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On The Cover: The Itasca Impulse Silver 26QP not only looks great against the distinctive Morro Rock landmark in Morro Bay, Calif., but it also handled the winding, hilly roads and beachside parking lots with ease (see test on page 48). Photo by Chuck Campbell.

YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY, DINGHY

Not that many years ago, buying a small car that was suitable for towing behind a motorhome was a compromise at best. Most of the vehicles that could be towed without drivetrain modifications were trucks and SUVs. There were a few car offerings, including the ever-popular Honda Civic and Accord, but until the Fit came along a couple of years ago Honda did not officially sanction any of its cars for towing on all four wheels — although, ironically, it provided precise instructions to follow for those who tow the Civic and Accord (and thousands have done so without any mechanical issues). Even today, Honda has a cautious attitude toward dinghy towing its two iconic nameplates.

While American auto manufacturers excelled in building trucks, vans and SUVs, their early compact-car offerings were almost laughable. Case in point: the original Ford Fiesta. It was certainly a big step up from the similarly sized Yugo import of the era, but refined it was not; even its mileage wasn't good enough to endure the Fiesta's rough ride and uncomfortable surroundings, much less its sluggish performance.

Fast forward to 2011 and Ford is now building compact cars that rival anything from Europe and Asia, including the aforementioned — and once-maligned — Fiesta. As a matter of fact, the Fiesta is a big seller in Europe, where buyers are pretty finicky about their small cars.

The transition to smaller, more fuel-efficient cars in America is a blessing for motorhome enthusiasts. As demand for these nimble automobiles increases and technology advances, the vehicles coming off assembly lines in the U.S. and elsewhere will change our perception toward compact cars. Ford's Fiesta, featured in the 2011 Guide to Dinghy Towing packaged with this issue of MotorHome, is a very sophisticated small car, with exceptional front-seat accommodations, a zippy little four-banger engine and enough electronic gizmos to make any tech geek smile. And the little Ford is only one of more than 100 vehicles list-



ed in our 2011 guide.

Granted, technology doesn't come without certain complications for those of us who tow on all four wheels. For example, many cars — including the Fiesta — can be equipped with wireless electronic starting. Since there is no steering column switch to unlock, users will have to jump through a few extra hoops before driving off — like disconnecting the battery on the automatic transmission model of the Ford Fiesta. At the end of the day, however, the gymnastics necessary to make cars towable are tiny inconveniences when compared to the build quality and longevity provided by these new entries.

Advances in technology are not exclusive to the automakers. Companies supplying the necessary equipment to make these vehicles towable utilize complex computer software when designing baseplates and tow bars. The result is superior fitting equipment with impressive safety and performance ratings.

The use of supplemental braking devices is more prevalent than ever, and for good reason. Braking systems are easier to use, work more effectively in concert with the motorhome and provide more choices between permanent and temporary installations. Combine improved braking with wireless tire pressure monitoring of the dinghy vehicle, and the towing scenario has never been safer.

Even wiring systems are becoming more efficient. One-way diodes and wiring harnesses make it easy to hard-wire a system, and even "plug and play" wiring systems are starting to hit the market — and will be covered in an upcoming issue.

The dinghy vehicle universe has never been better. Purely utilitarian compact cars that once were relegated to storage between trips are now desirable daily drivers. There's just about no reason to go solo any longer. ♦

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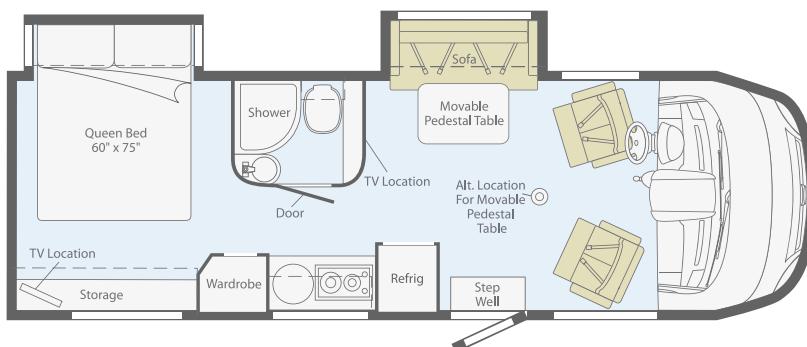
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“WHAT IS YOUR MOST IMPORTANT CONCERN WHEN IT COMES TO SATELLITE TV SERVICE IN YOUR MOTORHOME?”

That's the question we asked in our December 2010 issue, and here are some of the replies we received.

WANTED: RV-KNOWLEDGEABLE TECH HELP

My experience with DirecTV's East and West Coast major channels is that I am only able to get East Coast because of my ZIP code unless I pay double for the service. I think this is a rip-off. I live in Michigan but winter in Arizona so I enjoy both. Also, I'd like to be able to speak with a DirecTV technician who is knowledgeable about RV issues and who has command of the English language. DirecTV needs to do better with its large RV customer base.

RICHARD MCCONNELL | HOUGHTON LAKE, MICH.

ANNOYING SECURITY FEATURE

I have a satellite system at home and also in my Winnebago Voyage. At RV sites, I use the satellite when there is no cable or the cable lacks quality. When making a reservation, I check to make sure that cable is available. If not, I ask for a site that has good satellite clearance such as minimal trees or overhead obstacles. One DISH Network feature that is somewhat annoying is that if I don't use the satellite for a period of time, I have to call DISH and ask to have it reset. They say it's a security feature. That's fine, except when the cable at the last park I visited didn't have the Disney Channel and I had to call in from the RV while my granddaughters danced around me anxiously waiting to see a show that was about to come on. To me a satellite system is essential. Site Wi-Fi is just as important.

ANDREW DESANTO | MULLICA HILL, N.J.

SOLUTION: SWITCH PROVIDERS

As a solution to Art Lloyd's problem with getting local and/or distant networks (“Airing His Beef With the FCC,” P.O. Box, December 2010), I offer a simple solution. Drop DirecTV and sign up for DISH Network. DISH will allow you to change your physical address or “address of record” to whatever your location may be. This will allow you to get all the local channels no matter where you are. I have DISH Network and spend winters in Texas. A quick call to DISH when I arrive switches my local channels to where I am physically located.

STAN SANTOW | THREE RIVERS, MICH.

FCC SHOULD INVESTIGATE

DirecTV seems to do anything possible to keep from offering satellite service to RVers. The company will not offer me local channels even in my ZIP code — they say it is illegal. I think the FCC should investigate the problem. Also, when I signed up for service I had to



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send DirecTV a copy of my RV title. What are these folks afraid of?

GARY GROSS | ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.

BP EMPLOYEE'S MOM SPEAKS OUT

I want to thank Mr. Calvert ("Don't Punish BP Employees," P.O. Box, December 2010) for his call to not blame the employees at BP. My son works for BP in Carson, Calif. If Camping World would take the time to check into what caused the blowup they would find out it was not BP's fault. BP does not own the rigs, it leases them, and the people running the rigs are not BP employees. I am tired of people doing things like not stocking Castrol and not even knowing what they are talking about.

**JANICE PATTERSON
PASO ROBLES, CALIF.**

KNOW WHERE THE VETS ARE

The issue on RVers traveling with pets ("Happy Tails to You," December 2010) has been needed for a while. Thank you. One thing I would like to add is to get information on the vets in the areas or re-

gions one is going to visit.

One time we needed a vet late at night and we had no idea where to find one. Now, before we leave, we go to one of the map websites to locate where we are going. Then we click on "search near here" and enter "vets." On Google, flags pop up and there are addresses and phone numbers. We print this out and take it with us. We have also recently started doing this for area doctors.

BILL SIEBERT | LOS ALTOS, CALIF.

'PET-FRIENDLY' PARKS THAT AREN'T

Thank you for the special section on traveling with pets. We enjoyed it, and learned much from it. One thing missing was a word about campgrounds that profess to be pet-friendly but are not.

A campground may say it welcomes pets, but that does not necessarily mean it is pet-friendly. One campground we visited had a miserable, dirty, unshaded and unkempt dog run in one corner of the property, far from many of the available RV sites. The campground had a rule prohibiting

dogs from using any place but the dog run for their necessities. We ended up carrying our diabetic Schnauzer the 200 yards or so from our motorhome to the dog run to make sure he didn't have an accident before he got there.

**PHIL AND PATTI GERICKE
APPLE VALLEY, CALIF.**

FURRY FAMILY MEMBERS' BINDER

I'd like to add something to the great section on traveling with pets. We developed the following to provide some information to emergency responders in case of an accident or fire while on the road or at a campground.

As a retired police officer, I've seen instances where knowing the name of a pet or a contact person is of great value. We travel in a Class A to dog events in a multi-state area and have multiple dogs on board. The dogs travel in crates that are secured to the motorhome for safety. We travel with a binder labeled "Show Travel Information" with information about the event we are headed to. This book is kept

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in the open and accessible. A copy of our information sheet is also attached to one of the dog crates. We include our names, address and phone number. We also list names and numbers of contacts, if we are incapable of returning. We describe where we are traveling to or from and potential contacts at the event or RV park. We also state that if veterinary services are required we will guarantee payment. This works for us; thankfully we haven't needed it, though.
STEVE SOEFFKER | GLENCOE, MINN.

HE AND HIS BUDDY ARE 'PARIAS'

I read your December 2010 issue with bittersweet feelings. While I loved the attention paid to the "on the road" pets, I was sad to see no attention paid to the dark other reality of traveling with pets: If you happen to have one of the so-called "bad" breeds, you are denied any and all services.

The ever-growing list of "dangerous" dogs includes Rottweilers, Akitas, Dobermans and German shepherds. So-called pit bulls (this is not an actual breed, by the way) get probably the worst rap at the

moment. I know. I have one. The fact that public perception changes so rapidly on which is the most dangerous breed is testament to the inaccuracy.

My dog is amazingly sweet. No history of violence. I've known dozens of pits and my fondness for this type of dog only grows.

Because of my beloved dog Buddy, I am a pariah, a leper to the overwhelming majority of RV sites. There are no bad breeds, only bad dogs. Just like there are no bad races, only bad people. I just wish I could take my dog on the road.
DAN HAGEN | SEATTLE

A YORKIE IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

One morning last May my wife was asleep in the rear of our 2001 40-foot Holiday Rambler diesel-pusher. I started the engine and while waiting for the air pressure to build decided to do a final walk-around. I walked down the side of the coach and was about to walk behind it to check the tow bar for my car when the coach started backing down the street. I ran after the motorhome and was able to open the door,

jump inside and apply the brakes.

It seems my little Yorkie, who weighs only 8 pounds, had jumped into the driver's seat, onto the transmission control panel located on a flat surface on the left of the driver seat, then jumped on the brake release. If someone had told me this was possible I would have said they were crazy, but it happened.

GERALD VRABEL | SEBRING, FLA.

SAFETY FOR STRETCH

In your December 2010 special section on traveling with pets, I found that little was said of pet safety while on the road. When my wife and I purchased our first motorhome in 2007 one of the first things we bought was an inflatable seat for Stretch, our 6-pound Pomeranian mix. The seat comes with straps that we anchored to the dinette seat frame and a short strap to hook to his harness. We inflate it enough so he can see out the window. Last year, a pickup truck lost control on the freeway and crashed into the front left wheel of the vehicle we were towing. Almost everything

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P.O. BOX

in the kitchen ended up in the cab so we are sure our pet would have been badly hurt or killed if not for the safety seat. We encourage everyone traveling with pets to keep them restrained in some way so they don't become a missile in an accident.

**RANDY AND KAY AGOR
PALM SPRINGS, CALIF.**

PRESTO! A HIDDEN LITTER BOX

With regard to the issue of where to put the cat litter box: Long ago my father got tired of getting kitty litter between his toes whenever he took a shower. Between us, we modified five RVs by cutting an access opening to a cabinet under a dinette, or in one case, a refrigerator.



We cut a cat-size hole, finished it with purchased trim and installed a litter box that fits through a cabinet door that allows access to clean it. If the floor is carpeted, you can staple some heavy-duty plastic floor runner in the bottom first. If your cat hangs over and "misses" the box, buy a large plastic storage box with low sides that will fit through the door. If you need to cut a side down for easier access to the box, cover the sharp plastic edges with duct tape to prevent injury to the cat.

Presto! No more moving the cat box, looking at the cat box or cleaning kitty litter off the floor. Just make sure there is sufficient cat "head room" in your cabinet.

**LARRY AND CAROL STUBBS
PAYSON, ARIZ.**

QUESTION:

What custom or non-custom feature do you wish your motorhome had and why?

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escapes

edited by PATRICIA MARROQUIN

EVENTS | NOTEWORTHY | NEWS BRIEFS | WHEELS & GEAR | CROSSROADS

BADLANDS IN *NORTH DAKOTA*? IT'S A GOOD THING

When some people think of the Badlands they think of South Dakota, but badlands are not just a South Dakota phenomenon. North Dakota can brag of them too.

North Dakota's Theodore Roosevelt National Park is a land of rugged badlands, abundant wildlife (including bison, elk, deer, prairie dogs and grouse), hiking trails, scenic drives and campgrounds.

Open all year, the park has three units. I visited two of them, the North and the South, and the North Unit was my favorite. Why? Because it was remote, uncrowded, and it just had a wonderful, pristine feel to it.

While exploring the North Unit, I walked the Little Mo Nature Trail twice, searching for and finding new birds to add to my life list.

But the South Unit shouldn't be missed. During my visit, I saw prairie dog towns and feral horses. While camping in the South Unit, bison strolled through the campground.

Badlands weather can change dramatically. One day I was exploring in 87-degree temperatures, while the next day it dropped to 50 degrees. Another day, clear skies in daytime turned to dark clouds, lightning and 70-plus MPH winds at night. No doubt, the weather can be as rugged as the landscape. For more information, call 701-623-4466 (South Unit), 701-842-2333 (North Unit) or visit www.nps.gov/thro.

— Donna Ikenberry





PHOTO: PHS

MARCH 6-13

It will really feel like springtime with the scents of thousands of flowers in the air at the **Philadelphia International Flower Show** in Philadelphia. This year's theme is "Springtime in Paris," and displays will draw from impressionist paintings and artists such as Renoir, Monet and Van Gogh as well as modern art. An international bazaar, sweet treats and complimentary wine tasting will be offered to complement the dizzying array of colorful fleurs; 215-988-8800; www.theflowershow.com.

MARCH 4-13 | There's still snow on the ground in March in North Lake Tahoe, Calif., where the annual **Snowfest** will be taking place for 10 days to celebrate the area's long winter season. As long as you're bundled up, there are a variety of activities that appeal to a range of ages. Most of them are free and take place in different areas around town. Enjoy fireworks and a laser show, a parade, an ice castle and snow

sculpture contest, downhill and cross-country skiing events, or find out what "human bowling" entails; 530-883-7167, www.tahoesnowfestival.com.

MARCH 5-20 | If you think all competitive sporting events are the same, think again — the **Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race** in Anchorage and Willow, Alaska, is unlike any other competitive event in the world. The famous race cov-

ers about 1,050 miles through a beautiful and rugged landscape, creating a challenging and sometimes dangerous course for the mushers and their dog teams. If you're willing to take the extra precautions necessary for motorhome travel in Alaska (where there are 41 Good Sam parks), this event is one to check off the bucket list; 907-248-6874, www.iditarod.com.

MARCH 12-13 | Each year the **Hebron Maple Festival** draws thousands of people to the small town of Hebron, Conn., for a weekend of maple-related activities. Families can tour maple-sugar houses, see how maple is made and the many ways it can be enjoyed, such as in maple cotton candy, maple kettle corn, maple pudding cake, doughnuts and plain old maple syrup. A craft fair, pony rides, carving demonstrations and more round out the fun; www.hebronmaplefest.com.

MARCH 18-27 | If there's one cherry blossom festival to go to this spring, it's the one in

the "Cherry Blossom Capital of the World," Macon, Ga. The town's 300,000 Yoshino cherry trees are sure to be in bloom during the 10-day **Cherry Blossom Festival**, which features hundreds of events including parades, concerts, hot air balloons, fireworks, a formal ball, tours of homes, amusement rides and even a "bed race"; 478-751-7429, www.cherryblossom.com.

MARCH 19-20 | Recognized as the No. 1 fair and festival in 2010 by American Style magazine, **Kentucky Crafted: The Market** at the Kentucky Exposition Center in Louisville, Ky., is a must-see for art collectors or even those just looking for something to spruce up the motorhome. To complement the fine art and crafts, there will be live music and the chance to meet Kentucky authors, watch films by Kentucky moviemakers and purchase Kentucky specialty foods. RV parking is available at the exposition center; 888-833-2787, www.kycraft.ky.gov.

RV SHOWS

MARCH 3-6

Central New York RV & Camping Show & Sale
Syracuse, N.Y.;
877-228-8240

MARCH 3-6

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Denver;
800-457-2434, ext. 25

MARCH 4-6

Cleveland RV and Camper Show
Euclid, Ohio;
941-780-0538

MARCH 4-6

Moncton RV Show
Moncton, New Brunswick;
888-454-7469

MARCH 4-6

Ottawa Spring RV Show
Ottawa;
877-817-9500

MARCH 4-6

Rhode Island RV & Camping Show
Providence, R.I.;
804-425-6556

MARCH 4-6

Windsor RV Show
Windsor, Ontario;
888-331-8885

MARCH 11-13

Columbus RV Supershow
Columbus, Ohio;
941-780-0538

MARCH 11-13

Germain RV Show
Estero, Fla.; 239-482-6006

MARCH 11-13

New Orleans Spring RV & Camping Show
Kenner, La.; 888-948-1355

MARCH 11-13

South Carolina RV & Camping Show
Greenville, S.C.;
732-403-1610

MARCH 11-13

Virginia RV Show
Hampton, Va.;
804-425-6556

MARCH 11-13

York Campers World RV Show
York, Pa.; 610-767-5026

MARCH 18-20

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

MARCH 25-27

Acadiana RV & Camping Show
Lafayette, La.; 888-948-1355

MARCH 25-27

New Mexico RV & Travel Show
Albuquerque, N.M.;
702-348-1570

MARCH 25-27

Northwest Michigan Camper & RV Show
Traverse City, Mich.;
517-349-8881, ext. 11

MARCH 25-27

RV Camping & Travel Show
Rockford, Ill.; 815-877-8043



CAREFREE OFFERS PERMANENT MILITARY DISCOUNT

Carefree RV Resorts announced late last year that it will offer permanent 50 percent nightly discounts to active and veteran military servicemen and women and their families at 35 RV parks.

“At Carefree RV Resorts we value all of our customers, but it is with great pride that we get to offer discounts to the active and veteran servicemen and women who protect our country’s democracy and keep us safe,” said Mike Rosenhagen, a retired U.S. Army major who now serves as Carefree RV Resort’s vice president of operations.

“All veterans need to do to take advantage of this promotion is show their military ID or other form of identification that shows their service,” Rosenhagen said, adding that the discounts also apply to immediate family members who are traveling with active or veteran military. The discounts are being offered Sunday through Thursday nights on a space available basis.

For more information, go to www.carefreervresorts.com.

CANADA’S TOP SPOTS TO GO RVING

Go RVing Canada has announced

the Top 11 Spots to Go RVing in Canada. Its promotion commemorated each province’s top destination for RVing. The winning regions were selected by hundreds of submissions received by Canadian travelers through Go RVing Canada’s Top 100 Spots to RV in Canada Centennial Contest last year.

The contest was conducted by Go RVing Canada (www.gorving.ca) in partnership with the Recreation Vehicle Dealers Association (RVDA) of Canada and the Canadian Tourism Commission.

The top spots, listed by province, are:

Alberta: **Banff National Park.**

British Columbia: **Pacific Rim National Park Reserve.**

Manitoba: **Spruce Woods Provincial Park.**

New Brunswick: **Fundy National Park.**

Newfoundland and Labrador: **Gros Morne National Park.**

Nova Scotia: **The Cabot Trail.**

Ontario: **Algonquin Provincial Park.**

Prince Edward Island: **Twin Shores Camping Area.**

Québec: **Gaspésie.**

Saskatchewan: **Douglas Provincial Park.**

Yukon: **Kluane Lake.**



News Briefs

The **United Nations** General Assembly has declared 2011 as the International Year of Forests to bolster efforts to promote sustainable management, conservation and development of forests worldwide. This year, the **U.S. Forest Service** (USFS) — in partnership with its sister federal land management agencies, as well as state and private and other partner organizations — will host and coordinate many activities to celebrate the International Year of Forests. Public events include Earth Day, Arbor Day, National Get Outdoors Day and National Public Lands Day. As part of the yearlong effort, the Forest Service is seeking volunteers for work that includes maintaining and hosting campgrounds. “Volunteer work is important to the Forest Service and they perform many and varied types of work, whether in a one-time project, several months, seasonally, part time or full time,” the USFS said. For more information about volunteering, visit www.fs.fed.us/fsjobs/jobs_volunteers.shtml.

A website launched recently is dedicated to golfers and RVers. **GolfandRV.com** focuses on helping its users plan golf and RVing vacations. The website features RV resorts and golf courses that are in close proximity to them. Website users can browse a directory to plan their vacations at resorts and parks in the U.S. and Canada. GolfandRV.com was created in response to an increase in golf courses teaming up with RV parks to provide the ultimate outdoors experience.

About 25 percent of pet owners have taken a vacation with their animals in the last two years, according to results of an **Associated Press-Petside.com** poll conducted last fall by **Roper Public Affairs and Corporate Communications**. Seventy-five percent of the owners found the trip to be more enjoyable than stressful. Among pet owners, those with dogs (31 percent) were more likely than those with cats (19 percent) to bring pets along on the trip. **Kampgrounds of America Inc.**, the largest network of campgrounds in North America, reported that based on registration forms, 55 percent to 60 percent of its campers travel with pets. That’s up from about 45 percent eight years ago, according to a KOA spokesman.



WAIST WEAR

We all remember when the fanny pack was in its heyday, but most of us fashion-conscious individuals are probably grateful that its time has passed.

The **SPibelt** took the idea of the fanny pack and turned it into a more compact and stylish accessory.

Designed to hold small, lightweight items such as keys, cell phones, and credit and ID cards, the SPibelt is worn around the waist and offers a hands-free alternative to carrying a bulky purse or backpack when all you need are the essentials. They come in many colors and sizes to fit men, women and children, and several accessories are available such as a water bottle holder for active types. The SPibelt is also a popular choice for diabetics looking for a way to keep their insulin close at hand.

The SPibelts range in price from \$14.95 to \$29.95, with the Original SPibelt retailing for \$19.95.

SPibelt, 866-966-4440, www.spibelt.com.



EASY OIL CHANGE VALVE



Fumoto Engineering of America is now offering an easy-to-install **Engine Oil Drain Valve** for the RV market.

It is a quick-release, spring-assisted brass ball valve that

replaces the standard crankcase oil drain plug for a quicker oil change with less mess and no tools required.

To drain your engine oil, simply lift the lever from its locked position and give the valve a quarter turn to open and the oil will drain out in a steady, straight flow, so you don't have to worry about your hands coming into contact with the hot oil. The ball valve creates a perfect seal when closed. It's also a great tool for oil analysis, as you can draw a small amount of oil from the bottom of the pan by opening the valve, making it easy to check up on the health of your engine.

The valve can be used on several different motorhome engines, including Caterpillar and Cummins.

Fumoto Engineering of America, 425-869-7771, www.oildrainvalve.net.



FLEXIBLE INSPECTOR

No batteries? No problem! RVers can get great lighting that doesn't involve costly batteries with Solargoose's solar-powered LED lights.

The **Mirror Inspection Light**, in particular, is useful for illuminating the hard-to-reach areas that are found on an RV, such as in the engine or underneath the motorhome.

The flexible tube solar light contains one super bright, large-angle LED with a small mirror at the end that is perfect for investigating tight areas. The light will stay lit for four hours once the base is fully charged.

The Solargoose Mirror Inspection Light sells for \$34.95. **Solar LED Innovations, 770-855-1221, www.solarledflashlights.com.**

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Powell Gardens, a botany lover's dream come true, lies 30 miles east of Kansas City, Mo., on nearly 1,000 acres of grassy meadows, and includes nature trails, lakes, ponds and gardens of vegetables as well as flowers. Powell, which opened in 1988, has a mission: "to embrace the Midwest's spirit of place and inspire people to appreciate the importance of plants in our lives."

Among the many attractions are a 42-foot interactive Fountain Garden with flowers attractive to butterflies; an Island Garden on a 12-acre lake, featuring a 600-foot "living" rock wall — the longest wall of its kind in North America — where plants sprout from between sandstone blocks; and a Perennial Garden with 1,400 varieties.

There are also a three-acre Rock and Waterfall Garden; six-acre Wildflower Meadow; prairie grasses jeweled with wildflowers; Terrace Gardens outside the visitor center; and a glass-walled conservatory where seasonal plants and trees put on showy displays. Motorhome parking is available.

For more information, call 816-697-2600 or visit www.powellgardens.org.

— Pamela Selbert

POETIC LEGACY

John G. Neihardt (1881-1973), Poet

Laureate of Nebraska, wore many literary hats. He began writing poetry at age 12, was a published writer at 19, and over the years composed numerous lyric and dramatic poems, short stories, essays, book critiques and an autobiography. He was also a lecturer in English and a newspaper owner/editor.

But Neihardt is best known for his 1932 work "Black Elk Speaks," about the life of a Lakota (Sioux) holy man, written from transcriptions of his extensive interviews with Black Elk; and for his "A Cycle of the West," an epic poem about American expansion, from the mountain men era to the end of the Indian Wars in 1890.

From 1900 to 1920 Neihardt lived in Bancroft, Neb., where the 2½-acre John G. Neihardt State Historical Site includes his small studio, now in the National Register of Historic Places; the red brick museum; and circular Sacred Hoop Garden that Neihardt designed, based on the Lakota view of the universe. A bust of Neihardt by his wife, Mona Martinsen, one of only three students of sculptor Auguste Rodin, is in the library. There's also a gift shop/bookstore.

For more information, call 888-777-4667 or go online to www.neihardtcenter.org.

— Pamela Selbert ♦



PHOTOS: GUY LOUIS SELBERT

If you've traveled the great Southwest much at all you're probably familiar with the towering cliffs, gaping canyons and mysteriously shaped monoliths of Utah's Bryce Canyon, Zion and Canyonlands national parks. You might be surprised then, as I was, to discover an entirely different and surprisingly subtle and serene environment right in the middle of it all — a Sahara-like spread of giant sand dunes — that comprise aptly named Coral Pink Sand Dunes State Park.

There's good reason to be surprised, as this 3,730-acre sandbox is the only significant sand dune formation on the Colorado Plateau. The dunes, located 23 miles northwest of Kanab, are a quirk of nature.

They've been formed from the erosion of pink-colored sandstone surrounding the park. High winds passing through a notch between the Moquith and Moccasin mountains pick up

Coral Pink Sand Dunes State Park is only 23 miles outside of Kanab, Utah, but its rolling, Sahara-like dunes make it seem far from civilization. It is the only significant sand dune formation on the Colorado Plateau and a tranquil alternative to the more popular parks nearby.

PLAYING IN THE PINK SANDBOX

NATURE LOVERS, HIKERS AND ATV ENTHUSIASTS HAVE 3,730 ACRES TO ENJOY IN UTAH'S CORAL PINK SAND DUNES STATE PARK

loose sand particles and drop them onto the dunes — this owing to the so-called “Venturi effect.” The dunes are estimated to be between 10,000 and 15,000 years old.

So much for the science. What this all means to you and me is that here’s a park that offers a huge expanse of eye-popping scenery and a playground that allows for camping, hiking, nature studies, photography and off-road vehicle driving.

While I’m not into off-roading, it’s good to know that those who are have more than

1,000 acres of sandy terrain to attack (plus numerous trails that connect to adjoining Bureau of Land Management areas) — while still leaving plenty of space for those with more sublime pursuits.

As a photographer, for example, I can tell you that the dunes provide virtually endless opportunities for beauty shots, especially during early morning and late afternoon hours when the already colorful sand assumes an even richer palette — contrasting beautifully against a backdrop



PHOTO: DAVE G. HOUSER

Top: Since the park’s 6,000-foot elevation lends itself to a relatively high level of precipitation, it hosts a verdant plant life, including Kanab yucca, part of the lily family. **Below:** Coral Pink Sand Dunes State Park is an ATV enthusiast’s paradise, with more than 1,000 acres of dunes to explore and trails to the adjoining BLM land. If you don’t have a GPS and are worried about getting lost in the great expanse of the dunes, there is a half-mile loop nature trail at the park entrance/visitor center.



PHOTO: DAVE G. HOUSER



PHOTO: ELLEN BECKMANN

FOR MORE INFORMATION

CORAL PINK SAND DUNES STATE PARK

435-648-2800,
www.stateparks.utah.gov/parks/coral-pink.

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of purple mountains cloaked in emerald forests and the omnipresent cobalt skies.

Ever-shifting dunes don't allow for much in the way of permanent hiking trails in the park but there is a well-marked and maintained self-guided half-mile loop nature trail at the park entrance/visitor center. Hiking any great distance among the dunes can be exhausting so it's usually best to just take off your shoes, traipse about a bit, and let the soft sand warm your toes. Unless you're a well-oriented individual or possess a GPS unit, don't wander too far because the dunes all begin to look the same and it is embarrassingly easy to lose your sense of direction.

Nature lovers are surprised at the bounty of flora and fauna to be found in what initially appears to be a vast desert. Owing to its lofty 6,000-foot elevation, the park receives relatively high precipitation and the result is a proliferation of plant life, ranging from ponderosa pines to robust dune grasses, yucca and a variety of wildflowers. The park is home to a number of critters as well, including mule deer, coyote, fox, jackrabbits, rodents and various reptiles. A 256-acre conservation area has been set aside to protect the Coral Pink Tiger Beetle, found nowhere else in the world.

While once roamed by Paiute Indians, the dunes, along with the nearby town of Kanab, have a much more interesting recent history — as a movie location. According to Kane County Travel Council's historian, Jackie Hamlin, more than 100 movies have been filmed in the area, going back to 1924. Hamlin knows her stuff because she was an extra in many of them, beginning at age 6. The "Greatest Story Ever Told" was filmed in part at the dunes and other popular movies made in the area include "The Outlaw Josey Wales," "Desperate Hours," "Sergeants 3" and "Black Bart."

The park features a nicely laid out circular campground with 22 spaces capable of handling RVs up to 32 feet. There are modern restrooms, hot showers and a dump station. The camping fee is \$16 per site and the day-use fee is \$6 per vehicle. A nearby private option is Kanab RV Corral on U.S. Highway 89A just south of Kanab.

Best times to visit the coral pink dunes are spring and fall when daytime temperatures are moderate and the evenings crisp but not too cold. ♦

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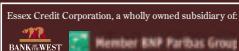


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SEEING AMERICA, ONE JOB AT A TIME

ABILITY TO TRAVEL, SENSE OF FAMILY ARE JUST TWO OF THE **BENEFITS OF WORK CAMPING**

by JEFF CRIDER

Job opportunities for work campers declined with the recession, but they are on the upswing again, and the opportunities for part-time or full-time employment are more diversified than ever.

“Work camping has become much broader than working in a campground,” said Steve Anderson, editor and co-owner of Workamper News, a print and online publication that provides educational resources and job listings for aspiring work campers.

Although work campers are generally thought to be those who handle cleaning, maintenance and front desk jobs at campgrounds — often in exchange for a campsite or a campsite and small salary — today’s work campers are just as likely to take jobs with retailers and amusement parks, particularly during their peak seasons.

“In January and February of 2006, we had one of our biggest issues with 780 different companies placing ads for work campers,” Anderson said. “Some of those companies were looking for hundreds of employees. In fact, one of our larger advertisers until about a year ago was Walt Disney World. Another one of the larger hiring operations is Adventureland Park in Altoona, Iowa. They hire about 400 work campers every summer.”

And although Workamper News has yet to see the volume of job listings it had in 2006, the numbers of job listings are increasing again as the economy gains steam and as Anderson continues his efforts to promote the availability of work campers to growing numbers of businesses and market segments.

“It’s a great way to see Ameri-



With its network of nearly 500 campgrounds across the United States and Canada, Kampgrounds of America (KOA) is one of North America’s largest work camper employers. The work campers wear distinctive yellow shirts and hold jobs that include recreational activity directors, maintenance workers and front desk staff.



Retired Houston-area schoolteachers Steve and Linda Ruff, top left, dreamed about living in scenic parts of the country. They decided to make their dream a reality after attending a KOA job fair in Houston. Their first assignment, last summer, was at a KOA in Buena Vista, Colo., and in the summer they will travel to the Boston Cape Cod KOA. Other KOA work campers shown here work in a variety of jobs to assist guests. Such jobs generally pay minimum wage to \$12 an hour and may also include a free campsite.

ca, one job at a time,” Anderson said, adding, “It’s a way to sample all the jobs you’ve always wanted to do, but never had a chance to do.”

And live where you’ve always wanted to live — at least temporarily.

Living part time in some of the most scenic parts of the country — and escaping the summer heat of the Texas Gulf Coast — are big enticements for work campers Steve and Linda Ruff, who live near Houston.

“Every time we went someplace in our RV, I’d say, ‘I think I could live here.’ And my husband would say, ‘You’d like to live everywhere,’” Linda said.

But rather than simply dream about living in different places, the Ruffs attended a KOA job fair in Houston and landed their first assignment last summer at the KOA in Buena Vista, Colo. Next summer, they’ll be working at the Boston Cape Cod KOA.

And while the Ruffs initially worried that they wouldn’t qualify for work camping jobs, since they were both retired schoolteachers and had no maintenance or front desk experience, KOA was more than happy

to teach them what they needed to know.

“I worked in the office, mostly registering guests and taking reservations,” Linda said. “But I also stocked the grocery part of the store and helped with merchandise in the gift shop and helped clean the bathrooms.” Meanwhile, her husband helped with maintenance work outside and even learned how to drive a tractor, which he had never done before.

Anderson said work camping jobs typically pay minimum wage to \$12 an hour. And although that’s not exceptionally high, it’s often enough to help RVers avoid tapping into their retirement nest egg, particularly if they have a work camping arrangement that includes a free campsite.

Jerry Langlois, 69, of Nunica, Mich., worked in the radio broadcast industry for 47 years, mostly as a disc jockey, though he later worked in the marketing side of the business. When MotorHome caught up with him late last year, he had landed a work camping job at 49er RV Ranch in Columbia, Calif., in the Sierra Nevada Gold Rush country.

Langlois provides marketing services and entertainment for the park in exchange for a small salary and a free campsite for his 36-foot Damon Intruder, the combination of which is enough to help him keep his living costs to a minimum for himself and his wife, Carole.

“I am reorganizing all of the park’s marketing efforts and helping train the rally person how to work with groups,” he said. “I also work with our IT guy on what’s good for the Internet site and I go out into the community and work with the chamber of commerce and other businesses. We’ve been able to form nice little partnerships to get discount cards for our guests for restaurants, golf courses and casinos.”

Perhaps best of all, Langlois is doing what he loves to do, which is host dances that bring back memories for the park’s guests, most of whom are retirees. Langlois travels with his own sound equipment and has a library with more than 160,000 songs.

“I like to mix with these campers and re-create the memories they had when they were younger,” he said.

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Views from the Road

Al Luehmann and his wife, Mary, are committed RVers from the North Star State of Minnesota. When they're away from home, Al and Mary enjoy our country's beautiful landscape in their 2007 Itasca Horizon motorhome, spending the winter months in Casa Grande, Arizona.

Al describes his time on the road as "a way of life after you retire. I have a whole new set of friends from around the country – we've become a family."

Even when traveling, he enjoys the comforts of home, including live TV. Al chose DISH Network to bring TV to his RV because of the unique service benefits.

"The ability to deactivate it whenever we aren't using the motorhome is a terrific feature. Plus, the rate was better than the competition, and we can get high definition free. I would highly recommend DISH Network service."

And what does he watch most when on the road? "Sports – the (Minnesota) Vikings and Wild, and my wife is a Jimmie Johnson (NASCAR) fan."

So what's next for Al and Mary? "Nova Scotia – beautiful country – and Yosemite."

Happy travels.



Al and Mary traveling the country



Other RV enthusiasts find they like work camping because it provides them with a way to keep socially engaged, active and traveling in their retirement years.

"Work camping for us is a tool to travel the country and meet new people," said Deb Powers, a former medical center administrator, full-time RVer and KOA work camper who now travels the country in a 40-foot motorhome with her husband, Dick. "If we had wanted to sit around," she said, "we wouldn't have sold our home and started full-timing."

Powers added that she's met wonderful people while work camping. "You make lifelong friendships with some of the (campground) managers and owners," she said. "We met a couple in Nashville last year that are like long-lost family and we now travel together."

Fifty-six-year-old Randy Borg of San Antonio finds work camping to be an antidote to loneliness.

A lifelong camper and RVer, Borg loves camping at Parkview Riverside RV Park in Concan, in the Texas Hill Country. But after his wife passed away last spring, he naturally felt an enormous void in his life.

Then came an unexpected opportunity: Parkview Riverside owner Doug Shearer offered Borg a work camping job.

Borg initially resisted the idea, but later accepted Shearer's offer, quit his job as a shop supervisor for a business technology company in San Antonio and now spends his days interacting with park guests and working with a team of several work campers with whom he has developed close friendships.

"I work in the office taking reservations and I answer the phone. I also am quite handy and help with electrical and plumbing repairs," he said.

And while he still has his home in San Antonio, Borg said he plans to rent it out and live at the RV park while employed as a work camper.

Financially, Borg says, he is better off employed as a work camper and having a free campsite than he was living and working in San Antonio. His home is paid off, he no longer has to pay the utilities and his vehicle insurance premiums have dropped by relocating to a rural area. He also has less stress than he had with his previous job.

"This lifestyle is so much better,"

he said. Not only is he more relaxed living and working along the scenic Frio River, but he is also surrounded by people who love to socialize, which he says is a wonderful tonic after losing his spouse.

"It's more like a family setting than sitting by yourself alone," Borg said, adding, "Being a work camper has forced me to get back into life. It's been a godsend." ♦

RESOURCES FOR ASPIRING WORK CAMPERS

WORKAMPER NEWS:

Founded in 1987, Workamper News provides e-books, videos, webinars and other educational resources in addition to print and online job listings for work campers across the country. It also has an online résumé service, job researching tools and opportunities to connect and network with veteran work campers and those just dreaming of the lifestyle. Visit its websites at www.workamper.com and <http://dreamers.workamper.com>.

KAMPGROUNDS OF AMERICA (KOA):

With roughly 475 campgrounds across the U.S. and Canada, KOA is one of the largest work camper employers in the country. KOA often hosts job fairs and "Work Kamper University" sessions to provide training and other information to aspiring work campers. For a \$35 fee, RVers can also post their résumés on a KOA website, along with the dates of their work availability and geographic preference. "A lot of people are ... already looking for jobs in 2012," said Lori Lyon, KOA's assistant vice president of franchisee sales. "Jobs can range from cleaning and outdoor maintenance to front desk staff, ambassadors and greeters and recreational activity directors. We even have work campers who are managers." Another nice perk: KOA provides veteran work campers up to five nights of free camping to help cover their costs of camping between assignments. Visit <http://workatkoa.com>.

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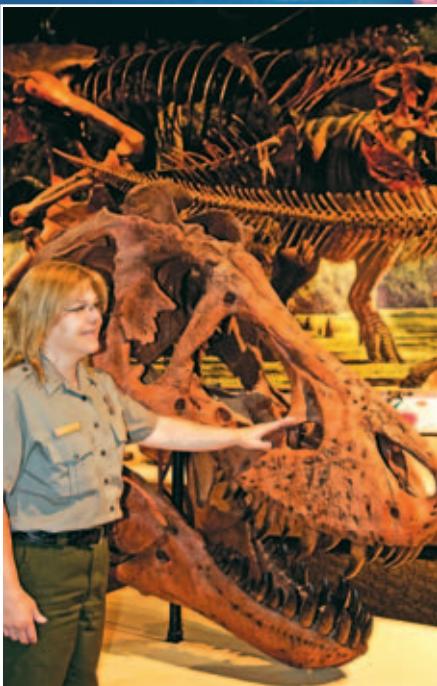
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DAM HAPPY

MONTANA'S FORT PECK — WITH FISHING, WILDLIFE AND NEW DEAL HISTORY — IS GUARANTEED TO KEEP YOU SMILING

by BERT GILDART



Top: The twin generator towers of the Fort Peck Dam and the road across the four-mile-long dam are illuminated against the night sky. **Above:** Michele Fromdahl, a park ranger and director of Fort Peck Interpretive Center, discusses the models depicting several species of dinosaurs found to have roamed the area immediately surrounding the dam.

When you drive your motorhome along a gigantic embankment 20 miles south of Glasgow, Mont., it may be difficult to realize that this enormous hill, known as Fort Peck Dam, is the world's third-largest earthen dam. The embankment, completed in 1940, was part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal. It was a Public Works Administration (PWA) creation that made many "Dam Happy," and today, a new generation is finding that the colloquialism still applies.

The fun begins the moment you drop from the crest and coast into the Downstream Campground. Situated as it is in view of two huge but quiet generator towers, most all sites have electricity. They are spacious and offer views of downriver features, including the Missouri River, little changed from the days when first explored in the early 19th century. Here, as the Lewis and Clark Expedition poled its boats upstream, members saw grizzly bears and moose, though they were hundreds of miles from the Rocky Mountains.

Of course, the upstream side — the "lake" side — is different, having been vastly altered. In fact, the huge reservoir has a shoreline that exceeds the California coastline — all backed up by the world's largest hydraulically filled dam. The area is immense and the best way to take advantage of Fort Peck's many exciting features is to drag out your bikes and ride one of the asphalted bike trails (or walking trails if you are without bicycles) to the visitor center located about half a mile away.

PHOTOS: BERT GILDART



Clockwise from top left: Fort Peck Theatre is a popular attraction in the summer, when featured sellout performances include "Forever Plaid" and "Will Rogers Follies." J.R. Rasmusen, a Fort Peck fishing guide, hefts one of the large walleye that swim in the lake. Loren and Sharon Denler from Loma Linda, Calif., enjoy the recreational opportunities in the Fort Peck area. Loren has a business card that reads, "On the road whenever possible." A burrowing owl at Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge clasps a grasshopper in its jaws, not for itself but for its anxiously awaiting young. These bison are part of a small herd that graze in the Leo B. Coleman Wildlife Pasture, not far from Fort Peck. The animals can be seen on a driving tour.

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DAM HAPPY

This path takes you through Beaver Creek Nature Trail, appropriately named. Before reaching the center, I quickly counted a dozen species of birds, not at all surprising as Fort Peck is highlighted on the Northeast Montana Birding Trail. Another reason to be so darn happy.

But that's just for starters. Fort Peck is also on the state's Dinosaur Trail, something you appreciate the moment you enter the visitor center and see the life-size model of Tyrannosaurus Rex, said to be one of the largest predators to ever roam the Earth. Fossils were excavated from lands surrounding the reservoir and archaeologists are still finding remains, so keep your eyes open. Meanwhile, study those swordlike teeth.

Though it is the dinosaur replica that initially grabs your attention, the bulk of the center is devoted to the "dam years." Construction attracted 10,000 out-of-work men and 40,000 family members who took up residence in New Deal, McCone City or Roosevelt — one of the area's 18 shantytowns. The expansive visitor center contains life-size representations of time-period buildings. It also offers a number of panels of period photographs, including one celebrating the work of Margaret Bourke White, whose dramatic image of the dam provided Life magazine with its very first cover.

In addition to the huge work project, the region also benefited by the creation of the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, one of the nation's largest. The refuge surrounds the "lake" and is another of the area's incredible attractions, for it is home to elk and antelope, white pelicans, terns and burrowing owls, among others. In early summer adult owls are tending their young, and if you are interested in photographing these tiny birds, you'll need patience and a photo blind.

Though I have visited the Fort Peck complex often, after reorienting at the visitor center and learning about new developments, I strike out, usually from the road near the twin generator towers. The road ascends a steep grade that culminates at a pullout overlooking Fort Peck Lake, and here I learn about a display that celebrates the construction, but also tells of tragedy. On Sept. 22, 1938, a massive mudslide cost eight men their lives, and six of them remain forever entombed in the huge dam over which you peer.

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DAM HAPPY

From the overlook the road continues four miles along the crest of the dam then abruptly turns back toward Fort Peck. The settlement features several buildings still used in exactly the same way they were during the dam years. One is the hotel, which offers sumptuous weekend meals. The other is the Fort Peck Theatre, a summer magnet that coordinates scheduling with the hotel. Over the years the Fort Peck Fine Arts Council has brought in talented actors and actresses, and in 2010, they performed such programs as "Forever Plaid," a musical about four young, eager male singers killed in a car crash in the 1950s. They also presented "Will Rogers Follies," all sellout performances.

Not far from the Fort Peck settlement a spur road veers off to the Leo B. Coleman Wildlife Pasture. Most conspicuous is the small herd of bison, which you will see most every time you make the short driving tour. Mating occurs in late July and early August; and when we found the small group, several huge bulls were charging one another, vying for dominance, just as they did in days of old when vast herds wandered the American prairies. Out here, the scale is always grand; that's a given.

That's certainly true of the relatively new fish hatchery you see as you depart the paddock. Operated by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, it is the state's largest and is partly responsible for the excellent fishing found around the Fort Peck complex. In part the hatchery augments fish populations children enjoy on ponds located near the campground. More dramatically, however, it augments the lake's Walleye Program, and does so in part by relying on volunteers to help extract eggs and milt. If your timing is right, you can certainly help. But if you're not around in the spring, make sure you include a hatchery tour, and learn how the program is guaranteed to benefit you.

Should you fish the lake you'll need a substantial boat to brave the capricious elements. As a result I rely on one of the area guides savvy about local walleye populations. With the help of J.R. Rasmusan I caught several walleye that weighed in at about 8 pounds — though it is not uncommon to land ones that weigh as much as 10 to 12 pounds.

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DAM HAPPY

much of what Fort Peck now offers, before departing you should join one of the daily power house tours between Memorial Day and Labor Day (otherwise scheduled by request), and learn about the power now generated that goes to five states. The free hourlong excursion takes you through the generator room and out to the tailrace where the water comes out of the power houses.

With so much activity you need a little time to rest up. Do so by returning to your motorhome, but don't retire too early. Plan to make a short evening walk to the river's edge. At this time the twin generators reflect in that portion of the Missouri again flowing just below the dam. Simultaneously, you'll see lights illuminating the dam's four-mile-long crest, and you'll truly realize that this huge pile of manicured rubble really is part of one of the world's largest and most impressive impoundments.

Soak up this chapter of American history and remote rural wildness and you'll be joining the ranks of a new generation of enthusiasts who are mighty "Dam Happy." ♦

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Edisto Island, a sea island in South Carolina’s “Lowcountry,” lies only about an hour south of bustling Charleston as the pelican flies. But Edisto, part of a chain of more than 100 tidal and barrier islands along the Atlantic coast between the mouths of the Santee River in South Carolina and St. Johns River in Florida, is a world apart.

Here, if the 17-mile stretch of South Carolina Highway 174 that links the Intracoastal Waterway and Edisto Beach weren’t paved, you might think you’d somehow driven back in time a century and a half or more.

This is a rustic world of ancient live oaks — acorns when Thomas Jefferson was president — that are thickly hung with light-as-air beards of Spanish moss; of

SOUTH CAROLINA’S EDISTO ISLAND LANDSCAPE — DOTTED WITH ANCIENT LIVE OAKS AND CHURCHES — OFFERS GLIMPSES INTO SOUTHERN HISTORY

by PAMELA SELBERT



Visitors try crabbing on one of the many creeks on Edisto Island.



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EDISTO ISLAND



Clockwise from top left: Built by white benefactor Hephzibah Townsend in 1818, the white-frame Old First Baptist Church welcomed slaves and free-blacks then and is still active today. Edisto Island Serpentarium houses dozens of animals, including turtles, snakes, alligators and iguanas. Geechie Boy Market sells produce grown by owner Greg Johnsman.

salt marshes densely lime-green with spartina, or smooth cord grass that when it dies and decays, “feeds” ragged oyster beds; of meandering sky-blue creeks; of farm fields where African slaves once tended rice and indigo, and the Sea Island cotton that made early English plantation owners rich; and of historic churches so numerous visitors sometimes ask if every family has their own (which in plantation days actually was the case).

These 17 miles of State Highway 174, which include “tunnels” of oaks, their gnarled branches woven by nature into jade canopies high overhead, is known as Edisto Island National Scenic Byway, one of just four national scenic byways in the state. My husband, Guy, and I came for the drive — but found much more than scenery, which does happen to be spectacular.

We had called ahead to arrange an hourlong narrated outing with Meg Hoyle of Botany Bay Ecotours. Local biologist Hoyle offers a variety of boat trips departing from Edisto Marina — sunset cruises,



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dolphin tours, half- to full-day charters and other custom tours — aboard her 24-foot Carolina skiff.

We met Hoyle and her sweet pit bull-German shepherd mix, Little Foot, at Dawhoo Landing, which lies at the south end of mile-long McKinley Washington Jr. Bridge. To reach the island from Charleston, take U.S. Highway 17 west to South Carolina Highway 174 south, which crosses the Intracoastal Waterway on the elegant high bridge, providing wide views of spartina-grass marshes trenched through by a complex water network. Hoyle says with a smile, “Visitors choose to come here — they don’t come by accident.”

Our boat trip was set for midafternoon, but on this early morning Hoyle wanted to offer suggestions for stops along the scenic drive: Edisto Museum, Edisto Island Serpentarium, Edisto Beach Interpretive Center, Steamboat Landing (the island was once accessed only by boat), With These Hands (a shop offering handcrafted gifts), Geechie Boy Market and Mill, and King’s Market (for local produce and other items), Flowers Seafood and several historic churches.

Greg Johnsman, owner of Geechie Boy Market, our first stop, grows the produce he sells: okra, onions, potatoes, cherry and grape tomatoes, cabbage, pears and figs (the best we’ve ever eaten). He also runs a 1945 mill that grinds grits and cornmeal. He explains that the most successful crop grown on Edisto was the Sea Island cotton: The temperature and soil were right and growing season lasts 280 days. But then in the 1920s the boll weevil appeared and wiped out the cotton, he said.

Our next stop, Edisto Island Serpentarium just south of Stone Creek, is the “first true serpentarium in South Carolina,” says Brenda Clamp, who with her husband, Ted, and other family members owns the first-rate 1½-acre facility, opened 11 years ago. Dozens of animals — turtles and tortoises, venomous and non-venomous snakes, alligators, iguanas, skinks and frogs — wild caught and purchased from dealers live here in a variety of settings, outdoor gardens and a large solarium. Snakes from around the world, the serpentarium’s “specialty,” are housed in large displays painted with scenes of their native lands.

Half-hour educational programs, “only about snakes,” says Clamp, are held four

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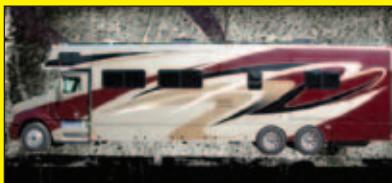
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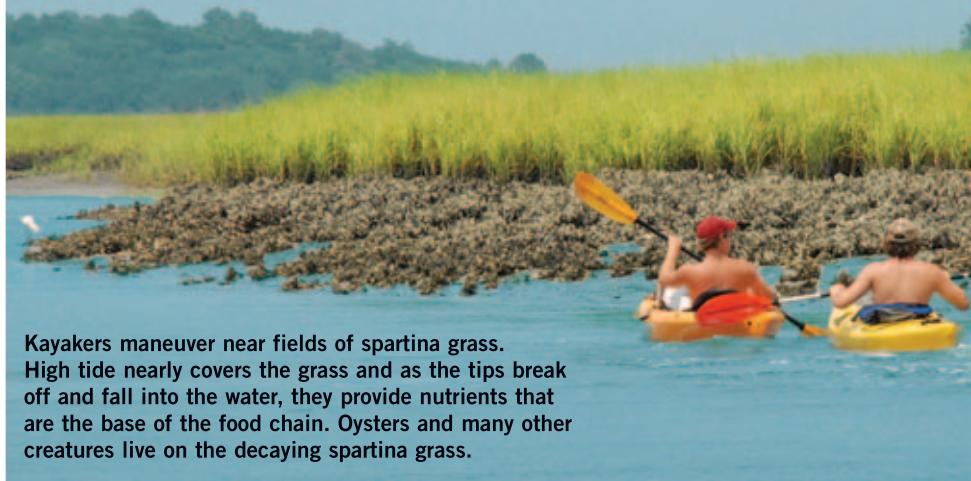
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Kayakers maneuver near fields of spartina grass. High tide nearly covers the grass and as the tips break off and fall into the water, they provide nutrients that are the base of the food chain. Oysters and many other creatures live on the decaying spartina grass.

times a day in the 185-seat amphitheater, and outside, twice daily at Green Pond, visitors watch alligators being fed and learn a little Alligator 101 (such as the critters can live up to 70 years and run 30 MPH).

Fossils and locally found artifacts are also on display. The serpentarium, which also includes an extensive gift shop, attracts more than 18,000 visitors annually.

Our next stop was Edisto Island Museum just off Highway 174 at Chisolm Plantation Road. The museum's mission, says director Gretchen Smith, is to preserve the history of the island, "which began long before European settlers arrived in the 17th and 18th centuries and cotton became 'king' on their plantations."

Exhibits are interesting and extensive, and include paintings, early photos, Civil War artifacts (Union headquarters were on the island), an 1850 roller cotton gin, cotton scale, fine furniture, including the bed John C. Calhoun died in, a recent acquisition and pride of the museum.

Plans are in the works to move two historic slave cabins from nearby Point of Pines Plantation to be displayed on the museum's seven acres.

We bought prepackaged sandwiches at King's Market and ate lunch as we drove south to Edisto Marina for our Botany Bay Ecotour. The designated scenic drive officially ends at Edisto Beach, a barrier island reached via a causeway through marsh. Continue south on Highway 174 (which becomes Palmetto Boulevard) through Edisto Beach, a popular resort community so different from Edisto Island, and around the end of the island to the marina at Big Bay Creek.

Our hour on the water was sublime: cool breezes on this sweltering day, water that glittered like a thousand rhinestones gently rocking the boat, V-shaped flotillas of pelicans soaring overhead. As Hoyle drove she explained some local natural history.

Edisto River, named for the Edisto Indians (original inhabitants of the area), is the longest and largest river system completely within the state, she said. It rises from springs 260 miles north, splits into North and South branches to flow around diamond-shaped Edisto Island (which is actually made up of numerous islands) and into the Atlantic.

ACE Basin, an acronym for the Ashpoo, Combahee and South Edisto rivers that arc through it, spans some 350,000 acres, one of the largest undeveloped estuaries on the East Coast, she said. These many acres of diverse habitat that lie just south of Edisto Island include protected uplands and wetlands, tidal marshes, barrier islands and beaches, and a host of wildlife.

The North and South Edisto branches flow into the ocean a little more than a dozen miles apart and roughly halfway between the two is Botany Bay and Botany Bay Wildlife Management Area. The near-wilderness, protected through the centuries by planters, now a South Carolina Heritage Trust site, part of the National Estuarine Research Reserve, and DNR Wildlife Management Area, makes up nearly a fourth of Edisto Island. About 100,000 visitors come every year. Hoyle offers tours by skiff and kayak of Botany Bay and ACE Basin.

Back on land we still had much to



see. Retracing our route we visited Edisto Beach State Park, which includes an interpretive center and two campgrounds, one on the beach just east of Highway 174, the other in a dense maritime forest of live oaks and palmettos just west of the road. Exhibits at the interpretive center, located on State Cabin Road, explain the natural history of Edisto Island and ACE Basin.

The beach campground includes 75 RV sites with water and 30-amp electricity, and the forest campground has 36 sites with water and electricity; a dump station is available. We recommend the beach campground (reservations can be made up to 11 months in advance) as forest sites are tight and the road is narrow and rough.

Continuing north we stopped at white-frame Old First Baptist Church, a church with an unusual history. Founded for slaves by Hephzibah Townsend of Bleak Hall Plantation, a white woman, the church was dedicated in 1818. By 1834 the church had a membership of 199 slaves and free-blacks and two whites, Townsend and her daughter. Nine years later 461 slaves belonged to the church, a fourth of the slave population on Edisto Island. Many current members of the newer adjacent New First Missionary Baptist Church are descendants. The historic church is used for special occasions.

Ahead we suggest taking Steamboat Landing Road to Steamboat Creek, winding through wide-open spartina marsh, past stiletto-leaved palmettos and centuries-old live oaks. A fishing pier is at the landing, the mud bank polka-dotted with thousands of half-inch fiddler crabs, where steamboats once docked and small fishing

boats put in today. To the west you can see the distant, once-fine manse at Rabbit Point Plantation (none of the 14 historic plantation houses on Edisto are open regularly to the public, but an annual tour is offered the second Saturday in October).

We stopped for shrimp at Flowers Seafood on Highway 174 at Jane Edwards Road and though it was a bit pricey, everything for sale was fresh and no doubt had been swimming earlier in the day.

We bid farewell to Edisto Island back at the Washington Bridge, taking time for a brief return to Dawhoo Landing, where today a 140-foot section remains of the drawbridge that was once here, and banks of the waterway bristle with jagged oyster shells. Evening light, as we drove across the high bridge and back to the 21st century, had turned the waterway, stretching wide to the west, to pewter streaked with bands of shimmering gold. ♦

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THE BUZZWORD FOR 'RIGHT-SIZING'

Motorhomes that are innovative and less expensive have taken center stage for the 2011 model year.

This year's new coaches and floorplans from motorhome manufacturers such as Thor Motor Coach, Tiffin Motorhomes, Monaco RV, Winnebago and Airstream emphasize fuel mileage while providing the types of conveniences that motorhome owners have become accustomed to.

That's not to say, however, that larger motorhomes are obsolete. Companies such as Winnebago, Fleetwood RV and Jayco's Entegra Coach division also have introduced traditional Class A gas and diesel-pusher coaches and floorplans for the new year.

Yet, there's a drive by RV manufacturers to "right-size" their products as opposed to just making them smaller.

"Right-sizing means delivering an optimal mix of size, convenience and features to meet the new realities facing consumers," said Richard Curtin, director of consumer surveys at the University of Michigan, who tracks trends in the RV industry for the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA).

"The motorhome market is here to stay, pending ridiculous economic issues and gas prices," said Bill Fenech, president of

Elkhart, Ind.-based Thor Motor Coach, which was formed last summer with the merger of Thor Industries' Damon Motor Coach and Four Winds International.

"I see drivability being a huge factor. We're always going to sell large motorhomes, but there's going to be a push for smaller units that are more economical," he added.

Acting on that promise, Thor Motor Coach introduced the diminutive front-engine gas A.C.E. Class A motorhome at the 2010 National RV Trade Show in Louisville, Ky., in late November.

The RV show also featured new floorplans in the American Coach lineup from Fleetwood as well as an innovative rear-end slideout on Fleetwood's Storm gas-powered Class A, Jamboree Sport Class C and Tioga Ranger. In addition, Fleetwood launched a new version of the Jamboree and Tioga on the diesel-powered Sprinter cab chassis, which has become popular with manufacturers again after a chassis changeover in 2008 caused some RV builders to back away from the imported platform.

Airstream, meanwhile, debuted the 2011 Avenue Class B on a Chevrolet van chassis at the Louisville show.

Roger Martin, Winnebago vice president of sales and mar-



Fleetwood RV American Eagle (interior below)



Monaco RV Vesta (interior below)



PHOTO: SHAWN SPENCE

MODEL-YEAR 2011:

MOTORHOME MANUFACTURERS STRIVE FOR THE PERFECT MIX OF SIZE, FEATURES AND CONVENIENCE

by BOB ASHLEY

keting, said that in addition to new conventional diesel-pusher floorplans, including some with tag axles, downsized motorhomes are still very much on Winnebago's radar. The Iowa-based company has added double-slideout floorplans for the first time in the front-end diesel Sprinter chassis-based Winnebago Via and Itasca Reyo and the Navion iQ and View Profile Class C's.

"Where we are seeing our best success is where we have new and unique floorplans that owners don't have today," Martin said.

Monaco RV for the 2011 model year has introduced a novel Monaco Vesta front-engine diesel and the similar Holiday Rambler Trip, which will be outfitted differently from the Vesta.

"There is opportunity for buyers in the smaller categories," said Ryan Lee, Monaco RV director of marketing. "Those types of products will bring in new buyers who haven't thought about motorized RVs. The Trip is going to have similar design characteristics to the Vesta, but it's going to have a different look and feel that will appeal to younger families."

Here's a closer look at some of the innovative new motorhomes and floorplans for 2011.

AIRSTREAM

Airstream Inc. of Jackson Center, Ohio, has added a Chevrolet-based van camper — the **Airstream Avenue** — to its motorized lineup, joining the Sprinter-based Airstream Interstate 3500 Class B. The Avenue is built on Chevy's 3500 Series Express van chassis equipped with a Vortec 6.0-L V-8 engine. "The distinctive combination of the two classic American brands, Chevrolet and Airstream, brings the ultimate value to customers," said Airstream President Bob Wheeler. The Avenue features side-impact air bags and a towing capacity of nearly 8,000 pounds. Amenities include swiveling front cockpit seats, stainless steel appliances, Ultra-leather seating, removable dining tables and 19-inch combo HD LCD TV/DVDs. Two-tone paint is optional. **MSRP: \$95,544.**

ENTEGRAL COACH

After a hiatus, Entegra Coach Inc., a division of Jayco Inc., has reintroduced the **Insignia** Class A diesel-pusher as the value-priced motorhome in the high-end Entegra lineup. "As we have in several of our other products, we have incorporated higher-end features in a lower-priced coach," said Sid Johnson, marketing director of



Newmar Canyon Star (interior below)



Winnebago Tour (interior below)





Airstream Avenue



Entegra Coach Insignia

Middlebury, Ind.-based Jayco. Insignia is available in three quad-slide, rear-bedroom floorplans built on a Freightliner XCR chassis with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 32,400 pounds and equipped with a 360-HP Cummins ISB diesel engine. Insignia features heated and enclosed holding tanks and frameless, flush-mounted slideout rooms. **MSRP: \$265,000.**

FLEETWOOD RV

For 2011, Fleetwood RV, now with headquarters in Decatur, Ind., has introduced an expansive rear-bath floorplan with a walk-in wardrobe in the luxury American Eagle diesel-pusher series. The 45-foot **American Eagle 45T** is built on Fleetwood's Spartan Liberty chassis with a GVWR of 48,600 pounds and equipped with a 500-HP Cummins ISM engine. Designed with full-time RVers in mind, the 45T has three 30-inch-deep slideouts, including a driver-side full-wall living room, kitchen and bedroom extension. A half-bath is located mid-coach. Amenities include solid-surface countertops, Sony LED TVs and DVD players connected to Bose home theater systems, high-gloss porcelain tile and hardwood cabinets. **MSRP: \$600,000.**

Fleetwood RV also has added four new Sprinter chassis-based floorplans to its Tioga/Jamboree motorhome series. All 25-foot, single-slideout floorplans are built on the Mercedes-Benz chassis with a GVWR of 11,030 pounds and equipped with the fuel-efficient 6-cylinder, 3.0-L turbocharged Mercedes-Benz front-diesel engine. Making their debut at the Louisville trade show, the higher-end **Tioga Ranger DSL/Jamboree DSL** is equipped with Ultraleather sofa/booth dinettes and comes with full-body paint, while the value-priced **Tioga Sport DSL/Jamboree Ranger DSL** features glazed hardwood cabinet doors. **MSRP for Tioga Ranger DSL/Jamboree DSL: \$88,060. MSRP for Tioga DSL/Jamboree DSL: \$101,500.**

FORETRAVEL

Luxury manufacturer Foretravel of Nacogdoches, Texas, has introduced the custom-built **IH-45** motorhome at the top of its diesel-pusher lineup. "We are targeting the 45-foot model because we think that's where this fits," said Lyle D. Reed, Foretravel executive director, adding that the IH series also is available in 42- and 44-foot lengths and that floorplans will change according to



Tiffin Breeze (interior below)



PHOTO: SHAWN SPENCE

Holiday Rambler Trip



Thor Motor Coach A.C.E. (interior below)



PHOTO: SHAWN SPENCE



Fleetwood RV Tioga



Foretravel IH-45

customers' wishes. "There's a gap there that has been vacated by the changes in the industry in recent times," he said. Built on Foretravel's proprietary TravelRide chassis with a GVWR of 48,000 pounds and equipped with a 600/650-HP Cummins ISX diesel engine, the IH-45 has been in planning for two years. To increase both interior height and basement storage, IH-45 stands 10 inches taller than Foretravel's Nimbus and Phenix motorhomes. The IH-45 also has a newly designed dash, wider entrance doors and up to four flat-floor slideouts. "We have re-engineered everything from the chassis on up," said Reed, who noted the IH series is Foretravel's first ground-up redesign in 25 years. "It will have more of a bus feel," he added. Custom amenities include residential tile, solid-surface countertops and all-wood cabinets with a choice of custom woods. **MSRP: Less than \$1.2 million.**

MONACO RV

Navistar International Corp. subsidiary Monaco RV of Coburg, Ore., has introduced the aerodynamic front-engine **Monaco Vesta** that also is available as the **Holiday Rambler Trip**. Using Navistar International's testing facilities, the Vesta/Trip is "the most aerodynamic, ergonomic, fuel-efficient coach ever produced," said Mike Snell, Monaco vice president of sales and marketing. The Vesta/Trip, with 32- to 35-foot floorplans, is built on Monaco's proprietary Monaco Roadmaster chassis with a GVWR of 26,000 pounds and is equipped with a 260-HP International MaxxForce 7 diesel engine that, according to Monaco, should get 15 to 18 mpg. A single-slide 32-footer retails for about \$195,000 with interiors featuring Ultraleather furniture and Corian countertops.

NEWMAR

Newmar of Nappanee, Ind., returns to the SURV market with the addition of a 39-foot garage model in the gas-powered 2011 **Canyon Star** motorhome series, the lineup of which has been redesigned with a new front cap and grille. The double-slide Canyon Star 3920 is built on a Ford F53 Super Duty chassis with a GVWR of 26,000 pounds and powered by a Triton V-10 engine, and features a 10-foot-deep garage. Standard features include 32-inch LCD TVs, a radius shower and drop-down electric bed in the garage. **MSRP: \$144,522.**

THOR MOTOR COACH

Thor Motor Coach is introducing the all-new **A.C.E. EVO29.1** gas-powered Class A motorhome. "This is an evolutionary product — a combination of a Class A and C motorhome," said Bill Fenech, president of Thor Motor Coach. Built initially on a Ford F53 Super Duty chassis with a GVWR of 18,000 pounds, the coach will eventually be downsized further, Fenech said, by mounting it

on a 16,000-pound GVWR platform. The 29-foot A.C.E. features a front cap with electric drop-down beds, kitchen slides, Dutch doors between the living area and rear bath/bedroom and oversized windows. **MSRP: About \$75,000.**

TIFFIN MOTORHOMES

Tiffin Motorhomes offers the new 28-foot **Tiffin Breeze** diesel-pusher, a concept vehicle named "Best of Show" by RV Business magazine at the 2009 National RV Trade Show. A 32-footer is expected by spring. The single-slideout Breeze is built on the Red Bay, Ala., manufacturer's proprietary PowerGlide diesel-pusher chassis with a GVWR of 21,500 pounds and powered by a 215-HP Navistar MaxxForce 7 engine. President Bob Tiffin says the coach is designed for those who no longer are comfortable driving one of the company's larger motorhomes, such as the Tiffin Phaeton or Allegro Bus. **MSRP: \$149,800.**

WINNEBAGO INDUSTRIES

Winnebago has introduced a bath-and-a-half floorplan in its redesigned top-of-the-line 2011 Winnebago Tour diesel-pusher coach. The triple-slide 42QD dual-zone layout includes a pullout kitchen island providing additional countertop space along with an office module. The redesigned Tour, available in four triple- and quad-slide floorplans — two with full-wall slides — is equipped with a new front cap that incorporates stacked headlights with LED running lamps. Built on a Maxum Freightliner chassis powered by a Cummins diesel engine, the Tour has an MSRP ranging from \$296,418 to \$324,314. ♦

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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WINNEBAGO ITASCA IMPULSE SILVER 26QP



COMPACT FOOTPRINT AND ABUNDANT STORAGE MOVE THIS CLASSY CLASS C COACH TO THE FRONT OF THE 'GO TO' LINE

by CHUCK AND TERESA CAMPBELL





2011 WINNEBAGO ITASCA IMPULSE SILVER 26QP

WHAT'S HOT

Full walk-around queen bed, not usually found in a floorplan of this length. Humongous, vinyl-lined pass-through exterior storage compartment.

WHAT'S NOT

Ford van cutaway chassis does not exactly turn on a dime. U-turns require plenty of room, and a fair amount of forethought. Small, curbside galley vent cover has no visible means of restraint and flaps while coach is underway.



PHOTOS: CHUCK CAMPBELL

Over the course of many years, Class C motorhomes built on van cutaway chassis have been the “go to” vehicle for countless RV enthusiasts. This trend has been driven in large part by several factors, including affordability, ease of handling, and of course, a level of comfort and amenities often associated with larger, costlier Class A’s.

One of the more prominent manufacturers of Class C motorhomes in the field today is Forest City, Iowa-based Winnebago Industries. This old guard company is renowned for the quality and reliability of its products, and has been able to weather the economic ups and downs of the recreational vehicle industry for decades.

At the forefront of Winnebago’s Class C lineup for 2011 is one of the latest incarnations of its Itasca brand, the Impulse Silver. We were fortunate to acquire one of the company’s most popular and best-selling models, the 26QP, to experience just what it had to offer in the way of performance and livability.

“The Impulse lineup is better than ever this year, with the addition of the new 26QP floorplan,” said Roger Martin, Winnebago’s vice president of sales and marketing. “Plus, with the addition of the Silver package, RVers can accessorize this classic motorhome with such amenities as a new, aerodynamic front cap, deluxe graphics, full-body paint and contemporary interior upgrade packages.”

Our 26QP came with what might be considered a rather close-quartered floorplan that is obviously dictated by the coach’s maximum length of 27 feet, 10 inches. Usable living areas amounted to a forward galley/dining area with streetside slideout dinette; an enclosed mid-coach bathroom, also streetside; a rear master bedroom that sported a walk-around queen bed; and a roomy cab-over bunk for an additional guest or two.

Base pricing on our test motorhome is \$83,317, and the coach includes many higher-end features as standard equipment, such as the molded, full fiberglass front-end cap, 7.5-cubic-foot double-door refrigerator, china bowl toilet and one-piece fiberglass roof. The motorhome also had a multitude of optional upgrades that made living even more comfortable, but commensurately elevated the coach’s final suggested retail price to \$92,688. Notable of these options are an entertainment system with 26-inch LCD flat-screen TV (\$1,120); a 4-kW AC generator (\$2,793); and a rear-view video monitor (\$812).

Clockwise from top: The cockpit of the Itasca Impulse Silver 26QP features creamy white, Ultraleather, multi-adjustable captain’s seats and an optional rear-view video monitor. The cabover area features a 53- by 78-inch bunk, which makes a great sleeping place for the grandkids. In the rear bedroom is a 60- by 75-inch queen bed that has space on either side for easy access. The mid-coach dinette is located in the streetside slide-out and can be converted to sleeping quarters for a smaller person or two. The motorhome is attractively appointed throughout and comes loaded with residential amenities such as a 26-inch LCD TV in the galley.



The streetside bathroom is compact but complete and features a full shower and china bowl toilet.

The automotive foundation of any good motorhome requires a solid, powerful chassis. In the case of this coach, it is built on a rugged and proven Ford E-450 van cutaway platform equipped with a 6.8-L V-10 engine. Not only does the motive core of this system churn out a willing 305-hp at a high winding 4,250 RPM, it also has 420 LB-FT of torque at 3,250 RPM for added emphasis. It is backed by Ford's dependable five-speed automatic transmission with overdrive, and includes a handy tow/haul feature that enhances towing and downshifting operations.

Winnebago is well-known for the robust construction of its coaches, and the Itasca reflected this reputation. The company uses its exclusive "Super Structure" architectural approach that includes a

specially joined framework of aluminum and steel, below the main floorboard and above. Upper coach walls are durable, lightweight composites of exterior high-gloss, gel-coated fiberglass panels, dense block foam insulation and internal aluminum support bracing. Also, roof segments utilize metal frame mem-bers, insulation and a one-piece fiberglass crowned roof. In our Silver model, molded fiberglass front and rear end caps contributed aerodynamic functionality as well as extra eye appeal.

California's central coast was the area we selected to road-test our distinctively painted Itasca, adorned in a contemporary Dark Bronzemist exterior graphics package. Beginning from our base in Ventura, Calif., and traveling north to Morro Bay, the route also offers access to several inland highways and byways that present topography ideal for testing the performance and livability of most any recreational vehicle.

First impressions of the Itasca's performance were its swift acceleration and almost passenger-car-like ease of handling as we headed out onto U.S. Highway 101. Nudging the gas pedal for a bit more power produced quick bursts of speed that were appreciated when trying to merge into fast-paced streams of freeway traffic.

Throughout the test, the motorhome demonstrated exceptional braking capability for a vehicle of its size. Whether at full speed in a fast traffic lane or just loafing around town, the four-wheel disc brakes with ABS exerted authoritative "whoa"

whenever called upon.

Early in the trip, we encountered a moderate 5-percent upgrade that produced minimal downshifting of the Ford's TorqShift transmission to third gear. Even though the unit was loaded with cargo, fluids and two adult passengers, it still descended the other side of the hill well within the 65 MPH speed limit, and without having to apply brakes.

Later in the trip, we had occasion to climb a more serious 7-percent incline that truly put our powertrain to the test. Despite the formidable wet weight of 11,872 pounds, we were still able to maintain a minimum upward speed of 58 MPH at 4,800 RPM in second gear. Heading down this same gradient near the end of the test, the coach exhibited excellent engine compression holdback that limited our downward progress to no more than 57 MPH in third gear at 3,000 RPM.

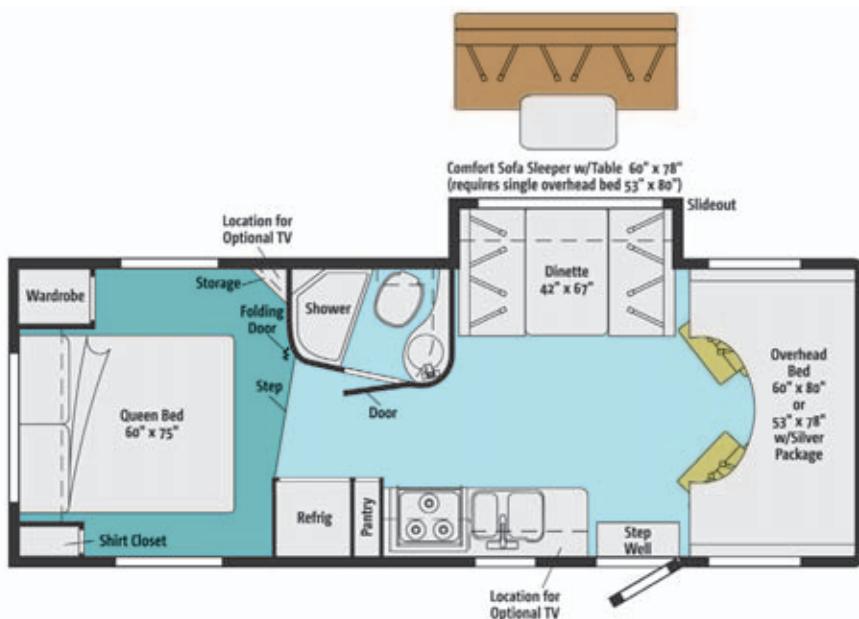
Upon arriving at our destination in the Morro Bay vicinity, we were able to deftly make our way through a crowded beach parking lot and back in to a space that a larger motorhome might not have negotiated, thanks to the coach's compact length just shy of 28 feet.

That afternoon, we spent a lot of time traveling around the tighter confines of several coastal towns. Despite the challenges, we were still able to easily get around, and even parallel-parked near a fast food joint to stop for a quick bite.

Our Itasca took us just about everywhere we wanted to go with ease. However, one shortcoming we experienced in town-driving was the Ford E-450 chassis's inherent wide turning radius of more than 33 feet. This really doesn't amount to much during normal highway driving unless you experience a sharp turn; but in any type of a U-turn situation, drivers should use plenty of forethought, and choose a very wide spot in the road before attempting such a maneuver.

Though the 26QP's floorplan is somewhat compressed, it isn't short on residential amenities, and is a study in the efficient use of available space. The décor scheme for our coach was Glacier Mist, and it reflected a blend of earthen brown hues from dark coffee through light beige. Added to this were creamy white Ultraleather, multi-adjustable captain's seats in the cockpit.

Other décor elements include thermo-



SPECIFICATIONS

PERFORMANCE

FUEL ECONOMY: 8.5 MPG
ACCELERATION
0-60 MPH: 17.1 SEC
40-60 MPH: 9.4 SEC

CHASSIS

MANUFACTURER: WINNEBAGO INDUSTRIES
MODEL: FORD E-450
ENGINE: 6.8-L FORD V-10
SAE HP: 305 HP @ 4,250 RPM
TORQUE: 420 LB-FT @ 3,250 RPM
TRANSMISSION: 5-SPEED AUTOMATIC
AXLE RATIO: 4.10:1
TIRES: LT225/75R16E
WHEELBASE: 190"
BRAKES, F/R: DISC/DISC W/ABS
SUSPENSION, F/R: COIL/LEAF
W/REAR AIR BAGS
FUEL CAP: 55 GAL
WARRANTY: 3 YRS/36,000 MILES

COACH

EXT LENGTH: 27' 10"
EXT WIDTH: 8' 5"
EXT HEIGHT: 11' 3"
INT WIDTH: 8'
INT HEIGHT: 6' 10"
CONSTRUCTION: ALUMINUM FRAMING,
FIBERGLASS SKIN AND ROOF, FOAM INSULATION
FRESHWATER CAP: 42 GAL
BLACK-WATER CAP: 30 GAL
GRAY-WATER CAP: 30 GAL
WATER-HEATER CAP: 6 GAL
LP-GAS CAP: 18 GAL
AIR CONDITIONER: 14,500 BTU
FURNACE: 30,000 BTU
REFRIGERATOR: 7.5 CU-FT
CONVERTER: 45 AMP
BATTERIES (3): (1) 12-VOLT CHASSIS,
(2) 12-VOLT COACH
AC GENERATOR: 4.0 KW
BASE MSRP: \$83,317
MSRP AS TESTED: \$92,688
WARRANTY: 1 YR/15,000 MILES BASIC LIMITED;
STRUCTURAL, 3 YRS/36,000 MILES

WET WEIGHT

(WATER AND HEATER, FUEL, LP-GAS TANKS FULL;
NO SUPPLIES OR PASSENGERS)
FRONT AXLE: 4,238 LBS
REAR AXLE: 7,634 LBS
TOTAL: 11,872 LBS

CHASSIS RATINGS

GAWR, F/R: 5,000/9,500 LBS
GVWR/GCWR: 14,500/20,000 LBS
ROCC: 2,628 LBS
(DEDUCT WEIGHT OF PASSENGERS FOR NET
CARGO CAPACITY)

GAWR: GROSS AXLE WEIGHT RATING
GVWR: GROSS VEHICLE WEIGHT RATING
GCWR: GROSS COMBINATION WEIGHT RATING
ROCC: REALISTIC OCCUPANT AND CARGO CARRYING CAPACITY (FULL WATER, NO PASSENGERS)

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formed, white laminate countertops in the galley and bathroom, warm Coffee-Glazed Sierra Maple cabinetry, predominantly vinyl flooring in the galley and bathroom, a touch of carpeting in the bedroom area, and an acoustic-enhancing, vinyl-lined ceiling. The vinyl flooring can withstand aggressive use and is easy to clean as well.

We found that the galley area afforded us plenty of room to enjoy a quick bite in comfort. With the 7.5-cubic-foot curbside refrigerator at hand, plus surrounding cabinets, drawers and a narrow but suitably ample pantry with slideout shelving to support our culinary efforts, we were able to put together a tasty lunch spread in just a few minutes. With food assembled, we moved into the adjacent streetside slideout 42- by 67-inch dinette to enjoy the fruits of our labor and recharge our batteries.

Storage cabinets and recesses are suitably situated throughout the coach's interior for items such as food, clothing and other gear, though no single receptacle would accept a lot. In the galley, modestly proportioned cabinets are located over the curbside sink and counter, while more are found above the dinette. Especially practical were storage areas beneath both dinette seats that are easily accessed, yet out of the way. In the rear bedroom, more cabinets are available over the bed, along with two rear corner wardrobe closets.

After an enjoyable day at the beach, we relocated to a nearby RV park. Once we had leveled and hooked up to shore utilities, dinner was swiftly prepared. We used the optional overhead convection/microwave oven (\$105) and afterward had things quickly cleaned up and squared away for the evening.

This model does not have a lot of sitting and lounging areas; the primary spots are the dinette, overhead bunk and rear bed. Despite this, we were able to find enough spaces to plop down and enjoy some of our favorite movies and cable shows using the very flexible 26-inch, swivel-mounted LCD TV near the kitchen sink, and a 19-inch LCD TV in the rear bedroom.

When time rolled around to turn in for the evening, we really appreciated the fixed, 60- by 75-inch queen bed located at the rear of the coach, and consider this one of the motorhome's key residential elements. We much prefer a dedicated

sleeping arrangement of this type as opposed to foldouts or other questionably comfortable contrivances. The bedroom also had enough aisle space on either side of the queen for easy access, making bed makeup in the morning effortless.

For those who wish to take along an extra passenger or a couple of grandkids, the 53- by 78-inch cabover bunk is an ideal sleeping place. In a pinch, the dinette can even be converted to a sleeping surface for a smaller person or two. And if the overhead bunk is not to your liking, buyers can instead choose an optional home theater system for this space, complete with a larger 32-inch LCD TV.

Mid-floorplan streetside, and tucked neatly out of the way, is the bathroom. It is compact but complete with full shower and china bowl toilet. Though small in layout, the facility afforded enough room for showers and adequate foot room in front of the toilet. Though a dinky washstand on the forward wall took some getting used to, this area and an exterior wash station were welcome and much-used fixtures during our stay.

Loading the Itasca before leaving home was remarkably easy, and due in large part to its external rear pass-through storage compartment. The generous bay is crafted of molded vinyl and comes complete with two large access doors — one aft and the other curbside. The large compartment is also uniquely designed with a removable floor segment that can convert into a picnic table, and includes a drain plug in the floor bottom for easy washouts.

Combined with several other small compartments spotted on either side of the unit, available external storage area amounts to more than 74 cubic feet. In all, the coach can accept up to 2,628 pounds of passengers and cargo before exceeding its gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 14,500 pounds.

Itasca's attractively appointed Impulse Silver 26QP is loaded with a generous array of residential amenities, in a compact floorplan less than 28 feet in length. Supported by a robust Ford E-450 chassis with lots of power, car-like handling, abundant cargo capacity and a size that allows easy access to a wide range of campsites and other locations, this classy coach is quite remarkable. ♦

WHEN ONLY THE

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WINDOW DRESSING

INSTALLING AN MCD SHADE SYSTEM IS AN EASY UPGRADE TO YOUR COACH

by E. DON SMITH



Although window shades are often overlooked, they can and do make a big difference in many aspects of motorhome travel. Not only do the shades filter out unwanted light, they also serve such functions as privacy and protection against UV light damage. They also help reduce heat in the summer and to a lesser degree they help hold in heat in the winter. What I like most about shades is their ability to filter daytime sun, which allows for those wonderful naps on a lazy afternoon.

There are many types and styles of shades/blinds in motorhomes sold today and one of the most common is the Venetian/pleated blinds shown below. Some of them work well and some, not so well. Typically the most common problem with these dual-layer Venetian blinds is wrinkling. The wider the shade the more likely it is to show these unsightly wrinkles. Another problem is tension adjustments. Since they operate on tension

from their mounting cords, adjustments become a way of life if you want them to stay put (either up or down).

The coach we are working with here had tension problems and all of the blinds wider than about 24 inches are prone to wrinkling. These wrinkles were so bad in some cases that it prevented use of the shade over that window. This coach also had a mix of window treatments (shades, fabric blinds and aluminum shades) so an upgrade allowed us to create a more cohesive look inside the coach, and fix the problems mentioned above. We chose MCD Innovations, a company known for making and installing some of the best RV shades on the market.

Texas-based MCD has a network of dealers across the country that are specifically trained to handle installation and service of all its products. In addition, the products are OEM installed by many RV manufacturers, including Monaco RV, Holiday Rambler, Foretravel, Newmar, Tiffin, Fleetwood and Winnebago.



Left: The original blinds were prone to wrinkling and tension problems. **Right:** The MCD shades come packed very well. The task is easier if you extend all slides and clear as many things as possible out of your way. You will need various screwdrivers as well as a cordless drill and bits as dictated by the screws used by your coach-builder. We found it best to completely remove the valance in order to remove the old blinds and install the new ones. So pick your first window and start by locating the screws or brackets and removing them.



PHOTOS: E. DON SMITH

The system we picked is the American Duo Day/Night shade. This system uses a black shade fabric that can be lowered to reduce the light entering the coach and create privacy during the day, yet still allow you to look outside. Then for complete light blockage you can employ the night shade, which effectively blocks all light in or out of the coach. MCD offers a manual version of these shades as well as fully powered and remote control models. For our coach we decided to stick to manual units throughout the living area of the motorhome and then use a powered unit for the front windshield. These shades are available in a wide range of colors and material (fabric and vinyl) options to fit most any décor. Since our 2008 Tiffin Phaeton motorhome already had some of the MCD shades in place, we simply matched the new ones with the OEM vinyl.

The first thing we did was decide which windows in our coach needed the MCD shade upgrade. We used the MCD-supplied measurement form and carefully measured each window two times. Since you will be measuring inside the various valances and tight locations, using a cloth tape is the best way and having two people helps a lot too. At the factory, an extendable straight rod is used to measure inside the valances but since most of us will not have this luxury we will have to be careful and measure as close as possible using the cloth measuring tape.

Within a couple of weeks of the final measurements two large boxes showed up from MCD and inside were the various blinds we ordered. Each package is marked exactly as you identified

the windows during your measurements so it is very easy to know which one goes where.

The entire project took us about six hours, but that included a lot of time for stopping to take photos along the way. This project is something that most any do-it-yourselfer could easily pull off in a day as long as you have a little help on the longer shades. Of course, how the factory blinds are installed will vary depending on the motorhome model. So if you are handy and thinking about this project, go ahead and tackle it. Just take your time when measuring as that is the most crucial step.

What is nice about the MCD shades is they are tension adjustable, meaning that the resistance to the shade rolling back up is adjustable. This allows you to simply grab the shade at the bottom and give it a little tug and release it. The shade will then completely roll up, based on the tension (or speed) you adjusted it to. That means no more pulling over and over to get the shade to move up a few inches each time.

We recommend these shades for anyone wanting to remove the pleated shades and upgrade the look and usefulness of your window shades. The project is a fun and easy upgrade to your motorhome. Suggested retail price for the 10 shades we ordered, not counting installation costs, is \$2,265. ♦

FOR MORE INFORMATION

MCD Innovations, 972-548-1850, www.mcdinnovations.com.



STEP 1. It is a good idea to start with one of the valances that is the least used and very small as they tend to be easiest to work with. After you get the hang of the process on smaller windows, you will be better equipped to work on the wider windows, which are the most difficult.



STEP 2. First you will need to locate all the L-brackets that secure the valance to the wall and remove them one by one. Sometimes there are some hidden brackets so look carefully before you try to remove the valance.



STEP 3. We used a cordless drill and a long flexible bit holder to make accessing the screws as easy as possible. Other locations require a screwdriver depending on available space.



STEP 4. After removing the valance, flip it over so you can see the back and determine how the shade is attached to the valance.



STEP 5. On this coach, each shade had a single screw in the middle that helped hold the center and, of course, it too has to be removed.



STEP 6. You will also need to remove the tension cords from both sides of the valance.



STEP 7. After removing the tension cords, flip the entire shade over the top of the valance in order to get a good view of the top of the shade. Then you should be able to locate the mounting system used to secure the shade to the valance frame. As you can see, there are metal clips that need to be relieved to allow the shade to come free of the valance.



STEP 8. These are the clips used to retain the factory-installed pleated blinds. They must be removed to make way for the new clips that hold the MCD shades in place.



STEP 9. Each of the MCD shades is identified based on the data you supply upfront when you place the order; this makes unpacking and installation easier.



STEP 10. Next you will need to install the clips to mount the new MCD shades. Depending on the width of the shade, MCD's installation manual includes guidelines for how many clips are suggested to carry the weight of the shade. They are very easy to install and plenty are included in the kit so don't hesitate to use an extra one on wider shades. These clips end up carrying the entire weight of the shade when the coach is bouncing down the highway.



STEP 11. Mount the new shade into place and snap it in the newly installed clips. It really couldn't be easier.



STEP 12. Reattach the valance to the wall using the original L-brackets. When working in corners such as this one, we found it best to remove both valances as opposed to doing them one at a time. The new MCD Day/Night shades look neat and clean and operate very smoothly with no wrinkles like we had with the older pleated shades.



STEP 13. Here is the same view as above with the night shades completely closed.



STEP 14. Repeat the process until all the valance shades have been removed and replaced with the new MCD units.



STEP 15. Here is another example of working in the corner where we removed both valances first.



STEP 16. The final valance is removed.



STEP 17. Re-hanging the valance with the MCD Day/Night shade in place.



STEP 18. A view out the den window with all the shades open.



STEP 19. Only the day shade is drawn. As you can see, there is a lot of shade offered by this setting.



STEP 20. This photo shows how effective the night shade is when drawn.



STEP 21. This coach came from the factory with the MCD electric front night shade but it was not the same two-stage Day/Night shade as the others we installed. We removed the old windshield shade and replaced it with the newer model that includes electric operation for both shades as well as programmable limit switches that prevent the shades from closing too far when the engine is running. This is a long and heavy shade so this was by far the most difficult one of the project, requiring two people.



STEP 22. Release the old shade from the factory clips above the dash. Since the old shade was a one-stage unit, it only had four clips. Before installing the new, heavier two-stage Day/Night shade we added several more clips to carry the extra weight.



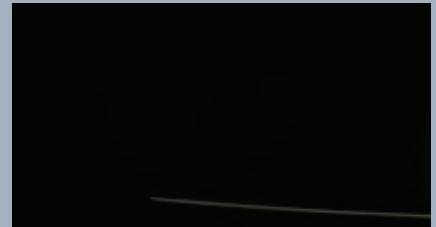
STEP 23. Next we snapped the new shade into place (according to the manual) with the shades turned in the correct direction to ensure the electrical motors can extend and retract the shades properly. Then we wired the power cords from the motors into the existing wiring for the coach. This allows the driver to open or close the shades from the cockpit. The wiring only consists of two power wires and two wires for programming the limit points. There is one wire that connects to a circuit that is only hot when the engine is running and this determines whether the shades have limited or full operation so they won't lower too far while on the road.



STEP 24. Here is a view out the front window with all shades open.



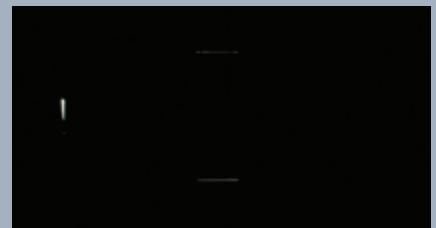
STEP 25. This is the same view with the day shade closed.



STEP 26. The night shade is closed.



STEP 27. A look inside the coach with every shade completely open.



STEP 28. In the same view as above, the night shades are drawn and the only light entering the coach is through the door from the bedroom and a slight space behind the kitchen shade. Basically these shades can create darkness in the middle of the day.



2011 THOR MOTOR COACH HURRICANE 32A

A new year brings 6 floorplans, attractive décor and sought-after features that come standard



Thor Motor Coach's Hurricane continues a very successful presence in the front gas coach segment entering its 17th year of production. It cruises into the new year attracting buyers to the line by offering six distinctive floorplans in five feature-laden lengths. The 32A is one choice in the offerings with a twin-slide plan that offers stay-over accommodations for six and room for entertaining. Depending on floorplan, the model is available with no slide or one to three slides.

With the large cabin slide shared by the Leatherette U-shaped dinette and matching (\$761) sofa bed with pneumatic mattress, dark carpeting defines the living area from the galley. Midtone cherry cabinetry and trim give the Hurricane a high-end look accented by the striking dark stone-patterned linoleum flooring in entry, galley and bath.

The U-shaped dinette creates a useful dining and entertainment setting that will sleep two. A Leatherette Euro recliner with ottoman is also standard equipment and rounds out the cabin seating along with swiveling Leatherette cockpit seats that can be ordered with the full power adjustment option. A 32-inch LCD TV mounts in hutch-style cabinetry next to the dinette for viewing anywhere in the cabin and the coach is prewired for HD/satellite equipment.

The Hurricane's proven curbside linear galley design provides more features that should appeal to buyers. A pull-out extension creates an L-shaped countertop that doesn't rely solely on the use of sink and stove covers for added space nor does it block the entry when extended.

Below the pullout are full-extension drawers that should

easily handle utensil needs even for long-duration adventures. Under-sink storage provides easy access to the twin-sink plumbing with additional overhead storage for table settings and pantry use. A three-burner high-output stove-and-oven combo is standard equipment, augmented by a microwave above or an optional micro/convection unit. A large pot and pan drawer, often offered in place of an optional gas oven, is standard equipment below this oven. Other standard features are the handy and useful pullout, full-height pantry next to a 6.3-cubic-foot, two-door refrigerator with matching wood door inserts.

The divided bath offers a toilet room with vanity curbside and a 6-foot shower stall with skylight and a swirled glass three-section door streetside. Rather than offering a simple, smooth shower enclosure, Thor has opted to incorporate a decorative faux stone pattern into the surround, illuminated by the domed skylight, with three useful shelves. Linen storage is provided in an overhead cabinet with additional storage in the lighted medicine chest. Another standard feature is a china bowl next to the decorative vanity sink set in the matching laminate faux-granite countertop used in the galley and bedroom.

The cherry cabinetry found in the bedroom with oil-rubbed bronze trim and hardware throughout immediately suggests a coach at a significantly higher price point. The even finish tone and tight joints seen in the Hurricane reinforce that thought. The walk-around queen pedestal storage bed is flanked by eyeglass nightstands with reading lamps suspended from the full-width overhead storage cabinets. Small windows in the slide walls provide cross-ventilation



with an optional (\$863) second 13,500-BTU rear roof A/C unit that requires the upgraded 5.5-kW generator (\$1,921). At the foot of the bed is more handsome cabinetry consisting of a wardrobe with a 43-inch-long clothes bar and six drawers below. A small dresser next to the closet offers a convenient window-width countertop, additional lower drawer space and storage above with room for the optional 19-inch LCD TV.

The Hurricane line is built on the Ford F53 leaf spring chassis and powered by the 6.8-L V-10 Triton three-valve engine coupled to the TorqShift five-speed transmission with its auto-shift point adjusting Tow-Haul Mode. Also standard on the 32A are hydraulic leveling jacks and a slideout battery tray. The standard exterior color is white with the graphic package but one partial paint/graphics package and two full paint/graphics packages are available as options.

The Hurricane 32A's long list of desirable standard features, eye-catching décor and cabinetry belie its front gas heritage and price point. Successfully creating a high-end look while maintaining affordability has kept the Hurricane line a popular choice in the gas-A segment. With family-friendly appointments and often-requested

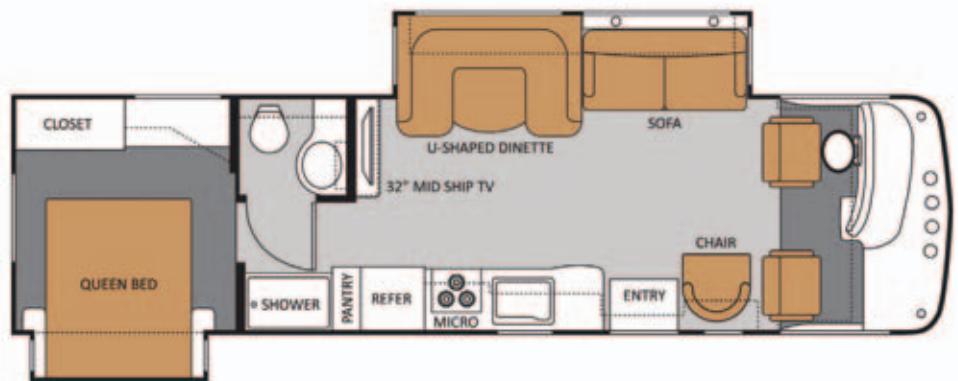
conveniences as standard equipment, this is one Hurricane you shouldn't run from.

Our thanks to Phil King and the staff at McMahons RV in Southern California for providing this motorhome for our review. ♦

SPECIFICATIONS

CHASSIS: FORD F53	INT HEIGHT: 6' 8"
ENGINE: TRITON 6.8-L V-10	WHEELBASE: 208"
FUEL: 80 GAL	FRESHWATER CAP: 50 GAL
GVWR: 18,000 LBS	GRAY-WATER CAP: 44 GAL
LENGTH: 33'	BLACK-WATER CAP: 32 GAL
WIDTH: 8' 3"	LP-GAS CAP: 20 GAL
HEIGHT WITH A/C: 11' 7"	BASE PRICE: \$102,008

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▼ DOWN THE DRAIN



When cleaning and treating our RV's roof I work on 3-foot-square sections at a time. To be able to rinse the wash pads with a freshwater hose while keeping the sides of the motorhome clean from dirty water (which can leave behind streaks), I put together a wash tub with a drain hose over the side to bring the dirty water down to ground level.

I drilled a hole near the bottom of one side of a plastic tub and applied silicone caulk on a 3/4-inch male hose thread (MHT) by 1/2-inch MPT garden hose adapter held together with a 1/2-inch galvanized hex lock nut. After the silicone dried, I attached the garden

drain hose. Just be sure to secure the freshwater hose so it stays on the roof.

JOE MIKLOSI | LIVINGSTON, TEXAS



FOAM ▲ SWEET HOME

My husband and I enjoy drinking our coffee and tea from porcelain cups but I wanted to find a way to keep them from rattling while going down the road in our motorhome. I finally came up with a solution.

I used a 2-inch-thick piece of plastic foam and placed my cups upside down on it, spacing them just far enough apart that they didn't touch. Using a ballpoint pen, I traced around the cup (including the handles) and used a sharp knife to cut entirely through the markings I had made. When I placed the plastic foam piece on my shelf and inserted my cups, there were no more rattles. It also made it very convenient to lift them in and out for use.

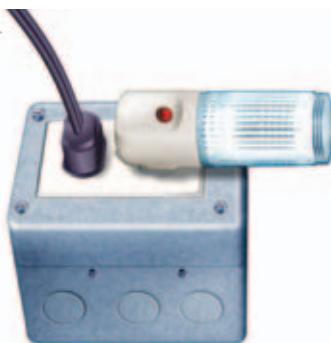
**JUDITH HINTERMAN
FLUSHING, MICH.**

NIGHT-LIGHT BRIGHT ▶

We plug our motorhome into 120-volt AC service about a week before a trip to operate the refrigerator on AC rather than wasting LP-gas. As I was walking past the motorhome after plugging it in, I was surprised to hear the ignition system for gas operation of the refrigerator start up. A quick check revealed no AC power to the motorhome because of a tripped GFCI outlet, which is not readily apparent from a distance.

Now when we plug the motorhome into an outlet, I plug a night light into the same circuit. The illuminated light makes it easy to see that power really is available for the motorhome.

GORDON MOOG | NINE MILE FALLS, WASH.



SLOTS OF SPACE

Need a place to store your sink covers while working? I found an unused space between the lower cabinets in the galley and used a hacksaw blade to cut the perfect size slots so that the covers would store out of the way yet be safe from breakage.

First, I made sure there was nothing under the countertop that would interfere with the slots. Then I measured the size of the slots needed and added 3/64-inch all the way around. I drilled holes in each corner to allow for the saw blade and then carefully cut out the slots, sawing inward to prevent splintering the outside finish. In order to keep the sink covers in place, I attached a 2x2 in the under cabinet. Be sure not to travel with the covers in this storage area!

PAUL AUBRY | GAYLORD, MICH. ♦



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techsavvy

HANDS-ON | HOT LINE | COACH & POWERTRAIN



in a channel and rotating the antenna until the picture is clear. Exact antenna positioning is crucial in order to accommodate your TV's channel scanning function. This is the way your TV loads the channels into the system so they can be recalled by the remote. King Controls' SureLock makes that process much easier and precise.

SureLock is a signal finder that locates local digital TV towers, which eliminates second-guessing on how to position the rooftop antenna and the time spent going through multiple scanning sessions after rotating the antenna.

Installing the 3 × 3½ × ¾-inch device is simple and takes only



minutes once you have access to the coax cable. The signal finder can be connected to the TV output of the wall plate or AV distribution box used in motorhomes with multiple TVs. It's powered by a 9-volt battery, and you might have to use a splitter on some configurations. You'll also need a length of antenna coax; two slide-on coaxial connectors are supplied with the signal finder. The only caveat is getting access to the cabling, which could take some time and

searching, depending on how well the coach's manufacturer concealed the components and cabling.

Once the device is installed, the operation is very intuitive. After turning on the signal finder, the antenna is rotated until a maximum number of lights is illuminated. You then turn the attenuator (adjustment knob) counterclockwise until the fourth LED goes out and adjust the antenna until the light comes on again. From there, the meter is turned off, and the TV scanning process begins.

We found SureLock invaluable in locating digital signals. The process definitely speeds up the tedious task of finding suitable channels. In the areas where we tested the device, the signals for most of the stations were consistently strong. The only exception was one channel that required a slight tweaking of the antenna in order to sharpen the picture.

SureLock retails for \$39.95 and works with any antenna designed to receive digital signals. We like using the signal finder as a portable device, but it can be mounted to a wall or shelf using the provided hook and loop mounts.

King Controls, 952-922-6889, www.kingcontrols.com. ♦

HANDS-ON | by DAVE RIGGS

TV SIGNAL FINDER

King Controls SureLock finds local digital broadcast towers before running the channel scanning process

Watching off-air (broadcast) TV has improved dramatically since the Feds pulled the plug on analog signals. Major local network affiliate stations can be received in many areas with towers in close proximity to RV parks. This gives RVers with digital TVs or converter boxes an opportunity to keep informed of local events and news, and take advantage of crystal-clear HD network reception, all for free.

Finding a strong signal is no longer simply a matter of tuning

PHOTOS: DAVE RIGGS



Three Months Without a Coach

FRUSTRATED BY THE SLOW RESPONSE TIME AND ULTIMATE DENIAL OF COVERAGE FOR A NEW ENGINE BY THE MANUFACTURER OF THEIR MOTORHOME'S CHASSIS, A COUPLE ASKED FOR HOT LINE'S HELP. THEY WROTE:

My husband and I own a 2007 Itasca Class A motorhome. Last May, as we were driving along Interstate 40 near Winslow, Ariz., we heard a sudden loud noise and saw lots of smoke. We immediately removed ourselves from the motorhome and discovered that we had a blown engine. We called Good Sam Emergency Road Service to tow us to a local repair shop, but then we decided to just have the motorhome towed to Kearny Mesa Chevrolet in San Diego, which was closer to our home.

After the motorhome sat there for 12 days without us receiving any information or communication, we had the coach towed to San Diego RV Center. They made the necessary repairs to our motorhome but we had absolutely no assistance from Workhorse, only delay, delay, delay.

The motorhome was 20 days out of warranty at the time, but the mileage was clearly less than 36,000 (first owner showed 8,190 miles, subtract 729 for delayed mileage), and for part of the three years covered by the warranty the motorhome was sitting in a sales lot and not in use. The motorhome has excellent maintenance records. We think this is a defective Workhorse engine, and not the fault of the owner. We

had no help from Workhorse, only delays that lasted three months. At our ages (74 and 76), these three months are a great loss.

If Hot Line can be of assistance in resolving the repair charges of \$13,359, we would greatly appreciate it.

**STERLING AND BETTY THOMAS
ALPINE, CALIF.**

In general, the longer a unit is out of warranty, the less a manufacturer is likely to accept responsibility or extend compensation. Since the Thomases' motorhome warranty only recently expired, we forwarded their complaint to Workhorse for its review and further consideration. Not long after, Hot Line received a letter from the Thomases that included Workhorse's response to their request and a brief note of thanks from the couple.

Workhorse Custom Chassis:

Per your request, Workhorse agrees to provide you with a cash reimbursement settlement offer in the amount of \$13,359 for the engine repairs completed on your motorhome at San Diego RV on July 6, 2010.

At Workhorse, customer satisfaction is of utmost importance and we truly are concerned when one of our customers is dissatisfied with the ownership of their motorhome.

I thank you for allowing us to address your concerns and we look forward to a positive ongoing relationship.

**K. HINES
CUSTOMER RELATIONS MANAGER
WORKHORSE CUSTOM CHASSIS
TROY, MICH.**

Sterling and Betty Thomas:

Today we received a check from Workhorse Custom Chassis. We are very happy about this settlement. Thanks again for Hot Line's assistance.

SKETCHY SHIPPING CHARGE

After receiving a new part to repair his motorhome's air conditioner, a reader realized that he was overcharged for shipping and due a refund for the difference. He wrote:

On June 17, 2010, Camping World ordered a part from Dometic to repair my RV air conditioner. The invoice showed a shipping charge of \$105.90 for overnight delivery from Riverside, Calif., to San Martin, Calif.

Thinking that the charge was excessive for a unit that weighed only a few ounces, I contacted a local UPS office and found that the shipping charge should have been \$20.

I think that Dometic owes me a refund of \$85. I would appreciate Hot Line's help with this refund. Thank you.

**GORDON CRAIG
SANTA CLARA, CALIF.**

We sent Craig's letter to Dometic Corp. so it could confirm whether there was an error with the shipping charges. Several weeks later we received a follow-up letter from Craig stating that the local UPS office might have misinformed him about the shipping charge only being \$20, but nonetheless he was still overcharged and owed a refund. We did not hear back from Dometic, but about a month later, Craig filled us in on the resolution to his shipping problem:

Just wanted to let you know I received a check for \$85 from Dometic. No explanation or reason for the overcharge was given. Thank you for your help. Hot Line is effective.

G.C.

POOR RECEPTION

While trying to get his satellite TV service transferred to a new location, a reader ran into a snafu and contacted us for assistance. He explained:

I have been living in an RV and traveling around the country for many years. I used DirecTV's Distant Network Service

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as my satellite TV provider.

When I purchased a condominium in Southern California, I contacted DirecTV about the move and set up a time to have the dish installed. (DirecTV runs ads stating that it will install and prepare a move to a new residence at no cost to existing customers.)

On the installation day there was a problem with the paperwork so DirecTV couldn't go ahead with the service. After 10 days and many, many phone calls, I told the DirecTV customer service representative to either get me my service or close my account — she closed the account and told me that my account was paid in full.

Some months later I received a letter stating that DirecTV had turned my account over to collections (for a \$160 early cancellation fee). I think I am being treated unfairly and hope you can intervene on my behalf.

ROY FLUHARTY
ROSEBURG, ORE.

We forwarded a copy of Fluharty's complaint to DirecTV. Shortly thereafter, we received a copy of DirecTV's correspondence to Fluharty. It read:

We received notification of your correspondence regarding your DirecTV account and appreciate the opportunity to respond to your concerns.

We applied credit to your DirecTV account and notified our collection agency to remove your name from collection activity and cease actions. Please allow six to eight weeks for the collection agency to update its records and notify the credit bureaus of this change.

DIRECTV
EL SEGUNDO, CALIF. ♦

TO CONTRIBUTE TO HOT LINE, please refer to Contact MotorHome, on page 12.

Be sure to visit
MotorHome's website:
www.motorhomemagazine.com

FOR FREE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON PRODUCTS AND SERVICES OFFERED IN THIS ISSUE, VISIT WWW.MOTORHOMEMAGAZINE.COM/INFO

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

Tandem Tow HD Dolly

I find your annual Dinghy Towing Guide informative, however I do not have a car that can be towed four wheels down, nor do any of them appeal to me. I'd like to buy a VW Golf TDI or a Mini S and put it on a Tandem Tow HD dolly so I can tow a car and my Harley-Davidson motorcycle. Is there any reason I could not tow one of these front-wheel-drive (FWD) vehicles two wheels up?

JIM DUFFY | ELIZABETHTOWN, KY.

The Tandem Tow HD works essentially the same as any tow dolly and the FWD models you mention should be able to be towed with the front wheels on a dolly. Make sure you order the optional brakes, as there will be a lot of mass to stop, and be sure that the combined weight does not exceed the motorhome's gross combination weight rating (GCWR). Also keep total weight of your dolly and vehicles in mind, as some motorhome hitch receivers have a maximum rating of 3,500 pounds.

HOWLING NOISE IN FORD REAR AXLE

I have a Class A motorhome on a Ford F53 chassis. At 20,000 miles the rear end started to develop a howling noise and it has since gotten louder. Can you explain the problem and offer a solution? I have had a bearing kit installed, but the howling remains. Fortunately it quiets down at 55 to 65 MPH.

**WAYNE CASANOVA
OWATONNA, MINN.**

You didn't mention the conditions when it occurs, such as cruise, coast or deceleration. A howl or whine during acceleration, across a certain speed range, is usually caused by worn ring and pinion gears or improper gear setup. A whirring noise only while decelerating is most likely caused by bad pinion bearings

or loose pinion bearing preload. Many times the internal parts are damaged because an oil leak allows the lubricant level to drop too low, so it's important to check fluid levels regularly.

BATTERY FLUID LEVEL

I have a 2008 Fleetwood Bounder 38P. When I add water to the battery, how full should it be? I am from the old school; I was told to fill it to near the top of the cells. I have also been told to only fill it so the water is just above the plates. I have not seen anything in your magazine about the level of the fluid in the battery.

DUANE HUNSTAD | HASTINGS, MINN.

You don't want to fill it all the way to the top or just skim the top of the plates. There should be some kind of indicator molded into the battery about halfway between those points that marks the correct height to top it. Auto parts stores sell battery filling devices that make it easier. Be sure to use distilled water.

**A HOWL OR WHINE
DURING ACCELERATION
IS USUALLY CAUSED BY
WORN RING AND
PINION GEARS OR
IMPROPER GEAR SETUP.
A WHIRRING NOISE ONLY
WHILE DECELERATING IS
MOST LIKELY CAUSED BY
BAD PINION BEARINGS
OR LOOSE PINION
BEARING PRELOAD.**



COOL TIP FOR HOT CATS

I had a 2005 Fleetwood Discovery with a 330 Cat engine in it and had the exact problem that "Lazy Diesel" had (Coach & Powertrain, January). I went to the Cat service center in Las Vegas and they told me the radiator needed cleaning. So I had them clean it, but that did not help. As I crossed the mountains east, the problem continued. Here is what the cause was:

There are two thermostats on the Cat engine. When one of the thermostats works, it allows enough coolant to prevent overheating except under hot conditions. Then you need to have both thermostats functioning properly for the engine to cool while under load or in high outside temperatures. The Cat service center didn't find this. I took out the thermostats and found one had broken into two pieces. These are easily changed and most people can change them themselves.

JEFFREY MCCLURE | DARIEN, CONN.

Thanks for sharing your experiences, Jeffrey. That's an unusual fix that's sure to help someone out.

WORKHORSE COACH BATTERY CHARGING

I have a 2005 Fleetwood Bounder 32W on a Workhorse W22 chassis. A year ago I noticed, after starting, the engine battery was charging (14-plus volts DC), but the house batteries were not. After about 30 minutes, the house batteries also started charging. This recently happened again. Since this problem is intermittent, it will be very difficult to troubleshoot. What part or relay should I replace to correct this problem?

**ROBERT B. MACDONALD
LANCASTER, CALIF.**

According to Workhorse, when the engine is running, the battery isolator does not engage the isolator relay until full charge is reached on the engine-starting battery. Also, just so you know, all Fleetwoods built since 1997 partially charge the engine battery while the coach is plugged into 120-volt AC shorepower.

BACK TO BASICS Tire Care

by BRAD CLAYTON

Among the essential chores of motorhoming, tire care is right at the top of the list. Lack of attention can lead to serious safety consequences and expensive repairs.

The most frequent routine is tire pressure monitoring. Sounds simple, but the challenge is doing it regularly, with the right tools and the essential knowledge.

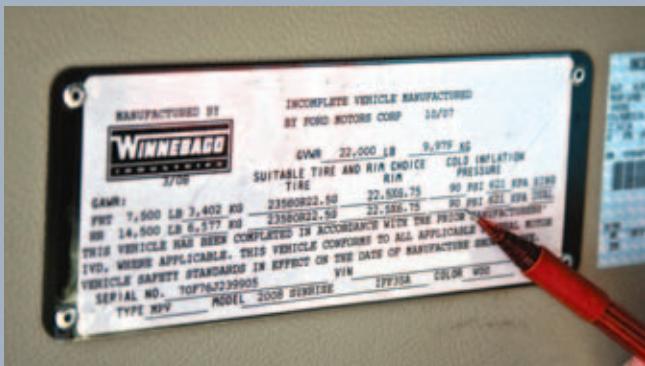


The most important tool is an accurate tire gauge and a way to use it — either the ability to reach through wheel windows to reach all valve stems, or via a set of steel-braid valve stem or some other commercial-duty extenders. Tire failures often are related to convenience; if you can't check tire pressures easily, you are not liable to do it often enough. How often? At least once a week while traveling, if not every day.

Electronic tire pressure monitoring systems provide con-

tinuous visual monitoring and signal the driver when air pressure changes.

Of course, checking pressure is only as beneficial as the validity of pressure numbers you are using. The manufacturer of



your motorhome posts tire pressure recommendations near the driver's seat for the maximum weight of the coach. However, if the motorhome is overloaded, those numbers are not valid.

To find out, weigh the motorhome, loaded for a trip. Weigh each axle and divide by two if you can't weigh wheels individually, which is more accurate. Consult the tire manufacturer's load/inflation table (usually available on the Internet) for correct pressure. You can add 10 PSI to those numbers for a margin of safety.



Also, compare your readings with your motorhome's gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) and gross axle weight rating (GAWR). You may need to reduce or redistribute weight.

Tire loading should never exceed the maximum weight molded on the tire sidewall or the weight stamped on the rim, whichever is less. A minimum inflation pressure number for the maximum load also is molded on the sidewall.



In addition to improper inflation, tire damage also can be caused by improper use of leveling blocks or boards, which are commonly used if a coach is not fitted with leveling jacks. The entire load surface of the tire should be supported by the board or block — not hanging over the block at any point. Both tires in a set of duals should be supported this way.



Tire age may become a safety factor if the motorhome sees limited road use. Michelin states that its motorhome tires should be discarded after 10 years even if they are not worn out;

Goodyear does not state a specific age limit but, like Michelin and other tire manufacturers, specifies regular inspection to evaluate wear and deterioration. If the manufacturer does not provide an age limit, it's generally recommended to replace the tires after seven years. To determine tire age, refer to the DOT number on the tire sidewall; the last four digits identify age; for example, "3507" means the tire was made in the 35th week of 2007.

Paying regular attention to motorhome tires can pay off in safe travel and in best possible tire life.

TIRE PRESSURES

I have a 2003 Coachmen Mirada 33-foot motorhome with 245/70R19.5 load range F tires on it rated for 85 PSI cold. I replaced the front tires with 245/70R19.5 load-range G because I wanted a stronger tire on the front. The dealer told me that the new tires were rated for 125 PSI cold, but to only put 105 PSI in because the rims were only rated for 115 PSI. As I am running no more weight in the motorhome than with the F-rated tires, he said they would be OK at 105 PSI, but is this OK for my RV? Will it cause the tire to overheat as it is less than the 125 PSI rating?

DICK BICKFORD | CRAWFORDVILLE, FLA.

When you talk about the ratings, you are quoting the pressure listed on the sidewall



NEW HIGH-PERFORMANCE QUIETZONE DUCTED AIR SYSTEM

Dometic has introduced its QuietZone Ducted Air System, said to feature the industry's only RV air-conditioning system that utilizes a 15,000-BTU high-performance compressor. It consists of the 15,000-BTU air conditioner, a residential-style return air duct system and Comfort Control Center. The result is the most power-efficient A/C system in existence with the industry's lowest power draw. The QuietZone system feeds cool air directly into the ductwork; cool air enters a port built into the rafters and warm air is pulled through separate ductwork to be vented outside, providing increased air change-over. A single-zone LCD thermostat or a Comfort Control Center II multi-zone thermostat are available. While the QuietZone's three-speed blower and other components provide an unprecedented 26 percent higher airflow, they actually decrease noise and vibration. For more information, call 574-294-2511 or visit www.dometic.com/duotherm.

for use with maximum load. That is not the recommended pressure for all conditions. You can only determine the correct pressure by weighing the axles on a truck scale when your coach is fully loaded for a trip with passengers, fuel and water. Then look up the pressures in a load/inflation table, which can be found on the tire manufacturers' websites and at tire dealers. If individual wheel weights are not available, be sure to add 10 PSI to the suggested inflation values listed in the tables.

INTERMITTENT OIL PRESSURE READINGS

I have a 2000 Dolphin motorhome with a Ford V-10 engine. At times during startup my oil pressure gauge will fluctuate and then drop to zero, and the oil pressure light will come on. This happens whether the motorhome has been recently driven, or has been sitting for a month. I can either let the engine idle and I might suddenly get pressure back, or turn off the engine and restart, possibly several times, and then get pressure. This happens when the oil level is normal. What is going on? I have never lost pressure while driving, only cold start.

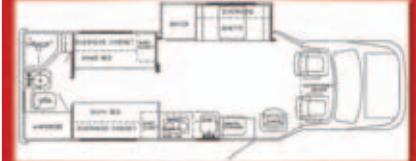
BILL HERBERT | HOMELAND, CALIF.

The problem is likely to be electrical rather than mechanical/hydraulic. Start by temporarily installing a mechanical oil pressure gauge to verify pressure. (Mechanics have these in shops if you don't want to do it yourself.) Use a plumbing "Tee" between the stock electrical sending unit and mechanical gauge to allow both gauges to be connected. Then monitor the mechanical gauge closely for a while to see if the pressure is consistent. You may have a faulty sender, wiring, in-dash regulator that maintains voltage for the gauges, or the gauge itself.

BATTERY LEAKAGE?

I have a 2005 Fleetwood Bounder 35E motorhome. One month ago I had the coach batteries replaced while I was on the road. The two new batteries are Interstate 6-volt, deep-cycle. Everything was working fine until last week when I noticed two wet spots under the coach. I removed the cover on the step to look at the batteries and both batteries were leaking from the caps. I checked the water in the batteries and they are fine. The batteries leak whether the mo-

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torhome is plugged in at home or not. Any help would be appreciated.

THOMAS PORTE | LA CAÑADA, CALIF.

If the batteries are actually leaking they must be steadily losing electrolyte. Overflowing is a sign that they were either overfilled or are overflowing because of excessive charging. Your town is hilly, so if the coach is parked on a slope this may be a factor. Test the alternator charging system and converter output voltages. Battery electrolyte is toxic and contains corrosive sulfuric acid, so you need to find the cause quickly. Be sure to neutralize the leaked battery acid with baking soda and water and clean and repair the area around the batteries.

FUEL GAUGE FOLLIES FOLLOW-UP

After reading "Fuel Gauge Follies" (Coach & Powertrain, October 2010) about a 2007 Country Coach, I think I may be able to help since I had problems with most of my gauges on my 2008 Allure Country Coach with the 425 Cummins ISL engine. After a couple of months owning my coach, I was having similar problems with my fuel, air and alternator gauges. Unable to find a bad ground, I contacted Country Coach and was told that Medallion Instrumentation System had a Warranty Bulletin (#2008-8653-01) on the gauges. After contacting the warranty administrator for Medallion (616-850-8019) I was told to send in the speedometer gauge (which is the brain for all of the gauges) for recalibration. Removal and reinstallation of the speedometer was easy and took less than 30 minutes. Since my gauge was reprogrammed, I have not had further problems with any of my gauges. I hope this is helpful for Greg Dum's problems.

MARIO GAGNON | HAYDEN LAKE, IDAHO

Thanks for the tip, Mario. With many companies failing during the recession, it's often difficult for owners of affected brands to get things repaired under warranty.

SLIDEOUT SOLENOID FAILURES

I have a 2006 Tiffin Phaeton motorhome. It has four slideouts that are controlled by a White-Rogers 12-volt DC four-post solenoid relay. I had no problems with this relay until about three years ago, but now a new

relay fails about every six months (probably less than 20 to 30 uses of the slides) and until a new one is installed I must jump the posts on the relay to move the slides. It has been my experience that relays rarely fail, so I am baffled by the continual failure of this relay. Tiffin advised me to check the wiring from the batteries to the relay for any loose connections and to check the wiring from the relay to the slide breakers. I have done this and find all of the connections to be clean and tight. I'm very careful about making sure that all of the battery terminals are always clean, free from corrosion and tight. I would appreciate any comments you may have to help solve this problem.

**OMAR L. BROWN
THE WOODLANDS, TEXAS**

You are correct that solenoid relays don't usually fail this often. You should take a failed one apart to see if the contacts are burned from excess current, or if they are corroded from moisture. It's likely that a slide motor is drawing extra current be-

DIESEL FUEL DOCTOR

We receive a lot of requests to feature products that protect and treat fuel during use and storage. Diesel Fuel Doctor's AFC-705 works for gasoline and diesel as well as ethanol and bio-fuels. The company reports that it is not only a fuel stabilizer, but also a detergent, surfactant, dispersant, lubricity enhancer and corrosion inhibitor as well. As a result, it's formulated to clean fuel systems, filters and tanks, remove carbon deposits, dissolve tank sludge, improve combustion, lower emissions and, of course, stabilize fuel. Besides AFC-705, Diesel Fuel Doctor offers filters, fuel conditioning and polishing systems that are used by a host of engine manufacturers in motorhomes and other applications. The products are certified "Green Clean" as well.

**Diesel Fuel Doctor, 517-605-5788,
www.dieselfueldoctor.com.**



cause the slide mechanism is binding. Clean, inspect and lube the slideout mechanisms to reduce the load on the motor. If that doesn't help, you may have to switch to a heavier relay.

HEADLIGHT CONFUSION

In the December 2010 issue a reader described a concern with headlights ("Foggy Flair Headlights"), and you provided an excellent suggestion about upgrading them, including going to HID headlights. HID headlights are sometimes referred to as "Xenons," which leads to some confusion, and some sellers on sites such as eBay exploit that confusion. It isn't unusual to see entries for "xenon bulbs" with the implication that they are HID headlights. These are not actually HID headlights, but merely conventional incandescent halogen bulbs using xenon gas. All halogen bulbs have an inert gas in them. That gas can be (and often is) xenon, but that has no meaningful effect on bulb brightness or quality. Halogens that are "like" HID actually have advanced filaments to create a whiter and brighter light. The inert gas is not the distinguishing feature.

A proper HID conversion kit is not merely a bulb replacement. It is a multipart set, including bulbs with the arc components in them, a ballast for managing the voltage levels, plus the attendant wiring harnesses. Some modifications to the headlight reflector housing may be required to increase airflow around the bulb itself, since HID tends to run hotter. The HID "bulb" is actually an arc light, and while it draws significantly less power than a halogen bulb, it does put out a bit more heat.

When converting to HID, you also have to be aware of any special regulations and limitations. Some jurisdictions require that HID lights be self-leveling, and the design of the bulb and reflector may have to take into account the beam pattern and how the light is aimed. A qualified installer should know about these issues.

GEOFF KRATZ | CALGARY, ALBERTA

Thanks for your excellent letter, Geoff. It will help inform readers about this subject.

SPEEDOMETER MALFUNCTION

I have a 1994 GulfStream 34-foot motorhome on a Spartan chassis with a 230-HP Cummins diesel and a six-speed Allison

transmission. A few months ago the speedometer quit for a time, operated for a while and then quit again, apparently for good. The odometer continues to work properly, indicating how many miles I've traveled, and the tach does fine also. A local diesel garage installed a sensor to no avail. I don't feel comfortable driving not knowing the road speed. Do you have any ideas about what the problem is and how to remedy it?
DANNY TRIBELL | HARROGATE, TENN.

Since the odometer still reads, it means the speedometer head is getting the speed signal, so the problem is within the gauge. Replacing the vehicle speed sensor was a misdiagnosis and a waste of money. Send it for repair to an auto/truck instrument specialist. You can do a Yellow Pages or Web search for "speedometer repair" to find one.

WATER HEATER CONTROL TIP

I've heard that an adjustable temperature control can be purchased for a gas Atwood water heater. I would like to know where one could be purchased.

RICHARD MASON | SEATTLE

They are Atwood part number 93105. You can find them at many RV parts stores, including Camping World, 888-626-7576; www.campingworld.com.

FUEL TANK FILLING PROBLEM

I have a 1997 Fleetwood Flair 25-foot motorhome on a GM P-chassis and 7.4-L engine with a 60-gallon fuel tank. My fuel tank takes forever to fill. I called Fleetwood Customer Service to find out if there is any apparatus in the fuel filler spout (such as a backflow preventer or screen). According to the company, the spout has nothing inside. Do you have any ideas?

G.C. KENNEDY | VIA E-MAIL

There shouldn't be anything in that hose; you can push a wire through to check for yourself. Usually slow filling problems are caused by a kinked or restricted vent hose or a low spot in either hose that traps liquid gasoline and kicks off the pump safety nozzle. ♦

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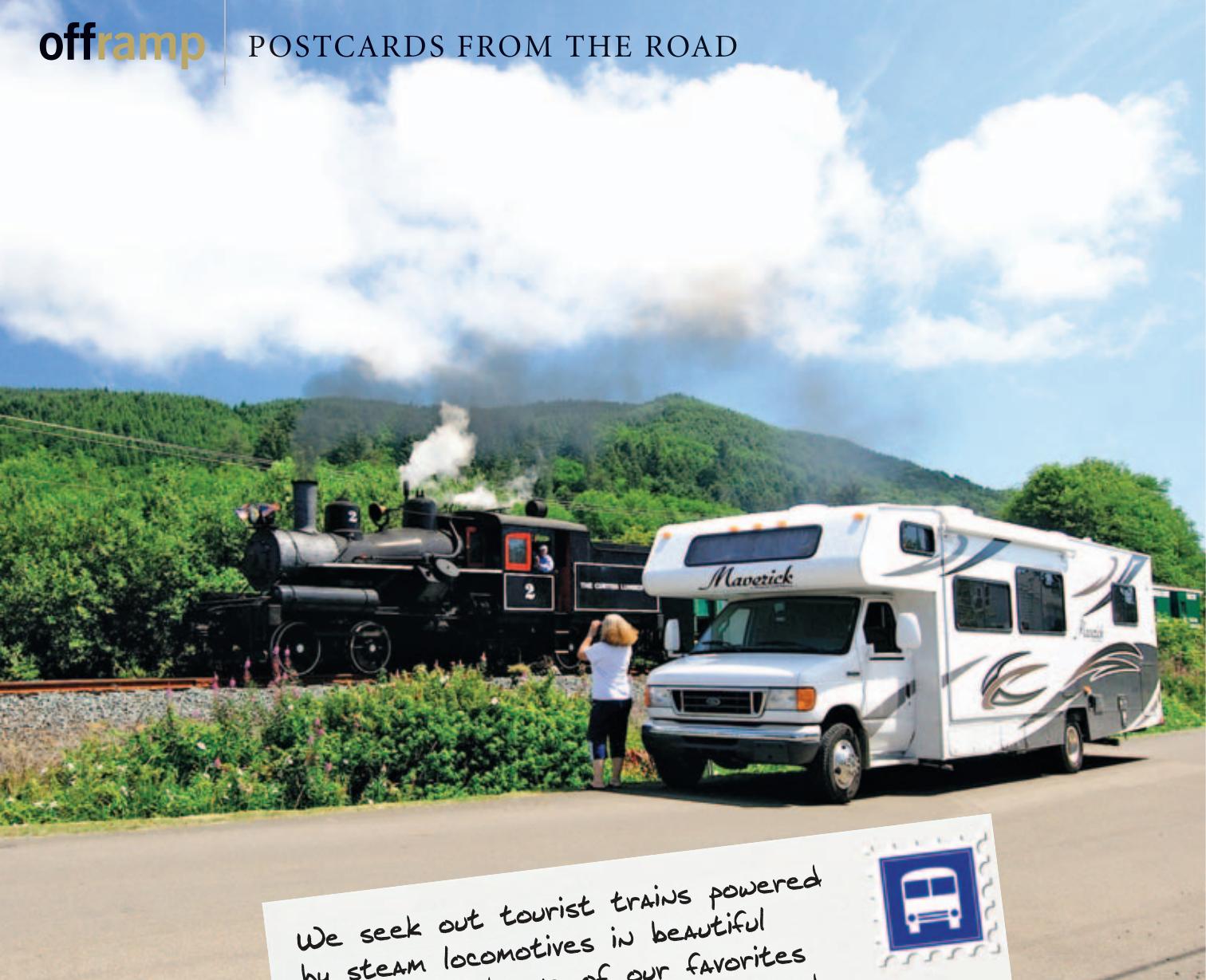
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Fig. 1 Saturn



Fig. 3 Asteroid Gaspra



Fig. 5 Mercury

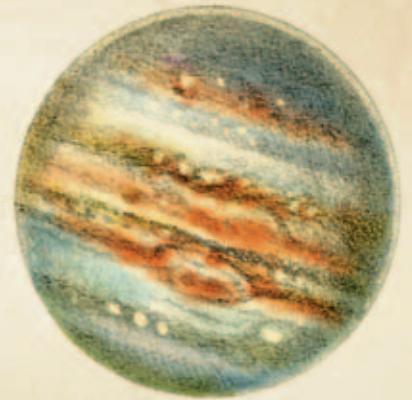


Fig. 7 Jupiter

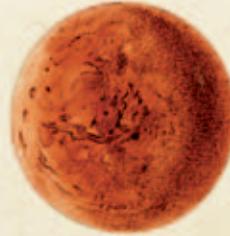


Fig. 6 Mars



Fig. 2 Neptune

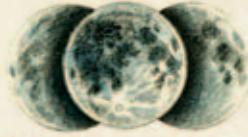


Fig. 4 Phases of the Moon

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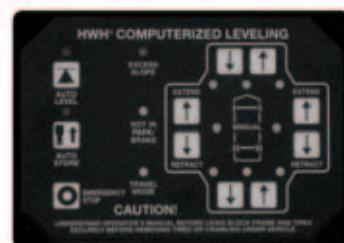
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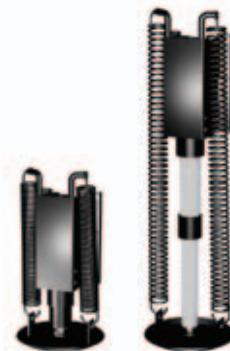
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