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# MOTORHOME

MAY 2009

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AFTERMARKET  
SHOCK ABSORBERS

ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO  
RV STORAGE AND  
PROTECTIVE COVERS

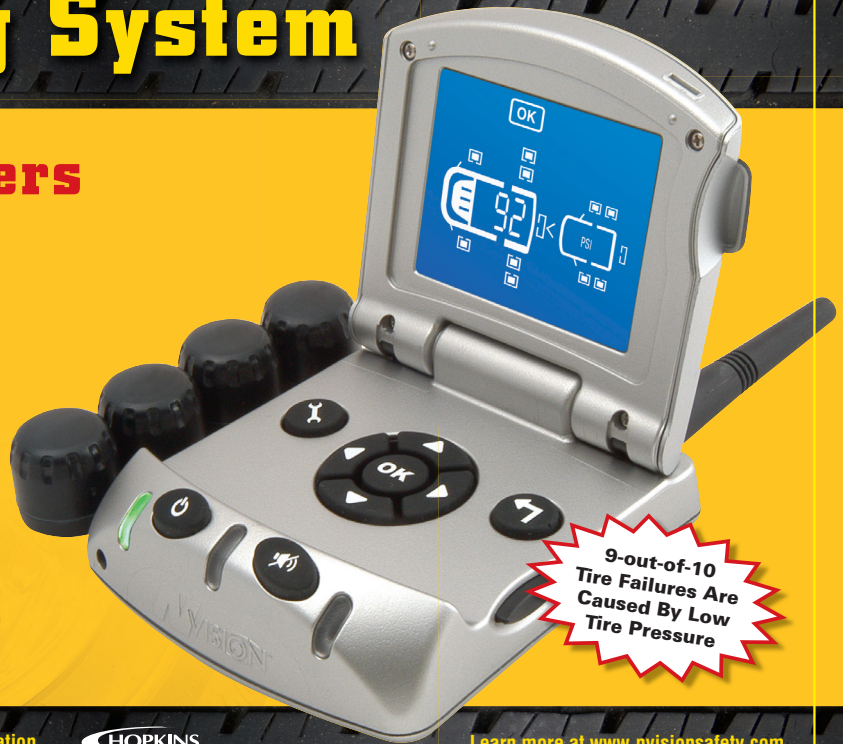


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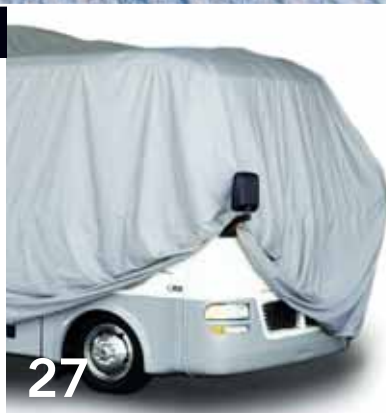
The nimble and fuel-efficient Itasca Navion iQ 24DL was a smart pick for exploring sand dunes, backroads and secluded spots along California's central coast

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**On The Cover:** The Itasca Navion iQ 24DL cruises through the Rancho Guadalupe Dunes Preserve along the coast of central California (see test on page 34). The sand dunes extend over 18 miles and are the second-largest area of coastal dunes in the state. Photo by Ross Hubbard.





# AN UNLIKELY MARRIAGE

**N**ow that summer is right around the corner, it's time take the ol' rig out of hibernation and spruce it up. Hopefully, winter storage hasn't been too hard on the exterior of your coach. After all, a motorhome is a big investment and you don't want it to look aged before its time.

Getting your coach ready for the road takes a lot of effort, but you can carve many hours out of the process if you keep it covered when in storage. Ultimately, storing your motorhome in a garage, barn or other type of shelter offers the highest level of protection (see "Ports, Pads & Parking at Home," page 31) — but that's not always practical due to space limitations and cost considerations. The next best defense is to use a cover (see "Under Wraps," page 27).

By "cover," I don't mean those over-size blue tarps you find in local hardware stores. A number of companies offer high-quality RV covers made of light-weight materials that do a tremendous job of protecting the exterior from rain, snow, wind and most conditions Mother Nature hands out. While these covers, generally, are sized generically, they actually provide a pretty close fit — and if you're willing to spend a few more dollars, you can get one custom fitted for your coach. In all cases, using a cover dedicated for motorhome use will add years of service to the exterior, and limit the heartache of a dulled finish — to say nothing of the backache of restoring it.

I know these covers can be costly, but I just learned of a great way to offset some of this expense: Pick the right insurance company! I know, it's an odd assertion. Just stay with me for a moment.

It's no secret our parent company offers RV insurance through its Good Sam Club. The coverage is under the Good Sam VIP Insurance banner and it's available to all members. But it's not your run-of-the-mill car insurance policy; the coverage is custom crafted for motorhomes.

Recently, I went to St. Louis, Missouri, to meet with a few execs at our partner company, GMAC, the underwriter of the Good Sam VIP program. I often join other industry and member advocates in reviewing policy coverage for RV owners. On this trip, I was reminded that you can suspend collision coverage (minimum of three consecutive months) for your motorhome while it's in storage. This provision, unique to Good Sam VIP, can save you enough in one year (depending on your travel schedule and coach) to buy that cover — or at least offset most of the cost.

The process is not difficult because GMAC's (VIP) agents are trained to work with RV owners, and understand the needs of RV enthusiasts — some are owners themselves. All you have to do is call in the suspension start date and call again when you're ready to get back on the road.

By the time our meetings concluded, it became clear to me how dedicated our partner company is to the motorhome owner. I even found out that a mishap I had with a wayward solar panel would have been covered had I called the incident hot line — and I've been a policyholder for many years (and yes, I pay full price for the coverage). A few years ago, one of my professionally installed solar panels dislodged from the roof while I was traveling down the highway at 65 MPH — destroying the satellite dish, air conditioner cover and Fan-Tastic Vent, and putting a nice big hole in the side wall of the rig. Two lessons learned: I would have saved thousands of dollars if I had taken advantage of GMAC's hot line ... and a close roof inspection should be part of any post-storage maintenance process.

Having the right insurance and proper storage may not appear to be a likely marriage, but it can certainly make you a happy camper. ♦

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**“BECAUSE SOME OF THE INFORMATION FROM MANUFACTURERS IS PRELIMINARY AT PRESS TIME, an updated 2009 Dinghy Towing Guide is available on our Web site at [www.motorhomemagazine.com](http://www.motorhomemagazine.com).”**

### DINGHY GUIDE UPDATE

I just received your February issue with the *2009 Dinghy Towing Guide*. I was excited to see that you listed the Chrysler Town and Country with automatic transmission as towable “with dealer-installed auxiliary transmission fluid pump.” After calling several Chrysler dealers, however, I couldn’t find anyone who was aware of such a Chrysler part. Did you mean a third-party item that was to be installed by a Chrysler dealer?

**MICHAEL HENDERSON | ARLINGTON, TEXAS**

*We sent your question to Chrysler for clarification and were told that the 2009 Town and Country is not recommended for dinghy towing. The manufacturer added that the 2009 Dodge Journey and Grand Caravan are also not approved for dinghy towing. It is possible to tow these vehicles with an aftermarket auxiliary transmission pump such as those sold by Remco (800-228-2481, [www.remcotowing.com](http://www.remcotowing.com)).*

*Because some of the information we receive from manufacturers is preliminary at press time, an updated/corrected version of our 2009 Dinghy Towing Guide is available on our Web site at [www.motorhomemagazine.com](http://www.motorhomemagazine.com). The online guide also lists revised information for the Dodge Caliber, Jeep Compass and Patriot, Mercury Sable and Nissan 370Z.*

### FUEL-EFFICIENT RIG OVERLOAD

I have to comment on the plethora of articles and reviews that have recently been published in your fine magazine, and every other one that comes my way. These days, it seems all we’re being fed are articles on tiny rigs built on variations of the Sprinter chassis or other downsized models.

I know that last year fuel prices were rugged, and they’ll rise again, but the only trend seems to be toward fuel efficiency and going green. I bet that until the latter stages of an RVer’s life, most want larger, rather than cramped, rigs. Most want decent storage space and room to spread out. Sprinter-based RVs, and other downsized models, will always have a limited appeal, as we simply aren’t Europe or Europeans. I get 11 MPG on my 37-foot Discovery, and to get 13–15 MPG diesel mileage isn’t worth the multitude of tradeoffs associated with a tiny rig.

Finally, I bet that almost everyone who loves the RV lifestyle is far more environmentally conscious than most others. Could we do better? Sure. But so many articles coming at us about tiny RVs and socially acceptable issues seems like overkill. Can you please get back to covering real motorhomes? Thanks.

**ALAN PARKS | MYRTLE BEACH, SOUTH CAROLINA**



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### EXERCISING CAUTION

Your article "Sun and Surf" in the February issue paints an idyllic portrait of traveling by motorhome in Baja California, Mexico. This is misleading; since April 2008, Mexico has been on a travel advisory by the U.S. State Department.

**TOM F. DUGAN  
SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA**

*You are correct, Tom. The travel advisory was extended to April 2009, and advises travelers to use caution when vacationing in Mexico. For more information, go to the U.S. Department of State Web site at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov).*

### PARKING PROBLEMS

We love eating at Cracker Barrel when we travel in our 36-foot motorhome. The restaurants provide great parking areas for buses and RVs, but much of the time automobiles fill up these spaces. It's very frustrating and I wonder if other RVers have run into the same problem.

**PHIL & LINDA REBHOLZ  
FORT PIERCE, FLORIDA**

### MORE FREE FACTORY TOURS

Your article "40 Free Factory Tours" (February) missed listing Michigan, along with nine other states. Michigan offers many interesting free factory tours including Morley Candy Makers and Stormy Kromer Mercantile, just to name two.

**KATHERINE MONISMITH  
OAKLAND TOWNSHIP, MICHIGAN**

*Unfortunately, space constraints did not allow us to list every state and every tour available. A more comprehensive listing of tours is available online. Please see "A Quick-Reference Guide to Factory Tours Across the Country" in the Web Exclusives section of our Web site at [www.motorhomemagazine.com](http://www.motorhomemagazine.com). Every state is covered in the online article, and some of the tours listed do charge entrance fees.*

Question:

**How do you save money while RVing?**

Send us your tips at [letters@motorhomemagazine.com](mailto:letters@motorhomemagazine.com). ♦

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by DENISE SANTOYO

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Purchased in 2001 by Linda Mueller, Castle Farms was restored to its original splendor, and is listed in the State Historic

Register and *National Historic Register*. Features of the magnificent castle include a rapidly maturing hedge maze, a 1918 museum located in what was originally the castle's blacksmith shop, a reflection pond stocked with large trout, a butterfly garden and a gift shop.

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**MAY 2-9**

See the spring blooms and celebrate Dutch culture at the **Tulip Time Festival** in Holland, Michigan. Named the "Best Small-Town Festival" by *Reader's Digest*, the event starts off with fireworks and includes three parades, a Dutch market, trolley tours, a display of more than 6 million tulips and more; (800) 822-2770, [www.tuliptime.com](http://www.tuliptime.com).

**MAY 2-3** | Be the first to taste the new vintage at the **Spring Release Weekend** in Walla Walla Valley, Washington. More than 50 wineries will introduce their new wines and offer selections that are only available by visiting the wineries and tasting rooms; (509) 526-3117, [www.wallawallawine.com](http://www.wallawallawine.com).

**MAY 6** | Explore Springfield, Illinois, on a **Pied Piper Architectural Tour**. The tour highlights the architectural styles, materials and treatments of the historic downtown area. Learn little-known

facts about the Illinois Statehouse and other buildings in the city; (217) 544-1723, [www.downtownspringfield.org](http://www.downtownspringfield.org).

**MAY 10** | Celebrate your mother or be celebrated with the **Mother's Day Event**



at the International Peace Garden in Dunseith, North Dakota. Take advantage of free admission, greenhouse tours, plants and entertainment, and enjoy a buffet at the pavilion overlooking Lake Stormon. Camping is available at the Garden; (888) 432-6733, [www.peacegarden.com](http://www.peacegarden.com).

**MAY 16-17** | Head to the Tesoro Cultural Center in Morrison, Colorado, for the **9th Annual Indian Market and Powwow**. Award-winning Native American artists will show their work in a juried show and with demonstrations. Dancers and drummers will compete in Traditional, Shawl, Fancy, Grass and Jingle dancing at the Powwow; (303) 839-1671, [www.tesorofoundation.org](http://www.tesorofoundation.org).

**MAY 30** | Golf for a good cause at the **Jim Berry Memorial Golf Tournament** at Balsams Panorama Golf Course in Colebrook, New Hampshire. The course offers wide fairways, small greens and sand bunkers. The tournament benefits Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital; (603) 388-4289, [www.northcountrychamber.org](http://www.northcountrychamber.org).

**MAY 30-JUNE 1** | Gather the kids and grandkids for **Becoming an Outdoor Family** at Stillwater State Park in Groton State Forest, Groton, Vermont. Experts will be on hand to teach forestry, hiking, wildlife photography, canoeing, fishing and more. Camping sites are available at the park; (800) 278-5480, [www.vtstateparks.com](http://www.vtstateparks.com).



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## CAMP FOR FREE AT KOA



**Hundreds of Kampgrounds of America (KOA)** campgrounds across the U.S. and Canada will participate in the sixth annual “Come Kamp and Care With Us” weekend May 8–9. RVers who make reservations at a participating campground on Friday, May 8 stay free the next night, Saturday, May 9.

KOA hosts the event in sponsorship of its KOA Care Camps — a network of 41 independent, specialized camps for children in treatment for, or recovery from, cancer. Each campground participating in the “Come Kamp and Care With Us” weekend will hold its own fundraising activities, which will include auctions, crafts, games and more.

Reservations for the event can be made online at KOA’s Web site. A list of participating campgrounds is available online as well — and nearly 400 KOAs in North America are part of the promotion.

**For more information,** go to [www.koa.com](http://www.koa.com).

## THETFORD GOES GREEN

### Ann Arbor, Michigan-based Thetford

Corporation — a manufacturer of sanitation and refrigeration products for the RV industry — has introduced a new line of green RV care products developed in conjunction with the federal government’s Design for the Environment (DfE) program.

The company has five products in its RV care line that have received DfE certification: Hard Water Spot Remover (MSRP \$7.99), RV Wash & Wax (MSRP \$8.99), Mildew Stain Remover (MSRP \$9.99), Ultra Foam Awning Cleaner (MSRP \$7.49) and Ultra Foam Black Streak & Bug Remover (MSRP \$7.69).

“Our customers are becoming more environmentally conscious and as a result, we have seen an increased demand for green options,” said Mary Burrows, Thetford’s manager of chemical development. The year-old project centered on “reformulating” products to conform with DfE’s certification requirements. Burrows noted that extensive testing was performed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to ensure the end products were nontoxic and biodegradable.

“The EPA was actually more stringent with RV products than household products because of their potential impact on the environment,” Burrows said. **Thetford Corporation, (800) 543-1219, [www.thetford.com](http://www.thetford.com).**



## News Briefs

The **National Park Service** recently named four additions to its National Natural Landmarks program: Nottingham Park Serpentine Barrens in Chester County, Pennsylvania, the site of one of the state’s largest stands of pitch pine forest; Cave Without a Name in Kendall County, Texas, containing exceptional cave formations



and paleontological deposits; Big Bone Lick in Boone County, Kentucky, for its combination of salt springs and Late Pleistocene bone beds; and Chazy Fossil Reef in Grand Isle County, Vermont and Clinton County, New York, representing the world’s oldest known occurrence of a biologically diverse fossil reef.

The Good Sam Club’s executive director, Susan Bray, has been elected to the **RV MH Hall of Fame** class of 2009. Bray, a 30-year leader of the Good Sam Club, has served for 25 years on the board of the American Recreation Coalition, and on the advisory board for the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Scenic Byways program. Nine others were also elected to this year’s class, including David Garvin, Camping World; Tim Dewitt, Michigan MHA; and Peter Leigl, Forest River Inc. The class will be officially inducted on August 3 at the Hall’s facility in Elkhart, Indiana.

Motorhome chassis manufacturer **Freightliner Custom Chassis Corporation (FCCC)** was recently accepted into the South Carolina Environmental Excellence Program (SCEEP) for its “ongoing commitment to reducing waste and improving South Carolina’s environment.” According to the chassis builder, it was admitted to the program primarily on the strength of its Zero Waste to Landfill efforts, the purpose of which is to become 100 percent landfill waste-free by 2010. As of the end of 2008, the company had achieved 90 percent waste-free status.



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In 2001, Vision Quest Ranch expanded Wild Things, its educational exotic/wild animal preserve, to include a unique bed-and-breakfast experience.

The Safari B&B is small — just four bungalows, built in the style of African safari tents. Choose from themed interiors like the Giraffe Manor (handicap accessible), Zebra Zone or Pachyderm Palace. Overlooking a 5-acre elephant playpen, the B&B promises an experience that is truly one of a kind, culminating in breakfast delivered to your bungalow by one of the park's gentle African elephants.

**For more information**, call (800) 228-7382, or visit [www.visionquestranch.com](http://www.visionquestranch.com).

### CAPTURING HISTORY ALONG THE ALCAN HIGHWAY

At Mile 300, the Alaska Highway runs past the doorstep of the Heritage Museum in Fort Nelson, British Columbia. Jam-packed with exhibits and artifacts, the small log structure captures Fort Nelson as an established stopover for travelers to the Yukon and on to Alaska. A 30-minute video of old movie newsreels orients visitors to the history of the Alaska Highway, while exhibit items bring to life the crude roadway carved from wilderness during World War II.

The museum spills outside to old vehicles, tools, snowmobiles and a crankshaft that once drove the engine to generate Fort Nelson's power. Vintage vehicles from an 1888 carriage to a 1942 Army truck fill a large garage on the grounds. Several reconstructed — or relocated — buildings include the Hudson Bay House and a replica of a trapper's cabin.

Fort Nelson Heritage Museum is open mid-May to mid-September. Motorhome parking is available across the highway at the Recreation Center.

**For more information**, call (250) 774-3536, or visit [www.fortnelsonmuseum.ca](http://www.fortnelsonmuseum.ca).

— Arline Chandler ♦







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### — 2009 Journey —

Redesigned from the ground up, the Winnebago Journey offers an ideal balance of luxury, performance and value. And the new, shorter 34Y floorplan follows suit, with a full-wall slide, king bed and a host of other amenities. It's the perfect way to enjoy large coach living in a compact package.



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## AMERICA'S FIRST SEASIDE RESORT

With its bounty of beaches and charming Victorian homes, Cape May, New Jersey, is a great summer camping destination



**P**eople have been flocking to the New Jersey shore in search of sun, sand and relaxation since the mid-1700s, so much so that, by the mid-1800s, Cape May — recognized as the nation's oldest seaside retreat — reigned supreme as the “Queen of the Seaside Resorts.”

Located at the southernmost tip of New Jersey, Cape May's illustrious past has been well preserved. Not only has the entire city been designated a *National Historic Landmark*, its 600 Victorian-era homes and buildings make up one of the largest existing collections of 19th-century architecture in America. The quaint village and the serenity of its beautiful beaches were just two of the reasons why my husband, Tom, and I chose Cape May as the perfect motorhome getaway for us and our two granddaughters.

The Cape May area offers plenty of campgrounds to choose from. We picked the well-rated Seashore Campsites, which has 700 sites and lots of amenities — full hookups, WiFi, laundry facilities, a camp store, miniature



**Top:** Cove Beach, located at the southwest end of Cape May, offers fabulous sunset views and a pavilion that's a popular spot for weddings and picnics. **Above:** From fishing and surfing to sunbathing and sand-castle building, the opportunities for family fun are endless in Cape May.



Visitors can climb 199 steps to the top of the Cape May Lighthouse.



Guided tours are available at the restored Emlen Physick Estate — Cape May's only Victorian house museum.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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golf, shuffleboard, a tennis court and a wonderful pool.

After checking in at the campground, we headed off to the shore. From Memorial Day through Labor Day, each person must purchase a beach tag to access Cape May's beaches. Our first stop was Cape May Beach. There's a boardwalk and on-duty lifeguards here, and our granddaughters had a wonderful time playing in the tame waves.

From here we were eager to see some of the other beach areas, so we followed the coastline south to the tip of New Jersey and ended up at Cape May Point State Park. The day-use park is home to the Cape May Lighthouse (which is open for tours), a World War II bunker and an impressive wildlife observation area. There are easy walking trails in the park that lead to various pond, coastal dune, marsh and forest habitats.

From the park, a two-minute drive brought us to the quaint community of Sunset Beach. There are a few shops here, a miniature golf course and an outdoor café, but the main attraction is the sunken World War I concrete ship, *Atlantus*, which lies broken in the water just yards from the beach. In retirement, *Atlantus* was supposed to be preserved as a ferry boat between Cape May and Lewes, Delaware, but a storm ran it aground.

Sunset Beach is also known for its Sunset Flag Ceremony. Each night as the sun sets over the ocean, the names of fallen soldiers, past and present, are read and *Taps* is played. The flags that fly here are donated from veterans' caskets.

Sunset Beach is strewn with smooth, round beach stones known as Cape May Diamonds. The majority of them are quartz crystal from the northern reaches of the Delaware River. The most common colors are pink, yellow, brown, gray and white, and the rarest ones are clear. The stones can be polished and faceted to look like diamonds.

Our next stop was Higbee Beach, located a couple of miles north. The beach is very beautiful and was the least crowded of all the beaches we visited. Parking is limited, so it's best to park out on a side street facing away from the beach.

It's a bit of a walk from the parking lot to the beach, but once we arrived it became clear why getting here was worth the effort. Higbee Beach is like a private natural paradise with only a handful of people around. If you're looking for peace and quiet and amazing sunsets, this is the place. We spent a perfect afternoon building sand castles and playing in the ocean.

The next day, we headed into the town of Cape May itself. There are a few options



for parking the motorhome in town — including the two schools that allow parking during the summer and a parking area with the busses at the visitor's center — but our choice was the Cape May–Lewes Ferry Terminal. There's plenty of parking here and a trolley shuttle runs back and forth from town to the terminal all day long. If you are interested in riding the ferry, it runs across the bay between Cape May and Lewes, Delaware. The ferry accommodates motorhomes, though the cost is based on the size of your rig.

The best way to see downtown and the historical district areas is on foot. We found great restaurants and shops, including the Washington Street Mall — an outdoor pedestrian mall several blocks long. I was anxious to see the Painted Ladies (the beautifully restored Victorian homes) as well. If you're interested in specifics about these homes, there are several tours you can take. The Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts offers trolley tours of its landmark buildings as well as boat, walking and ghost tours.

Tom wanted to eat lunch at the famed Lobster House at the Fisherman's Wharf. While eating on the deck next to the water and watching the boats drift in and out of the marina, we determined our next course of action.

Cape May offers a lot of activities for the adventurous, including kayak tours, charter fishing or sailing and jet ski rentals. We chose the Thunder Cat speedboat ride and dolphin watch, and had a great time zipping around in the water from Cape May to Wildwood.

Back on dry land, our final stop of the trip was a visit to the Cape May County Park and Zoo, located 15 miles north of town on Route 9. If you're on a budget, the zoo is a great place to come because admission and parking are free. We counted more than 200 species, including giraffes, lions, alligators and monkeys.

Everyone was a little quiet around the campfire on our last night in Cape May, and we were all sad to be leaving. I pulled out the calendar, and we picked a date for our next vacation in Cape May. I'm counting the days until our return. ♦

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# EXPLORE THE ENDLESS MYSTIQUE OF OUR NATION'S MOST POPULAR SAND DUNE FIELDS

by RHONDA OSTERTAG

## TRAVELING THE SANDS OF TIME AND TIDE

The sand at New Mexico's White Sands National Monument is almost pure gypsum and creates the world's largest gypsum dune field.

**D**unes. Their smooth-sided ridges, rounded mounds, scoured bowls and ruffled expanses conjure images of *Lawrence of Arabia*, camels and Bedouins in billowing garb. These restless landscapes capture the imagination and speak to our inner child. There is something magical about the changing canvases and the plants and animals that inhabit them.

Dune fields can be found along the Eastern and Western seaboards, along the Great Lakes or in isolated inland islands, where the conditions of wind, sand and erosion converge just right. Depending on mineralogy, dunes can appear buff, tan, black, coral pink or blinding white. Discovery can be riproaring, aboard an all-terrain vehicle or a plastic sled, or contemplative, gazing over the natural expanse.

The shifting sands can trap fresh water in ponds or shape estuarine marshes ideal for birding and fishing. Hiking, stargazing and photography pair well with dune exploration. Many dunes sit near campgrounds or rental services for dune conveyance, whether four-wheeled or four-legged.

Piping and snowy plovers, least terns and terrapins seek out the seaward edge of dunes for nesting. At California's Año Nuevo State Reserve, elephant seals lumber up the low seaward dunes for rituals of mating and pupping. Coyote, deer and bobcat can take shelter in vegetated dunes. Critters of the night leave a legacy of tracks. And always, the sand art mesmerizes with ripples, dimples and whip patterns.

The following seven sites highlight some not-to-be-missed dune fields and will carry you across the nation.

### **PARKER RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, MASSACHUSETTS**

Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, which claims much of Plum Island, is a prime example of a barrier island dune-beach habitat on the Eastern Seaboard. Here, the dunes are a first line of defense against an advancing sea and are highly guarded from trampling feet. Boardwalks provide access for dune exploration and crossovers to the ocean beach. Else-



where, nature trails probe related sand habitats. In upland areas, pitch pine, beach grasses, wild rose, coastal shrub, bayberry and beach plum stabilize the shifting sands.

The refuge balances the needs of nature with human needs, providing summertime closures for nesting piping plovers, while opening the beach to recreation as the nesting season allows. Scopes and binoculars are uniform gear, especially in winter, when snowy owls are an enticement to venture forth in the cold. Snowy egrets arrive in the spring. Camping is available just north of the refuge in Salisbury.

### **CUMBERLAND ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE, GEORGIA**

Another barrier island dune-beach habitat, Cumberland Island requires a passenger-only ferry trip to see it, unless you prefer paddling a kayak or have a private vessel. To spend the night on the island, visitors can either reserve in advance a permit for the designated primitive camps or a room at private Greyfield Inn. Warm, moist days can bring out the insects, but the pristine beaches and white sand dunes enchant, as do the reclaimed dune woodlands, thriving marshes and rich island history.

Visits begin with a ranger greeting. The small visitor center invites with porch rockers, and anglers drop lines off the dock. Island travel is by foot, but registered guests at the inn have access to a pool of bicycles. Armadillo, deer, raccoon, butterflies, acrobatic squirrels and wild turkey dwell on the island, and wild horses roam parts of the island near Dungeness Ruins.

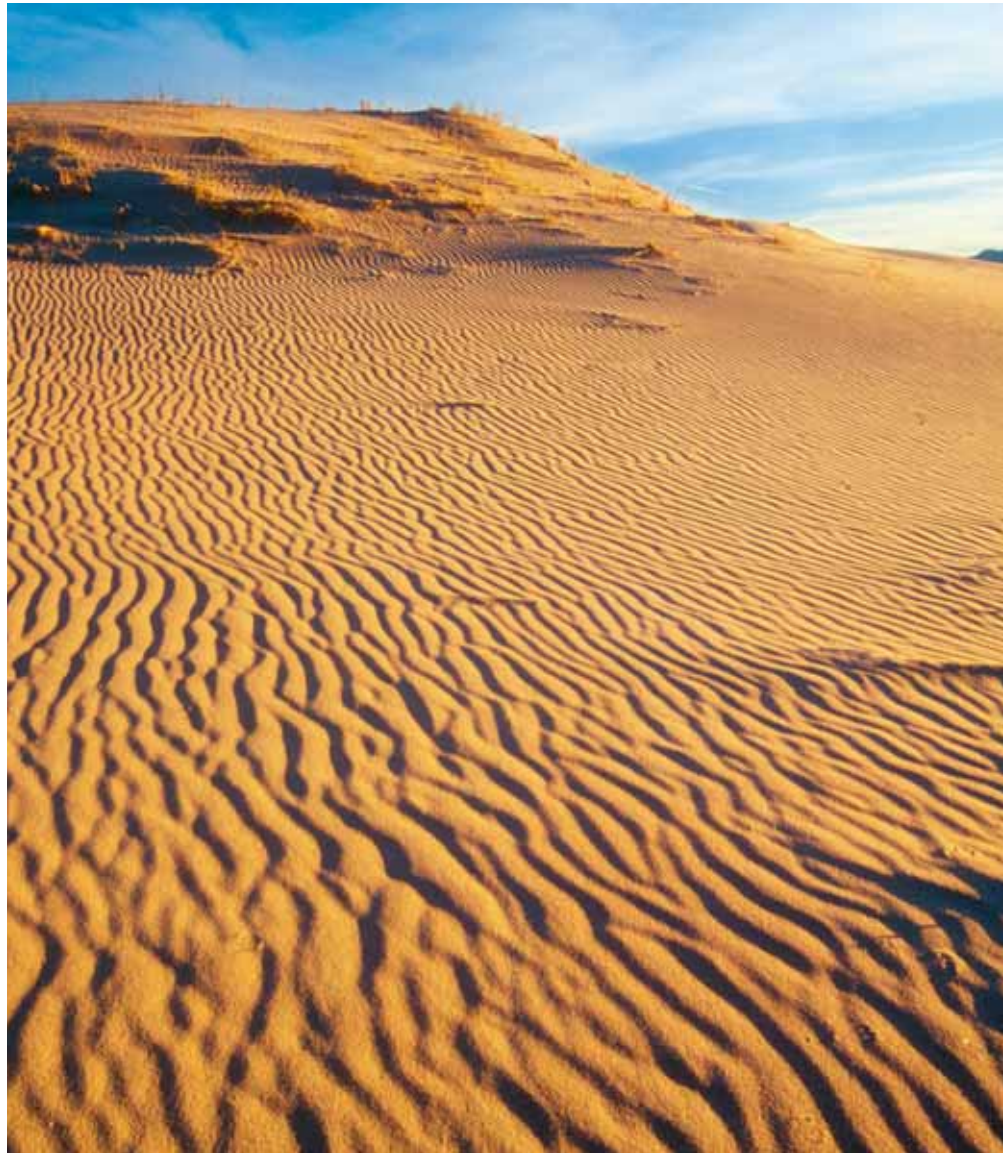
Black-and-white-striped barber poles guide beach hikers to boardwalk crossings that protect the dunes from random foot traffic, but designated trails afford acquaintance. The clean white dunes captivate with heights of up to 40 feet, ripples and buried trees. Wild turkeys appearing on a distant dune crest can elicit double takes and belly laughs as they race over the sand. When the sun burns too hot, the shade canopy of the reclaimed dunes invites with texture — moss-festooned oaks, scattered pines, saw palmettos and resurrection ferns.

Back on the mainland, motorhome camping is available seven miles north of the Cumberland Island Visitor Center at Crooked River State Park.

### **INDIANA DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE, INDIANA**

At the southern extent of Lake Michi-

gan, this 15,000-acre national park unites the sweeping and steep dunes with a wave-lapped 15-mile lakeshore, oak savannahs, prairies, forests, swamps and marshes. It also encompasses the Chellberg Farm, a traditional 1900s farm. The park's rich mosaic houses some of the most varied flora in



**Above:** Patterns in the sand fascinate at California's Kelso Dunes, Mojave National Preserve. **Bottom, right:** Umpqua Dunes in Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area provides opportunities for hikers to experience the dunes firsthand. **Bottom left:** Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park, also part of the Oregon Dunes NRA, serves as a convenient home base for RVing sand dune explorers.



## TRAVELING THE SANDS OF TIME AND TIDE

the National Park System, shaping a vital wildlife area for 350 bird species, including blue herons and bank swallows that nest in the sides of dunes. Blue butterflies (Karner blues), nurtured on the leaves of blue lupine, flit between wildflowers.

The slow, herky-jerky retreat of the Wisconsin glacier shaped this landscape. Four distinct-age dunes can be witnessed here, with the oldest dunes farthest inland. These Great Lake dunes reach heights of 200 feet and roll out a ruffled terrain of ridges, blowouts and depression-cupped wetlands. Climax forests stabilize the older dunes. Discovery is via marked foot trails through dunes and dune-related habitats; binoculars enhance travel. A paved trail follows and salutes Calumet Dune Ridge.

The park features a designated horse trail and its own campground, open April through October. Dunewood Campground is first come, first served and can accommodate motorhomes of any length.

### NEBRASKA'S SANDHILLS

Perhaps not the first area to come to mind

when you think of sand dunes, Nebraska's Sandhills represent the nation's largest dune formation, covering a whopping 19,600 square miles, much of it clad in native grassland. The dunes can top 300 feet in height. This is a land of bison, prairie dogs and sandhill cranes, private ranches and public wildlife lands and parks. To appreciate this expanse, you need to drive Nebraska's highways and byways. The state's Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway traces 272 miles along State Highway 2 from Grand Island west to Alliance, which covers bumpy prairies, planted woods, marshes, ponds and flowing waters. Public hiking trails and observation sites provide more intimate looks.

The Sandhills history traces back to prehistoric glacial deposits, followed by eras of blowing sand. Then came the emergence of native grasslands, swollen bison herds, homestead acts and present-day ranching. A significant stopover site along the Central Flyway, the Sandhills support more than 700 types of flora and 300 species of wildlife.



Arthur Bowring Sandhills Ranch State Historic Park in Nebraska is a living-history museum.

### WHITE SANDS NATIONAL MONUMENT, NEW MEXICO

Rising from the northern Chihuahuan Desert in south-central New Mexico, the white gypsum dunes of this monument shape an inspirational, otherworldly landscape with the purple San Andres Mountains to the west and the Sacramento Mountains to the east. The monument enfolds 40 percent of the world's largest — 275 square miles — pure gypsum dune field (the rest sits on U.S. military land). Dunes here lift up to 60 feet skyward, and the most active dunes can migrate up to 30 feet a year.

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The eight-mile Dunes Drive carries motorhomers into the heart of the dune field, passing mounds of changing character. The Nature Center at road's end explains the environment. Vegetation is thickest near the visitor center, thinning as you progress west and vanishing altogether by the time the drive ends.

Designated nature trails offer intriguing routes into the dunes. Animal tracks, wind patterns, drifts, slips and the glorious, blinding ultrawhite expanse urge you onward. Because shifting sand can dislodge guide posts, pay attention to surroundings, and if you cannot locate the trail, retrace your steps.

Backcountry camping for backpackers (the only overnight use available inside the park) treats overnights to a stunning star show, trading glistening sand for glistening stars. Five full-service RV parks are located 15 miles northeast of the monument in Alamogordo.

#### **KELSO DUNES, CALIFORNIA**

In Mojave National Preserve, these golden sand pyramids, 600 feet tall, are the third tallest dunes in North America. Trapped by the Providence and Granite mountains, blowing sands from dry lakebeds settled here, covering 45 square miles. These are stacked dunes, built up in five cycles over the last 25,000 years, when droughts created loose sands that the winds took walking.

The massive dune field, 43 miles south of Baker, has few amenities. The final distance is on a gravel road suitable for conventional vehicles, but take a dinghy vehicle if you have the option. At the gravel parking area, you'll find interpretive signs and vault toilets.

An impressive sight, Kelso Dunes also speak. While exploring the dunes on foot (no motorized vehicles allowed here), you may hear singing or booming. When wind-loosened sands sheet down the steep dune faces, the sliding motion over stationary sand produces rumbling, a sound phenomenon heard at only 30 dunes in the world.

The Preserve's Hole-in-the-Wall Campground has 35 dry-camping sites and boondocking is allowed at certain designated Roadside Camping Areas.

#### **OREGON DUNES NATIONAL RECREATION AREA, OREGON**

Within Siuslaw National Forest, the area's

hilly sands and ocean shore stretch more than 40 miles along the central Oregon coast between Florence and Coos Bay. Whether one's excitement comes from shooting over the dunes on an all-terrain vehicle (ATV), riding horseback in the surf, hiking to the top of a wilderness-like dune or jumping aboard a cardboard sled, the dunes answer the call.

The dunes can reach heights of 400 feet. Separate beach and dune areas serve hikers and ATV riders, allowing each to revel in their own way. Freshwater lakes and rolling surf call to anglers. With dune, coastal forest, lake and ocean habitats, wildlife sightings vary, and may include tree frog, hummingbird, beaver, deer and sea lion.

Coastal communities along U.S. Highway 101 offer services, including dune vehicle and horse rentals. U.S. Forest Service campgrounds and private RV parks dot the corridor, and maps and recreation ideas are offered at the Reedsport visitors center. ♦

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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# UNDER WRAPS



ADCO cover

Motorhome covers and accessories can help **keep your coach looking new**

by KEN FREUND

**M**otorhomes lead a tough existence. Due to their size, most coaches are left outdoors for virtually their entire service life. Sun, rain, hail, snow, blowing dust, tree sap and bird droppings all take their toll, and these forces of nature are unrelenting.

Weather damage occurs on many areas of the coach. It dulls, oxidizes and cracks paint, fiberglass gelcoat, stripes and graphics; fades and yellows window shades, curtains and blinds; causes plastic parts and lenses to discolor; cracks tire sidewalls and ruins awnings. Even the seemingly harmless dew that forms at night causes deterioration and black streaks down the sides of your rig. All of this damage can cost thousands of dollars to repair, and substantially reduce your coach's resale or trade-in value. A cover will save you far more money than it costs initially and will help keep that showroom-fresh look for a lot longer.

## THINGS TO KNOW

When you start shopping, you'll find that motorhome covers come in a bewildering array of styles, features,

materials and price ranges. The three major categories are universal-fit, semicustom and full-custom covers. Cost rises as more custom work is involved. If your coach has some unusual features or shapes, you may need a custom cover. Keep in mind the location of roof air conditioners and other objects such as mirrors that stick up or out.

Some covers are available with openings (usually zippers) to access the interior or storage compartments without removing the cover. Be sure the zippers are sturdy and in the locations where you need them.

Covers should be nonabrasive and breathable, yet water repellent and designed to resist mildew and dry rot. Most covers have sides made of polypropylene fabric, with the top made of heavier material that's more resistant to weathering and ultraviolet (UV) rays.

You don't need to spend a fortune on a cover, but avoid plastic tarps, which can abrade the finish on your motorhome and ultimately do more damage than they prevent. They trap moisture, so mildew, mold and corrosion can be problems. Tarps aren't form-fitted, so wind and debris can get under them as well.



**Covercraft motorhome cover**



**ADCO cover installation**

Ask the supplier which cover material is recommended for your area. Many manufacturers sell different cover materials based on local climate. For example, SFS AquaShed is completely breathable, yet prevents most liquid from penetrating to the coach's surface, with moderate UV stability. This makes it well suited to moist climates in northern states, such as New England, as well as Canada, the Midwest and Gulf Coast.

DuPont Tyvek is designed for harsher environments in areas with strong ultraviolet sunlight, dust and snow. Tyvek prevents most water, dirt, dust and UV rays from penetrating to the coach's surface and is breathable, making it appropriate in the Midwest and the South, plus areas such as Colorado and Utah. Sunbrella fabric is also designed for intense sun, rain and snow.

Covers shouldn't fit overly tight because this stresses the material, particularly on sharp corners and edges. When ordering a stock, universal cover, don't rely on dimensions supplied by the coach manufacturer. Instead, measure from end to end, including bumpers, spare tire and ladder.

When buying a cover, look for reinforced tie-down points that are strongly bonded to the material. Elasticized edges can reduce billowing in the wind, but a

strong windstorm can destroy a cover, so remove it in extremely windy weather.

Warranty length and terms vary considerably, so before buying a cover, read the terms of the manufacturer's warranty. Generally, the length of the warranty will give you a good idea of how long the expected service life is.

**INSTALLING A COVER**

Installing a cover requires some climbing. Always use caution, move slowly and deliberately, and have a helper. Consider your abilities and don't attempt it if your strength or balance are not up to it.

It may seem impossible at first, but installing a cover gets easier after you've done it a few times. With experience most motorhomes can be covered and tied down in 10 to 15 minutes. A cover should only be installed on a clean, dry coach and never install one when it is windy. Before installing the cover, remove storage pods and lower or remove antennas. Pad sharp edges and corners, which can snag or tear a hole in the cloth. Foam rubber and gaffer's tape work well; duct tape will leave an adhesive residue on the coach's finish.

Unpack the cover on clean, dry pavement behind the coach. Find the front of

the cover and pull it with you as you climb the ladder. Once you're on the roof, pull the cover up, creating a pile. Then start walking up the center toward the front of the coach, carefully pulling the cover along without snagging it on anything. Start at the front, placing the cover over the corners, as your assistant pulls it down into place. Work toward the rear, draping the cover over the sides. As you get to the rear of the coach, protect the cover by putting a ladder cap in place. (Most covers come with a ladder cap to protect the cover from the metal edges of the ladder top. If your cover does not come with one, you can fabricate one by wrapping foam rubber or bubble wrap around the exposed portions of the ladder where they come into contact with the cover. Secure the wrapping with cord or gaffer's tape.) Drape the cover over the corner opposite the ladder. Then as you descend the ladder, pull the cover with you.

**SECURING THE COVER**

Working from the ground, pull the rear corners under the coach first, then the front corners. Toss the ropes or straps beneath the coach and connect them to take up as much extra material as needed. Use non-elastic rope or straps, as tight bungee cords



**ADCO Universal Five-Strap Bicycle Cover**



**Sunguard Tire-Saver**



**ADCO DuPont Tyvek RV Side Mirror Cover**



can tear grommets from the cover. Straps or ropes that are run under the coach should be tied to structural members. Be sure to avoid sharp edges, which can cut through tie-downs from wind action. If necessary, pad the edges, straps or ropes to protect them. Sometimes a piece of old rubber hose can be slid over a strap to provide chafing protection. Don't over-tighten the ropes or straps; this may damage the cover or cause friction damage to rubber roofs.

Remove a cover in the reverse order. Allow it to dry completely, inspect it for damage, roll it up on a clean surface and store in a clean, dry area. Some owners use a new plastic rolling garbage can as a convenient storage container. Place the rear of the cover in the container first, so the front will pull out first when reinstalling.

### CLEANING COVERS

Dirty covers should be hand washed gently outdoors. If you don't have a large tub or basin to wash it in, place it on the driveway and use a garden hose to wet your cover. Then spot clean it using mild soap and a sponge. Avoid using abrasive cleaners or hard brushes. When you're finished, string a clothesline from four points set apart to dry the bulky cover. Do this when it's not windy. Never put a cover away when it's still wet or damp, as it will likely be damaged by mold or mildew.

### REPAIRS

Despite your best efforts, your cover may eventually be damaged. Small tears or holes can often be repaired with a patch kit. These are available from the cover manufacturer in matching materials and colors, and you should get a kit when you purchase a cover. Make repairs as soon as possible so that the

wind doesn't rip it beyond the damage site. If the damage is larger than the repair kit panels, you may have to send the cover to the manufacturer for professional repairs.

ADCO Products offers patch kits that consist of adhesive-patch material designed to match polypropylene, Tyvek or SFS AquaShed covers. The patch fabric is essentially a big "sticker" and requires no ironing. The company recommends applying the patch fabric on both the inside and outside of the damaged area.

### ACCESSORIES

Besides a cover for your coach, there are other cover accessories that may be used when you are driving, or staying at campgrounds for several days or more. If you carry bicycles on the outside of the coach, there are covers available to keep them clean and dry. External-mount spare tires look and stay better if covered.

If you tow a dinghy vehicle, there are windshield protectors, such as one by Camco, that help protect the glass from chips and cracks. Blue Ox offers the Kar-Gard Vehicle Protector and Roadmaster has the Tow Defender, which protect the lower front from dirt and rocks thrown up by the motorhome's rear tires. Tow-bar covers protect your tow bar while it's not in use. Covers also improve their appearance and make the bars less conspicuous.

When the coach is parked, use tire covers to protect the sidewalls from sun damage and cracking, which can often extend tire life by several years. While most owners don't use these for one-night stops, they are a good idea for extended stays.

Air-conditioner covers help preserve the plastic covers and keep dirt, bugs, leaves, rain and snow out of these expensive units. When temperatures are mild, the cover can be left on, even while driving. Just be sure it's properly secured.

Windshield covers provide privacy while you are parked, they stop fading of interior components and help to block heat from the sun. Some even allow you to see out while nobody can see in.

Mirror and wiper covers protect the finish on mirrors and keep the harsh sun from disintegrating the rubber on wiper blades. Wipers can last much longer in this case, saving the cost of the covers in just a few years.

### OTHER OPTIONS

Covers provide good defense against UV rays, but for even greater protection consider a metal building, carport or tent-style structure to house your pride and joy (see "Ports, Pads & Parking at Home," page 31). There are designs and sizes to fit every taste and budget, and prefab buildings can be less expensive than hiring an architect and contractor and having a conventional building constructed. With so many options available to protect your home on wheels, you're sure to find the method that's best for you. ♦

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# PORTS, PADS & PARKING AT HOME

THERE ARE MANY  
OPTIONS AVAILABLE  
WHEN DECIDING  
WHERE TO STORE  
YOUR COACH

by BERNICE BEARD



**M**ost motorhomes take up a lot of space, which leads owners to ponder the question: Where can I store my motorhome when it's not in use? While many RVers park on their own property — that's what my husband, Paul, and I do — others rent commercial sites or purchase RV storage facilities near their residence.

As long as your community allows it, you can park your motorhome on the street, in your driveway or elsewhere on your property. While some communities don't have specific rules, others have very detailed criteria about the length and height of the vehicle, the distance it must be from the street and even requirements for constructing the pad on which it is parked. To learn of any restrictions for your area, ask your neighborhood homeowner's association or contact your city or county zoning office.

We park our motorhome on the side of our house in a secondary driveway that was constructed by a home improvement contractor. It has a concrete pad and full hookups. Because we back the motorhome into the driveway and onto the pad, we placed the electrical and sewer hookups on the far side of the concrete pad. This meant going underground before the concrete was laid and chiseling holes in the cinder-block wall of the home's foundation.

We mounted a 30-amp electrical cable hookup on a short post beside the driveway that connects to the electrical

panel in our basement. Nearby, a plumber installed a sewer hookup with a 2½-inch-diameter PVC pipe for water drainage and waste matter that connects to our home's septic system. The house already had an outdoor water faucet on the side near the motorhome. We find that it's not always convenient to empty the holding tanks on our way home, and — for us — a local dump station is not available, so the convenience of having full hookups at home was well worth the cost of providing them.

Motorhome owners who want to build a concrete pad for their coach should first check on local building codes and zoning regulations before hiring a specialized driveway or general home improvement contractor. When planning the project, be sure to include a generous amount of space around the pad so that you can conveniently work around the motorhome.

Because we live in an area where it snows, our contractor dug out soil 9 inches from the surface, laid in 3–4 inches of base stone, covered it with plastic sheeting and wide wire mesh, inserted rebar where needed and then poured the concrete.

I know of one motorhome owner who was working with a contractor to install a sewer hookup beside a concrete pad for his motorhome. When the municipality would not allow him to hook up to its sewer line, the contractor installed a septic system on the property. This kind of situation varies widely and will depend entirely on your



During construction of our home pad, a plumber hooked up piping to our existing sewage system.



Our parking pad includes a 30-amp hookup, which connects to the electrical panel in our basement.



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local code and zoning requirements.

Another at-home storage option is to order plans for building a detached RV garage to blend in with your existing home. Before ordering, obtain any local government permit or zoning variance that may be required to add a carport or garage on your property.

If you're looking for a home with an RV garage already attached, there are specialized communities that offer homes with oversize garages or ports. Homes in the gated Indian Palms Country Club in Indio, California, for example, include an RV garage with full hookups inside and a finished interior. Other examples include The Great Outdoors RV Resort in Titusville, Florida, Retama Village in south Texas and Lily Lake Golf Resort in Frostproof, Florida.

If zoning or other reasons prevent you from storing a motorhome at your residence, you can rent or buy RV storage. Features of rental RV storage include outdoor or indoor parking, indoor climate control, 24-hour video surveillance, resident security staffing, a dump station, wash station, electronic gates with coded access, 24/7 accessibility and others. Storage can be on a month-to-month basis or long term.

A growing option is condominium storage, in which the owner buys a unit to store the motorhome. Following purchase, the owner pays monthly dues to the condo owners association. Condo owners may rent or sell their units and they may improve and customize them with drywall, paint and other choices. All-Stor Storage Condominiums, Fairview, Oregon; Eucalyptus at Beaumont, Beaumont, California; and River Palms Storage Condominiums, Mohave Valley, Arizona, are examples of firms selling condo units for RV storage.

Additional options for storage include military bases, such as the 99th Services Squadron at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada (military bases offer low-cost RV storage for members of the military); fairgrounds, such as Northwest Missouri State Fairgrounds in Bethany, Missouri, and Westmoreland Fairgrounds in Pleasant Unity, Pennsylvania; and campgrounds, which often have areas set aside for RV storage.

Finding or building the proper parking spot for your motorhome may feel like a chore, but properly protecting your investment will make the effort well worth it. ♦

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by JEFF JOHNSTON

walk-through



## DYNASTY MAJESTIC V

A telescoping dual slideout complements plush accommodations

### SPECIFICATIONS

<b>CHASSIS:</b> ROADMASTER S-SERIES	<b>FRESHWATER CAP:</b> 100 GAL
<b>ENGINE:</b> CUMMINS ISM 500 HP	<b>BLACK-WATER CAP:</b> 40 GAL
<b>WHEELBASE:</b> 286"	<b>GRAY-WATER CAP:</b> 70 GAL
<b>EXT LENGTH:</b> 44' 11"	<b>LP-GAS CAP:</b> 25 GAL
<b>EXT WIDTH:</b> 8' 4½"	<b>GVWR:</b> 50,160 LBS
<b>EXT HEIGHT:</b> 12' 6"	<b>BASE MSRP:</b> \$489,833

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CIRCLE 230 ON READER SERVICE CARD.

**J**ust when you think a lot of big Class A coaches are starting to look alike, someone comes along with an interesting twist. The new Monaco Dynasty Majestic V model, at about 45 feet long and with a base MSRP of \$489,833, is up there with the best the manufacturer has to offer.

The exterior, with its tasteful graphics, smooth lines and clean, stylish details nonetheless reveals something unique: the innovative new slide-within-a-slide design. This feature provides even more inside space that goes well beyond that of the average Class A.

That extra space is immediately evident from the first look inside. The street-side dual slideout contains a roomy sofa in the extra slide section — which moves 18 inches farther out than the wall of the main slideout. The curbside slideout houses an entertainment center and the main 42-inch LCD TV forward, along with the galley farther back, creating a wide-open space that lends the effect of a roomier living area.

Rather than a traditional table, the dinette island, designed for casual meals or party convenience, is centered between the galley and sofa slideout. A pull-out desktop in the entertainment center is conveniently sized for a laptop computer workstation.

The optional (\$3,053) glazed cherry cabinetry and trim adds to the luxurious feel of this coach. Select wood trim pieces, such as the cabinet doors above the main bed, are a slightly lighter shade, adding an attractive look to otherwise single-hued wood surfaces. It beautifully complements the ceramic tile floor, solid-surface countertops and stainless-finish appliance trim. The optional (\$1,146) wine chiller features an all-black surface.

A door in the aft wall leads to a walk-through bath. With a gorgeous vanity and molded-in metallic-hued sink with ceramic backsplash, it's sumptuously spacious. The toilet is in a streetside enclosure along with a second vanity sink, which is very practical.

The king-size bed and its opposing vanity/dresser with 32-inch LCD TV are

housed in opposite wall slideouts, producing an open maneuvering space near the foot of the bed. An aft-wall wardrobe handles most travel-clothing needs.

Between the Aqua-Hot furnace system and the trio of 15,000-BTU air conditioners, aided by the dual-pane windows, users have their interior climate needs covered. A 10kW diesel generator and 2kW inverter plus an optional (\$1,640) solar charging system make sure the home theater system, optional (\$2,655) in-motion HD digital satellite system and other electronic toys perform without fail.

When it's time to hit the road, the driver enjoys a single-piece-windshield view and the flexibility of adjustable pedals and a full-power seat. A VIP Smart Wheel, power sunscreens with blackouts and a recessed dash workstation are additional amenities.

Dynasty drivers can be sure the rig will hold its own in the hills and on the long haul thanks to the Roadmaster S-Series chassis, powered by a Cummins 500-HP ISM engine backed by an Allison 4000MH six-speed automatic transmission and riding on a full brace of 10 air bags and 10 shock absorbers. Full steel-cage semi-monocoque construction provides strength and structural stability. The tag axle raises for extra-sharp-turn maneuvers.

The Dynasty Majestic represents a happy marriage of the latest innovations and established comfort, class and styling. ♦





# IQ TEST

Itasca's 2009 Navion iQ24DL earns high marks for its **smart use of space and innovative rear bedroom slide**

by ROSS & EILEEN HUBBARD

**I**t's often said there are two types of travelers: those who are focused on the destination and those who enjoy the journey. The Itasca Navion iQ will be most appreciated by the latter. This go-anywhere motorhome can handle tough grades, rough asphalt and one-lane roads with ease, and because it's less than 25 feet long, the compact coach easily fits into tight spaces. With sleek and smooth exterior lines and standard full-body paint, this motorhome has a fresh and contemporary appeal.

Offered in two floorplans — the 24CL and our test rig, the 24DL — the coach rides on the Dodge Sprinter chassis with a 154-HP Mercedes-Benz CDI, 3.0-L V-6 turbodiesel engine. Not only does the Sprinter produce plenty of diesel power and good

fuel mileage (in the 17.7 MPG range), its smooth, responsive acceleration and braking make the ride and handling more like a passenger vehicle than a traditional Class C.

## ON THE ROAD

We put the Navion iQ through its paces on a 390-mile loop north from Ventura along California's Highway 1. Entering the freeway, the coach easily reached cruising speed and settled into its sweet spot at 2,500 RPM, which, on relatively flat ground, gave us 65–70 MPH.

Typical on-the-road rattles and squeaks are almost nonexistent in this well-crafted coach, though we occasionally picked up a wind-buffeting sound between the cab and body. The lack of cabin and road noise made for easy pilot/copilot conversation.

The seats in this motorhome are as near to perfect as we can imagine, comfortable and generous in size, which alleviated any road fatigue. Visibility is excellent with well-placed side mirrors with standard as well as convex mirrors.

The cockpit is roomy and offers plenty of storage areas to hold snacks, maps and travel gear. Door panels have large nooks for reading material and an extra-large beverage, and more cup-holders are integrated into the front dash. There's also

a rubber-lined open compartment above the glove box and a similar compartment above the center console, which is designed to store/charge iPods and MP3 players and hook up to the optional (\$280) Sirius satellite radio.

Our first uphill test was the Gaviota Pass with a 6-percent grade. We were anxious to see how well the V-6 turbodiesel engine and its five-speed tip shift automatic transmission were matched. We started the first part of the grade at 65 MPH at 2,700 RPM, and then used the tip shifter to drop down into fourth gear at 58 MPH turning 3,650 RPM as we crested the grade. A downhill shift into fourth gear kept us at 60 MPH with no need to brake other than a tap to keep us at the posted speed limit.

At one point, we had to stop short and the four-wheel ABS with Adaptive ESP technology was put to the test. Braking was remarkably smooth — the system senses the load of the vehicle, which helps to keep the motorhome on track.

## IN CAMP

We overnighted at Flying Flags RV Resort and Campground in Buellton, and because we arrived after dark the optional (\$875) color rear-view monitor with lighting and microphone was used and appreciated.





## 2009 ITASCA NAVION iQ24DL

### WHAT'S HOT

Smooth, sedan-like ride and handling; rear bedroom slide makes fitting into smaller campsites, such as state parks, a breeze; front skylight adds abundant light and is worth the trade-off in overhead storage

### WHAT'S NOT

Limited counterspace in the galley — a flip-up extension would be a nice addition; the shower, while functional, is a tight fit for larger campers; dinette bench-seat bed conversion awkward for sleeping



In-camp setup was a breeze. The electrical and cable TV lines are stored in a streetside compartment behind the driver's door, and the water hose is a straightforward attachment to the aft streetside compartment inlet that shares space with the outside shower. A lever determines if you are filling the tank or using city water pressure.

Back inside the coach, we closed the accordion-type pleated privacy shades in the cab and started prepping for dinner. Itasca has developed a unique and easy-to-use windshield and door-mounted pleated shade system that provides complete privacy while allowing full access to the cab and its swivel seats.

The curbside galley sticks to the traditional triangular kitchen layout with a Norcold 5.5 cubic foot refrigerator/freezer opposite the stainless-steel single sink and Dometic two-burner stove. Both the sink and stove are equipped with tempered-glass hinged covers, which helped to expand the usable prep space, but additional counterspace is limited. Above the

stove are an easy-to-reach built-in Sylvania microwave and a moderately sized pantry storage cabinet, which could also be used to store pots and pans.

Excellent fit and finish are found throughout the coach and the tasteful décor in the Coaster option (three fabric schemes and two wood choices are available) and Honey Cherry curved cabinetry give the interior a warm, homey feel. Brushed-nickel push-button hardware made it easy to see at a glance if everything was stowed properly, and kept all the drawers and cabinets in our rig secured while we were on the road — even during tight cornering and sudden stops.

We found the traditional booth dinette to have more than enough room for two to spread out and eat, but if additional space is needed, the table can be unlatched and a small, wall-mounted extension table flipped up. When the table is extended it meets with another built-in seating bench for two, which is situated fore and aft. This bench offers the best viewing spot for the wall-mounted 15-inch LCD TV, with under-

**Clockwise, from top: Cab and dining area have an open and airy feel thanks to the huge skylight and swivel cockpit seats. Down the hall is a fully equipped kitchen, followed by the raised-platform rear bedroom. When the rear slide is in, the bed makes a nice sitting area; when the rear slide is extended, the bedroom bumps out an additional 30 inches, making room for the queen-size bed. The bathroom is surprisingly roomy, with plenty of elbow and legroom as well as good storage and counterspace.**



The Navion iQ24DL easily fits into campsites and, when deployed, the rear slide-out only adds 2 feet to its overall length.

neath storage space for bulky and heavy items. Additional seating is afforded by swiveling the driver and passenger cockpit seats. The cab seats in our coach were covered in the optional (\$499) Ultraleather and we thought they were the most comfortable seats in the motorhome.

Two outlets for 120-volt AC and one for 12-volt DC are conveniently located on the wall next to the dinette, which made it easy to power-up the laptop and recharge cameras while in camp. Handy in a driver's side cabinet above the dinette is the complete Jensen entertainment unit that controls the dinette and bedroom LCD TVs and is equipped with an AM/FM stereo, CD/DVD player, MP3 player, AUX/AV input and headphone jack.

The living area, which is married to the cab by design and necessity, is made roomier by a cutout cabover. This space makes movement between the cockpit and living area exceptionally easy for even the tallest camper without any head knocking or stooping. In addition, the open cab area is enhanced by the use of a large, well-placed skylight with a privacy shade.

Both of the bench seats in the living room have seat belts for two, making the Navion iQ 24DL equipped to seat six. With an Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity (occc) of 1,350 pounds, there should be enough payload for six adults, though real-

istically there's only room around the dining table for five and sleeping accommodations for four, and that's debatable, as the 38 x 82-inch cross-coach sleeping arrangement is somewhat awkward.

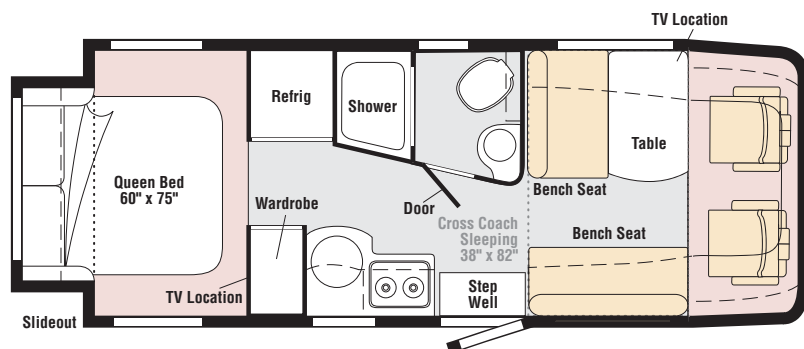
To make up this cross-coach bed, the dining table folds down and the fore-and-aft seating bench unhooks and hinges to create the support platform. The bench seat back cushions complete the berth, and although it's a good idea in theory, in practice we thought the setup is better suited for children.

We found the rear slide bedroom to be a haven. With the rear slide extended there's an additional 30 inches of bedroom space created that accommodates one part of the two-piece memory-foam mattress. The queen-size bed was surprisingly comfortable. Even with its horizontal split no hint of seaming was detected and we enjoyed a restful night's sleep.

Floorspace in the bedroom is a little tight and storage is at a premium here, though the two overhead cabinets are a perfect place to store a comforter, pillows and bedding. Flanking the mattress is a curved 5 x 23-inch shelf that accommodates small items, such as the remote for the 15-inch LCD TV, which is mounted on the curbside wall corner. Accent lighting around the headboard area gives a warm and inviting glow, with the addition of dual, adjustable reading lights.

Though there is no door separating the bedroom area from the rest of the coach, a heavyweight curtain is provided for privacy. In the hallway, adjacent to the bedroom, is a lighted hanging locker, where we fit a dozen shirts, a couple of jackets and more. Additional wardrobe space is found underneath the locker in a pair of pullout drawers.

Across the galley on the driver's side is the amidships bathroom, which is quite comfortable for a motorhome of this size.



## SPECIFICATIONS

### PERFORMANCE

**FUEL ECONOMY:** 17.7 MPG

**ACCELERATION:**

0-60: 24.91 SEC

40-60: 14.94 SEC

### CHASSIS

**MODEL:** DODGE SPRINTER

**ENGINE:** MERCEDES-BENZ 3.0-L V-6 TURBODIESEL

**SAE HP:** 154 HP @ 3,400 RPM

**TORQUE:** 280 LB-FT @ 1,200-2,400 RPM

**TRANSMISSION:** 5-SPEED AUTOMATIC

**AXLE RATIO:** 4.18:1

**TIRES:** LT215/85R16E

**WHEELBASE:** 170"

**BRAKES:** HYDRAULIC WITH ABS

**SUSPENSION, F/R:** INDEPENDENT

WITH TRANSVERSE MONO-LEAF SPRING AND

STABILIZER/LEAF SPRING WITH STABILIZER BAR

**FUEL CAP:** 26.4 GAL

**WARRANTY:** 3 YRS/36,000 MILES

### COACH

**EXT LENGTH:** 24' 8"

**EXT WIDTH:** 7' 6"

**EXT HEIGHT:** 10' 7" W/AC

**INT WIDTH:** 7' 3"

**INT HEIGHT:** 6' 5"

**CONSTRUCTION:** STEEL AND ALUMINUM

FRAMING, FIBERGLASS EXTERIOR WALLS

AND ROOF, POLYSTYRENE INSULATION

**FRESHWATER CAP:** 35 GAL

**BLACK-WATER CAP:** 32 GAL

**GRAY-WATER CAP:** 32 GAL

**WATER-HEATER CAP:** 6 GAL

**LP-GAS CAP:** 18 GAL

**AIR CONDITIONER (1):** 13,500 BTU

**FURNACE:** 20,000 BTU

**REFRIGERATOR:** 5.5 CU-FT

**CONVERTER:** 45 AMP

**BATTERY (2):** 12-VOLT CHASSIS, 12-VOLT COACH

**AC GENERATOR:** 3.2 KW

**MSRP:** \$102,714

**MSRP AS TESTED:** \$109,700

**WARRANTY:** 1 YR/15,000 MILES

### WET WEIGHT

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

NO SUPPLIES OR PASSENGERS)

**FRONT AXLE:** 3,340 LBS

**REAR AXLE:** 6,340 LBS

**TOTAL:** 9,680 LBS

### CHASSIS RATINGS

**GAWR, F/R:** 4,410/7,720 LBS

**GVWR/GCWR:** 11,030/15,250 LBS

**OCCE:** 1,350 LBS

(DEDUCT WEIGHT OF PASSENGERS

FOR NET CARGO CAPACITY)

**GAWR:** GROSS AXLE WEIGHT RATING

**GVWR:** GROSS VEHICLE WEIGHT RATING

**GCWR:** GROSS COMBINATION WEIGHT RATING

**OCCE:** OCCUPANT & CARGO CARRYING CAPACITY

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The Thetford toilet sits on a raised platform, which provides plenty of legroom. But while there's plenty of headroom in the shower, elbowroom is limited. Showering in the small, rectangular-shaped stall is a bit of a challenge, but the feature is well worth any shortcomings.

There's adequate storage in the bathroom's overhead cabinets, and the vanity has a decent-sized countertop and under-cabinet storage. The well-lit vanity mirror was appreciated while getting ready in the morning, and our wet towels found a home on the removable rod in the shower. A ceiling fan and moderately sized window round out the bath area.

### DRIVIN' THE DUNES

Breaking camp the next morning was quick and easy as we headed north on the highway through rolling hills and vineyards to the town of Lompoc, famous for its flower fields, and then on to Guadalupe. Five miles off the main highway is the Rancho Guadalupe Dunes Preserve, where we were treated to a spectacular expanse of the highest beach dunes in the western U.S. — some reaching 450 feet tall. The preserve is a day-use area virtually on the beach overlooking the Pacific.

From there, we continued north to our final stop — Pismo Beach — the dune playground Mecca of California. Our campground choice was Pismo Coast Village RV Resort, which provides easy walking access to the beach dunes, restaurants and shops. Our spot at the resort provided us with great views of the ocean and north to the Pismo Pier.

By the third day of our trip it was time to break camp and head home via the Santa Ynez Valley. Leaving the valley floor, we started up the famous San Marcos grade, which has a 7-percent grade. With only a bit of turbo whine and occasional transmission hunting, the coach handled the grade without complaint, topping the hill at 55 MPH at 3,500 RPM.

Itasca has produced a well-designed, quiet, easy and fun-to-drive motorhome. The rear slide is a good answer to more livability in a smaller footprint coach and the Sprinter provided economical performance while handling road surfaces with grace and precision. The Navion certainly earned high grades with us during this "iQ test." ♦

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WE PUT THREE BRANDS OF AFTERMARKET SHOCK ABSORBERS THROUGH A 1,000-MILE ROAD TEST — THE RESULTS MAY SURPRISE YOU

# SHOCK THERAPY

by E. DON SMITH



Bilstein

**F**or motorhome owners seeking a better ride and handling, the most popular modification to make to a coach is to replace its shock absorbers. Even brand-new motorhomes are open to improvements due to the higher quality (and cost) of the aftermarket suspension components available today. In order to determine the benefits of these aftermarket shocks, we gathered several models and put them through our own test. Currently there are three major suppliers

of aftermarket shocks to the motorhome market: Bilstein, Koni and RoadKing. Many new rigs come equipped with Sachs shock absorbers, as was the case on our test coach — a 2008 Tiffin Phaeton 36QSH 36-foot diesel-pusher on a Freightliner XC raised-rail chassis with a 228-inch wheelbase. In order to evaluate the performance of these aftermarket shocks, we ordered shocks specifically for this chassis. The coach has a gross vehicle weight rating (gvwr) of 32,000 pounds with 20,000-pound rear and 12,000-pound front axle ratings.

During the test we installed and removed the shocks several times, driving the coach on the same 1,000-mile route repeatedly during a three-month test program. During each shock test, my copilot and I took detailed notes on performance, and at the conclusion of round one we retested a few shocks to confirm our initial impressions.

## SACHS

The first trip was made with the factory Sachs shocks, and initially we thought they performed fairly well — with one main issue.







Koni



RoadKing

Due to the lack of low speed compression or rebound damping, the front of the coach raised or lowered 2–3 inches with the release or press of the brake pedal. We found this annoying at times; in some cases it caused the rear of the coach to drag on steep angles if I didn't pay particular attention to the brake pedal. We also thought the Sachs shocks were too soft on the road when it came to cornering and overall body roll control.

**KONI**

Next, the Koni FSD shocks were tested.

Koni shocks are made in Holland and are well known in the racing world. The first thing we noted about the Koni shocks was the complete lack of front-end bounce at low speed while braking.

On smooth roads the Konis were great, and they exhibited much less body roll than the Sachs. The coach handled better and driving was less stressful due to the lack of sway. However, when the road got really rough with potholes, highway expansion strips, or any sharp bump, we noticed the Konis were considerably harsher than

the original Sachs shocks. Unfortunately, the Konis did not perform as well under poor road conditions. The Konis for this motorhome carry an MSRP of \$181 each.

**BILSTEIN**

We had the German-made Bilstein Comfitrac shocks installed at our local Camping World and set out on our test trip. Bilstein is also a well-known worldwide producer of shocks for motorhome chassis, racing and other high-performance applications. The Bilsteins exhibited a similar level of low-



This page and opposite page: We tested three aftermarket shock absorbers (shown left to right, Bilstein, Koni and RoadKing) that were ordered specifically for the Freightliner XC raised-rail chassis with a 228-inch wheelbase. As you can see, each shock uses a different design and construction. The Bilsteins at the far left are gas-pressurized monotubes, as are the billet aluminum RoadKings, while the Koni and Sachs units are lower-tech twin-tube shocks. For installation, we turned to Camping World of Chattanooga in Tennessee, where Rick Guthrie (RVIA Master-Certified Technician) carefully mounted and torqued the shocks to the proper specifications. While the front shocks are fairly easy to access, the rears are much more difficult.

BRAND	CORNERING AT SPEED	SLOW SPEED HANDLING	ROUGH ROAD COMFORT	SMOOTH ROAD COMFORT	TOTAL	VALUE
Bilstein	4	4	3.5	4	15.5	5
RoadKing	4.5	4	2	4	14.5	1
Koni	4	4	1.5	4	13.5	4
Sachs	2	1.5	3	3	9.5	3

*1 = Poor, 2 = Fair, 3 = Average, 4 = Above Average, 5 = Exceptional*

speed control while going on and off the brakes as compared to the Konis.

On the smooth parts of the road the Bilsteins handled the ride well. They were comfortable but still maintained nearly the same level of roll control as the Konis. When we hit the interstate the real test began. Within a few miles it was clear that these were significantly less harsh compared to the Konis, though they still possessed similar handling and roll control. At an MSRP of \$125 each these are the least expensive of the group.

### ROADKING

The RoadKings were the last set of shocks in our test. They are a new entry into the motorhome market, though RoadKing has been producing shocks for 18-wheelers for years. Two of the main claims of RoadKing are the ultralong life of the product and the fact that its shock is rebuildable. The company claims the typical life is up to 350,000 miles.

Once we got on the road, the RoadKings also showed an immediate advantage over the stock Sachs shocks. In fact, every shock we tried was an improvement over the OEM shock in one aspect or another and, as with the Bilsteins and Konis, the brake-induced dive/rise was completely gone.

The RoadKings displayed perhaps the best handling of the group during slow and highway speed handling on smooth roads. Body lean was minimal and the low-frequency bumps were handled with ease. They had a bit more firmness on smooth roads compared to the Bilsteins.

The next leg of the trip was the interstate and, just as with the Konis, the RoadKings were quite harsh. Both damping and compression were just too stiff for a coach of this weight. At an MSRP of \$400 each they are easily the most expensive product on the market. Though we didn't have the ability to measure the life of the shocks tested, these would have a lot of cost to overcome when compared to the other products tested.

### THE RESULTS

When comparing the shocks and the resulting ride, we thought the Sachs were most like a big, heavy sedan — such as an older-model Buick or Cadillac — soft and mushy with a lot of body roll on turns and a lot of bounce over bumps. The Bilsteins felt more like a BMW — smooth and comfortable yet in control. The Konis and RoadKings have great handling and body roll control but, like a track-ready sports car, they were just too firm for our liking.

After driving thousands of miles comparing all these shocks, it was clear which ones performed best in each category. We rated them all on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the best), then added a value score based on the cost of each product. Because the Bilstein shocks showed the best performance and the lowest cost they received the highest score.

Of course, everyone has a different opinion of what the most important aspect of an ideal shock is; with this in mind, we have given individual ratings to help you select your ideal product in the event you have a different list of needs for your shocks.

### HOW SHOCK ABSORBERS WORK

Technically, shock absorbers are damping devices, because their real function is to slow and dampen the compression and rebound of your suspension. This is done by controlling the rate of movement of the piston inside the shock housing. Each manufacturer has its own design philosophy on the best way to achieve this function, but in the end they all serve to dampen the up-and-down motion of a motorhome while in motion.

If you took high school physics, you were taught about the conservation of energy. As applied to a suspension system, this means that the energy in the suspension cannot be destroyed. This kinetic energy is simply transformed into thermal energy (heat) and is dissipated into the atmosphere as the coach moves down

the road. The shocks turn the bounce into heat; the best ones do a great job of it, while others do not, based on our tests.

There were two types of shocks used in our test: twin-tube and gas-pressurized monotube shocks. The RoadKing and the Bilstein Comfitrac shocks are both gas-pressurized monotubes, while the Koni FSDs and the factory-installed Sachs shocks are both of the twin-tube variety.

The twin-tube design works using two separate cylinders, or tubes, inside the body of the shock. One is an inner tube and the outer tube (or reservoir) is simply the body of the shock. In order to dampen the linear motion of the shock, a piston inside the shock is made with tiny holes to restrict the flow of the oil used inside the shock. The sizes of the metering holes as well as the viscosity of the shock oil are two of the factors that determine the level of damping.

The main drawback of the twin-tube design is that during rapid motion this constant pumping of the piston causes the oil to overheat and foam. Once the shock oil foams it greatly reduces its ability to be precisely metered and the shock loses its ability to dampen.

The gas-filled monotube shocks, such as the RoadKing and Bilstein, overcome this foaming issue by putting the fluid under a high pressure condition. Due to the high pressure within the shock, the entire assembly has to be precisely machined, which can result in a more expensive shock to produce. Without this level of precision, shocks under this type of pressure would simply leak and ultimately fail.

In this monotube design a high-pressure chamber sits below the oil chamber of the shock and with the oil under extreme pressure the piston can move as rapidly as needed without the foaming problem that is common in the twin-tube shock. These shocks can be distinguished from twin tubes because the high pressure causes the shock to always fully extend itself due to the pressure inside the shock, whereas the twin tubes we tested can be fully compressed and they will stay there indefinitely.

Within each type of shock there are differences and the Koni, RoadKing and Bilstein shocks we tested each feature unique properties. The Koni FSD twin-tube shock uses its own proprietary system called Frequency Selective Dampers

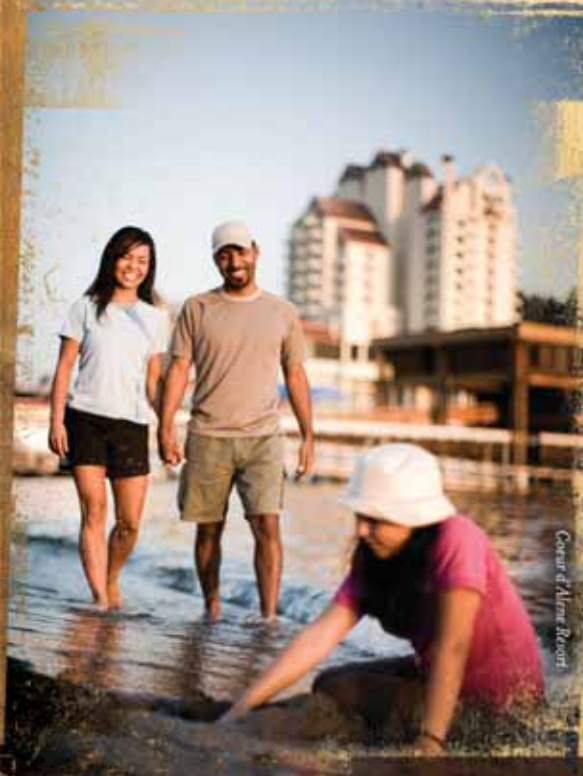


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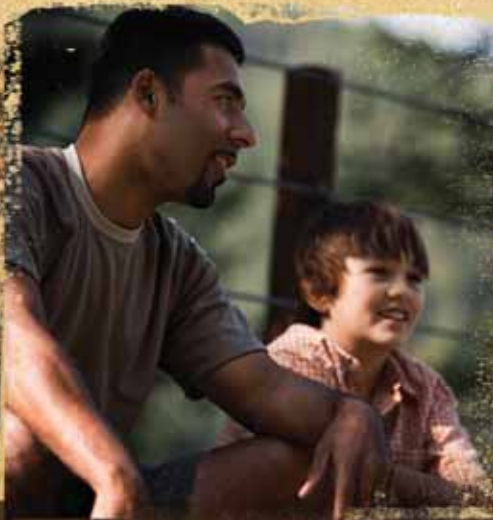
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(FSD). According to Koni, the internal FSD system allows the shock to remain firm on smooth (low frequency) bumps, but when the coach is subjected to rough (high frequency) bumps an internal valve is employed to help reduce the typical harshness that would result if the shock used single-stage valving. Koni offers a lifetime shock warranty for the original owner.

The Bilstein Comfitrac gas-charged shock has a special 1.81-inch diameter piston that allows the shock to react normally over smooth roads, but when the road gets rough the shock uses a bypass valve to divert the flow of shock oil, and the result was noticeable as shown by our ratings. Bilstein backs its product with a lifetime aftermarket warranty.

RoadKing modifies the gas pressurized system by greatly increasing the size of the internal piston. This shock uses a 2 $\frac{5}{16}$ -inch piston bore, which results in a large increase in total piston area inside the shock. This greater diameter allows the shock to spread out the damping load over a greater area and reduce the overall harshness over rough roads while still maintaining control on smooth roads and corners according to RoadKing.

As you can see in our ratings, each shock has its strengths and weaknesses. Because we are not suspension engineers, we can only comment on the results obtained in our tests as opposed to deciding a winner based on engineering or design. Now that you are armed with more information, hopefully you will be able to select the shock that most suits your needs. ♦

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## ▲ UNDERCOVER

I recently purchased tire covers for my motorhome. After lying on the ground to attach bungee cords, I thought there must be a better way to hold the covers in place.

Being a scuba diver, I started with four 2-pound belt-loop style lead weights from a dive shop. I cut them in half down the center with a hacksaw so that I ended up with eight 1-pound weights. I attached the weights to the tire covers through the grommets with zip ties. This holds them securely and I no longer have to get on the ground to fasten or unfasten the covers. The weights can be rolled up with the covers when stored.

**AL GAMENTHALER**  
ESTERO, FLORIDA



## CELL-PHONE SPIRE ▲

As a full-timer, I rely on my cell phone. Although I've found good signals in most parts of the country, there are enough marginal signals for me to justify an investment in an external antenna.

I was reluctant to drill holes in my rig, so I sought a simple, inexpensive means of temporarily mounting an antenna for those times when it's needed.

My solution was a \$1 swimming noodle and a 50-cent clamp. I cut two 9-inch pieces from the noodle. One piece supports the cell-phone antenna shaft while resting on the bat-wing antenna. The other piece of foam simply helps to stabilize the setup.

What enabled this fix was that the cell-phone antenna shaft easily passes through an opening in the TV antenna's mounting bracket that's just the right size. I run the cable through a slightly opened window to the interior of the rig.

Installation only takes a few minutes and the antenna is higher than it would be if it were mounted in a more permanent fashion.

**HOWARD BATES** | CINCINNATI, OHIO

## PARKING BRAKE RELEASE LOCK



To keep the air parking brake knob from being accidentally pushed down and released, I used a piece of 3/4-inch PEX pipe cut to 1 inch (measure to fit your knob) and then cut out a 3/8-inch slot (check yours). It snaps around the base knob and prevents accidental releases. Other plastic cylinder or piping material may also work. In a pinch, I have found that two clothes pins stacked fit mine very well.

**PERRY SEXTON** | SHENANDOAH, VIRGINIA ◆

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



# techsavvy

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



HANDS-ON | *by* KEVIN LIVINGSTON

## AN EYE ON INFLATION

Keeping tabs on tire pressure is easy with the new portable nVISION electronic monitoring system

When dealing with motorhome safety, one often overlooked area is tire pressure monitoring. Until the last few years, there was only one way to check tire pressure — using some type of gauge pressed against the tire's Schrader valve. While this method works as long as the owner manually checks the rig's tires before each trip, the onset of electronic tire pressure monitoring systems takes much of the guesswork out of the process while improving the convenience factor.

New to the growing family of electronic monitoring systems is the nVISION Tire Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS). With enhanced functionality and simplicity, the TPMS sets itself apart from the rest. Installation of the TPMS follows a quick three-step set-up

process. The first step involves setting all of your tires to the desired pressure based on actual weight of the motorhome or dinghy vehicle. Make sure this is done when the tires are cold (the vehicle has been driven less than one mile).

The next step has you turning on the TPMS to display the default pressure type — pounds per square inch (psi), the common measurement used for tires. The screen directs you to one of four programming modes, where you can find the right configuration for your motorhome, with or without a dinghy vehicle. The monitor can check up to 24 tires through its various configurations, so you can easily keep track of any combination, including the pressure in the dinghy vehicle's tires (and even the spare tire).

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## HANDS-ON

The third and final step requires the installation of the TPMS sensors, which look like jumbo-size valve caps. An icon on the screen will prompt you when it's time to install the sensors, and a flashing tire position icon will guide you so the caps can be installed in proper sequence. It takes about 30 seconds for the sensor to recognize the tire's pressure. The individual sensors depress the valve core in the valve stem, so it's important to make sure the seal is secure (and not leaking air), without over-tightening the sensor. You'll get the feel as the resistance increases, and will end up turning the caps about one-sixteenth of a turn after it seems to be seated. You can verify the integrity of the seal by using soapy water.

The nVISION TPMS has a slew of functions. The primary warning system uses a highly precise preprogrammed, two-level warning system with audible and visible alerts. A 12.5 percent pressure drop triggers the first one, whereby a yellow light flashes on the monitor screen and the corresponding signal tone will beep for five seconds. The second one will be a blinking red light, indicating a 25 percent drop below your set PSI. In some cases, a 12.5 percent drop in pressure can affect tire loading and wear, so a corresponding pressure readout for each tire keeps the owners informed as pressure slowly decreases. We found this pressure readout to be very accurate when compared to numbers using a high-quality tire gauge. It's important for the owner to pay attention to these numbers.

In use, the monitor can be positioned on any flat surface and kept from sliding using the included rubber pad. It gets its power via a standard 12-volt-DC plug. Portability is its versatility; the device can be unplugged and moved to the dinghy vehicle so its tire pressure can be monitored while driven. The preset programming and tire pairing is maintained in the unit's memory.

The nVISION TPMS is made by Hopkins Manufacturing Corporation, a company that produces a long line of RV and automotive aftermarket products — including the BrakeBuddy dinghy-braking device. The TPMS has an MSRP of \$300 with four sensors; additional sensors sell in quantities of two for \$100.

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## Not-So-Expert Warranty

ATTEMPTING TO FIND HIS WAY THROUGH THE PROCESS OF OBTAINING REFUNDS FOR A COUPLE OF CANCELLED SERVICE CONTRACTS, A READER SOLICITED HOT LINE'S INTERVENTION. HE EXPLAINED:

Last summer, I sold a motorhome that I bought in 2004. When I originally purchased the unit, I also bought a service contract plus a tire and wheel guarantee through Warranty Experts of San Antonio, Texas. After I completed the sale of my motorhome, I requested prorated refunds on the above contracts.

When I approached Warranty Experts on the refund, its representatives directed me to the two companies that actually held the contracts: MBA Owners Choice for the coach coverage, and R.O.A.D. InTire for the tires and wheels.

I then sent appropriate paperwork to each company, but only received a refund from MBA Owners Choice. I was advised by a company named Innovative Aftermarket Systems (IAS) that it was the administrator of my R.O.A.D. InTire contract, but that it had sent any money that was due to me back to Warranty Experts.

At this time, I believe I am being given the runaround by Warranty Experts. I am asking for *Hot Line's* help in getting back the money that is owed to me.

**JIM LUCAS | LINDEN, MICHIGAN**

*Hot Line contacted IAS and Warranty Experts on Lucas' behalf. We heard nothing from Warranty Experts, but did receive a detailed response from IAS. A company representative wrote as follows:*

We are in receipt of *Hot Line's* letter regarding Mr. Lucas' refund concerns.

Mr. Lucas purchased an InTire Vehicle Tire and Wheel Guarantee for \$389 in April 2004 from Warranty Experts. Warranty Experts in turn paid a portion of this fee to IAS to administer the warranty.

When a customer wants to cancel his warranty, IAS sends its portion of the applicable prorated refund to Warranty Experts. In this case, we sent them \$58.29.

Warranty Experts is now responsible for adding on its portion of the refund, and then issuing a check to Mr. Lucas for the entire refund owed. If Mr. Lucas' vehicle was financed, then the refund would be sent to the financing institution. If the loan had been paid in full, then the refund would be sent directly to the customer.

In an attempt to assist Mr. Lucas, IAS has made numerous attempts to contact Warranty Experts. However, we have not received any return calls. After receiving *Hot Line's* letter, we again tried to contact them, but without success.

Upon further review, we determined that our original check to Warranty Experts for \$58.29 was never cashed. We have subsequently issued a stop payment on the check, and reissued a new one to Mr. Lucas for this amount.

It is unfortunate that Mr. Lucas is being denied the money he is owed by Warranty Experts. IAS has fulfilled its obligations under this warranty, and is unable to assist Mr. Lucas any further. He must now pursue the remainder of his refund directly from Warranty Experts.

**DARREN MCDONALD  
CUSTOMER SERVICE SUPERVISOR  
INNOVATIVE AFTERMARKET  
SYSTEMS  
LEANDER, TEXAS**

### SERVICE CONTRACT CONFLICTS

*Attempting to obtain a refund for the cost of services performed on their motorhome, a couple asked Hot Line to get involved. They wrote:*

Approximately six years ago, we bought a new diesel-pusher motorhome. At the time, we also purchased an RV Shield warranty insurance policy (managed by Heritage Administration Services) to cover things not addressed by the unit's original warranty.

Over the years, we've had to use the RV Shield policy on four separate occasions. A fifth time, the policy would not pay for the replacement of an alternator

because my husband purchased and installed the item himself. RV Shield refused to compensate us because they said my husband "was not an authorized garage."

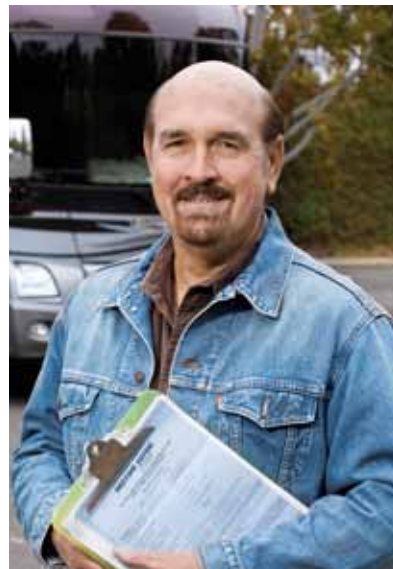
The final frustration with RV Shield was an incident this spring involving an air-conditioning compressor. When the A/C system went out, we called RV Shield, who referred us to Hill Truck Sales in South Bend, Indiana.

As part of its authorization process, RV Shield required Hill to tear the A/C system down to obtain serial numbers. RV Shield finally authorized replacement of our compressor, but said we would have to accept a rebuilt model that they had located, rather than a new one that Hill had on hand.

Despite this, we directed Hill to install the new compressor at a final cost of \$1,578.09. Although we believe that RV Shield should have covered the cost of replacing the compressor with a new part, we were told that it would pay \$641.59 (the cost of the rebuilt unit). We were also advised that to receive any

**"IT'S COMMON IN MANY SERVICE AGREEMENTS TO AUTHORIZE REBUILT OR USED PARTS RATHER THAN NEW ONES.**

**REPLACING A COVERED PART WITHOUT PRIOR AUTHORIZATION IS GROUNDS FOR DENIAL OF MOST CLAIMS."**



refund, we would have to submit a written request to RV Shield.

We submitted a written request as instructed, but have not received any refund from RV Shield. We have also called the company numerous times and have not been able to resolve this issue.

How can we get our money back? Any assistance *Hot Line* can give us would be greatly appreciated.

**JACK & STEPHANIE REAVIS  
NORTH LIBERTY, INDIANA**

*Considering their own statements, it appears that the Reavises have failed to heed terms and conditions of their RV Shield service contract on at least two separate occasions. Replacement of a covered part without prior authorization, as in the replacement of their alternator, is grounds for denial in most all contracts of this type.*

*When they ordered the installation of a new A/C compressor instead of a rebuilt model that RV Shield had authorized, they again put themselves outside the coverage parameters of their contract. It is common*

*procedure in many service agreements to only authorize rebuilt or sometimes even used parts rather than new ones.*

*Based on their actions, it did not seem like there was much *Hot Line* could do in this case for the Reavises. However, we contacted RV Shield (Heritage AS) to see if there was any further assistance the company could provide.*

*Heritage eventually responded with a brief note to say that it had sent the Reavises a check for \$641.59. We also received the following information from the Reavises:*

We finally received a check from Heritage AS in the amount of \$641.59. Although we believe that our contract should have paid the entire amount, minus the \$50 deductible, we are at ease with the fact that we finally received something. We want to thank *Hot Line* for its assistance in this matter.

**J. & S. R.**

**RESTOCKING RUCKUS**

*Blindsided by a return-policy technicality for an item he had purchased by phone, a*

*reader turned to *Hot Line* for help. He wrote:*

Last spring, I placed an order for an Eden Pure space heater with Affordable Heat. I planned to use the product as an auxiliary heat source in my RV, and also to cut down on my utility bills. When I placed the order, the person I spoke with said that my heater would be shipped in a few days.

After further consideration overnight, I called Affordable Heat the next day to cancel my purchase. Unfortunately, I was told that the heater had already been shipped, and that my credit card had been billed. The person I spoke with said that my money would be refunded upon return of the heater.

I shipped the heater back as soon as it arrived. However, when I received my credit card statement I found that I was not given a full refund for the return. I then called Affordable Heat and a customer service representative informed me that the reason for this was that I was charged a 15 percent restocking fee.

When I bought the Eden Pure heater, there was no mention of a restocking fee.

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Nor was there a mention of this policy in the paperwork that arrived with the heater.

My wife and I are retired and on a fixed income, so the \$67.35 that was withheld by Affordable Heat for restocking is important to us. We would appreciate any help that *Hot Line* can offer in having this amount returned.

**THOMAS J. NOLAN**  
MIDDLETOWN, NEW YORK

*Not all companies charge customers a restocking fee on returned merchandise. However, when buying anything from a retailer whose policies are unknown, it's wise to ask first. In this way, customers are not presented with an unwelcome surprise should they have to return an item.*

Hot Line contacted Affordable Heat on Nolan's behalf. The company did not respond to us directly, but Nolan later called to advise that he finally received the remainder of his refund. ♦

TO CONTRIBUTE TO *HOT LINE*, please refer to *Contact MotorHome*, page 8.

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## No 120-Volt AC Power

I have a 2005 Itasca and I store it at home. It's hooked up to a shoreline from my house through a heavy-duty extension cord using a pigtail that the dealer provided to connect to the 120-volt AC generator power cord.

Recently, I noticed that I have no electricity in the coach. I checked the outlet and the extension cord, and both have power. I took the motorhome to the dealer to have it checked out. The service technicians said they got electricity into the coach through the 120-volt AC generator power cord. I took the coach home to see if there was something wrong in my electrical system at my house. I checked various outlets and extension cords, and still didn't get electricity in the coach.

I took the pigtail to another service

**"I CAN'T RECOMMEND ANY TIRE THAT SAYS ANYTHING BUT STEEL IN THE SIDEWALL AND IN THE TREAD.**

**ALL-STEEL TIRES HOLD UP BEST AND TIME HAS SHOWN THEM TO BE THE MOST RELIABLE ON MOTORHOMES."**



provider, and was told that the pigtail is good. I checked the fuses in the converter box with a circuit tester, and they were all good. Do you have any suggestions?

**TODD TILLMAN  
EL MONTE, CALIFORNIA**

*Doesn't it seem strange that your motorhome has power at the service shop but not at your home, Todd? This tells me there is nothing wrong with your motorhome, but there is something wrong with the power in your home.*

*Believe it or not, low voltage is a very common home electricity problem that often goes undetected. The power company is supposed to supply 120 volts AC plus or minus 5 percent (114 VAC to 126 VAC).*

*I have seen home voltages as low as 105 volts, and that low voltage won't trip the relay in your transfer switch. The transfer switch usually defaults to shorepower, and has to switch when generator power is used.*

*For reasons unknown to me, you are plugging into a generator power cord, and not your shorepower cord. I suspect low voltage in your home is unable to trip the transfer switch.*

*Plug the generator power cord back into the generator and start the generator. After it comes up to speed, turn on an air conditioner, microwave or any other 120-volt AC appliance. If the appliance works, you will know you have a home power problem. If it doesn't work, the generator may be producing low voltage, too.*

*Get a digital voltmeter and check the voltage at the end of the extension cord. If it is less than 114 volts AC, call your power company and complain loudly about low voltage in your home. Low voltage will potentially damage your home refrigerators, furnaces and other motor-driven appliances.*

### **NO COOL**

The Norcold refrigerator in my 2003 Holiday Rambler Ambassador shuts down when the vent area is in the hot sun. Unfortunately the vent is not covered by an awning, and it is sometimes impossible to shade the area when having to park according to a campground's layout.

I've had circuit boards replaced and that does not seem to solve the problem. I believe that the shutdown is occurring due to overheating and I would like to try additional fans. Do you think they would help?

**PAUL GERSTER  
RAMSEY, MINNESOTA**

*If the refrigerator runs normally when the sun goes down, Paul, fans won't help at all. Your refrigerator is an absorption refrigerator that uses heat to cool. When the temperature behind the refrigerator is about the same as the cooling unit temperature, heat saturation causes the cooling process to stop.*

*Heat saturation is one of the few absorption refrigerator negatives. It usually happens under the circumstances you describe. The only way to keep the refrigerator cold in hot weather is to shade the outside part of the motorhome that is behind the refrigerator. An awning is the most common solution, but refrigerators in slideouts don't lend themselves to being easily shaded with an awning.*

*The space behind the refrigerator is a cooling column called a chimney. It runs from the lower side vent to a roof chimney cap, or an upper side vent. One side of the chimney is the side of the motorhome. When the sun shines directly on that side, the air in the chimney gets extremely hot just like the interior of a car parked outside in the sun during summer.*

*The chimney must be kept reasonably cool so the cooling process will function and keep the refrigerator cold. A hot car is kept cool with its air conditioning, but I've never seen an air-conditioned refrigerator chimney.*

*I don't think air conditioning the chimney would be practical, because the cool air would have to be blown out the chimney, and not recirculated in order to eliminate carbon monoxide. Shading the chimney with an awning is the most practical solution to the problem.*

### **OILY LP-GAS**

I have a 1999 Class A motorhome with an Onan Marquis 7,000-watt LP-gas generator. Since purchasing the motorhome in 2001, the LP-gas pressure



regulator supplying fuel to the generator has been plugged with a heavy, oily residue twice. I replaced the LP-gas regulator on both occasions. I spoke with several LP-gas service technicians; however, none of them had ever heard of this problem.

Would installing a "T" fitting with a 4-inch capped drop tube prior to the fuel solenoid shutoff valve to allow the heavy residue to collect before reaching the LP-gas regulator work? This is similar to what is used in residential installations of natural gas furnaces and water heaters.

**RON HAVERDINK  
HAMILTON, MICHIGAN**

*I've heard of the problem on a couple of prior occasions, Ron. In both cases contaminated LP-gas was involved. Unlike natural gas, which does have some impurities, LP-gas is a manufactured product that is very clean. Drop tubes are not required, and are not used.*

*Depending on whether your generator is liquid or vapor fueled, your LP-gas tank may be the culprit. The only way to eliminate oil in the tank is to empty the tank and have it cleaned. Then, purge the tank at least five times with LP-gas vapor before refilling it. This will eliminate almost all of the air that will get into the tank during cleaning. A competent LP-gas service company will know how to purge air from the tank.*

*According to Onan, the most common contaminants found in liquid fuel are the oils from the pumping facility. The oil is removed from the fuel at the location the fuel vaporizes. If your generator is vapor fueled, vaporization occurs in the tank, and the oil drops out in the tank. If your generator is liquid fueled, vaporization occurs in the regulator, and the oil can clog the regulator. Some Onan liquid fuel systems provide a drain for oil removal. Check with your Onan service center for the location of the drain, or the installation of a drain.*

**NO AIR PRESSURE**

I recently purchased a 1999 Allegro Bus on a Freightliner chassis. I live in the Chicago area and generally do not drive the motorhome in the winter.

Last week I went to start it up after it sat for about 30 days. It was about 15°F outside. The coach started fine. I let it run

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With the new Bilsteins installed, I was able to drive over the roads that we normally travel at normal speeds and the suspension didn't bottom out. I couldn't believe it. I was amazed and very relieved that your product had solved my problem."

Thank you.  
Peter K. Brown

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for about 25 minutes, but the air pressure in the brake lines did not get high enough for the buzzer to go off.

How long should it take for the pressure to build up? Is there anything I can do to shorten the amount of time? I'm just glad I was not planning on taking it anywhere — I'm not sure it would have gotten enough air pressure to drive it. Any suggestions? Thanks for your help.

**IRA HOLTZMAN | GLENVIEW, ILLINOIS**

*Since you are not planning on going anywhere, Ira, wait until spring and the weather warms up. There may be something wrong with your air compressor, but I suspect ice is causing your problem.*

*Water accumulates in all compressed air systems, and it freezes in winter weather unless incoming air is dried or treated with alcohol. Truckers commonly use alcohol breathers in the wintertime to keep their air brakes and air suspensions from freezing up.*

*Come spring, I think your motorhome air compressor will pump up, and its pressure will turn off the buzzer in the same amount of time as it did last fall. If so, drain all water from your air system, and discuss drying your air or treating it with alcohol with your local Freightliner service center.*

**SPARE TIRE**

I have a 2007 Pace Arrow motorhome without a spare tire. I have read that purchasing a tire without a rim to have on hand may be advantageous in the event of a tire mishap.

I don't have a basement storage area large enough for a 22.5-inch tire so I would need to build a platform between the rear frame rails near the rear axle. To protect the tire, should I cover it in plastic wrap or have it shrink-wrapped? I'm not sure if the tire would need to breathe, but I think it needs to be protected from road debris. Do you have thoughts on this?

**KEVIN WILMOUTH  
GREENWOOD, INDIANA**

*For those who have expressed concern about not having spare tire availability on the road, I have long recommended carrying a tire without a wheel, Kevin. In most large Class A motorhomes there is enough room to store one in a basement compartment, and you can fill up the center of the doughnut with other stuff.*

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Your situation is different, but you can apparently build a place to carry the tire under the motorhome where mounted spare tires are often carried on a variety of vehicles. The only difference is the bead seat and the inside of the tire will not be kept clean with a wheel.

Depending on how you build your rack, I wouldn't wrap the tire at all. Just carry some cleaning equipment to quickly wash the inside of the tire and the bead seat if and when you need the tire. The rest of the tire will take care of itself.

**TIRE CHOICE**

I bought a 1994 Bouncer 28T about 18 months ago, and the coach has 35,000 miles on it. The couple I bought it from said the tires only have 25,000 miles on them. The tire tread is good, but the sidewalls are starting to develop cracks. The tires have been covered when I'm not using the coach, but the cracks have me worried.

The tires are Michelin XPS, which are quite expensive to replace. I know you cannot recommend a specific tire to me, but could there be an article printed on the different tires, prices and quality comparisons?

**CHARLIE SITES  
SIERRA VISTA, ARIZONA**

*Tire choice is really quite simple, Charlie. Tires that hold up best on heavily loaded motorhomes are all-steel tires. Michelin, Goodyear and Bridgestone make them. Your Michelin XPS tires are all-steel tires.*

*Tire construction is printed on the sidewall of all tires. The construction information will tell you the make up of the tread and the sidewall. The tread is almost always all steel, but the sidewall can be a mixture of steel, polyester, nylon and other materials.*

*I cannot recommend any tire that says anything but steel in the sidewall and in the tread. Unfortunately, they are the most expensive tires, but time has shown them to be the most reliable on motorhomes.*

*When you consider what a new motorhome costs, paying top dollar for all-steel replacement tires makes a lot of sense. Just one tire failure can do a lot more dollar damage to a motorhome than the price of the tires. ♦*

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## Most Mileage and Allison Call Center

I am writing in response to “Most Mileage” from the October 2008 issue. I have a 2003 40-foot Newmar Mountain Aire with a Cummins 400 ISL engine and Allison 3000MH transmission. My transmission shifts into sixth gear at 56 MPH. I then take it up to 60 MPH at approximately 1,400–1,500 RPM. I flat tow a Chevrolet Tracker and have been doing this for the past five years. I’ve found that my mileage varies between 7.8 to 11.1 MPG at this speed and RPM, depending on road and wind conditions. I also make sure the transmission is in economy mode. This makes a difference in shifting and mileage.

As you stated in your column, “the lower the RPM, the better the mileage.” I have tried different settings and this one has proven to be the best for my coach and pocketbook.

Another thing I’m sure you know is that motorhome tires have a speed limit rating on them. My tires, Michelin XZA1 295/80R22.5, have a maximum speed limit of 75 MPH. Many people don’t know this, but it’s printed in the tire manual that comes with a motorhome. Another speed limit is posted for some vehicles that are dinghy towed. This should be checked before towing fast.

As a last thought to Mr. Dennie in the October column, he may want to check with an Allison shop and make sure the transmission’s onboard computer is set for the proper shifting speeds; 70 MPH seems a bit high for the final shift.

**GEORGE MCELVY**  
EDGAR SPRINGS, MISSOURI

*Thanks for writing about your experiences and the safety reminders. For readers with questions about their Allison transmissions, the company now has a Technical Assistance Call Center (TAC) to provide motorhome owners and shops with answers to service questions. The center is staffed with experienced, ASE-certified technicians who are familiar with transmission service.*

*The TAC number is (800) 252-5283 and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. MotorHome featured the TAC in the February Noteworthy section.*

### SHIMMY AND SHAKE

We have a 30-foot 2004 Itasca motorhome on a Ford F53 chassis that we purchased new. While on a trip about a year ago, we hit a very small pothole while driving at about 35 MPH, and the

steering column started to vibrate wildly. I stopped and started on the downhill summit twice but the vibration reoccurred.

When we got home we took the vehicle to the Ford dealer, but the only thing the service technician could find that was wrong with the coach was that he said the front disc brakes were warped and needed to be resurfaced. We decided to seek a second opinion, and after questioning several establishments as to whether this could be the problem, were told no by all of them.

On another trip, we had a few instances where the steering column started to vibrate while driving on a smooth freeway. I slowed and it stopped. I slowly accelerated and it started again at about 40 MPH. The vibrating/slowing/accelerating/vibrating repeated three or four times and then quit happening. What could it be?

**CONRAD & SANDY KOPEC**  
COSTA MESA, CALIFORNIA

*The Ford F53 chassis is prone to this problem of severe shimmying, which is exacerbated by certain ripples and irregularities in the road surface. Any play or looseness in the front end or tire/wheel imbalance increases the likelihood of this (harmonic oscillation) happening. Have the play in the steering gear and linkages and wheel balance checked by a front-end expert. If the problem persists, have a hydraulic steering damper (which looks just like a shock absorber) installed onto the steering linkage. Any 4x4 or chassis specialist shop can do this for you.*

**“A FAILED CLAMP CAN CAUSE A HOSE TO BLOW OFF WHEN THE ENGINE IS WORKING HARD, RESULTING IN A RUINED ENGINE. REPLACE THEM WITH STAINLESS-STEEL AFTERMARKET CLAMPS IF THE ORIGINALS ARE STILL IN PLACE.”**



### BEST MILEAGE AND HANDLING FORMULAS

As a prospective motorhome owner, I would like to know if a relationship or formula exists between coach weight and engine horsepower that results in optimum fuel mileage. When shopping for a motorhome, nothing official exists to give the buyer an honest picture of expected fuel mileage. Manufacturers print nothing in their literature regarding fuel consumption.

If a buyer is concerned with fuel ef-



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## POWERTRAIN

iciency, would you say that they should purchase the largest motor available on the smallest chassis, or are the variables too great to preclude such a formula?

Also, I've heard that a relationship exists between wheelbase and overall coach length that affects handling. What ratio or relationship identifies coaches that should be expected to handle well?

**STAN TERZOPOLOS**  
ALBURTIS, PENNSYLVANIA

*There is a lot more to mileage than these few simple factors. Weight, aerodynamics, gearing and engines all are major players, but how the coach is driven is one of the biggest variables, percentage-wise.*

*Generally, lighter, more aerodynamic coaches with smaller engines (not the largest) will get better mileage. The more gear ratios the transmission has, the better, and numerically lower axle ratios help too. Of course, diesels also get 30 percent or greater mileage, compared to a gasoline engine. The driver can make up to a 20 percent difference in mileage as well.*

*Wheelbase vs. coach length is also a subject more complex than a simple formula and requires various compromises. Having the wheels close to the corners provides the best stability and resistance to sway, especially at high speeds, but it increases the turning radius and makes tight turns difficult. Weight distribution and front-to-rear balance have a great effect on handling, as does the center of gravity. Tires and wheels are also major factors.*

*Generally, try to avoid coaches with excessively long rear overhangs, as they tend to sway and drag bottom, and that rear overhang acts like a blown-sideways rudder in strong crosswinds. Weight in the overhanging portion unloads the front axle and affects ride and handling greatly.*

## GASOLINE STORAGE WITH ALCOHOL BLENDS II

As a regular reader of *MotorHome*, I feel compelled to comment on the letter in the March issue, "Gasoline Storage With Alcohol Blends." I have found a product that's rather impressive. I own a 120-HP Johnson outboard motor, and it has had rough idling problems for years. I've spent literally hundreds of dollars trying to fix it, but nothing helped until I started using

Star Tron, a product manufactured by Star Brite Marine Products. I'm such a believer that I now use it in all gasoline that goes in vehicles that sit for long periods of time, which for me is a large selection of two-stroke and four-stroke engines. StarTron is also quite economical. A 32-ounce container (\$30) will treat 512 gallons of gasoline.

My attempts to find information on the Internet about the problem with the jelling of ethanol suggests that the greatest risk is when regular (no alcohol) gasoline is mixed with ethanol, which is why it is recommended that ethanol should not be added to non-ethanol until the tank is nearly empty.

Also, my research has found that a product called Sea Foam is very good, but it appears to be considerably more expensive to use. Both products (StarTron and Sea Foam) also work as carbon-reduction cleaners.

**JERRY SPIELBUSCH**  
MEDFORD, OREGON

CONTINUED ON PAGE 60

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As alcohol blends become more common so do the problems. There are many products on the market and it's good to hear of real-world results from our readers. Here is the contact info for Star Tron ([www.mystarbrite.com/startron](http://www.mystarbrite.com/startron); 954-587-6280) and Sea Foam ([www.seafoamsales.com](http://www.seafoamsales.com); 952-938-4811).

**COOLANT LOSS CURED**

I had the same problem with coolant loss as Mr. Gluck in the February issue, "Coolant Loss." I have a 2002 Damon Daybreak motorhome with the Ford V-10 engine. I finally crawled under the motorhome in order to check the hoses and clamps, and when I checked the lower radiator hose clamp, it fell apart in my hand. After replacing it with a better quality clamp, I have not had to add any more coolant. Problem solved.

**JOHN WENTHE**  
MT. ZION, ILLINOIS

Thanks for writing, John. As I mentioned in my reply: "Some of these chassis had faulty hose clamps which cause leaks ..." and I can't stress enough how important this problem is, because a failed clamp can cause a hose to blow off when the engine is working hard in hot weather. The result can be a ruined engine in a very short time, before most drivers notice the coolant temperature gauge has gone into the red zone. Owners of these Ford coaches should carefully check their hoses clamps and replace them with stainless-steel aftermarket clamps if the originals are still in place. It's cheap insurance.

**LEAKING LIFT PUMPS**

My motorhome is a 2001 Rexhall Aerbus with a 330-HP Cummins ISC, now out of warranty with 68,000 miles. I'm told that fuel leaks on cold start up of ISB and ISC Cummins engines with externally mounted fuel lift pumps (aka fuel transfer pumps) are caused by low-sulfur fuel shrinking the O-rings. I experienced this problem; when I called Cummins, I was told the leak would get worse and that a fire hazard existed. They didn't mention how to fix the problem, just that a new pump would cost about \$250 and that it was a three-hour job (with labor at \$119 per hour).

I decided to handle the repair myself.

My son sat in the cockpit and we could hear each other, so I had him turn the key on to start the pump; it did leak about three drops per second from the O-ring seal. I had him turn it off and I dried the assembly off. I could see how the pump body was held in place by three triangular-spaced 11mm hex bolts. I put the small socket on them and found that they were all one-eighth turn from being snug. (Do this cold before expansion is a factor.)

We tested it and it worked fine; there was no leak. I wonder how many serviceable pumps have been tossed because of a lack of mechanical knowledge — and for a \$600 repair bill? I'm told that these pumps have been installed in the fuel tanks of 2003 and later models. The service manager also told me of many Dodge trucks they had similarly serviced, all due to low-sulfur fuel. He went on to relate how the new pumps were upgraded with better seals and O-rings.

**BOB WILCOX**  
WICKENBURG, ARIZONA

We're glad you were able to fix it for free, Bob. The new ultra-low-sulfur diesel fuel is supposed to have additives that prevent these problems and improve lubricity, but stories like this keep cropping up. The fact that tightening the mounting stopped the leak could indicate that the O-ring dried out and shrank due to the fuel, or the bolts simply loosened from use and heat cycles. Either way, readers should keep an eye on this area for leaks. ♦

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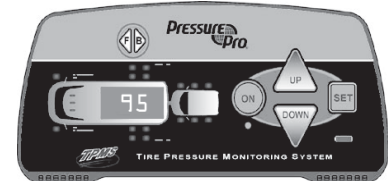
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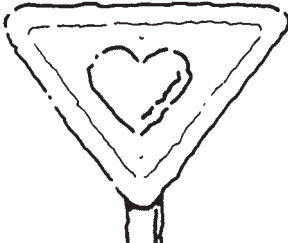
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## LAKE TROUT AND GRANDMA-BOY DIP

**T**agish, Yukon, Canada — Back when my son, Eric, was 5 and my daughter, Tiffany, was 3, we met my parents at a campground along the Tagish River. The Tagish is a short stream joining Tagish and Marsh lakes, the latter being the headwaters of the Yukon River in northern British Columbia, Canada.

We didn't have a motorhome then, but my folks did, so we often tent camped next to them. My mother is a great cook, and anything she could prepare at home she could prepare in her motorhome, including an onion dip that my kids really liked. Tiffany, especially, loved what our family called Grandma-boy dip.

Arriving at Tagish, we parked next to the motorhome. The kids hadn't seen Grandpa-boy and Grandma-boy (so named to distinguish my parents from my wife's) for more than a year, and

everybody was excited. Tiffany got to the motorhome first, just as Mother leaned out the door.

With absolutely no preambles, Tiffany looked up and said, "Grandma, got any dip?"

Mother had chips and dip ready, but insisted on a hug first.

Dad joined us a few minutes later. He'd been fishing from the Tagish River Bridge when we arrived. Fish, specifically lake trout, lured us to Tagish. To that end, I spent \$7 to purchase a child's fishing kit for Eric before leaving home — you know the kind: rod, reel, line and cheap lures wrapped in plastic and sold as a child's first kit.

Next morning Eric strutted out to the bridge carrying his new pole. In the shallow water near shore we snagged a few spawning cisco for bait. Cisco are herring-

sized fish that spawn in the river, and lake trout chase the cisco into the river.

On the bridge over the deepest part of the river, we baited our hooks, dropped them into the water and settled back to chat with others on the bridge.

Within seconds, Eric's rod began twitching. Moments later he hooked onto a 7-pound lake trout.

He fought the fish frantically, reeling forward and backward, shouting all the while. Gradually he pulled the fish close to the bridge. It splashed furiously on the surface right below our feet. Eric saw the thrashing fish, screamed in terror, threw down his pole, and lit out for camp. Mom grabbed the fishing pole and landed the fish. Dad chased the boy.

We teased Eric mercilessly about his fish until we returned to Tagish a year later. Again, the first fish took his bait, but this time he fought it to the finish and carried it back to camp. He meant to end the teasing once and for all.

The picture of him telling his first fish story later that night around the campfire is one of my most prized possessions. Ever since, he has always caught the first fish, the most fish and the biggest fish, including the largest lake trout we've ever pulled out of Marsh Lake when he was 13. ♦



PHOTOS: RON DALBY; GOVERNMENT OF YUKON



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2008	Diplomat	40PDQ	M10434
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