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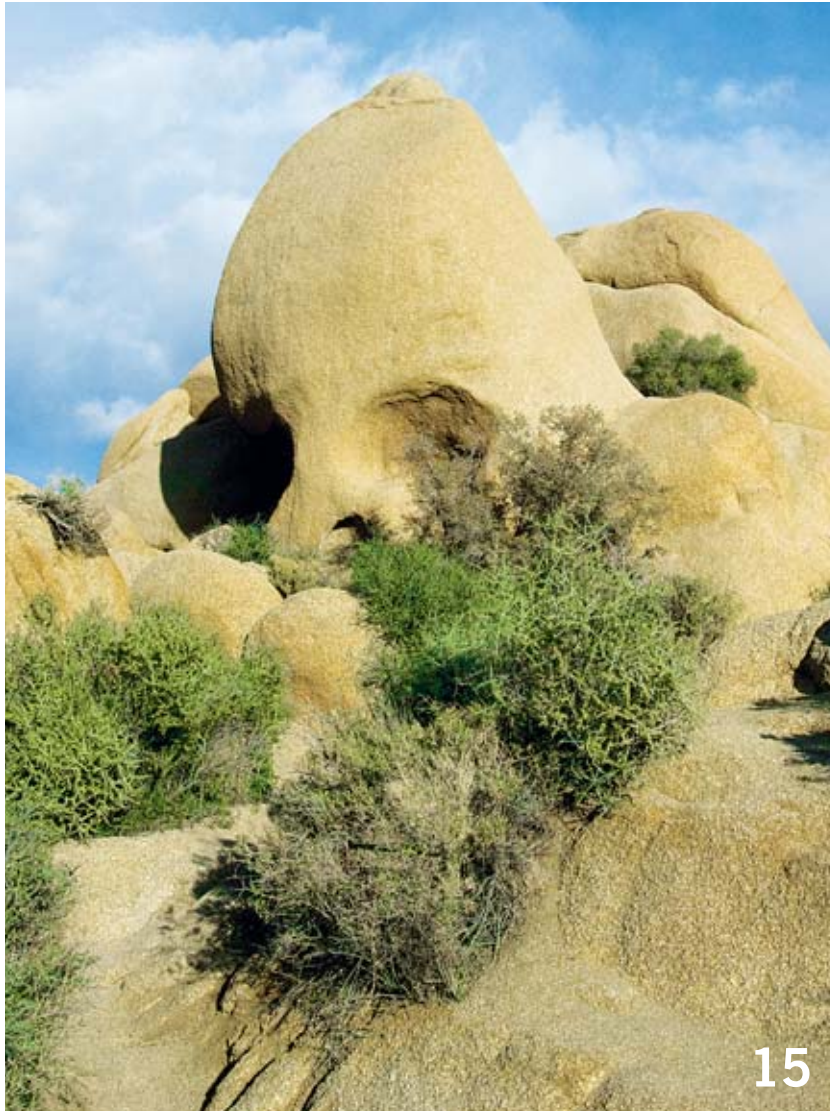
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On The Cover: Tiffin's Allegro Breeze was one of the highlights of Recreation Vehicle Industry Association's 47th annual National RV Trade Show in December 2009 in Louisville, Ky. (see page 36). Photo by Shawn Spence.

LET THE CURTAIN FALL



When the curtain went up on Tiffin's Allegro Breeze at December's National RV Trade Show in Louisville, Ky., Bob Tiffin, the company's president, pulled off the perfect surprise.

To the amazement of the audience, what was rumored to be another ultra-long, ultra-luxurious motorcoach turned out to be this year's showstopper: a 28-foot diesel-pusher — a first for our industry.

The masquerade was flawless; even Tiffin was not sure he could pull it off, although he never showed his cards beforehand. In the front of the diminutive pusher was a freestanding wheel and tire; in the rear were three more wheels and tires. To onlookers, only the "triple axle" in the rear and the separation to the wheel and tire in front of the real coach were visible from beneath the black drape that shrouded the motorhome. We were all scratching our heads, verbalizing the impossibility of introducing a 45-foot coach with triples. When the curtain lifted, "oohs" and "ahhs" rippled through the crowd — and Bob Tiffin had "gotcha" written all over his face.

Tiffin is hoping that the Breeze will be available soon. There were no prices at showtime and the company has some tweaking to do before releasing production units. Personally, I was enthralled by the compactness of the rig and how it exuded the kind of livability only found in much larger coaches. But the key will be the company's ability to pull off the engineering necessary to produce such a short-wheelbase chassis while making room for the MaxxForce 7/Allison drivetrain. We'll look forward to getting a Breeze into our test fleet — and visiting places normally taboo for large diesel-pushers.

The Allegro Breeze was just one of the many new motorhomes we viewed at the show, and our coverage begins on page 36. This year many of the attendees held their breath in anticipation of a much

more subdued motorized environment under the roof at the Louisville venue. That was certainly not the case, evident by the wrap-up of the show in this issue.

Two big players, Monaco and Fleetwood, recovering from bankruptcy, displayed a refreshing lineup of coaches, albeit driven by serious model reductions. From Fleetwood, new President John Draheim took the podium and introduced a svelte lineup of coaches, including a new entry-level model, the Encounter, that takes cues from both Class C and Class A floorplans — aimed at enthusiasts who need multiple sleeping arrangements.

Monaco, while perhaps a mere shadow of its former self, showed a selected array of coaches that target both ends of the price spectrum. Needless to say, these two former giants are back in the saddle.

Winnebago's impressive display featured upgrades to a very complete model lineup — including the promised new queen-bed floorplan for the Sprinter-based Via we tested in the October 2009 issue. Winnebago continues to market a very expansive line of motorhomes.

It was also nice to see renewed activity in the Newmar camp. Highlighting its offerings was the redesigned Mountain Aire, a luxury diesel-pusher with a 2011 model-year designation. And there were a number of new coaches introduced or reworked from Coachmen, Damon, Forest River, Four Winds and Jayco.

I was impressed with the creativity exhibited by a number of Sprinter-based Class C's and Class B's, as well as those models built on traditional vans. Leisure Travel's Unity, fitted with a Murphy bed, was quite a sight, as was the rear slide-out on Roadtrek's SS-Ideal Class B.

The year ahead promises unparalleled variety and versatility across the model and size universe. It feels good to be back. ♦

MOTORHOME

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

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

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

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

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



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



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“IF YOU ARE AN OWNER OF AN OLDER MOTORHOME, HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANY DISCRIMINATION AT PRIVATE CAMPGROUNDS BECAUSE OF THE AGE OF YOUR RIG?”

That’s the question we asked in our December 2009 issue, and here are some of the replies we received.

SEA BREEZE HAS AGED GRACEFULLY

Just wanted to let you know that we have encountered several RV parks with a “10 Years or Newer” policy. We have a 33-foot Sea Breeze (International RV) that is in beautiful condition inside and out. We have just decided that if we were asked for the “year” of our motorhome we would tell them what they want to hear! How many people can look at a motorhome and tell what year it really is? While I understand why these parks have this policy, it really should have nothing to do with the age of the vehicle, but rather the condition.

JUDY AND GARY ROOT | BANNING, CALIF.

SHABBINESS COMES IN ALL AGES

We own a 1996 Foretravel, and it is beautiful. We have not yet been denied a site due to its age, but we don’t patronize campgrounds with that stipulation. I think that privately owned campgrounds have every right to limit rentals as they see fit, but “public” campgrounds whose sites are not privately owned should be much more careful about discriminating. *All* campgrounds should have the right to deny space to *any* unit that is shabby, and poorly maintained, regardless of age. Age alone, however, should not be the primary criteria.

STEVE AND GINNY HILL | TAMPA, FLA.

GO AHEAD AND GIGGLE

We are a family of four (two kids ages 8 and 10) that cannot afford a newer motorhome. We love taking short trips and were spending too much money on hotels and eating out; so when we found our ’93 Four Winds 29-foot Class C, we were thrilled. Not so much discrimination from campgrounds themselves, but we have seen snickering and finger-pointing at our motorhome’s expense. It’s not the most beautiful RV out there, and my husband’s homemade wood levelers have gotten many comments.

We have made some unforgettable memories and seen some great things that we would not have had staying within city limits in our hotels. We even braved a 2,500-mile round trip last summer and are planning to try another this year.

I don’t think older motorhomes get the respect they deserve. So ours isn’t shiny and new, and maybe doesn’t have all the bells and whistles that a newer model does, but it gives us the same experiences traveling, camping and spending family time together. We love our motorhome as is, so go ahead and giggle — we’re having a great time, and not drowning in a huge monthly payment doing it!

TRACY RICHTER | COLUMBIA, MO.



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**“THE BEST THING ABOUT WEATHERING A STORM
IS ENJOYING THE RAINBOW AT THE END OF IT.”**

Ever since the day Tiffin Motorhomes opened its doors, we've believed that if you can build the best product and then stand behind it staunchly, everything will take care of itself. So it comes as no surprise to us that while the motor home industry continues to endure tough times, our company is doing quite well. Thanks to the hard work and diligence of everyone at Tiffin – from Tim, Van, and Lex to all our dedicated employees and national network of dealers – we see only blue skies ahead for our company. And as anyone who spends time on the road in an RV can tell you, blue skies are what it's all about.



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ALWAYS WELCOME

We've traveled in two bus conversions I did. No million-dollar paint jobs. Our MCI-9 bus is painted flat black — not pretty, I'll admit. We have ended up way back, in the back row sometimes, but have never been refused a space.

ROY W. RANUM
SILVER BAY, MINN.

A 'FLIP,' AND HE'S IN

I am a new RVer and am enjoying my first issue of your magazine. Regarding the discrimination issue, I have a 1994 Jayco Eagle Class C and found that my local award-winning RV resort would not allow any RVs in their storage yard that were older than 10 years. They said that the million-dollar coaches that frequent the resort don't like seeing the older, weathered coaches coming and going. Luckily, I had just finished a complete interior and exterior "flip" of my 1994 and it looked pretty close to brand-new. The resort manager agreed to meet with me in order to inspect my rig and ultimately allowed me a storage contract. He also commended me on the flip, which I will never, ever do again, by the way.

DARIN BIAMONTE
VIA E-MAIL

A FIGHT FOR POWER

In the December 2009 issue, Steve Dudas advocated the use of a "voltage management system" ("Managing Your Voltage," P.O. Box). These things do work, but systems such as these are essentially constant voltage transformers and do not make energy out of thin air. In order to boost voltage, they must draw extra current from the mains. By doing this, the user's voltage stays at a safe level, but everyone else on that feeder circuit (likely a whole parking loop) may suffer even lower voltage. That's not a very neighborly thing to do. Having several RVs so equipped on one feeder can result in everyone fighting each other for the power. Because of this, some campgrounds I have stayed in prohibit the use of such equipment.

LESTER SHIELDS
WEIRTON, W.VA.

WHERE HAVE CLASSY COACHES GONE?

I have owned six motorhomes during the

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past 30 years. I liked the paint scheme of the earlier models that had horizontal lines and in my humble opinion they had a classy look to them, i.e., like the older Barth motorhomes or the TelStar motorhome (which I used to own). Then something strange happened about 10 years ago. They started sticking on gaudy swirls everywhere. These aesthetics remind me of childish graffiti. I refuse to buy a new motorhome with swirls.

BOB JONES
LOS ALTOS, CALIF.

REAR WINDOW ON THE WORLD

I own a 29-foot Class C motorhome with two sliders that I am very happy with. Occasionally, I look on the Internet at Class A motorhomes in the 30- to 32-foot range with the thought of upgrading someday. I am very surprised that I cannot find a Class A with a rear window. I go camping to enjoy nature and my motorhome provides the comforts of home. Sometimes my back window looks out on the ocean or bay, other times I may be near a lake or just out in the woods. My rear window, although it's small,

allows me to enjoy nature from the bedroom. For some reason many of the new Class A's have no rear window and are designed to be extremely dark when closed up and not much better when opened. Even though I would like a Class A motorhome, I would never purchase one without a rear window. I'm quite sure there are many people who would agree with me.

ALDEN WHITEHEAD
EAST NORTHPORT, N.Y.

Alden, we've tracked down a few Class A's available with rear windows for you to check out: Four Winds International's Hurricane and Windsport floorplans; Gulf Stream Coach's Independence; and Holiday Rambler's Admiral (33SDD, 34SBD, 35SFD).

DINGHY DEFICIENCY

I'm surprised by how little auto salesmen know about dinghy towing. While shopping for a new vehicle to tow behind our motorhome, I found that most salesmen had little or no knowledge about towing — they told me to look in the vehicle's instruction

manual. Dealerships need to educate their sales staff on dinghy towing, which might increase their sales.

SANDI MILBURN
WINNEBAGO, ILL.

Sandi, we always stress that prospective buyers should visit the dealer and ask to see a copy of the owner's manual. Look in the index under "flat towing" or "recreational towing" to find instructions for towing the vehicle in question. This will not only tell you if the vehicle is, in fact, towable, but also what is involved. Some vehicles are easy to tow, while others may require that very specific procedures be followed before/during towing to prevent damage.

Question:

Which automobile do you use as your dinghy vehicle and why?

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

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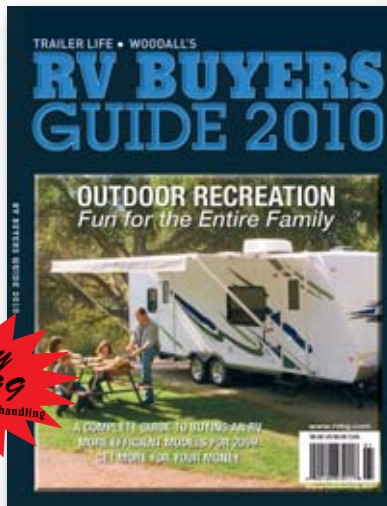
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escapes

edited by PATRICIA MARROQUIN

EVENTS | NOTEWORTHY | CROSSROADS

Like Las Vegas or New York City, Yosemite National Park in California is one of those attractions that's open 24/7, 365 days a year. And while summertime in some areas of the park such as Yosemite Valley can be busy, March — falling at the tail end of the park's winter season with average temperatures of 58 degrees (high) and 32 degrees (low) — may be the perfect time to hop into your coach and pay a visit. In fact, Yosemite calls its December-March wintertime “a season of snow and solitude.”

Located in the central Sierra Nevada about 180 miles east of San Francisco, Yosemite encompasses nearly 750,000 acres (or about 1,200 square miles). There are 214 miles of paved roads, 800 miles of trails and two rivers (Tuolumne and Merced).

Once the fee is paid at one of five main entrances — three are open year-round — you are free to travel throughout

the park without a reservation. However, camping reservations are essential if you plan to spend the night. The park has 10 campgrounds that can accommodate RVs of varying lengths, and there are private campgrounds outside the park.

Scenery, sports and photography are among the park's big draws. Spectacular landmarks include Bridalveil Fall, El Capitan and Half Dome.

A winter survey conducted by the park in February 2008 found that 91 percent of visitors were U.S. residents, with 89 percent of those from California; and 26 percent of respondents were visiting Yosemite for the first time. Whether it's your first visit or your 101st, Yosemite's “doors” are always open. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/yose, and for RV camping details, see www.nps.gov/yose/playourvisit/rvcamping.htm.

— *Patricia Marroquin*



THE SEASON FOR SNOW AND SOLITUDE

YOSEMITE WARMLY
WELCOMES VISITORS
AT WINTER'S END

MAR. 5-7 | Wake up and smell the flowers at the 75th annual **Azalea Trail** home and garden tour in Houston. This three-day event features tours of private homes and historic sites, such as the Bayou Bend, Rienzi and River Oaks Garden Club Forum of Civics Building and Gardens, all adorned with pink, purple, white, red and yellow azaleas in full springtime bloom; 713-523-2483, www.riveroaks.gardenclub.org.

MAR. 6 | Snowshoeing followed by beer tasting is the perfect way to enjoy the cold weather and then warm yourself back up at the 4th annual **Suds & Snow** event at Timber Ridge Resort in Traverse City, Mich. The beer samples will include a wide variety of Michigan breweries, and the event will feature food and live music from the Mike Moran Band. A ticket includes a souvenir

glass, trail pass and access to the tasting and entertainment. Best of all, the event is being held at an RV and recreation resort; 231-947-2770, www.timberridgeresort.net.



MAR. 6-7 | Rock and roll over to the 24th annual **Gem and Mineral Show** at the Klamath County Fairgrounds in Klamath Falls, Ore. Presented by the Rock and Arrowhead Club of Klamath Falls, this “rockin’” event will feature vendors with rocks, gems, minerals, jewelry and equipment for sale. Master craftsmen will demonstrate their crafts and

MAR. 28

Ring in the springtime with a classic down-home festival — the annual **Fremont Daffodil Festival** in Fremont, N.C. Bring the whole family for some music, food (everything from grilled turkey legs to funnel cakes), crafts, gifts, historical displays and live entertainment. The kids can enjoy the Children’s Alley or race on a miniature NASCAR track while you appreciate the art and daffodils on display; 919-242-5724, www.fremontdaffodil.festival.com.



techniques, and displays will showcase their work. Even the kids will be excited to learn about rocks with activities such as gold panning and treasure hunts; 541-545-6773, www.klamathrockclub.org.

MAR. 7 | Whether you’re Irish or not, put on some green and have some fun at the family-friendly **Saint Patrick’s Day Parade** in Belmar, N.J. The parade was originally intended to be a showcase for the “Irish Riviera,” as Belmar is a picturesque beach town. It is the largest parade for this holiday in the state, with more than 6,000 marchers, including pipe bands, string bands, high school bands, floats and even a beauty pageant; 732-280-2648, www.belmarparade.com.

MAR. 12-14 | Celebrate your spring break the sandhill crane way at the **Monte Vista Crane Festival** in Monte Vista, Colo. More than 20,000 4-foot-tall sandhill cranes journey to the San Luis Valley each year to strut their stuff. Besides the cranes there are thousands of waterfowl and wildlife experts offering guided tours to explain it all. A craft fair, dinner with

live entertainment and a pancake breakfast provide sustenance while you observe the beauty of the cranes in this scenic Colorado town; 719-852-3552, www.cranefest.com.

MAR. 20-21 | Experience a weekend filled with truly American music at the **Old Town Temecula Bluegrass Festival** in Temecula, Calif. Among the performers will be Munde, one of the world’s foremost five-string banjo players, and even off-stage there’s plenty of entertainment, as musicians gather along the streets to entertain the crowds. All daytime concerts, workshops and jam sessions are free, and RV parking is available in town, so grab your banjo and head over; 951-678-1456, www.temeculabluegrass.org.

MAR. 26-27 | A barbecue cook-off and much more draws tens of thousands of visitors every year to the **Rio Rancho Pork & Brew BBQ State Championship** in Rio Rancho, N.M. There will be live entertainment, fun jumps, pig races and tons of delicious food to fill your stomach; 888-746-7262, www.rioranchoNM.org.

RV SHOWS

MARCH 4-7
53rd Annual Colorado RV, Sports, Boat and Travel Show
Denver; 303-892-6800

MARCH 5-7
15th Annual Atlantic City RV and Camping Show
Atlantic City, N.J.; 732-616-2922

MARCH 5-7
19th Annual New Orleans Spring RV and Camping Show
Kenner, La.; 337-436-4355

MARCH 12-14
Campers World RV Show
York, Pa.; 610-767-5026

MARCH 12-14
Columbus RV Super Show
Columbus, Ohio; 941-780-0538

MARCH 12-14
6th Annual Virginia RV Show
Hampton, Va.; 804-425-6556

MARCH 19-21
23rd Annual Acadiana RV and Camping Show
Lafayette, La.; 337-436-4355



RV BUSINESS HONORS TOP 50 DEALERS

MotorHome's industry-oriented sister publication, *RV Business*, honored 50 North American RV retailers late last year for their professionalism and dedication to consumer care as part of the 2nd annual "RV Business Top 50 Dealer Awards" reception and dinner.

The dinner, at which guests honored dealers and heard remarks from keynote speaker Mike Huckabee, was held during the Recreation Vehicle Dealers Association's annual RV Dealers International Convention in Las Vegas.

In this, the first year including Canadian dealers, the response was significant given the general economic atmosphere.

"Our goals are twofold and really very simple," Mike Schneider, chief executive officer of Affinity Group Inc., publisher of *RV Business* and *MotorHome*, told attendees. "We want to showcase some of the finest examples of top-notch dealers in this country and at the same time help raise the bar for the entire industry. And we do so at a time when ... the RV industry has been hit hard by what is arguably the worst economic time in the last 30 years."

But Schneider pointed out that recent indicators have pointed to an upswing in the market that may again lead the nation out of a downturn.

An independent panel of industry veterans coordinated by *RV Business* selected the top 50 dealers based on applications submitted by dealers who had been nominated by North American RV builders. Winners were deemed to be among North America's best in terms of finance and insurance, technician training, aftermarket stores, civic involvement and — more than anything else — consumer care.

"What really makes this story amazing is that even with the headwinds of 2009, we received about 40 percent more applicants than in 2008," said *RV Business* Publisher Sherman Goldenberg.

The 50 honorees collectively generated about \$1.6 billion in sales last year and have received hundreds of awards from manufacturers and their local communities.

Here, in alphabetical order, are the 10 North American "Blue Ribbon" dealers recognized as being over and above the rest: ArrKann Trailer and RV Centre; General RV Center; Guaranty RV; Ketelsen Campers of Colorado; Lazydays RV SuperCenter; Mike Thompson's RV Superstores; Parkview RV Center; Poulsbo RV; Tom Johnson Camping Center; and Topper's Camping Center.

THE TOP 50 DEALERS

ABERDEEN RV CENTER, Aberdeen, Miss.
ALOHA RV, Albuquerque, N.M.
ALTMANS WINNEBAGO, Carson, Calif.
AMERICAN RV SALES AND SERVICE, Grand Rapids, Mich.
APACHE VILLAGE RV CENTER, Hazelwood, Mo.
ARRKANN TRAILER AND RV CENTRE, Edmonton, Alberta
BECKLEY'S CAMPING CENTER, Thurmont, Md.
BIG COUNTRY RV, Bend, Ore.
BILL PLEMMONS RV WORLD, Rural Hall, N.C.
BOAT N RV SUPERSTORES, Rockwood, Tenn.
CAN-AM RV CENTRE, London, Ontario
CAROLINA COACH AND CAMPER, Claremont, N.C.
COACHLIGHT RV SALES, Carthage, Mo.
COATES RV CENTER, Columbus, Minn.
COLONIAL AIRSTREAM AND ITASCA, Lakewood, N.J.
CROWN RV, Conyers, Ga.
CURTIS TRAILERS, Portland, Ore.
DANDY RV SUPERSTORE, Anniston, Ala.
DIXIE RV SUPERSTORE, Newport News, Va.
DODD RV, Yorktown, Va.
GENERAL RV CENTER, Wixom, Mich.
GIANT RV, Montclair, Calif.
GREENWAY RV SALES AND SERVICE, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.
GUARANTY RV, Junction City, Ore.
HILLTOP TRAILER AND SALES, Fridley, Minn.
KETELSEN CAMPERS OF COLORADO, Wheat Ridge, Colo.
KINGS CAMPERS, Wausau, Wis.
LAZYDAYS RV SUPERCENTER, Seffner, Fla.
LITTLE DEALER LITTLE PRICES, Phoenix, Ariz.
MIKE THOMPSON'S RV SUPERSTORES, Santa Fe Springs, Calif.
MODERN TRAILER SALES, Anderson, Ind.
MOUNT COMFORT RV, Greenfield, Ind.
PARKVIEW RV CENTER, Smyrna, Del.
POULSBO RV, Kent, Wash.
PLEASURELAND RV CENTER, St. Cloud, Minn.
QUALITY RV CENTER, Draper, Utah
REINES RV CENTER, Manassas, Va.
RICHARDSON'S RV CENTERS, Riverside, Calif.
RICK'S RV CENTER, Joliet, Ill.
ROY ROBINSON MOTORHOME AND RV CENTER, Marysville, Wash.
RV AMERICA INC., Johnstown, Colo.
STEINBRING MOTORCOACH, Garfield, Minn.
TENNESSEE RV SALES AND SERVICE, Knoxville, Tenn.
TERRELL CAMPING CENTER, Terrell, N.C.
THOMPSON FAMILY RV, Davenport, Iowa
TOM JOHNSON CAMPING CENTER, Marion, N.C.
TOPPER'S CAMPING CENTER, Waller, Texas
TRAFFORD'S RV, Center Conway, N.H.
VEURINKS' RV CENTER, Grand Rapids, Mich.
WOODY'S RV WORLD, Red Deer, Alberta

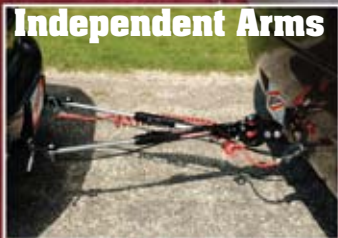


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THE MIGHTY MUSH ROUTE

PHOTO: BLM

If you're traveling to Anchorage, Alaska, be sure to stop in nearby Wasilla and see the Iditarod Trail Headquarters and Gift Shop/Museum.

The Iditarod Trail, now a *National Historic Trail*, began as a mail route and supply trail during Alaska's gold rush. In 1925, the trail captured the nation's attention when relay teams of heroic men and dogs mushed diphtheria serum to the stricken city of Nome. In 1973, Joe Redington Sr. organized a race that used the same trail as that lifesaving run. This became the annual 1,000-mile Iditarod Sled Dog Race, labeled "The Last Great Race on Earth."

The museum contains artifacts and photos telling the history of the race and of the courageous men and women who run it. Race footage from previous years is shown daily. Outside during the summer months, you can hop on a cart pulled by Iditarod sled dogs for a short but lovely ride through birch, spruce and wildflowers. A veteran Iditarod musher is on hand and available to answer questions.

For more information, call 907-376-5155, ext. 108, or go to www.iditarod.com.

— Norma Lewis

IT'S A SMALL WORLD

Blink and you could miss it.

It's the "World's Smallest Museum," located on U.S. Highway 60 in Superior, Ariz., about 65 miles east of Phoenix and 25 miles west of Globe, Ariz.

The 134-square-foot structure contains 10 glass-enclosed display booths filled with "artifacts of ordinary life." With five booths on each side of the shack and a walkway down the middle, that leaves only 80 square feet to display the eclectic mix of items.

Its "artifacts" pay tribute to "common people" and "the world's extraordinary work force." Inside you'll find an 1850s frying pan; a gasoline-powered iron; an autographed photo of Porky and Buckwheat from "Our Gang"; a 1917 Corona typewriter and one of its successors, a 1984 Compaq computer; political campaign buttons; Beatles and Bing Crosby 45s; and much more.

A gift shop sells such items as jalapeño pepper hot sauce and "Apache Tears Good Luck Stones," semi-transparent gemstones found near Superior.

Admission to the museum is free.

Since it won't take long to tour this roadside attraction, you may want to stop at such nearby spots as Boyce Thompson Arboretum, two miles away; Buckboard City Café, next to the museum and open for breakfast and lunch; and saguaro-filled Tonto National Forest. Area RV parks include Superior RV Park, surrounded by the peaks of Picket Post, Apache Leap and Iron Mountain; and Apache Gold RV Park next to the Apache Gold Casino Resort near Globe, Ariz.

For more information, call 520-689-5800, or visit www.worldssmallestmuseum.com. — Patricia Marroquin ♦



PHOTO: ELDRED REANEY

MAGICAL MARKERS

VIVID DESERT WILDFLOWERS, MONSTROUS BOULDERS AND THOSE WHIMSICAL LOOKING TREES COMBINE TO MAKE JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK A SPECIAL PLACE

The vast deserts of America's great Southwest may look dry and void of color most of the year, but just below the sandy surface billions upon billions of tiny wildflower seeds lie sleeping, waiting for those magical years when the winter and spring rains come at just the right time and in the right amount. Too little rain and they don't germinate; too much and they may be washed away. Who knows when those magical years will occur, but when they do you'll want to be there to see the resulting explosion of color.

We'd been waiting for just such a year to photograph California's Joshua Tree National Park and had heard that mid-March would be the perfect time. A call to one of the visitor centers confirmed that the wildflowers were in bloom and the Joshua trees were sporting huge, creamy white blossoms.

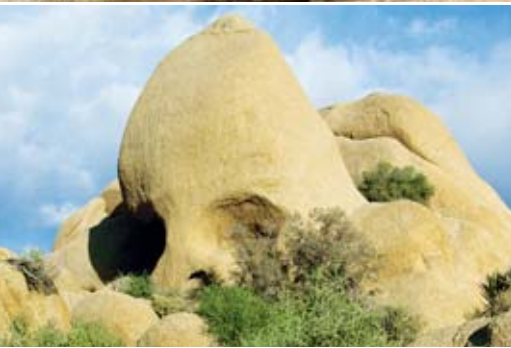
We arrived the 14th of March. Perfect timing. Leaving Interstate 10 at exit 168 we camped on Bureau of

From top: Co-author Ellen Thane photographs the "monzogranite" in Joshua Tree National Park. Water and a dump station are available at Black Rock Campground, where the motorhomes sit in spacious sites nestled amid the Joshua trees. A Mojave yucca flower blooms in the 800,000-acre California park.





Joshua Tree attracts rock climbers who ascend boulder faces that appear impossible to climb. Above, a couple take a hike through Cholla Garden. Be careful to not brush up against the sharp cactus, which has been called the “jumping cholla.” Skull Rock, below left, is a popular photographic subject. A blossoming beavertail cactus, bottom, is among the plants and shrubs that can be found in the park.



Land Management land just south of the park entrance. Located nine-tenths of a mile north of I-10 on the west side of Cottonwood Springs Road and almost directly opposite the “no commercial vehicles allowed in park” sign, we found the whole area awash in a sea of color. Surprisingly, there were only a few other RVs making use of the many spacious camping spots.

heavy gales for the rest of our two-week visit, making flower photography a challenge.

As we traveled the 40-mile paved road through the park, our first stop was the Cottonwood Visitor Center, where we picked up a wildflower guide, a map and fliers listing a number of ranger-led activities. A swing through the adjoining campground revealed a water filling station and dump-site available for a \$5 fee.

Half a mile down the road we took a short walk to Cottonwood Springs Oasis, filled with thick California fan palms and large cottonwoods, all planted in the early 1900s by miners and pioneers who used this spring as their source of water. Grinding holes in nearby rocks tell the story of an even more ancient use of the oasis by Native Americans centuries ago. Several longer trails branch off from here to Lost Palms Oasis, the ruins of several old mines or a view of the Salton Sea.

Before driving farther north through the rest of the park, be sure you have everything you need with you, as there are no services available along the way. That includes a full gas tank, plenty of water, food, sunscreen, hat, comb for removing cactus, binoculars and a first aid kit.

Continuing north along Pinto Basin Road we passed great mounds of red chuparosa blossoming in the lowlands. Ribbons of blue lined the roadsides with Mojave lupine, Canterbury bells and wild heliotrope. Tiny spheres of chia tinged the desert floor with soft shades of burgundy interspersed with clumps of delicate white desert pin-cushion. Yellow gleamed from clumps of desert dandelion, bushes of bladder pod

Though Joshua Tree has a number of campgrounds, they are all without utility hookups and are designed for tents or small rigs. We did see several RVs as long as 40 feet in a few of these spots but park rangers discourage such an attempt as there are probably less than a handful of spots that are large enough and navigating a long rig around some of the huge boulders and Joshua trees can be quite a challenge. Several commercial campgrounds are available in nearby towns such as Indio or Twentynine Palms but that means a longer drive each day to explore the park.

Morning dawned with a glowing sunrise. The weather was mild, the air still and perfect for photographing wildflowers. Having never been to Joshua Tree, we decided to spend the day familiarizing ourselves with the park so we could plan our days to maximize our opportunity for flower photography. After all, the flowers had just opened and would still look just as good tomorrow for photographs. What a mistake. If you ever find that you are in a wildflower area for photographs on such a day, forget about everything else and take those flower pictures immediately. We sure wish we had, for that night the wind began to blow and continued in varying degrees from mild to

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and desert sunflowers. Rocky hillsides appeared as exquisite flower gardens with golden brittlebush, apricot mallow and red spined barrel cactus filling every crevice. Thick balls of mistletoe dripping with red berries hung from the branches of small desert trees. We were on sensory overload, taking notes on where we would return for photographs.

As we approached Smoke Tree Wash, the delicate branches of the trees, though not blooming yet, etched the deep blue sky with lacy gray patterns. Along Porcupine Wash, large clusters of ghost flower glistened in the sunlight. After passing through Fried Liver Wash, we came to Ocotillo Patch — the tips of their tall wands just about to open in brilliant orange.

The Cholla Garden, a few miles beyond, glowed in shades of soft, silver green. Hike the trail with caution, though, as this cactus isn't referred to as "jumping cholla" for no reason. Just the slightest brush and a piece will imbed itself painfully into your skin. Remove it carefully or it will just stick to your hands — that's what that comb is for.

As we continued north, the look of the desert changed and the temperature grew cooler. Wildflowers were more sparse and creosote bush began to appear. A roadside exhibit describes the merging of the Colorado Desert we were leaving with the Mojave Desert beyond.

Then the road snakes through enormous piles of monstrous boulders. Rock climbers were scaling the heights, honing their skills before trying such climbs as Yosemite or Mount Everest. Soon we were among the Joshua trees, whimsical looking plants with arms that twist in all directions. They were in their glory with tips heavy in blossom. The story goes that Mormon pioneers named them Joshua trees because they reminded them of Joshua holding out his arms in supplication to God. They were considered hideous by some people and cut down to make paper, build fences or use as firewood before their uniqueness became appreciated.

Bypassing, for now, the road leading to the western section of the park, we continued north to the Oasis Visitor Center in the town of Twentynine Palms.

Through murals and pictorial displays we learned the story of a remarkable

woman named Minerva Hoyt, who loved these desert lands with the unusual plant life. After witnessing the massive poaching of cactus and destruction of the Joshua trees as well as land speculators who attempted to sell orchard lots by tying oranges to Joshua trees, she waged an almost one-person battle to convince President Roosevelt, in 1936, to preserve the area as a National Monument. Later, in 1994, it was elevated to national park status.

While there we made reservations for a tour of the Desert Queen Ranch, also known as Keys Ranch. Though we didn't see it advertised anywhere, a wonderful museum filled with ancient pottery and other artifacts from prehistoric times is located at this visitor center. Reservations are needed to visit.

Behind the information building, a short trail led us through the Oasis of Mara, where a multitude of birds serenaded from towering palms. Plaques along the way reveal a vivid story of ancient man thriving in this part of the southwestern desert long before the arrival of European settlers. The water tastes better here than down at the Cottonwood end of the park, so we made a point of filling our water bottles every time we passed through the Oasis Visitor Center. After gassing up in Twentynine Palms we returned to our campsite, stopping along the way for a few flower photos.

Sometime during the night the wind began, rocking the motorhome and rattling the window awnings. Realizing we didn't have a chance of getting any flower photos the next day, we decided to just relax and enjoy seeing them along the roadside as we drove up to explore the northwest section of the park. At least we could photograph rock patterns without having to worry about them moving around.

At the White Tank campground a little boulder-hopping led us up to Arch Rock, an opening 25 feet long and 15 feet high in the "monzogranite" that makes up these house-size boulders. Then, taking the northwestern branch of Park Boulevard toward the Joshua Tree entrance, we watched in amazement as rock climbers ascended boulder faces that looked impossible to climb. Stopping to take the popular photograph of Skull Rock and the surrounding geometric patterns, we almost didn't see Elephant Rock standing just to the right.

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MAGICAL MARKERS

Look carefully and you can't miss it.

The park's third visitor center, Joshua Tree, is located at the end of Park Boulevard, where it intersects Highway 62. A nice gift shop and interesting displays make it well worth visiting. You may also fill your water bottles there. Turning west on Highway 62, we traveled on to explore the campgrounds at Indian Cove (mostly tent sites used by climbers) and Black Rock with its spacious sites beneath giant Joshua trees. Finding them a bit remote from the major part of the park, we decided we were content with our lovely campsite to the south.

For an entire two weeks we explored Joshua Tree — driving the backroads, hiking the trails and snatching every moment of quieter winds for flower photography. Each day brought a new landscape as the bloom marched northward through the park, changing color as flowers closed and new ones opened.

One of the highlights of our stay was a trip out the Old Dale Road, a 4WD trail to a long-abandoned mine where much of the equipment and several bright-yellow vehicles quietly rust away. The nearby Black Eagle Mine Road looked dry and void of interest but then we turned a corner and a broad expanse of California poppies filled the valley floor, dancing in the wind, like a shimmering golden carpet.

A hike into Hidden Valley led us through a narrow opening to a secret place among the rocks where tall grass once grew and old yarns tell of rustlers hiding stolen cattle.

With 792,623 acres of land, Joshua Tree absorbs 1.5 million visitors each year so well that we often found ourselves completely alone at viewpoints and along the trails. Most visitors, like us, come to photograph the flowers, but you certainly don't need to wait for a stellar wildflower year to visit. (Park rangers told us they happen on an average of every three years.)

This national park with its mesmerizing landscape and vibrant history will work its magic for you any time of year except, perhaps, the hot summer months, when temperatures can climb above 100 degrees. We'll brave some of that heat, though, in early June when the smoke trees are said to bloom, turning the desert washes to rivers of blue. ♦

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ATTRACTIONS THAT WON'T COST YOU A DIME

by PAMELA SELBERT



Among the attractions at the 90-acre St. Louis Zoo is Penguin and Puffin Coast, a walk-through habitat for oceangoing birds.



For as long as I can remember, my family has taken at least a dozen mini-vacations every year, day trips that don't require leaving town — or if so, just barely. We're fortunate to live in St. Louis, a city that offers a host of attractions for tourists and locals, but what's better still is that so many of these are free. In fact, there are more "freebies" available in the St. Louis region than anywhere else outside the nation's capital.

You won't find too many areas where you can visit a different family-oriented point of interest every day for more than two months and never pay a dime, other than for the fuel to get there. And many of these free attractions are within easy walking distance of others.

Here is a sampling of what

this diverse area has to offer at no charge. It would be daunting to detail every attraction offered, so a more comprehensive list, minus the descriptions, follows.

ANHEUSER-BUSCH BREWERY

In 1860, German immigrant Eberhard Anheuser bought a small brewery along the Mississippi River in St. Louis. Four years later he was joined in the business by another German immigrant, Adolphus Busch, who eventually married Anheuser's daughter, Lilly. Busch's dream of creating a universally popular brand came true when the company introduced Budweiser in 1876.

The Anheuser-Busch Brewery is a vast complex of brick buildings on 100 acres located in the historic Soulard region

just south of downtown St. Louis. An enormous wall on the side of the lager cellars features a sign that is blazoned with an oversize team of Budweiser Clydesdales pulling the famous red beer wagon.

Ninety-minute tours take visitors through several buildings to learn about the Budweiser brewing and packaging process and the Clydesdale horses. At the Brew House, a *National Historic Landmark* where elegant brew kettles, wall murals, ornate wrought-iron railings and hop vine chandeliers are as they were a century ago, visitors learn about the famous Budweiser brewing process. At the Bevo Packaging Plant, you can watch as the beer is bottled and canned.

Tours also include a visit to the Clydesdale stables, which

were once used to house the Busch family's horses and carriages. Afterward, visitors over age 21 can enjoy two complimentary samples of Anheuser-Busch beers and minors can have soft drinks, and finish up, if they like, at the gift shop. Tours are ADA accessible.

BLACK MADONNA SHRINE AND GROTTO

In 1927, Cardinal John Glennon, archbishop of St. Louis, invited several Franciscan Brothers from Poland to come to Eureka, Mo. (about 35 miles southwest of downtown St. Louis). Among those who came was Brother Bronislaus Luszcz, who as a young man had watched pilgrims en route to the shrine of Mary in Czestochowa, where the Black Madonna painting, allegedly by St. Luke, was displayed. Over

PHOTOS: ST. LOUIS CVB; ANHEUSER-BUSCH BREWERY



The famous Budweiser Clydesdale horses can be seen at the Anheuser-Busch Brewery and Grant's Farm.

the centuries the painting, so named for the dark complexions of Mary and Jesus, had been moved to Constantinople, then Kiev and finally to Poland.

To honor the pilgrims' devotion to Mary, Brother Luszcz began in 1937 a 22-year labor of love building a series of grottos from Missouri tuff (which looks similar to sponge rock) and seashells. Walls of the nine grottos — the Stations of the Cross, Our Lady of Sorrows, the Assumption, the Nativity and others — are decorated with costume jewelry donated by visitors and foreign missions.

Paths wind among the grottos to the Chapel of the Hills, a lovely open-air chapel decorated with colorful mosaics and paintings of Our Lady of Czestochowa. The Shrine is partially ADA accessible; sever-

al of the grottos have stairs.

GRANT'S FARM

This former homestead of President Ulysses S. Grant is one of only two houses still standing that were hand-built and occupied by a U.S. president. Grant and his wife, Julia Dent, had received 80 acres of land as a wedding gift in 1848 (her family owned many more adjacent acres), and he built his cabin there seven years later. The Grant farmstead passed out of the family at his death in 1885, and was owned by various people until it was purchased by August A. Busch Sr. in 1907.

Busch had the Grant cabin moved to St. Louis from nearby Old Orchard, Mo., where it had been since being displayed at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. He also developed the

land into a country estate, bringing in deer, horses and cattle.

Busch's son, August A. Busch Jr., continued in the tradition, expanding the variety of species to include two African elephants, lemurs and parrots, and in 1954 opened Grant's Farm to the public.

Today more than 1,000 animals from six continents live on the 281-acre wildlife preserve. A tram takes visitors through the Deer Park, then to the Tier Garden, where children can feed baby goats from small bottles of milk and watch animal exhibits and shows. The 19th-century styled Bauernhof Courtyard includes stables and a carriage building that houses a collection of more than a dozen vehicles dating from the 18th century.

Grant's Farm, operated by Anheuser-Busch, is also home to

the Budweiser Clydesdales and serves as a breeding and training facility. The facility is ADA accessible and offers free admission, but there is a parking fee.

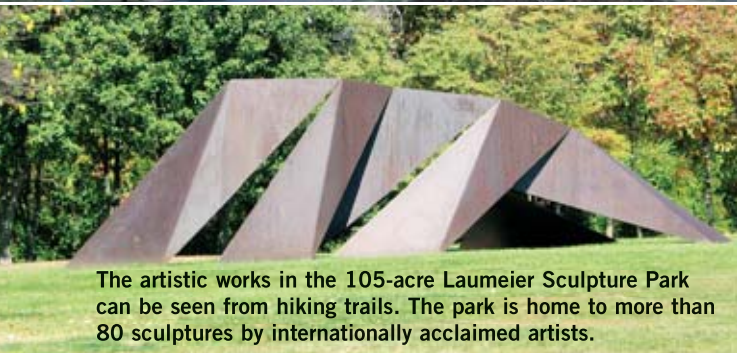
LAUMEIER SCULPTURE PARK

This 105-acre sculpture park, opened in 1976, is home to a collection of more than 80 sculptures by internationally acclaimed artists, plus a museum of art for contemporary sculpture, drawings, paintings, ceramics and photography.

In 1968 Matilda Laumeier donated 72 acres to the St. Louis County Parks Department in memory of her husband, Henry. The former Laumeier residence has been remodeled to house the museum and gift shop. Hiking trails wind visitors through the park past the sculptures. The



The Old Courthouse was the site of slavery trials. The Gateway Arch at the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial dominates the skyline.



The artistic works in the 105-acre Laumeier Sculpture Park can be seen from hiking trails. The park is home to more than 80 sculptures by internationally acclaimed artists.

museum is ADA accessible, as are some of the trails. Braille texts are located near many of the sculptures.

MISSOURI HISTORY MUSEUM

Run by the Missouri Historical Society, the museum documents and interprets the history of the St. Louis area, with 2 million books, archival papers, photos and artifacts in the collection.

Among the hundreds of items displayed here is the Louisiana Purchase transfer, which passed the Louisiana Territory from Spain to France on March 9, 1804, then to the United States the following day; Meriwether Lewis, co-captain of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, was among the signers. Personal artifacts from his co-captain William Clark are also here, as

are items from some of St. Louis' cultural icons, including Chuck Berry, Tina Turner, Miles Davis and composer Scott Joplin.

Founded in 1866, the museum was housed in various locations until 1913, when it moved to its current site in Forest Park; the Jefferson Memorial, as the museum originally was called, was built with funds from the 1904 World's Fair. In 1989 the archives and library were moved to a former Jewish temple nearby, a Greco-Byzantine building new in 1925, and now in the *National Register of Historic Places*. The museum is ADA accessible.

NATIONAL GREAT RIVERS MUSEUM

This fine museum is located at the Melvin Price Locks and Dam No. 26 at Alton, Ill. (across the

Mississippi just north of St. Louis). In dozens of exhibits the museum tells the story of the river, and of the people, wildlife and ecosystems along it. Other displays illustrate ways the river has been used by the people over the centuries, and how it has influenced their lives. Navigation exhibits play a major role here, and there is a towboat simulator (you're at a computer but feel like you're in the pilothouse maneuvering a tow). Nearly two dozen other interactive exhibits focus on such topics as barge traffic, nature and river cycles.

One of the museum's particularly impressive displays is the towering rocky bluff, realistic in plaster, that appears to rise at a river's edge (inside the building); it includes similarly realistic artificial plants, plus a dozen mounted birds and mammals. Also here is the half-hour film, "Power of the River," as well as other movie offerings throughout the year. The museum and locks tours are ADA accessible.

OLD COURTHOUSE, JEFFERSON NATIONAL EXPANSION MEMORIAL

The stately Old Courthouse is best known as the place where

the Dred Scott slavery trials began; mock trials are re-enacted here today in two restored historic courtrooms. Built between 1839 and 1862, the elegant old building was home to the civil courts of St. Louis County until 1876, when the county separated from the city. Afterward the city courts remained until 1930. A decade later it was deeded to the National Park Service.

The courthouse theater presents "Slavery on Trial: The Dred Scott Case," a film that tells about the famous slave whose story helped spark the Civil War. An extensive new exhibit on Scott discusses what life was like for slaves in St. Louis. Elsewhere in the building St. Louis history is documented with artifacts, early photographs and dioramas. In the Rotunda, where art exhibits are often displayed, prominent orators once debated issues of the day, while spectators filled the balconies. The first floor of the courthouse is ADA accessible.

ST. LOUIS FIRE MUSEUM

The museum houses a large collection of historic fire-related items such as toy firetrucks, photos of St. Louis' most famous fires, fire alarm boxes that once were common on city streets, glass hand-grenade fire extinguishers and fire helmets. On permanent loan here from the Missouri Historical Society are more than 700 artifacts, fire memorabilia collected by a local insurance agent, including leather water buckets and fire marks. Fire marks were plaques — some of those displayed date back more than two centuries — that were issued by early insurance companies to be posted on insured buildings.

ST. LOUIS ZOO

The 90-acre zoo is home to more than 18,300 exotic ani-

MORE FREE ATTRACTIONS IN ST. LOUIS AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

mals, among them rare or endangered species, representing the major continents and habitats of the world. In 1904, for the World's Fair in St. Louis, the Smithsonian Institution built a large walk-through bird cage, filled with hundreds of unusual birds, in Forest Park. After the fair ended, the city bought the cage, and in 1910 the zoo was established.

Among its attractions are Penguin and Puffin Coast, a walk-through habitat for ocean-going birds; an Insectarium with a geodesic dome where butterflies fly free, and other exhibits that provide a close-up look at an insect's life; and River's Edge with Hippo Harbor, an underwater hippo viewing area. River's Edge, a winding waterway, is also home to the zoo's elephant family, rhinos, cheetahs and other animals that live along the rivers of the world. Other fine exhibits in natural settings include Cypress Swamp, Big Cat Country, the Bear Pits and the Children's Zoo. All major zoo facilities are ADA accessible.

SOLDIERS' MEMORIAL MILITARY MUSEUM

The museum was begun in 1935 to commemorate the 1,075 St. Louisans who had lost their lives in World War I; since then the collection has expanded to include all of our country's wars. Among the many items displayed are a bell dated 1906 from the USS St. Louis; a U.S. torpedo; WWI military uniform; spiked helmets from the German army; a model of the USS New Jersey; and photos, postcards and letters from the Great War. Outside the stately stone building are sculptures representing virtues in a soldier's life: courage, vision, loyalty and sacrifice. The museum is ADA accessible. ♦

CAHOKIA MOUNDS

618-346-5160,
www.cahokiamounds.com.

CENTER FOR AMERICAN ARCHEOLOGY

618-653-4316,
www.caa-archeology.org.

COLUMBIA BOTTOM CONSERVATION AREA

314-877-6014,
www.mdc.mo.gov/areas/areas/bottom.

FOREST PARK VISITOR CENTER

314-367-7275,
www.forestparkforever.org.

FORT BELLE FONTAINE

314-544-4714,
www.stlouisco.com/parks/ftbellefontaine.html.

HOLOCAUST MUSEUM AND LEARNING CENTER

314-432-0020, www.hmlc.org.

LEWIS AND CLARK

STATE HISTORIC SITE
618-251-5811,
www.campdubois.com.

MEMORIES MUSEUM

314-421-6655,
www.stlouisunionstation.com.

MILDRED LANE KEMPER ART MUSEUM

314-935-4523,
www.galleryofart.wustl.edu.

NATIONAL SHRINE OF

OUR LADY OF THE SNOWS

618-397-6700,
www.snows.org.

POWDER VALLEY

CONSERVATION NATURE CENTER
314-301-1500,

www.mdc.mo.gov/areas/cnc/powder.

PULITZER FOUNDATION

FOR THE ARTS

314-754-1850, www.pulitzerarts.org.

PURINA FARMS

314-982-3232,
www.purina.com/purina-farms.

SCHLAFLY BOTTLEWORKS

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314-241-2337, www.schlafly.com.

ST. LOUIS ART MUSEUM

314-721-0072, www.slam.org.

ST. LOUIS

MERCANTILE LIBRARY

314-516-7240,
www.umsl.edu/mercantile.

ST. LOUIS SCIENCE CENTER

800-456-7572, www.slsc.org.

SUSON PARK ANIMAL FARM

314-638-2100,
www.stlouisco.com/parks/suson.html.

TOWER GROVE PARK

314-771-2679,
www.towergrovepark.org.

ULYSSES S. GRANT

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

314-842-3298, www.nps.gov/ulsg.

WORLD BIRD SANCTUARY

636-225-4390,
www.worldbirdsanctuary.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

ANHEUSER-BUSCH BREWERY

314-577-2626,
www.budweisertours.com.

BLACK MADONNA SHRINE AND GROTTO

636-938-5361,
www.franciscancaring.org/blackmadonnashri.html.

GRANT'S FARM

314-843-1700,
www.grantsfarm.com.

LAUMEIER SCULPTURE PARK

314-821-1209,
www.laumeier.org.

MISSOURI HISTORY MUSEUM

314-746-4599,
www.mohistory.org.

NATIONAL GREAT RIVERS MUSEUM

618-462-6979,
www.mvs.usace.army.mil/Rivers/museum.html.

OLD COURTHOUSE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE — JEFFERSON NATIONAL EXPANSION MEMORIAL

314-655-1600,
www.nps.gov/jeff.

SOLDIERS' MEMORIAL MILITARY MUSEUM

314-622-4550,
www.stlsoldiersmemorial.org.

ST. LOUIS FIRE MUSEUM

314-289-1933.

ST. LOUIS ZOO

314-781-0900,
www.stlzoo.org.

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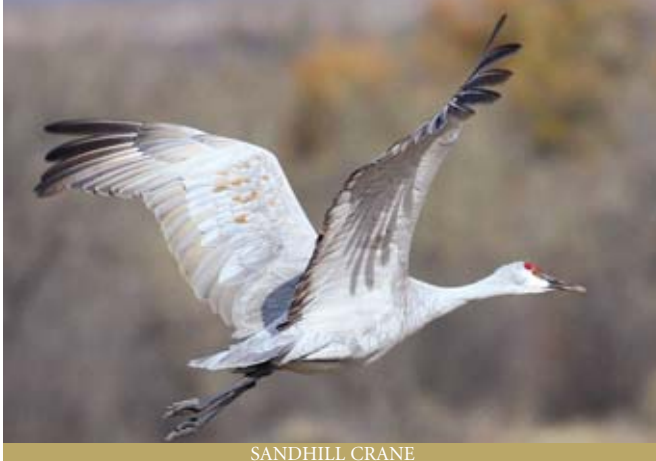
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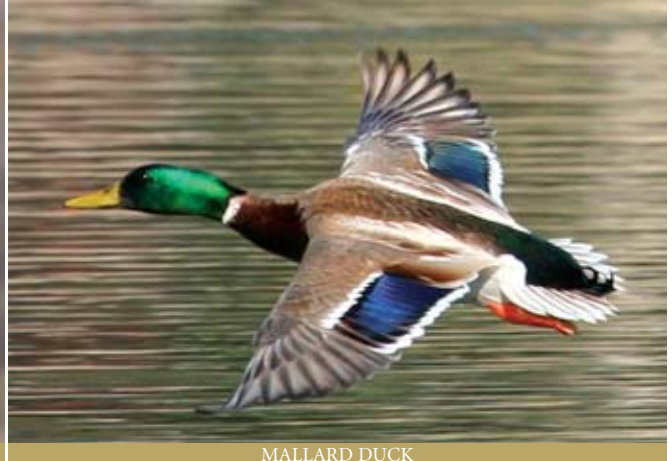
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BEFORE YOUR BIRD-WATCHING ADVENTURES TAKE WING, READ THESE TIPS ON HOW BEST TO VIEW THOSE FEATHERED FRIENDS

by BOB DIFLEY



PHOTOS: DAN SMITH; U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

The recreational activity of bird-watching is expanding among Americans, especially among RVers. More than 50 million people report that they watch birds, according to a U.S. Forest Service survey.

It's natural for RVers to take up bird-watching. We travel with our own bird blind, we venture into all areas of the country with ever-changing bird species and we love the outdoors. Henry David Thoreau considered a day wasted that he did not go for a walk and enjoy nature. Bird-watching does just that — it gets us outdoors, connecting us with the wonderful world in Mother Nature's

backyard: the sweet smell of a pine forest, a quick glimpse of a deer ducking into forest cover and birds flitting among the trees and shrubs.

It's an excellent source of exercise — I am often amazed at how much ground I've covered after concentrating on birds during a walk. It's also a brain jogger, working out the identities of my discoveries. And the best part is that bird-watching can be done just about anywhere, from a campsite to the wildest and most remote boondocking spot you can get your motorhome into.

Novices can learn bird-watching quickly with mini-

mal study and expense — a pair of small folding binoculars and a local bird brochure or regional bird guide book (field guide) will launch you on your new hobby. Later, you may want to purchase a better pair of optics, or a spotting scope (a telescope made for bird-watching and mounted on a tripod), and additional bird books, as they all offer slightly different tips and photos to help in identification.

A birding vest, like a fishing vest, comes in handy. You can keep your binoculars, field guide, a notebook and pen, and a small can of insect repellent in the pockets ready to go, hung by the door to grab on your way out. Local birding clubs welcome novices, and members readily share their bird-watching expertise, notes and discoveries. There are few outdoor activities that practice social camaraderie between experts and novices; can be undertaken by grandchildren as well as grandmas and grandpas; and promote conservation, environmental protection and habitat preservation as bird-watching does.

As you begin birding you will be surprised by how much more you notice about your environment. You will spot more lizards, butterflies and other creatures. You will start to identify likely habitats — trees, underbrush, ponds and wetlands — where birds and wildlife are likely to be spotted, and you will begin to notice what is over your head, both perching and flying.

An excellent way to learn about birds is to take a bird walk led by a park ranger, National Audubon Society member or local birding expert. Regular walks scheduled by the Audubon Society, state and national parks and local bird groups put you on the fast track to bird identification and appreciation. Discover the fun of watching bird behavior — such as feeding, nesting, chasing away predators, raising nestlings and brightly adorned males in “breeding plumage” singing rapturous arias to attract a mate.

In any given area in the nation you can expect to find a minimum of 100 species of birds, and if you are along one of the flyways — Pacific, Central, Mississippi River or Atlantic — even more. More than 900 birds have been identified in this country, enough to keep your eyes sharp, your binoculars focused and your bird book close at hand.



Observing behavior of birds, such as the barn owl, above, can include their feeding and nesting habits. Keep binoculars and a bird book handy when you travel, and look for wildlife refuges, such as Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge in Vero Beach, Fla., below. Check with the park or visitor center for a list or brochure naming local birds. Birds don't often see a vehicle as a threat, enabling you to move up closer to birds in your motorhome than if you were on foot at birding stops.



USE YOUR MOTORHOME AS A BIRD BLIND

Everywhere you travel, wherever you visit, and whatever campground you stay in, there will be birds. You'll learn the different birds in various parts of the country, continually adding new species to your Life List.

Hanging out the bird feeders is one of the first things I do upon arrival at a new campground. When traveling I look for wildlife refuges and birding trails to see what I can find. Often birds do not identify a vehicle as a threat and you can move up closer to birds in your motorhome than you can on foot at a pond or at birding stops.

BIRD-WATCHING TIPS

How do you start bird-watching? You could simply sit in your camp chair and pitch bread crumbs out in front of you. However, if you want to take it a step further, check

with the park or area visitor center for a local bird list and brochure so that you can identify what you see — eliminating about 800 of the birds you will find in a national bird book. That leaves only 100 or so that have been identified in the area.

Many bird lists have columns to the right of the bird's name, labeled with the seasons of the year. Look down the column of the current season and you can eliminate another few dozen from the list. These seasonal columns list what birds have been identified in that location at that time of year and may also identify whether the bird is migratory or resident, common, nesting or rare.

With this data, you are a lot closer to identifying any bird you might see through the process of elimination.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Ratchet up your stealth genes and put your



Learning about birds can be fun when you join a bird-watching group or take a walk led by a ranger, birding expert or National Audubon Society member.

senses on full alert as you venture out into nature. Listen not only for calls but also rustling in the bushes. Look up into the trees and in the sky overhead. Move slowly and freeze when you hear or see movement. Wait. Often birds will go about their business once they determine you are not a threat.

Likely locations to find birds are both sandy and rocky shores, estuaries, National Wildlife Refuges, wetlands, grasslands, along rivers and streams, on ponds and lakes, in agricultural fields, along the four U.S. flyways or at desert oases. Forest, desert and open-country birds tend to be busiest in the early morning, while water birds are active all day.

Add a note pad and pencil to your arsenal and jot down your field notes if you can't make an immediate ID, and don't be discouraged if you can't. Often — especially in the case of sparrows, warblers and flycatchers — you will need to dig deeper and compare notes with others or gain more experience to make a positive ID. Time and practice will add to the depth of your knowledge.

Soon you will be able to identify many birds from their flight pattern, call or habits alone. When you make an ID, write the date and location in your bird book for a record of your sightings and the beginnings of your Life List. ♦

FOR MORE INFORMATION

AMERICAN BIRDING ASSOCIATION

800-850-2473, www.aba.org.

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

212-979-3000, www.audubon.org.

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MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD



BROWN PELICAN



TERN



HAWK

< **SIZE** You can't always use size for ID purposes unless compared with an object whose size is known, though size can provide useful identification clues.

Take care when determining size. For example, gull species range from pigeon-sized through goose-sized. It's best for novice birders to reference a bird guide book — "The Sibley Guide to Birds" by David Sibley is particularly well-known and is endorsed by the National Audubon Society — when attempting to use size as a determining characteristic. According to Sibley, "Size is very difficult to judge at a distance, and for the beginner, size is nearly useless for identification, except when making direct comparisons."

< **HABITAT** If you see little gray birds pecking along a beach, you can bet they are shorebirds, not songbirds. And you don't often find turkey vultures sitting on a wire. Your bird book will identify the preferred habitat of your bird, such as forest, grassland, desert, mountain, ocean, estuary, rivers, lakes or ponds.

< **SHAPE OR POSTURE** This is a good identifier at dusk or if the light is behind the bird. Some field guides show silhouettes that you can compare to your sighting. Note body weight (plump or skinny), head crests, tail length and how it is held (high like wrens or low like flycatchers), leg length, beak or bill shape (applicable to the bird's intended use of cracking seeds, drilling into a sandy shore, or catching insects).

< **PATTERNS AND COLORS** These are easy identifiers during the breeding season, but the rest of the year colors may downgrade into grays and browns. In some species the male and female are identical (killdeers), in others they are vastly different (most ducks), and sometimes they look like completely different birds (the male Northern Harrier is smaller than the female and gray instead of brown). Head markings are a key identifier. Note colors, eye rings, head shape and beak shape.

< **BEHAVIOR** You can often identify a bird by how it acts, its flight pattern (rapid flapping of ducks or soaring like turkey vultures and raptors), and whether it runs (roadrunner, quail), hops (robin, towhee), or perches (swallows, songbirds). Some water birds dive (loons, grebes), others dabble with their tail feathers stuck up into the air like a semaphore (mallard, widgeon). Others dive into the water from above (brown pelican, terns, osprey). It produces a feeling of satisfaction when you make a positive ID, and a feeling of awe watching a mother feeding her nestlings, or giving them their first flight lesson. Watching a hopeful male strut through his mating ritual attempting to impress an indifferent female can elicit belly laughs.

< **CALL** Learn the distinctive calls of some birds, like the redbill hawk, crow, meadowlark, mockingbird, red-winged blackbird and mallard duck, and you can identify many birds even before you see them.

Note all the identifying characteristics of a bird before laying aside your binoculars and reaching for your field guide. By the time you look back, it could be gone. — *B.D.*



FOLLOWING THE HERD

A COUPLE TRACE A PORTION OF THE CHISHOLM TRAIL —
TERRITORY OF CATTLE AND COWBOYS IN THE 1800S

by RICHARD AND ELLEN THANE



A cook prepares grub out of a chuck wagon at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City, which houses one of the finest collections of western art and artifacts.



A harvester is seen in the background at Oasis RV Park in South Haven, Kansas, which provides good and reasonably priced camping and is near the old cattle town of Caldwell. The mostly undiscovered Chisholm Trail Museum in Wellington, Kansas, has excellent collections of pioneer artifacts, including this parlor display. In Wichita, Kansas, the Old Cowtown Museum brings the Old West back to life with replicated and original buildings and re-enactors in period dress.

The earth beneath us trembled with the pounding of cattle hooves as 3,000 head of Texas longhorns stampeded toward the river. The grass on the southern shore had been eaten to the roots, a storm was coming and we had to get the cattle to the other side and green pastures before the water rose too high. The smell of dust filled our nostrils, then blackness descended and jagged spears bolted from the sky — eerie blue ghost lightning danced along the tips of the thrashing longhorns. Our horses plunged into the river along with the frantic cattle and our bodies cringed as cold water flew up to hit our faces. Screams of horses and cattle mingled with the cries of cowboys as we struggled to stay in the saddle. Adrenaline pumped — the acrid smell of fear surrounded us.

Then the sounds receded, the lights came on and we remembered that we were sitting, warm and safe, in the theater of the Chisholm Trail Heritage Center in Duncan, Okla., watching “The Chisholm Trail Experience,” a wonderfully accurate description of life on the great cattle trails during the 1800s. The theater’s enormous screen and multi-sensory presentation made it seem as though we were really there taking part in it all.

Though the Chisholm Trail actually begins down south in Brownsville, Texas, we were following only the northern portion from the southern border of Oklahoma to the trail’s end in Abilene, Kansas. This trail became famous in the late 1860s as cattle ranchers sought a way to take their cattle from their ranches in Texas, where beef prices were low, to the railheads in Kansas, where the cattle could be sold for good prices and shipped to Eastern markets. During the short time span between 1867 and 1885 millions of cattle moved up the Chisholm Trail, spawning the culture of the cowboy, which is still revered today

and enjoyed by people worldwide through books and movies.

They say that Jesse Chisholm, for whom the trail was named, never had much interest in cattle. Instead, he was a merchant who traded goods with the Plains Indians of Kansas and Oklahoma, but the tracks left by his wagon train traveled through rich prairie grass and along rivers and streams, both crucial for the cattlemen who sought to get their beef to market and, though this trail only crossed southern Kansas and northern and central Oklahoma, it wasn’t long before the entire length of around 1,200 miles was called by his name.

We began our journey at the Red River, which runs along the Texas/Oklahoma border, and traveled north on U.S. Highway 81, which roughly follows the Chisholm Trail. Camping at the South 81 RV Park on the south end of the little western town of Duncan, our first introduction to this famous cattle trail was the Chisholm Trail Heritage Center. In addition to the wonderful and realistic film we saw in its theater, we found life-like robots acting out a campfire conversation between Jesse Chisholm and a young cowboy. Great exhibits of western art as well as interactive exhibits on the cattle drives all gave us a good sense of this fascinating part of our country’s history.

Continuing north on Highway 81, driving through softly rolling prairie cloaked in velvet green and trimmed with lacy tree lines, we passed vast agricultural fields, numerous little farms and a few oil wells. It wasn’t difficult to imagine the sights and sounds of the days when “cattle flowed like a dark tide across the prairie.” As we reached the south fork of the Canadian River north of Chickasha, the sky turned black and a driving rain pelted our windshield. The placid river became a raging torrent. Pulling over to let the storm pass, we paused to think about



A statue of our nation's 34th president towers over visitors to the Dwight D. Eisenhower Museum in Abilene, Kansas.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

ABE'S RV PARK

405-478-0278.

CHISHOLM TRAIL HERITAGE CENTER

580-252-6692,
www.onthechisholmtrail.com.

CHISHOLM TRAIL MUSEUM

405-375-5176,
www.ok-history.mus.ok.us.

COVERED WAGON RV PARK

800-864-4053,
www.coveredwagonrvpark.com.

MUSEUM OF THE CHEROKEE STRIP

580-237-8999,
www.regionalheritagecenter.org.

NATIONAL COWBOY AND WESTERN HERITAGE MUSEUM

405-478-2250,
www.nationalcowboymuseum.org.

OASIS RV PARK

620-892-5115.

OLD COWTOWN MUSEUM

316-219-1871, www.oldcowtown.org.

SOUTH 81 RV PARK

580-252-7300.

USI RV PARK

800-782-1531, www.usirvpark.com.



the long miles the cowboys had come by the time they reached this point and about how they often had to make camp here until the water receded.

Our next stop was the old cattle town of El Reno, a western suburb of Oklahoma City. A wild and lawless town during the days of the cattle drives, it still has a rough look to it. After exploring the historic streets, we drove a few miles east to Stockyards City, where we enjoyed dinner at the renowned Cattlemen's Steakhouse. Won in a crap game many years ago, it has fed cowboys and tourists since 1910.

From there we drove into Oklahoma City for camping at Abe's RV Park. This was convenient for our next destination — a visit to the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, which houses the world's finest collections of western art and artifacts. The tangy smell of campfires drifted through the air as we pulled into the museum parking lot the next morning, and the aroma of roasting beef played havoc with our appetites. It was the end of May and the annual Chuck Wagon Gathering was taking place on the museum grounds. Cooks with 10 chuck wagons from actual working cattle ranches were preparing food over campfires using ingredients and cooking utensils similar to those used along the cattle trails in the late 1880s. A small fee allows you to sample all you want.

Western music, storytelling and pioneer living skills demonstrations entertained a large and delighted crowd. Tom Perini, owner of Perini Ranch Steakhouse in Buffalo Gap, Texas, recited a fascinating history of the great western cattle drives as he demonstrated how cooking was done for the cowboys on the trail using Dutch ovens and trenches. An autographed copy of his cookbook, "Texas Cowboy Cooking," has an honored spot in our motorhome, as many of the delicious recipes are easily prepared during our modern-day trail rides.

Returning to Highway 81, we headed to the town of Kingfisher, where an excellent Chisholm Trail Museum houses an extensive collection of artifacts from the days of the cattle drives as well as early farming implements. Historical interpreter Ginger Murphy led an excellent tour and shared lively tales of the days on the cattle trails. Several old original cabins from that era are located on the grounds, one of which belonged to the mother of some of the boys in the Dalton Gang. Across the street you may tour the Governor Seay Mansion, built in 1892 along with big dreams that Kingfisher would become the state capital and the house would be used for entertaining dignitaries. Kingfisher's other claim to fame is that it is the birthplace of Sam Walton, founder of the Wal-Mart chain.

As we drove north from Kingfisher we crossed the Cimarron River (meaning "wild" or "unruly" in Spanish), which runs the color of blood from the red clay soil it flows through. Many stories abound of the tough crossings the cattle and their drovers encountered there.

Our next stop was the lovely farming community of Enid, where giant wheat harvesters swarmed through vast fields of wheat cutting wide swaths of golden grain. Pic-



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FOLLOWING THE HERD

turesque, abandoned farmhouses leaned crazily to one side or the other along the road, contrasting sharply with the modern farmhouses surrounded by their sprawling fields. In the distance, huge “Cathedrals of the Prairie” punctuated the skyline. They are some of the world’s largest grain storage facilities but, from a distance, they look like enormous Gothic churches.

While in Enid we visited the Museum of the Cherokee Strip (currently undergoing construction to become the Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center) with its interesting collection of historical artifacts covering the settlement of Oklahoma, and explored historical buildings in the adjoining Humphrey Heritage Village. Lovely old architecture invited leisurely walks along quiet city streets that didn’t exist during the days of the cattle drives. Instead, prairie grass grew lush in this region and the herds often paused to allow the cattle to rest and put on some weight. How long would the cowboys and their herds have been on the trail by now, we wondered? Two months? Three? There was still a long way to go.

After crossing the border into Kansas we found the old cattle town of Caldwell. A sleepy little place now, with many empty buildings, it once epitomized the wildest of the Wild West towns with an abundance of gunslingers, saloons and red light districts. Known as the “Border Queen,” many a cowboy found trouble in Caldwell.

Historical markers throughout town lead past deteriorating historical buildings. The Cherokee Strip Museum was closed the day of our visit but we stopped at the visitor center and someone phoned Karen Strum, the tourism director, who came right over and opened up the museum. After several delightful hours prowling through old artifacts and spinning yarns of Caldwell’s heyday, she took us down the street to show off the old Opera House, which is being restored to its former glory. Following up on her suggestion, we had a good steak dinner that evening at the Last Chance Saloon. A few miles east, the Oasis RV Park in South Haven provided good and reasonably priced camping.

Continuing north on Highway 81, our next stop along the Chisholm Trail was Wellington, Kansas. The mostly undiscovered Chisholm Trail Museum there had one of the best collections of pioneer artifacts we’ve seen anywhere, lovingly displayed.

The Panhandle Railroad Museum is also worth a stop with its wonderful glimpses into our country’s railroad history.

Our next stop was Wichita and the US1 RV Park on the east side of the city. The largest metropolitan area along the trail and also the largest city in Kansas, Wichita was founded in 1864 when it served as a rough-and-tumble stopping place along the trek to Abilene.

Taking exit 6B off Interstate 135, we spent a day at the Old Cowtown Museum, a living-history museum created with replicated and original old buildings brought in from across the state. Employees dressed in period costume demonstrated such practices as needlework, blacksmithing and printing. They manned the saloon and even taught us how to play “Hot Cross Buns” on a dulcimer. You will also enjoy some time exploring downtown Wichita with its historic architecture and good restaurants.

Continuing north on State Highway 15, our next stop was the Mennonite Heritage Museum in Goessel, where we learned the story of the Mennonite families who fled Russia in 1874. Driven from their homeland because of religious persecution, they settled the Kansas plains, bringing their Turkey red wheat with them — wheat that grew so well in Kansas soil that it helped to spawn a reputation as “Bread Basket of the World.” Six historic buildings tell the story of the everyday lives of Mennonite families.

From Goessel we continued north to Abilene and the end of the Chisholm Trail. The Covered Wagon RV Park was a good spot for camping and we spent several days exploring Abilene with its Heritage Center, Eisenhower Center and beautiful old mansions built by early cattlemen. A highlight of our stop there was a wonderful family style fried chicken dinner at the legendary Brookville Hotel.

This trip that we covered in a little more than a week would have taken those on cattle drives three to four months to complete. Each day would have been a struggle for survival. What an astonishing testament to the endurance of the cowboys and the cattle they drove. And each night, as we camped along the trail, we listened — for it’s said that when the sky is very dark and the wind is quiet you may still hear the Ghost Riders of long ago thundering down the Chisholm Trail. ♦



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Honda Generators, go to www.motorhomemagazine.com/info

Each year, in late November, motorhome manufacturers gather in Louisville, Ky., to show off their best offerings for the new year, and hopefully pull off some surprising reveals. The Recreation Vehicle Industry Association's 47th National RV Trade Show was no exception. Despite the past year's economic downturn, motorhome manufacturers have heartily embraced innovation.

One of the most exciting introductions at the show was from Tiffin Motorhomes. The 28-foot Allegro Breeze diesel-pusher motorhome — named “Best of Show” by our sister publication *RV Business* — breaks new ground on diesel-pusher length because of its relatively short size.

“Smaller” was definitely one of the themes for manufacturers showing 2010 and 2011 product at the trade show. Led by Tiffin, this year's motorhomes tend to be smaller, with Fleetwood RV offering an all-new 28-foot gas-powered Encounter Class A, and Damon Motor Coach recasting the 28-foot Avanti front-end diesel on a new Freightliner chassis.

The Tiffin Allegro Breeze, built on the Red Bay, Ala., manufacturer's own chassis with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 21,500 pounds and equipped with a 215-hp Navistar MaxxForce 7 V-8 engine, may well point to the future direction of motorhomes. The Breeze unveiled at the show was a concept vehicle that is expected to be available in March. As of press time, the company had not set an MSRP or determined the coach's fuel mileage, although fuel economy is expected in the mid-teens.

Highlights of the Allegro Breeze include a single streetside slideout, one-piece windshield, antique white interior, booth dinette, queen bed, separate toilet and shower and plenty of interior and exterior storage for a coach its size, and as such, may be a glimpse of things to come.

The trend toward smaller coaches, however, was not universal. Winnebago Industries, Monaco RV and Four Winds International all introduced new 40-foot-plus tag-axle models for a market some see as going in two directions at once.

“The motorhome market has migrated from the middle to the ends,” said Fleetwood President John Draheim. “It's migrat-



SHOWSTOPPERS

FROM THE COMPACT TO THE HIGH END, THE OFFERINGS AT THE LOUISVILLE TRADE SHOW WERE ALL ABOUT INNOVATION

by BOB ASHLEY



Newmar Mountain Aire



Forest River Georgetown

ed down on the A's and C's and it's migrated up on the A's to the very high end.”

Canadian builder Roadtrek Motorhomes pushed the envelope on innovation with the first slideout in a van camper on a Sprinter chassis imported to North America by Germany-based Daimler AG. Roadtrek's SS-Ideal was designated “Best of Show” runner-up for engineering a 3-foot-deep slideout extending through the Sprinter's rear double doors, thus requiring no chassis modification.

On the motorhome chassis front, Spartan Custom Chassis introduced a highly

customizable Next Generation Platform (NGP) chassis that the company calls a crossover between a Class A diesel-pusher and a Class C rail with a front-engine version available later this year. At the Louisville show, Spartan displayed a 34-foot NGP with a GVWR of 33,000 pounds.

The custom-designed NGP comes with or without a front cap and can be equipped with holding tanks, wiring and leveling jacks before being shipped to the RV manufacturer — all designed to allow manufacturers flexibility and the ability to focus on designing and building floorplans.



Fleetwood Encounter

been certified to get 13.2 miles per gallon by independent testers at the Bosch Proving Grounds in South Bend, Ind.

“Potential (Class A) buyers still want power and performance, but they are also demanding better fuel economy and that’s what the new W-series delivers,” said Tony Monda, Workhorse vice president of marketing.

Although new diesel emissions standards kicked in on Jan. 1 that require diesel engine manufacturers to reduce tailpipe emissions, 2010 will be a year of transition because chassis manufacturers are being allowed to use engines that meet the former standards until they run out.

Here are some of the highlights from the Louisville show:



Four Winds Montecito



Spartan Next Generation Platform

DAMON AVANTI

Thor subsidiary Damon Motor Coach has added a second floorplan to the stylish Avanti front-end diesel Class A motorhome, which is now being built on Freightliner’s MC-L chassis and is equipped with a Cummins 6.7-L 200-HP ISB engine mated to an Allison automatic six-speed transmission. One of the industry’s most visible downsized motorhomes, the Avanti’s new 28-foot offering is equipped with 17-foot full-wall slideouts with corner beds and large walk-through baths. Features include Corian countertops and curved cabinets and side walls. Base MSRP: \$140,000.



Roadtrek SS-Ideal



Monaco Riptide

FLEETWOOD RV ENCOUNTER

Motorized manufacturer Fleetwood RV, of Decatur, Ind., introduced an entry-level gas-powered Encounter Class A motorhome that the company calls a crossover model. “The Encounter has the increased sleeping capacity of a Class C and the increased storage and tank capacity of a Class A,” said Fleetwood’s Draheim. “It has the driving benefits of both.” Available in three 28- to 31-foot floorplans, Encounter is mounted on a Ford F53 SuperDuty chassis with a GVWR of 16,000 or 18,000 pounds. Options that characterize the Encounter as a crossover include a queen-size hide-a-loft bed that powers down electronically from over the cockpit. Encounter features include pass-through storage, heated holding tanks and luggage compartment, rear-vision camera with monitor and water filtration. Base MSRP starts at \$81,263.

“It could be a number of GVWRs and could go anywhere from 300- to 600-HP,” said Spartan Director and CEO John Szytkiel. “It could go as long as 45 feet or as short as 30 feet.”

In the front-diesel category, Freightliner Custom Chassis introduced the new MC-L front-diesel chassis, equipped with a Cummins 6.7-L 200-HP ISB engine that Damon Motor Coach adapted to its 2-year-old Avanti Class A motorhome.

“Freightliner developed the MC-L chassis as a solution to Class A customer needs,” said Jonathan Randall, Freightlin-

er director of sales and marketing. “Working in conjunction with body builders, we designed and engineered the MC-L to enable the manufacture of more fuel-efficient and aerodynamic motorhomes, while offering customers a durable, reliable and maneuverable option.” The MC-L also features an updated driver station configuration, low-profile frame rail, a GVWR of 18,000 pounds and an up to 50-degree wheel cut.

Meanwhile, Workhorse Custom Chassis reported the front-diesel Workhorse W20D Class A chassis powered by a 230-HP International MaxxForce 7 V-8 engine that has

PHOTOS: SHAWN SPENCE



Damon Avanti



Four Winds Serrano



Itasca Rey



Fleetwood Encounter



Leisure Travel Unity With Murphy Bed

FOREST RIVER GEORGETOWN

Forest River has added two new floorplans — for a total of three — to the recently introduced gas-powered non-basement (NB) entry-level Class A Georgetown motorhome. The 30½-foot Georgetown NB is designed with a full-wall slide equipped with free-standing tables and chairs while a 32-footer features rear bunk beds. Built standard on a Ford F53 SuperDuty chassis powered by a 6.8-L, 362-HP Triton V-10 gasoline engine, the Georgetown NB is optionally available on a Workhorse W20 platform. Forest River earlier introduced a 34-foot double-slide floorplan. Featuring a fiberglass front cap with one-piece windshield, the Georgetown NB is equipped with side-swinging, one-piece fiberglass baggage doors, rear pass-through storage, flat floors throughout, halogen accent lights and convertible booth dinettes. Base MSRP starts at less than \$80,000.

FOUR WINDS MONTECITO

Motorized manufacturer Four Winds International introduced a Montecito motorhome — the Thor Industry subsidiary's first diesel-pusher. Available in three 38-foot single-axle and two 42-foot tag-axle floorplans, Montecito is built on a Freightliner XCR chassis with a GVWR of either 32,000 or 44,600 pounds and powered by a 360-HP Cummins ISC diesel engine. Pro-

jecting a residential feel inside the coach, the Montecito features king-size beds, dresser drawers, kick panels, solid-surface countertops and glazed solid wood cabinet doors. Base MSRP: \$230,000.

LEISURE TRAVEL VANS UNITY

Manitoba, Canada-based Leisure Travel Vans has installed a fold-down Murphy bed into the U24MB, one of two floorplans in its new Unity Class C motorhome. The Unity is built on a Sprinter cab chassis with a GVWR of 11,030 pounds and is powered by a 154-HP Mercedes-Benz diesel engine. The queen-size Murphy bed hinges down from an 18-inch slideout above two powered reclining lounge chairs that become the bed's base. New front and rear caps, European-designed windows, LED interior lighting, Corian countertops and curved cabinetry are standard. The second floorplan, also with a single slideout, includes a rear bed. Base MSRP: \$121,458.

MONACO CAYMAN

Monaco RV redesigned its Monaco Cayman/Holiday Rambler Neptune diesel-pusher with four new floorplans on the company's proprietary Roadmaster eight-air bag raised-rail chassis. "We tried to incorporate a high-value product with residential floorplans," said Monaco Brand Manager Ryan Lee. "From a ride standpoint, there is a

major difference in how this handles." The Cayman/Neptune, available in 36- and 40-foot floorplans, is powered by a 340-HP or 360-HP Cummins engine. Features include tile floors, queen beds and optional residential refrigerator and stackable washer/dryer. Base MSRP: \$214,278.

NEWMAR MOUNTAIN AIRE

For the 2011 model year, motorhome manufacturer Newmar redesigned the luxury Mountain Aire diesel-pusher coach built on the Spartan Mountain Master chassis with a GVWR of 34,600 or 46,000 pounds and powered by a 425-HP Cummins ISL engine. Available in six 40- to 43-foot floorplans, the redesigned Mountain Aire includes new front and rear caps with an integrated spoiler, frameless double-pane windows, integrated power awnings, a coffered ceiling with halogen lighting, porcelain floors, solid-wood hand-glazed cabinets with concealed hinges, Mystera countertops and a NewPlex multiplex wiring system that allows users to control lights, ceiling fans and window shades from multiple locations inside the coach. Base MSRP: \$406,695.

ROADTREK SS-IDEAL

The motorhome industry's first and only slide room out the rear doors of a Class B was introduced at the show by Canadian builder Roadtrek. Built on the high-mileage Sprint-



Tiffin Allegro Breeze



Holiday Rambler Augusta



Monaco Cayman

er 2500 chassis with a GVWR of 8,550 pounds and equipped with a 154-hp six-cylinder Mercedes-Benz diesel engine, the new 20-foot SS-Ideal has a 3-foot-deep rear slide, which houses half of a double bed that converts to a sofa. With the rear doors extended the slide creates an extra 3 feet of living space when in camp. By using the existing rear door opening, the vehicle's original structural integrity is not compromised, according to the company. Base MSRP: \$97,110.

WINNEBAGO VIA/ITASCA REYO

Winnebago Industries introduced a second floorplan of its Sprinter-chassis based Winnebago Via/Itasca Rey Class A motorhome. The new rear-bath 25R floorplan features two dining areas and a larger streetside bed/sofa slideout. The 25-foot Via/Reyo, equipped standard with a bed that drops down from over the cockpit, is the first Class A motorhome built on the Sprinter Cowl chassis with a GVWR of 11,030 pounds and equipped with a six-cylinder 154-hp Mercedes-Benz diesel engine. Base MSRP: \$143,000.

Winnebago also debuted a Winnebago Tour/Itasca Ellipse 42D tag-axle model on a Freightliner Maxum chassis with a GVWR of 44,320 pounds and equipped with a turbocharged 400-hp Cummins ISL diesel engine. The new 42D features a curbside slide with an L-shaped sofa that extends with the slideout. Base MSRP: \$339,000. ♦

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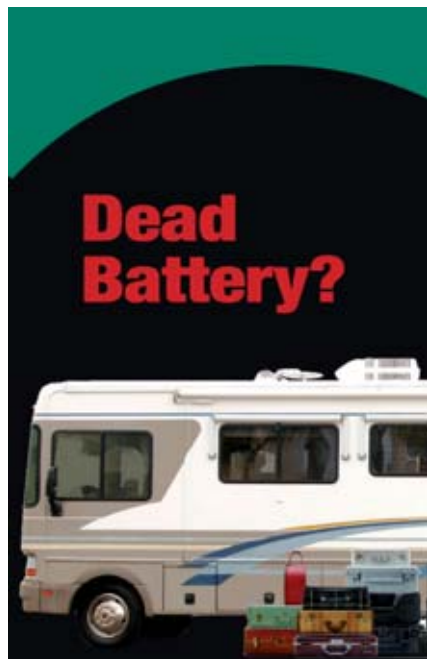
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GEORGETOWN 341 DS

Forest River's Class A with an entry-level price sets a high standard



Forest River's new Georgetown "non-basement" 341 DS Class A may well feature an entry-level price tag, but there's a lot about the Georgetown that belies that "entry-level" status.

From the expansive one-piece windshield to the solid-surface countertops to the etched mirrors on overhead living room cabinets, the Georgetown 34-foot double-slide 341 DS model sets a high standard for a coach retail-

ing in the high \$70,000s.

The Georgetown non-basement series is built standard on Ford's F53 Super Duty chassis with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 20,500 pounds and is powered by a 6.8-L, 362-HP Triton V-10 gasoline engine. Another option is the Workhorse W20 platform with a GVWR of 20,700 pounds.

Looking at the Georgetown hood, its fiberglass front cap with its one-piece windshield and high-powered projector headlights has a clean, unclut-

tered look. Laminated fiberglass side walls are mounted on an aluminum superstructure while the laminated floor is secured to the 3-inch steel frame.

The 341 DS is equipped with side-swinging, one-piece fiberglass baggage doors for ease of access. And while there's no basement, there's plenty of rear pass-through storage with access from both sides as well as the back of the coach, which sports a 5,000-pound hitch receiver and an access ladder to the one-piece EPDM roof.

Controls for the automatic leveling jacks and holding tanks are conveniently located on the streetside of the coach. Heat and AC are ducted throughout, including vents in the bathroom and bedroom.

Stepping into the price-sensitive Georgetown 341 DS, a decorative valance frames the convertible Leatherette sofa that sits opposite the 30-inch mid-coach door.

The cockpit is equipped with Soft Touch reclining driver and passenger seats, optional rear-vision camera and monitor, AM/FM radio and wraparound privacy curtains, along with five small overhead storage cabinets.





With a flat floor throughout, slide-outs house the streetside living room/galley and, opposite, a convertible booth dinette with fabric seats — also with overhead cabinets that have etched-mirror inlays.

A 30-inch Magic Chef residential microwave is mounted over the top of a three-burner range. The kitchen also is equipped with a sizable number of cabinets with solid wood, cherry-stained doors, a double stainless steel sink and a large double-door Dometic refrigerator/freezer. A pantry next to the refrigerator has four pullout wire shelves.

Pancake ceiling lights and halogen accent lights illuminate the coach throughout.

An optional home theater with a 32-inch LCD HDTV that can be viewed from either the sofa or dinette is situated beyond the dinette atop a cabinet with four storage drawers.

Moving to the rear of the coach, the curbside bath/toilet is equipped with a one-piece shower

SPECIFICATIONS

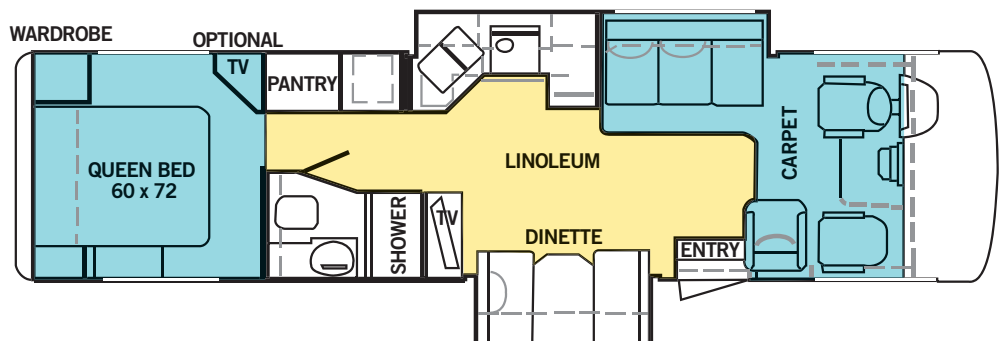
CHASSIS: FORD F53	HEIGHT: 12' 1"
ENGINE: TRITON 6.8-L V-10 362 HP	WHEELBASE: 208"
FUEL: 75 GAL	FRESHWATER CAP: 50 GAL
GVWR: 20,500 LBS	BLACK-WATER CAP: 41 GAL
LENGTH: 35' 6"	GRAY-WATER CAP: 41 GAL
WIDTH: 8' 5"	LP-GAS CAP: 29 GAL
	BASE MSRP: \$79,999

FOREST RIVER INC., 574-296-7700,
WWW.FORESTRIVERINC.COM.

with skylight and laminate-top vanity.

A pocket door separates the bedroom from the rest of the coach. Storage cabinets are above a "north-south"

queen-size island bed flanked by two wardrobes and a curbside nightstand. Fabric wood valances frame windows on either side of the bed. ♦



CLOUDY FORECAST? NOT WITH THIS DIY PROJECT

IF YOU HAVE
THE TIME AND
ARE WILLING
TO EXPEND THE
EFFORT, HEADLIGHT
LENS RESTORATION
IS SIMPLE

by E. DON SMITH



f your motorhome is more than a few years old or is constantly exposed to strong sunlight, chances are good that your plastic headlight lenses have suffered from UV damage. First, it starts with a slight haze, and then as the exposure continues they eventually turn yellow. Plastic lenses have been used on automobiles and motorhomes for years and they offer many advantages, such as shatter resistance and lighter weight. But UV damage is one of the weaknesses.

Not only does it make your motorhome look older, it is also a safety issue. As the lens gets cloudy the light output is dramatically reduced. This makes it more difficult for you to see where you are going, and for other motorists to see you.

The good news is that this problem can be easily repaired. If you are not inclined to do the work yourself, many motorhome dealers and automotive re-

pair shops offer headlight restoration. The prices we have seen range from \$50 to as high as \$129.99. These repair prices are still a huge savings over a complete headlight replacement.

If you have the time and are willing to do the work yourself, this is a pretty simple DIY project. The repair is not permanent, so plan on doing this every couple of years depending on where your coach is parked. The more sun it is exposed to, the sooner the damage will return.

If you decide to tackle the project yourself, all you need are a few basic tools and a headlight restoration kit. In order to restore our headlights we selected the 3M Headlight Lens Restoration System (www.3m.com). There are other systems on the market, but at \$24.99 from AutoZone this one proved to be economical and complete.

In addition to the kit you will need a drill capable of 1,200 to 2,000 RPM,

masking tape, a spray bottle filled with water and a microfiber or tack cloth. In order to do our restoration we went to Camping World in Chattanooga, Tenn. Joshua Laney was the technician who performed the work but rather than using the professional kit commonly used at this location, he cooperated with our article research and used the DIY 3M polishing kit that we supplied.

We intentionally selected Laney to do this project because he was not specifically trained on headlight restoration. We felt that it would have been unfair and not representative of typical results to use someone with extensive training in the process.

In order to get started the first thing you need to do is clean the headlights thoroughly with soap and water so they are free from dirt, bugs and other debris. If you follow our steps you can expect to be finished in about 30 to 60 minutes.

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CLOUDY FORECAST?

STEP ONE



Tape the area around the lens to prevent damage to the surrounding paint. The following operations involved a rotating drill head and sanding disks. We suggest that you double- or triple-tape the area closest to the edge of the headlights.

STEP TWO



Mount the sanding pad in the drill and install the P500 (gold) sanding disk. It attaches using a pressure-sensitive backing that makes installation and removal quick and simple. Using light to medium pressure, place the sanding disk flat against the headlight lens and move it back and forth. Expect to do this four to six times, fully covering the lens. It is important to keep the pad moving to avoid excessive heat. Since the lens is plastic, sanding in one area can lead to melting of the lens. Keep sanding until the entire lens is white and frosted. If the pad clogs up and stops sanding, replace the disk with another one; several are included in the kit. Wipe the lens with a tack cloth and inspect. If the lens is not equally sanded or if you see areas that need additional work, repeat this operation.

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CLOUDY FORECAST?

STEP THREE



Remove the P500 disk and install the P800 (white) disk. Sand the entire surface again with the disk flat against the lens. This step is basically removing the coarse scratches from the earlier operation. Continue sanding until all coarse scratches are gone. It's important to do a good job on this step to make the next steps easier. Take your time and go back and forth over the entire area six to eight

times or more if needed. As always, keep the pad moving to prevent excessive heat. Wipe the lens and inspect before continuing.

STEP FOUR



Remove the P800 pad and install the P3000 gray-colored foam disc. Wet the lens and the pad completely with water. Begin sanding and move the pad back and forth across the lens. White slurry should begin forming soon.

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Continue to sand the lens four to six more times and make sure the surface stays wet. The lens should start becoming significantly clearer as you polish. Keep polishing until all the fine scratches from the P800 disk are completely gone. After you are satisfied with the lens' clarity, wipe it with a tack cloth.

STEP FIVE


Install the orange foam polishing pad and place a dime-size drop of polishing cream on the pad. Before turning on the drill, rub the pad all over the lens to spread the polish. This prevents the polish from slinging off as you run the drill. Run the polishing foam back and forth across the lens until the clarity improves. If needed, repeat the process with another dime-size drop of cream. Using a clean microfiber towel, wipe the lens. It should now be scratch-free and optically clear. If you see mistakes or areas you missed, go back to one of the previous steps and redo the process. Just remember, if you start with Step Two, you will have to do Steps Three to Five again.

If your lenses were heavily oxidized and damaged, they may not return to 100 per-



cent new condition, but they will be dramatically improved. In the case of our test coach, we discovered the lenses also contained numerous micro cracks that can't be repaired, but, as you see in the before and after photos, the difference is quite noticeable. When driving at night, it will be easier for you to see the road and for others to see you. It is also a nice visual upgrade for your coach to keep it from showing its age too quickly. ♦

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TIFFIN ALLEGRO BUS 43 QGP

Style, sophistication and superb craftsmanship make it easy to call this coach home

Tiffin's Allegro Bus rolls into the new year with a new look, new features and new options sure to draw attention from those looking for a tag-axle coach. With a choice of chassis from Spartan, Freightliner or Tiffin's proprietary Powerglide equipped with the 425-hp Cummins ISL engine, Allison 3000MH six-speed transmission and a towing capacity of 10,000 pounds, the Allegro Bus continues its tradition of fine motor living. Buyers can choose from three floorplans, notably the 43 QGP (shown) as one of the most popular.

Rich, dark cherry cabinetry welcomes you at the entry of this quad-slide beauty balanced against light-colored floor tile laid in a staggered plan with mosaic accent insets (less carpeting makes for quicker and easier cleanup). Six exterior paint choices, three interior upholstery décors and five wood tones are available, including a new 2010 Glazed Honey cherry option that is expected to become very popular.

Opposing slides form a spacious cabin and galley. There's plenty of room when using the opposing Ultraleather sofa beds for overnight guests or the optional U-shaped dinette/lounge combo. Other optional offerings for the living area include the choice of a free-standing dinette with cabinet or computer workstation and two types of recliners.

The curbside galley offers expansive custom-edged solid surface countertops, a tiled mosaic backsplash that incorporates the floor tile pattern and a pantry cabinet shelf that holds the 37-inch HD-ready LCD TV. An optional drawer-style dishwasher wrapped in the galley's cherry cabinetry is often mistaken for an oven — that task is handled by the stainless steel overhead micro/convection unit. A choice of raised-panel four-



door or optional two-door stainless steel residential-style refrigerators fill out the streetside slide with proper cabinet and drawer storage throughout, befitting this luxurious full-time cruiser.

The finely crafted cabinetry continues aft, housing washer/dryer options and the powder room, while the private master bedroom suite with rear bath — enlarged by twin opposing slides — occupies the rest.

Tiffin listens to owner feedback and for 2010 offers a popular tiled bedroom floor option ready for the new owner's Persian throw rug collection. A large queen or optional king bed with upholstered headboard and matched nightstands fill out the streetside slide while the built-in dresser and entertainment cabinetry housing the 26-inch LCD TV is fitted to the curbside slide. The suite's bath with double lavs, 36-inch neo-corner shower and full-width rear-wall mirrored closet, wrapped in the same handsome cabinetry and trim, creates a very upscale and complete dressing area.

The Allegro Bus gets a facelift this year with new front and rear caps, a new "Rocky Mountain" brown paint scheme and a panoramic windshield of titanic proportions. Also new for 2010 is Tiffin's "Energy Management System" in the Allegro Bus that displays, monitors and divides electrical loads onto two separate circuit legs rather than one, calling upon intermittent inverter assistance whenever power draw exceeds available shore-



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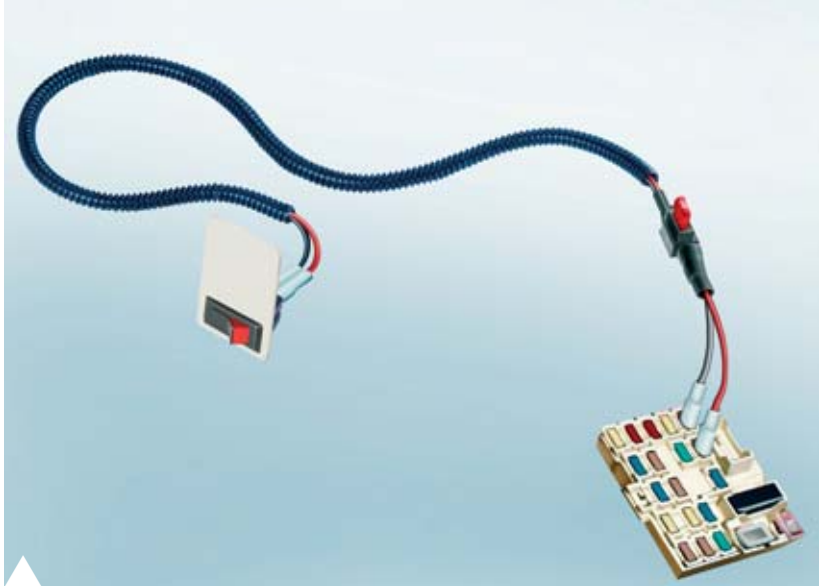
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SEE-THROUGH SOLUTION

My tip relates to items that continue to fall from the medicine cabinet in my motorhome. At first I tried adding pieces of thin wood to the front of the shelves to add height to the lip. It worked fine, but I couldn't see what was behind the wood. Finally, I came up with the idea to attach Plexiglas pieces to the front of the shelves, extending about an inch above the height of the shelf. It works like a charm and I can now see what's behind the shelf. Be careful when drilling holes in the Plexiglas (for the installation of small nails) as it can easily crack.

ROGER HUNSICKER | JACKSON, GA.



SWITCH FIX

With some vehicles rated for dinghy towing, a fuse must be pulled before towing to prevent the battery from being drained with the ignition switch turned to ACC. To make this easier on my Chevrolet HHR I installed a Dome Light Switch with Harness Kit (part #JW-DLB) from www.quadratec.com.

This is a really nice package that's primarily used by Jeep owners to deactivate dome lights when doors are removed, but this fix has universal applications. You could buy all the required parts and make your own, but I doubt that would save much money.

To install the switch, pull the required fuse, insert the ends in the fuse block (retain the inline fuse you removed), route the wiring to the desired location with easy access to the switch, mount the switch and install the fuse in the inline holder. Turn the ignition to ACC, push the toggle switch to deactivate the ignition circuit and tow away.

Be sure to activate the circuit when you are ready to turn the key back to OFF, as the key will not move with the switch deactivated.

HOWARD TIDWELL | MOUNT DORA, FLA.



SNUG IN BED ▲

I use a Ford Ranger as a dinghy vehicle with my Class C motorhome. I found that items I carried in the bed of the pickup slid to the front during transit. To solve the problem, at no cost, I took the light cones off an old pole lamp and cut the pole to fit across the truck bed. The spring-loaded mechanism holds the pole in place and works as a good solution to keep boxes of tools, firewood or other items secured in the back of the truck. They can also be easily accessed when the tailgate is open.

KEN DAVIS | PUYALLUP, WASH. ♦

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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* KEVIN LIVINGSTON

WAR OF THE HOSES

THETFORD'S NEW SMARTDRAIN DUMP HOSE SYSTEM MAKES AN UNPLEASANT TASK EASIER

Motorhoming offers freedom to roam and enjoy new places. It also requires a number of chores on a daily basis to keep things working smoothly. Hooking up to utilities is one of those chores. My least favorite part of that process is dumping the holding tanks, especially the black tank. It's not that I'm squeamish, it's the wrestling with the hoses and fittings that put this task on my dislike list.

It seems like it's a constant battle with couplers and fittings, not to mention hoses that end up crushed or leaking. Thanks to Thetford, the usual trip to the boxing ring with sewer drain hoses and adapters can be put to the wayside. The company has recently introduced a new drain system called SmartDrain. The SmartDrain system includes everything necessary to replace your current dinosaur technology with easier to use components.

Starting at the tank valve, the SmartDrain couples to the standard 3-inch bayonet fitting via a proprietary adapter that remains on the pipe. The fit here is snug and dry, utilizing an internal seal. Once in place, the expandable, crush-resilient 15-foot hose locks onto this adapter using the pre-attached SureLock fitting. The SureLock is comprised of a special sealing and locking design, which uses air-hose-like quick couplers and

two easily operated aluminum tabs for a strong hold. From here, the super tough, super pliable, abrasion-resistant, polymer coil-constructed SmartHose can be stretched and connected to the sewer utility using the company's creatively designed 90-degree nozzle and universal sewer adapter. The remaining hose end is connected to the 90-degree nozzle by simply popping the coupler in and latching down the SureLocks. The 90-degree nozzle, with handle, is positioned into a universal sewer adapter, which is placed in the sewer opening. Storage of the system is also easier and more sanitary because of the SmartHose's ability to lock into itself, totally sealing it.

Although the SmartDrain is very innovative, exhibiting great functionality, I'd like to see Thetford improve the flimsy cap that's designed to seal off the adapter that remains on the end of the motorhome's dump pipe. Also, the fittings at the ends of the hose do a good job connecting the components, but they are a little tight at first, which may make it difficult to seat from the get-go. After a few uses, though, they seem to break in, making the process very simple and quick. Suggested retail price is around \$80.

For more information, call 800-543-1219, or go to www.thetford.com. ♦



Water Heater Headache

ATTEMPTING TO OBTAIN A REFUND FOR EXPENSES THEY BELIEVED WERE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A GARAGE THAT HAD SERVICED THEIR MOTORHOME, TWO READERS SOUGHT THE HELP OF *HOT LINE*. THEY EXPLAINED:

Last year we were traveling through Washington in our 2000 Winnebago Journey when our hot water tank wouldn't work when we tried to use it in gas mode. We took the motorhome to Roy Robinson RV service center in Marysville, Wash., for repair. The technician said that the circuit board was bad, so he installed a new one and it worked fine.

When we got back home to North Dakota, we parked the coach for a couple of months before heading out on our next trip. This time we found that the water heater wasn't working again when turned to gas mode. So we took it to Capital RV in Bismarck, N.D., and were told, again, that the circuit board was bad and needed to be replaced. The bill for the work totaled \$308.89.

I called Roy Robinson dealership, told them the circuit board needed to be replaced again and asked if there was a warranty for the part. They told me it was for 90 days.

We hope *Hot Line* can help us get some of our money back.

**JANET AND NORBERT
FRANCKOWIAK
HETTINGER, N.D.**

Hot Line contacted Roy Robinson Inc. on the Franckowiaks' behalf. Shortly thereafter, the company responded as follows:

Enclosed please find a reimbursement check for the charges you incurred at Capital RV for replacement of the water heater PC board in your motorhome. Our replacement of the board that failed

ONCE A WARRANTY HAS EXPIRED, THERE IS NO GUARANTEE THAT A MANUFACTURER WILL COVER FURTHER COSTS. HOW LONG IT HAS BEEN SINCE A WARRANTY EXPIRED CAN OFTEN DETERMINE WHETHER A MANUFACTURER WILL EXTEND COMPENSATION.

while you were visiting Washington only had a 90-day warranty on the part from the manufacturer.

We agree with you, the part should not have failed so soon. Because of this we have chosen to send you this reimbursement while we pursue the matter with the manufacturer.

Our staff apologizes for the inconvenience this created for you. The failure of a printed circuit control board in such a short period of time is not a common occurrence.

Thank you for understanding and happy RVing!

**BUTCH SMITH
FIXED OPERATIONS MANAGER
ROY ROBINSON INC.
MARYSVILLE, WASH.**

GENSET UPSET

Seeking compensation from a manufacturer for a recently out-of-warranty part failure, a reader asked for Hot Line's help. He wrote:

I have a 2007 Winnebago View Class C that I bought Aug. 28, 2006. I purchased the motorhome new and it came with a three-year factory warranty. Last year I was on a trip to Knoxville, Tenn., when the Onan AC generator suddenly stopped and would not start. This happened Sept. 16, 2009, less than 30 days out of warranty and with less than 20 hours on the generator's hour meter.

I took the motorhome to Cummins Crosspoint in Hazard, Ky., and the Onan technicians found the air cleaner cover had come loose and had gotten into the flywheel, damaging the flywheel and the plastic housing in front of the flywheel. The silencer pad had also been pulled into the flywheel and was destroyed. They ordered the necessary parts and fixed it.

According to the shop foreman, Onan would not honor the bill (\$605.61 for parts and labor) under warranty. Any help would be appreciated. Thank you.
**CANER CORNETT
LONDON, KY.**

Once a warranty has expired, there is no guarantee that a manufacturer will cover further costs. How long it has been since a warranty expired can often determine whether a manufacturer will extend compensation.

Hot Line sent a letter of inquiry to Cummins Onan Generators to see if it could help Cornett. Soon thereafter, Cornett sent the following update:

Please be advised your letter to Cummins has resulted in my receiving full payment of \$605.61 for work performed on my Onan generator. Many thanks for your help and a great magazine.

C.C.

DECAL DILEMMA

Looking for a replacement decal on a motorhome that was long since out of warranty, two readers asked Hot Line to intervene. They explained:

We own a 2005 Winnebago Adventurer 38G. The large "W" decal on the rear panel is oxidizing and doesn't do justice to the coach's expensive full-body paint.

We contacted Winnebago and were told to go to our local Winnebago dealer and Sharpline (a decal company) would send them a new decal for replacement. The problem is that the closest Canadian Winnebago dealer is 700 miles from our home.

I tried to get Winnebago to send the decal to our local non-Winnebago dealer, but the company refused. We are not

going to travel 1,400 miles round trip for a decal.

Can *Hot Line* please help us get the decal so we can have a local decal detailing company remove the old one and replace it? We are willing to pay for the service.

**GORDON AND MILLIE DALIK
WINNIPEG, MANITOBA**

Hot Line *does not usually handle cases with issues that are well beyond their warranty limits. However, because the Daliks were so far away from an authorized dealer and had offered to pay for the service, we contacted Winnebago Industries on their behalf. A Winnebago representative responded as follows:*

Winnebago Industries regrets any difficulties the Daliks have experienced with their 2005 Adventurer. Our sincere desire is to provide quality products and service to all Winnebago owners.

The Winnebago Industries New-Vehicle Limited Warranty provides for repair or replacement of any part or parts proven to be defective in material or workmanship within a specific time and/or mileage, 12 months or 15,000 miles, whichever occurs first, from the date of original purchase or when the vehicle is first placed into service as a demonstrator. Our records show that the Daliks' warranty expired Nov. 12, 2005.

The goodwill policy offered to the Daliks by Winnebago Industries and Sharp-line, even though their vehicle has exceeded the terms of our limited warranty, was in the interest of good customer relations and in appreciation of the Daliks, as Winnebago owners.

Since receipt of the Daliks' letter, I have taken the liberty to contact Sharp-line and sent a copy of the letter to the company for review. Winnebago Industries and Sharp-line have reached a decision to authorize an independent dealership to do this repair. Upon receipt of an accepted estimate for labor, I will send the decals needed at no charge.

**BRIAN BUFFINGTON
SERVICE ADVISOR
WINNEBAGO INDUSTRIES
FOREST CITY, IOWA ♦**

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

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Vibration

I have a 1998 30-foot Airstream motorhome that was built on a GM P-chassis. It's had a vibration since it was new. The vibration starts at 51 MPH, and continues to 60-plus MPH. It is more pronounced on the steering wheel during the first 10 minutes, and then it diminishes somewhat.

The original tires were balanced at least three times, including the addition of pellets inside the tires. The second set of Michelins have been balanced (front ones twice), but the vibration is still there.

Over the years, the wheel bearings, parking brake, drive shaft, universals, hanger bearing and differential have been checked, repaired or balanced and aligned, but there is still something

AN EVA IS AN ELECTRONIC VIBRATION ANALYZER, WHICH MANY GM SHOPS RELY ON TO FIND ELUSIVE VIBRATIONS. ALL VIBRATIONS HAVE THEIR OWN FREQUENCY, AND THE EVA KNOWS WHICH ONE IS WHICH.



vibrating. I'm wondering if I should try to find someone who does on-the-vehicle balancing, start all over again, or just give up? I sure would appreciate your thoughts.

**ROYCE MCCRACKEN
CAMPBELLFORD, ONTARIO**

Even though you have a GM chassis, you do not mention ever having an EVA diagnosis, Royce. An EVA is an Electronic Vibration Analyzer, which many GM shops rely on to find elusive vibrations, such as yours. All vibrations have their own frequency, and the EVA knows which one is which.

Initially, only some GMC Service Centers purchased EVAs, but other GM Service Centers as well as some independent shops now have them. Find a shop with an EVA, and a technician who knows how to use it. I feel confident an EVA will identify your elusive vibration, and the technician will make it go away.

FUEL LEVEL

I have a 1997 Winnebago Brave 29-foot motorhome that was built on a GM P-chassis. I purchased it used with 29,500 miles on it, and in what seemed like good condition. When purchased the gas gauge was reading half full.

On my first trip I filled the gas tank. I stopped fueling the first time the pump shut off, and read the gauge. It showed full at the full mark. On my trip when the gauge indicated half full, I again added gas, expecting to add about 35 to 40 gallons, as my gas tank holds 78 gallons of fuel.

This time I continued to fill the tank until I could add no more. It took just over 70 gallons to fill up. When I read my gas gauge, it showed the tank level a little past the full mark.

The gauge does recede as mileage is put on the vehicle, but when it is at the half-full mark, I have learned I only have 5 to 10 gallons of fuel left. It seems like the gauge is reading the fuel level, but not correctly.

I have looked at the fuel gauge itself, and it is an internal part of the instrument cluster. I don't believe I can change the gauge without changing

the whole instrument cluster.

Is there a way to adjust the gauge to read correctly? Has the sending unit just gone bad, and requires replacement? Is there some other cause for the gas gauge reading the way it does?

**KEN YOUNG
SEQUIM, WASH.**

I believe you have a bad gas tank sender or sender circuit, Ken. I don't think the gauge is at fault.

The senders in GM fuel tanks range from zero to 90 OHMS to ground from empty to full respectively. When you think the tank is almost empty, but the gauge is reading half full, a stuck sender or bad sender circuit will read around 45 OHMS to ground.

The primary sender wire can be identified without dropping the tank. In fact, there should be a connection that can be pulled apart so you can test the sender's resistance to ground with a multimeter. Connect one multimeter probe to the sender wire, and the other probe to a known ground. If the multimeter reads around 45 OHMS, you will know the sender is probably stuck, and probably needs to be replaced.

I say probably, because there is always the possibility that the ground side of the circuit is corroded, and not providing a good ground. Senders sometimes have a ground wire, and sometimes simply depend on the tank being grounded. Either ground can become compromised in the 13 years your motorhome has been on the road. Dropping the tank and testing the sender directly will determine the culprit.

CEILING INSTALLATION

I saw your response in the December 2009 issue about vinyl material separating from the ceiling panel ("Ceiling Glue"). I have the same problem. My ceiling panel is thin lauan plywood. You mentioned a possible solution is to use Masonite hardboard, scuffed and then the material applied.

In my motorhome, the ceilings were installed before any partitions were put in place, and the partitions help in holding the ceiling in place. I have a

1994 Itasca Sunrise, which otherwise is in great shape. I just need to know how the Masonite is held in place and what material is used to glue the Masonite to the ceiling, if that is how it is installed. Any information on this will be appreciated.

DARRYL WAGLEY
OPELOUSAS, LA.

The old ceiling panels often cannot be easily removed, Darryl. When that is the case, we strip the old ceiling down to the lauan, and cut the 1/2-inch Masonite hardboard panels to fit around the partitions and cabinetry.

The covered panels are then installed using covered aluminum strips at the joints. The strips are fastened to the roof with screws that have decorative caps. Screws are also installed around the outer edges, and concealed with a molding that is either painted or covered to match the ceiling material.

COLD TV

I recently upgraded my 1999 Georgie Boy Intruder with a 19-inch LCD TV. Should I remove the TV for winter storage? Can these TVs withstand cold temperatures such as a few nights below freezing?

Also, this motorhome has the Ford V-10 engine. When traveling in wet conditions the engine has a slight miss. I have already replaced the air intake system due to it sucking in water. What else would typically cause this problem?

CHARLES SUMMERS
SISSONVILLE, W.VA.

Some LCD TVs can stand cold weather, and some can't, Charles. Most TV sets have a label on the back that gives the operating specifications. The temperature range will be one of the specifications along with the voltage and power consumption. If you can't find a specification sticker, look in the owner's manual, or consult the TV manufacturer's customer service department.

A slight miss in wet weather can have a number of causes. Since you have already replaced the air intake system in accordance with Ford recommendations, I suspect an electrical problem. Check your battery cable connections, ground cable connections to the frame, and other electrical connections that get wet.

STOVE FIRE

We have seldom used the oven in our rig. When we have used it, it was just to warm something.

This year we decided to cook a full meal. As the oven got to full temperature the motorhome started to fill with smoke. The oven vent has a shield directing the hot gases at the surrounding cabinet with a resultant well-charred piece of cabinet.

After the fire was out, the cabinet sealed to obscure the smell, and the trip completed, I tried to find out how the vent should have been installed. The installation instructions were less than useful, and the motorhome manufacturer was convinced the installation was incorrect.

Can you help with describing how the installation is incorrect? I suspect the vent should be vented directly into the room with either a different shield or this one reversed.

LYNN EBERHARDT
KNOXVILLE, TENN.

There's no rocket science here, Lynn. Just about every stove/oven combination has a vent at the rear. It goes up the back of the oven to the stove top, where the hot gases are deflected onto the metal stovetop. Check your stove at home; you will see a similar vent.

The deflector on your motorhome stove was either the wrong one, or it was installed incorrectly. Hot oven gases should never be deflected onto combustible materials, as was the case in your motorhome.

If the existing deflector cannot be installed to correctly deflect the hot gases onto the metal stove top, order a new deflector for your stove. Check your stove model and serial number to make sure you are ordering the proper part.

TOWING METHOD

I hear all the problems of towing four wheels down, unable to back up, etc. It seems like it would be easier to use a car trailer, which can be backed up. I am retiring soon and am trying to make up my mind about how to tow. I've ruled out a tow dolly. Is there any place I can find information on this subject?

GARY PINKLEY
FORT MYERS, FLA.

Take a look at the supplement in this issue, Gary. Our Dinghy Guide lists all 2010 cars, SUVs and pickups that can be towed on all four wheels with the manufacturer's blessing. Despite not being able to back up, that's still the preferred towing method.

You've ruled out a dolly, but don't say why. Many of the reasons probably apply to a trailer.

A trailer sounds good until you get where you are going. Then, what do you do with it? It also adds significant weight to what you are towing, which may cause your towed load to exceed the towing capability of your motorhome. Lastly, car trailers are expensive and require periodic maintenance. Is that all worth the ability to back up when you can simply disconnect the towed vehicle you are towing on all four wheels? I think not.

DEEP-CYCLE BATTERIES

We are in need of new deep-cycle batteries. We have only just discovered there are maintenance-free deep-cycle batteries. Would you please tell me the best one to use in our motorhome, maintenance-free or the regular deep-cycle requiring maintenance? Please take into consideration the cost difference and reliability. Thank you.

KATHLEEN GAY
WESTVILLE, S.C.

There are conventional and Absorbed Glass Mat (AGM) maintenance-free, deep-cycle batteries, Kathleen. The conventional ones are expensive, and don't last long. The AGM batteries are very good, and are very safe because they cannot leak, but they are very expensive when compared with traditional flooded deep-cycle batteries.

Since you seem more concerned about cost and reliability as opposed to being maintenance-free, I cannot recommend anything but pairs of six-volt, golf-cart batteries. While they require periodic watering, they by far give you the most bang for your buck, and usually can be purchased at a discount wherever your local golf course buys them. ♦

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

Quits All the Time

I have a 1988 Shasta 33-foot Class A coach with a 454-cid Chevrolet engine and three-speed automatic transmission. I have a problem with the motorhome. When it's running down the road and I step on the brake, the engine dies. When I turn on the turn signal the engine dies. When I turn on the radio the engine dies; any electrical load off the engine causes it to die. I replaced the ground strap, the alternator tested OK and the battery is new. I replaced the solenoid, the battery cables, everything I can think of, yet it still dies when I turn on any electrical item.

When the engine dies the unit has no power steering or brakes, and when in a curve or turn that is dangerous. It's a real hassle trying to steer and start the engine at the same time. Any ideas? Thanks.

BOB FOX | VIA E-MAIL

I suspect a faulty ignition switch on the steering column under the dashboard or wiring connector. Check the system voltage and voltage going to the distributor when this is happening. If it falters, trace it back to the ignition switch. Also make sure not only the chassis is grounded, but the engine is too.

SWAPPING THERMOSTATS

I have a 2005 motorhome with a 8.1-L Chevrolet engine on a Workhorse chassis. With five years and 30,000 miles on the coach, it's about time to change the belts, hoses and antifreeze. I'm thinking of changing the 195-degree thermostat to one that is 180 degrees. I travel during summer and I hear the engine fan running during the heat of the day. By reducing the thermostat, there'd be more of a margin between the dash temperature and when the fan comes on. Will I run into problems doing this?

BOB STAMPS | RICHARDSON, TEXAS

The higher 192-195 thermostats were introduced as an emission reduction measure as it was found that running the engines hotter caused the fuel to be burned more thoroughly and reduced harmful pollutants. The higher T-stat setting also helps the oxygen sensor run in a closed loop and running a lower thermostat may cause the CHECK ENGINE light to come on.

SLOW GAS TANK FILL

My Holiday Rambler Class A has a problem: The gas tank will not fill completely unless I add the gasoline very slowly. In fact, the pump nozzle trips at a fast fill rate when the tank is less than half full. I've tried everything, with the only improvement being a positioning of the motorhome so it is leaning away from the pump. Is there a fix for this? I'm tired of taking 20 minutes or more to fill up while holding the nozzle barely open.

KENNETH HESELTON | JOPPA, MD.

Inspect the filler hose to the tank for sharp bends or kinks. Also, make sure the vent hose is open, that it isn't kinked

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and doesn't have a low spot that traps gasoline, preventing air from escaping during fill-up. Sometimes (rarely) tanks have the filler necks installed too far down into the tank, which also causes filling problems.

TRACKER DINGHY TROUBLES

We are having a problem with our 2004 Chevy 4WD Tracker dinghy vehicle. We have a fuse that keeps blowing and when this happens the blinkers don't work and the gear shift lever will not come out of the PARK position. Changing the fuse remedies the situation for about half a day, and then it blows again. Any ideas on what might be the cause?

BILL AND MARILYN WHITE HOWELL, MICH.

It's likely to be a short or cross feed between wires. Are the towing lights separate or run through the existing lights? It could be that when the wiring was incorporated for towing, something was messed up. That's where I'd look first. Due to the possible three-wire/four-wire incompatibility of the motorhome and tow vehicle taillight wiring systems, you may need to install diodes to prevent the problem. Roadmaster and others sell these diode kits, and they come with instructions.

GENERATOR GRIEF

I have a 2007 Outlook by Winnebago, which I bought used. When I got it home I ran the AC generator for two hours and found a small leak. I took it to the dealer. The first time they said it was the drain plug. It leaked again. The second time they said they sealed the drain plug. After the third time I gave up.

The dealer wants me to believe that they all leak a little, but I called Onan and was told that it shouldn't leak. Should they leak? What should I do?

ROBERT GORGES | LOS ANGELES

No, they don't normally leak. Clean the oily areas with carburetor cleaner spray. Then when it dries, spray foot powder on it. Run the engine and this powder will show where the oil is coming from so it can be properly diagnosed and then repaired.

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POWERTRAIN

REPLACING SPARK PLUGS

My 1998 Bounder with a 7.5-L Ford V-8 has 102,000 miles and the plugs have never been changed. The mileage is as good today as it was when it was new. Do I need to change plugs? What if I don't? If I do, what kind of plugs should I use? What about plug wires and rotor? Thank you.

THOMAS MELLY | PHOENIX, ARIZ.

At this mileage you should replace them. As the gaps widen, the voltage required to jump the gaps increases. Eventually this causes ignition components to fail. I prefer long-life premium plugs, such as platinum tips. The cap, rotor and cables should all be replaced.

ETHANOL ANGST

I'm having a problem finding gasoline without ethanol. My motorhome will not run on ethanol. As soon as some is put in, it just sputters and sputters. The motorhome is a 1985 Class C Shasta with a 460-cid Ford engine with the original carburetor. I hope you can help me solve this problem.

HAROLD DURHAM | NEWLAND, N.C.

Your engine should run better than what you report, using available reformulated fuel with up to 10 percent ethanol. While it can be problematic, there are many older carbureted engines zipping around satisfactorily while burning ethanol-blend fuel. How long has it been since it had a good tuneup? I suggest you take your coach to a carburetor and tuneup specialist (not one of those quick-tune places) and have the specialist run it on an exhaust gas analyzer, chassis dyno and a scope to find the problem. Ethanol runs leaner than gasoline, so you may need to have the carburetor re-jetted richer. Ethanol also vapor locks easier, and you may have an issue with that condition if it only sputters when warm/hot. Also, make sure the fuel filter is clean and fuel pressure sufficient.

SMOKING DIESEL GENERATOR

I have a 2004 Monaco Cayman with a 5.5 kW Onan diesel generator. When it's started at 6,000 feet or higher it runs very rich for a long time and is embarrassing. If I let it run long enough it does clear up, but it can take as long as 10 to 15 minutes. Is there any way it can be adjusted when

CONTINUED ON PAGE 62

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used at this elevation, or is this normal?
JERRY DETTMANN | TUCSON, ARIZ.

You didn't mention exactly what model genset you have. My records show a 6 kW diesel. Most diesel injection pumps can be adjusted for altitude, but it may require a technician. Check the owner's manual to see if the generator has an altitude adjustment knob and if so, adjust it as needed. It will then lose power at lower elevations, so reset it again when changing altitudes.

STARTER PROBLEMS

I have a 2001 Fleetwood Southwind 36 on a Ford chassis. After the engine has been running for a few minutes and is turned off, it won't restart. All dash warning lights come on when the ignition is turned on, but the starter will not engage, just as if the transmission was not in PARK. After sitting a while, everything is fine and the starter will engage properly. What do you think the problem is?
CHARLES SMITH | HOUSTON

You may have a hot starter that won't function until it cools. Begin by measuring voltage at the large starter terminal when the engine won't crank. It needs to be at least 9.7 volts. If it is, the starter may need replacement. If you're not getting voltage there, it needs to be traced back through the starter circuit, neutral safety switch and to the ignition switch.

FIX THAT FUEL GAUGE: A FOLLOW-UP

After 11 months battling my fuel gauge situation ("Fix That Fuel Gauge," Powertrain, December 2009), the problem has finally been solved. Following your recommendations, it turned out the problem was a faulty new fuel sending unit and bad wiring from the sending unit to the dash gauge.

Also, the dealer had hired a new tech, one knowledgeable in 12-volt DC electrical RV systems. He understood your recommendations and with his experience on similar issues found the problem in short order.

Because of the bundles of wires running through the coach, he capped off the existing bad wires, and ran new wiring, leaving the old wires in the bundles. (What are your feelings about this?) Thanks again. My RV buddies and I follow your column with gusto. Keep up the great job.
PAUL D. BRODDICK | LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

I'm glad you got it sorted out. It can be impractical to try to remove an old wire from a harness, so as long as the new one is run properly and the old one is disconnected at both ends, you should be fine.

GAUGE GRIEF GONE

I read Randy Smith's problem ("Gauge Grief") in the November 2009 issue regarding no oil pressure and hot at idle. I have had 454-cid engines in racing boats and motorhomes and have come across this problem before; it's a collapsed lifter, believe it or not. Depending on intake or exhaust, it may not even show up as a misfire. The temperature will rise because it's not getting full oil pressure at speed, only at idle; not a big problem if caught in time.
MIKE SAWICKI | MASSAPEQUA, N.Y.

Thanks for writing, Mike. That's one I haven't heard of, but it certainly could be. I've seen pushrods pop out, which allowed lifters to come out, followed by a loss of oil pressure, but accompanied by a bad misfire.

CRANKCASE CRUD

You mentioned crankcase fume crud as a common cause of overheating in response to Lyle Johnson ("Intermittent Overheating II") in your October 2009 column. I was having that problem with my 2005 Fleetwood Excursion on a Spartan Chassis powered by a Cat C-7. When I took it to NC Power Systems, the Cat dealer in Tukwila, Wash., to have it serviced, I asked them to clean the radiator while they were at it. I explained about my overheating issue and they told me about a Cat service bulletin that called for installing a fume recovery system at no cost, since my engine was under warranty. I hope you can mention this to other owners of Cat-powered motorhomes with rear radiators.

PAUL THORPE | GIG HARBOR, WASH.

Thanks for writing, Paul. The Cat service bulletin for the 3126 engine is No. 980924, dated 1998. The Cat part number for the kit is 269-2002 and the price (\$335.50) is high, but should solve the problem. The kit contains the hardware to install the unit, but you may have to build a bracket to install it on the engine or coach. ♦

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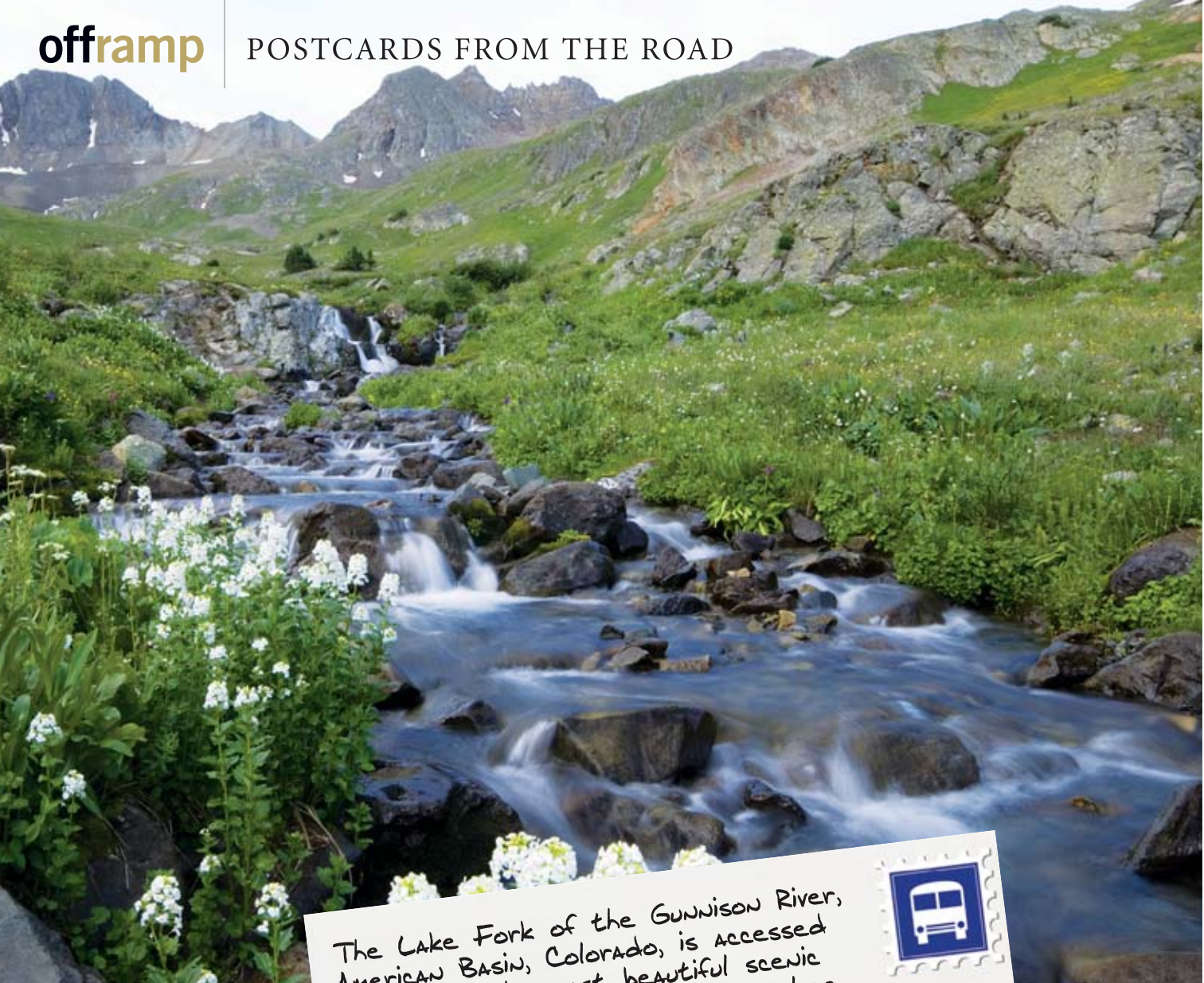
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Donna Ikenberry
South Fork, Colorado



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