.

We hope that *Hot Line* can intercede on our behalf to see if we could get reimbursed for the water pump. We saved the warranty company the price of the towing, and we were very satisfied with the service at the NAPA center. Thank you for your help in this matter.

**RAY AND GAIL BARTHEL
TINLEY PARK, ILL.**

Although the Barthels did contact the manufacturer prior to undertaking any warranty repair work, they did not follow the instructions given by their service contract holder and chose a repair shop

outside of the Chrysler system. Owners of vehicles still under warranty who use an independent shop may find themselves in a situation similar to the Barthels — on their own and beyond the warranty system.

Hot Line contacted Chrysler Service Contracts Inc. to see if we could muster up any further help for the Barthels. The company responded with the following:

This letter is to acknowledge receipt of your correspondence concerning Ray and Gail Barthel. We have reviewed the matter and based on the documentation provided, we have initiated a policy reimbursement on those repairs and expenses that are covered by the Plan, less the \$100 deductible. This reimbursement check will be forwarded to the customer in approximately 10 days.

Any future repairs performed by a repair facility other than a Chrysler dealer will be denied, unless authorized by our offices prior to the repair.

Thank you for writing.

S.L. WELCH
MANAGER, CUSTOMER RELATIONS
CHRYSLER SERVICE CONTRACTS INC.
TROY, MICH.

REFUND RESOLUTION

Unable to obtain a refund on his campground membership, a reader sought Hot Line's assistance. He wrote:

Being retired and in good health at the time, I bought multiyear memberships in Coast to Coast and Resort Parks International (RPI). Late last year, however, medical conditions dictated that my RVing days had unfortunately come to an end.

I called Coast to Coast to advise of my situation, and the following week I received a refund for the unused portion of my membership. About the same time, I called RPI to also request a refund. I was told I had to write a letter to the company, explaining my justification for canceling.

About 2½ months later I sent a second letter to RPI and have now waited another month with still no reply or any refund.

By my computation, RPI owes me \$216.12 on the unused portion of my membership. At this time, however, it seems that the company has ignored my request for reimbursement. I feel I have no other option

but to ask Hot Line to assist me. I thank you in advance for your efforts.

JOHN CLARKE
CAMP VERDE, ARIZ.

Hot Line contacted Resort Parks International in an attempt to facilitate a positive resolution to Clarke's membership problem. We received the following letter from Clarke that filled us in on the conclusion to his case. He wrote:

Due to the efforts of Hot Line on my behalf, I have received a letter from RPI advising me that it has credited my credit card account in the amount of \$140. Although I calculated that RPI owed me more than was refunded, I'm tickled pink to get anything. Many thanks for a job well done.

J.C. ♦

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Fuel Fill Opening

I have a 2003 Airstream motorhome that was built on a 2002 Workhorse chassis. The fuel fill opening is recessed, and is behind a small door.

More and more frequently I find the vapor recovery nozzles won't go far enough into the filler neck to allow gas to be pumped. The only way to add fuel is to retract the boot by hand, defeating the purpose of the vapor recovery nozzle.

When doing this, the flow rate has

A SLOW GAS FILL IS RELATED TO A PARTICULAR VEHICLE. ... IF THE FILLER NOZZLE ISN'T WELL INTO THE HOLE, GAS CAN SPLASH INTO THE RING, WHERE IT WILL BE SPIT BACK AND TURN OFF THE NOZZLE.



to be so slow that even the lowest notch on the filler handle is too fast. So I stand there for 15 minutes holding both the boot and the nozzle trigger.

I have no problem filling the tank at stations that have not converted to the vapor recovery nozzles, and have only encountered the problem in Southern California. So far, local stations have not switched to these nozzles.

Have owners of other motorhomes encountered the same problem? If so, is there a fix available? The local Airstream dealer as well as Airstream Customer Service were of no assistance.

**ANTHONY KENT
PASO ROBLES, CALIF.**

This is a California problem, Anthony, and then only here and there. The very large vapor recovery boot makes it difficult to fill a lot of vehicles.

The slow fill is another issue, and only related to a particular vehicle. The inside of most filler necks looks like a doughnut. The gas goes in the center hole, and vapor from the tank(s) comes out of the ring. If the filler nozzle isn't well into the hole, gas can splash into the ring, where it will be spit back and turn off the nozzle.

It's not unusual for the motorhome manufacturer to have a deaf ear. The GMC motorhome built in the 1970s has both problems, but is alive and well today. I know of no fix for the problems, which can be overcome by pulling the boot back and getting the nozzle well into the filler neck.

When you travel outside of California, you will find gas pump nozzles a lot more user friendly. They don't have any vapor recovery feature, and aren't much different than they were 30 years ago.

California has very stringent vapor recovery laws that go so far as affecting the type of nozzle that can be on a gas can used for filling a lawn mower. The vapor recovery boot has to be pulled back to fill those cans, too. The boot still sucks up vapors, but not as completely as intended.

OVERSIZED TIRES

I recently purchased a 1991 24-foot

Class C motorhome that has good oversized tires all the way around. The tires on the rear duals are just barely touching at the bulge. Do you think that dual spacers could be a viable option?

**DON MCDONALD
NORTH KELOWNA,
BRITISH COLUMBIA**

I'm not familiar with dual spacers, Don. If the wheels are hub piloted, they could be a disaster. If the wheels are stud piloted, longer studs at the very least would be necessary.

This ignores different wheel bearing loads, speedometer calibration, fender well clearances and possible computer error. Newer vehicles would have to have their computers reprogrammed for the new tire size, if everything else was OK. Your chassis may be too old to have computer control.

If the oversized tires were put on the motorhome to increase the tire load carrying capacity, you would be much better off going back to the original tire size, and shedding some weight. Get the motorhome weighed, preferably individual wheel weights, and visit with a knowledgeable tire dealer. Doing nothing is not an option.

NOISY WATER PUMP

I have a 1997 Allegro Bus, and recently replaced the original water pump with a new SHURflo unit. No problems with the installation.

The old pump made a noise you could hear inside the motorhome when you turned it on as it was what I'll call "priming up." You would then hear the pump again as long as the water was on (washing dishes, showering, etc.).

Now, the new pump has the same pressure, but is louder. The pump is mounted on a vertical wall in a compartment that is made of galvanized steel. My questions are these: Will an accumulator make this quieter, maybe better operating? Will mounting the pump on a wood panel act as a shock absorber (the pump does have rubber mounting pads) or is there a way to quiet it down?

I thank you for your time.
DEAN TATE | DOTHAN, ALA.

The galvanized steel wall mounting is acting as a sounding board, Dean. You need to isolate the pump from the wall using a rubber pad or another mounting location. Thick plywood is recommended, and can usually be found on a motorhome floor.

An accumulator will reduce the number of pump cycles. It will not reduce the noise when the pump is running.

SHURflo makes a standard pump and quieter pumps. Your original pump may have been a quiet model. Visit www.shurflo.com.

50-AMP TESTING

I have a 2008 Fleetwood Bounder 38P with 50-amp service. When I go to an RV park, I want to test the power box before plugging in. How do I test the receptacle?

DUANE HUNSTAD | HASTINGS, MINN.

I suspect you want to test to see if the voltage is adequate, Duane. The best way to test a 50-amp receptacle is with a multimeter set to AC volts with at least a full-scale reading of 300 volts.

Insert the probes into the two flat-blade openings that are on each side of the receptacle. You should get 240 volts plus or minus 5 percent, or 228 to 252 volts. If it passes that test, remove one probe and insert it into the bottom flat-blade opening. You should get 120 volts plus or minus 5 percent, or 114 to 126 volts. If it passes that test, remove the remaining side probe and insert it into the flat-blade opening on the other side. Again, you should get 120 volts plus or minus 5 percent, or 114 to 126 volts.

Once you plug in, you can test for a ground with a plug-in tester available at most hardware and RV parts stores. It will also tell you if the wiring is correct.

A motorhome with 50-amp service has two buses in its circuit breaker box. Ideally, you want to test both buses with the plug-in tester, but you may not be able to do so. All 120-volt receptacles may be on one bus, with the other bus supplying other 120-volt devices such as a second air conditioner. An electrician can open the circuit breaker box and tell you what is on each bus.

SHOCKING

I own a 1984 27-foot Winnebago Chief-tain, and I get a shock after touching the

coach when the ground or my feet are wet. This seems to be mainly when touching the metal door latch.

I know it is suggested that shorepower be disconnected when washing a coach, but I do not understand my problem. Everything electrical is original.

Do you have any suggestions to correct this problem? I am using standard grounded house power.

NEAL KELLEY | ORMOND BEACH, FLA.

You have a 120-volt AC leak, Neal. If you plug into a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) receptacle, your motorhome will probably trip it.

As advised above, get a small plug-in tester from a hardware or RV parts store that will show whether the motorhome wiring is correct. If that checks out, look for a short to ground somewhere in the motorhome. The heating element in an electric water heater is a common culprit.

Unplug all 120-volt AC devices in the motorhome, and see if the problem goes away. Keep in mind some are always plugged in like the converter, which is usually out of sight and out of mind.

Also, check the house receptacle that you use for shorepower with the plug-in tester. The short may be in that receptacle. Such a short will make anything plugged into it hot.

POWER AND WATER FEEDBACK

When you run the auxiliary 120-volt AC generator with the motorhome plugged into shorepower, will it feed back power to the line it is plugged into?

If you are hooked up to city water, can you use your house pump and water from the tank to help the water pressure if the city water is low on pressure?

ROBERT PROSSER | MANTECA, CALIF.

The answer to both your questions is no, Robert. Let me explain.

Most modern-day motorhomes have a transfer switch that selects the power source for the motorhome. It defaults to shorepower.

When the 120-volt AC generator is started and gets up to speed, the transfer switch has a large relay that switches from shorepower to generator power. The two power

sources are never connected together.

Some motorhomes have a manual system that uses the shorepower cord and plug. The generator has a shorepower receptacle that is either a 30-amp or 50-amp receptacle.

When the motorhome is on the road or in a no-hookup parking place, the shorepower cord is plugged into the generator receptacle. When the motorhome is in a hookup campground, the shorepower cord is unplugged and plugged into the campground shorepower receptacle.

The manual system is totally foolproof. The source of power is completely controlled by the motorhome user. Transfer switches are very reliable, but they have been known to fail. When they do, they usually stay in the shorepower default position.

With respect to low incoming water pressure, the motorhome water pump can be turned on while you are connected to city water, but no city water will be used. There is a check valve in the city water inlet that will shut off the city water, and there is a check valve in the water pump that will shut off water pump water. In addition, there are back-flow preventers on almost all campground faucets to prevent feed-back into the public water system.

The water source with the highest pressure will prevail. Either water pump water will be used, or city water will be used, not both. You don't have to worry if you forget to turn the water pump off when you hook up.

TV ANTENNA ALARM

Concerning the "Top 10 Mistakes You Don't Want to Make While RVing" (August), the No. 1 mistake was driving off with the TV antenna up. Yes, I'm guilty.

If my motorhome jacks are not completely up, I get an alarm when I turn on the ignition. So, I devised and installed a system that will alarm if the antenna is up when I start to leave.

DEAN TURMAN | WINNEBAGO, ILL.

Winegard has offered such an add-on feature for years, Dean. It is called the SW-2012 Antenna Up Warning Switch. Visit www.winegard.com/mobile/other.php. ♦

TO CONTRIBUTE TO COACH & CHASSIS, please refer to *Contact MotorHome*, on page 8.

Solar-Hybrid Drive?

Do any companies offer an electrical motor that can be connected to one of the rear axles of a motorhome and runs off of power generated by photovoltaic panels on the roof? I'm not referring to an expensive, complicated system typical of a hybrid vehicle with a large bank of batteries — I'm just referring to a small motor that would run off of 20-plus amps of continuous power while driving down the road. My assumption is such a small electric motor would never be intended to provide the main power for a heavy motorhome, but would just be there to provide a small amount of boost, while traveling down the road, and would be set up similar to a cruise control where the motor would disengage whenever the brake is used or the main power switch is turned off. It is hoped such a system would provide some small amount of fuel savings. Is such a system available as an aftermarket add-on or being considered as an option by any of the motorhome manufacturers?

LARRY GIPSON
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

An interesting idea, but let me explain why I think it isn't practical with the current state-of-the-art solar systems. With 20 amperes at a nominal 12 volts, you have about 240 watts. One horsepower (for rating electric motors) is equal to 746 watts and one mechanical horsepower (550 LB-FT per second) is equivalent to 745.7 watts. Either way, you have less than one-third horsepower ($240/746 = 0.321$), disregarding conversion losses and assuming 100 percent efficiency. Therefore, I think that with current technology the best use for a solar roof panel is to recharge coach batteries. If solar panels become more efficient and cheaper, this may change, but we also need to lighten the vehicles and reduce wind drag and frictional loss-

es before solar can make a significant contribution to driving a motorhome.

BLOWN EXHAUST GASKETS

I have a 1994 Pace Arrow on a GM P-chassis and the 454-cid engine continually blows exhaust gaskets, leaving a clack-clack noise. I was going to install a Banks or other similar system, but was told by my mechanic that headers would accomplish the same goal, because the engines of this era came from the factory at maximum power. Power is not the issue; it is the noise. I would appreciate your input for a possible solution to the problem. I realize the coach is vintage, but so am I, and it meets my needs.

RIFE DENTON | ROUND ROCK, TEXAS

I'm not sure what your mechanic means by "... the engines of this era came from the factory at maximum power" because a lot more power can be extracted from them with aftermarket equipment. Motorhome gas engines work hard and develop a lot of heat in the exhaust manifolds,

particularly those with air-injection systems. Any restrictions downstream of the exhaust ports (including manifolds, catalyts, mufflers and tight bends in exhaust pipes) build up back pressure, which raises the pressure and hence the heat in the manifolds. Late ignition timing and/or lean mixtures made worse by alcohol added to the fuel further add to the heat.

This intense heat warps the manifolds and causes the fasteners (mounting bolts/studs) to expand, thus allowing the gaskets to blow out. Low-restriction aftermarket headers and exhaust systems help remedy this situation and also shed heat better than cast-iron manifolds.

Fuel mixtures under full load need to be checked; this typically requires a chassis dynamometer and an exhaust gas analyzer. If you can't afford headers, check the engine's state of tune as described above, have the manifold flange surfaces checked for warpage and use new hardware, but no gaskets. Lower-restriction mufflers will also help.

GAUGE GRIEF

I have a 1990 Fleetwood Southwind with a 454-cid engine. When I drive it the oil pressure shows zero; however when I stop it reads 40-plus pounds of pressure. Do I need to be worried? Also, my temperature gauge does not show correctly. It hardly moves at all, and then when I stop it wants to go to hot. What could the problem be?

RANDY SMITH | KOKOMO, IND.

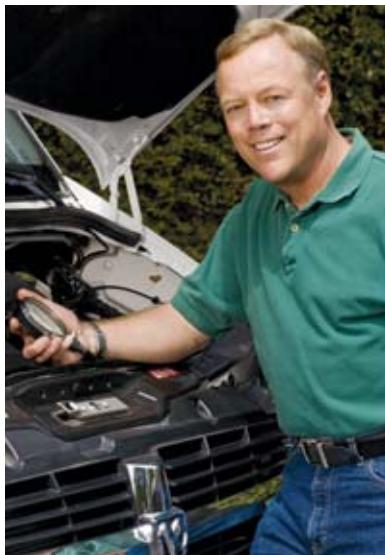
If it did actually have zero oil pressure your engine would have failed by now. You may have a faulty printed circuit on the back of the gauge cluster, or bad ground or other problems. You should follow the factory service manual procedure for testing gauges. Dealers and good private shops usually have special testers and know how to check gauges. If you don't know how, or can't afford it, you can install some relatively inexpensive aftermarket gauges for these two functions. You can even get simple mechanical gauges that require no wiring.

WHISTLIN' WORKHORSE

I have a 2005 Four Winds Hurricane Class A motorhome with a GM 8.1-L

WITH CURRENT TECHNOLOGY, THE BEST USE FOR A SOLAR ROOF PANEL IS TO RECHARGE COACH BATTERIES.

IF SOLAR PANELS BECOME MORE EFFICIENT AND CHEAPER, THIS MAY CHANGE.



engine. It has a loud whistling noise that comes from the left side of the engine and gets louder at higher RPM. This only occurs in DRIVE, not in PARK OR NEUTRAL.

RICHARD HARRISON
HOUSTON, TEXAS

It's probably a small intake leak somewhere on the top of the engine. Your best bet is to remove the engine doghouse cover and test-drive the coach. Have an assistant listen using a piece of hose as a stethoscope, if needed, to pinpoint the location.

DECREASED MILEAGE ON ULSD

I have a 1998 National Tradewinds model 7300 on a Freightliner XC chassis with a 300-HP turbocharged Caterpillar diesel engine with 85,000 miles. Since the introduction of ultra-low-sulfur diesel fuel (ULSD) I've noticed a decline in my fuel economy from 10.5–11 MPG to about 7 MPG. I've had the engine regularly serviced and the engine runs and performs well. There is no abnormal smoke from the tailpipe. Recently a Freightliner chassis service manager told me that he has had many reports of decreased fuel economy from drivers of older diesel trucks since they started using ULSD, and he suggested using a fuel additive with each fuel fill-up. What do you think? Any harm done?

JEROLD ARONSON | VIA E-MAIL

Most owners report very slight mileage drops — in the realm of 5 percent or less — with ULSD. If you are experiencing a drop as large as you report, there's probably some other factor involved. With 85,000 miles it could have to do with dirty injectors, so it shouldn't hurt to try some fuel additives, as long as Caterpillar approves them. If that doesn't solve it, you may want to take it to a Caterpillar dealer for a checkup.

ENGINE LIFE EXPECTANCY

I have a 1993 Winnebago Adventurer motorhome with a Chevrolet 7.4-L V-8 gas engine, and it has 91,999 miles. I have the unit for sale and prospective buyers are telling me that it has too many miles. What is the life expectancy of this engine in miles?

DAVID DUNCAN | SURPRISE, ARIZ.

Living in a place named Surprise, you no

doubt know things can happen unexpectedly. Engine life varies tremendously, even within families of similar engines. Some of the variation is due to manufacturing tolerances and assembly. Occasionally a great-running engine will fail suddenly and catastrophically because of some defect. However, the main variables are how an engine is driven and how it is maintained. There are no written guidelines, but a common psychological barrier seems to be 100,000 miles, after which many people expect that gas motorhome engines won't last. This perception does make it difficult to sell a high-mileage gasoline-powered coach.

Many motorhomes for sale on the market have lower mileage, and it's tough to convince potential buyers they should choose yours rather than another one with lower mileage. There are some things you can do, though. Detail the coach so it looks great. If you have maintained it meticulously and kept the records, show these to potential buyers. It's especially good if you used synthetic lubricants. You could also have a cylinder leakdown test done, which shows the general health of the engine. If the results are good, have the shop write them down on stationery to further document the engine's health.

FRYIN' FRONTIER FLYER II

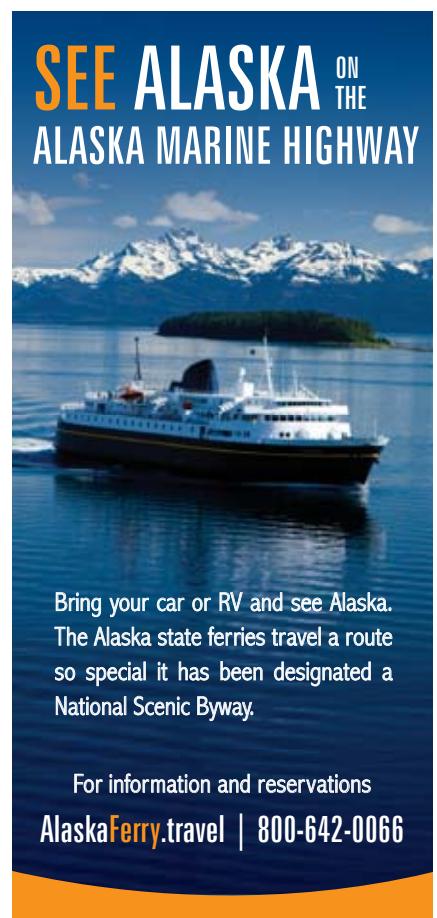
Regarding the overheating problem ("Fryin' Frontier Flyer," July) with the 1992 Damon Frontier Flyer Class A on a Chevrolet chassis, I had a similar problem that turned out to have an unusual cause. I own a 1994 Itasca Sunrise 33RQ on a Chevrolet P-chassis with the Chevy 7.4-L gasoline engine. I purchased it used four years ago and noticed the engine running hot. Mechanics checked all the usual things and replaced thermostats, etc. On the last day home from a trip, I started it up (cold), stepped outside and noticed coolant running out onto the ground from the rear of the engine. I drove a short way, stopped, checked it again, and the flow had stopped. I added coolant to the overflow reservoir to be safe. When I got home I let it cool off and then pulled the doghouse. I got a bucket to catch the coolant and restarted it with the engine cold. Sure enough, coolant was flowing from the rear of the engine. I searched around in the engine compartment from the doghouse opening and discovered

a hose that was routed under the passenger side rear corner of the doghouse opening. The doghouse opening has a formed metal lip that is surprisingly sharp on the underside. This hose had worked its way into this lip and had a 1-inch gash in it that was pressed up around the lip. When the engine was cold, coolant would flow from this cut, but as it heated up the hose swelled slightly and pinched off the opening and the coolant flow stopped. Of course, by then it had lost enough coolant that the engine was going to run on the hot side. I explained what I found to my mechanic, who replaced (and slightly rerouted) the hose, and the motorhome has had no temperature problems since.

BRUCE FAY
FARMINGTON HILLS, MICH.

Thanks for writing, Bruce. That pinched hose is a rare one, but I'm sure your letter will help someone out there. ♦

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TIME TO BE THANKFUL

Did you ever think you'd be happy to see \$3 gas? After last year's \$4 a gallon, it's a reason to be grateful, though we've still had to make some changes in our lives.

Tripped up by the topsy-turvy economy, our full-timing has been put on hold for the season. We're wintering over in Palmer, Alaska, this year, the community we've called home for decades.

There is much to appreciate amid this turn of events. Good friends need-

ed housesitters for the winter, so we will be snug and warm. A full-time writing job came my way, so we can pay some bills and put money aside for our next long-term motorhome journey. Yet more reasons to be grateful.

Though we'll miss the daily excitement of full-timing that comes with each bend in the road, the anticipation of adventures to come is sweet, too. But we're not going to be hanging up the keys to the coach. This winter we'll be spending time on weekend jaunts to favorite streams and forests. We're

certainly not leaving motorhoming behind; we're just revising the way we approach that part of our lives for now.

The best part of this situation is the chance to spend more time with my mother. She's been the ultimate RVer — ready to go anywhere at a moment's notice ever since she and Dad bought their first motorhome nearly 40 years ago. Over the past 20 years, Mom has been an almost permanent fixture in the spare bed of the rigs we've owned.



Many of Mom's old stories will be retold over holiday feasts this season ... like the first motorhome Mom and Dad bought for a trip to Alaska to visit us. It was a 19-foot

Class C, and the salesman assured Dad it could sleep six people.

Never having heard that a motorhome is best suited for entertaining six, feeding four and sleeping two, Dad immediately filled every bed in his new coach for the Alaska adventure.

The fact that my folks, along with my two sisters, a brother-in-law and a niece, made it to Alaska and back in a 19-footer without incident speaks well of them all, especially when you consider that Dad routinely drove 600 miles or more every day back when gas cost less than 40 cents a gallon.

Mother's favorite road remains the Alaska Highway, a route she first experienced in 1950. So we'll probably spend some time this winter reminiscing about our many trips along that unforgettable route — and maybe cooking up another Alaska Highway trip that Mom can enjoy.

At any rate, come Thanksgiving Day, with the aroma of roasting turkey wafting through the house, we'll sip a secret family recipe Manhattan or two, relive adventures from years past, give thanks for what we have and share ideas for future trips. Like exploring a new road, this, too, is a special part of the motorhome lifestyle we all share. ♦

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