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FOR THE RV ENTHUSIAST

MOTORHOME

OCTOBER 2009

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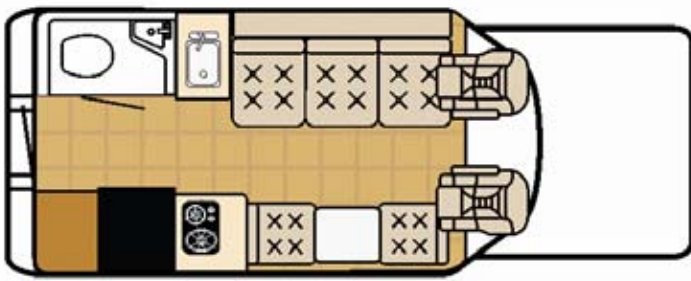
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On The Cover: Winnebago's innovative Via Class A is field-tested for the first time at Clear Lake State Park near Ventura, Iowa (see page 36). Photo by Bob Livingston.

PUCKERBRUSH, IOWA

We arrived in Puckerbrush in plenty of time to claim our seats along Main Street and watch the annual parade. Puckerbrush, a small town in northern Iowa, was hosting the

40th annual Winnebago-Itasca Travelers Club (WIT) rally. The population of this small Midwestern town — just 4,500 — swelled dramatically as 1,218 Winnebagoes and more than 2,400 people converged on the rally grounds in July.

Actually, my wife, Lynne, and I were in town for a couple of reasons. The business reason was to be the first people to road and camp test the new Via, Winnebago's innovative Class A on a Sprinter chassis. The other was to experience the annual Winnebago club event. For that, we took up residence in a 2010 Tour with a brand-new floorplan.

But first we needed to watch the parade.

And there it was: the distinctive Via rolling down Main Street — No. 60 in the lineup of bands, floats, cars and representatives from the various business establishments in and around Puckerbrush. It looked as if almost everyone in town turned out for the event. It was the first time the Via was seen in public, drawing tremendous cheers from the crowd.

Afterward, we managed to get possession of the Via long enough to find out if a 25-foot Class A on a chassis straight from Europe could pass muster among the ranks of American RV enthusiasts (see test report on page 36).

After putting the Via through its paces on the highways and backroads, and in shopping centers and crowded tourist towns, we tried settling into a campsite at Clear Lake State Park. Within minutes of our arrival, onlookers fascinated by the unique motorhome followed us around like lovesick puppies. As we slowly made our way to our site, we were stopped by the campground host, waving his hands and blocking the



road. No way we were speeding, and we had reservations ... what was going on? As we soon learned, he became a human barricade because two *MotorHome* readers asked him to stop the coach so they could take a look. They had been waiting to see this coach since we broke the news earlier this year — and to their surprise here it was in the same place they were camping. Paul and Ruth Laursen, from Elko, Minnesota, motorhome enthusiasts and big fans of this magazine, were ecstatic to coincidentally be in the same place we were testing the Via for the first time.

As it turned out, Paul and Ruth were very supportive, helping us find suitable locations to photograph the Via.

We really enjoyed our time in the Via, but we were eager to get back to the rally grounds to visit with the WIT members. This year's theme was "Witstock," a clever take-off on the famous Woodstock gathering in New York 40 years ago. It was also WIT's 40th rally! While there were political overtones at the real Woodstock, the WIT group celebrated only the love and music of that history-making event. Rally-goers dressed as if they were back in the '60s, decorated their rigs in peace signs and flowers, and hosted sensational get-togethers — including the annual "row party" in which state groups served up a taste of local fare. It was an event to experience!

For the record, Puckerbrush was actually the original name for Forest City, Iowa, a town put on the map by Winnebago Industries — and, of course, Witstock. The rally was a rousing success. Unfortunately, I had to leave before the bra burning. Some parts of history are best left to memories. ♦

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“HOW HAS THE ECONOMY AFFECTED YOUR SUMMER PLANS?”
That’s the question we asked in our July issue, and here are some of the replies we received.

PROCEEDING WITH CAUTION

The economy has put the brakes on our travel plans for this year. There is a strong indication that fuel will be increasing in price. What if more RV parks offered incentives, like some KOAs do? People might take that vacation. My wife and I love to travel. We are retired and look forward to our next trip. We are just waiting to see what happens with the economy.

BOB & MARINA SLOMAN | SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA

FUEL PRICE COMPLAINTS

I’m tired of hearing people talk about the cost of fuel. I recently moved up from a Class C to a new Class A rig. Nobody likes to pay more for fuel but people should enjoy it while they can. We love our motorhome and we use it a lot and will continue to in the future. This is how we have our fun and it’s still cheaper than a two-week vacation in a hotel.

MIKE & CHRISTINA LLOYD | SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Now that Fiat has acquired Chrysler and fuel prices are rising again, I can envision new micro-minimotorhomes similar to those that were popular in the 1980s and 1990s. They were built on Toyota chassis, had four-cylinder or V-6 motors and were quite economical to operate. The majority of European motorhomes are built on Fiat chassis and powered by turbodiesel motors. They are about 20–22 feet in length, and fuel consumption usually exceeds 22 MPG. American motorhome manufacturers might well benefit from a business relationship with Fiat/Chrysler. There appears to be a market niche waiting to be filled.

RICHARD BROWN | SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA

SHRINKAGE

We’ve noticed a marked difference in the size of *MotorHome* this year. We’ve subscribed for a long time and noted that during 2008, the average number of pages each month was 92. This year, we’ve seen a reduction to an average of 68 pages per month. What gives? The magazine is great, but the seeming loss of article space is an issue for us. Any explanation?

KEVIN & LORI WILLIAMS | LA PINE, OREGON

As the publisher of MotorHome, I can appreciate everyone’s concern about the size of the magazine — admittedly, it’s smaller than any time in the history of the company — but frankly, we’re in the same boat as the entire publishing industry.

We have always been supported by the RV industry, which has been struggling in concert with most major industries in the U.S. The loss of advertising revenue throughout the publishing industry has made it more challenging to produce a magazine that looks like it did a few years ago. When ad lines fall, the number of pages must be regulated accordingly.



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Our Provisional Members: Flying Horse Farms, Ohio • Roundup River Ranch, Colorado

That said, I would like to point out that the editorial package in this magazine hasn't shrunk as dramatically as the physical size of the publication might suggest. We still maintain a sizable editorial package and we remain committed to providing our readers with the highest quality editorial possible — something we've done for almost 70 years.

Rest assured, as the RV industry and advertising climate improve (and there's certainly movement in that direction), MotorHome will increase in size and continue to be filled with more of the articles enjoyed by our loyal readers and RV enthusiast friends.

As always, we appreciate your support and thank you for "listening."

BOB LIVINGSTON
PUBLISHER | **MOTORHOME**

STELLAR CUSTOMER CARE

We had a wonderful experience with Gulf Stream. After having trouble getting our slide fixed — three times by an authorized shop, only to have it fall out of warranty — we contacted the home office for help. We were

able to get the slide fixed and still have Gulf Stream honor the warranty. This is customer service to the max!

ROBERT & TERESA OUSTECKY
LAKE GEORGE, NEW YORK

STEP BACK IN TIME

July's *MotorHome* had a piece about the Thimble Islands in Stony Creek, Connecticut. It's a great place; I know, I grew up there. One point that should be mentioned is that the bridge you need to go under to get to the town of Stony Creek will not fit large RVs. I'd hate for someone to go out of their way, not have a dinghy and find they can't get into that delightful step back in time.

DAVID GRAY | NEW BRAUNFELS, TEXAS

Question:
Have you recently visited a location that was featured in *MotorHome*? Please send your comments to *MotorHome*, 2575 Vista Del Mar Drive, Ventura, CA 93001; or e-mail letters@motorhomemagazine.com. ♦

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escapes

by DENISE SANTOYO

EVENTS | NOTEWORTHY | WHEELS & GEAR | CROSSROADS



Saluting a golden era in transportation, the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Canal National Historical Park — affectionately known as “the Grand Old Ditch” — stretches along the Potomac River between Georgetown (District of Columbia) and Cumberland, Maryland. With seven feeder dams and 74 lift locks to conquer 605 feet in elevation, this 19th-century canal successfully linked producers to their markets — hauling coal, lumber, crops and finished goods.

Today, visitors can ride on a canal boat and meet the mules at Georgetown and Great Falls, walk or bicycle the 184½-mile historic path, kayak restored waters, sightsee and track history, of which the Civilian Conservation Corps was a part. More than 1,300 historical features — locks and lock houses, aqueducts and culverts — remain.

The day-use fee park is open April through October. For more information, call C&O Canal, (301) 739-4200, or visit www.nps.gov/choh.

— Rhonda Ostertag

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escapes EVENTS

by KAITLYN VOYCE



OCTOBER 17-18

Half Moon Bay, California, the World Pumpkin Capital, is celebrating autumn with the **Half Moon Bay Art and Pumpkin Festival**. This free event features all things pumpkin with a 1,000 plus-pound pumpkin, pumpkin pie-eating contests, pumpkin carving, and a mix of pumpkin cheesecakes, cookies, ice cream and more. Live music, arts and crafts booths and other entertainment round out the event; (650) 726-9652, www.miramarevents.com.

OCTOBER 1-3 | Head to Kincaid, Kansas, for the **10th Annual Kincaid Free Fair**.

There will be a carnival, a huge parade, community feed, games, entertainment and Fair Queen judging; (785) 448-0331, www.andersoncountys.net.

OCTOBER 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 | Enjoy the fall season with **Family Fun** events at Pin Oak Creek RV Park in Villa Ridge, Missouri. Saturdays during the month of October will feature activities such as Halloween crafts, trick-or-treating, apple bobbing, scarecrow building, pumpkin carving and costume contests; (636) 451-5656, www.pinoakcreekrvpark.com.

OCTOBER 10 | Get outdoors at North Bend State Park in Cairo, West Virginia, with the **10-Mile Fall Hike**. The hike follows the North Bend Rail Trail, which passes through wild and natural areas, farmland and historical points of interest. Camping is available at the park's two campgrounds; (304) 643-2931, www.northbendsp.com.

OCTOBER 10-11 | Visit Madisonville, Louisiana, for the **Madisonville Wooden Boat Festival**. Held along the Tchefoncte River at the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Maritime Museum, the festival features hundreds of classic and spectator boats as well as live music, crafts, classic cars, a Quick 'N Dirty Boat Building Contest and more; (985) 845-9200, www.lpbmm.org.

OCTOBER 18 | Car enthusiasts will want to stop by the **Smithville Vette Review** in Smithville, New Jersey. The Original Garden State Corvette Club will display more than 100 Corvettes. The show is free for spectators; www.smithvillenj.com/events.

OCTOBER 31 | Learn about a haunting past on the **Bristow Spirits on Route 66 Ghost Caravan Tour** in Bristow, Oklahoma. The caravan tour leads participants to multiple stops in their own vehicles as the tour guide reveals ghost stories about each location; (918) 850-3083, www.visitbristowok.com/spirits.

RV SHOWS

OCTOBER 2-4

Chantilly Fall RV and Boat Super Sale
 Chantilly, Va.; (804) 425-6556

OCTOBER 2-4

Fall Rhode Island RV Show
 Providence, R.I.; (804) 425-6556

OCTOBER 2-4

Northeast RV Show's Fall
 RV Marketplace
 Suffern, N.Y.; (845) 343-2772

OCTOBER 15-18

Fall RV Show and Closeout Sale
 Oklahoma City, Okla.; (405) 376-3897

OCTOBER 16-18

New Jersey RV Show
 Edison, N.J.; (804) 425-6556

OCTOBER 16-25

California RV Show
 Pomona, Calif.; (951) 274-0696

OCTOBER 17-18

Year-End RV Clearance
 Ottawa, Ontario, Canada;
 (877) 817-9500

OCTOBER 30-NOVEMBER 1

Fall Atlantic City RV Show
 Atlantic City, N.J.; (804) 425-6556

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

22 NEW TRAILS

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar

recently designated 22 trails as newly recognized National Recreation Trails. “From coast to coast, the National Trails System helps connect American families with the wonders of the outdoors,” said Salazar. “These new National Recreation Trails will create new opportunities for fitness and stewardship, while creating a lasting legacy for our children and grandchildren.”

The new trails, by state, are:

- ALABAMA** | Hugh S. Branyon Backcountry Trail
- CALIFORNIA** | San José Trail Network
- ILLINOIS** | Moraine Hills Trail System
- INDIANA** | Rivergreenway
- KANSAS** | Pioneer Nature Trail
- MASSACHUSETTS** | Great Barrington Housatonic River Walk
- NEBRASKA** | Niobrara Scenic River, Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge Section
- NEW JERSEY** | Hackensack River Greenway through Teaneck
- NEW YORK** | Chenango Canal Towpath Trail
- NEW YORK** | Feeder Canal Towpath Trail
- NEW YORK** | Historic Champlain Canalway Trail
- PENNSYLVANIA** | Greater Hazleton Rails to Trails
- PENNSYLVANIA** | Pittsburgh to Harrisburg Main Line Canal Greenway—6 to 10 Trail; Juniata River Water Trail; Lower Trail; Path of the Flood Trail; Roaring Run Trail; and West Penn Trail
- PENNSYLVANIA** | Susquehanna River Water Trail — North Branch Section
- TEXAS** | Cameron Park Trails
- VIRGINIA** | Occoquan Water Trail
- WISCONSIN** | Kohl Park Hiking Trail



Phillip West, left, and Hugh S. Branyon at trail dedication.

News Briefs

In June, Navistar International Corp. completed the purchase of certain assets of Monaco Coach Corp. for about \$47 million. The new company, named **Monaco RV LLC**, will be headquartered in Coburg, Oregon. According to Jack Allen, president of Navistar’s North American truck group, the purchase expands Navistar’s diesel business and complements the company’s Workhorse chassis business.

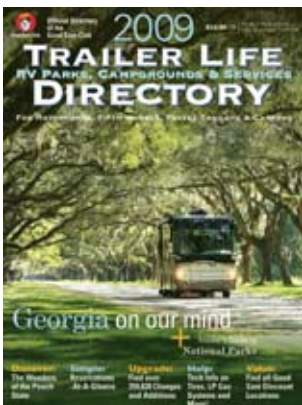
In August, Monaco’s luxury RV resort division, **Signature Resorts**, was acquired by Morgan RV Resorts, Saratoga Springs, New York, and Sunland RV Resorts, La Jolla, California.

The new **Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009** will add three units to the National Park System: Paterson Great Falls National Historic Park in Paterson, New Jersey; River Raisin National Battlefield Park in Frenchtown, Michigan; and William Jefferson Clinton Birthplace Home National Historic Site in Hope, Arkansas. The bill also designated more than half-a-million acres of new wilderness to five park units in Michigan, California, Colorado and Utah.

Winegard Company has added a new video library to its Web site (www.winegard.com) that provides installation and troubleshooting tips for some of its power supply and portable satellite antenna products.

The **Obama administration** has ordered a one-year moratorium on most road building and other development on about 50 million acres of remote national forests. The moratorium reinstates most of a Clinton-era ban from 2001 against new construction and road development in national forests. A spokesperson for Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said the secretary could still approve roads if necessary for special circumstances such as protecting public safety or forest health.

IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE



Ratings are big business, with many well-known companies setting the industry standard for their expert evaluation: Nielsen for TV programming; *Consumer Reports* for automobiles and Equifax for credit scores. When you’re looking for the most reliable campground ratings, it makes sense to access the No. 1 campground directory in North America — the *Trailer Life RV Parks, Campgrounds and Services Directory*. The 2009 directory, with nearly 12,000 campgrounds rated, highlights the top 300 campgrounds in North America.

Last year, *Trailer Life Directory* consultants inspected nearly 12,000 parks throughout North

America — 300 of which received a near-perfect rating of 27.5 and above. Through this rigorous inspection, two of the parks that attained perfection in 2009 are Evergreen Park RV Resort in Mount Eaton, Ohio, and Woodland Park in Sauble, Ontario.

For more information on these exceptional parks, visit www.TrailerLifeDirectory.com. — *Dee Reed*



PHOTO: USDA FOREST SERVICE

MOBILE HOT SPOT



The new **NETGEAR 3G Mobile Broadband Wireless Router** gives RVers access to the Internet anytime, even while on the road. The router essentially creates a WiFi hot spot anywhere — even where DSL and cable connections are not available. A compatible 3G USB modem with a broadband data plan plugs into the router, which can be shared with friends and family. The router also features an optional cigarette-lighter power adapter for charging the unit on the road. The NETGEAR 3G Mobile Broadband Wireless Router retails for \$109.99. **NETGEAR, (888) 638-4327, www.netgear.com.** — *Kaitlyn Voyce*



GET WIRED

Xantrex recently released a new line of lower-priced true sine-wave inverters for RVers — the **Xantrex PROwatt SW** series.

With high surge capability, the PROwatt SW provides the necessary current to start up demanding electrical loads for variable speed hand tools, advanced electrical appliances and more. It's available in 600-watt (MSRP \$200), 1,000-watt (MSRP \$350) and 2,000-watt (MSRP \$485) models. All models feature dual 120-volt AC ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) outlets and a USB port for charging portable electronic devices.

An ON/OFF remote panel is available as an accessory, and provides an automatic lockout feature to prevent the vehicle's battery bank from being drained when the ignition is not engaged.

Xantrex Technology, (408) 987-6030, www.xantrex.com/prowattsw.



DOMINATE THE DINGHY

Demco has introduced a new self-aligning tow bar — the **Demco Dominator** (MSRP \$995). Constructed of steel and aluminum components using a modular design, the Dominator is held into the motorhome's hitch receiver with a silent hitch-pin system, which the company says provides a solid and noise-free attachment.

The tow bar features independently moving arms, which allow for easier hook up, and weighs just 30 pounds. When not in use, the Dominator stores in one of three positions, both arms left, both arms right and one arm left and one arm right.

All Demco tow bars, including the Dominator, are equipped with safety cables. The Dominator is rated at a 7,500-pound towing capacity when used with the appropriate weight-rated 2-inch hitch receiver.

Demco, (800) 543-3626, www.demco-products.com.



MOAB MARVEL

It's difficult to say which is more interesting, the 5,000-square-foot Christensen home carved into a huge rock in Utah's Canyonlands country or the clever statues made from found objects that sit outside.

Visitors to Hole N" the Rock in Moab, Utah, can discover the handiwork of Lyle Nichols, an auto mechanic turned sculptor. He crafted a Jeep using license plates for the body and rusty metal tools for the wheels, a golfer from golf club heads and shafts and a bull from scrap metal.

There's no charge to tour the grounds, though for \$5, you can tour the home Albert Christensen hand-carved in massive sandstone for his wife, Gladys. What started as a two-room diner grew to a 14-room residence. After Albert's death in 1957, Gladys completed the home and opened a gift shop and exotic zoo, which features an aviary of exotic birds alongside zebras, camels, bison, wallabies and more.

Hole N" the Rock is 12 miles south of Moab on U.S. Highway 191. It's open year-round and offers plenty of RV parking.

For more information, call (435) 686-2250, or visit www.theholeintherock.com.

— *Mary Zalmanek*

BEACHFRONT BEAUTY



If camping right next to the beach is your idea of paradise, then you'll want to check out Red Coconut RV Resort in Fort Myers Beach, Florida. The campground is nestled among palm trees and stretches

from the Gulf of Mexico to the edge of Matanzas Pass Wilderness Preserve. The beachfront sites offer a breathtaking view of the ocean and fabulous sunsets, and no matter where your site is, it's just a short walk to the powdery soft white beaches.

Fort Myers Beach — known as one of the world's safest beaches — is located on the thin barrier islands of Estero and San Carlos on the Gulf of Mexico. While you're in the area, be sure to visit nearby Lovers Key State Park, a famous haven for wildlife, manatees, dolphins and bald eagles.

For more information, contact Red Coconut RV Park at (888) 262-6226, or www.redcoconut.com. — *Katherine Neis Haskins* ♦



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During Country and Western Weekend at Brookdale Family Campground in Meadville, Pennsylvania, young campers enjoy panning for gold while the adults hit the links for a Hillbilly Golf Tournament.



Jellystone Park Camp-Resorts offer organized activities ranging from tie-dyeing classes, above, to karaoke.

FUN & GAMES

FROM THEMED WEEKENDS TO MOCK GAME SHOWS, MORE CAMPGROUNDS ARE OFFERING **ACTIVITIES THAT ENGAGE GUESTS OF ALL AGES**

by JEFF CRIDER

Situated in the maple forests of Kennebunkport, Maine, Red Apple Campground is an ideal spot for a weekend getaway or extended vacation, with the Atlantic Ocean, art galleries and fine seafood restaurants just minutes away.

But campground owners David and Linda Berg do not rely solely on the natural beauty that surrounds them — or the allure of Kennebunkport itself, for that matter — to entice motorhome enthusiasts to their 140-site park. They also provide plenty of fun and games, including their own version of “The Newlywed Game.”

“We call it ‘The Almost Newlywed Game,’” David Berg told *MotorHome*, noting that the park’s version of the popular TV game show makes every couple a potential contestant. “We have a sign-up list and ask people if they’d like to volunteer. But if we don’t get enough, we pick people out of the audience.”

The questions can get a little risqué if there are no children in attendance. But no matter who is in the audience — which



Telling scary stories around the campfire is only part of the fun at Kampgrounds of America (KOA) parks.



Fourth of July weekend at Brookdale Family Campground is filled with family fun, such as canoe races, above, a patriotic campsite decorating contest and a fishing tournament.



The Halloween-themed weekends at Strawberry Park Resort Campground in Preston, Connecticut, are so popular that the park offers them from the end of September through October.

typically numbers at least 75 to 80 people — campers get plenty of chances to see the “almost newlyweds” squirm.

“We start off easy,” Berg explained, “asking questions like ‘What is your wife’s favorite color?’ But as the questions progress, they get more difficult.” One recent question: “Which of the following three words best describes your wife? Flabby, crabby or gabby?”

“It’s just a night full of laughter,” Berg said with a smile, adding that the women are each given a blow-up hammer that squeaks should they decide to bop their husbands on the head after hearing their answers.

While it’s a safe bet that relatively few campgrounds host their own version of “The Newlywed Game,” private campgrounds and RV resorts across the country *are* developing unique games and activities as well as special themed weekends, according to Linda Profaizer, president and CEO of the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds in Larkspur, Colorado.

“Many parks are moving more and more into the entertainment business,” she said. “We see evidence of this all over the country.” And they’re doing this, she said, not only to entertain their guests, but to lure guests away from parks that do not offer such activities.

Parks affiliated with Kampgrounds of America (KOA) and Jellystone Park Camp-Resorts, for example, are rolling out an increasingly diverse range of family-friendly activities, such as ice cream socials, karaoke, tie-dyeing T-shirts, “American Idol”-type competitions and geocaching events, which are essentially scavenger hunts in which participants look for clues and prizes with GPS navigation devices.

Many are also developing activities tied to themed weekends. The Jellystone Park in Estes Park, Colorado, for example, has toga parties and “dog days of summer” events — in which campers are invited to dress up their pet and join the park’s pet parade — while the Jellystone Park in Cave City, Kentucky, has a Renaissance weekend.

Meanwhile, the KOA campground in Santa Cruz, California, has competitions in which campers are tested to see if they can last eight seconds on a mechanical bull or ride a mechanical surfboard, while the KOA in McCall, Idaho, entertains its guests with pancake breakfasts, line dancing, gold panning and poker nights.

And while many parks now provide their own live entertainment, others get their guests involved as cast members in special events. Several parks affiliated with the Morgan RV Resorts chain, for example, now offer murder-mystery weekends in addition to Oktoberfest celebrations and special grandparent weekends, with activities designed for grandparents to share with their grandkids.

Sunbelt RV resorts affiliated with Equity LifeStyle Properties now offer everything from ceramics and woodworking classes to daylong educational seminars by professors from Ivy League universities.

Some parks, in fact, offer enough activities to keep their guests entertained for days, if not weeks. Strawberry Park Resort Campground in Preston, Connecticut, for example, has more than 30 activities a day during the summer months, including a greased pole climb, teen-versus-adult dodgeball and flag football, adult coed pool volleyball, karaoke singalongs and hypnosis shows.

Lake Bluff Campground in Wolcott, New York, offers water-gun wars, frisbee-throwing competitions, a children’s sailboat race, a beer-can-stacking contest and a watermelon-seed-spittin’ contest.

Not to be outdone, the Tall Pines Campground in Bainbridge, New York, organizes a “Pirates and Princesses Parade,” a treasure hunt and other themed games as well as Pioneer Days, where campers learn how to cook over an open fire and other pioneer skills, such as basket and jewelry making, candle making, hooping and frontier games.

Many parks also have special events tied to existing holidays. This year, for example, Duncan’s Family Campground in Lothian, Maryland, and Frost Ridge Campground in Le Roy, New York, offered a free Mother’s Day breakfast and all the materials needed for children to make their mothers a gift and card.

Meanwhile, the Friendly Beaver Campground in New Boston, New Hampshire, hosted a Father’s Day dance with a live band, while the South Haven Family Campground in South Haven, Michigan, hosted a “best legs” contest in addition to an essay contest in which children competed to see who could write the best essay about their dad.



Clockwise from left: The Revolutionary War comes to life in historical reenactments, storytelling sessions and stage shows at Shenandoah Crossing. The membership resort offers 125 full-hookup RV sites, each with its own fire ring, grill and picnic table. At the park's marina, guests can rent fishing poles and pontoon, paddle and Jon boats to enjoy the facility's 65-acre lake.

CROSSING INTO HISTORY

While private campgrounds and RV parks are finding they can boost occupancies and return visits by promoting themed weekends and other special events, a leading time-share company is testing a similar concept, but with a twist.

Instead of simply coming up with fun games, Boca Raton, Florida-based Bluegreen Corp. is developing plays, nature walks, scavenger hunts and other activities that are tied to actual historical events that took place in the areas where its resorts are located. The concept is being tested first at Shenandoah Crossing (www.shenandoah-crossing.com) in Gordonsville, Virginia, one of two parks in Bluegreen's 45-unit network that includes an RV resort (the other is Christmas Mountain in Wisconsin Dells).

"Having activities is unusual in the time-share business," said Ramona Legowski, Bluegreen's director of program development. It's even more unusual, she said, to offer activities with a historical theme. And if the strategy pays off at Shenandoah Crossing, it will likely be applied at other Bluegreen properties, including Christmas Mountain.

Through its historical research, Bluegreen identified a man from Albemarle County named Jack Jouett, a Paul Revere-type character who warned Virginia legislators when they were about to be attacked



Shenandoah's new Presidential RV sites feature private hot tubs.

by British troops. Bluegreen has taken that slice of history, added some creative elements and used it to create a Revolutionary historical theme for Shenandoah Crossing, which provides a unique backdrop for plays, stage shows and other activities.

In Shenandoah Crossing's retelling of the story, Jouett rode a horse named Sallie, so now all of the horses in Shenandoah Crossing's Equestrian Center are presented as descendants of Sallie. Shenandoah Crossing has also created a coin that has Jouett's portrait on one side and Sallie's on the other, and it regularly hosts scavenger hunts and invites children to find these special coins.

"We're trying to make history fun for families," Legowski said, adding that the

resort has also developed two other fictional characters to help round out the story line and appeal to people of all ages with different types of activities. One is General Tombstone, who leads nighttime ghost story trail walks through the woods. Another is Sergeant Smores, a character who plays marbles and other games with children.

The resort has combined the traditions of a rural plantation — complete with an original manor home on the property — with the forested wilderness of Revolutionary War times, giving guests a unique historical experience. These historical attractions are in addition to other nature-oriented activities at the resort, including fly-fishing and paddle boating on a 65-acre lake as well as hiking and riding on equestrian trails. The park also has two outdoor pools, one indoor pool, a large playground area, miniature golf, tennis and volleyball courts.

Legowski said the development of the historical theme concept complements other physical improvements that have been made at Shenandoah Crossing in recent years.

Last year, Shenandoah increased its RV section from 40 to 125 sites, complete with concrete pads, gas grills, sinks and patio furniture. "Six of these sites even have hot tubs," said Dick Coyle, Shenandoah's general manager. "We're getting rave reviews."

Other improvements this year include

FUN & GAMES



Carriage rides through the resort are available through the park's Equestrian Center.

the addition of 40 yurts, which can be used to accommodate people who don't have an RV but want a unique camping experience. The circular tent-like structures with domed roofs are two-bedroom units with hardwood floors, plasma TVs and grills on the deck. "It is deluxe camping," Coyle said of the yurts. The yurts complement Shenandoah Crossing's 29 three-bedroom, two-bath log cabins, which were also recent additions.

A new pavilion building houses a convenience store, deli and multipurpose room. The resort has also added a fitness room, game room, owner's lounge and a 300-seat amphitheater in the woods for special events.

Shenandoah Crossing is a membership resort. However, Coast to Coast members also have access to RV sites at the resort.

RV owners say they are pleased with the improvements. "The new presidential site was fantastic. I haven't seen any better," said Raymond Taylor, a two-year Bluegreen member who visits Shenandoah Crossing with his 30-foot Gulf Stream motorhome.

Douglas Lawrence of Gladys, Virginia, who has had a Bluegreen membership since 2003, also told *MotorHome* he was impressed with the resort. "I tried out the new campground and really liked it," Lawrence said. He likes the variety of activities that are available as well as its quiet location not far from Monticello and other historical sites. "There are things to do and yet there's nothing to do," he said. "It's however you want to make the weekend."

Of course, many parks don't let the calendar get in the way of their planning for themed weekends. Brookdale Family Campground in Meadville, Pennsylvania, and Camp Chautauqua in Stow, New York, offer "Thanksgiving in July" celebrations. The parks provide the roasted turkeys, while their guests supply the trimmings.

Many parks also offer "Christmas in July" celebrations, including Sea Pirate Campground in West Creek, New Jersey, and Hidden Hill Family Campground in Harrison, Michigan, both of which feature appearances by Santa Claus, gifts for the children and prizes for the best decorated campsites.

Labor Day is worthy of a special event at Sagadahoc Bay Campground in Georgetown, Maine, which celebrates the day with a golf tournament on the tidal flats. "We have a mile-and-a-half of hard-packed sand when the tide goes out and we set up six holes — actually sticks with flags," said Patricia S. Kosalka, the park's owner. "We pick six teams and give prizes for the first person to get muddy, the ball closest to the stick, the wackiest-looking club and so on. People sit on the beach and cheer their favorite teams. We play rain or shine and, of course, food and drinks are encouraged."

Campground operators, in short, are learning that the more fun they create for their guests through activities, themed weekends and special events, the better their chances of securing return visits.

Berg of Red Apple Campground echoed that message as he explained "The Amazing Camera Race," in which campers compete in teams with campers from other sites.

"We give them a list of 100 things they have to get a picture of themselves with, like a police officer, or all of the men in your party wearing a woman's hat or a picture of your team in a shower stall," he said.

The teams often leave the campground and spend the whole day taking pictures, then return in the evening for a potluck and picture show featuring all of the photos that were taken that day. "It just becomes giggly and fun," Berg said. "It also builds relationships and our guests want to come back and do it again." ♦

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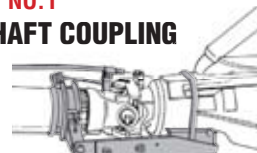
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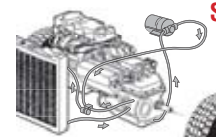
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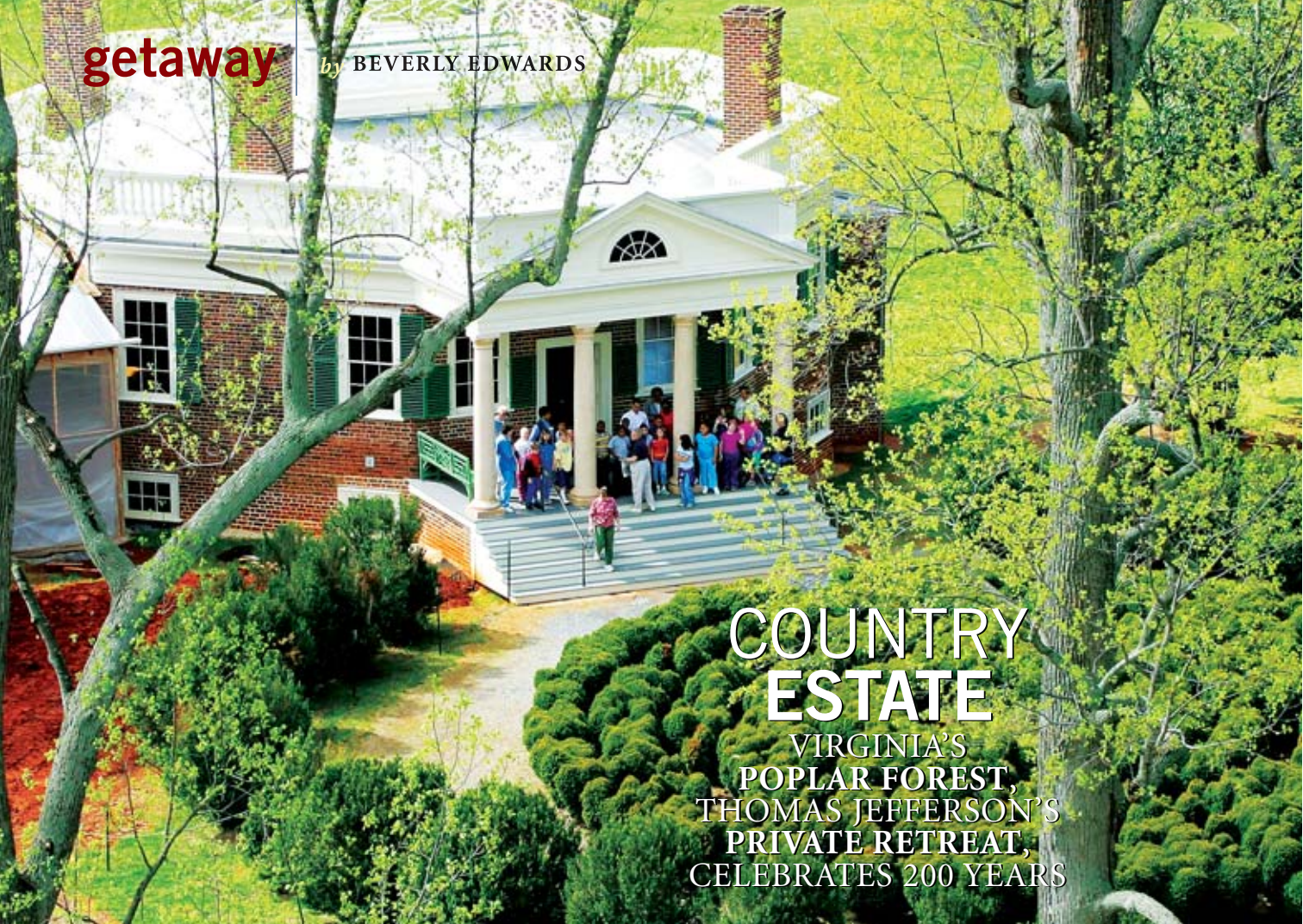
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COUNTRY ESTATE

VIRGINIA'S
POPLAR FOREST,
THOMAS JEFFERSON'S
PRIVATE RETREAT,
CELEBRATES 200 YEARS

Anyone who has studied high school history knows that Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and third president of our country, had a home in Virginia called Monticello. Designed by Jefferson — a student of classical architecture — Monticello has become a major tourist attraction. However, just 80 miles away is another home that Jefferson designed and had built for his personal use.

Known as Poplar Forest, Jefferson's second home served as a refuge from the almost constant barrage of visitors who made their way to Monticello. During his second term as president, Jefferson started advising craftsmen as they began construction on what he considered his best architectural design. So enamored was Jefferson of Poplar Forest, which was opened to the public on July 4, 1986, he wrote, "When finished, it will be the best dwelling house in the state, except that of Monticello; perhaps preferable to that, as more proportioned to the faculties of a private citizen."

The interior of the "best dwelling house in the state" is accessible via guided tours only, though visitors are invited to enjoy the surrounding area at their leisure. The estate can also provide a map for a walking tour. Poplar Forest is open daily 10AM–4PM April through November (closed Thanksgiving Day).

This year, the estate celebrates a unique anniversary: Jefferson's first extended stay at Poplar Forest occurred in

October 1809 — 200 years ago. "An Evening With the Richmond Symphony" concert on October 3 and the inaugural Poplar Forest Wine Festival, to be held on Nov. 21, are two of the special events.

As might be anticipated, Poplar Forest is an unusual edifice, built in the shape of a perfect octagon. Jefferson was fascinated with the shape because of the symmetry and airy environment it created.

In the interest of preserving its historical significance, a nonprofit group rescued Poplar Forest for the educational and cultural benefit of the public. One of the first orders of business was to return the home to its original appearance so it could be opened for visitation. This involved gutting the interior and stabilizing the exterior brick walls. Once the structure was sound, the restoration project focused on returning the interior to its original floorplan. Fortunately, the explicit plans that Jefferson sent to those in charge of building Poplar Forest had been saved, providing today's craftsmen with guidelines for reconstructing the home.

When approaching the main entrance, it appears to be a single-story structure — though in reality it is not. To accomplish this illusion, Jefferson built on the crown of a hill so that only the top floor is visible from the front. The land slopes around the sides of the house, leading to the rear and revealing the lower floor, which was used primarily for storage. In



Clockwise from top left: Archaeology field school excavations are part of an ongoing restoration project at Poplar Forest. Jefferson, who suffered attacks of arthritis, enjoyed relaxing in his Campeachy, or “siesta,” chair. This portrait of Jefferson was painted by Rembrandt Peale in 1805. A mound at each end of the home obscures the brick privies.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

**THOMAS JEFFERSON'S
POPLAR FOREST**
(434) 525-1806,
www.poplarforest.org.



PHOTOS: BEVERLY EDWARDS; LES SCHOFFER; HENLEY; THE CORPORATION FOR JEFFERSON'S POPLAR FOREST

contrast to the Tuscan columns on the front and rear porticos, Roman arches lead into the lower floor.

The most important feature of the home is the cube room. Situated in the middle of the structure, this room is a perfect cube that measures 20 feet in every direction. A 16-foot skylight provides illumination for the otherwise windowless area. This is where Jefferson, his grandchildren and occasional guests took their meals.

There is a door in the middle of each wall of the cube room providing access to other areas of the house. To the west is Jefferson's bedchamber and to the east is another bedchamber that was usually occupied by Ellen and Cornelia, his granddaughters. To the north, a hall leading from the front door to the cube room separates two small storage rooms. To the south is a sunny parlor with floor-to-ceiling windows, a feature Jefferson admired in the homes he visited in France. This is where Jefferson and his granddaughters would gather to study or read books from the estate's extensive library. Sometimes Jefferson would entertain his grandchildren with stories about his experiences or by playing his violin.

Further evidence of Jefferson's admiration for European design can be found on the grounds of the estate. Behind the house is a large, sunken lawn. The area was hand dug by servants who moved 36,000 cubic feet of dirt, which was used to create a mound at either end of the house — yet another

European concept. These mounds served a dual purpose in that they were used for estate owners and their guests to admire the landscaping and gardens while obscuring the octagonal brick privies.

Once outside, visitors see a 100-foot-long structure leading to the east. Jefferson referred to this wing as offices, but the space was probably used for storage, a kitchen, laundry room and smokehouse. He ordered a flat roof on this addition, making it barely visible from the front of the house.

Archaeologists continue to study what types of vegetation Jefferson had planted in the acres surrounding the house. His original notes serve as a guide for future landscaping, and some of the original poplar trees still stand in front of the home.

For 14 years, Poplar Forest provided Jefferson a place where he could, in his words, enjoy the “solitude of a hermit” and be a doting grandfather. He made the three-day trip to the retreat three to four times a year, traveling in a carriage that he designed.

Unlike many of his peers, Jefferson was a quiet man who cherished his solitude. He was not known to speak much in public, and was relieved when his eight years as president came to an end. A visit to Monticello provides the public with a look into the life of Thomas Jefferson, the statesman, but a visit to Poplar Forest provides a look into the life of Thomas Jefferson, private citizen. ♦



DISCOVERING

Sam, the bear, was hungry and he knew from smell where he could satisfy his appetite.

Padding across the grounds to a large tree, the massive grizzly examined the bag located high above. Like all bears, Sam was smart and began testing the tree by rocking it back and forth. When he couldn't bend the tree far enough to grab the bag, the 1,000-pound bruin paused as though filled with a revelation. Stooping and encircling the tree with his arms, Sam gave a mighty heave and ripped the tree from its foundation. He then walked to the upper limbs, now prostrate on the ground, removed the bag of food and turned his huge primordial head to stare at all the spectators with a look of immense satisfaction. The appreciative crowd erupted in laughter.

My wife, Janie, and I were in West

Yellowstone, Montana, adjacent to Yellowstone National Park, checking in on a nonprofit, educational complex called the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center. We had been traveling back and forth from our campground at Madison Junction, about 15 miles away, and so began the journey back, poking along the road paralleling the Madison River. We drove slowly, marveling at the gold-colored cottonwoods and aspens—all threaded here and there by geysers and a thick emerald ribbon created by the Madison River.

That's when we heard the elk beginning to bugle, their calls filtering in from a distant, verdant stand of timber.

It was a fall October day, the best time to visit the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center, primarily because we had so much of the place to ourselves. But fall is also the best season to be in Yellowstone National Park, not only because

A LATE-FALL VISIT TO YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO WITNESS CREATURES BIG AND SMALL

by BERT GILDART

Opposite page: October is a beautiful time to see the fall colors of the aspen trees in Yellowstone National Park. Below, clockwise from left: All of the wolves at the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center in West Yellowstone were born in captivity. A bull moose is easily identified by the flap of skin and hair that dangles from its throat and its large antlers, which are shed each year. Sam, the 1,000-pound bear, was brought to the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center as a cub after his mother disappeared in Alaska. Bison roam Yellowstone freely; here, a small herd holds up traffic on the road from Old Faithful to Madison.



THE CALL OF THE WILD





Clockwise from top: In the wild: Huddling helps rams establish a social hierarchy without having to battle one another physically. A bald eagle along the Madison River keeps company with other, more common birds such as geese, owls and ravens. Norris Geyser Basin, 14 miles from Madison, is Yellowstone's oldest, hottest and most dynamic thermal area.



there are fewer visitors, but also because so many species of wildlife are gearing up for battle. In other words, it's mating season, and at this time the park's most conspicuous species want to pass on their genes, and the battles and rituals that each species exhibit are some of the park's greatest calls from the wild.

Yellowstone and West Yellowstone are two of the best places in our country to learn about such things, but at this time of year you must keep in mind the weather. If it's inclement, head to the Discovery Center; if favorable, head into the park.

The previous night, it had snowed, and the thick wet stuff dramatically altered the landscape surrounding Madison Campground, where we were staying. In this high plateau country — elevation about 6,000 feet — rain quickly changes to ice and snow.

Obviously, camping in Yellowstone toward the end of the season requires a heads up, but it is certainly worth the effort. Not far from our rig we heard the clear, clarion call of a bull elk from a nearby meadow.

Essentially, bull elk use their calls to keep other male suitors from their territory, but when warnings go unheeded, fights result. The time is one of high drama, and Janie and I grabbed our cameras, located the bull, which was several hundred yards away, and settled in to watch and record. The animal was an impressive one, for on one side of its "rack" the bull carried eight tines while on the other, seven.

About an hour later our elk moved on and we decided to drive to Old Faithful, about 40 minutes from Madison, where we saw bison — they

were everywhere, even on the road. At one place the huge, shaggy beasts plugged the road, circling a couple in their motorhome.

That night it snowed lightly, but enough to close one of the nearby passes, so we headed back to West Yellowstone. As we drove our dinghy, we found a bald eagle perched in a tree adjacent to the road, following a tip from Katy Duffy, Yellowstone's district interpreter in the Madison area, had offered. Katy, as she insisted we call her, had just helped establish a birding trail that coursed along roads just outside the park, and she became a source for locating not only eagles, but also geese, owls and one of my very favorite birds, the raven.

Katy is also involved in the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center, explaining that naturalists

use the not-for-profit center as a backdrop for their interpretive programs. Here, they not only use the animals for instruction, but they also use the dioramas and displays to explain bear behavior and evolution. Still, it was the live creatures that kept drawing us back.

Sam the grizzly was up and about, and as we walked into the huge compound, this powerhouse was again pulling down a tree. But a bear named Spirit had also worked magic. Biologists had removed this beautiful and grizzled bear from Whitefish, Montana, because she had started grazing the grass on local golf courses and on the residential grounds flanking the greens. "Biologists tried to dissuade her," said Director John Heine, adding that they had used firecrackers, pepper spray and even Karelian

dogs. Heine said these techniques had failed because Spirit had become habituated to human food. "The only alternative," said Heine, "was to either destroy the bear or bring her here — so we brought Spirit here!"

Equally compelling at the center were the wolves. Like bears, they symbolize much that is wild and free. They would howl, play or sometimes, simply rest.

With its substantial enclosure, the center provides a wonderful setting for the wolf, an intelligent beast that was once a historical component of the park's ecosystem. Today, the wolf is back, with 150 of them inhabiting Yellowstone. The species is at the top of the biological pyramid, but because it can be so elusive, the center is probably the most

dependable place to observe these fascinating creatures.

Wolves are extremely intelligent mammals, but they don't do well if taken directly out of the wild. Consequently, the Discovery Center keeps only wolves that were born in captivity. Still, they communicate in the same manner as their wild counterparts. Here, you can watch them as they interact and see what prompts them to create their soulful music. We were thoroughly captivated, enough so that we decided that, come morning, we'd search for them in the park itself.

That night the clouds began to lift and the temperatures dropped. But cold weather makes for wild geyser viewing, as freezing air tends to compress the steam and make the eruptions more billowy. Norris Geyser basin, about a

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DISCOVERING THE CALL OF THE WILD

14-mile drive from Madison, is always impressive, and that day it seemed particularly alive. The snow-covered woods created a wondrous setting, and we took the time to walk the entire mile-long boardwalk loop. From there, we drove to a series of flats just above Mammoth Terrace, where we spotted two bull moose pawing the earth. Impressive as the displays were, we still wanted to find wolves in the wild, so we set out bright and early the next day.

From years past, Janie and I knew that one of the best places to find wolves was in the Lamar Valley, the valley about midway between Mammoth and Cook City, and we decided to give wolf sighting one more try. It's about 90 minutes from Madison Junction to Lamar, but by early morning we were scoping a vast expanse of grassland near Soda Butte, another of the park's thermal sinks. It was cold, and tiny snowflakes wafted in soft mountain currents. Of course we spotted the large creatures — bison and elk — and even saw several coyotes, but no bears (they were probably about to hibernate). Then, near a stand of willow, we saw a large German shepherd-sized animal and knew that our quest was about to pay off.

For a while the animal just sat there; then, for no apparent reason, it lifted its head and howled, and that's when three other wolves materialized from a vast sweep of sagebrush, willow and scattered stands of golden aspen. The animals trotted toward one another, tails erect, swaying back and forth. The pack was on the move, an event that seemed so appropriate in a season when elk were bugling, bison bellowing, moose sparing, sheep mating and geysers erupting in the crisp, clear air. Certainly, at this time of year, Yellowstone provides a multitude of calls from the wild. ♦

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RVING IN YELLOWSTONE

There are lots of choices

when it comes to campsites in Yellowstone, but for RVers who want the most amenities, Fishing Bridge RV Park, above, is the best pick. Though most of the park's campgrounds can accommodate motorhomes (length requirements do apply), only Fishing Bridge offers full hookups, coin laundry facilities, pay showers, and a store and dump station nearby.

Four other campgrounds in the park — Bridge Bay, Canyon, Grant and Madison — offer dry camping and a dump station, and reservations can be made through the Yellowstone Reservation Center (866-439-7375).

Dry camping is available at the remaining campgrounds, though there are some restrictions: Norris has limited sites for RVs longer than 30 feet; Slough Creek and Tower Fall are best suited for smaller RVs and generator use is prohibited; generator use is also prohibited at Indian Creek, Lewis Lake and Pebble Creek. Mammoth Campground allows generator use between the hours of 8AM and 8PM and restrooms and potable water are available.

All but Mammoth Campground, operated year-round by the Park Service, are open seasonally May–June to October–November (months of operation vary). — *Denise Santoyo*

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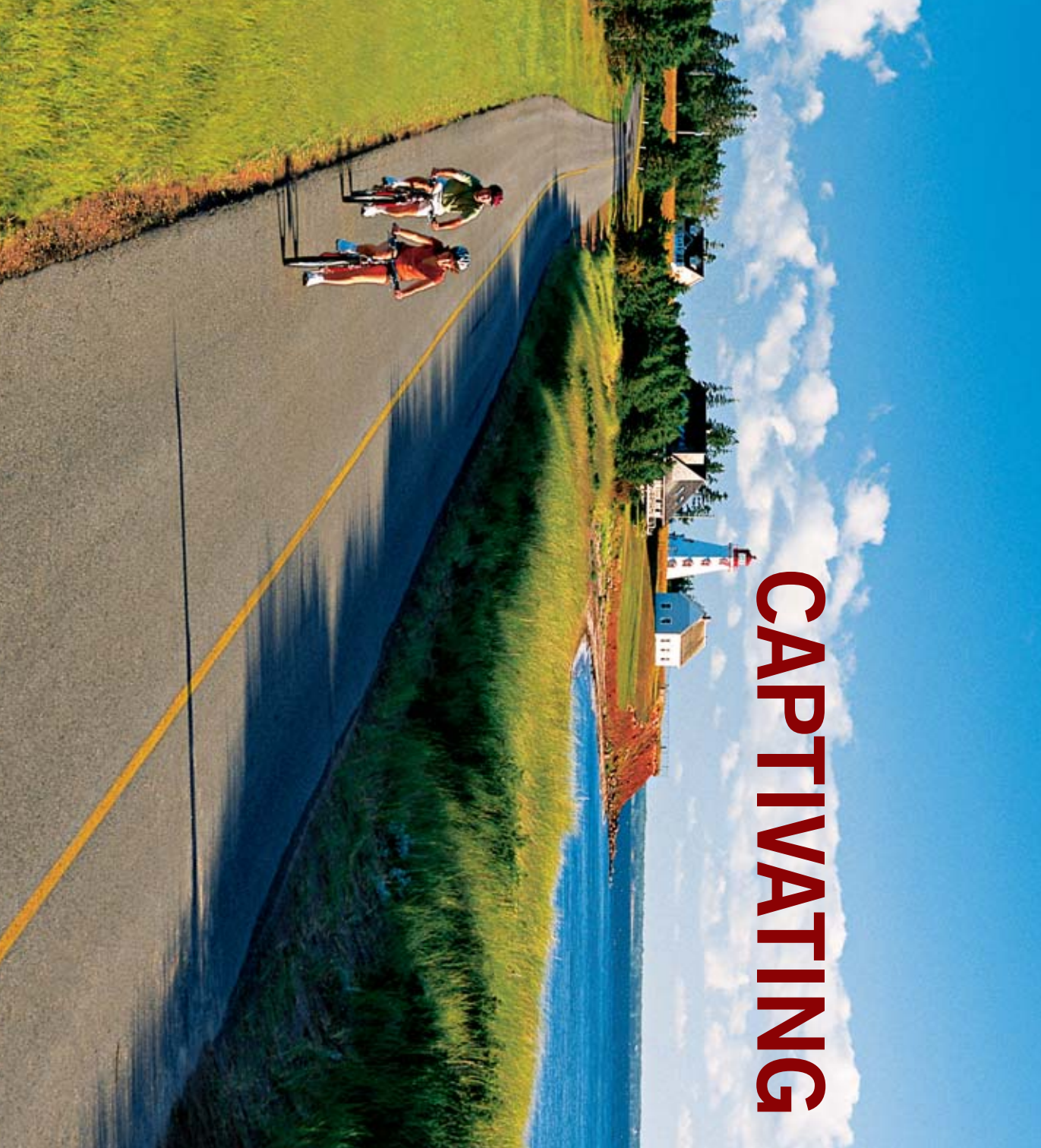
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CAPTIVATING



The Canadian mainland is a 10-minute, eight-mile trip across Confederation Bridge, a toll bridge that spans the distance between Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick.

Readers of Lucy Maud Montgomery's "Anne of Green Gables" can visit the Green Gables House — one of the island's most popular attractions.



PHOTOS: PATRICK BORDERS; TOURISM PRINCE EDWARDS ISLAND/
JOHN SYLVESTER/RON GARNETT/LOUISE VESSEY

CANVAS

AS CANADA'S SMALLEST PROVINCE, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND IS A LIVING PAINTING FOR MOTORHOMERS

by PATRICK BORDERS

Rising from the mainland of New Brunswick, Confederation Bridge beckoned my family and me to follow its eight miles of dramatic spans to a land often described as a living painting: Prince Edward Island.

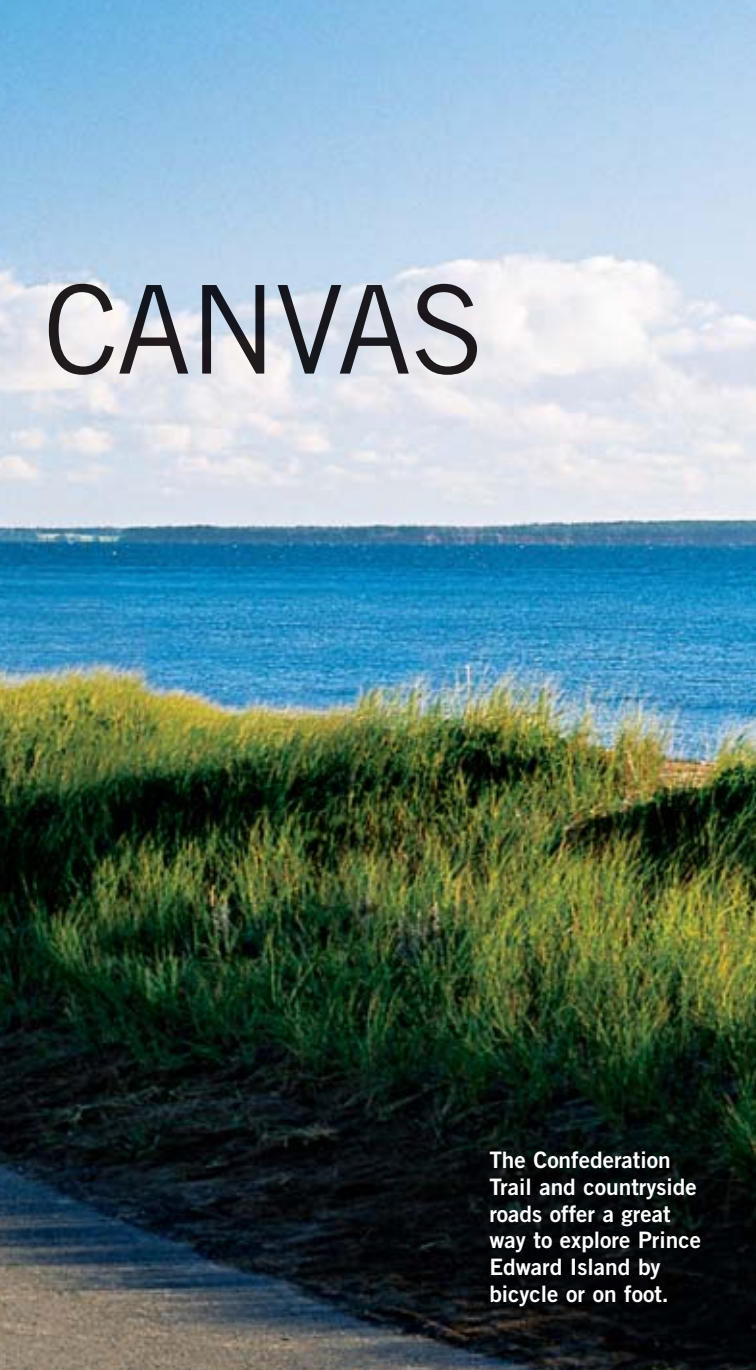
At first, the bridge seemed to lead us to a distant and unknown horizon. But as it ascended 200 feet above the Northumberland Strait's shimmering waters, an island of color began to emerge. Soon, we touched down on the island and ventured to explore a land surrounded by cobalt blue waters, covered in lush green farm fields, and accentuated with purple lupine and red sandstone cliffs.

Prince Edward Island, Canada's smallest province, is tucked away in the Atlantic region, just east of New Brunswick and north of Nova Scotia. Its 140,000 residents — many with Celtic, Acadian and native Mi'kmaq heritages — warmly welcome visitors.


The three major industries of fishing, farming and tourism dominate life on Prince Edward Island — evident by the rolling fields of picture-perfect farms, the lapping waves in timeless fishing ports and the bustle of quaint artists' shops or lobster supper restaurants.

After arriving on the island from Confederation Bridge, we began our visit near the foot of the bridge at Gateway Village. With parking for motorhomes, the village offers a visitors center, plus exhibits that introduce travelers to Prince Edward Island's industries and cultures. Visitors can plan their itinerary by using the interactive kiosks or by consulting with the travel counselors. Should your plans change, other visitors centers dot the island and always offer an abundance of information and help.

Although Prince Edward Island is known for



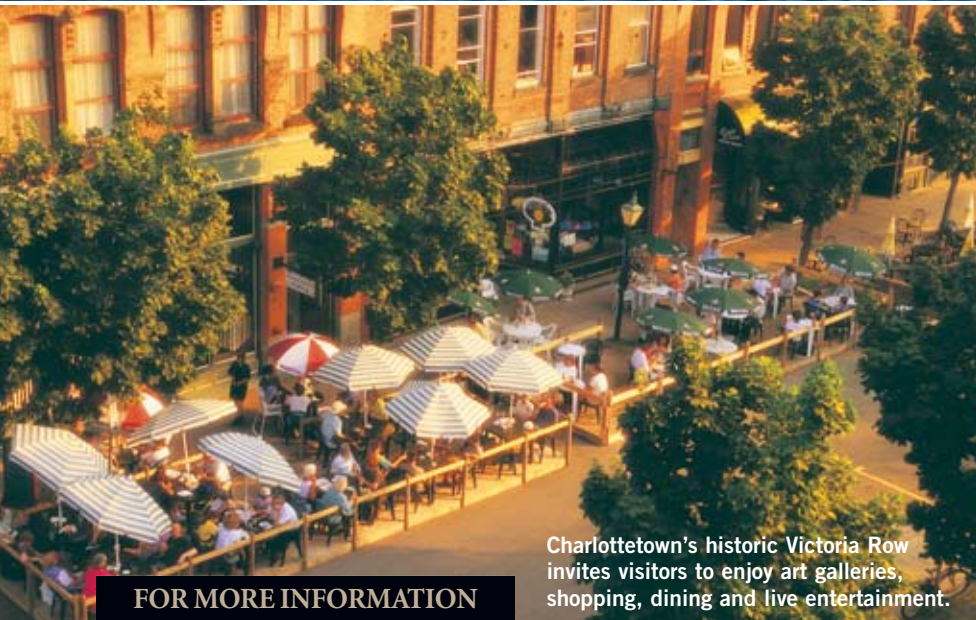
The Confederation Trail and countryside roads offer a great way to explore Prince Edward Island by bicycle or on foot.



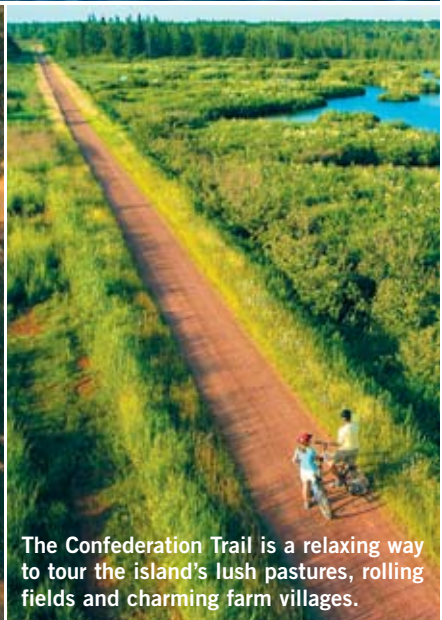
The island is known for its red sandstone cliffs, magnificent sand dunes and beautiful beaches. Kayaking is a popular water activity here.



The beaches in Prince Edward Island National Park boast surprisingly warm waters.



Charlottetown's historic Victoria Row invites visitors to enjoy art galleries, shopping, dining and live entertainment.



The Confederation Trail is a relaxing way to tour the island's lush pastures, rolling fields and charming farm villages.

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red cliffs and red dirt roads, arguably its most famous association with the color red is through the redhead in Lucy Maud Montgomery's novels about Anne of Green Gables. With the first novel written in 1908, Montgomery's stories about the beloved orphan, Anne Shirley, have sold more than 50 million copies and have been retold in a movie series so popular that it seems to run whenever public television holds a membership drive.

Many travelers visit Prince Edward Island specifically to see the places Montgomery wrote about, and the first place they're likely to visit is the real Green Gables, a 19th-century farmhouse that inspired the setting for the first novel. Montgomery's elderly cousins once lived in the Cavendish home, and she spent many childhood hours visiting them and walking Lovers' Lane and the Haunted Wood — places she immortalized in her books and that still beckon walkers today.

The Green Gables National Historic Site is part of Prince Edward Island National Park, most of which protects a special section of the island's vast coastline — a stretch that includes magnificent sand dunes, as well as beaches, cliffs, wetlands and forests.

Motorhomers seeking to explore some of Prince Edward Island's natural wonders won't go wrong with a visit to the park. Not only do the dunes deliver breathtaking scenery, but they're also home to fascinating wildlife. Marram grasses wave in the wind, while their roots form a mesh to hold the dunes together. Wild rose with its cheerful pink flowers also grows on some of the dunes, and red foxes make dens within the mounds. The largest concentration of dunes is found in the Greenwich section, where a boardwalk guides visitors through some of the 900 acres

of this intriguing environment.

More than 300 species of birds call the park home, finding perfect habitats in coastland, marshes and woodlands. You're likely to spot a piping plover nesting in the sand, a bald eagle soaring over the beach or a blue heron feeding along the water's edge.

Many people visit the park for the supervised beaches, however. Yes, beaches. A shallow shelf surrounds Prince Edward Island, so here, 300 miles northeast of Maine's frigid waters, you'll find the warmest waters north of the Carolinas.

The island's vast and sometimes rugged coastline is home to almost 50 lighthouses — seven of which are open to the public during the summer. Four of those lighthouses are found in the Points East region, including the Cape Bear Lighthouse — the first Canadian station to receive distress signals from the RMS *Titanic*. Many of the lighthouses are square-tapered and are sometimes located within a quaint harbor village as if they're just another building.

Prince Edward Island isn't all pastoral landscapes and gleaming harbors, however.

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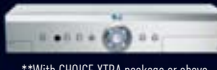


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**“THE THREE INDUSTRIES OF FISHING, FARMING AND TOURISM
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The island's two cities, Charlottetown and Summerside, are found along the southern coast and provide plenty of classic city fun. The biggest historical claim to fame of Charlottetown, the capital of Prince Edward Island, stems from an event that occurred at the Province House in 1864. Delegates from the British North American colonies met there to discuss forming a confederation. From that meeting, the nation of Canada was eventually born, and Charlottetown earned the honor of being the “Birthplace of Confederation.”

Today, visitors can tour the restored Province House National Historic Site, which still serves as the province's legislative home. Outside, you can experience history from costumed interpreters who reenact some of the events and debate the pros and cons of confederation. Near the

waterfront is Founders' Hall, a museum that uses interactive multimedia displays to tell the confederation story.

Charlottetown is walkable, and we enjoyed strolling along the tree-shaded streets lined with classic red brick buildings and colorful pocket gardens. The most charming area of the city is Victoria Row, where you can eat at an outdoor café and listen to live entertainment among the galleries and shops. The best known entertainment along Victoria Row, however, can be found inside the adjacent Confederation Centre of the Arts. The center is home to several productions, including, of course, “Anne of Green Gables — The Musical,” which opened in the mid-1960s and is Canada's longest running musical.

Down by the waterfront, you can explore Peake's Wharf, which is home to more

shops. Then cap your day with dinner at a restaurant overlooking the water followed by a cone of island-favorite COWS ice cream.

Heading west from Charlottetown through the Charlotte's Shore region, you'll come to Prince Edward Island's other sizable city, Summerside. There, you'll find another bustling waterfront and walkable town. Summerside's stately 19th- and early 20th-century buildings entice visitors to take a walking tour among tree-lined streets and past the many large murals depicting events in the town's history.

West of Summerside, Prince Edward Island again displays the hills and villages typical of the island. But as visitors drive north, the land narrows and the waters close in from both sides. The island ends at North Cape, where nature and science converge. There, the longest natural rock

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reef in North America stretches into the sea, providing a great site to view seals and the dramatic confluence of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Northumberland Strait. During low tide, you can traverse the reef, enjoying the ocean breeze as it glides toward the island and is captured for energy by an enormous field of giant windmills. A major research facility, the fascinating Atlantic Wind Test Site and Wind Farm, also supplies 5 percent of Prince Edward Island's electricity, and visitors can learn about wind energy from its Wind Energy Interpretive Centre.

The island's western side is also home to the beginning (or end, depending on your perspective) of the Confederation Trail. With its lush pasturelands, charming villages and picturesque coastlines, Prince Edward Island beckons the bicyclist, and the Confederation Trail presents an ideal avenue to tour the island.

The trail of red crushed rock dust runs across the island on old railway beds, beginning in Tignish and following level terrain for more than 167 miles to Elmira. Whether biking or hiking, the villages along the way provide ample opportunity to rest or grab a meal. In addition to the main line, which meanders from tip to tip, branch trails extend to Charlottetown and other coastal towns. Every kilometer is marked, and by journeying among the potato fields and the fishing harbors, you'll experience an authentic view of how most Prince Edward Island residents live. You'll also catch an up-close glimpse of the abundant wildflowers, including Queen Anne's lace, fireweed and the lady slipper, that cover the countryside.

A calorie-burning day on the Confederation Trail leads naturally to another must-do activity: donning a bib and enjoying dinner at one of the many lobster supper restaurants. The most famous lobster restaurant on Prince Edward Island is New Glasgow Lobster Suppers — a 500-seat family restaurant and island institution, which has served up lobster since 1958. But you'll need a large appetite. In addition to the well-loved crustacean, served from the restaurant's pound, the supper also comes with seafood chowder, steamed mussels by the bucket and homemade desserts.

Although the Confederation Trail offers adventure over land, plenty of off-coast adventure calls as well. Two of the most



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CAPTIVATING CANVAS

popular water activities are kayaking and deep-sea fishing. Outfitters provide beginner and expert kayaking excursions for a few hours up to a few days. And if you want to enjoy seafood before it reaches your table, deep-sea charters will take you to seek fish such as mackerel or, if you want a fight, the enormous bluefin tuna.

If you seek more relaxation than a three-hour battle with a 200-pound bluefin, the island delivers many golf, shopping and entertainment options. With more than 25 courses, some with gorgeous coastal views, Prince Edward Island has been named Canada's best golf destination. For shopping, Prince Edward Island's artists can occupy your attention for days. Their shops — found in cities, country villages or down a solitary red clay lane — offer pottery, paintings, quilts, sweaters and woodworking that capture the rich colors and cultures of the island.

Prince Edward Island also promises top-notch entertainment — whether it's "Anne of Green Gables — The Musical" in Charlottetown, or productions at the

Jubilee Theater in Summerside or the Victoria Playhouse in the charming town of Victoria-by-the-Sea. But if you want some authentic grassroots fun, then you'll want to stop in one of the many *ceilidhs* (pronounced KAY-leees). Local social gatherings, ceilidhs are open to visitors and fill the air with the sounds of traditional music, dancing and storytelling.

For motorhome travelers, you'll find many RV-friendly campgrounds on the island, including private RV parks, several provincial parks and Prince Edward Island National Park. Once it's time to leave the island, you can depart via the Confederation Bridge (upon leaving the island, there's a \$42.50 bridge fee for the first two axles), or consider traveling, like we did, to Nova Scotia via a 75-minute cruise operated by the Northumberland Ferries system.

Regardless of how you depart, however, you'll leave with the image of a living painting in your head — a painting of red cliffs and purple lupine, of salty breezes and fresh lobster, and warm people who'll be glad you came. ♦



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With a style that makes for a love/hate response from most, but gets long looks from all, the quirky, yet quite capable Ford Flex can handle daily chores and be a respectable dinghy when you're on the road in a motorhome. The seven-passenger Flex provides gracious amenities and comfortable accommodations with an interior designed to flip and fold into a handful of seating and storage-space configurations.

Ford's Sync hands-free communication and entertainment system helps to keep the driver's attention forward and on the road. Its voice-activated GPS navigation system integrates destination entry, climate control and Sirius satellite radio into a single 8-inch, easy-to-use touch-screen display. Comfortable seating and easy-to-see and use controls also help make it a fun vehicle to drive, even on long hauls. Our test model — the 2009 AWD Ford Flex Limited — came complete with an optional reverse camera system that displays the area behind the vehicle on the navigation-system screen when the Flex is shifted into REVERSE.

Passengers will delight in the Flex's use of pleasures,

such as the optional compressor-style refrigerator built into the second-row seat center console in lieu of a seventh passenger seat. The sunroof bathes occupants of the entire vehicle in a warm glow, providing a wide-open view of the sky.

The 3.5-L V-6 Duratec 35 engine in the Flex is a four-valve-per-cylinder, intake variable camshaft timing power plant with an aluminum block and heads. It puts out 262 HP at 6,250 RPM and 248 LB-FT of torque at 4,500 RPM. The spunky little V-6 is mated to a well-mannered six-speed automatic transmission and can really get up and go when you put some pressure on it. Fuel consumption can average as high as 22 MPG on the highway.

The Flex's steel unibody platform rides on a fully independent four-wheel suspension design that incorporates gas-pressurized MacPherson struts, rear-facing L-shaped lower control arms, an isolated subframe and 32 mm stabilizer bar up front; and a multilink rear end with upper and lower control arms, fully isolated subframe and 22 mm stabilizer bar. Its power rack-and-pinion steering system is responsive and works well with the vehicle's flat-riding yet smooth suspension, keeping the vehicle, its occupants and cargo secure and under control. ♦



EXCLUSIVE TEST: VIA 25'

WINNEBAGO INTRODUCES THE **FIRST CLASS A ON A MERCEDES-BENZ DIESEL-POWERED SPRINTER CHASSIS** FEATURING EUROPEAN STYLING AND AMERICAN LIVABILITY

by BOB LIVINGSTON



When Winnebago introduced the first Sprinter-based Class C in 2004, it created a whole new buzz in the industry. And now the venerable motorhome maker from Forest City, Iowa, is stirring up the industry once again with a brand spanking new Class A, the Via, that undoubtedly will be the most innovative motorized product of this decade.

The diminutive and sleek 25-foot-5-inch body is mated to an F-50 Sprinter chassis that's a true Class A rail, not just its Class C counterpart with the cab lopped off. The coach's European-style stature is the result of painstaking proprietary bodywork on the part of Winnebago's product and design team — a process that was launched quietly in 2006. When the smoke cleared, the Via took on unique lines that cater to advanced aerodynamics and appeal to the green mindset.

Powered by a 154-hp Mercedes-Benz 3.0-L turbodiesel six-cylinder engine, the Via is not only nimble to handle, but also exhibits plenty of get-up-and-go under all driving conditions. We verified that during our exclusive road test in Iowa, where we got the very first chance to live aboard the

Via and put the new motorhome through its paces under actual road-trip conditions.

INSIDE

While it takes a short time to acclimate to the driver's compartment, controls and instruments are very European, meaning there's nothing fancy — only practical accouterments that facilitate driving and engine monitoring. Cab seating is exceptionally comfortable, and visibility forward and rearward is superb thanks to the large windshield, side windows and clearly viewable side mirrors. Side-mounted cameras provide a picture of the road when the signals are activated, viewed through the in-dash audio/backup monitor — the only piece of equipment that provides a touch of American to the instrument panel.

The cab seats play a pivotal role (literally) in the execution of the floorplan. In camp, foot levers are used to elevate these seats to interior floor level, which is a few inches higher than the driver's compartment. Swiveling the seats toward the rear integrates them with the small couch that



Clockwise from top left: Once the table is stashed, the front living area is a nice place to socialize, with easy viewing of the 26-inch LCD TV. Two big twin beds flank center drawers. A bed pulled down from above the driver's compartment chairs offers secondary sleeping. A large windshield and side windows provide superb visibility.

2010 WINNEBAGO VIA 25T

WHAT'S HOT

Great maneuverability, compliant chassis, imported Italian cabinetry, lightweight components, creative twin-bed sleeping area, 90 cubic feet of exterior storage.

WHAT'S NOT

Small size refrigerator, limited galley counterspace, ineffective shower diverter valve and small bathroom sink.



moves outward when the single slide is extended. A nice size table, stored underneath the couch, can be positioned in one of two floor receivers so that four diners can be seated comfortably. Once the table is stashed, the front living area becomes a nice social area. This is a European approach to space efficiency and it works very well.

Living room seating is conducive to watching the 26-inch LCD TV, which becomes completely exposed when the slide is extended. Uniquely, the TV can also be pulled out from its compartment, if viewing it is desired when the slide is retracted.

As one enters the coach, the curvy walls and cabinets become instant eye candy. The cabinetry is imported from Italy, where the styling experts and craftspeople from Tecnoform specialize in weight reduction and quality components. Tecnoform is a predominant supplier of interior components to the European RV and yachting industries. All the pieces are precision cut on a CNC router that is computer controlled, and understated colors are used masterfully with contrasting accents.

The most radical curve starts at the entryway and

continues to form the kitchen galley along the curbside wall. Built into the extremely lightweight, albeit solid-looking, galley counter is a single round sink and recessed double-burner cooktop. The countertops in the rig, including the one in the bathroom, weigh only 14 pounds. Folding glass covers for both these fixtures provide additional counterspace that's otherwise limited. Within the galley structure is a folding cabinet door that provides unexpected access below the sink and fairly deep drawers. The cabinet above the galley offers some space to store supplies and a place to hook up the satellite receiver and other audio components.

We didn't miss the quintessential three-burner stove or the oven; the microwave/convection oven easily handled cooking duties. The refrigerator, though, is on the small side for a Class A. The single-door refrigerator is very European-esque, utilizing lightweight materials, a smallish internal freezer compartment and a sexy purple-hued interior light. Weight reduction is not only a factor when dealing with an 11,030-pound gross vehicle weight rating (gvwr), it's also a science that's been perfected across the pond. Fortunately,

SPECIFICATIONS

PERFORMANCE

FUEL ECONOMY: 14.5 MPG

ACCELERATION:

0-60 MPH: 25.49 SEC

40-60 MPH: 14.56 SEC

CHASSIS

MANUFACTURER: DODGE

MODEL: SPRINTER COWL

ENGINE: MERCEDES-BENZ TURBODIESEL V-6

SAE HP: 154 @ 3,400 RPM

TORQUE: 455 LB-FT @ 3,200 RPM

TRANSMISSION: ELECTRONICALLY

CONTROLLED 5-SPEED AUTOMATIC

WITH TIP SHIFT

AXLE RATIO: 3.923:1

TIRES: (4) LT215/85R 16LRE

WHEELBASE: 170"

BRAKES, F/R: DISC

SUSPENSION, F/R: INDEPENDENT

WITH TRANSVERSE MONOLEAF SPRING

AND STABILIZER; LEAF SPRING WITH

STABILIZER BAR

FUEL CAP: 26.4 GAL

WARRANTY: 3 YRS/36,000 MILES

COACH

EXT LENGTH: 25' 5"

EXT WIDTH: 7' 6"

EXT HEIGHT: 10' 10"

INT WIDTH: 7' 3"

INT HEIGHT: 6' 5"

CONSTRUCTION: ALUMINUM FRAMING,

FIBERGLASS EXTERIOR WALLS AND ROOF,

POLYSTYRENE INSULATION, ALUMINUM

UNDERBELLY

FRESHWATER CAP: 29 GAL

BLACK-WATER CAP: 36 GAL

GRAY-WATER CAP: 36 GAL

WATER-HEATER CAP: 6 GAL

LP-GAS CAP: 13 GAL

FURNACE (1): 20,000 BTU

AIR CONDITIONER (1): 13,500 BTU

REFRIGERATOR: 7 CU-FT

INVERTER/CHARGER: 300 WATT

BATTERY: (1) 100 AH CHASSIS,

(2) DEEP-CYCLE MARINE/RV GROUP 24 COACH

AC GENERATOR: 3.2 KW, DIESEL

BASE MSRP: \$135,132

MSRP AS TESTED: \$139,745

WARRANTY: 1 YR/15,000 MILES

WET WEIGHT

(WATER AND HEATER, FUEL, LP-GAS

TANKS FULL; NO SUPPLIES OR PASSENGERS)

FRONT AXLE: 3,745 LBS

REAR AXLE: 6,204 LBS

TOTAL: 9,949 LBS

CHASSIS RATINGS

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

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

OCC: 1,081 LBS

GAWR: GROSS AXLE WEIGHT RATING

GVWR: GROSS VEHICLE WEIGHT RATING

GCWR: GROSS COMBINATION WEIGHT RATING

OCC: OCCUPANT AND CARGO CARRYING

CAPACITY RATING

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In its debut before the public, the Via rolls down Main Street in Forest City, Iowa, getting cheers from the crowd at the Puckerbrush Parade. The small Midwestern town was also hosting the 40th annual Winnebago-Itasca Travelers Club (WIT) rally.

as exhibited by the Via, weight reduction does not mean we have to give up as much as the Europeans, who have to contend with an infrastructure that's quite different from ours. But living in the Via does require acceptance of certain appliance limitations so that other components, such as roof air-conditioning, an AC generator and holding tanks — items that are commonly not found on European coaches — can be incorporated within GVWR parameters.

Fortunately, Winnebago was able to design the above amenities into the Via, including the roof air, 3.2 kW diesel AC generator, large holding tanks, a 5,000-pound-rated hitch receiver and a crank-up satellite dish with positioning controls. And in keeping with the company's trademark central command center, a new monitor panel has been designed that uses flat glass and touch controls. The information is provided on an LED screen, including battery condition in actual numerals. These controls are placed above the refrigerator.

It is hoped that the list of options will eventually include leveling jacks, although unless a light enough system is available, weight will probably dictate feasibility.

A small hallway is produced by the bathroom enclosure opposite the refrigerator. Inside is a surprisingly roomy facility.

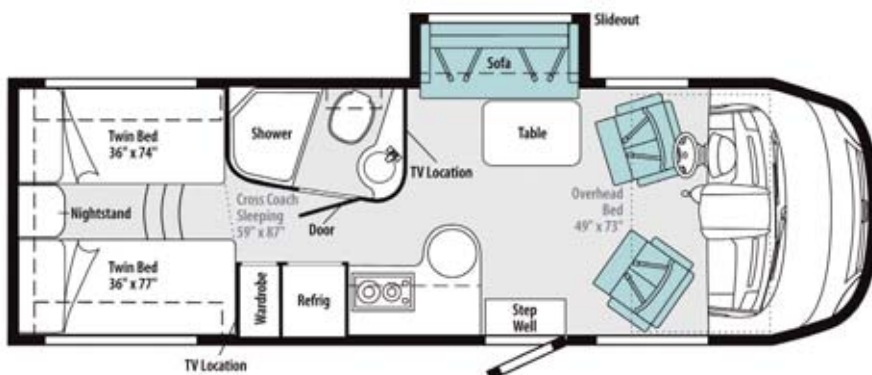
There's plenty of sit-down room for the toilet and just enough counterspace when using the sink, as long as you utilize the cabinet above the toilet for toiletries. The sink is rather small, but the tall faucet offers additional versatility.

Fairly big guys can fit comfortably in the shower since the skylight/dome increases headroom. A retractable shower curtain adds flexibility (being compliant when affected by active elbows while soaping down). The mixer valve could use some upgrading; it's virtually impossible to keep water temperature constant.

Out back, the bedroom configuration exudes creativity. The plan revolves around two large twin beds that flank a center drawer structure, and steps up from floor level. These twins are perfect for lounging, using the folding bolsters as backrests, or sleeping. A smaller LCD TV can be viewed from both positions. The steps provide easy access to thick mattresses, which are exceptionally comfortable. Integrated into each twin bed structure is a huge drawer, and additional storage can be found in the cabinets and open shelves above the beds.

If desired, users can convert the entire back section into a huge bed — somewhere between a queen and California king size, but

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42



CLEAR VISION

THESE GLASS-TREATMENT PRODUCTS CAN HELP KEEP YOUR WINDSHIELD SPARKLING

by E. DON SMITH

Diving in bad weather can sometimes be difficult, which is why it's important to keep your windshield as clean and clear as possible. There are a variety of products on the market today that claim to offer increased visibility, but how do you know if they work? We took several of these windshield-treatment products through an 11-month test to evaluate how they would stand up in rainy weather.

Our test products included Rain-X, Rain Block, Rain Clear (and its companion product, Glass Scrub), PPG Glass Treatment (also sold under the name Aquapel) and NanoSafeguard.

I started by dividing the windshield of a 2008 Tiffin Phaeton motorhome (with a large one-piece windshield) into quadrants to test the application and durability of each product. I then used the same method on dinghy vehicles to try different products or to confirm the findings of the motorhome windshield test, since the cars are driven every day.

Before application, it's important to completely clean your windshield (I used Stoner's Invisible Glass aerosol and found it to be one of the best glass cleaners on the market). It's also a good idea to keep Viva paper towels or microfiber towels handy.

Remember that the application of these glass treatments must be done in the shade. They contain ingredi-

ents that evaporate very quickly, and if you attempt to apply them in direct sunlight, they will cure too quickly and cause problems during the removal ("polishing") process.

RAIN-X AND RAIN BLOCK

These two spray-on products are similar and easy to apply. After thoroughly cleaning the windshield, simply spray Rain-X or Rain Block onto a clean microfiber towel and wipe it on the glass, first in one direction, then in the other with overlapping motions to ensure proper coverage. Then allow the surface to cure, or haze, and wipe with a clean microfiber towel until the glass is clear. If you experience any hazing with either Rain-X or Rain Block, sprinkle the windshield with water and it will buff off and leave a sparkling clear surface.

I noticed that at cooler temperatures (45–70°F) both of these products were easier to apply and remove, leaving a streak-free surface. Rain-X and Rain Block should not be used on plastic or paint, as damage could occur to the surfaces.

Neither product makes a claim as to how long they last, but they are very inexpensive. The Walmart price for a 16-ounce spray bottle of Rain-X was \$7.49 and the 17-ounce bottle of Rain Block was \$6.99. They both worked well, but in order to blow rain off the flat windshield of the motorhome, I found that



PHOTOS: E. DON SMITH

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CLEAR VISION

driving speeds of 45 MPH or greater were required. The performance time for these products seemed fairly short at three to six weeks, depending on the exposure time to the elements.



PPG GLASS TREATMENT/AQUAPEL



These two products appear to be identical but are sold under different trade names. Rather than a spray bottle, they are packaged in small, one-time-use applicators. I found mine at O'Reilly Auto Parts at a cost of \$9.95 for an 8-milliliter single-use dispenser.

The main claim of this product is that it lasts six months. Our testing did not confirm the six-month durability claim, but it does seem to last slightly longer than Rain-X or Rain Block. However, at \$9.95 for 8 milliliters, it will take two to three applicators to treat a full-size motorhome windshield, so you will have to weigh the cost/benefit of spending \$30 per treatment versus the lower cost of the other products.

It is best to apply the PPG or Aquapel when the ambient temperature is between 50 and 90°F. It's also important to not allow the product to contact your skin, which is why it's sold in an applicator format. Unlike the Rain-X, this one should *not* be allowed to dry. Once you activate the applicator, wipe a section of the glass with the built-in pad and then immediately wipe it dry with a paper towel. For a motorhome windshield, you will have to repeat this several times to cover the entire surface. I found this product easy to apply and it worked well at repelling rain while driving.

GLASS SCIENCE RAIN CLEAR AND GLASS SCRUB



The next product we evaluated was from Glass Science. In addition to the glass

treatment, it includes a soft liquid or cream precleaner called Glass Scrub. I liked Glass Scrub so much I used it several times throughout the testing process. Apply it to a wet window and massage it onto the glass using a sponge. After cleaning the window, simply rinse with water and then dry. I found it to be a great glass cleaner/stripper that easily removes bugs and other contaminants. The only caution with this product is that it has to be used with a wet sponge on a wet window, or scratching can occur.

The Glass Science kit also included a 5-ounce tube of Rain Clear rain repellent gel. Unlike the other products mentioned so far, this one does not have a strong isopropyl alcohol smell. Its application is simple yet slightly different from the others. The gel is placed onto a microfiber towel and then rubbed onto the surface using overlapping motions. After covering the window, turn the towel to a clean, unused section and polish it off until the window is clear. As with the others, this is best applied in the shade. If you experience any streaks, sprinkle the surface with water and wipe again with the microfiber towel or Viva paper towels. Our test results indicated it slightly outlasts Rain-X, and at \$6.99 from Wal-Mart for the kit, it's a good deal, too.



NANOSAFEGUARD

The final product in our test was NanoSafeguard, which I ordered from the company via the Internet. The main attraction of this product was its 12-month durability claim. It was the most expensive product we tested — \$36.95 for the cleaner and sealer two-part system — but it could be considered worth the cost if it worked a full year.

Unlike the other test products that employed a very easy application method, NanoSafeguard's application process is more complicated. The first step in this system is to clean the window using a mild soap and water, and dry the surface thoroughly. Next, apply the auto-glass cleaner (using gloves) in a circular motion over the entire window and dry using a lint-free microfiber towel. One precaution: Do not touch the window between the cleaning process and the sealer application.

To apply the sealer, use a small sponge and wipe vertically over the entire window.

All of this work should be done in the shade, when the air temperature is less than 86°F. Then allow the window to cure for 30 minutes. After it is completely cured, polish it dry with a clean microfiber towel. At this point, there is a two-hour waiting time before the windshield can be exposed to water.

Though the process was somewhat complicated, I was able to follow the directions without too much difficulty. The cleaner and sealer come in 2.54-ounce packages, which is about enough to treat one large motorhome windshield at a cost of \$36. While it did seem to last longer than the other products, the cost pushes the value part of the equation in the wrong direction. Also, the complicated application method was another strike against it.

In summary, all of these window treatments were very effective at improving the ability to see while driving in the rain. All of them cause rain to bead into smaller drops that are more easily blown off the window while driving.

On one occasion during our test I experienced a blown windshield wiper fuse while it was raining. Normally this would mean getting out of the coach in the pouring rain to replace the fuse, or parking to wait out the weather. In this case, the driver's window had just been treated with rain repellent, so I was able to drive with no wipers at all. As stated earlier, in order for the wind to blow off the small rain droplets, the motorhome needs to be traveling at least 45 MPH, but all of these products make it easier to drive in the rain.

We suggest finding one you can buy locally, and using it often. From now on, I won't be caught in the rain without it. ♦

FOR MORE INFORMATION

GLASS SCIENCE/RAIN CLEAR

(480) 991-7272,
www.rainclear.com.

NANOSAFEGUARD

(206) 792-9774,
www.nanosafeguard.com.

PPG/AQUAPEL

(800) 861-4999,
www.aquapel.com.

RAIN-X

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closer to the latter. Two aluminum braces can be positioned between the twin structures, and the bolsters are used to fill in the gaps. Sleepers then place their heads toward the side walls. The only downside to this huge bed is finding sheets that will work. Most owners will likely opt for a sleeping system that incorporates a sleeping bag arrangement with attachable sheets.

Sometime this fall, a second floorplan for the Via will roll off the assembly line. It has a queen bed on the driver's side, in front of a rear bathroom. The slideout is larger in that plan because it houses the bed and front couch, which will be a little larger than the one in the test coach.

A secondary sleeping area is created by pulling down the bed above the driver's compartment chairs. To engage, the seat backs are reclined enough to clear the spring-loaded platform that hinges down from the ceiling. This bed is 49 inches wide and graced with another thick mattress. Access is fairly easy since the platform comes down waist-high from the floor.

When the front bed is deployed, cur-

tains on three sides are positioned automatically so that they cover the cabover windows (front and sides). That's a system that's been used in Europe for a long time. In reality, two adults can snuggle up on this bed and be comfortable enough to get a good night's sleep. Six-footers will fit nicely; taller people may have to assume a slight fetal position. No doubt the kids will love it up there — and have a perfect view of the larger TV. A smaller person (most likely a child) can use the couch for another sleeping position.

OUTSIDE

Full-body paint and sleek lines give the Via a handsome profile. Alcoa aluminum wheels and the electric awning with painted cover and arms accent the exterior smartly. Adding to the aesthetics are exterior storage doors that are curved just enough to keep the lines flowing. And they are not just pretty faces on the outside; exterior storage adds up to 90 cubic feet, including a gargantuan locker spanning the back. A large door accesses this area from the curbside, while a smaller door opens to the other side. The spare is



Exterior storage adds up to 90 cubic feet, including a large rear locker. The area also houses the spare tire.

housed here, and other than that, it's wide open for larger items.

One door leads to the LP-gas tank fill, which uses a remote hookup and the mandatory remote shut-off switch. This allows the tank to be mounted between the center frame rails, opening up additional exterior space normally allocated to LP-gas storage. As an additional convenience, the LP-gas can also be switched off at the monitor panel inside the coach — a nice feature when driving conditions require tank valve shutdown.

Also embellishing the exterior is the entry door, which went through a tremendous amount of design calisthenics for not only ergonomics, but also to be complementary to the exterior lines of the coach. For practicality, the interior door handle is higher so users don't have to bend down to operate,

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VIA 25'

and the outside handle is lower so it can be reached while standing on the ground. There's no screen door, but the center window opens and is screened. There's also a grab handle built into the inside of the door.

An unbroken seal is used for this door and the hinges are concealed from the outside, ensuring a rattle-free fit. A gas strut is used to restrict the door from crashing into the awning arm, but it needs to be a little stiffer so the wind won't close the door unintentionally.

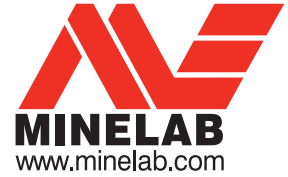
ON THE ROAD

The Via is a pleasure to drive. The chassis is relatively compliant, taking concrete expansion joints and other rough surfaces in stride. Inside, the coach is almost silent — free of rattles and squeaks. The coach glides through windy conditions and is stable when passed by large trucks. Lane changes are firm, and there's limited body roll.

The Mercedes diesel six-banger propels the coach effortlessly; we had to concentrate on our right foot in order to keep from exceeding the 65 MPH speed limit. Eventually we just gave up and used the cruise control. Nevertheless, we managed to control our speed long enough to register fuel economy. At 65 MPH the Via got 14.5 MPG, which was pretty much in line with the readout in the dash (from the onboard computer). Winnebago engineers have seen as high as 15.9 MPG and I think mileage will improve as the engine breaks in a little.

Although the coach has a hitch receiver for towing small vehicles, it's perfectly suited for running errands and sightseeing. We purposely pulled into one of those motorhome-unfriendly fuel stations (you know, the ones with the convenience store right in front of the lanes) to test maneuverability in tight spots. Here the Via got an A-plus. We also experienced no difficulty negotiating and parking in shopping centers — or crowded vacation resorts.

Our test coach was the first and only one produced, and that said, as a prototype it was pretty impressive. Once a few expected minor bugs are worked out and the design and production teams sign off on the final product, Winnebago will surely have another winner in its lineup of quality motorhomes. It's somewhat pricey at \$139,745 (with options), but it's certainly classy — and was well worth the wait. ♦



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LEXINGTON 300SS

A single-slide Class C from Forest River with a classic design



Forest River's largest Lexington, the 300SS, is a fine example of a versatile coach with all the ingredients for creating memorable camping experiences. Whether traveling the road solo or with a partner, entertaining an active family or taking the grandkids out for the weekend, this floorplan can fit the bill.

Stepping into the 300SS through the forward-entry door reveals a roomy main cabin, thanks in part to the single 11-foot streetside slide. The open and spacious living area is a comfortable spot to entertain guests or relax and watch a movie with the family.

Drivers will immediately recognize the uncluttered Blue Oval (Ford) cockpit that sports a faux-wood dash overlay and full easy-to-read instrumentation for the chassis' 6.8-L V-10 gasser. The five-speed TorqShift transmission — with Tow/Haul feature — is standard.

Ford has responded to the lament of travelers and offers a double set of cup holders that will organize any style of beverage container or gadget cup. A lower package shelf for those ever-disappearing trip snacks and related necessities is a thoughtful addition, and both can be easily reached from either captain's chair. Large powered-and-heated exterior mirrors and the

optional (\$362) backup camera with overhead monitor and sound will likely inspire driving confidence.

A sofa bed and facing dinette opposite the galley share the streetside slide, creating additional beds for four people by night and seating for seven by day. Forest River's designers wisely chose to maximize the use of a laid-stone-pattern vinyl floor to handle busy — and often messy — traffic areas, while creating the feel of upscale living and dining areas with the use of space-defining carpet.

Handsome cherry cabinetry and the hazelnut interior décor is a pleasing combination while the chef in residence attends to the menu in the nicely appointed curbside galley with stainless-steel cooktop and micro/convection combo. Adequate countertop space is augmented by drop-in covers for the double sink. Generous storage is provided above and below the galley countertop, providing space for pots, pantry and utensils. The raised two-door stainless-steel refrigerator anchors the galley and also provides room below it for the ducted furnace.

The amidships bath placement allows for different privacy configurations depending on needs. The bath can





SPECIFICATIONS

CHASSIS: FORD E-450	INTERIOR HEIGHT: 6' 6"
ENGINE: GAS 6.8-L TRITON V-10	WHEELBASE: 223"
FUEL: 55 GAL	FRESHWATER CAP: 40 GAL
GVWR: 14,500 LBS	GRAY-WATER CAP: 35 GAL
LENGTH: 32' 1"	BLACK-WATER CAP: 35 GAL
WIDTH: 7' 10½"	LP-GAS CAP: 9.8 GAL
HEIGHT WITH A/C: 10' 5"	BASE MSRP: \$85,043
	PRICE AS REVIEWED: \$106,807

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remain an accessible part of the main living area, providing privacy for the bedroom; it can be cordoned off to create a bed-and-bath suite; or a totally enclosed bath can be created for complete privacy. The skylight above the large shower stall spills natural light through the opaque stall door and into the hallway. The separate lav and toilet room is located opposite the shower and has ample vanity storage, including a medicine chest. A hanging wardrobe — with lower drawer storage — next to the shower completes the bath area.

The design of the master bedroom is clean and straightforward. The lack of a bedroom slide eliminates the sport of mattress hurdling to access the room while traveling, and the walk-around queen-size bed on a raised platform is a welcome inclusion. With cabinetry above the bed, a streetside hanging wardrobe and a dedicated curbside nightstand, there's plenty of storage available for any size object or clothing type.

Small carpeted steps on either side of the bed make the platform a convenient pet bed or place to comfortably tie shoes and act as a step up to reach into

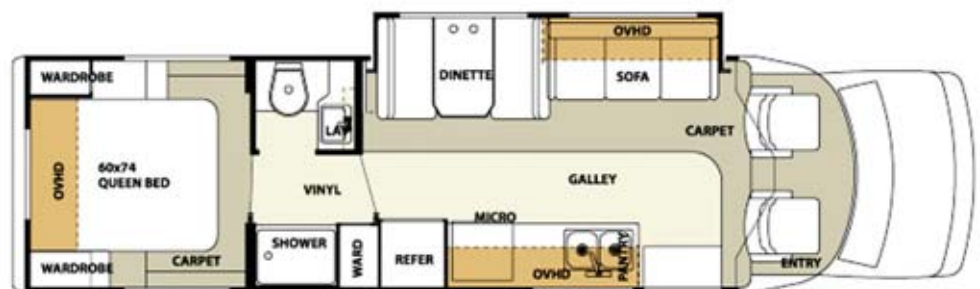
the overhead storage, but its real purpose is to create the cavernous exterior storage-trunk compartment across the entire width of the rear wall.

Outside, that compartment will hold everything from golf clubs to ladders. With convenient three-sided access, the grandkids' bikes should have little difficulty being stowed for their big adventure. Optional (\$1,588) upgraded aluminum wheels and the GTS'

standard and striking full-body paint over aerodynamic body lines announce the Lexington anywhere it heads.

Our thanks to the staff at Vacation Station in Corona, California, for providing the Lexington 300SS for our review.

Forest River has produced a beautiful gas coach that offers many of the popular and time-proven features that RVers appreciate. That alone should put this one on your pencil list. ♦



A close-up photograph of a blue plastic bottle pouring a thin stream of yellow-green engine oil into a metal oil cap on an engine. The background is blurred, showing various engine components. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

A SLIPPERY SUBJECT

EVERYTHING YOU
NEED TO KNOW ABOUT
TODAY'S ENGINE OILS

by CHRIS HEMER

The oil in the engine of your motorhome is likely something you rarely think about until it's time to get it changed. The reality is, most of us don't take an interest in engine oil, because we view it as a complex, or even boring, subject. Depending on your focus, it can be — but if you omit the technical details of engineering, refining and testing, understanding today's engine oils isn't difficult, and it's actually quite interesting. If all you've ever wanted is someone to break it down for you in laymen's terms, this story is for you.

READ THE LABEL



The API "Donut" on the back of the oil bottle contains information about the oil's application and viscosity.

Just about everything you need to know about an oil is on the American Petroleum Institute (API) "Donut" on the back of the bottle — that is, if you know how to decipher its meanings. At the top, you'll see the words "API Service," followed by two or more letters. Sequences beginning with the letter "S" (such as SM, SL and SJ, for "spark" ignition) are service categories designed for gasoline-burning engines. Sequences beginning with "C" (such as CJ-4, CI-4, CH-4 and CG-4, for "compression" ignition) are commercial categories designed for diesel applications. (See the sidebar for an explanation of these codes



and what they mean.)

In the center of the Donut is the number you're most likely concerned with, which is the viscosity grade of the oil. Put simply, viscosity is a measure of an oil's thickness, typically expressed in numbered grades ranging from 5 (thinnest) to 50 (thickest). Originally established by the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE), an oil's viscosity was originally a single grade, or "straight weight," but that changed when the SAE added winter grade designations, indicated by a "W" after the viscosity grade (i.e. 10W). Engineers realized that the existing grade specification did not adequately identify the cold-weather characteristics of a particular oil; depending on which region the crude came from (the U.S. or Persian Gulf, for example), two oils with the same grade could exhibit very different viscosities.

The evolution of engine oil

took another big step a short time later, when advances in petrochemical engineering led to the development of viscosity enhancers that made it possible for a single oil to serve double duty in both low and high temperatures. These became known as "multigrade" oils, and are the ones that we are familiar with today. These oils perform like a lower viscosity oil to make it possible for oil to flow easily to critical engine components in freezing temperatures, but then protect like a heavier weight oil at the SAE-specified 210°F. Hence the oils we're all familiar with: 10W-30, 10W-40 and so on.

Today's engines are assembled with greater precision and have tighter tolerances than the engines of yesteryear, which is why 5W-30 is the most common automotive oil grade for gasoline engines, 15W-40 for diesels. Typically, it is rec-



Delo is a popular oil among diesel consumers. According to Chevron, Delo combines ISOSYN technology and advanced additives to disperse soot, control deposits and significantly slow engine wear.



AMSOIL's new synthetic Diesel Oil is designed for 2007 and newer diesel engines requiring API CJ-4 oil. At \$8.55 per quart, it costs more than conventional oil, but it also extends oil life up to three times, according to the company.



Shell Rotella T is a synthetic heavy-duty engine oil formulated for new and older diesel- and gasoline-powered engines.

ommended that you stick with the oil grade recommended by the manufacturer, but this is not always the case. Bear in mind that the manufacturer's recommendation is based on a new or as-new engine operated in a typical environment; a high-mileage engine, or one operated in extreme heat or cold, may be better suited to a different oil grade. Moreover, oils have a temperature operating range, so if you're in a jam and need to add a quart or two of oil to your engine, but your grade isn't available, you'll be fine to select a different grade. For example, the API cites 5W-20, 5W-30, 10W-30, 10W-40 and 20W-50 as being suitable for passenger cars operated at temperatures no lower than 32°F.

Oils designed for gasoline-burning passenger cars and light trucks will have "Energy Conserving" displayed at the bottom of the Donut, indicating that the oil has been formulated to conserve fuel. For diesel applications, you will find the CI-4 PLUS designation. Used in conjunction with API CI-4 and CJ-4, the CI-4 PLUS designation identifies oils formulated to provide a higher level of protection against soot-related viscosity increase and loss in diesel engines. Elsewhere on the label, you may find reference to ILSAC, which means that the oil meets the current engine protection and fuel-economy standards of the International Lubricant Standardization and Approval Committee, a joint effort of U.S. and Japanese automobile manufacturers.

KICKING ASH

CJ-4 "low ash" oil was designed to meet the 2007 model year on-highway exhaust emissions standards, which regulate

the diesel engine, its emissions system and its fuel as a single system. Particulate filters and after-treatment systems used on these vehicles can be harmed not only by high sulfur content diesel fuel (no longer available for on-highway diesel

vehicles), but also by using the wrong oil. CJ-4 is formulated to prevent the poisoning of the catalyst and/or diesel particulate filter and improve soot-handling properties, as well as reduce engine wear, piston deposits, thickening, foaming

and viscosity loss.

In a nutshell, if you drive a 2007 or later model year diesel motorhome, the engine and/or after-treatment system may be adversely affected by using something other than CJ-4 oil. On the flip side, if you drive an

THE OIL ABCs

What's in the letters? These designations from API will help give you a clue. Note that any obsolete/off-road categories have been omitted.

GASOLINE ENGINES

SM: For all automotive engines currently in use. Introduced in 2004, SM oils are designed to provide improved oxidation resistance, improved deposit protection, better wear protection and better low-temperature performance over the life of the oil. Some SM oils may also meet the latest ILSAC specification and/or qualify as Energy Conserving.

SL: For 2004 and older automotive engines.

SJ: For 2001 and older automotive engines.

DIESEL ENGINES

CJ-4: Introduced in 2006. For high-speed, four-stroke engines designed to meet 2007 model year on-highway exhaust emission standards. CJ-4 oils are compounded for use in all applications with diesel fuels ranging in sulfur content up to 500 PPM (0.05 percent by weight). However, use of these oils with greater than 15 PPM (0.0015 percent by weight) sulfur fuel may impact exhaust after-treatment system durability and/or oil drain interval. CJ-4 oils are effective at sustaining emission control system durability where particulate filters and other advanced after-treatment systems are used. Optimum protection is provided for control of catalyst poisoning, particulate filter blocking, engine wear, piston deposits, low- and high-temperature stability, soot handling properties, oxidative thickening, foaming and viscosity loss due to shear. API CJ-4 oils exceed the performance criteria of API CI-4 with CI-4 PLUS, CI-4, CH-4, CG-4 and CF-4 and can effectively lubricate engines calling for those API Service Categories. When using CJ-4 oil with higher than 15 PPM sulfur fuel, consult the engine manufacturer for service interval.

CI-4: Introduced in 2002. For high-speed, four-stroke engines designed to meet 2004 exhaust emission standards implemented in 2002. CI-4 oils are formulated to sustain engine durability where exhaust gas recirculation (EGR) is used and are intended for use with diesel fuels ranging in sulfur content up to 0.5 percent weight. Can be used in place of CD, CE, CF-4, CG-4 and CH-4 oils.

CH-4: Introduced in 1998. For high-speed, four-stroke engines designed to meet 1998 exhaust emission standards. CH-4 oils are specifically compounded for use with diesel fuels ranging in sulfur content up to 0.5 percent weight. Can be used in place of CD, CE, CF-4 and CG-4 oils.

CG-4: Introduced in 1995. For severe duty, high-speed, four-stroke engines using fuel with less than 0.5 percent weight sulfur. CG-4 oils are required for engines meeting 1994 emission standards. Can be used in place of CD, CE and CF-4 oils.

earlier diesel motorhome, CJ-4 oil will still work for you. According to API, CJ-4 oils are qualified using several new engine tests that are more severe than those used for CI-4 or CI-4 PLUS oils, bestowing CJ-4 with more robust performance characteristics than previous categories (see sidebar for more detail).

SYNTHETIC OILS

Though synthetic oils were introduced to the mainstream consumer market decades ago, there still exists an abundance of uncertainty, misinformation and outright falsehoods on the subject. First off, synthetic oil isn't really synthetic — it still uses a petroleum "base stock," which is transformed using a process known as organic synthesis.

When oil is pumped out of the ground, it has hydrocarbon chain links of all sizes, which creates two issues. One, the chains have gaps that allow oxidation and breakdown to occur. Two, the lighter molecules will eventually boil off, leaving the heavier molecules behind. This not only changes the viscosity of the oil, it also leads to sludge and varnish buildup.

When the petroleum oil base stock undergoes organic synthesis, however, uniform molecular structure is achieved, and a "perfect" oil is created. This offers a number of benefits, including greater film strength (for better wear protection), a lower pour point (for easier pumping in cold weather) and greater lubricity, which can result in reduced operating temperature, improved fuel economy and more power. And as we mentioned earlier, synthetic oils are less volatile and therefore not prone to "boil off" like traditional petroleum-based oils are.

It is a commonly held belief that synthetic oils should not be used in a new engine, but many high-performance vehicles such as the Corvette and Viper come from the factory filled with synthetic oil, as do many European imports. There has also been some concern that synthetic oils can cause oil leaks in older engines, as the higher detergent qualities of synthetic can wash away varnish that keeps gaskets sealed. This can, in fact, take place — but it depends largely on the engine, its mileage and overall condition.

CHANGE INTERVALS

Oil change intervals have historically been

another topic of debate, but realistically, how often you change your oil has a lot to do with the age of your vehicle and the way you drive (mostly city, or mostly highway). Years ago, presiding engine technologies mandated that oil be changed every 3,000 miles or so, but that's not the case today. Recall that most engines from the mid '80s and earlier had less evolved fuel and ignition systems, so the oil got dirtier and/or contaminated more quickly. Today's engines can often go 7,000–10,000 miles before a change is needed — again, depending on how the vehicle is driven (see your owner's manual for the recommended change interval). Proof of this can be found in the oil life systems used by some newer vehicles. These systems assess exactly when the oil should be changed based on climate conditions and how you have used the vehicle. General Motors estimates that its system allows its customers to go from five oil changes a year to only two or three. It's worth mentioning that the very company whose commercials still recommend 3,000-mile change intervals is

owned by an oil company — go figure.

Synthetic oils can go even longer between oil changes, because they don't break down and become sludgy. In fact, some synthetic motor oils have a recommended change interval of 25,000 miles or one year; you simply replace the filter after six months, and top it off with more oil. But a change eventually becomes necessary because, although the oil itself doesn't break down, its detergents and additives eventually will. If in doubt, you can always send out a sample of your engine's oil for analysis to determine its condition; several synthetic oil companies offer this service, as do many other companies you can find on the Internet by typing the words "engine oil analysis" into your search engine.

You can read so much about the technical details of oil that it will make your head spin. But if you simply use the recommended oil for your application, keep the fill level up and change it when necessary, your engine oil will serve you (and your engine) well for many years to come. ♦

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HOLIDAY RAMBLER NEPTUNE 38PBD

An entry-level diesel-pusher with a long list of features

A wide range of choices exists when it comes to buying an entry-level coach, and if you're looking for a diesel-pusher, you may want to add the Holiday Rambler Neptune to your list. Available in six specific floorplans based on 35- to 39-foot lengths and in three full-body paint colors, the Neptune can meet the needs of a growing family as well as empty nesters ready to travel.

The Neptune 38PBD rides on Holiday Rambler's Roadmaster raised-rail RR4R chassis, designed exclusively for this line, providing full-width cavernous storage between the axles and cushioned on the frame rail-aligned, four-bag Air Glide suspension with front torsion bar. Three sensors actively monitor body attitude and initiate changes in air-bag pressures while driving to minimize any porpoising or sway, enhancing stability and comfort in less-than-ideal conditions.

The single choice of the Cummins ISB 340-HP power plant mates to an Allison 2500MH six-speed World Transmission with push-button shift convenience. Automatic traction control in slippery conditions and ABS braking supplemented by the Cummins variable geometry turbo — using engine braking much like an inline exhaust brake — is also featured. An aluminum stacked radiator and turbo air cooler keeps the Cummins happy, as does a transmission cooler for the Allison. Safety is further improved with a steel firewall protecting the cockpit.

Stepping into the Neptune, with its beautiful fit and finish, we had a first impression of a far more expensive coach. The cockpit is laid out with the driver in mind, using three main 5-inch gauges that display multiple engine functions in a clear analog style that's easy to read. A comfortable power driver's chair and a tilt and telescoping steering column provide drivers



of any size a clear view of all dash and console features. The center dash houses the optional (\$547) three-camera backup monitor and optional (\$833) GPS system. An optional (\$350) Sirius satellite/AM/FM/CD unit mounts directly below. Centered in the dash are the climate control switches, easily reached from the optional (\$605) six-way power copilot chair with power footrest. First-class visibility is provided by the panoramic one-piece windshield kept clear by no less than six defroster vents and 32-inch wipers. Forward-mounted rearview mirrors not only provide clear vision without taking your eyes off the road but also house a camera in each — connected to the dash monitor — for additional safety when changing lanes or backing.

Once the automatic hydraulic leveling system has landed, both driver and copilot chairs can be swiveled for additional seating in the spacious cabin. The 38PBD floorplan creates very usable space by combining the optional (\$735) 74-inch sofa bed (with air mattress) and optional (\$791) free-standing dinette and chairs in the 12-foot streetside slide lined with deep overhead storage cabinets above. An optional (\$71) 60-inch Leatherette loveseat behind the copilot chair provides additional seating and valuable interior storage for large flat items under it with more storage cabinetry above. However, given the considerable basement storage available in this floorplan, this space would seem to be better suited for a recliner and computer workstation. An optional (\$693) 32-inch flat-screen LCD TV handles the main cabin entertainment needs and is mounted in the cockpit overhead for an unobstructed view.

The upscale galley is laid out with an angled double sink set in a solid-surface countertop with a residential-style pullout





SPECIFICATIONS

CHASSIS: ROADMASTER RR4R	WHEELBASE: 240"
ENGINE: CUMMINS ISB 340 HP	FRESHWATER CAP: 95 GAL
FUEL: 75 GAL	GRAY-WATER CAP: 55 GAL
GVWR: 29,000 LBS	BLACK-WATER CAP: 39 GAL
LENGTH: 38' 9"	LP-GAS CAP: 39 GAL
WIDTH: 8' 4½"	BASE PRICE: \$177,300
HEIGHT WITH A/C: 12' 6"	PRICE AS REVIEWED:
INTERIOR HEIGHT: 7'	\$190,612

HOLIDAY RAMBLER, (800) 634-0855, WWW.HOLIDAYRAMBLER.COM.

faucet and a three-burner cooktop mounted on top of drawers. Baking needs are handled by the microwave/convection oven combo with oversize pot storage above. Holiday Rambler incorporated the solid surface material into the cooktop backsplash using inlaid natural stone mosaic tiles for an ornate touch. The optional (\$455) stainless-steel appliance package includes the 12-cubic-foot, four-door fridge that anchors the curbside galley. The lighted entertainment hutch has multiple use possibilities and forms the division point between galley and bath.

The bath and toilet room occupy the full width of the coach, with privacy created by matching pocket doors at opposite ends. A beautiful sky-lit neo-corner shower across from the corner lav will accommodate the tallest of users and the layout provides plenty of room for two. The toilet room employs a clever and useful Jack-and-Jill storage cabinet arrangement that can also be accessed from the bedroom when the optional (\$1,438) washer/dryer combo that occupies that space is not chosen.

The bedroom uses the second slide to hold the spacious hanging wardrobe and two-drawer dressing vanity, allowing full use of the platform queen bed without having to extend the slide. Under-bed storage is available for bulky items and also houses the compact optional (\$364) central vacuum system. Additional storage surrounds the headboard, with needed drawers for small items under each matching nightstand. An optional (\$119) ceiling fan is suspended from the roof and gives the bedroom a residential look. The coach's standard 19-



inch widescreen LCD TV is perfectly situated, built into the door of the upper storage cabinet at the foot of the bed.

Overall, the Neptune 38PBD has the look and feel of a much more expensive coach, and with its elegant features and quality craftsmanship it's a good candidate for buyers looking for an entry-level diesel-pusher. ♦



▲ SHOE STORAGE SOLUTION

Most motorhomes have a storage area underneath the built-in dinette table seats that is difficult to put to good use. I made two “shoe trays” that allow me to use that space to store shoes and hiking boots. I used a piece of plywood and added trim wood around the left and right sides and back edges. Then I attached a handle to make it easy to pull the tray out. To help the tray slide on the carpet, I put two furniture sliders on the underside of the tray near the back.

JOHN ROBERTS | KANAB, UTAH

BE COOL

I like to enjoy the great outdoors while I’m camping but sometimes the weather gets too hot and I need to turn on the air conditioning. I don’t like the closed-up feeling of having the door shut when the A/C is on, so I bought a clear shower curtain, cut it to fit the door opening and put up hooks above the door so I can hang up the curtain when the A/C is running. This way I can leave the door open with the screen closed and it doesn’t affect the efficiency of the A/C. It’s easy to pull aside when exiting and entering the motorhome and the rig stays cool. The best part is that I can still enjoy the outdoors because I can see through the shower curtain.

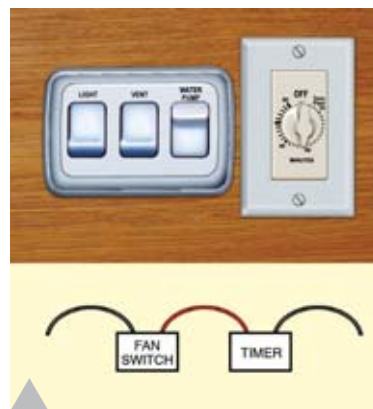
CAROLYN BAUSERMAN | MCGAHEYSVILLE, VIRGINIA



BATTERY LEVEL GAUGE

My motorhome had three LEDs that showed the house battery level, but the LED lights didn’t give me much information. I purchased a 12-volt DC digital automotive gauge and mounted it near the other electrical indicators. To mount it, I cut a hole to fit the gauge and connected it to the power from the other battery gauge. The gauge measures voltage to 0.1 volts, and it’s very bright and can easily be seen in the daytime. Now I have an accurate reading of the battery level to one-tenth of a volt.

JOSEPH VOLK | PAHRUMP, NEVADA ♦



CLEANER AIR

When turning on the ceiling fan in the bathroom of my RV I found it a chore to have to go back later to shut it off. I took care of this by installing a simple timer in series with the fan switch.

The timer is installed in the wall next to the fan switch, utilizing an “old-work” box. I removed one wire from the fan switch and hooked it to one of the two terminals on the timer. I then added a short wire from the empty terminal on the fan switch to the empty terminal on the timer. (The wire size of the short “jumper” wire should be the same as the originals.)

By leaving the fan switch in the ON position, the ceiling fan is now controlled by the timer. When entering the bathroom I twist the timer knob a little and the fan goes off a few minutes after I exit.

**FRANK WOYTHAL
ANDOVER, NEW YORK**

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

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

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



HANDS-ON | by DAVE RIGGS

COOKING IN STYLE

Camco's Olympian RV 5500 Stainless Steel Gas Grill has a two-way mounting system and an efficient burner

I can't think of an outdoor accessory that's more apropos to RVing than a barbecue. The market is flooded with all kinds of grills in various sizes and configurations, but Camco's Olympian RV 5500 Stainless Steel Gas Grill is a cut above most of the available portable products.

The Olympian grill has that clean styling of a high-end product many barbecue aficionados appreciate, and its performance is equal to its good looks. Measuring 21½ × 13¼ × 8¾ inches, the top hinges open exposing a grill that has a 180-square-inch cooking surface. That's large enough to easily prepare meals that will feed four — and maybe six if you don't overload the grill with side dishes such as vegetables. A patented smoker plate enhances flavor without the hassle of grease fires, although very fatty meats will still create some flare-ups. Grease drippings are routed to a sliding tray, easily removable for cleaning, underneath the barbecue. Lining this grease trap with heavy-duty aluminum foil facilitates easy cleanup.

A versatile mounting bracket is used to position the barbecue on a table or the ground, in areas where using picnic tables is prohibited. The same bracket can be mounted to the side wall of the motorhome using an optional rail that sells for around \$8. Since the barbecue is pretty weighty, it's recommended that the rail be installed by a professional, who can attach it to a solid surface. That's a convenient option, especially if your rig is equipped with a low-pressure, quick connection to the LP-gas system. A short hose with quick connectors is provided with the barbecue, and longer hoses are available from Camping World and other RV supply stores.

If your motorhome is not equipped with a low-pressure connection, you'll have to get the adapter kit (\$30) for using throwaway cylinders, which is what we did. The kit includes the regulator and even a plastic base for stabilizing the cylinder. You can also get a kit (\$32) that

connects to larger cylinders with the standard Acme fitting.

Assembling the barbecue is relatively simple, following easy to understand instructions. The only difficulty was dealing with the fragile gasket that goes between the control valve and the body of the grill. Getting the spark igniter gapped properly takes some patience.

The RV 5500 grill is a pleasure to use, has a temperature gauge built into the lid, and provides even heat all across the cooking surface. Its 12,000 BTU burner gets the temperature up in a hurry and the flame is very controllable.

To protect the barbecue between uses, we put it in Olympian's Grill Storage Bag, which is just the right size to store the barbecue, adapter kit and long-handle cleaning brush. The barbecue sells for around \$250, but at press time it was available at Camping World for \$199 (President's Club price). The bag sells for less than \$20.

For more information, visit www.campingworld.com. ♦





Battery Blues

BELIEVING THE LABOR CHARGE INCURRED DURING THE INSTALLATION OF A BATTERY SHOULD BE COVERED BY HIS CHASSIS MANUFACTURER, A READER APPEALED TO *HOT LINE* FOR HELP. HE EXPLAINED:

I have a 2006 Pace Arrow 37C motorhome on a W24 Workhorse chassis. I have been quite happy with the coach, except for an intermittent starting problem. Sometimes the engine would start and sometimes nothing happened when I turned the key. I usually had to use the dual battery switch to get it started.

I called Workhorse and explained my problem to a service technician. I told him I was going to install a new battery, unless he had another suggestion. He said that it wasn't a battery problem and that I should take it in for service to a Workhorse service center. I took the rig to Turning Wheel RV Center in Clermont, Florida. A technician at Turning Wheel found a stripped terminal, so he replaced the battery. He said the work wouldn't be covered under warranty, though I thought it should be because the Workhorse technician had told me it wasn't a battery problem.

I sent Workhorse a copy of the invoice from Turning Wheel and a request to be reimbursed \$173.90: \$119 for the battery, \$54.90 for the labor. Sometime later, I received a reply letter from Workhorse stating that it "does not warranty the battery under the conditions that the cause of failure was a stripped terminal."

I'd like at least to be reimbursed for the labor charge, since I would have installed a new battery myself if I hadn't been misadvised by Workhorse.

WAYNE STRONG
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

Hot Line contacted Workhorse Custom Chassis on Strong's behalf for further consideration of his claim. Workhorse and Strong responded as follows:

Workhorse Custom Chassis:

Thank you for contacting Workhorse Custom Chassis with regard to Wayne Strong's

"EVEN IF A SYSTEM OR APPLIANCE REMAINS UNUSED OVER A LONG PERIOD OF TIME, IT SHOULD BE TESTED INTERMITTENTLY.

THIS PRACTICE WILL UNCOVER ISSUES THAT NEED SERVICE LONG BEFORE THEY BECOME BIG PROBLEMS."

motorhome. We appreciate the opportunity to review his situation. Workhorse has revisited Strong's information, and upon further review, we have decided to reimburse him \$95.98 as a goodwill gesture for the battery installed in his coach.

We appreciate you contacting Workhorse and allowing us the opportunity to provide you with our position and information with regard to this claim.

DEBRA ANDERSON
REIMBURSEMENT COORDINATOR
WORKHORSE CUSTOM CHASSIS
TROY, MICHIGAN

Wayne Strong:

Thank you to *Hot Line* for your help in obtaining a reimbursement from Workhorse. I received a check for \$95.98 and am very satisfied with the outcome.

W.S.

SATELLITE TV TROUBLE

Disagreeing with an early termination fee from her satellite service provider, a reader sought Hot Line's help. She wrote:

My husband and I chose DirecTV for our satellite service because we were told that it could provide distant local service for our motorhome when we traveled. After signing up for an account, we were informed that we couldn't get distant local service because we lived in a served area.

So we opened up a second account for the motorhome in order to enjoy satellite TV while on the road. I didn't want to

pay for two accounts and was assured by a representative of DirecTV that the accounts would be regarded as one account and all we had to do was switch back and forth between accounts, suspending the RV account when we returned home.

This worked well for about a year. Then we were informed that DirecTV would only allow an account to be suspended twice a year. This negated any advantage to us to remain customers, as we use our motorhome more than twice a year, so we canceled our accounts. Then we received a bill for \$125, for a "prorated early cancellation fee."

During the two-year period that I was with DirecTV, I was a good customer and always paid my bills on time. I am asking that DirecTV reverse this charge.

BARBARA BOWEN
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

Hot Line contacted DirecTV in an attempt to facilitate a positive resolution to Bowen's dilemma. We received the following letter from Bowen that filled us in on the conclusion to her case. She wrote:

Thank you for your help in resolving my dispute with DirecTV. I received a reimbursement for \$125. I appreciate *Hot Line's* prompt and effective action.

B.B.

REFRIGERATOR WARRANTY WOES

Under the impression that he was owed compensation on an appliance that was out of warranty, a reader asked Hot Line to step in. He wrote:

In December 2006, I purchased a Norcold N841R refrigerator and had it installed in my 2000 Safari Trek. I used it for about four months and then I stored my motorhome in my pole barn for almost a year and a half. In November 2008, I took a five-month-long trip to Florida. Four months into the trip, I found that the refrigerator had stopped operating and indicated a "no cool" message on the door.

I took it to a repair shop in Florida and the serviceman was only able to make it work on gas. He contacted Norcold and was told to reset the refrigerator using the front panel on the door.

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HOT LINE

A week later, the refrigerator stopped working again. This time I called Norcold but the phone numbers I tried were disconnected. A friend then referred me to Lacey's RV Service. The Lacey's serviceman said the control module was bad and he ordered a new one; however, when he tried to install the part, he found it was the wrong one, so he reset the module and said to use it on gas.

On my trip back home, the "no cool" indication reappeared two more times and I had to take it in for service twice. In sum, I have spent \$630 on repairs, and I still don't have a working refrigerator. My Norcold warranty is only good for two years, unless they inspect the appliance; then it's a three-year warranty. Any assistance *Hot Line* can provide me will be appreciated.

**DALLAS BICKNELL
ATLANTA, MICHIGAN**

The issue presented by Bicknell would probably not have progressed to the stage it did if he had checked his appliance on a regular basis. Even if a system or appliance remains unused over a long period of time, it should still be tested intermittently to ensure it will be ready for use when needed. This practice will also uncover issues that need service long before they become big problems.

Hot Line contacted Thetford Corp., the parent company of Norcold Inc., on Bicknell's behalf. A representative responded to Bicknell as follows:

Thank you for taking the time to write to us. We received your letter requesting warranty coverage. As you mentioned in your letter, the three-year limited warranty states that maintenance must be completed in the second year of warranty to retain parts-only coverage during the third year of warranty.

As a goodwill gesture, our warranty manager has agreed to offer you the third year parts-only warranty to get your refrigerator fixed. The dealer must contact our technical support team for authorization. Again, this is a goodwill gesture and does not cover previous dealer visits.

**THERESA CARRIERO
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
THETFORD CORP.
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN ♦**

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Minimum or Maximum?

I recently purchased six new tires for my 1992 33-foot Fleetwood Southwind, after my front driver's-side tire had a blowout. I bought Michelin LT235/85R16 LRE XPS RIB tires, and was told by a service technician at Discount Tire to inflate them to 80 PSI cold (that's the amount noted on the side of the tire).

You have recommended inflating tires to 10 PSI more than the stated amount, but I was told at Discount Tire that the stated amount on the tire is the maximum amount to inflate the tires. What air pressure should I put in my motorhome's tires? Is the tire pressure stated on the tires the minimum or the maximum? Thanks for your help.

JOHN WILSON | OMAHA, NEBRASKA

It is the minimum pressure required for the tire to carry its maximum load, John. Read the sidewall; it so states.

“MOST MOTORHOME MANUFACTURERS DON'T LEAVE MUCH PAYLOAD FOR THE END USER; THEREFORE, MAINTAINING THE MINIMUM TIRE PRESSURE REQUIRED TO CARRY THE MAXIMUM LOAD IS VERY IMPORTANT.”



This is confusing to users and tire dealers, because they deal mostly with passenger-car tires. The pressure stated on passenger-car tires is in fact the maximum. The federal government created this confusion by making tire manufacturers state different specifications on passenger-car tires than on truck tires. As a result, truck tires are often underinflated.

By the tire size, I know your motorhome was built on a Ford chassis. Ford chassis with 16-inch tires are tire limited. This means that the maximum load-carrying capacity of the tires is the axle rating, and in the case of a Ford chassis with 16-inch wheels, the gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR).

Since most motorhome manufacturers didn't leave much payload for the end user, maintaining the minimum pressure required to carry the maximum load is very important. That's the reason for the extra 10 PSI — as long as it doesn't exceed the maximum inflation pressure stamped on the wheel. This is recommended by the standards-setting Tire and Rim Association for tires in severe service and/or operated at speeds exceeding 65 MPH. Tires in severe service are tires that are always loaded to their maximum load-carrying capacity, which is very common in the motorhome industry.

If the minimum pressure required to carry the maximum load is 80 PSI, only inflating to 80 PSI cold gives no allowance for normal permeability. The only way you can be assured of having at least 80 PSI in your tires is to inflate them to 85 or 90 PSI cold, and reinflate them at some pressure higher than 80 PSI.

LP-GAS TANK VALVE

I recently filled the 80-pound LP-gas tank in my 2001 Safari Serengeti, only to discover that the supply valve is not working. I made a workaround that allows me to use a 20-pound portable tank, but now I'm left with the dilemma of a full tank and no way to replace the supply valve.

Can you offer any advice? Can the tank be drained by using the fill valve to empty it into another tank? Your help with this is greatly appreciated.

**JOHN TESAURO
BROCKTON, MASSACHUSETTS**

Check your phone book for LP-gas suppliers in your area, John. One or more will have a service department that can help you. A full-service LP-gas supplier can pump all of the LP-gas out of your tank through the fill valve. Then, either you or the service department can replace the bad supply valve. I suggest letting the service department do the work, because they can then refill the tank. The value of the LP-gas will more than likely cover the cost of the service.

MICHELIN TIRE AVAILABILITY

In 2003, you suggested using Michelin LT225/75R16 LRE XPS RIB tires as a replacement for the Firestones failing after only 25,000 miles on them. The Michelins worked extremely well until now. One blew a hole in the sidewall facing the outside tire on the left inside tire while parked in my garage. All tires have very fine cracks about one inch away from the rims.

Being satisfied with the motorhome handling, I went to get replacements only to be told Michelin no longer makes these tires. Do you have any other replacement suggestions? Suppliers want to sell me tires they claim are equal to the XPS RIB.

PAUL LAMMERT | ISMARCK, ILLINOIS

The Michelin LT225/75R16 LRE XPS RIB tire is still being manufactured, Paul. It is just in short supply. Michelin ran out of them before newly manufactured tires came from a German plant. They are currently being allocated to dealers as fast as they come back into stock.

If your dealer has trouble getting them for you, call Michelin Consumer Relations at (800) Tire Help (847-3435). They will get the required number of tires to your designated dealer as soon as possible.

The XPS RIB tire is an all-steel tire, and that is the tire construction we have consistently recommended for motorhome applications. Bridgestone and Goodyear also make LT225/75R16 LRE all-steel tires. The all-steel construction can be seen in wording embossed on the side of the tire.

LP-GAS LEVEL SENDER

I have a 1984 Eldorado motorhome. My

mounted LP-gas tank has a sender that grounds the signal from the monitor station inside the coach. It seems to give erroneous level information. The sender is a round gauge, secured in place with two small screws, and it has a single wire connection. It states, "90 ohms for full" on the back. Where can I get a replacement sender? The magnetic float level inside the tank appears to work fine.

HOWARD FORTNER | HOUSTON, TEXAS

Single wire senders are no longer available, Howard. They are now two-wire senders with the second wire connected to a known ground. Single wire senders were really two-wire senders. Their ground wire was usually attached to a mounting bolt on the tank that often corroded. Cleaning the ground connection can often fix the sender circuit.

New two-wire senders are readily available from RV parts stores. The single wire goes to one terminal, and the new ground wire goes to the other. It doesn't matter which terminal gets the ground or the single wire.

Once you clean or repair the existing tank ground, you can test the circuit by removing one or the other wires. An open circuit should cause your monitor panel gauge to swing all the way in one direction. Shorting the circuit by connecting the single wire directly to ground should cause your monitor panel gauge to swing all the way in the other direction.

If the gauge responds to an open circuit and a grounded circuit correctly, you can check the sender with a magnet. Using a multimeter set to ohms, connect one test wire to the sender terminal, and the other test wire to the case of the sender. Then, move a magnet under the sender. The multimeter should move from zero to 90 OHMS smoothly.

BRAKE FAILURE

I've had four complete brake failures with my 1998 Class A motorhome built on a GM P-chassis. As I'm driving down the road, all of a sudden, I don't have any brakes.

I searched the Internet regarding motorhome brake failures on GM P-chassis and found that the exhaust manifold might be too close to the brake master cylinder. Brake pressure builds up in the master cylinder from heat expansion, causing the pedal to go to the floor, because the brake fluid will boil.

DOT 3 brake fluid boils at 275°F, and DOT 4 at 305°F. DOT 3 is standard. Heavy truck and motorhome manifolds get very hot pulling a load. When the master cylinder cools off after a couple of hours you have good brakes back, and everything works.

This also happened in 2003 and 2006; I had to use the emergency brake, which is a drum brake on the driveline on the tail of the transmission, in order to stop. I called the Chevrolet hot line, and reported it. I asked if there was a recall on this and was told no.

Thank goodness I haven't had an accident. So far I've spent \$2,400 replacing brake parts, and the motorhome only has 28,974 miles on the odometer. I still have the problem. Wish me luck.

LEE BRAY | JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

I will wish you luck, Lee, but I will also advise you to stop throwing parts at your motorhome and simply change your brake fluid every two years or sooner. Brake fluid is hygroscopic, which means it absorbs water. If it didn't, water would accumulate in your calipers and turn to steam when it got over its boiling point of 212°F. That's why DOT 5 brake fluid, which doesn't absorb water, is never recommended for motorhome applications.

Brake fluid and water are noncompressible, but any kind of steam is compressible. Steam in your calipers would cause your brake pedal to go to the floor. The pedal would return to normal when the calipers cooled off and the steam returned to noncompressible water or brake fluid.

New DOT 3 brake fluid has a minimum dry boiling point of 401°F. This temperature declines as the brake fluid absorbs

water. The minimum wet boiling point is 284°F, not 275, but you were close for wet brake fluid, and it is wet brake fluid that is causing your problem.

You live in a humid climate, and don't use your motorhome very much or go very far. Brake cylinders, calipers and other brake parts breathe in and out with the change of temperature from day to night. Daily use and long trips help keep moisture out of brake fluid by keeping it warm. That's why brake fluid isn't a normal maintenance item for automobiles, but Honda recommends changing it every three years.

When Ford started building motorhome chassis in the 1990s, Ford chassis started having brake problems similar to those you have experienced. Motorhome manufacturers notoriously box in chassis engines, making engine compartments very hot. Initially, Ford insulated its brake lines, but the real cure was Ford's High Performance DOT 3 Motor Vehicle Brake Fluid that has a minimum dry boiling point of 500°F.

Motorhomes sitting in storage in humid climates are prime candidates for wet brake fluid that will boil and create steam at temperatures less than 300°F. The Ford brake fluid raises the bar by 200°F, but even it should be changed every two years according to Ford. Ford High Performance DOT 3 Motor Vehicle Brake Fluid is an over-the-counter item at any local Ford dealer. I suggest you buy a few 12-ounce containers and completely change your brake fluid, and then plan to do it again in two years or less. ♦

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Inactive Air Conditioning

My wife and I own a 1984 Vogue Class A motorhome with a P30 chassis and 454-cid engine. For years we have not used the air conditioning, and I heard that I might damage the compressor by not running it occasionally. I was also told that if the compressor should freeze up it could damage or destroy the belt. Can you comment on my air-conditioning concern?

JIM POPOVICH | MORA, NEW MEXICO

Air-conditioning compressors do fail, and when they do they often seize (I don't like to use the word "freeze" because that implies it's related to cold temperatures, which it's not). Since yours is 25 years old, it certainly could happen and not using it could contribute to its failure. Many people don't realize it, but the DEFROST position on dash air controls also switches on the compressor clutch. That allows the system to provide drier air to the defroster to prevent windshield fogging.

Sometimes compressors fail because some of the oil they contain leaks out along with refrigerant. Therefore, before attempting operation, I would give the system a thorough inspection.

With the engine off and ignition key removed for safety, I would also try turning the center of the compressor (within the outer compressor clutch housing) by hand in the normal direction of rotation (clockwise). Look for signs of oil stains on hoses and fittings, hose deterioration, etc. The system should have a low-pressure switch that prevents it from operating if the refrigerant gas has leaked out. Therefore, if it can be turned by hand and everything looks good, I'd give it a try. If the compressor doesn't come on or the belt squeals, take it to an automotive air-conditioning shop. Chances are the R-12 refrigerant gas has leaked out and you're in for a shock on the price of that or a conversion to R-134a.

Regarding belt damage, if the driver hears belt squeal and shuts off the air conditioning immediately, the electrically operated A/C compressor clutch should disengage and save the belt from being shredded.

GNAWED WIRES

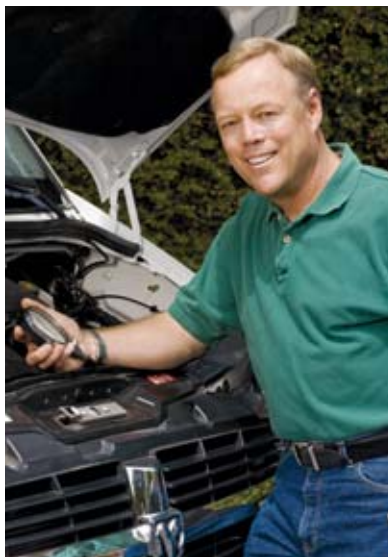
I have a 2000 Four Winds Chateau Class C that is experiencing an electrical issue. After placing the batteries back in the coach after winter storage, the unit fired right up, but then the engine began pulsating. A 12-gauge wire from the negative terminal on the engine-starting battery began to get hot and the insulation started to melt. Is this a ground issue or is there something else going on? The engine is a Ford V-10 and I have 60,000 miles on it.

**JOHN DAU
CLINTON TOWNSHIP, MICHIGAN**

Since it was right after storage, I suspect that it's caused by a short circuit from rodents chewing on wires and insulation. I

“MANY PEOPLE DON'T REALIZE IT, BUT THE DEFROST POSITION ON DASH AIR CONTROLS ALSO SWITCHES ON THE COMPRESSOR CLUTCH.

THAT ALLOWS THE SYSTEM TO PROVIDE DRIER AIR TO THE DEFROSTER TO PREVENT FOGGING.”



just finished repairing some wiring damaged in this manner. Usually it's somewhere on top of the engine. That would be on the positive side, not ground side.

However, if the main ground wire is not carrying its share of current because of poor connections or frayed wire, the excess current may be going through the smaller wire. Follow the wire backward from the battery. Give the wiring a thorough inspection and be sure it is repaired properly before reconnecting the battery or attempting to drive it. Sometimes these shorts cause engine-compartment fires. Also, check the main ground. It's usually connected from the engine to the frame.

FALTERING FORD

Last June while traveling in Wisconsin the engine in my 1994 Winnebago Vectra with a Ford 7.5-L V-8 started bucking. I changed plug wires, one at a time, to no avail. I took it to a Ford truck shop in Milwaukee and the service technician said the wiring was OK, but he changed the cap, rotor, distributor, several sensors and spark plugs, and checked the fuel pressure, which was fine. I also had a new, updated fuel pump and harness installed three years ago. After \$1,600 and no fix, I chugged back to Texas and took it to an RV shop there. The serviceman at that shop said the wiring was wrong (Ford said it was OK) and he changed it, but this did not help. He proceeded to change four injectors, the EGR valve, oxygen sensor and some other sensors; did a vacuum check on valves and removed the intake manifold; inspected it visually and finally gave up.

He also tested fuel pressure on the road. (The pump pressure is good and increases when under power and all injectors have now been replaced.) One tech said that it has erratic timing, even when trying to time it manually, something the computer will not allow. My coach only has 80,000 miles, so the technician is trying to find something other than a worn timing chain; he thinks it has a possible timing-chain problem. Every possible cause we researched has been tried or changed, and we still have

CONTINUED ON PAGE 63

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not been able to fix the problem.

Do you have any ideas? Thanks.
GARY VAN LYDEGRAF | VIA E-MAIL

This certainly seems as if the repair shop is just changing parts without a plan or testing routine and hoping the problem will fix itself before you run out of money. I have a few suggestions that aren't too expensive.

First, change to a shop with a good reputation that specializes in drivability diagnostics. Have the technician check the plug-cable firing order. Then ask the technician to check the manifold absolute pressure (MAP) sensor connections and look for small leaks in the hose. Also have the distributor module connections checked and test the module if the problem hasn't cleared up by then. Sometimes these modules fail due to heat and then work when they cool down.

With 80,000 miles it's possible, but unlikely, that the timing chain has become worn and loose and possibly jumped timing. If that's the case, the engine will sound different when it's cranked with the starter. There should also be a lot of slack in the chain. To check this, remove the distributor cap and have one person watch it while another turns the crankshaft by hand very slowly one way and then the other, just enough to take up the slack before the distributor starts to turn. If necessary, compare this to a known-good engine.

FUEL PUMP PLUNDERER

I have a 1997 Winnebago Adventurer with a 7.4-L Vortec fuel-injected V-8 engine with 30,000 miles on it. I have replaced the in-tank fuel pump three times and replaced the fuel filter three times. I've heard that leaving the fuel level low causes the pumps to run hotter and fail sooner, but I hardly ever let the gas tank get below half full. I store the coach with a full tank of gas with STA-BIL fuel storage conditioner in it. I have also replaced the in-tank wiring harness three times. Is this a common problem with the Chevy P30 chassis? Do you have a recommendation on what to do or how to correct the problem? I'm concerned every time I go on a trip.

LARRY CRAWFORD
BEAVERCREEK, OHIO

Your storage and filling procedures are OK, but three pumps in 30,000 miles is defi-

nitely excessive. It could be that one or more of the pumps were OK, and that the problem was misdiagnosed. It could also be that there was foreign matter in the fuel and tank.

What tests were used to determine that the pumps and wiring were faulty and needed replacement? Did you run pressure tests under load? Were you using original-equipment pumps, good brands of after-market units, or unknown imported parts for replacement? Did you examine them externally and internally after failure to determine what was wrong with them? Were the inline filters or fuel-pickup "socks" clogged? These are questions that need to be answered to start solving this mystery.

WET WORKHORSE

I have a 1999 Damon Daybreak on a Workhorse chassis with a 7.4-L Vortec and four-speed transmission with overdrive. I have a problem with the transmission. During a heavy rain and on water-soaked pavement, the transmission will begin to jerk violently (regardless of whether the cruise control is on). If I'm stopped and then start forward, the transmission shifts into the next gear by dropping into it very hard and with a jerk. A GM service manager said the electrical switch on the side of the transmission shifting cable was the trouble. This switch was replaced and the problem still remains. If I stop for a long period of time or overnight, the heat from the engine or transmission dries out the switch or wiring or whatever. Then normal shifting conditions return until I'm in wet weather again. How can this condition be corrected?

GARY ROBERTS
TECUMSEH, MICHIGAN

Since the switch was replaced and that did not help, I'm going to suggest something you may not have considered. Next time it acts up, check the air filter. I suspect the engine is sucking water into the air intake and partially blocking airflow. This can cause a loss of power and low vacuum that causes erratic shifting. If this is the case, the air intake needs to be modified and drain holes added. Just to hedge your bet, try to protect the switch and connections by wrapping them with duct tape and plastic temporarily to see if this helps too.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 65

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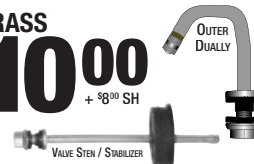
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MH2009-10

SOLAR CHARGING

I have a 1993 Newmar London Aire motorhome that has four 12-volt coach batteries with approximately 1,600-amp hours total capacity. I would like to change to a pair of six-volt batteries in series. Will the two solar panels charge the six-volt batteries, or is their resistance different from the 12-volt batteries? Does the regulator on the solar panels have adjustments to raise voltage as needed? Thank you for your help.

JAMES B. RAFFE | BASIN, WYOMING

The solar panels will be able to charge the six-volt batteries in series, just as they would be able to charge four 12-volt batteries in parallel. The amount of time it takes will vary with the depth of discharge and the amount of capacity that the new batteries have compared to the old ones.

You didn't mention what model charge controller you have. Some are adjustable and some aren't. If you haven't had any problems with charging in the past you shouldn't need to adjust the output voltage setting. This is because a 12-volt battery is really six separate cells in series, and in fact two six-volt batteries also have six cells in series. Each cell puts out about 2.1 volts, for a combined 12.6 volts fully charged at rest.

INTERMITTENT OVERHEATING II

This is in regard to "Intermittent Overheating" in the July issue, as I had an overheating issue on my 1997 American Eagle diesel-pusher, also with the 8.3-L Cummins. I took it to two shops and the second diagnosed the problem correctly. It seems that the cooling fans on this coach are not electrical or two stage; they are controlled by hydraulic pressure. As the temperature comes up there is a bypass valve that opens and allows more pressure to flow through and speed up the fans, thus doing the proper cooling. Have this bypass valve checked and you may solve your problem. It did mine and I was more than glad to pay the price.

LYLE JOHNSON | SALEM, OREGON

Thanks for writing, Lyle, and sharing your solution. The most common cure to overheating issues seems to be cleaning dirt and crankcase fume crud off the radiators. ♦

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There's nothing I like better than stopping my motorhome, cranking open a window and pointing my camera at a wild animal standing alongside the roadway. And when you've driven more than 750,000 miles on North America's roads, as I have over the years, you learn the places where you can count on spotting critters no matter the time of day, or even the time of year.

Try out these locations and I can all but guarantee you'll see the animals I've listed. In these locales, the scenery will inspire you and glimpsing the denizens that inhabit them never fails to thrill.

White-tailed deer: You can find these in any Eastern state, often on the road after dark, and in more and more Western states. For reliable sightings, though, you can't beat the Yorktown Battlefield in southeastern Virginia. Drive through the battlefield at dusk any night of the year and you'll see deer feeding in the fields where we won our inde-

pendence more than two centuries ago.

Elk and American bison: Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming provides great opportunities for viewing elk and bison (a.k.a. buffalo). I seem to have the most luck with buffalo in the northeastern part of the road system and with elk on the west side.

Black bears: The southern 200 miles of the Cassiar Highway in western British Columbia tops this category. I've seen as many as a dozen bears in an hour along this route.

Rocky Mountain goats: Logan Pass in Glacier National Park, Montana, is the place for goats. I've gotten out of the car to photograph goats at the top of the pass and have been literally surrounded by animals feeding within 30 feet of me. You'll need your dinghy as the road is restricted to vehicles 23 feet in length or less.

Bighorn sheep: Banff and Jasper national parks in Alberta, Canada, and adjoining Kootenay National Park in British

Columbia almost always have bighorns feeding in the ditches next to the roads.

Moose: You can see moose from almost any road in Alaska or northwestern Canada late in the evening or early in the morning. Be careful if moose are on or near the highway — collisions are not only deadly to the moose, they can literally destroy a vehicle. A moose in Alaska derailed a freight train a few years back.

Grizzly bears: The Park Road in Denali National Park, Alaska, is the only highway from which you are virtually assured of seeing a grizzly. You'll have to park the rig and take a bus tour because the Park Service limits the number of vehicles on the road. Many consider this daylong bus ride the highlight of their Alaskan experiences.

So grab your binoculars and a camera and hit the road. With this list of places, you can't go wrong. And even if the critters are momentarily absent, the scenery is reason enough to stop. ♦



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