

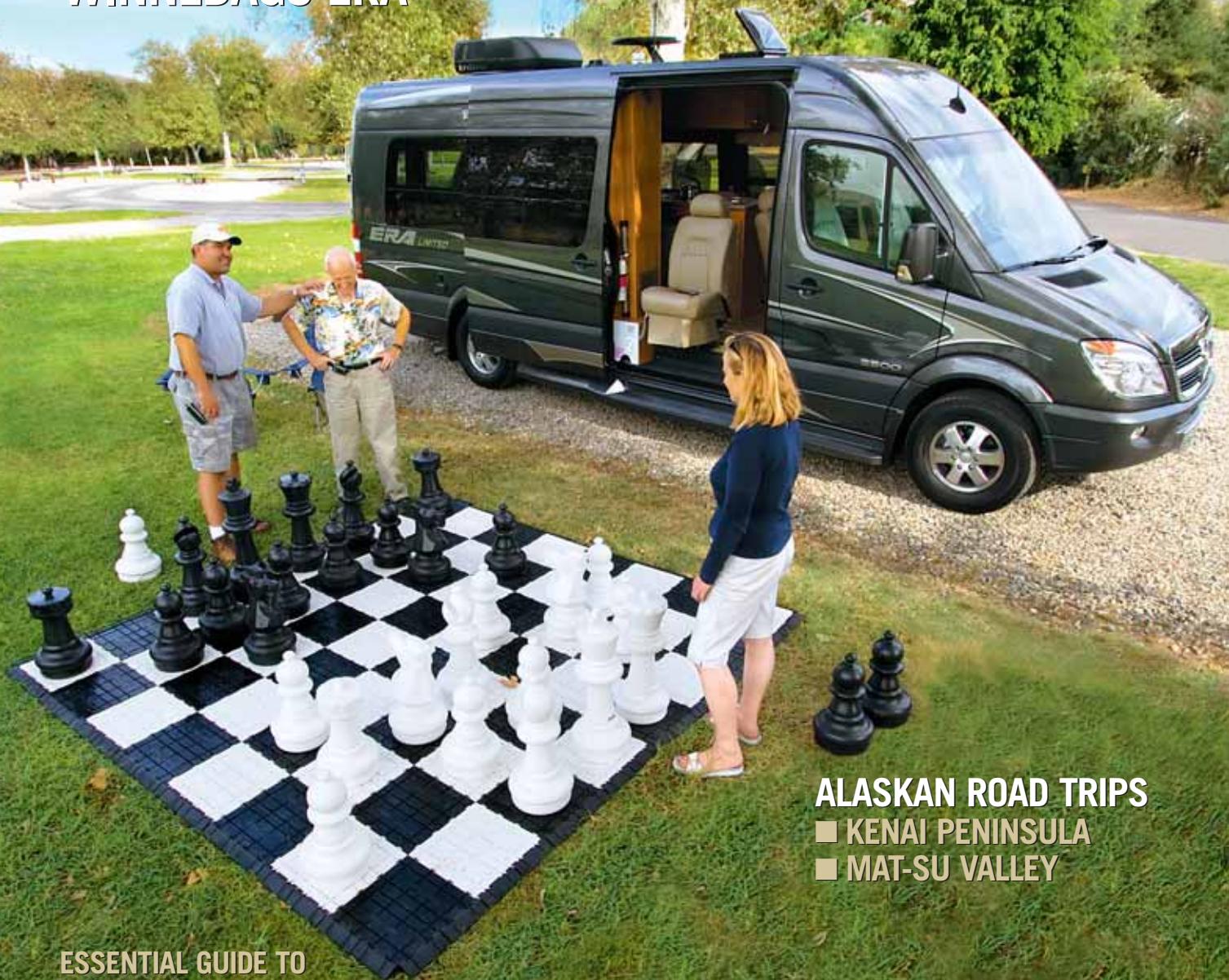
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MOTORHOME

MARCH 2009

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- NEW COACHES
- HYBRID PLATFORM
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2007 Born Free 24' Rear Bath (C/N 7458) Cabover bed, Generator, Roof air, Sofa/Bed & Dinette, TV/DVD, Microwave/Convection oven, 3 burner stove, Partial body paint (gray), Awning; 8,500 miles	\$96,930	\$78,500
2008 Born Free 22' Rear Door (C/N 7766) Cabover bed, Generator, Roof air, Sofa/Bed, 2 chairs & pull-up table, TV/DVD, Microwave/Convection oven, 3 burner stove; 129 miles	\$88,220	\$77,995
2008 Born Free 22' Built for Two (C/N 7744) Demo Front entertainment center, Generator, Roof air, Twin inclining beds, Tripod table, TV/DVD, Microwave/Convection oven, 3 burner stove; 1,970 miles	\$85,070	\$75,000
2008 Born Free 24' Rear Bath (C/N 7790) Cabover bed, Generator, Roof air, Sofa/Bed, 2 chairs & pull-up table, TV/DVD, Microwave/Convection oven, 3 burner stove, Awning; 170 miles	\$105,310	\$92,500
2008 Born Free 26' Rear Bath (C/N 7817) Cabover bed, Generator, Roof air, Sofa/Bed, 2 chairs & pull-up table, TV/DVD, Microwave/Convection oven, 3 burner stove, Awning, Color backup camera; 69 miles	\$108,940	\$92,500
2008 Born Free 32' Rear Twin (C/N 7755) Demo Chevrolet Kodiak Chassis, HWH leveling system, Front entertainment center with TV/DVD, Generator, Roof air w/remote climate control, Sofa/Bed, 2 chairs & pull-up table, 2 rear inclining beds w/night stand, Power awning, Color backup camera, Central Vacuum; 3,212 miles	\$166,425	\$135,500
2008 Born Free 32' Rear Queen (C/N 7701) Demo Chevrolet Kodiak Chassis, Front entertainment center with TV/DVD, Generator, Roof air w/remote climate control, Sofa/Bed, 2 chairs & pull-up table, Rear Queen bed, Bedroom TV/DVD, Power awning, King Dome satellite, Bose Wave Radio; 4,755 miles	\$162,719	\$131,550

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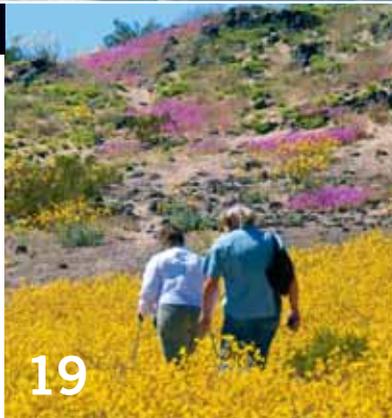
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48 | Winnebago ERA 170XL

This no-nonsense Class B packs a nice punch in a pleasing mix of economy, efficiency and comfort

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On The Cover: High-stakes chess is only one of the many activities found at beautiful Canyon RV Park in Anaheim, California, where the Winnebago ERA is in its element (see test on page 48). Photo by Fred Pausch.

onramp by BOB LIVINGSTON

LOWER CARBON FOOTPRINT

It's pretty clear that green initiatives are not just a passing fad. People from around the world are serious about preserving the earth and finding ways to protect and conserve our natural and man-made resources. Leaving a smaller carbon footprint is a large part of "going green," so all eyes were on the 46th annual RVIA National RV Trade Show, held in Louisville, Kentucky, last December. Anticipation was high that new energy-efficient RVs would be displayed.

We were not disappointed.

The highlights included the unveiling of the Winnebago Via/Itasca Rey, the first Class A built on a European-built Sprinter chassis. No, this is not a coach-factory modified Sprinter cab and chassis; it's a dedicated Class A rail powered by a reliable 3.0-L Mercedes-Benz diesel. Inside, the coach is surprisingly livable, thanks in part to our friends at Tecnoform, the Italian design firm that produces modern, European-style interior components for the RV and boating industries. Look for this rig to cruise the highways sipping diesel fuel at around 15 MPG.

Down the hall, another RV first was being touted. Freightliner introduced the ecoFRED chassis, a Class A rail sporting a 27,000-pound gross vehicle weight rating and a hybrid diesel power system. The chassis combines a front-mounted diesel engine (just like the standard FRED chassis) with a stout electric motor powered by lithium-ion batteries.

I got the chance to test drive a 36-foot coach built on the ecoFRED chassis while at the show. The 300-HP Cummins ISB 6.7-L electronic diesel (620 LB-FT of torque) and electric motor do a good job propelling the coach, although it's not a "rocketship" by any means. Off the line, the electric motor gives the rig a boost to get it going; the diesel engine comes in when the load dictates additional power is needed.

The ecoFRED chassis is a work in progress, with a number of programming changes scheduled by the time it goes into production this summer. For example, the



one I drove was not equipped with an idle-off feature; production chassis will have this capability, which will help improve fuel economy. At this point, Freightliner engineers refrained from speculating on mileage, but we already know the standard FRED chassis is good for 11-plus MPG, so projecting 13-14 MPG is not unrealistic.

The efficient Eaton six-speed automated-manual transmission used on the ecoFRED gets a lot of the fuel economy credit. This transmission is new to the RV industry, and it really makes the motorhome interesting and fun to drive. It shifts just like a manual transmission, going through the motions as if the driver was depressing a clutch and moving the shifter, but without human involvement. It even feels and sounds like you're shifting manually. In this case, though, it's impossible to miss a shift.

The batteries are charged via the diesel engine and through regenerative braking, whereby the electric motor reverses direction while braking. This not only helps charge the batteries, but assists in stopping the motorhome. The regenerative braking is so effective, it felt like I needed to accelerate to get to my stopping point. Indeed, this will increase service brake life dramatically.

While the above examples are just two of the energy-efficient entries at the trade show, the floor was filled with new, smaller motorhomes throughout the class range (see "Industry Innovations," page 34).

Ironically, new fuel-efficient rigs were being displayed while the price of fuel was dropping to prices we haven't seen in years. Fortunately, the price of fuel is predicted (at press time) to stay down for a while, but it's certainly refreshing to know that we now have options, even though improving our carbon footprint may not be cost-effective. ♦

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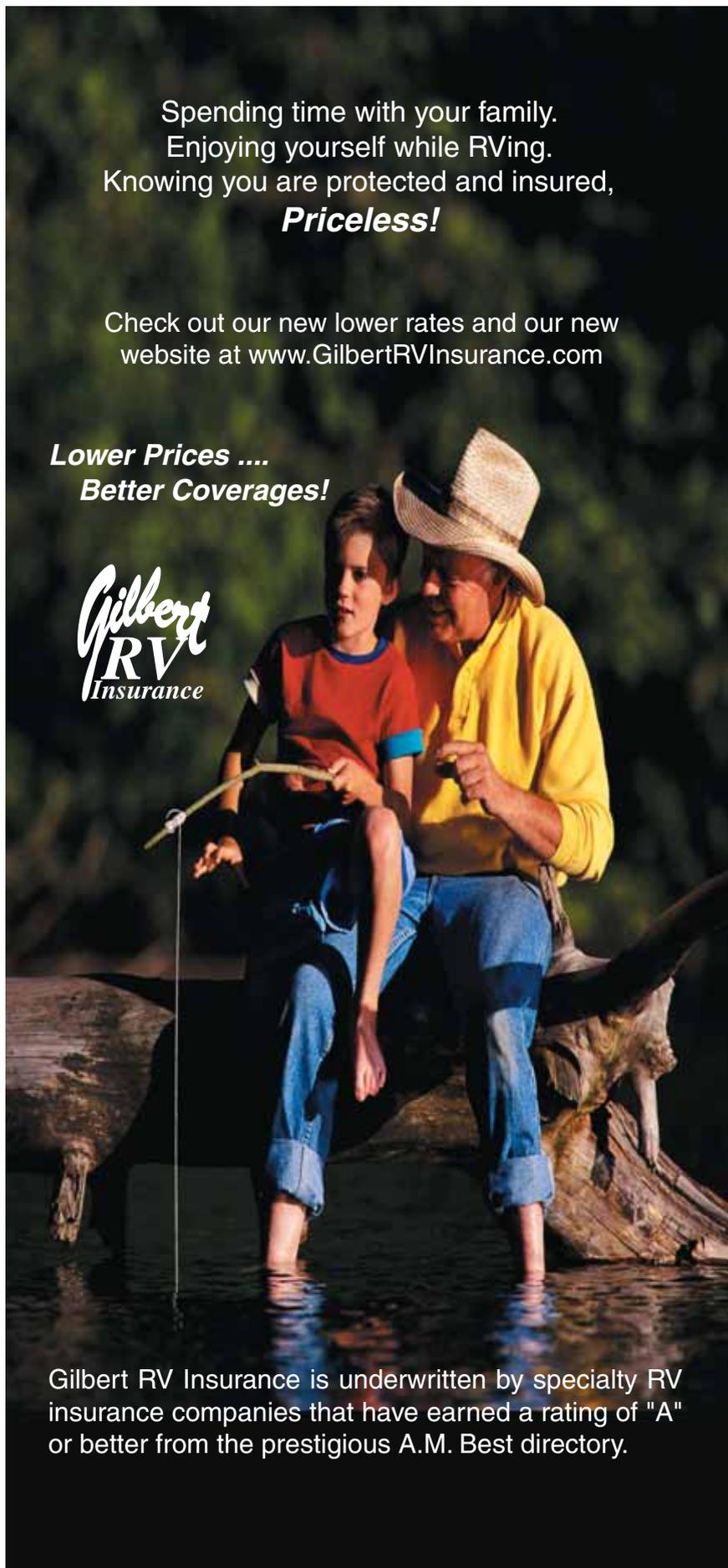
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p.o.box

from OUR READERS



WHAT TYPE OF AMENITIES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE MORE OF AT CAMPGROUNDS?

That's the question we asked in our December 2008 issue, and here are some of the replies we received.

REMEMBER TO RECYCLE

In response to your question in the December 2008 magazine, I'd like more campgrounds to have recycling bins, especially for paper, aluminum cans and plastic bottles. The money gained from recycling could go toward upkeep of the facility.

SYLVIA RUBLE | SIBOLO, TEXAS

PET PERKS

I would like to see improved pet-walk areas and larger fenced exercise areas for pets. Overall, more pet-friendly RV parks would be a plus. Also, more hiking and walking trails like those I see in many state parks.

BRUCE GABBY | GREER, ARIZONA

GETTING WIRED

I would very much like to see WiFi connections that work. Many campgrounds advertise WiFi; however, there are only a few where I can actually use the connection inside my RV. I'd be willing to pay a small nightly fee for a connection inside my rig.

ED JACKLITCH | SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

MAKING TIME FOR THE CLASSICS

I was glad to see the article on the restored Prevost ("Busman's Holiday," December 2008). I've been reading *MotorHome* and *Trailer Life* for more than 25 years, and I've always wished that they would include articles or a monthly section on restoring classics. I have a 20-year-old Aero Cruiser and there is an active club for the 200 or so that are still on the road. Restoring RVs is becoming a big hobby.

DALE MAGGIO | SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA

THE CCC CHANGED LIVES

Thank you for the article "Celebrating the CCC" in your December 2008 issue. My dad graduated from high school one day and enlisted in the CCC the next. Because there were an excess of workers in Iowa, he was sent to work in Wyoming. He worked on a project building Bull Lake Dam on the Wind River Indian Reservation.

The CCC has received so little recognition for all it did for this country. Thank you for giving this worthwhile organization recognition, which has been a long time in coming in most cases.

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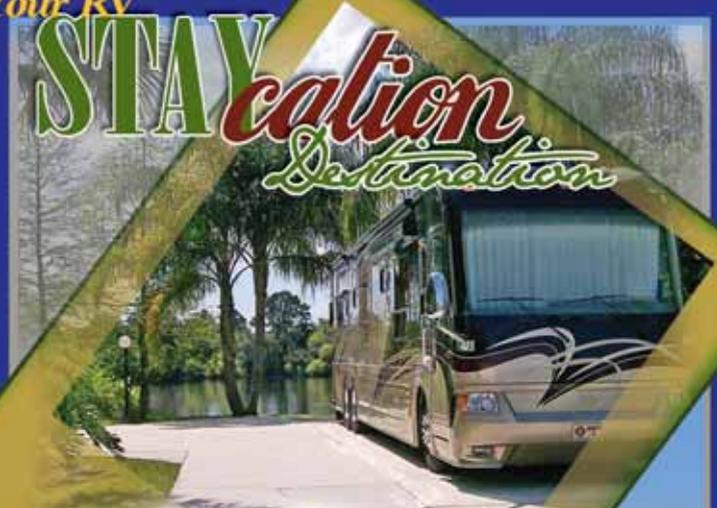
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P. O. BOX

HONORING THE CCC

Your December 2008 article about the CCC was interesting to me because my father was part of this program during 1934/1935. When I was a child, he told me about the work he did in Oregon, which included building roads in logging camps. Up until I read this article, I didn't realize how big and important this program was in building the state and national park systems.

My father has since passed away. Where can I find out more facts about what projects my father might have worked on?

MARK LUDLOW
LITTLE RIVER, SOUTH CAROLINA

The Web site www.ccclegacy.org should be able to help guide you in your efforts, Mark.

CLARIFYING HIGH DEFINITION

I'd like to point out an error in the December 2008 article "(Motor)Home Movies." It states that all of the video cameras reviewed are capable of high-definition recording. This is not true of the Sony DCR-SR220, which is not capable of high-definition recording. All Sony models capable of high-definition recording are prefixed with the letters HD, as in the case of the HDR-SR10, which most closely compares with the competitors' models in the article and sells for \$899.

MICHAEL MCALLISTER
CAMP VERDE, ARIZONA

BONDING OVER BERRIES

While camping one day, my partner and I met a family when we were picking berries. When I started to clean the berries, they asked if we wanted to see how they winnow them. I thought that was funny because of the Winnebagos there. We baked six berry pies on their wood stove, and that's what we all had for dinner. None of us had ever seen each other before or since, but we sure had fun!

RUTH HILL
CHETWYND, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Share your fun or unusual camping stories with us. Write to us at letters@motorhomemagazine.com. ♦

Correction: The December 2008 article "Freedom II Serenity" erroneously stated that the bath is located curbside; in fact, it is located on the streetside of the rig.

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escapes

by DENISE SANTOYO

EVENTS | NOTEWORTHY | NEWS BRIEFS | CROSSROADS

IRRESISTIBLE ICE

Alaska's gurgling Glacier Bay

Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve is an eclectic marine wilderness that includes tidewater glaciers, ocean coastlines, fjords, and freshwater lakes and rivers. It collects numerous glaciers that descend into the bay from the surrounding high mountains. In fact, the park includes some 12 tidewater glaciers that calve into the bay; as water undermines some of the ice fronts, icebergs break loose and crash into the water.

As part of one of the world's largest in-

ternationally protected biosphere reserves, Glacier Bay is a World Heritage Site. Located near the southeast Alaska gateway communities of Juneau, Haines and Skagway, it can only be reached by boat or plane. However, the nearby Skagway Mountain View RV Park has 91 sites with water and electricity, laundry facilities, RV wash facilities, dump station and WiFi, and provides local tour reservations.

For more information, call (907) 697-2230, or go to www.nps.gov/glba. — Dale Myers

escapes

EVENTS

by KAITLYN VOYCE



MARCH 14-15

Visit Connecticut's only maple festival at the **Hebron Maple Festival**. Take a tour of the four maple sugar houses, learn how maple syrup is made and used, and shop for some maple products to take home; www.hebronmaplefest.com.

MARCH 6-8 | Find unique accessories for your home and motorhome alike at **Antique Spectacular** in Rock Island, Illinois, featuring pieces from around the world. The show will be overflowing with a large selection of fine antiques and collectables for sale; (712) 326-9964, www.antiquespectacular.com.

MARCH 7 | Explore life in the 18th and 19th centuries with **Colonies of the Gulf Coast** at Historic Fort Gaines in Dauphin Island, Alabama. There will be basket weaving and open-hearth cooking demonstrations, as well as a resident blacksmith. Camping is available; (251) 861-6992, www.dauphinisland.org.

MARCH 7-8 | Head to Moab, Utah, for the **Quilting in the Red Rocks Quilt Show**. More than 120 antique, traditional, art, wearable art and home décor quilts will be on display at this free event. A certified appraiser will also be on hand; www.discovermoab.com.

MARCH 8 | You don't have to be a professional skier to participate in the **Tour of Anchorage** in Anchorage, Alaska. With 25K, 40K and 50K freestyle distances, these point-to-point races are for amateur cross-country skiers of all abilities; (907) 276-7609, www.anchorage.net/1264.cfm.

MARCH 12-15 | Kick off the new season at the **Springfest Flower & Garden Show** in Augusta, New Jersey. The show features a 5,000 square-foot conservatory, demonstrations, plant sales, boutique, café and more; (973) 948-9448, www.springfestgardenshow.com.

MARCH 14 | Celebrate St. Patrick's Day at **Féile Franklin**, a Celtic street festival. Explore historic downtown Franklin, Tennessee, while enjoying Irish music, dance, food, beer tasting and more; (615) 591-8500, www.historicfranklin.com.

MARCH 21 | Join **Operation Clean Sweep** at Jenny Wiley State Resort in Prestonsburg, Kentucky, and give back to the state park community. Gather with fellow volunteers in the morning to help keep the park clean, then enjoy a cookout in the afternoon. Camping is available on-site; (800) 325-0142, www.parks.ky.gov.

MARCH 27-29 | Enjoy a **Women's Getaway Weekend** at North Bend State Park in Cairo, West Virginia. There will be haircuts, facials, kitchen tips, crafts and much more with camping opportunities available; (304) 643-2931, www.northbendsp.com.

RV SHOWS

March 5-8

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

March 5-8

Colorado RV, Sports, Boat & Travel Show
Denver, Colo.; (303) 892-6800

March 5-8

Jacksonville RV SuperShow
Jacksonville, Fla.; (813) 741-0488

March 5-8

Manitoba RV Show & Sale
Winnipeg, Manitoba
(204) 452-1227

March 5-8

Montreal RV Show
Montreal, Quebec
(514) 338-1471

March 5-8

Northern Washington RV Show
Monroe, Wash.; (253) 756-2121

March 6-8

Atlantic City RV & Camping Show
Atlantic City, N.J.; (732) 449-4004

March 6-8

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

March 6-8

Central Illinois Recreational Show
Peoria, Ill.; (309) 692-6465

March 6-8

Columbus RV Supershow
Columbus, Ohio; (941) 827-7144

March 6-8

Rhode Island RV & Camping Show
Providence, R.I.; (732) 449-4004

March 12-15

Central Oklahoma RV Dealer Association's RV SuperShow
Oklahoma City, Okla.; (405) 376-3897

March 12-15

Iowa RV & Travel Show
Des Moines, Iowa; (763) 383-4400

March 13-15

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

March 13-15

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

March 13-15

Lexington RV Supershow
Lexington, Ky.; (941) 827-7144

March 13-15

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

March 20-22

Las Vegas Sportsmen's Boat, RV & Travel Show
Las Vegas, Nev.; (805) 290-2203

March 26-29

Annual Spring RV Show
Sacramento, Calif.; (800) 782-7469

March 26-29

Quebec City RV Show
Quebec City, Quebec; (514) 338-1471

March 27-29

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

March 27-29

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

March 27-29

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ROADMASTER ENTERS THE EUROPEAN MARKETPLACE



Towing system manufacturer

Roadmaster Inc. has ventured into the European market, setting up a distribution system in Amsterdam for launching retail sales in its latest expansion venture.

"Europeans have never towed cars behind their motorhomes," said Jerry Edwards, founder and president of the Portland, Oregon, company. "And they have about half a million motorhomes over there."

After Roadmaster received approval in 2008 for its tow bar to be used by European "caravaneers" from the Dutch National Police Agency in The Netherlands, which acts as a safety certification authority, Roadmaster tow bars were automatically certified for use in other European Union countries with the exception of Germany, where approval is pending, Edwards explained. Approval was initially received for use in Holland before expanding to cover other areas.

Roadmaster products were introduced in Europe during the 2008 Caravan Salon RV show in Düsseldorf, Germany, and drew a great deal of consumer attention, Edwards said.

"On average there were no less than 20 people in our booth at any time," Eric Jason, national sales manager, noted. "Our product was judged to be one of the top three new products shown at Düsseldorf."

Roadmaster tow bars will be manufactured in Oregon and distributed from a warehouse in Amsterdam. "The Netherlands is a good location to get to the larger part of Europe when it comes aboard," Edwards added.

New brackets were designed for the front ends of European cars so they can be towed. When European motorhomers tow, they use a ball system to attach the tow bar to the towing vehicle as opposed to the receiver system used in the U.S.

"What really brought it about in Europe was the lack of standards," Jason said. "People were towing cars with handmade, antiquated towing systems. Whatever they could weld together, they used."

Jason indicated the company's challenge is to educate European motorhome owners about towing cars behind their coaches. "This is a totally new concept to them in general," Jason said. "They've not been exposed to the towing culture."

One of the difficulties in opening the European market to a U.S.-built product is the currency conversion. Roadmaster intends to sell a package that includes the tow bar, necessary wiring, safety cables and towed-vehicle brakes for 5,000 euros — which in early November 2008 was equivalent to \$5,400 dollars. "It's tough to tell right now what the European price will be because of the fluctuation of the euro, which has dropped quite a bit," Edwards concluded.

How well will Europeans embrace the new product? According to Edwards, Roadmaster "expects to do some numbers, but we have no idea how many."

In the U.S., Roadmaster towing systems are distributed wholesale through major distributors, including Coast to Coast Systems, Stag-Parkway, Arrow and NTP. Camping World is Roadmaster's largest retailer. — *Bob Ashley*

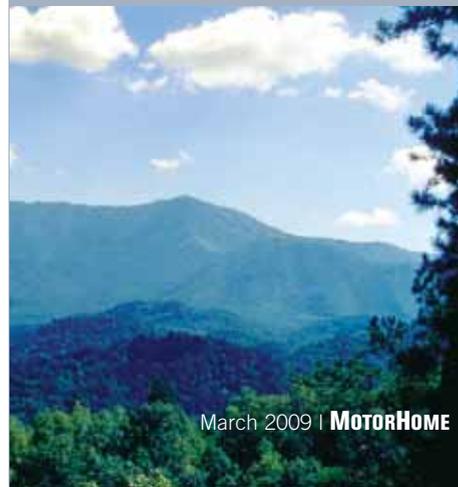
News Briefs

RVDA, the National RV Dealers Association, honored Itasca, Jayco, Tiffin and Winnebago last December with its Quality Circle Award. The award is given to manufacturers that score 80 percent or higher in overall dealer satisfaction, which is rated in eight core areas: sales support, sales territory, vehicle design, vehicle quality, parts support, competitive price/value, dealership warranty support and overall dealer communications. This is the 13th consecutive year that Winnebago has received the award.

Online classified Web site RVT.com has partnered with GetRV.com to add RV rentals to its portfolio. RVT customers who are not yet ready to purchase a motorhome will have the opportunity to sample the RV experience by renting through GetRV.com, which will search their local area for available units.

Last November, Class C manufacturer **Bigfoot Industries** closed its doors. The company, which was based in Armstrong, British Columbia, was one of Canada's largest RV manufacturers and had been in business for 31 years.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year with a series of events and activities leading up to a big anniversary weekend celebration June 13-15. This spring, there will be an Employee and Alumni Reunion, bringing together past and present **National Park Service** employees, park partners, CCC workers, volunteers and others. Go to www.greatsmokies75th.org for more information about the anniversary events.



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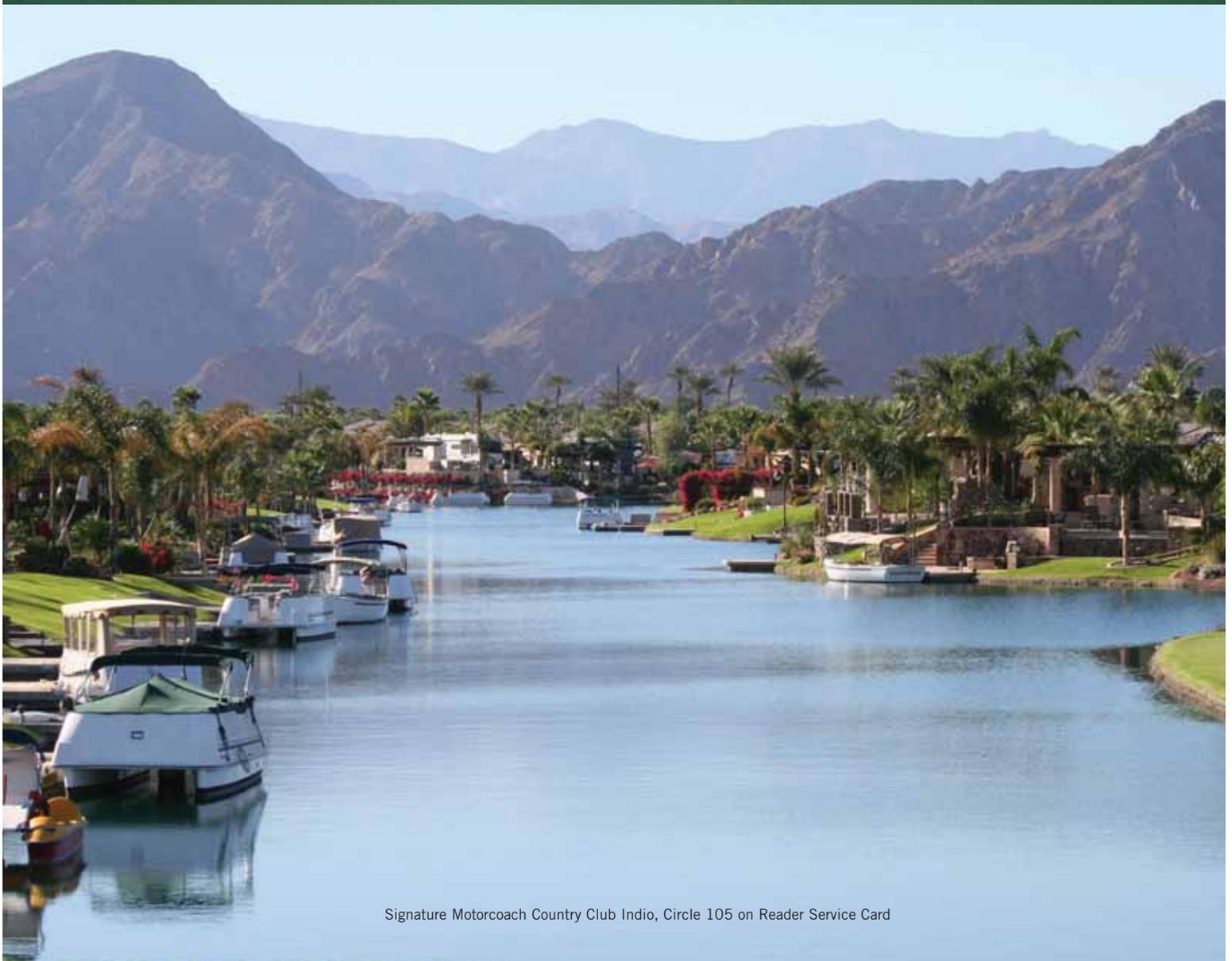


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PHOTO: ARKANSAS TOURISM

GO WITH THE FLOW

The Buffalo National River, designated in 1972 as the country's first national river, flows wild and free for 135 miles, cutting a winding path through limestone bluffs in the Arkansas Ozarks. One of the Lower 48's few remaining undammed rivers, the Buffalo offers an unspoiled setting for floating, fishing and family fun.

The stretch of river from Tyler Bend to Gilbert provides a safe and scenic float for all ages. In the early spring, the Upper Buffalo, swollen by spring rain, attracts seasoned paddlers for a fast and furious ride. The length of a float trip can range from hours to days, depending on the time of year and the water flow. Most visitors choose distances of eight miles or less. Outfitters are available to rent canoes and shuttle guests to and from entry and exit points.

Three RV campgrounds are on-site; Buffalo Point Campground, situated along the river, is the largest and offers water and electricity March through November. Private campgrounds in the area provide full hookups and amenities.

For more information, call (870) 439-2502, or go to www.nps.gov/buff. — Arline Chandler

PULL-TAB ART

More than 30 years ago, Herman Divers decided he needed a hobby. "You can't get into trouble when you're working," he said.

Divers, the "master of pull-tab engineering," worked a full-time job by day and at night he pieced together beverage pull tabs. He used 197,200 removable beverage tabs from the early 1970s to create a full-size replica of a motorcycle.

Roslyn Schultz, director of the Grassroots Art Center in Lucas, Kansas, estimates that the two-seater "automobile" Diver also created contains four times as many interlocking tabs. The pieces are made entirely of beverage-can pull tabs, without reinforcement of any kind.

Eighty-five-year-old Divers' work is just one of the permanent displays at the Grassroots Art Center, which is open year-round. The town of Lucas is located 15 miles north of Interstate 70 off State Highway 232.

RV camping is available at nearby Wilson State Park (call 620-672-5911, or go to www.kdwp.state.ks.us).

For more information, call (785) 525-6118, or visit www.grassrootsart.net.

— Mary Zalmanek ♦



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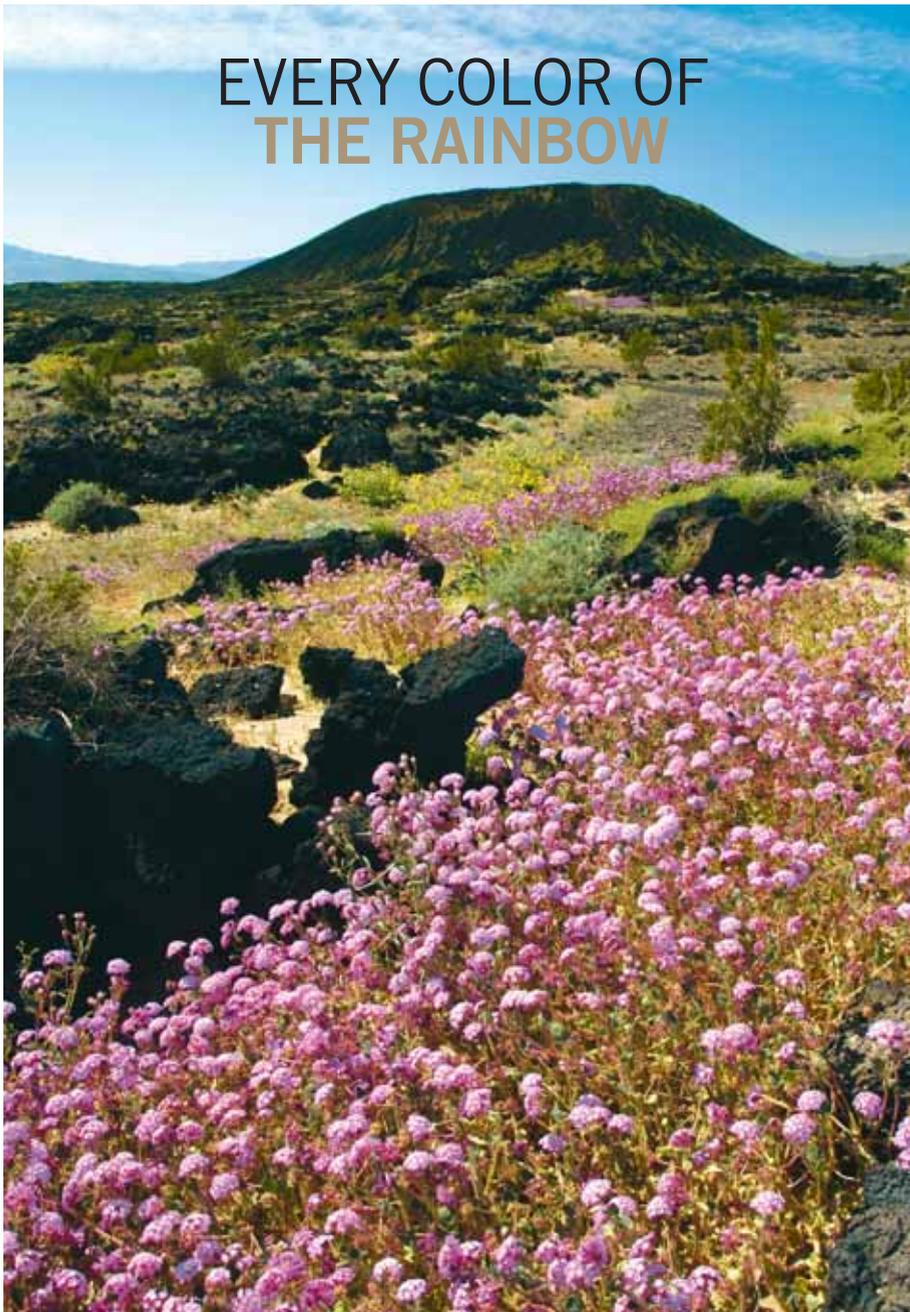


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EVERY COLOR OF THE RAINBOW



Above: The area surrounding Amboy Crater is rich with pink sand verbena during the spring months. Right: The road approaching the crater is dotted with desert blossoms.



The spectacular wildflower bloom at Amboy Crater in Southern California is a springtime delight

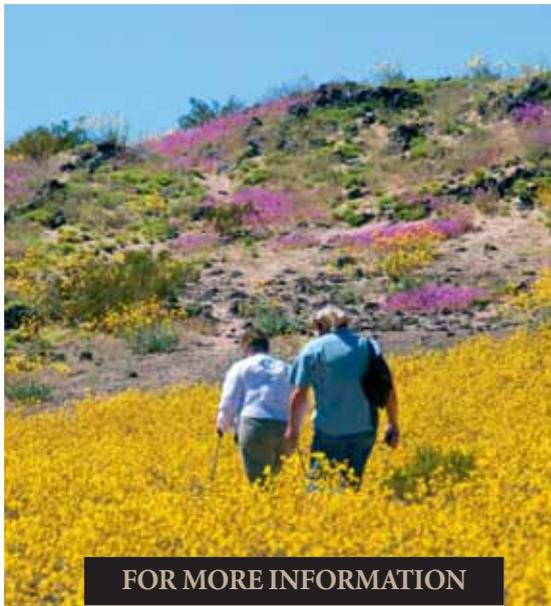
While browsing the book displays in Joshua Tree National Park's Oasis Visitor Center in Twentynine Palms, California, last spring, we happened to overhear an excited couple describing to park rangers the amazing wildflower bloom they had driven through while traveling south from Las Vegas through the Mojave National Preserve to reach Joshua Tree National Park.

"As far as the eye can see," they said, "Especially around Amboy Crater and along the road south of there leading into Twentynine Palms. Purple, yellow, pink — miles and miles of wildflowers."

"And where," I asked, "is Amboy Crater?" I'd never heard of it before. It turns out that Amboy Crater is one of the many interesting places you should see while visiting Joshua Tree National Park and the surrounding area.

Located about 50 miles, or 45 minutes, northeast of Twentynine Palms, the town of Amboy was once a popular stop for travelers along historic U.S. Route 66. With the opening of Interstate 40 in the 1960s, traffic and tourism dropped off and Amboy became a ghost town along the famous roadway. Sadly, the town is haunted by nothing more vital than tumbleweeds and cactus now, but it has not been completely forgotten — Hollywood continues to use the old Roy's Motel and Café as a backdrop for movies set in the 1950s. Fuel and minimal supplies are available in town, as well. And it turns out that, as a designated National Natural Landmark, the adjacent Amboy Crater and lava field is still a popular stop for photographers, nature lovers, families and, of course, RVers.

PHOTOS: THANES



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Top, left: Fields of spring wildflowers, from March through May, make Amboy Crater a popular destination for photography and horticultural buffs. **Top, right:** The crater is an excellent example of an almost perfectly symmetrical volcanic cinder cone.



Amboy Crater is a cinder cone-type crater formed in layers of mostly vesicular *pahoehoe* — basaltic lava that has a smooth, billowy or ropy surface. It is situated in one of the youngest volcanic fields in the country, and geologists estimate its age at around 6,000 years old. A wonderful example of an almost perfectly symmetrical volcanic cinder cone, Amboy was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1973 and is maintained by the Bureau of Land Management. It was in these lava fields that the Mars rovers were tested before being sent into space.

We set out from Twentynine Palms early the next morning, determined to experience the crater and its fields of spring flowers for ourselves. Driving north on Amboy Road, the extravaganza of impossible colors began before we even reached the outskirts of town. First, there were massive carpets of brilliant pink sand verbena, punctuated with gleaming white dune primrose. Here and there we'd spot a delicate desert lily nodding above the other ground-hugging blossoms. As the road rose in elevation the flowers changed to deep purple Arizona lupine and golden yellow brittlebush growing among the dark volcanic rock.

As we approached Bristol Dry Lake with its sparkling salt deposits and chloride extraction plants, we could see the crater rising northeast of us and we entered the broad, surrounding valley of lava rock. More than 24 square miles in size, this is a desolate region most of the year but on the day of our visit the entire valley shimmered in the golden colors of acre after acre of desert sunflowers. We'd never seen such a massive wildflower display.

Upon reaching the old historic U.S. Highway 66, off to the east we could see the few buildings remaining in once-thriving Amboy. Turning west onto Highway 66 we drove about a mile to the Amboy Crater turnoff.

Parking in the large day-use area, we were surrounded by vast clusters of ebullient pink sand verbena growing around the inky black volcanic rock. A few other photographers, like us, prowled the lava fields snapping away at flowers that weaved and bobbed in a stiff wind.

We hadn't planned to spend all day here but after looking out over the trail from the shaded viewing platform (which is wheelchair accessible) we couldn't resist grabbing our water bottles and setting out on the 3.3-mile roundtrip hike to the top of the basalt crater, rising 250 feet above the Mojave Desert floor. The hike to the rim and back can take half a day, so be prepared. Be sure to bring plenty of water and food, a hat, sunscreen and sturdy footwear, and keep an eye out for snakes and other desert wildlife.

What should have been an easy two-hour walk over the mostly level trail took us most of the morning, as every step seemed to present an even more beautiful spectacle of the glorious flowers and surrounding landscape. Pastel mountains rose on the horizon beyond the golden valley and bright-red trains wound their way through the flowers as they traveled between Barstow and Needles.

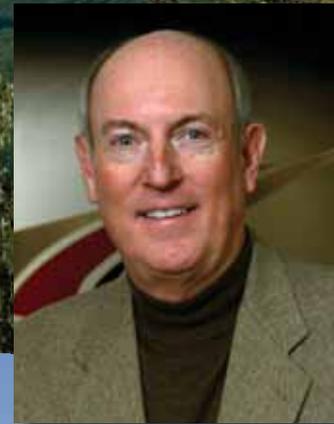
Reaching the base of the crater, the trail rose sharply to the rim. A stiff wind that had plagued us on the valley floor accelerated as we reached the top, requiring caution, lest it blow us from the narrow trail and right down into the depths of the cone. We could clearly see that this isn't just one crater but a series of four, with each one nesting within the earlier ones.

A young family, with a firm hold on their children and an avid interest in geology, ex-

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EVERY COLOR OF THE RAINBOW

amined the rock formations nearby, the parents explaining to the children the cataclysmic forces that formed the crater. We listened in on the impromptu geology lesson and learned some interesting things about volcanoes — such as why some of the rock is porous and some is smooth, all depending on the differing amount of steam held in the flowing lava. The occasional venting of sulfurous gas is a reminder that it will awaken again someday.

Returning to the parking area, we shared one of the shaded picnic tables with a family who was traveling to the nearby U.S. Marine base to greet a son returning from overseas, before returning to our campsite in Joshua Tree National Park. The day had been exciting and exhausting and we were glad that, when we decided to explore this beautiful area, we had reserved a few extra nights at the campground.

If you are planning a visit of your own, it's wise to secure accommodations in nearby Twentynine Palms or at Joshua Tree. The Twentynine Palms Resort is the most accessible, with 157 full-hookup sites, WiFi,

laundry facilities, grocery store, swimming pool with sauna and hot tub, and its own nine-hole golf course.

Of course, you can choose one of the campgrounds located in Joshua Tree National Park, but these are dry camping sites. Only two campgrounds — Black Rock and Cottonwood — offer water, flush toilets and dump stations and most have a 25-foot length limit, so it's best to check ahead of time. Most of the campgrounds are first-come, first-serve, but a few take reservations during peak visiting seasons (September through May; summer is the slow season because of the heat).

Amboy Crater makes a nice day trip while visiting Laughlin, Nevada, or the surrounding area, especially in combination with a trip to Joshua Tree National Park. It makes a great getaway weekend for RVers who are nature and photography enthusiasts as well. April is the best time to visit if you hope to encounter its astonishing wildflower bloom, and get a shot at that "perfect" photo, bursting with spectacular spring hues. ♦

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Camp by a glacier, take a flight-seeing tour of Mount McKinley or fish from roadside streams in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley

by RON DALBY

ALASKA'S PLAY

Ever have one of those days when you're just overwhelmed with choices? Such would be a bright, sunny afternoon in Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Valley.

Here's the dilemma: Do you head up to the Denali Viewpoint North on the Parks Highway, set up camp and wait for the evening and early morning light to photograph Mount McKinley? Do you park your motorhome next to a stream filled with scrappy silver salmon? What

about the blueberry picking in Hatcher Pass? Is the prime campsite in front of the Matanuska Glacier available?

Now imagine an entire vacation filled with these kinds of choices, or even a whole year, and you know why the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Convention and Visitors Bureau describes this part of the state as "Where Alaska Comes to Play." Adding to that, your motorhome offers the perfect means of taking advantage of what the Mat-Su Valley has to offer.

WHAT IS THE MAT-SU VALLEY?

Most people planning an overland trek to Alaska for the first time have never heard of the Matanuska-Susitna area — Mat-Su Valley for short, or simply the Valley. They usually think in terms of driving first to either Fairbanks or Anchorage and then exploring the state from those cities. The fact is, though, that everyone who explores Alaska by RV will almost certainly pass through the Valley a couple of times while driving around the 49th state. And it's not like the Valley is



GROUND

Matanuska Glacier is accessible by RV from the Glenn Highway — a National Scenic Byway.

trying to hide from anybody, as it's approximately the size of West Virginia.

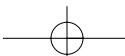
If you drive south from Fairbanks, you'll enter the north side of the Mat-Su Valley shortly after passing Denali State Park. If, driving into Alaska, you turn left at Tok and set a course for Anchorage, you'll enter the Valley from the east about an hour after passing through the small town of Glennallen. Once entering the Valley from either direction, you'll remain in it until just before you get to Anchorage.

Geographically, the Mat-Su Valley is the land drained by the Matanuska River flowing west out of the Chugach Mountains and the Susitna River flowing south out of the Alaska Range. The two rivers flow into the Knik Arm of Cook Inlet within a few miles of each other. Both rivers are spawned by massive glaciers.

Three mountain ranges dominate the landscape: the Alaska Range to the north and west; the Talkeetna Mountains, which are sort of in the middle; and the Chugach Mountains on the east

side. The Alaska Range, in particular, provides one of the sights that make visiting the Mat-Su Valley a must: Absolutely the best roadside views of Mount McKinley, the continent's highest peak, can be had from alongside the Parks Highway in the Valley.

The two state-maintained roadside viewpoints, Denali Viewpoint South and Denali Viewpoint North, are about 130 miles and 160 miles north of Anchorage, respectively. The two facilities are part of Denali State Park, which com-





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Top, left: Dry camping here, with Matanuska Glacier just a few feet away, is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Top, right: At the height of the season, flight-seeing tours explore the many peaks — including Mount McKinley — in the Alaska Range.

plements Denali National Park and Preserve by providing additional facilities and activities for visitors. Both sites can handle motorhomes; you can even stay overnight at Denali View North Campground.

A FEAST FOR THE SENSES

Feasting your eyes on the scenery is one thing, but after awhile a feast on some local protein is in order. Since you're in the area, you may as well cast for a salmon from one or more of Alaska's fabulous roadside salmon streams. Along the Parks Highway south of the Mount McKinley viewpoints are Montana Creek, Sheep Creek, Willow Creek, the Deshka Landing and the Little Susitna River. There are more famous salmon streams in Alaska, but no part of the state offers as many of these splendid fish in roadside streams as does the Mat-Su Valley.

There are campgrounds and/or RV parks at or near all of these streams. Fishing guides with boats are available, or you can join hundreds of other fishermen casting from shore. For the most part, regulations require anglers to fish downstream of the Parks Highway bridges, and most fishermen tend to concentrate near where these streams empty into the Susitna River. The one exception is the Little Su, which flows into Cook Inlet on its own; the best fishing there is near the boat launch and campground, which are about 15 miles up Knik-Goose Bay Road from its intersection at Parks Highway.

Another great fishing adventure is to turn off the Parks Highway for the 14-mile drive to Talkeetna and have Mahay's Riverboat Service run you a few miles up the silty Talkeetna River to the mouth of Clear Creek.

TALKEETNA

Talkeetna is also the staging area for Mount McKinley climbing expeditions and Mount McKinley flight-seeing adventures. The climbing season begins in late April and runs through the middle of July. By all means go out to the airport and have a look if you're in town during that time. Watching the mountaineers coming and going from North America's highest peak, and maybe talking with some of them, is an adventure in itself.

Flight-seeing, run by the same companies that ferry climbers to the mountain, runs daily throughout the season and even in the winter (weather permitting). If you want to get up close and personal with Mount McKinley and other peaks in the Alaska Range, this is the way to do it. A number of operators will also land on Ruth Glacier and allow you to get out and explore. It's easy to see why a flight-seeing tour from Talkeetna is considered one of the Valley's premier attractions.

Talkeetna is fun for a lot of other reasons, too, some less obvious than others. For instance, the biggest summer party in this eclectic community is the Moose Dropping Festival. Yes, there really is a two-day celebration in mid-July centered around moose droppings. At the festival, you can explore the many uses one can find for it: made into jewelry, fashioned into lapel pins and painted and numbered for an actual moose-dropping drop contest with a substantial cash prize if your nugget is closest to the target are among just a few.

Talkeetna has a small RV park and a number of opportunities for boondocking in and around the town. If you go for the Moose Dropping Festival, you'll probably have to boondock because a caravan company generally reserves most of the sites in the RV park for the festival weekend.

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ALASKA'S PLAYGROUND

THE BIG CITY

South of Talkeetna the Parks Highway runs through a couple of small settlements and then into Wasilla, the shopping hub for the region and a town that has been described as two miles long and a block deep. Most of the Valley's larger stores are in Wasilla, making it a great place to stop for groceries and other supplies. Anglers should stop in at 3 Rivers Fly and Tackle for the latest information on where the big ones are biting.

While stopping in Wasilla, be sure to visit the museums, particularly the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race Headquarters and Museum and the Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry, which offers a fun look at everything from dog sleds to airplanes. Both are located a few miles north of town and have large, circular driveways that can handle any size motorhome.

PALMER

A short distance east of Wasilla is Palmer, sort of a Midwest farming town dropped between a couple of Alaska mountain ranges. The farms in the area were created by the Franklin Roosevelt administration in the 1930s in an effort to make Alaska self-sufficient in terms of food production. It didn't work and Alaska still imports most of its edibles from other states.

The best of the local farming efforts come together in late summer every year with the Alaska State Fair in Palmer — 12 big days ending on Labor Day in early September. There is plenty of RV parking; you can even stay overnight in your rig.

For RVers, a big plus for Palmer is the number of RV parks near town. Anchorage, about 40 minutes away by car, has relatively few RV parks. Many RVers wanting to explore Anchorage find it easier to camp in Palmer and use their dinghy. Other than during standard rush-hour traffic times, you should have no trouble getting back and forth to Anchorage for shopping, dining and other adventures.

Two unusual key attractions near Palmer are the Musk Ox Farm and the Reindeer Farm. The first holds a reproducing population of the woolly northern beasts and provides raw material — *qiviut* (musk ox wool) — for knitted garments as well as facility tours for a small fee. Items made from *qiviut*, probably the warmest wool you'll ever find, are available at the farm's



SAVE BIG

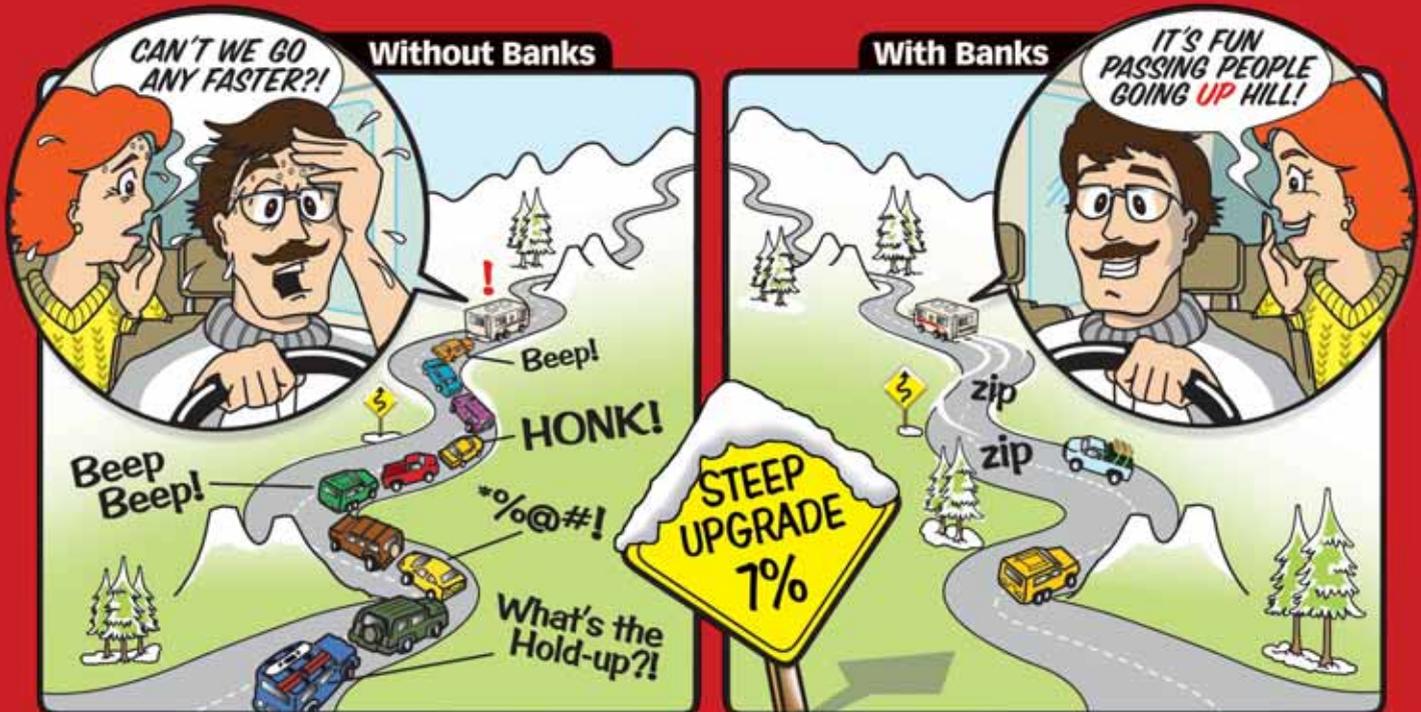
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ALASKA'S PLAYGROUND

gift shop for a fairly steep price.

The Reindeer Farm is always extra popular at Christmastime for obvious reasons though it actually sees most of its visitors in the summer months. Be sure you have a camera in hand when you visit either farm.

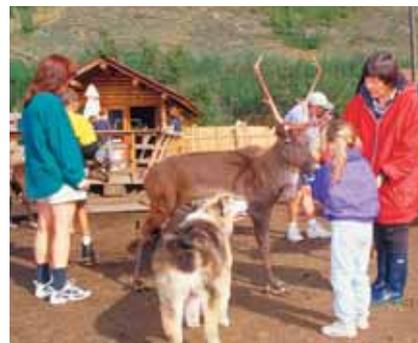
THE GLENN HIGHWAY

Two of Alaska's three major roads, the Parks Highway from Fairbanks and the Glenn Highway from Tok, come together just out-

side of Palmer. In fact, many visitors tend to first enter the Valley by one of these roads.

The drive along the Glenn Highway qualifies as one of the most spectacular drives on the continent, and is recognized as a National Scenic Byway. In early September, as the fall colors begin to dominate, the Chugach Mountains along this route must be seen to be believed.

Then there is the glacier — Matanuska Glacier, to be specific. This is the largest



The Reindeer Farm in Palmer offers a chance to pet, feed and photograph the animals on its reindeer tour.

accessible glacier along Alaska's road system where you can park your rig and dry camp right in front of an active, flowing glacier. The land in front of the glacier is privately held so there is a per-person fee for driving in and camping here, but if the weather is halfway decent this is one of those things you do just so you can say you have done it. From where you park your rig, the glacier is just a couple of minutes' walk away.

It's easy to see why native Alaskans believe that, along with being very RV friendly, the Matanuska-Susitna Valley — with its abundance of mountains, glaciers and wildlife — offers much of what visitors want to experience. In this respect, Alaska, I think, exceeds most people's expectations. ♦

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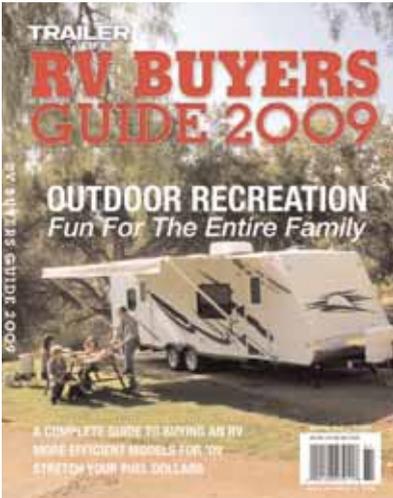
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My wife, Sandra, and I made it out to Alaska recently, and a nice chunk of our time was planned for the Kenai Peninsula (aka the Kenai) — that geographical area south of Anchorage. We spent about three weeks on the Kenai in our 42-foot Monaco Dynasty, though we found that the Kenai is ideal for RVers with motorhomes of any size.

A little larger in size than the state of Maryland, most of the Kenai is covered by mountains, national parks, forests and wildlife refuges inaccessible by roads, but two major highways connect most of the communities to Anchorage. Within about four hours' driving time, you can reach the southern end of the Kenai — a fact that RVers from the Anchorage area verify every summer weekend. The peninsula can get a bit busy but there's always plenty of room.

BY LAND AND BY SEA

We approached the Kenai Peninsula via a six-hour trip on an Alaska Marine Highway ferry from Valdez to Whittier. The ferry system accommodates motorhomes of all sizes, though U.S. Coast Guard regulations prohibit access to vehicles while a ves-

sel is underway, so RVs may not be used for dining or sleeping while on the ferry.

From Whittier we drove approximately 180 miles to Homer and set up camp for the night. The next morning, we left our rig behind at the campground while we set out in our dinghy vehicle for a side trip off the peninsula. A nine-hour ferry ride took us to Kodiak Island, home to the world-famous brown bears. RVers who take their motorhomes with them to the island will find campsites at Fort Abercrombie State Historic Park and Buskin River State Recreation Site. After three days on the island, we took the return ferry back to Homer and began our tour of the Kenai.

HOME SWEET HOMER

Think fish — that's what Homer is all about. The town refers to itself as the Halibut Fishing Capital of the World. The fishing here is excellent and charters are everywhere, but that's only one reason to visit Homer.

Perched on the southern tip of the Kenai, the city of Homer is an RV-friendly community. The Homer Spit is a narrow, 4½-mile-long stretch of land that sticks out into Kachemak Bay — a huge body of water surrounded by snowcapped mountains.

MOTORHOMING ON THE KENAI

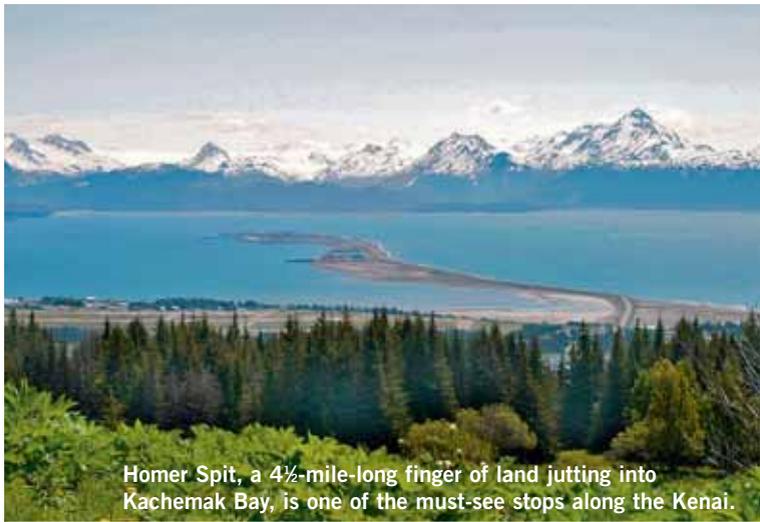
Alaska's popular peninsular retreat offers a wide variety of activities for RVers

by RON JONES

Alaska's RV-friendly Seward Highway stretches 127 miles from Anchorage to Seward.

MOTORHOME | March 2009

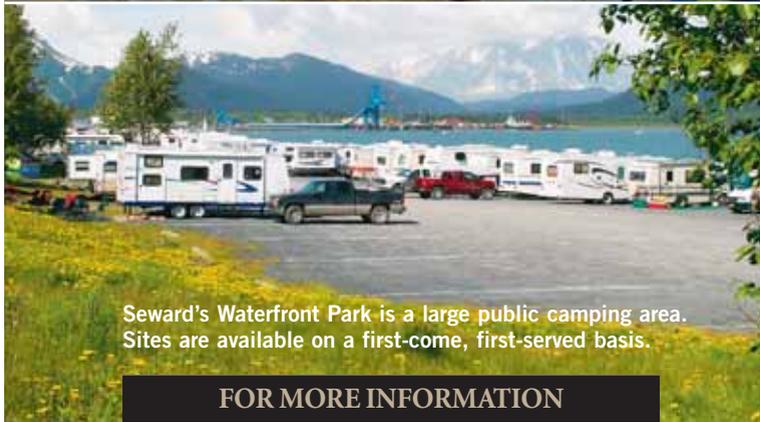
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Homer Spit, a 4½-mile-long finger of land jutting into Kachemak Bay, is one of the must-see stops along the Kenai.



It's easy to see why Homer is known as the Halibut Fishing Capital of the World.



Seward's Waterfront Park is a large public camping area. Sites are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

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There are at least three campgrounds on the Spit and every site has a view of the bay and the mountains. Two of the campgrounds are private parks — Heritage RV Park and Homer Spit Campground — and the city offers a public camping area for RV parking (without hookups). There's a two-week maximum stay limit at the city's camping area, but otherwise, just pull in, sign up, put your \$15 per day in the "Iron Ranger" (the metal container), find a spot and park your coach. Here, life is good and the view is better. You are within walking distance of restaurants, bars, shops and, of course, fishing charters. There is plenty of room on the Spit for your motorhome even if you just want to park and have dinner.

For a real treat, find Skyline Drive (accessible from West Hill Road or East Hill Road) and start at the north end. Meander south for the most impressive views of Homer, the Spit and the bay. Skyline Drive is very steep so don't take the big rig — the south end of the road is at least a 10-percent grade.

The Alaska Islands and Ocean Visitor Center in Homer is one of the most unique in Alaska. Located on the main highway through town headed for the Spit, the center is open year-round and admission is free. Inside, huge dioramas showing the coastal regions and wildlife can be explored, and the Seabird Experience Theater is not to be missed. While RV parking is available, space is limited, so it might be best to use your dinghy vehicle if you're visiting during summer.

BOONDOCKING IN SOLDOTNA

Leaving Homer on Sterling Highway (Alaska Highway 1), we had a leisurely drive north along the Cook Inlet about 85 miles to Soldotna. This is a nice drive with lots of places to pull off the highway, and most of the pull-offs can easily accommodate a large motorhome. There are limited services along the way so we fueled up before we left Homer.

Soldotna is known for its world-class salmon fishing. The Kenai River flows through the center of town and offers four of the five types of Pacific salmon: king, pink, red and silver. The easiest way for the public to access the river is via one of the town's elevated fishing boardwalks, or fishwalks.

It's easy to find a place to stay in Soldotna, though some of the options are rather unconventional. We boondocked behind a Laundromat and we even picked up free WiFi. Another spot you can overnight at is the local Fred Meyer grocery store, which has a dump station for the convenience of its RVing guests. The city offers dry camping at two of its municipal parks — Centennial and Swiftwater — and both have dump stations. If you need hookups, private RV parks in the area offer more than 200 private campsites as well.

A must-stop in Soldotna is the Moose is Loose bakery, where there is plenty of space for motorhome parking. The bakery offers enormous glazed and chocolate-covered glazed donuts — each one would barely fit on a normal dinner plate — as well as Road Kill Carmel Rolls: normal cinnamon rolls, flattened so they are about 8 × 12 inches (and thin), and baked crispy.

As we left Soldotna and made our way toward Seward, we took a detour off the Sterling Highway at Mile 47.7 and stopped in the tiny town of Cooper Landing. The Kenai River runs through Cooper Landing before it flows to Soldotna and fishing here is the primary activity. The Kenai Princess RV Park was small but



Deep blue glaciers are an awe-inspiring sight in Kenai Fjords National Park's Ailik Bay, where kayakers can get up close and personal.

nice and clean, with hookups and basic amenities, but no frills. However, the adjacent Kenai Princess Wilderness Lodge has several amenities, and RV park guests are welcome to enjoy them.

SEVEN DAYS IN SEWARD

On the east coast of the Kenai, Seward is 46 miles from Cooper Landing. Follow the Sterling Highway about 10 miles east and it will intersect with the Seward Highway (Alaska Highway 9).

Of course there is fishing in Seward, too, as well as many other things to see and do. We found the Seward Museum a great place to start our visit.

We spent an afternoon at the Alaska SeaLife Center — the state's only designated facility to rehabilitate marine animals and seabirds. We took a behind-the-scenes tour that was excellent and spent some time feeding the birds and learning how they are cared for.

The Seward Waterfront Park contains a large public camping area along Resurrection Bay. It's a good deal at \$15 per night for dry camping (\$30 for water and electric sites) and RVs were

constantly moving in and out. There are also a number of private RV parks, including Miller's Landing Campground (with electric hookups) and Stoney Creek RV Park (with full hookups).

While you're in Seward, make time to visit the nearby Kenai Fjords National Park. Believe me, the trip is worth it, but we recommend that you drive your dinghy and not your rig on this side trip. From Seward Highway 9, take the turnoff at Mile 3.7 and head west about 8½ miles to Exit Glacier — the only land entry point into Kenai Fjords National Park.

This portion of the park is beautiful and opportunities to explore are plentiful, from walking near an active glacier to boat tours and ranger-led day hikes. The coastal portion of the park provides visitors with the possibility of spotting puffins, whales and other wildlife, particularly during May through September.

If you'd like to take a boat tour of the park, several operators depart from Seward's small-boat harbor daily in the summer months. We decided on a day-long boat tour, where we saw several glaciers and sailed pretty close to one of them — close enough to hear the glacier groaning, cracking and creaking as it moved. We were lucky enough to see it calve several times and watched giant chunks of ice breaking away, falling and creating a massive splash. We also saw several whales, sea lions, eagles and other wildlife throughout the day-long venture.

From Seward, we said goodbye to the Kenai and headed north to Anchorage and the rest of our trip.

Visiting the Kenai was an excellent choice, and an easy trip to make in the RV. With accessibility for any size motorhome, good highways, lots of things to see and do, and excellent fishing, it was easy to have a great time. Restaurants were everywhere and nearly all specialized in fresh fish.

What's not to like about a travel destination that has snow-capped mountains, gorgeous green forests, plentiful wildlife, and rushing streams and rivers — all just outside the window of your motorhome? ♦

GUIDING THE WAY

When it comes to traveling, it's a good idea to bring along a guidebook. I found some helpful information about RVing in Alaska in these two books:

The Milepost. Legendary Alaska trip planner and travel guide to the highways, roads, ferries, lodgings, recreation, sightseeing attractions and services along the Alaska Highway to and within Alaska. MSRP \$27.95; www.milepost.com.

Traveler's Guide to Alaskan Camping, 4th Edition. Authors Mike and Terri Church provide complete camping coverage of the state's routes. Maps are also provided. MSRP \$21.95; www.rollinghomes.com.

INDUSTRY INNOVATIONS

THE ANNUAL NATIONAL RV TRADE SHOW
IN LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY, SHOWCASED
THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST OFFERINGS FOR 2009

by BOB ASHLEY



Winnebago Via

PHOTOS: SHAWN SPENCE

Lighter Class A motorhomes that promise higher fuel mileage from Winnebago, Gulf Stream and Damon were among the major trends at the 46th Annual National RV Trade Show December 2-4, 2008, in Louisville, Kentucky.

Winnebago introduced the new 25½-foot front-engine diesel Winnebago Via/Itasca Reyo Class A, estimated to get 15 MPG on an 11,030-pound GVWR European-built Dodge Sprinter chassis, while similar mileage is anticipated from Gulf Stream's 30-foot Montaj Class A on the 14,500-pound GVWR Ford E-450 gas platform. Previously, the Sprinter had only been available for Class B or C motorhomes, and the Ford had only been available for Class C's.

Winnebago's Via/Reyo was named "Best of Show" by *MotorHome's* sister publication, *RVBusiness*, with the Gulf Stream Montaj receiving an "Honorable Mention." In addition, Damon's

Avanti front-engine diesel Class A — built on a 16,000-pound GVWR Workhorse W16D chassis powered by a 200-HP Navistar MaxxForce 5 V-6 — made its trade debut at the Louisville show.

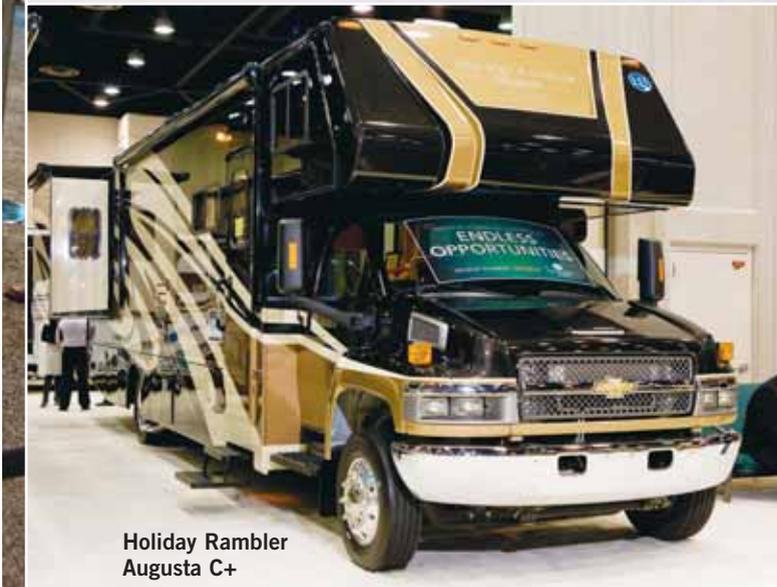
"The whole idea is to get better gas mileage," said Dean Crane, Gulf Stream's director of public relations and training. "Everything is becoming more lightweight."

Besides Winnebago mounting a Class A motorhome on a Sprinter chassis for the first time, new Class C motorhomes — including Jayco's Precept, Coachmen's Freelander and Forest River's Solera — were introduced on the Sprinter chassis that, until three years ago, had only been available for van campers.

But those weren't the only motorhomes grabbing attention at the show. Winnebago and Fleetwood introduced concept Class A motorhomes on Freightliner's new ecoFRED front diesel/electric hybrid rail that promises to get better mileage by augmenting the



Fleetwood Hybrid



Holiday Rambler Augusta C+



Forest River Solera



Jayco Precept

diesel engine with an electric motor that kicks in under load.

"From a product standpoint, we continue to innovate," said Paul Eskritt, President of Fleetwood RV Group. "We are spending resources to develop technologies that we will be able to put into our products two to four years out."

Winnebago also introduced a 33-foot Itasca Sunstar floorplan on the new Workhorse 20,500-pound GVWR W20D front-engine diesel chassis, as did Four Winds International, which also debuted the sleek 32-foot Serrano Class A on the W20D chassis.

Holiday Rambler went lighter with the reinvented Aluma-Lite Class A on an 18,000-pound GVWR Ford gas-powered chassis, while Gulf Stream introduced the new Silver Bullet Class C to the 19,500-GVWR Dodge Ram 5500 cab chassis.

Other innovative models for 2009 included the redesigned gas-powered Georgetown Class A series from Forest River; the addition of a diesel-pusher floorplan to Tiffin's entry-level Allegro lineup; the introduction of a new top-of-the-line 45-foot Cornerstone diesel-pusher to Entegra Coach's offerings; and the Dynasty Class A diesel-pusher with a telescoping slide-within-a-slide from Monaco.

FLEETWOOD HYBRID

Leading off the list of new models and rigs, Fleetwood's Hybrid Class A is mounted on the aforementioned 27,000-pound GVWR Freightliner ecoFRED front-engine diesel/electric hybrid concept chassis.

"We are collecting feedback from the public about their interest in this kind of vehicle," said David Coffin, Fleetwood's director of product development and engineering. In an initial test, Coffin reports, the 36-foot, triple-slide Fleetwood Hybrid got 19 percent better fuel consumption than a traditional diesel motorhome.



Holiday Rambler Aluma-Lite

The chassis is powered by a standard 300-hp Cummins ISB 6.7-L diesel engine that includes an Eaton automated manual transmission equipped with an HEV electric motor. The system continually recharges 340-volt lithium-ion batteries to power the electric motor and automatically selects diesel, electric or both.

FOREST RIVER SOLERA

Class C motorhomes are often seen as leaders in the quest for better MPG, and to that end, Forest River has introduced three 24-foot Solera Class C motorhomes floorplans on an 11,030-pound GVWR Sprinter cab chassis. The Solera is expected to get 16-19 MPG from its 154-hp Mercedes-Benz 3.0-L V-6 turbocharged engine.

"The Solera is similar to our Sunseeker motorhome, but we wanted to take advantage of the higher-mileage Sprinter chassis," said Tim Graber, general manager of Forest River's Sunseeker/Lexington Class C division.

The prototype Solera on display at the Louisville show had 7-foot ceilings and ducted air conditioning and featured a single streetside flush-floor slideout containing a booth dinette, along with a 67-cubic-foot rear storage compartment with side-swinging doors large enough to store bikes or other sports gear. The Solera has an MSRP of \$85,000.

FOUR WINDS SERRANO

Sleek styling was the order of the day for Four Winds, which introduced its Serrano front-engine diesel Class A on the new Workhorse W20D chassis powered by a 230-hp MaxxFORCE 7 V-8 engine.

"It's got European styling, but it's still an American motorhome with all the conveniences that Americans have come to expect,"



Gulf Stream Montaj



Four Winds Serrano

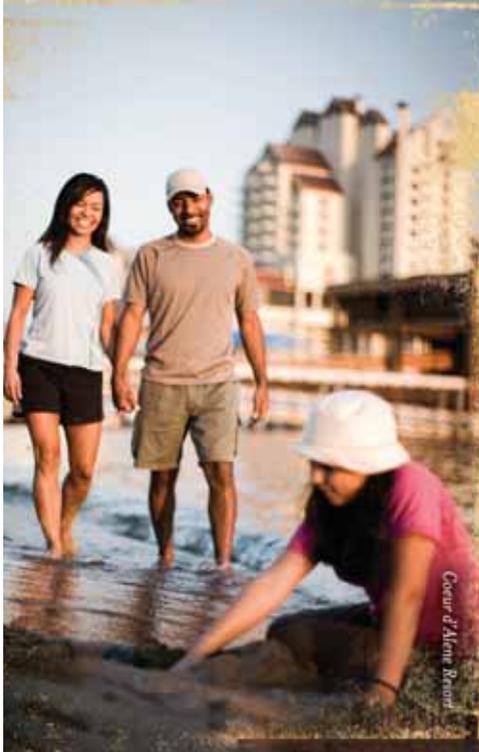


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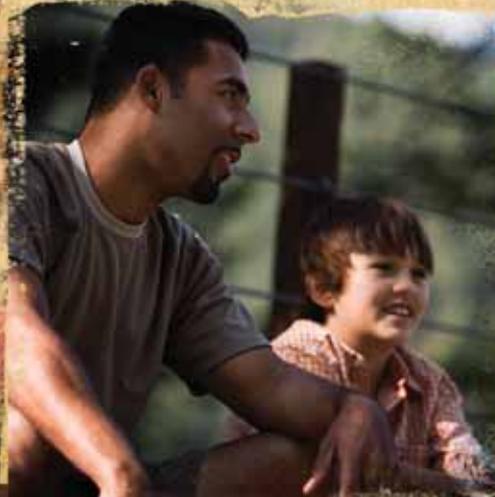
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INDUSTRY INNOVATIONS

said Dana Simon, vice president of sales and marketing. Available in two 32-foot floorplans with one or two slideouts, Serrano features 150 square feet of pass-through rear storage — large enough to carry bikes and other equipment that can also be accessed from beneath the rear bed. Amenities include an exterior TV, contemporary lighting, radius cabinets, leather furniture and solid-surface countertops. The Serrano's base MSRP is \$130,000.

GULF STREAM MONTAJ

The 30-foot Class A Montaj by Gulf Stream Coach is built on a 14,500-pound-rated Ford E-series chassis — a platform previously reserved for Class C motorhomes.

"It's all about being lightweight, lightweight, lightweight," said Dean Crane, Gulf Stream's director of public relations. Equipped standard with a 255-hp 5.4-L Ford V-8 gas engine, Montaj will achieve up to an estimated 15 mpg. With either one or two slideouts, Montaj features a one-piece windshield and a European-inspired interior with Thermopane acrylic windows,

curved cabinets, twin beds that swing down from over the cockpit and convertible J-couches. Cockpit seats swivel and slide back toward the dash to meld with the living area. Though the unit we saw was a prototype, look for Montaj to be available soon, at a base MSRP of \$111,986.

HOLIDAY RAMBLER ALUMA-LITE

Monaco Coach Corporation's reinvented Holiday Rambler Aluma-Lite is an affordable, low-profile Class A motorhome built on an 18,000-pound GVWR Ford or Workhorse gas-powered chassis.

The 31-foot Aluma-Lite floorplan unveiled at Louisville features 6-foot 10-inch ceilings, Corian kitchen countertops and a 22-foot full-wall slideout along with a smaller bedroom slide. To increase aerodynamics, the Aluma-Lite's roof is 14½ inches lower than a traditional coach, resulting in 17 percent less front-cap surface area. The aluminum-and-fiberglass Aluma-Lite has a 76-cubic-foot rear passenger-side storage compartment suitable for storing bicycles and other equipment.

The coach has a base MSRP of \$91,959.

**HOLIDAY RAMBLER AUGUSTA C-PLUS/
MONACO MONTCLAIR C-PLUS**

Seeking to appeal to buyers looking for Class C motorhomes with high gross vehicle weight ratings, Monaco added the Holiday Rambler Augusta/Monaco Montclair Class C motorhome on a 22,000-pound-rated Chevy 5500 cutaway chassis.

Outfitted with convertible sofas and booth dinettes along with queen beds in the rear bedroom and cabover, the Augusta/Montclair can sleep up to eight people. The 36-foot two-slide floorplan features a streetside full-wall slideout that extends the length of the coach, containing the dinette, sofa, dual-purpose desk, large wardrobe and bedroom dresser.

"We are a true Class A manufacturer, so you are going to see Class A tendencies in these," commented Ryan Lee, director of marketing. Amenities include full-body paint, side-swinging storage doors, Corian countertops and 32-inch and 19-inch LCD TVs. Base MSRP for the coach is \$160,000.

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INDUSTRY INNOVATIONS

JAYCO PRECEPT

If you're looking for Class A styling in a Class C rig, look no further than Jayco. The company has introduced the Precept, its first Class C motorhome on the popular high-mileage Sprinter chassis with a GVWR of 11,030 pounds. The 25-foot Precept, powered by a 154-HP 3.0-L turbocharged V-6 diesel engine, is designed with molded front and rear caps, vacuum-bonded side walls and one-piece polyethylene storage compartments.

"There's a lot of Class A styling," said Paul Gardner, Jayco's director of product development. Standard features include a 3,200-watt generator, backup camera and monitor, outdoor media center, 19-inch LCD TV, curved cabinets and drawers and under-bed storage.

WINNEBAGO VIA/ITASCA REYO

On the cutting edge of a new wave of downsized motorhomes is Winnebago's new 2010 Class A Winnebago Via/Itasca Reyó motorhome on a front-diesel Dodge Sprinter F-50 "cowl" chassis — a body-

free version of the imported Mercedes-Benz van chassis. The Sprinter is equipped with a 154-HP Mercedes-Benz 3.0-L turbocharged V-6 diesel engine.

The Via/Reyo has a 20-inch-deep streetside slideout and a 79 x 40-inch "studio loft" that drops down from over the cockpit. The interior sports laminated countertops, a two-burner stove, steel sinks and a large bathroom, complete with an angled shower. The rear bedroom can be configured by the owner with either twin or queen beds.

The 25-foot European-inspired Via/Reyo is expected to be available later this year and will carry a base MSRP in the high \$130,000 range.

Keeping in mind the old saying about necessity being the mother of invention, it was clear to those of us attending the Louisville show that the changing market and needs of consumers has driven the industry to come up with some its most creative and exciting innovations to date. It's a trend we're happy to see carry us through 2009 and beyond. ♦

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CHASSIS CHOICES FOR 2009



Workhorse W20D



Tiffin PowerGlide

Chassis to the casual observer are an amalgamation of steel beams, cross members, suspension systems, wires and tanks.

The functional fact of the matter is that chassis serve as a platform for big-and-getting-bigger slideout rooms, integrated control systems, granite countertops and marble floors, residential-style furniture and convenient floorplans.

Chassis for 2009 continue to evolve and provide motorhome manufacturers more options for what they build and how they build it.

The most noteworthy new chassis for 2009 include a Class A version of the imported Dodge Sprinter chassis that previously had been designed only in Class B and Class C coaches; front-engine diesel versions of the heretofore gas-powered Workhorse W-Series chassis using Navistar MaxxForce engines, along with a separately developed front-diesel Class A W16D; a 14,500-pound E-series Class C gas-powered chassis from Ford equipped with a 255-HP 5.4-L Ford V-8 engine; and the new diesel Power Bridge from Fleetwood in partnership with Freightliner. In the Class C-plus arena, International Engine's DuraStar and Chrysler's Dodge Ram 5500 platforms entered the RV market in motorhomes with high gross vehicle weight ratings (GVWR) assembled by Gulf Stream.

In addition, Freightliner also unveiled the ecoFRED diesel/electric "hybrid" chassis during the 2008 National RV Trade

Show in Louisville, Kentucky, that promises to improve fuel mileage. "The ecoFRED was developed to address environmental concerns as well as fuel-savings opportunities that are important to our customers," said Tony Sippel, RV product manager for the Gaffney, South Carolina, subsidiary of Daimler Trucks North America.

The new Sprinter Class A chassis with a 11,030-pound GVWR from Daimler AG that carries the Dodge nameplate in the U.S. is powered by a 154-HP 3.0-L turbocharged V-6 diesel engine that will get an estimated 15 MPG when it debuts on Winnebago Via/Itasca Reyo motorhomes later this year.

Similarly, Gulf Stream Coach introduced the Montaj Class A on the E-series chassis that traditionally has been the platform for Class C motorhomes.

With midrange weight ratings ranging from 28,000 to 32,000 pounds, Fleetwood's Power Bridge diesel-pusher chassis, equipped with Cummins ISB or ISC engines rated to 360 HP, offers up to 242 cubic feet of pass-through storage along with increased water and fuel tank capacities of 105 and 100 gallons, respectively, and has become the platform of choice for most of Fleetwood's diesel-pushers.

As it already does with the Liberty chassis on the American Coach series, Fleetwood adds a bridge — i.e., connecting supports — of its own design to front and rear sections to customize the chassis for each application.

"We are looking at more tank capacity and more pass-through storage — and lighter-weight component materials," said

Stan Sassmann, a product development manager for Fleetwood. "Weight is always an issue. It always has been the case in Class C and Class A gas chassis, and it's going to take on the same sense of importance on the larger diesels as well."

North American RV builders have long looked for inspiration to Europe where motorhomes generally get better fuel mileage, although most of the Continent's Class A diesel chassis typically weigh considerably less than their American counterparts.

Taking inspiration from their European brethren, Workhorse developed a 16,000-pound GVWR W16D low-profile chassis powered by the International MaxxForce 5, a six-cylinder turbodiesel front engine. The W16D is estimated to get 14.5 MPG as a platform under Damon Motor Coach's new Avanti Class A motorhome and is expected to become the framework for offerings from other motorhome builders. "The low profile allows you to design better aerodynamics," said Matt Thompson, Damon's vice president of Avanti sales.

According to Bill Walmsley, Workhorse director of marketing, "The biggest thing we've been trying to do is work with fuel economy. We've taken a platform we already used in other segments of our business and we've re-engineered it for RV applications. It's not designed to be the performance machine that we typically have strived for in the past with our big block engines and some of our diesel chassis, but it is very functional."

Also with the idea of increasing fuel mileage, Workhorse introduced the W20D

This year's selection offers an exciting mix, including the **first-ever Class A Sprinter**, new **front-end diesels**, increased **towing capabilities**, and a recently unveiled **RV diesel hybrid** | *by* BOB ASHLEY



Fleetwood Power Bridge



ecoFRED

and W22D front-engine diesel chassis with a GVWR of 20,500 and 22,000 pounds, respectively, powered by 230-HP MaxxForce

7 V-8 engines.

"Manufacturers already know how to build on this platform, and we've added a

fuel-efficient diesel engine that's already set up for the new 2010 EPA emission requirements," Walmsley said. ♦

CLASS C

MODEL	WHEELBASES (INCHES)	ENGINE(S)	GVWR ¹ (LBS.)	GCWR ² (LBS.)	TOWING ALLOWANCE (LBS.) ³
CHEVROLET					
KODIAK C4500/C5500	166–221	GM Vortec 8.1-L V-8 325 HP/450 LB-FT Duramax 6.6-L V-8 diesel 300/330 HP/705/841 LB-FT	16,500–21,500	26,000	Determined by manufacturer
CHEVROLET/WORKHORSE					
	159	GM Vortec 6.0-L V-8 323 HP/373 LB-FT	14,200	20,000	5,800
DODGE					
RAM 5500	238.5–257.5	Cummins 5.7-L 350 HP/610 LB-FT	19,500	26,000	6,500
DODGE/FREIGHTLINER					
SPRINTER	144, 170	Mercedes-Benz 3.0-L V-6 diesel 154 HP/280 LB-FT	11,030	15,520	5,000
FORD					
E-350SD	138, 158, 176	Ford 6.0-L V-8 diesel 235 HP/440 LB-FT Ford 6.8-L V-10 305 HP/420 LB-FT Ford 5.4-L V-8 255 HP/350 LB-FT	10,000–12,500	13,000–20,000	7,800–10,000
E-450SD	158, 176	Ford 6.0-L V-8 diesel 235 HP/440 LB-FT Ford 6.8-L V-10 305 HP/420 LB-FT Ford 5.4-L V-8 255 HP/350 LB-FT	14,500	20,000–22,500	10,000
NAVISTAR/INTERNATIONAL					
DURASTAR	140–254	MaxxForce DT I-6 diesel 300 HP/660 LB-FT	25,500	33,000	Determined by manufacturer

¹ Gross vehicle weight rating. ² Gross combined weight rating. ³ Depending on actual motorhome weight.

CHASSIS CHOICES FOR 2009

CLASS A

MODEL	WHEELBASES (INCHES)	ENGINE(S)	GVWR ¹ (LBS.)	GCWR ² (LBS.)	TOWING ALLOWANCE (LBS.) ³
CUSTOM CHASSIS PRODUCTS					
RSR	192	Cummins ISB-AD 5.9-L I-6 340 HP/660 LB-FT	22,000	26,000	4,000
RSRH	216	Cummins ISB-AD 5.9-L I-6 340 HP/660 LB-FT	25,000	29,000	4,000
RR4R	204-252	Cummins ISB 5.9-L I-6 340 HP/660 LB-FT	29,000	36,000	7,000
RR8R	237-273	Cummins ISC 8.3-L I-6 360 HP/1,050 LB-FT	33,000	43,000	10,000
		Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 425 HP/1,200 LB-FT			
RR8S	248-272	Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 425 HP/1,200 LB-FT	37,600	47,600	10,000
RR10R	261	Cummins ISC 8.3-L I-6 360 HP/1,050 LB-FT	43,000	53,000	10,000
		Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 425 HP/1,200 LB-FT			
RR10S	248-272	Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 425 HP/1,200 LB-FT	44,600	54,600	10,000
DYNAMAX (COUNTRY COACH)					
TRIBUTE	239, 263	Caterpillar C9 9.3-L I-6 425 HP/1,350 LB-FT	37,200	47,200	10,000
		Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 425 HP/1,200 LB-FT			
INSPIRE	205, 229, 265, 277, 279	Caterpillar C9 9.3-L I-6 425 HP/1,350 LB-FT	37,200-47,600	47,200-57,600	10,000
		Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 425 HP/1,200 LB-FT			
ALLURE	219, 243, 279, 296	Caterpillar C9 9.3-L I-6 425 HP/1,350 LB-FT	47,600	57,600-62,600	10,000-15,000
		Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 425 HP/1,200 LB-FT			
		Cummins ISM 10.8-L I-6 500 HP/1,550 LB-FT			
INTRIGUE	234, 270, 294	Caterpillar C13 12.5-L I-6 525 HP/1,750 LB-FT	52,000	67,000	15,000
		Cummins ISM 10.8-L I-6 500 HP/1,550 LB-FT			
MAGNA	241, 265, 289	Caterpillar C15 15.2-L I-6 625 HP/1,900 LB-FT	54,000	69,000	15,000
		Cummins ISX 14.9-L I-6 600 HP/1,850 LB-FT			
AFFINITY	241, 265, 289	Caterpillar C15 15.2-L I-6 625 HP/1,900 LB-FT	54,000	69,000	15,000
		Cummins ISX 14.9-L I-6 600 HP/1,850 LB-FT			
RHAPSODY	292	Caterpillar C15 15.2-L I-6 625 HP/2,150 LB-FT	59,000	79,000	20,000
FORD					
F-SERIES SUPER DUTY	158, 178, 190, 208, 228, 252	Ford 6.98-L V-10 362 HP/457 LB-FT	16,000, 18,000 20,500, 22,000 24,000, 26,000	26,000-30,000	4,000-10,000
FREIGHTLINER					
MC (FRED)	178, 190, 208, 228, 242, 246, 250, 252, 254, 260, 270	Cummins ISB 5.9-L I-6 300 HP/620 LB-FT 340 HP/660 LB-FT	22,000-27,500	26,000-30,000	Determined by manufacturer

¹ Gross vehicle weight rating. ² Gross combined weight rating. ³ Depending on actual motorhome weight.

CLASS A

MODEL	WHEELBASES (INCHES)	ENGINE(S)	GVWR ¹ (LBS.)	GCWR ² (LBS.)	TOWING ALLOWANCE (LBS.) ³
XCS	190, 193, 200, 203, 208, 228, 242, 252, 262, 266, 276	Cummins ISB 5.9-L I-6 300 HP/620 LB-FT 340 HP/660 LB-FT 325 HP/750 LB-FT 350 HP/750 LB-FT Cummins ISC 8.3-L I-6/360 HP/1,050 LB-FT	26,000–32,400	30,000–42,400	Determined by manufacturer
XCR	193, 200, 203, 208, 216, 228, 234, 238, 242, 248, 252, 262, 266, 272, 276, 282 (tag axle), 288 (tag axle)	Cummins ISB 5.9-L I-6 300 HP/620 LB-FT 340 HP/660 LB-FT 325 HP/750 LB-FT 350 HP/750 LB-FT Cummins ISC 8.3-L I-6 360 HP/1,050 LB-FT Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 370 HP/1,200 LB-FT 400 HP/1,200 LB-FT 425 HP/1,200 LB-FT	26,000–44,600	30,000–59,600	Determined by manufacturer
ecoFRED	178, 190, 208, 228, 242, 246, 250, 252, 254, 260, 270	Cummins ISB 6.7-L I-6 300 HP/620 LB-FT	27,000	37,000	Determined by manufacturer
XCL	228, 267, 276	Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 400 HP/1,200 LB-FT 425 HP/1,200 LB-FT	29,500–34,600	39,500–44,600	Determined by manufacturer
XCP POWERLINER	252, 266, 282, 292, 296	Cummins ISM 10.8-L I-6 500 HP/1,550 LB-FT	44,600–49,000	59,600–64,000	15,000
XCP POWERLINER III (Tag axle)	252, 266, 282, 292, 296	Cummins ISM 10.8-L I-6 500 HP/1,550 LB-FT	50,000	65,000	15,000
FREIGHTLINER/DODGE					
SPRINTER F-50 COWL CHASSIS	170	Mercedes-Benz 3.0-L V-6 diesel 154 HP/280 LB-FT	11,030	15,250	5,000
FORETRAVEL					
PHENIX	252, 276, 304	Cummins ISX 15-L I-6 650 HP/1,950 LB-FT	52,000	60,000	18,000
NIMBUS	228, 252, 276	Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 425 HP/1,200 LB-FT Cummins ISM 11.0-L I-6 500 HP/1,550 LB-FT	34,800–46,800	51,000–60,000	15,200–16,200
LIBERTY (FLEETWOOD)					
AMERICAN ALLEGIANCE 40X, 42G, 42T	278–302	Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 400 HP/1,200-1,500 LB-FT	34,600–44,600	49,600–59,600	15,000
AMERICAN TRADITION 42C, 42F, 42M, 42P	302	Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 425 HP/1,200 LB-FT	44,600	61,600	15,000
AMERICAN EAGLE 42C, 42F, 42M, 42P, 45D, 45E, 45H	302–304	Cummins ISM 10.8-L I-6 500 HP/1,550 LB-FT	46,600	61,600	15,000
AMERICAN HERITAGE 45B, 45E	304	Cummins ISM 10.8-L I-6 500 HP/1,550 LB-FT Cummins ISX 14.9-L I-6 650 HP/1,550-1,950 LB-FT	46,600–50,600	61,600–65,600	15,000
POWER BRIDGE (FLEETWOOD)					
BOUNDER DIESEL 36B, 36D, 38F, 38S, 38V	228–252	Cummins ISB 6.7-L I-6 340 HP/660 LB-FT	28,000	33,000	5,000
EXPEDITION 34H, 38F, 38L, 38R, 38Y	228–252	Cummins ISB 6.7-L I-6 325 HP/750 LB-FT	31,000	41,000	10,000
DISCOVERY 37D, 39R, 40G, 40K, 40X	228–252–276	Cummins ISB 6.7-L I-6 350 HP/750 LB-FT	31,000	41,000	10,000
EXCURSION/PROVIDENCE 39R, 40E, 40Q, 40T, 40X	252–276	Cummins ISC 8.3-L I-6 360 HP/1,050 LB-FT	32,000	42,000	10,000

¹ Gross vehicle weight rating. ² Gross combined weight rating. ³ Depending on actual motorhome weight.

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CHASSIS CHOICES FOR 2009

CLASS A

MODEL	WHEELBASES (INCHES)	ENGINE(S)	GVWR ¹ (LBS.)	GCWR ² (LBS.)	TOWING ALLOWANCE (LBS.) ³
ROADMASTER (MONACO COACH CORPORATION)					
RR4R	204-252	Cummins ISB 5.9-L I-6 340 HP/660 LB-FT	29,000	36,000	7,000
RR8R	237-261	Cummins ISC 8.3-L I-6 360 HP/1,050 LB-FT Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 400 HP/1,200 LB-FT	33,000	43,000	10,000
RR8S	248-272	Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 425 HP/1,200 LB-FT	37,600	47,600	10,000
RR10R	261	Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 400 HP/1,200 LB-FT	43,000	53,000	10,000
RR10S	270	Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 425 HP/1,200 LB-FT	44,600	54,600	10,000
S-SERIES	242-284	Cummins ISL 8.9-L I-6 425 HP/1,200 LB-FT Cummins ISM-II 11.0-L I-6 500 HP/1,550 LB-FT Cummins ISX 15.0-L I-6 650 HP/1,950 LB-FT	50,300	60,300	10,000-15,000
SPARTAN					
NVS	Per coachbuilder's specs	Cummins ISB 300 HP/620 LB-FT	23,000-25,500	28,000	5,000
NVS GT	Per coachbuilder's specs	Cummins ISC 300 HP/1,000 LB-FT	24,000-29,500	34,000-39,500	10,000
K2	Per coachbuilder's specs	Cummins ISM 500 HP/1,550 LB-FT	44,601-46,600 (with tag axle)	59,601-61,600 (with tag axle)	15,000
K3	Per coachbuilder's specs	Cummins ISX 600/650 HP/1,850/1,950 LB-FT	50,601-54,000 (with tag axle)	65,601-69,000 (with tag axle)	15,000
MOUNTAIN MASTER	Per coachbuilder's specs	Cummins ISC 330/360 HP/1,000/1,050 LB-FT	29,601-34,600	39,600-46,600	10,000-12,000
MOUNTAIN MASTER GT	Per coachbuilder's specs	Cummins ISL 350/400/425 HP/1,200 LB-FT	31,601-34,600 41,601-44,600 (with tag axle)	46,601-49,600 56,601-59,600 (with tag axle)	15,000
TIFFIN					
POWERGLIDE	238-318	Cummins ISL 8.9-L 425 HP/1,200 LB-FT	36,600-49,900	46,600-59,000	10,000
WINNEBAGO					
MAXUM	267	Cummins ISL 8.9-L 400/425 HP/1,200 LB-FT	32,350-34,320	42,350-44,320	10,000
WORKHORSE					
W16	158.5-228	GM Vortec 8.1-L V-8 340 HP/455 LB-FT	16,000	22,000	4,000
W16D	190	MaxxForce 5 V-6 200 HP/440 LB-FT	16,000	20,000	4,000
W18	158.5-228	GM Vortec 8.1-L V-8 340 HP/455 LB-FT	18,000	22,000	4,000
W20	190-228	GM Vortec 8.1-L V-8 340 HP/455 LB-FT	20,500	26,000	5,500
W20D	190, 208, 228	MaxxForce 7 V-8 230 HP/620 LB-FT	20,500	26,000	5,500
W22	208-242	GM Vortec 8.1-L V-8 340 HP/455 LB-FT	22,000	26,000	4,000
W22D	208, 228, 242	MaxxForce 7 V-8 230 HP/620 LB-FT	22,000	26,000	4,000
W24	228-242	GM Vortec 8.1-L V-8 340 HP/455 LB-FT	24,000	30,000	6,000
UFO 22	208-228	GM Vortec 8.1-L V-8 340 HP/455 LB-FT	22,000	26,000	4,000
UFO 26	208-262	GM Vortec 8.1-L V-8 340 HP/455 LB-FT	26,000	30,000	4,000
R28	228-252	Caterpillar C7 7.2-L I-6 300-360 HP/860-925 LB-FT	28,000	40,000	12,000
R29	228-252	Caterpillar C7 7.2-L I-6 300-360 HP/860-925 LB-FT	29,500	41,500	12,000
R31	228-252	Caterpillar C7 7.2-L I-6 300-360 HP/860-925 LB-FT	31,000	43,000	12,000
R32	228-252	Caterpillar C7 7.2-L I-6 300-360 HP/860-925 LB-FT	32,000	44,000	12,000

¹ Gross vehicle weight rating. ² Gross combined weight rating. ³ Depending on actual motorhome weight.

WINNEBAGO ERA 170XL



SLEEK STYLING AND A MERCEDES DIESEL
MAKE WEEKEND GETAWAYS MORE ECONOMICAL AND FUN

by FRED PAUSCH

No matter which way the economy swings, the one certainty that remains is the enjoyment of the RVing lifestyle. Luckily, for those who are shopping for new wheels, there are more choices in the smaller motorhome arena than ever before, and Winnebago has joined the fray in Class B offerings with the ERA. Built on the popular Dodge Sprinter chassis that uses the Mercedes-Benz, 3.0-L turbodiesel, the ERA offers a full list of features in a very pleasing, compact form.

Two Touring and two Limited versions are available, all built on the single rear wheel (SRW), 170-inch wheelbase using Winnebago's well-conceived floorplan. Our test unit arrived fully equipped in the striking Charcoal Limited Package, leaving no doubt that this is much more than just a simple van conversion.

UNDER THE HOOD

The heart of the Sprinter is the Mercedes CDI turbodiesel pumping out 154 smooth ponies through a paddle-shift-assisted five-speed transmission. The engine bay is open and neatly organized, making fluid checks a breeze, and owners will appreciate the clever non-skid step integrated into the lower grille valance. Mercedes also adds an interesting twist in that it does not include a transmission dipstick on the diesel-powered Sprinter. Instead, it requires the motorhome be driven to a Dodge or Chrysler dealership for free transmission fluid checks that — according to our local Chrysler dealer — require the use of a special dealership tool. This is not especially convenient or reassuring after ingrained fluid check routines that are more easily conducted during refueling stops. Hopefully, future iterations will restore this basic maintenance necessity.

Underhood features include the passenger-side fresh air intake for the cabin. Air enters the vehicle through the driver-side

hood grille intake, crossing the full width of the hood's core and under the matching passenger-side dummy hood grille, wringing out any moisture along the way and entering a large filter box that uses the hood as the lid. An easy-to-change 9 × 14-inch pleated filter is visible anytime the hood is opened and ensures only fresh, filtered air enters the cabin's blower motor housing for dash-selected distribution. At first glance, the battery seems to be missing, but it's actually secured in a well under the driver's feet. Dodge has wisely provided additional space for an optional driver-side second battery and tray combo under the hood while the house battery resides in a vented battery box in the rear cabinetry.

THE TOUR

A short step up into the driver's seat provides uncompromised forward visibility maintained by large 23-inch wipers and the sharply sloping hood that immediately identifies this newest player in the utility van offering. A pair of round, no-nonsense analog gauges clearly display speed and engine RPM. Numerous color-warning icons logically arranged above and between the gauges inform the driver of a laundry list of maladies — from low tire pressure to burned-out signal bulbs, plus a host of engine, brake and traction/stability system malfunctions. A small, centered digital information screen displays distance functions and fuel status along with time functions.

Within the center dash pillar is Winnebago's RV Radio, which includes an AM/FM stereo/CD player and a connection point for MP3 and iPod input. Ours also included the optional (\$280) Sirius satellite radio feature. Immediately below, two bands of controls include three large intuitive knobs and adjacent switches to control air and A/C distribution. Rounding out the dash is the ergonomically located paddle shifter, cup holders and a 12-volt DC power point.

Fully adjustable, comfortable captain's chairs sport a single

PHOTOS: FRED PAUSCH



2009 WINNEBAGO ERA 170XL

WHAT'S HOT

Quiet, easy driver with excellent road manners; Mercedes-Benz turbodiesel; multi-use floorplan

WHAT'S NOT

Minimal Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity; no transmission dipstick; easily damaged running boards

Clockwise from top: In the cockpit, monitoring engine functions and operating dash controls are a simple task thanks to the intuitive layout. Large side shades and built-in pleated door and windshield shades create privacy while adjustable, swiveling chairs provide comfortable seating. The ERA's compact but efficient kitchen module makes meal service a breeze with plenty of storage above.

ratcheting armrest and are equipped with a manually adjustable lumbar support. The chairs easily swivel to face matching companion seats around the movable pole-mounted table that can also be positioned in front of the sofa bed.

Dodge and Winnebago have complemented each other's efforts by creating a window array for the Sprinter/ERA that provides panoramic views from every seating location. The standard tinted awning-style windows allow useful and needed ventilation, moving or camped, and the room-darkening roller shades help keep out the heat. It's often the case that dark-color paint schemes, while stunning, can become uncomfortably warm on sunny days without using auxiliary ventilation or cooling. A lighter exterior paint choice would be welcomed not only for longer van washing intervals but better heat reflection as well.

Loading the ERA for a weekend getaway was no problem thanks to the storage area under the removable rear 60 x 80-inch sofa bed, which was equipped with the optional (\$294) electric fold-down mechanism that really is a necessity for owning this motorhome. Leaving the sofa in the bed position will increase usable storage space but also limits aisle access. Still, not a bad tradeoff since the sofa doesn't have seat-belted positions.

Additional storage is available above the sofa bed in an overhead cabinet, thanks to the Dodge "High Roof" that creates the 6-foot, 3-inch interior height. More storage abounds in the 9-foot length of upper Euro-style Light Maple cabinetry that runs unbroken nearly the length of the driver's side cabin area.

A removable clothes bar is provided across the length of the bath for drip drying wet clothing or towels and can act as a temporary hanging space for long items. Permanent hanging shirt-length wardrobe cabinets can be substituted for one or both of the companion captain chairs if storage is preferred over seating

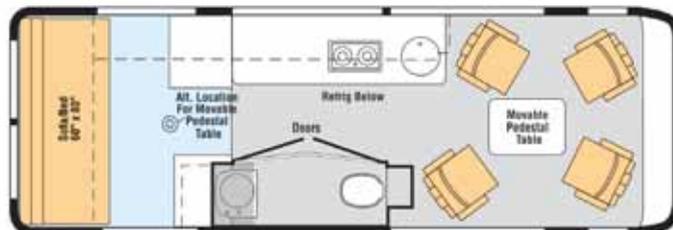
and six drawers of various sizes are provided in the galley module to stow cooking utensils and dishware.

MANAGING WEIGHT

The ERA does not have unlimited Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity (occc). Given that the well-appointed, two-sleeper ERA is best suited as a suite-for-two weekender, we could make the best use of its available payload by traveling with reduced freshwater volume to increase the occc and connecting to the campground water supply when needed. We determined from the ERA's factory weight certification label and our scale measurements that freshwater capacity has the greatest variable effect on the occc, so traveling with a half-tank of water and using only two of the four seatbelted positions during travel created an occc of 329 pounds. Owners will have to monitor their cargo selections in earnest to make every pound count, but the ERA should accommodate the necessities for a weekend trip. Eliminating one of the companion seats for the available storage cabinet might also help improve payload totals.

OFF AND RUNNING

Undeterred, and mindful of the weight limitations, we set off for our overnight destination at the beautiful and secluded Canyon RV Park (www.canyonrvpark.com), just off Highway 91 in Ana-



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WINNEBAGO ERA 170XL

heim, California. Located in the heart of the Southland, it's a perfect destination for quick weekend getaways like this.

En route, the ERA provided smooth ramp-to-freeway speeds without hesitation or transmission complaints — easing in and out of traffic without effort — often making us feel we were driving something much shorter than its true 24 feet. Cruising at 65 MPH, the Mercedes diesel turned 2,400 RPM, giving us a range of 17–20 MPG for its efforts — once the commuter traffic was behind us and the cruise control was set. When we took the speed down to 55 MPH, mileage increased to an impressive 20–22 MPG. The power rack-and-pinion steering was very responsive, with excellent feedback, requiring minimal input as the independent front suspension smoothed out road surface irregularities.

Kudos to the soundproofing crew at Dodge and Winnebago whose talents and skill allowed the ERA to score big points for a quiet, rattle-free ride. Measuring only 70–72 decibels at freeway speed on average-condition road surfaces, the refreshing quiet allowed clear hands-free cell phone use.

IN CAMP

Setting up camp is as simple as backing into the site and plugging in ... or not. It's your choice. Our ERA came equipped with the optional (\$2,793) 2.5 kW Onan LP-gas-powered AC generator that is tucked up behind the rear axle, but also subtracted 113 pounds of valuable occc. Sliding open the side door reveals the companion seats, making entry an easy step up on the oversized but low running board design. You'll have to be careful parallel parking as the low running boards could easily be damaged.

Galley duties are a breeze on the dual-burner stovetop. Dometic's new three-way single-door fridge stows perishable supplies as well as other tasty treats slated to be finished in the small built-in microwave.

With dishes washed in the hinged lid single-basin sink and stowed, a rejuvenating shower is possible courtesy of the 6-gallon water heater. The wet bath is similar in design to those found in truck campers and though tight for some, it's still nice to have a hot shower anytime you want.

We discovered an additional benefit of that electric sofa bed: leaving the seatback

SPECIFICATIONS

PERFORMANCE

FUEL ECONOMY: 17–22 MPG

ACCELERATION:

0-60 MPH: 19 SEC

40-60 MPH: 10 SEC

CHASSIS

MODEL: DODGE SPRINTER

ENGINE: MERCEDES-BENZ 3.0-L

6 CYLINDER TURBODIESEL

SAE HP: 154 HP @ 3,400 RPM

TORQUE: 280 LB-FT @ 1,200–2,400 RPM

TRANSMISSION: 5-SPEED AUTOMATIC

AXLE RATIO: 3.92:1

TIRES: LT 245/75R16E

WHEELBASE: 170"

BRAKES, F/R: ABS DISC W/SKID CONTROL

SUSPENSION, F/R: IFS/LONGITUDINAL LEAFS

FUEL CAP: 26.4 GAL

WARRANTY: 3 YRS/36,000 MILES

COACH

EXT LENGTH: 24' 1"

EXT WIDTH: 6' 4"

EXT HEIGHT: 9' 7"

INT WIDTH: 5' 10"

INT HEIGHT: 6' 3"

CONSTRUCTION: STEEL FRAMING, STEEL SKIN

AND ROOF, 2" FIBERGLASS BATT INSULATION

FRESHWATER CAP: 30 GAL

BLACK-WATER CAP: 10 GAL

GRAY-WATER CAP: 22 GAL

WATER-HEATER CAP: 6 GAL

LP-GAS CAP: 16 GAL

FURNACE (1): 16,000 BTU

AIR CONDITIONER (1): 9,200 BTU

REFRIGERATOR: 4 CU-FT

CONVERTER: 45 AMPS

BATTERY (2): 12-VOLT CHASSIS,

12-VOLT COACH

AC GENERATOR: 2.5 KW

MSRP: \$91,466

MSRP AS TESTED: \$95,351

WARRANTY: 1 YR/15,000 MILES

WET WEIGHT

(WATER & HEATER, FUEL, LP-GAS TANK FULL;

NO SUPPLIES OR PASSENGERS)

FRONT AXLE: 3,500 LBS

REAR AXLE: 4,460 LBS

TOTAL: 7,960 LBS

CHASSIS RATINGS

GAWR, F/R: 3,970/5,630 LBS

GVWR/GCWR: 8,550/13,550 LBS

OCCC: 590 LBS

GAWR: GROSS AXLE WEIGHT RATING

GVWR: GROSS VEHICLE WEIGHT RATING

GCWR: GROSS COMBINATION WEIGHT RATING

OCCC: OCCUPANT & CARGO CARRYING CAPACITY

SCWR: SLEEP CAPACITY WEIGHT RATING

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partially raised for perfect movie viewing on the HD-capable LCD TV. Unique pleated horizontal blinds are fitted to the windshield and doors, eliminating the need for traditional wraparound curtains. Pull-down shades handle the cabin.

With a comfortable night behind us, we headed for apple festival activities in nearby Oak Glen, in the foothills of San Bernardino County. The ERA handled some 5-percent grades without a stutter and the transmission never exhibited any hunting or gear confusion due in large part to the torquey turbodiesel. Heading downhill in third gear kept our speed at 42 MPH in complete control without need for the 4-wheel discs with another slap of the shifter ringing up second gear, bringing the speed down to 25 MPH on the same grade.

Despite its tall silhouette, the ERA never once gave any indication of top-heaviness or any sickly roll during our spirited foothill driving. The computer-aided stability control system, which senses speed and steering angle to ensure proper direction control based on payload, was



In the reclined position, the rear sofa and bench-seat cushions create a large bed.

reassuring to have. The system seamlessly monitored the off-camber turns and sudden braking, and for the most part, we were unable to feel any system-generated braking correction in any particular maneuver.

After sampling "everything-apple" in this quaint little mountain hamlet and losing light fast, we headed home with another great single-tank getaway in the logbook and equally great marks for the 2009 ERA in almost every category. ♦



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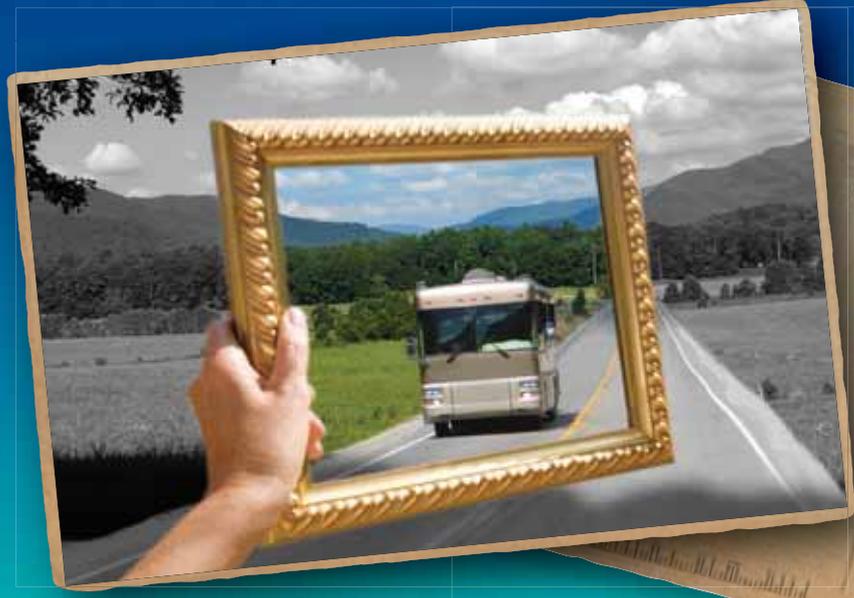
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Not available in all states. Blue Sky RV Insurance is managed by Recreation Insurance Specialists, LLC.

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quicktips

from OUR READERS



HANDY HAMPER

Most motorhomes either don't have a clothes hamper or have one that's too small. I solved that problem in my RV by converting an unused vanity into a large hamper. First, I cut an opening inside the top of the vanity and created a hinged door. Next, I drilled holes around the inside opening and glued dowels into each hole, making "hooks" on which to hang a mesh laundry bag.

To close up the front opening, I bought a wood frame and stained it to match the existing woodwork. I inset a brass mesh metal panel for decoration and air circulation. The frame is held in place with four cabinet-door magnets. To take out a full bag of laundry I simply lift open the counter and pull the bag out.

RONALD BELL | KINGSVILLE, MARYLAND

SOLAR SECURITY

I wanted to secure the solar panels on the roof of my motorhome to help prevent theft. I used a cable padlock, like those used for gun locks, and drilled a hole in a mounting foot and then one in the side frame of the solar panel so that the cable would be tight and not rub on the roof. I chose the mounting foot that was closest to the outside edge of the RV and one that was near a vent so that the lock would be visible from the ground in order to discourage theft; it would also be difficult to cut the lock without a ladder to the side of the rig.

The solar panels can still be tilted in one direction without moving the lock. More than one lock can be used on a panel for added security.

STEVE GARRETT | PENSACOLA, FLORIDA



ON THE HOOK



Each time I stored my fishing rods in the compartment of my RV, they would tangle up with other equipment. My solution was to purchase a cup hook and a tool holder from the hardware store and install them on one of the compartment walls. The rods no longer get tangled up with each other or other gear in the storage area, and are easily accessible.

DANNY LINDSTROM | SALINAS, CALIFORNIA ♦

Quick Tips,

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

ILLUSTRATIONS: BILL TIPTON

techsavvy

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



HANDS-ON | by DAVE RIGGS

GOING UP, GOING DOWN

Unique, and sturdy, the telescoping pedestal from Springfield Marine adds versatility to dinette tables

Motorhome owners spend a good deal of time sitting

around a dining table. There are a number of table configurations, but the standard-type dinette is still a mainstay of the industry. Trouble is, many of these dinette tables are supported by flimsy pedestal legs that wobble or even self-destruct over time. Because there are very few good solutions for the RV industry when it comes to table pedestals, we sometimes have to turn to the boating industry. In this case, we found a slick 3-Stage Table Pedestal offered by Springfield Marine Company.

The 3-Stage Table Pedestal is much more versatile than a standard RV dining table in that it adjusts infinitely from 12¾ inches from the floor to 28 inches — the appropriate table height for eating. When extended to maximum height, all three tubes are exposed. When the middle tube is pushed down into the bottom tube, the 20-inch maximum height makes for a nice “coffee” table. When the two top tubes are collapsed, the table is at its lowest point (12¾ inches).

My interest in this type of an arrangement stems from the

need to position the table at a lower point for the convenience of using my laptop. In many cases, such as the C-shaped dinette we used in our installation of the new pedestal, the table can also be positioned to fill out the cushions when used as a bed — without juggling boards and brackets.

Installation is quite simple since the pedestal is attached to a base that bolts to the floor and the top tube has a platform that is used to secure the table.

Here's where some modification might be necessary. Depending on the table hardware, this platform may need cutting, as it did in our case. That was because the sliding mechanism under our particular table was too narrow to fit over the platform without restricting movement. Bolting into a table itself should pose no problem, especially since there are plenty of slots in the platform for matching bolt-holes. Bolting the base to the floor was simple.

In use, each section can be moved after releasing the latch, and the sections are pressurized to allow effortless movement. Collapsing the tubes takes a little oomph, but nothing difficult. Each section can be stopped and locked in place at any point in their respective travel zones.

The Springfield 3-Stage Table Pedestal is made of anodized aluminum and is available in satin or black finishes. It's very stout, and of course, meets rigid marine standards. It sells for \$321.10 (plus shipping) at Cascade Depot and *MotorHome* readers can get 10 percent off their first order when referencing this article.

For more information, contact Cascade Depot at (541) 327-2195, or go online to www.cascadedepot.com.

Caliper Conundrum

Disagreeing with his service-contract provider on how it covered a repair associated with his motorhome, a reader turned to Hot Line for assistance. He wrote:

During a recent trip in my motorhome, the brakes began to smell like they were burning, and the brake pedal went to the floorboard. After allowing the brakes to cool off, I proceeded to my destination cautiously with partial brake control.

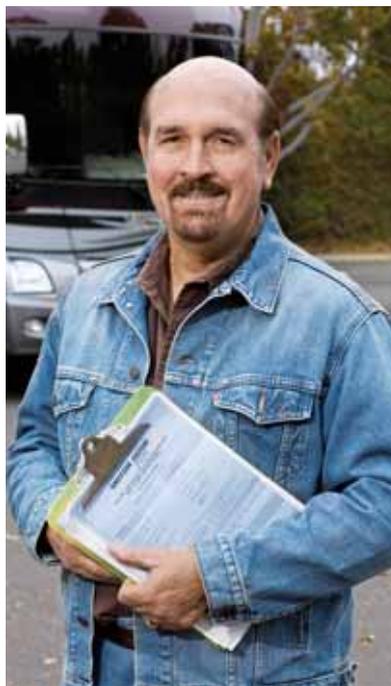
Three days later, I drove 60 miles home without any further problems, although the CHECK BRAKE light was on continuously. I took the coach to a local RV repair facility, where the mechanics there determined that both rear-brake calipers had locked up. In sorting out the causes of the failure, it was found that the locking up of the right-wheel caliper caused a speed sensor to melt.

My service contract underwriter, National Warranty of Florida, Inc., allowed for the replacement of the speed sensor, but denied coverage for the replacement of the calipers. The claims adjuster who examined my coach declared that my calipers were working at the time of inspection.

My National Warranty contract states that a part has failed "when it can no longer perform the function for which it was intended." In fact, the calipers on my unit *did* fail to perform their intended function when they locked up.

I am asking *Hot Line* to intercede for me in getting National Warranty of Florida to re-evaluate my claim.

JOHN H. SLEVIN | LILLIAN, ALABAMA



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Hot Line contacted National Warranty of Florida on Slevin's behalf. National Warranty elected not to answer our inquiry directly, citing conflict of interest and privacy concerns.

When presenting complaints to any company, it is never Hot Line's intent to take sides. We act as an impartial go-between for our readers. When readers/complainants request our assistance, they are in essence waiving any issues of privacy involving information surrounding their complaints.

Both National Warranty of Florida and Slevin responded as follows:

National Warranty of Florida:

We appreciate *Hot Line's* attempt to bring this situation to light. However, we believe that resolving this matter through your magazine would be a conflict of interest, since your parent company sells a competing extended-warranty product. We don't believe in resolving this matter via a magazine

by CHUCK CAMPBELL

out of respect for our customer's privacy, though we will respond directly to Mr. Slevin.

**ERIC VANCEAVE
CLAIMS MANAGER
NATIONAL WARRANTY OF FLORIDA
WHEAT RIDGE, COLORADO**

John H. Slevin:

Due to *Hot Line's* intervention, National Warranty reconsidered my claim, and sent me a check for \$598.80. Adding this amount to the \$434 the company previously allowed pretty well covers my repair expenses. Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

J.H.S.

POWER OVERLOAD

Thinking that an RV park owed him compensation for damages he believed he incurred during his stay there, a reader requested Hot Line's help. He wrote:

I recently stayed at the Western Horizons RV Park in Casa Grande, Arizona. Upon plugging in to the park's 50-amp receptacle, I believe 220 volts inadvertently coursed through my RV's electrical system. This power surge caused the electronics in both TVs, as well as the control board in my washer/dryer, to burn out. When I checked the park's power hook-up station at my site, the plug-in receptacle appeared to be worn.

I contacted Western Horizons' [home office] to request reimbursement for the cost to repair my coach's burned-out systems. The company denied liability, though it offered me a \$1,000 discount coupon toward a future Fantasy Tour.

I was advised that Western Horizons made its decision to deny my claim based on a report by its maintenance staff. The company then responded with an additional offer of \$500, but said it did not accept any liability. Despite the offer of partial payment, I still believe I am owed \$761.22 as compensation for my full repair bill (totaling \$1,261.22).

**ROBERT E. HERRY
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA**

Hot Line was unable to assist Herry in his quest for further compensation. However, we thought it prudent to share his letter with our readers.

Although situations similar to Herry's are not unheard of when hooked up to shorepower, they can be avoided if one uses a good quality surge protector. Unfortunately, it is difficult to prove liability when an electrical mishap occurs unless other coaches in the park are similarly affected at the same time.

A variety of surge protection devices can be purchased from Camping World and other retailers. Investment in a protection device is a good idea and can save money and headaches should an electrical mishap ever occur.

Following is Western Horizons' response to Hot Line.

Thank you for forwarding Mr. Herry's letter to our office. A report from our maintenance person, who inspected the receptacle in question, deemed it in good working

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HOT LINE

order. Considering this information, we cannot see how we are at fault in this matter. It is unfortunate that Mr. Herry had problems with his rig, but there is no evidence to support his claim.

However, our risk manager, in a good faith gesture, has sent Mr. Herry a cash payment of \$500, and a \$1,000 coupon for one of our caravan tours.

LYNN BERRY
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS
WESTERN HORIZON RESORTS
GUNNISON, COLORADO

AIR CONDITIONER WOES

At loggerheads with an RV repair facility over a bill, two readers requested Hot Line's intervention. They explained:

Recently, we took our 2004 diesel-powered motorhome to Brambillas, Inc., in Shakopee, Minnesota, to have the air conditioner repaired. Brambillas changed a couple of switches, claimed the A/C was fixed, and charged us \$450. However, on our next trip the A/C exhibited the same symptoms.

We took the rig back to Brambillas. We were told this time that a ground wire to the A/C was loose, and required dismantling part of the unit's ceiling area. We were billed \$1,122.27 for these repairs, which we feel is too high. Can *Hot Line* please help us resolve this?

RAY & PAULA MAIR
WOODBURY, MINNESOTA

Hot Line contacted Brambillas, Inc., on the Mairs' behalf. The company's service manager responded positively to them with a compromise offer. At this point however, the Mairs have not accepted.

Brambillas responded:

Brambillas' standard warranty is 90 days on parts and labor, which refers to parts that we ourselves replaced. The second time Mr. Mair brought his coach in for repairs, we found that his A/C was not getting ground signals, and traced the cause to the ground wire itself. This issue is not associated with the first repair work done on his A/C. That repair involved a start-up

relay (this part is still in working order).

Mr. Mair's service contract would only pay for 1½ hours to fix the ground wire, when it actually required 8 hours to do the job. The service contract underwriter finally agreed to add \$500 against the bill. This now leaves Mr. Mair with a total bill of \$522.27 (not including his \$100 deductible).

We have been trying to contact Mr. Mair with an offer to split the difference with him. This will leave him with a total outstanding balance of \$361.13. Mr. Mair has not yet returned our phone calls.

MICHAEL SANDGREN
BRAMBILLAS, INC.
SHAKOPEE, MINNESOTA ♦

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

Be sure to visit
 MOTORHOME's Web site:
www.motorhomemagazine.com



NEW! Dometic Recall Information

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

Previous Recall Announcement

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

Current Recall Announcement

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

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

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February 27-March 1, 2009 - Raleigh, NC

Rhode Island RV & Camping Show
February 27-March 1, 2009 - Providence, RI

Colorado RV, Sports, Boat & Travel Show
March 5-8, 2009 - Denver, CO

Atlantic City RV & Camping Show
March 6-8, 2009 - Atlantic City, NJ

Iowa RV & Travel Show
March 12-15, 2009 - Des Moines, IA

Virginia RV Show
March 13-15, 2009 - Hampton, VA

Las Vegas Sportsmen's Boat, RV & Travel Show
March 20-22, 2009 - Las Vegas, NV

Pomona RV & Travel Show
April 23-26, 2009 - Pomona, CA



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Wiring Diagrams

In your January column — “Electrical Outage II” — you stated that “Wiring diagrams are invaluable tools. Every motorhome owner should carry one for his or her use or the use of a technician.”

In 2006 I purchased a new Gulf Stream B Touring Cruiser. Since the purchase, I have not been able to acquire an electrical wiring diagram from the manufacturer or from the dealer, having attempted this on three occasions.

I was informed by one of the customer service contacts at Gulf Stream that a wiring diagram for this unit is “not available.” I tried to buy one from the

“IF THE SWITCH IS MELTING DOWN, ACCESSORIES THAT DON’T NEED TO BE KEYED COULD BE DIRECTLY WIRED OR CHANGED TO RELAY WIRING TO REDUCE THE LOAD ON THE IGNITION SWITCH.”



dealer’s parts department, and was informed that it was “not available to retail customers.”

I would be happy to pay whatever reasonable cost is involved to purchase one. However, it seems that Gulf Stream will not release this publication to its motorhome owners.

I would appreciate any help you may be able to provide to get Gulf Stream to change its policy. This motorhome has three slide outs, and the electrical wiring is somewhat complex. A wiring diagram would be very useful, if not necessary, for servicing this coach.

**CHARLES WOOD
VACAVILLE, CALIFORNIA**

I agree, Charles. I have not known Gulf Stream to refuse to supply wiring diagrams in the past, but this may be a change in policy. The diagram is obviously available, but not to “retail customers.”

I received a similar letter from Bob Vigna in Punta Gorda, Florida. He couldn’t obtain a wiring diagram from Newmar for his Dutch Star motorhome.

The automotive industry has been supplying detailed maintenance manuals and wiring diagrams to dealers and vehicle owners for many, many years. My company distributes them for the classic GMC motorhome built in the 1970s, and Helm, Inc. distributes them for many of the car brands. See www.helminc.com.

I would call Gulf Stream again, and ask to speak to someone other than a customer service representative. Explain to that person that you need the diagram to service your motorhome, and you are hoping that Gulf Stream will comply as part of its customer service policy.

ELECTRICAL OVERLOAD

I read your January column, “Electrical Outage II” — about Workhorse ignition switch problems — with a smile. My first experience was in North Carolina on a holiday weekend. After filling up with gas, I returned to the coach and had no juice at all. The Good Sam people and Cox Repair Service in Smithfield, North Carolina, got me moving after finding a

replacement switch for the ignition.

Cox Repair Service’s recommendation was to carry a spare, because the switch was too small for what was routed through it. I put a new switch in my toolbox on my return to New England, and a year later, same deal. The plug and switch actually started to melt. I plugged in the new switch, and was on my way.

I contacted Arlington RV Center, and they advised me there is a switch kit that replaces this obviously inadequate one. It uses a new switch with relays. It is called a P32 kit, and cost \$191.24 for the parts.

I was told that a handy person could install it, but I opted to have Arlington do it. All has been running fine since the conversion.

I ran into another Workhorse owner last winter in Florida. He had lost his switch, and had to have repairs. I wonder how many of these switches have failed?

**PAUL HARDY
NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS**

Thanks for the information, Paul. As mentioned in my January column, “If the switch is melting down, accessories that don’t need to be keyed could be directly wired or changed to relay wiring to reduce the load on the ignition switch.” The conversion you mention adds relays to the switch to take the added load.

A much easier and less expensive alternative would be to remove add-on wiring from the motorhome manufacturer, and wire it direct to a 12-volt DC source. Most of it does not need to be ignition keyed.

Direct wiring is something an average do-it-yourself owner can do. Better yet, when under warranty, get the motorhome manufacturer to do it for free.

SPLIT MODEL YEAR

I purchased what was called a “split model” in 1991. The motorhome was built on a 1990 GM P-chassis. It was registered as a 1991 model — similar to Michael Demma’s dilemma, addressed in your January column (“Model Year”).

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COACH & CHASSIS

However, I encountered a major problem with my split model when the first smog test was required for the fifth-year registration. California changed smog-test requirements for model-year 1991 vehicles, and because my 1990 chassis was registered as a 1991 vehicle, it was unable to pass the smog test. Neither Chevrolet nor the motorhome manufacturer was of any help. They said it was a state issue.

I had no luck dealing with the California smog folks. In the end, this motorhome became the dealer's problem when I traded it in on a new motorhome that had matching chassis and model year designations.

I think all *MotorHome* readers would be well advised to verify their states' smog requirements when purchasing a split model to determine if there are any differences between the purchase year and the chassis year.

CHUCK GRAY
YORBA LINDA, CALIFORNIA

I agree with your recommendation, Chuck, but have to think you were in a one-of-a-kind situation.

While your motorhome was unable to meet California's 1991 smog requirements, California has an inspection level above the typical smog shop that would have more than likely cleared the vehicle.

Buying a new motorhome and leaving the problem to the trade-in dealer solved your problem. I suspect the dealer was able to solve the split model problem very quickly. Thanks for the warning, though. It always helps to know about a potential problem in advance.

CHASSIS BATTERY MAINTENANCE

Since my 2008 Winnebago View is kept in a heated storage facility from November to March, I keep it plugged in, which charges the coach batteries. Unfortunately the engine battery discharges in this time.

Would I hurt any of the systems by plugging a battery charger into a 120-volt AC outlet in the coach, and using a cigarette lighter charging plug to keep the engine battery charged? Thanks for your response.

BRIAN HOUSTON
NASHUA, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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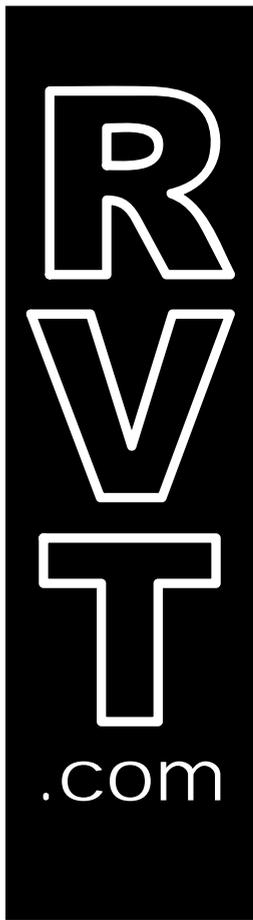
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A better and less expensive short-term alternative is to jumper the battery-boost solenoid relay, Brian. A short length of heavy gauge wire with two large alligator clamps will do the job. Don't forget to remove the jumper when you get ready to hit the road.

If the motorhome is plugged in during camping or storage, the jumper works fine for periods of less than a month. If the batteries are fully charged when they are jumpered, the converter will keep a head on them while they are jumpered. However, the motorhome must be driven or the batteries otherwise fully charged at least once a month to keep them from being sulfated due to the converter's limited charging capacity.

30 AMPS/50 AMPS

I have a 1998 Fleetwood motorhome. It has a 30-amp hookup. Can I change it to a 50-amp hookup?

JAMES CHEEK
ACWORTH, GEORGIA

CONTINUED ON PAGE 71



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by KEN FREUND

Gasoline Storage With Alcohol Blends

I've heard that gasoline with alcohol will absorb water and may cause water at the bottom of the tank — right where the fuel line picks it up. Have you heard of any motorhome storage problems that involve gasoline containing alcohol?

TED BRYANT
ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

Yes, I have heard of and experienced this problem, known as phase separation. These days it's difficult to find gasoline that is not blended with alcohol.

Here's a field procedure for detecting alcohol in gasoline. Use a small, clean bottle or test tube with a tight-fitting cap. Mark a line at the one-third level and fill it up to the line with water. Fill the other two-thirds with gasoline, leaving a small amount of air space on top. Shake the container vigorously, then let it settle for several minutes. (No smoking and keep it away from all sources of ignition.) If the volume of water seems to increase, alcohol is present. If the line between the gas and water becomes cloudy, estimate from the center of the cloudy portion. This procedure doesn't differentiate between methanol and ethanol, but it'll tell you if your fuel contains alcohol and is therefore subject to phase separation.

I recently found a product called K100 Fuel Treatment (716-745-1461, www.k100fuel.com) that's designed to cope with this problem. If you're concerned about phase separation, keep your fuel tank full to reduce the amount of air in it, which contains moisture, and consider using an additive such as K100.

TRANSMISSION TROUBLES

We own a 2001 Georgie Boy 29½-foot Suite with a 7.4-L Chevy engine on a Workhorse chassis. We're having trouble with the transmission not shifting back into overdrive after automatically downshifting to third gear when climbing a hill. Our dealer has changed a sensor, replaced the transmission fluid with synthetic and

upgraded the software. It hasn't helped.

The only things that help this problem are manually downshifting (before it automatically does) when climbing a hill, then manually shifting back to overdrive after reaching the top; or pulling over, shifting to park, turning the engine off and then turning it back on.

Should we take it to a transmission shop? We are running at 3,000 RPM (rather than the typical 2,200 RPM) most of the time and we get poor mileage.

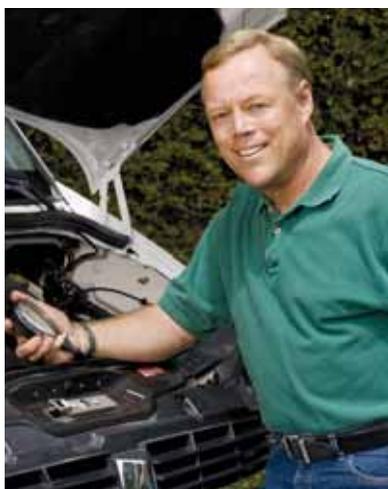
JIM & PAT BERNHARD
LAGO VISTA, TEXAS

Without looking at it and performing a pressure test, it's impossible to be certain, but there are a few possibilities. Either something is sticking in the valve body or a solenoid is not working right, or the third- and fourth-gear fluid pressure has a leak in the circuit, preventing the valve body from moving unless one side will go low after the shutdown.

The best thing to do is to have a technician drive with you using a handheld scanner called the Tech-2. While the problem exists, he can use the Tech-2 to command the solenoid to shift, then watch the line pressure during the shift to diagnose the problem.

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SYNTHETIC TRANSMISSION FLUID SWAP

I have a 2000 Ford E-450 Class C motorhome with a V-10 engine. Is it OK to use a synthetic transmission fluid?

JACK BALDWIN
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

Yes, the use of synthetic transmission fluid in this application is fine. Keep in mind that if you drain the fluid out of the pan there will still be a lot of the old fluid retained in the torque converter. Therefore, it may be best to have a transmission shop use a flushing machine that changes all of the fluid.

PROPER PRIUS PREPARATION

I have a 2008 Toyota Prius hybrid. The owner's manual is confusing on the procedure for towing it behind my coach on a dolly with the front wheels off the ground. Can you help clarify this?

ED HUBER | ELBERT, COLORADO

MotorHome publishes an annual guide to dinghy towing, which is also available online at our Web site www.motorhome.com. Your 2008 Prius is not listed in our 2008 Dinghy Towing Guide, which means that it is not manufacturer-approved for flat towing (with all four wheels on the road). However, since it is a front-wheel-drive vehicle, you can tow it on a dolly with the front wheels stationary and the parking brake off.

PLUGGED IN REVISITED

In the November 2008 item “Plugged In,” you expressed concern about leaving a coach plugged in because the converter keeps a head on the batteries and can result in excessive water use and shorter battery life. What if I have a three-stage charger? Should I use a timer to limit the time power is applied to my rig?

JIM BIESTEK | EVERGREEN, COLORADO

If you have a three-stage charger you should be OK, but I still find some that seem to overcharge batteries left on them for long periods, as evidenced by excessive water use. I use a timer set to a few minutes once a day with good results.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 65

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POWERTRAIN FROM PAGE 61

TRANSMISSION TEMPERATURE TIP II

I was surprised at your answer to "Transmission Temperature Tip" in the December 2008 issue, which concerned where to install the transmission temperature sensor. Logically, there is no reason to measure the fluid temperature in the pan. The transmission temperature sensor that feeds the PCM is inside the transmission (not in the pan). This will be the lowest temperature in the system, since it will be the fluid returning from the transmission cooler up front.

The temperature of the transmission is the most important reading to take — this allows you to see if the transmission is getting hot enough that you should stop and let it cool or back off on the throttle. Because of space, the sensor for this is usually located at the point where the fluid enters the engine radiator input to that first cooling stage.

ED JACKLITCH | SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

You bring up some good points, Ed. Manufacturers have provided recommended maximum temperatures based on locating the sensor in the pan, which is why we have traditionally suggested this location. I recommend using two sensors — one on the outlet, one in the pan — with a switch to allow the driver to choose between them. This lets the driver see how hot the fluid is getting as well as the effectiveness of the coolers.

CNG CONVERSION

I have a Gulf Stream 31-foot Class C coach on a 2001 Ford chassis with a 6.8-L V-10 engine. What will it cost to convert it to compressed natural gas?

JAMES SCHREINER
FREDONIA, ARIZONA

It depends on who does the conversion, but it will certainly be thousands of dollars — outweighing any potential savings. A CNG conversion will take up a lot of storage space for tanks, etc., and it will be hard to find a good shop to do the conversion safely. Therefore I don't recommend it.

ROTUND ROCKWOOD

I own a 1991 Rockwood Class C 21-foot motorhome, built on a Chevy G30 1-ton chassis. After reading your articles about not overloading RVs, I took my coach to a scale.

The tag on the door panel states: Front GAWR 3,580 pounds, rear GAWR 6,000

pounds, GVWR 9,400 pounds. With a quarter-tank of fuel, holding tanks empty and me in the driver's seat, the scale operator had me weigh the front (2,860 pounds) and then the whole RV (9,220 pounds); I then subtracted the two to come up with the rear weight (6,360 pounds). Is this the proper way to weigh an RV? And, with a rear weight of 6,360 pounds, which is over the axle limit by 360 pounds, but under the total GVWR limit by 180 pounds, am I in trouble?
G.B. MARCUM | LOS GATOS, CALIFORNIA

Since the rear axle appears to be overloaded and this is a critical measurement, I would take it back to a scale and have it measured directly. If the edge of the pavement by the scale drops off, for example, the weight might shift when one axle is weighed, causing an incorrect reading. If those readings are correct, you need to lighten your load as much as possible and shift weight forward to stay within the maximum load ratings.

OIL INFORMATION

I have some information regarding recommended oils for gas and diesel engines, particularly Shell Rotella T. The most recent oil formulations for gasoline cars and trucks (API SM/CF) have all but eliminated wear additives to meet the latest emission rules. This is fine for engines with close tolerance and roller-lifter camshafts. Most of our generators have flat tappet lifters, so the oil available now will result in extreme wear of the camshaft and lifters up to engine failure. The Rotella T is recommended for gas or diesel engines, and still has the wear-additive package. I use the Synthetic 5W-40 in the Onan generator and 7.4-L engine in my coach, and I get excellent mileage and no oil use, which is rare for motorhome engines or generators.

Constantly changing government regulations make it difficult for those of us who don't buy new vehicles every year, as the oil industry makes lubricating oil for new cars, and the standards are not necessarily backward compatible.

ALLEN NEAL | POWELL, TENNESSEE

As you mention, Allen, oil specifications keep changing and government regulations often replace one problem with another. ♦

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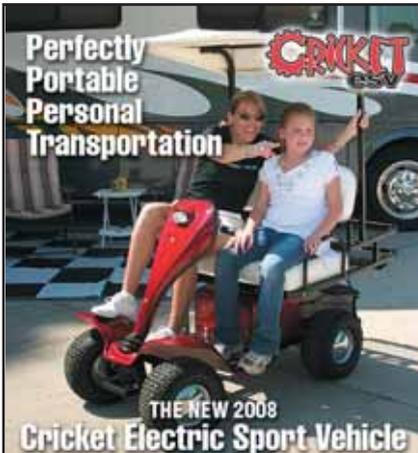
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A good electrician can make the change, James, but it will be expensive. Everything from the 30-amp AC circuit breaker box all the way out to the end of the shorepower cable will have to be changed.

Unless I'm missing something, all you will gain is the ability to run two air conditioners at the same time when a 50-amp hookup is available. Many campgrounds don't have 50-amp hookups. Will it be worth it? You be the judge.

TIRE STORAGE

I recently replaced all six tires on my Class A motorhome. When I moved the coach after four months on a concrete slab this summer, I noticed black "skid marks" under each tire. It looked like the concrete absorbed some of the compound right out of the tires.

Is concrete OK for long-term storage? I have read some people use plywood to protect tires from moisture, which seems silly to me.

**SADIE RINEHART
TOLEDO, OHIO**

It's not silly at all, Sadie. All tire companies recommend storing tires on a vapor barrier surface. Sheet metal on plywood is a good vapor barrier.

Concrete is porous, and is particularly so when there is no vapor barrier under it. Concrete in basements is often poured over sheet plastic, which is a fair vapor barrier. Concrete that is poured outside is rarely poured over any vapor barrier.

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INVERTER

I have a question about the inverter that you mentioned in your December 2008 column, "12-Volt Converter." I am also thinking of replacing my 12-volt DC bedroom TV with a 120-volt AC LCD TV. I have tried looking on the Internet for this inverter, but was not able to find it. Could you give me a Web address where I can find it?

**ROBERT GERBERICK
SHELLEY, IDAHO**

You couldn't find it, Robert, because the number is now RS400. See www.xantrex.com/web/id/7/p/1/pt/8/product.asp.

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

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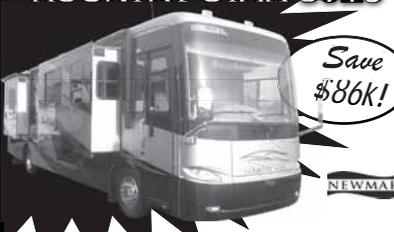
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TALES FROM THE TRAIL

by RON DALBY

MOTORHOMING TO THE IDITAROD



Willow, Alaska — Few consider the annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, over 1,150 wilderness miles across Alaska, an RV event.

However, the tailgate parties at the restart have become legendary. All you have to do to claim the best spot is to dry camp overnight on a frozen lake in the middle of an Alaskan winter.

The Iditarod begins in downtown Anchorage on the first Saturday in March. After trotting out of sight, the dogs are trucked to the scene of Sunday's restart in Willow, a few miles farther north, to take advantage of better snow conditions and less-populated terrain. (The race restart was, until recently, held in Wasilla until conditions deemed a move to Willow prudent.)

As far as tailgating is concerned, though, the site of the restart doesn't matter. Get there the afternoon before, park overlooking the trail, and rev up the party.

Once parked, we fire up the grill and make available sufficient quantities of snow-snake medicine/personal antifreeze to insure a raucous afternoon. Depending on our moods — and whatever equipment is at hand — we may strap on snowshoes or cross-country skis or roar off on a snow machine. Each gives us the chance to touch the Iditarod Trail for a brief moment. "Ski-joring" behind a

snow machine is a particular favorite and has so far not resulted in any 911 calls. I attribute this to Draconian rationing of snow-snake medicine beforehand.

Sunday morning begets nonstop excitement. The restart kicks off at 2PM, and by then there will be thousands of cars surrounding your rig. People will be sitting in lawn chairs at trail side or standing on top of their motorhomes for a better view.

If you've never been in the middle of 1,000 or more howling huskies surrounded by at least twice as many people, some of whom flagrantly disobey the rules about interfering, you haven't lived. That most of the teams get through this mad house relatively unscathed and untangled is a tribute to the mushers who trained them.

With 90 or so teams heading out at two-minute intervals, the restart takes

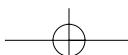
three hours or more with never a lull in the action. If you wish, you can get up close and personal with some of the teams in the staging area, though you should heed any requests to stay back from the dog drivers.

Also, don't bring Fifi the miniature poodle out to meet the huskies. Hardy working dogs may consider her a chew toy or maybe a snack — a recipe for creating utter chaos if there ever was one.

And then there is the chance to soak up the splendor of Alaska's outdoors. It has occasionally dipped to 10 below zero or colder the night before the restart; cold temperatures mean clear skies and a chance to see the northern lights dancing in the heavens. Whatever happens with the dogs, nature's most spectacular light show is reward enough for any effort needed to be part of the "Last Great Race on Earth." ♦



PHOTOS: RON DALBY; BRIAN ADAMS



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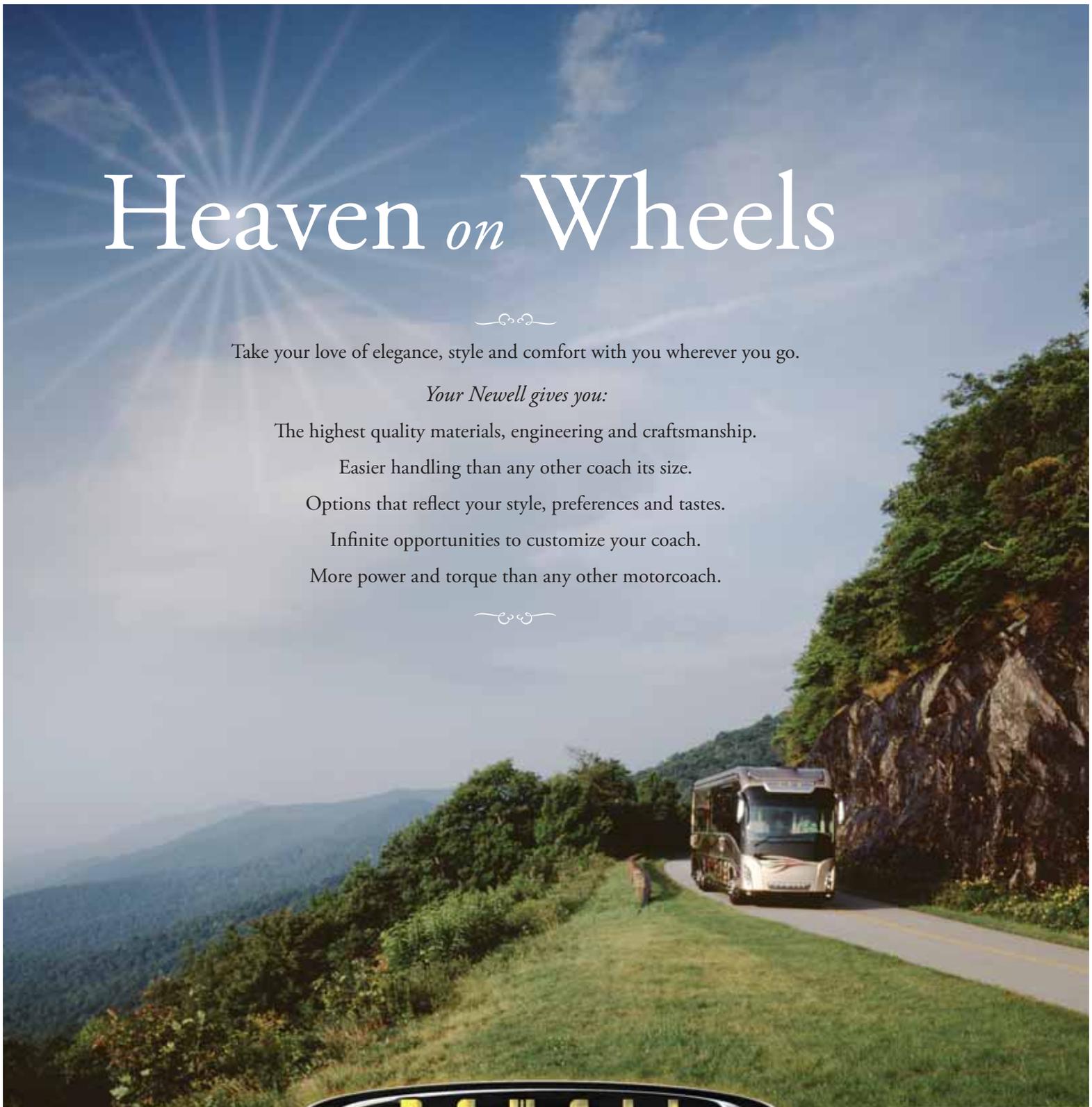
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