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MAY 2010

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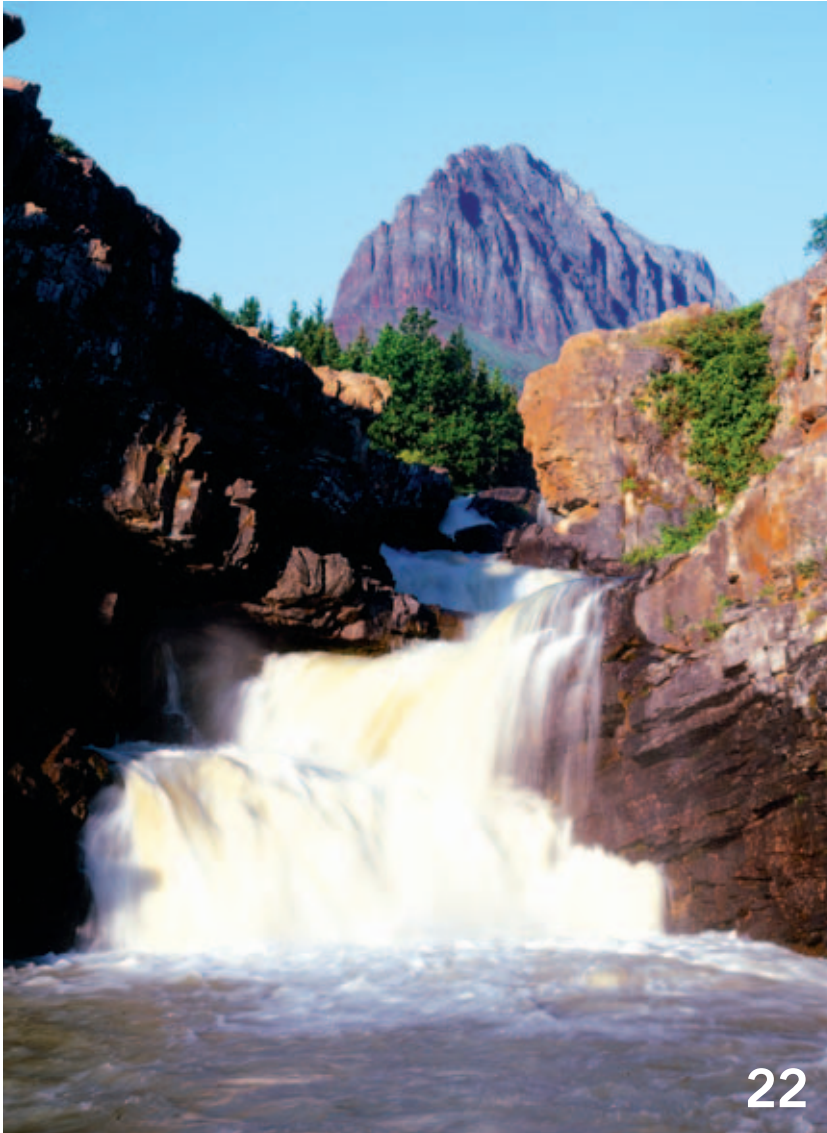
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On The Cover: Roadtrek's ingenious rear-slide Class B is the perfect travel adventure vehicle, whether boondocking in the wilds or relaxing beach-side at the beautiful Newport Dunes Waterfront RV Resort and Marina in Newport Beach, Calif. (see test on page 44). Photo by Fred Pausch.



STATE PARKS UNDER FIRE

While on a recent visit to one of our favorite playgrounds on California's central coast I heard some pretty disturbing news. The campground we stayed in — Morro Bay State Park — was going to be severely impacted because of state budget considerations. The proposed plan would close about half the park to RVers and campers.

Put simply, California's park system is about to become ravaged. That's because it seems to be a pawn in the state's dysfunctional political arena. California's parks are among the most beautiful properties in the world — and knowing that these locations are cherished by so many of its constituents, politicians use them as leverage. This time the state's governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, has concocted a plan to tie the survival of the state park system to revenues generated from oil drilling off the Santa Barbara coast.

Regardless of your position on the controversy, linking the future of California's precious natural resources to offshore drilling is unconscionable — and nothing but a political game. Even if conservation groups and the residents acquiesce, revenue from offshore drilling could be years away. By then the park system, sans stable funding, will be devastated.

Last year more than half of California's 278 parks were temporarily shut down or suffered deep cuts in maintenance. The prognosis for 2010 is even worse: Unless drastic measures are taken, we could be looking at permanent park closures, with most of the system out of service.

Fortunately, the California State Parks Foundation (www.calparks.org), an organization that was instrumental in neutralizing political efforts to close down many of the parks last year, is actively pursuing solutions. The group is trying to place the California State Parks and

Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010 on November's ballot. If this effort succeeds, voters will decide whether to approve an \$18 annual surcharge on their vehicle license fees. This money would be earmarked exclusively for the parks and wildlife, and provide vehicle owners (residents) free daily access to all the parks.

Certainly no one likes more taxes, but if the money can be isolated from the general fund and provide a secure future for the park system, sign me up!

California's state parks are not the only ones hemorrhaging. A number of other states, including New York, Utah and Arizona, have publicly announced possible park closures due to budget constraints. Arizona plans to close 13 more parks this year (five were closed last year), leaving only nine parks in the system. Utah is considering privatizing some of its parks as lawmakers attempt to align spending with budgeted resources. And in New York, the nation's oldest state park system is at risk of losing almost half of its sites. With budgets tightening nationwide, I fear that many more state park systems will be targeted for closure.

I can't imagine what the RVing (and camping) experience will be like without a healthy state park system. California's parks, for example, attract more than 80 million visits annually.

Motorhome owners are not alone in their appreciation for the state park system; I suspect all citizens feel a sense of pride in showcasing their state's natural and historic resources. Once the funds are pulled from the system, the parks will deteriorate quickly — and may never return to their current vitality. I encourage everyone to use the ballot box to keep that from happening. ♦

EDITORIAL

Publisher ■ Bob Livingston
Editor ■ Eileen Hubbard
Senior Managing Editor ■ Patricia Marroquin
Assistant Editor ■ Meaghan Alfier
Midwest Bureau Chief ■ Sherman Goldenberg

Consulting Editors ■ Wes Caughlan; Ken Freund; Jeff Johnston

Contributors ■ Bob Ashley; Gary Bohinc; Bert Gildart; Kevin Livingston; Fred Pausch; E. Don Smith; Richard and Ellen Thane

CREATIVE

Art Director ■ Susie Lieu Almazan

PRODUCTION

Production Director ■ Bob Dawson
Senior Ad Production Manager ■ Brenda Hutchinson

CIRCULATION

Circulation Director ■ Jill Anderson
Fulfillment Manager ■ Melissa Vizzo

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CUSTOMER SERVICE:

www.motorhomemagazine.com,
 MotorHome, P.O. Box 5860,
 Harlan, IA 51593-1360.
 800-678-1201 (U.S.) or e-mail:
mhmcustserv@cdsfulfillment.com.



Subscription price United States and possessions: 1 year: \$19.97, 2 years: \$34.97, 3 years: \$47.97. All other countries, including

Canada and Mexico, add \$12 per year. MotorHome is a registered trademark of Affinity Group Inc. Copyright 2010 by Affinity Group Inc. All rights reserved. MotorHome (ISSN #0744-074X) is published monthly by TL Enterprises from editorial and business offices at 2575 Vista Del Mar, Ventura, CA 93001.

Printed in the United States. Periodical postage paid at Ventura, CA 93001 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send all address changes to: MotorHome, P.O. Box 5860, Harlan, IA 51593-1360. Publication Sales Agreement No. 1488163; Canadian Post Sales Agreement No. 40012332. Canadian return address: Affinity Group, Inc., 4960-2 Walker Road, Windsor, Ontario N9A 6J3. Authorized Subscription Agent – AGA.

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“ARE YOU HAPPY WITH YOUR RV INSURANCE?”

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

SMOOTH SAILING WITH GMAC

Last November our motorhome was severely vandalized. Shortly after the break-in was discovered, I called the GMAC claims number to report the damage. From that moment through the next two months of the rebuilding process, every contact with GMAC was satisfactory and pleasant. They were considerate of my devastating loss. The claims adjuster assigned to my case was very helpful, fair and cooperative. She was clear and concise in what she wanted from me. In the few insurance claims I have had in my life, none went as smoothly as this one, even though it required a two-month rebuilding time at the factory. The factory personnel commented on how smoothly the process went working with GMAC. I can, and do, highly recommend Good Sam’s GMAC insurance for all of my fellow RVers.

JIM HELMS | RUSSELLVILLE, ARK.

A CUSTOMER FOR LIFE

I have to compliment Progressive Insurance and Coach-Net for outstanding service. Last summer we were traveling to Alaska in our motorhome. In a construction zone we put a rock through the radiator, causing a disabling leak. We were about 200 miles from Whitehorse, Yukon Territory — out in the middle of nowhere. Using our satellite phone we contacted Coach-Net and Progressive. They were fantastic. Coach-Net had a lowboy truck (not a tow truck) on site within a couple of hours. The motorhome was carried all the way to Whitehorse. Coach-Net knew where to get the radiator repaired in Whitehorse. Progressive picked up the ball at that point and couldn’t do enough for us. I received calls and e-mails from them making sure all was going smoothly. Issues were handled over the phone or via e-mail using scanned copies of documents. I don’t think I’ve ever been treated better than by the folks at Coach-Net and Progressive. Needless to say, they have a customer for life.

GERRY BRENTNALL | LOOMIS, CALIF.

COVERAGE IN QUESTION

We have a 1975 GMC 26-foot motorhome with about 40,000 original miles. It’s licensed as an antique, and is insured for \$28,000. We have Hartford insurance for two of our vehicles, and last year we added the motorhome to the policy.

Last April, a small fire started under the dashboard and caused a minimal amount of damage. Hartford stated in a letter that the damages were the result of normal wear and tear, and not the result of sudden and accidental damage. The letter also stated that the policy doesn’t cover a mechanical or electrical breakdown of any part of the vehicle. I sent a letter stating Hartford’s rationale for refusing to pay \$6,419 for parts and labor was not acceptable.

The policy does cover damages caused by the fire itself and Hartford offered to pay for the dashboard, HVAC duct and associated parts, however, I’m not sure if this vehicle



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EDITORIAL / BUSINESS OFFICE

2575 Vista Del Mar
Ventura, CA 93001
Tel 805-667-4100
Fax 805-667-4484

ADVERTISING

VENTURA, CALIFORNIA
VP National Sales
Terry Thompson

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insurance policy adequately covers three vehicles and whether or not the motorhome is covered correctly or not.
JAMES HAMILTON | SACRAMENTO, CALIF.

A NEW MEANING FOR 'WI-FI'
On a recent trip to Palm Springs it dawned on me how backward RV resorts have become. I stayed in a very nice resort (\$86 a night) only to find it had "pay for" Wi-Fi usage. Why don't parks offer free Wi-Fi as a way to attract me to their resort, much the same as Starbucks does for its customers? Nickel-and-diming me once I arrive at a resort is not my idea of customer service. I'm starting to believe that in the case of RV resorts, the Wi-Fi stands for "We Interfere for Investment."
MIKE CHAMBERLIN | PHOENIX

UP WITH 'DOWN UNDER' ARTICLE
We have to congratulate Mr. Couper for his excellent and so-accurate article on his Australian motorhome experience ("Driving Down Under," January). Having bought our own U.S. Class C coach in 2005 and having driven through some 45 states for eight months doing 26,000 miles, we know the pleasure of touring another country — and the United States is the best!
However, we also have driven around Australia prior to our U.S. trip (twice). While Couper's trip was short, it did brilliantly cover most of what Australia has to offer — only the Red Centre was missed, and to get there is difficult on a short time schedule.
**PETER AND HELEN CLISDELL
SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA**

PARK EXPERIENCE IS A FANTASY
The January On Ramp column was very nicely written, but didn't present the realities of our national parks and RVs.
I first visited many of our national parks as a teenager. I now travel in my motorhome all over the country visiting our "treasured" parks using a park pass. I still enjoy each park, but they hardly resemble what I first saw 45 years ago. It is so sad to see what the excessive number of visitors have done to the parks. In the summer there are more tourists than at the Disney parks. As a result the parks are trampled to death. I've seen TV programs about the parks and they must only film early on Sunday mornings because they don't reflect

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PLATINUM

the congestion that ruins the park experience. As for the RV sites in the park: They are antiquated by today's standards. I never stay in the park, but visit in my dinghy vehicle and leave the motorhome at a private campground outside the park.

The parks need protection with the latest technologies; off-site parking garages, trams, electric trains and moving sidewalks; food and souvenir vendors and restaurants moved miles away from the beautiful sites; restrooms hidden and maintained. This would be a good start.

You can stop with the fantasy of the park experience and get real before there is nothing left to see.

BILL MEYER | BRADENTON, FLA.

THE VIEW FROM A HOLIDAY

Mr. Whitehead wrote about the joys of having a rear window ("Rear Window on the World," P.O. Box, March). My husband and I own a 40-foot Holiday Rambler/Ambassador and boy, were we shopping during the perfect year — 2007! Our bedroom is in the rear and has a lift-up table and two

comfy chairs! There's nothing like backing up against a water inlet, forest or elevated site, with tea mugs full, and watching the sun rise, set or even a great thunder and lightning rain. That is the RVing life!

**KAREN AND DWIT TUITT
WILLINGBORO, N.J.**

DON'T FORGET WINNEBAGO'S WINDOW

Regarding the letter from the reader searching for coaches that have "rear windows": He overlooked Winnebago. I own a 2002 Winnebago Brave, which has a large rear window. It's in pristine condition due to being garaged when not on the road. I'm sure there are others out there.

J. PHILLIPS | SEQUIM, WASH.

Question:

Do you travel with your pets? If so, please tell us what kind and how many.

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escapes

edited by PATRICIA MARROQUIN

EVENTS | WHEELS & GEAR | NEWS BRIEFS | CROSSROADS

FLOATING HISTORY LESSON

ALASKA'S CULTURE AND PAST COME TO LIFE ON RIVERBOAT

A four-hour excursion on Riverboat Discovery III in Fairbanks, Alaska, is more than a cruise down the Chena River to its convergence with the silt-laden Tanana. From an open sun deck or heated and glass-enclosed observation areas, guests experience an entertaining slice of Alaskan history and culture.

Departing twice daily from mid-May to mid-September, the 280-ton stern-wheeler carries passengers past rustic cabins and historic structures huddled along the riverbank. At Trail Breaker Kennels, home of four-time Iditarod champion Susan Butcher, a representative speaks from the riverbank about sled dogs and their training. A lively demonstration of harnessing the dogs prefaces a fast race around the property. Video monitors throughout the vessel flash live feeds so passengers in any seat have a front-row view.

A one-hour land tour of a replica of the Old Chena Indian Village and fish camp provides a glimpse into Athabascan Indian life long ago. Native Alaskan hosts guide guests through the village, identifying primitive shelters, an authentic birch bark canoe, various pelts and the small log caches on stilts that stored their winter food.

After passengers board the riverboat for a return trip, a guide demonstrates from the shore the cutting and preparation of their family's summer salmon catch. For more information, call 907-479-6673, or visit www.riverboatdiscovery.com.

— Arline Chandler



PHOTO: LEE SMITH

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PHOTO: JOSH MONKEN, COURTESY OF THE MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

MAY 15-16

Combine your love of gardening with the opportunity to learn about Chinese culture at **Chinese Cultural Days** at the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis. Sip some Chinese tea while you take a tour of the grounds that focuses on the symbolism of significant plants and architectural features, or watch a 70-foot dragon dance in the Grand Parade along with Shanghai acrobats. The event will also feature martial arts, tai chi lessons, Chinese calligraphy, painting and authentic regional cuisine; 314-577-5100, www.mobot.org.

MAY 1 | Get a glimpse of what the world was like before television, cell phones and the Internet at the **Colonial May Fair** celebration at Pottsgrove Manor in Pottstown, Pa. It will feel just like the 18th century with puppet shows, colonial crafters and demonstrations of historic trades like blacksmithing and sheep shearing. And what May Fair celebration would be complete without games and dances around the maypole?; 610-326-4014, www.historic-sites.montcopa.org.

MAY 1-2 | If you've heard about a dulcimer but aren't quite sure what it is, or you want to learn more about this traditional string instrument, go to the **Southern Appalachian Dulcimer Festival** in McCalla, Ala. The festival features dulcimer craftsmen and musicians from across the country, as well as a dulcimer-making class, music lessons and instruments, and

books for sale; 205-477-5711, www.tannehill.org.

MAY 1-2 | Add a little spice to your life at the **Big Mamou Cajun Festival** in Grand Prairie, Texas, where you can listen to Cajun music and set your feet tapping to the beat, enjoy traditional Louisiana creole foods like gumbo, crawfish and red beans and rice, and shop for bargains. Park your coach at the RV park next door, which has pull-through sites and full hookups, and let the fun begin; 972-647-2331, www.traders-village.com.

MAY 15-16 | Enjoy a casual yet sophisticated spring weekend at the **A la Carte & Art** festival in Mountain View, Calif. World-class art, great music, a wide variety of food and drink, a farmers market, a kids' Fun Zone and an organic and green products showcase combine to create a fabulous experience

for the entire family; 650-964-3395, www.miramarevents.com/alacarte.

MAY 22-23 | Many of the top artists and craftspeople from across the country gather at the annual **Spring Crafts and Fine Art Fair** in Roslyn Harbor, N.Y. There will be more than 100 displays of contemporary American craftsmanship and



PHOTO: PATRICIA MARROQUIN

by MEAGHAN ALFIER

fine art, including decorative pottery, leather, jewelry, blown and stained glass, home furnishings and clothing, as well as entertainment and food and drink; 973-746-0091, www.craftsatlincoln.org.

MAY 29 | Even if it's more than a stone's throw away, you'll want to check out the **Antrim County Petoskey Stone Festival** at Barnes Park in Eastport, Mich. The event, which honors Michigan's state stone, will include stone-hunting on the beach, stone-skipping, children's entertainment, music, prizes and some of the finest rock and gem vendors in Michigan; 231-533-8363, www.petoskeystonefestival.com.

MAY 29-31 | Say ciao to the *bella* artwork at the **I Madonnari Italian Street Painting Festival** in Santa Barbara, Calif. More than 25,000 visitors annually flock to the steps of the Old Mission to watch the artists create brightly colored chalk "paintings" on squares of concrete. In addition to being a feast for the eyes, this event has live music and an authentic Italian market; 805-964-4710, ext. 4411, www.imadonnarifestival.com.



MONTAJ WITH A LIFT

Gulf Stream has rolled out the 32-foot, low-profile Montaj

Class A motorhome on the modified Ford E-450 chassis with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 14,050 pounds. In the prototype stage since late 2008, a production version of the Montaj was introduced at the National RV Trade Show last December. After a 15,000-mile test run, the Montaj was subsequently refined and as a result, the floorplans have been extended.

Equipped with one or two slides, the Montaj features an electric lift that raises the bed and allows easy reach to the storage area beneath, curved cabinetry, a twin-sized bed that swings down from over the cockpit, convertible horseshoe couches and seats that swivel and slide back toward the dash to become part of the living area. Base MSRP is \$114,000.

Gulf Stream Coach, 800-289-8787, www.gulfstreamcoach.com.

— *Bob Ashley*



COOK, SERVE, STORE



Making the most out of a small space is a key ingredient

in the recipe for fun and stress-free RVing — especially in the galley. Baking dishes, serve ware and food storage containers are necessities for cooking, whether you're making a quick dinner for two or throwing together a green bean casserole for a campground potluck. But they can fill up your cabinets and rattle around while driving.

FoldTuk Kitchenware has introduced collapsible bake ware that does it all — you can cook, serve and store with a single product.

The bake ware utilizes a proprietary material that is non-sticking, non-breakable, dishwasher-safe and oven-safe up to 500 degrees Fahrenheit, according to the company. The product can go straight from the freezer to the oven, so it's perfect for storing food that you've prepared before a trip. When you're done, the product collapses to a 1-inch thickness, taking up a minimal amount of space in your coach.

The bake ware — available in 4-cup or 6-cup capacities in a variety of colors and shapes — has a retail price starting at \$14.99.

FoldTuk Kitchenware, 804-353-7160, www.foldtuk.com.

— *Meaghan Alfier*

News Briefs

Bob Lee, founder and former CEO of defunct luxury RV manufacturer **Country Coach Inc.**, along with his brother Ron Lee, are starting a new company to build motorhomes after spending about \$1 million to buy Country Coach assets during a bankruptcy auction in February. The Lees purchased the intellectual property of the Junction City, Ore., high-end manufacturer, including brand names and blueprints plus steel fabrication equipment, 13 paint booths and chassis testing equipment during the court-ordered auction after Country Coach attempted to stave off foreclosure for nearly a year. Bob Lee said that plans for the new company are sketchy, but that he and his brother will build coaches that are generally smaller than those that were manufactured by Country Coach.

Thor Industries Inc.'s fiscal second-quarter revenue nearly doubled from a year earlier on stronger RV sales. For the quarter that ended Jan. 31, the company's preliminary sales rose to \$429 million, compared with \$226.7 million in the year-ago period. The company, which sells about 50 RV brands, began hiring again late last year after months of slashing jobs and closing factories.

Renegade/Kibbi LLC, a builder of luxury motorcoaches to the racing industry, has expanded its line to include a new model targeting the traditional RV market. The 45-foot **IKON** by Renegade is built on a **Freightliner Coronado** truck chassis with a 56,650-pound GVWR and is powered by a 450-HP Detroit Diesel DD 13 or 560-HP DD 15 front-end diesel engine. IKON features standard leather Flexsteel furniture and sofa bed, solid surface Corian countertops, polished tile flooring, and 40- and 31-inch Sony TVs. The MSRP is in the \$500,000 range.

Arizona's State Parks Board voted to close 13 state parks due to an \$8.6 million state park deficit. The parks will be closed in a phased sequence from Feb. 22 through June 3. Nine of the state's most profitable parks will remain open: **Buckskin Mountain** in Parker, **Catalina** near Tucson, **Cattail Cove** in Lake Havasu City, **Dead Horse Ranch** in Cottonwood, **Fool Hollow** in Show Low, **Kartchner Caverns** in Benson, **Lake Havasu** at Lake Havasu City, **Patagonia Lake** in Patagonia (below) and **Slide Rock** in Sedona. Four other parks, which have agreements with other entities or are passively managed by an adjacent park, will also remain open.



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WALT DISNEY'S MAGICAL STORY



PHOTO: COURTESY WALT DISNEY FAMILY FOUNDATION ©DISNEY

Everybody has seen a

Disney movie: If you haven't sat in front of a movie screen in awe as a lion cub was raised into the air at Pride Rock, then you've probably watched Cinderella croon "So This Is Love" to her handsome prince or blushed as two pooches found the end of a string of spaghetti. The recently opened Walt Disney Family Museum in San Francisco offers insight into the fascinating

life of the man who made all of these memorable moments, and much more, possible.

Walt Disney's story is told primarily visually — through interactive exhibits, more than 200 video monitors, historical artifacts, listening stations and more. Each gallery is dedicated to a different stage of Disney's life. See where it all started with his childhood sketches of Mickey Mouse, or look through a two-story-high animation camera that was used to create 3-D effects for "Pinocchio" and "Fantasia," among other films.

Special presentations reveal how Disney's toughest visual media challenges were tackled; others focus on live-action movies like "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea," and his TV work in the 1950s. In the final gallery, there's the actual miniature steam-engine train that Disney used to ride around his property; his plans for EPCOT; and a scale model of Disneyland as he envisioned it to be.

The museum is located in the Presidio of San Francisco, a former U.S. Army base. There are several campgrounds in the area, including Candlestick RV Park.

For more information, call 415-345-6800, or visit www.waltdisney.org.

— Meaghan Alfier

ROCKLAND BREAKWATER: 700,000 TONS OF FUN

One of the things I enjoy most about traveling around this great country of ours is finding unique places to walk. I found one such extraordinary location on a recent visit to Maine.

My sunny-day stroll began in Rockland Harbor and ended at Jamison Point and the Rockland Breakwater Lighthouse. Amazingly, 768,774 tons of granite was used to make the nearly one-mile-long breakwater walkway, which took 18 years to complete. That in itself is something to see.

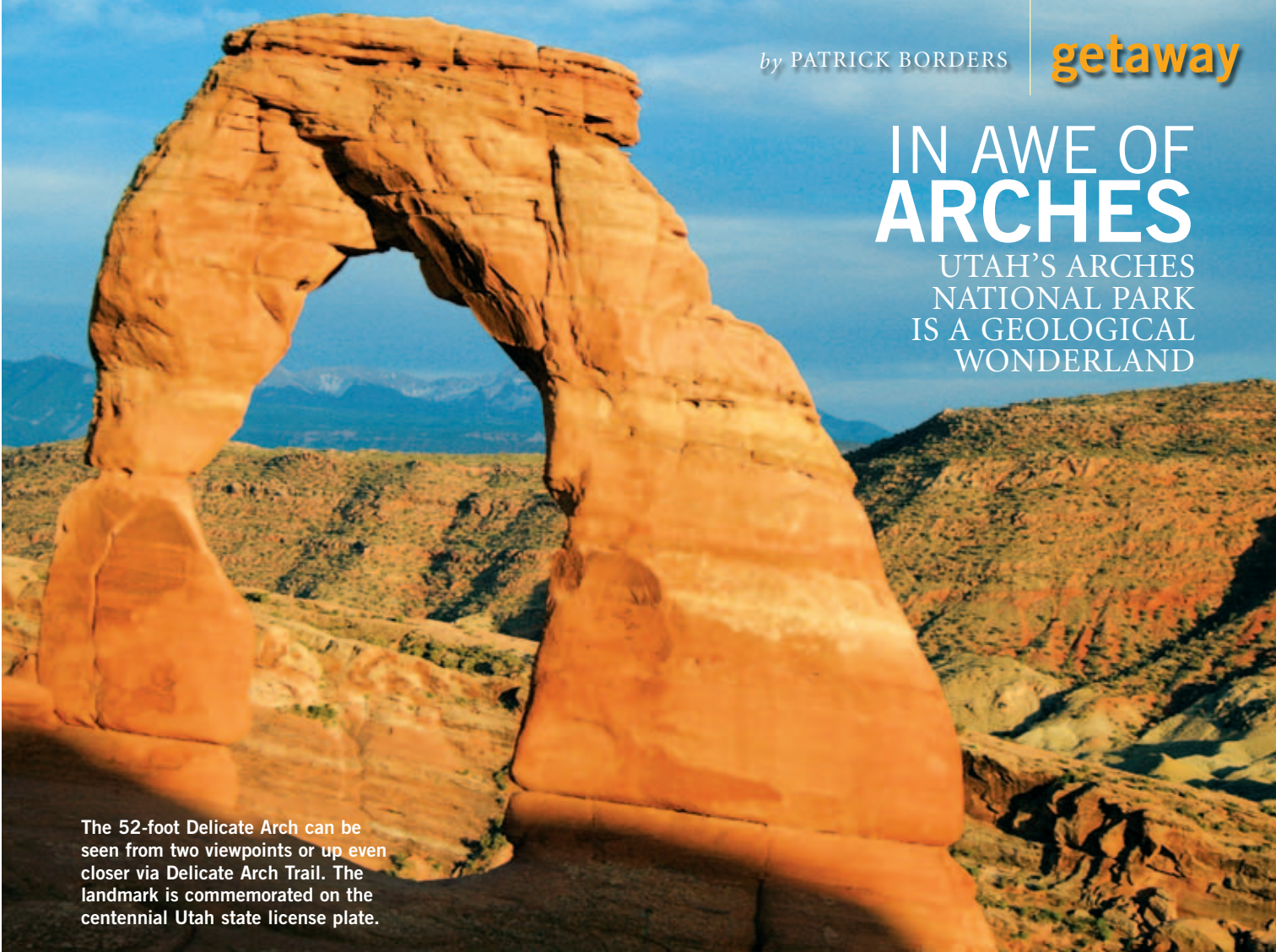
The lighthouse was built at the end of the breakwater in 1902 to mark the navigational hazard the breakwater posed for mariners. It consists of a 25-foot-high tower, engine room, keepers' quarters and boathouse. Lighthouse keepers manned the lighthouse until 1965, when it became automated. Volunteers are in the process of restoring the lighthouse, which is open for viewing on weekends from Memorial Day to Columbus Day as well as holidays and other special event days.

For more information, contact the Friends of the Rockland Breakwater Lighthouse at 207-542-7574, or visit www.rocklandlighthouse.com. — Donna Ikenberry ♦




IN AWE OF ARCHES

UTAH'S ARCHES NATIONAL PARK IS A GEOLOGICAL WONDERLAND



The 52-foot Delicate Arch can be seen from two viewpoints or up even closer via Delicate Arch Trail. The landmark is commemorated on the centennial Utah state license plate.



Famous arches attract attention all over the world. St. Louis has its Gateway Arch. Paris, its Arc de Triomphe. Road-weary travelers are often attracted by the golden arches of McDonald's. But only in Utah can you find a concentration of arches — natural arches — unlike anywhere else.

At Arches National Park, located five miles north of Moab in southeast Utah, visitors find more than 2,500 cataloged sandstone arches. The arches come in all sizes, ranging from a minimum opening of 3 feet to the 306-foot span of Landscape Arch, one of the largest in North America. In addition to arches, the landscape hosts an expanse of otherworldly features, such as enormous sandstone fins, balanced rocks and towering pinnacles — all in vibrant reds, oranges and other colors.

The park lacks some amenities of our most popular national parks, however its

Ample parking is available near the popular Devils Garden trailhead. The trail showcases many of the park's best arches and hike lengths vary from 1.6 miles to 7.2 miles, depending on how many arches you want to view.

silent landscape offers a wonderland ripe for exploration. You can get a thorough sampling in just a few hours by driving the scenic road to many viewpoints. Or you can pursue a more intimate exploration by hiking the trails during a full-day or multi-day visit.

The park's 76,518 acres serve as a museum, of sorts, where geologic faulting has exposed a vast span of natural history — an epic tale of salt and sand, wind and rain. More than 300 million years ago, vast seas blanketed the Colorado Plateau. When the waters receded, they left behind salt beds thousands of feet deep. Sand and other sediments eventually covered the salt and compressed it into sedimentary rock. Under pressure, the buried salt shifted and was forced upward by faults, cracking the rigid overlying rock into parallel fractures.

Over time, erosion carried away grains of sand and widened the cracks, creating thin canyons. Fins (or narrow slices of rock) were left standing between the canyons.

Water continued to wear away at the sandstone, and gradually, pieces of rock



A hiker enjoys a view of Turret Arch in the distance from North Window. When viewed together, the two Windows arches look like eyeglasses resting on a nose, and are also known as The Spectacles. Below, Balanced Rock is a distinctive feature in which a 55-foot-high boulder sits precariously on a narrower pedestal.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

ARCHES NATIONAL PARK

435-719-2299,
www.nps.gov/arch.

MOAB AREA TRAVEL COUNCIL

800-635-6622,
www.discovermoab.com.

MOAB VALLEY RV RESORT

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www.moabvalleyrv.com.

RIVERSIDE OASIS RV PARK

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www.riversideoasis.com.

SPANISH TRAIL RV PARK

800-787-2751,
www.spanishtrailrvpark.com.



tumbled off the fins. In many cases, the fins collapsed. But the more balanced fins remained with holes in the middle — and arches were born.

Today, the story continues. Erosion works away grains from the sandstone, creating new arches and destroying others.

The first stop in Arches National Park should be the visitor center, located just inside the park entrance. The relatively new 18,000-square-foot center offers an excellent collection of interactive exhibits and a film that highlights Arches and nearby Canyonlands National Park. Rangers are also on hand to answer questions and provide maps and other material.

Once inside the park, the 18-mile Scenic Drive climbs a steep cliff and winds along the desert terrain, skirting the first amazing glimpses of red rock features. The road initially passes the Park Avenue area

and then Courthouse Towers — a red monolithic setting used in the 1991 movie, "Thelma and Louise." The road then comes to the rolling landscape of Petrified Dunes before arriving at Balanced Rock, a trick of nature where a 55-foot-high boulder sits precariously on a narrower pedestal.

After Balanced Rock, a turnoff leads to the Windows section, home to the first concentration of arches and some of the park's largest. Short trails lead from the road to Cove Arch and to Double Arch, which was used as a setting in the 1989 movie, "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade." The side road ends at the site of the North and South Windows and Turret Arch. From the parking area, a one-mile trail loop leads visitors around and through three massive arches. The two Windows arches, when viewed together, look like eyeglasses resting on a nose, and are also known as The Spectacles.

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Back on the main road, you can follow the Scenic Drive for 2.5 miles to another turnoff, which leads to Wolfe Ranch and the Delicate Arch viewpoints. An old log cabin is located at Wolfe Ranch, where in 1888, John Wesley Wolfe, a disabled Civil War veteran, built a homestead with his son. On this rugged land, they operated a primitive ranch for more than 10 years.

One mile past Wolfe Ranch, you can access two viewpoints for the famous,

52-foot Delicate Arch, which is commemorated on the centennial Utah state license plate. A short, surfaced path leads to a distant view of the arch as it stands guard at the edge of a slickrock bowl. A rocky, uphill route will take you to the top of a ridge, affording a closer view.

Once again on the main road, visitors will come to overlooks for Salt Valley and Fiery Furnace. Salt Valley offers views of the unstable salt deposits that played such

a dramatic role in creating the complex Arches landscape. Fiery Furnace is home to a fascinating labyrinth of ridges and narrow canyons. Hikers used to get lost weaving their way through the intricate furnace, but today most visitors explore the area as part of a ranger-guided tour.

If you're in a four-wheel-drive dinghy, you can take another side road, just before Scenic Drive ends, for an adventure through Salt Valley. You'll travel off-road through wash crossings to the more isolated backcountry of the Klondike Bluffs, home to another concentration of arches and other features. Scenic Drive ends at Devils Garden area, site of the park's only campground and the trailhead for the popular Devils Garden Trail.

Although the road winds close to many features, to fully experience the striking sights and peaceful solitude, it's best to explore the park's many hiking trails. Several trails of various lengths and difficulties take hikers up close and personal to the features, and sometimes even through arches.

Devils Garden Trail showcases many of the park's best arches and can be hiked from 1.6 miles to 7.2 miles, depending on how many arches you want to see. The shortest leg takes visitors to the famous Landscape Arch, an amazing ribbon of rock that spans more than a football field from base to base. That portion of the trail is a moderately easy, relatively flat gravel trail that also offers side spurs to Tunnel and Pine Tree arches.

Landscape Arch stands as just one example of the ever-evolving creation and destruction of the park's features. In 1991, a 60-foot section of rock fell from the span, thinning the ribboned curve even more. But the arch still remained intact. It's easy to gaze at the long, thin structure and wonder how much longer it will be around to fascinate visitors.

Past Landscape Arch, Devils Garden Trail continues along a rockier and steeper path to Double O Arch. This portion delivers more adventure as hikers traverse over sandstone slabs and fins and skirt narrow ledges. Along the way, you'll also catch mesmerizing views of Salt Valley and the snow-capped La Sal Mountains. On the rocky portions, there's no actual trail, per se, so hikers must follow a path marked by cairns — intermittent piles of strategically placed rocks.

Between Landscape Arch and Double



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O Arch you'll find the remains of Wall Arch. At 71 feet wide, Wall Arch was the 12th-largest arch in the park, but it collapsed in an instant of crashing rubble on the night of Aug. 4, 2008.

Another popular trail is Delicate Arch Trail, which, unlike the Delicate Arch viewpoints previously mentioned, takes you directly to the majestic feature. The 1.5-mile (one-way) trail begins back at Wolfe Ranch and climbs nearly 500 feet over open slickrock. Again, hikers must follow strategically placed cairns to reach the top. The final 200 yards run along a ledge that conjures images of Wile E. Coyote chasing Road Runner. Delicate Arch is particularly popular as a sunset destination. As the evening sun descends, the orange hue of the arch, perched on a canyon edge, glows against the spectacular backdrop of the snow-capped La Sal Mountains.

The maze-like canyons of Fiery Furnace offer another favorite hiking opportunity. Because of its labyrinth nature, however, it's best to take the ranger-guided hike among the narrow sandstone fins. Since

no marked trails exist in Fiery Furnace, it takes an experienced hiker with knowledge of the trail to navigate through the area.

As part of the Colorado Plateau, the park's elevation ranges from 4,085 feet to 5,653 feet. It's in a high desert region and subject to greater temperature fluctuations than the sandy deserts to the south. Summer daytime temperatures can exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit and winter lows can drop into negative territory.

When hiking all trails in Arches National Park, it's important to drink plenty of water. The intense summertime sun will leave you thirsty even during a short stroll from the car. The park recommends visitors drink 1 gallon of water per day.

Although the region around Arches offers many campgrounds, options are limited for motorhomers within the park itself. The park's one campground, Devils Garden Campground, offers sites that accommodate RVs up to 30 feet long, with a few sites allowing longer rigs. Reservations are strongly recommended, and there are no hookups or showers.

If you're looking for more activities and amenities than the park offers, the town of Moab is fortunately a prime vacation destination with plenty of recreational and cultural opportunities. As the largest town in southeast Utah, Moab is a major base for recreation, including rafting down the Colorado River. Situated along the river and bordered by red cliffs, Moab serves as the gateway to not only Arches National Park, but also nearby Canyonlands National Park, Dead Horse Point State Park and the La Sal Mountains.

Visitors to Arches National Park often visit Canyonlands National Park. The aptly named Island in the Sky District of Canyonlands spreads across a 1,500-foot mesa and offers spectacular views of canyon country for nearly a hundred miles.

The area's beauty has attracted filmmakers and tourists alike. For many, however, it's the arches that command the most attention. Spread across the Colorado Plateau in southeastern Utah, the many sandstone arches stand as a testimony to nature's awe-inspiring creative power. ♦



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A GLACIAL COMING OF AGE

AS IT MARKS 100 YEARS, MONTANA'S GLACIER
NATIONAL PARK TAKES TIME TO CELEBRATE
WITH HIKES, HISTORY TALKS AND HOOTENANNIES

by BERT GILDART



Grinnell Falls is one of many scenic areas in Glacier National Park in Montana. The park encompasses 1 million acres.



Glacier National Park is famous for its grizzly bears, which can weigh as much as 600 pounds. Grizzly bears feast on the bulbs of glacier lilies, a preferred spring food. Kayaking on a serene lake is among the activities available in the park. Visitors can also take boat tours that originate in Canada. The one above is at Goat Haunt.



“It’s a grizzly!” exclaimed my wife, Janie. **“And it’s coming right at us.”**

Upon hearing our voices, the bear reared on its haunches and tried to find us. We grabbed cans of bear spray from our belts and began a slow retreat. Simultaneously, we noted the frosty appearance created by the backlight, the dished-in face, the immeasurable power so apparent in its brawny neck and hump-backed body. No question, this was a grizzly bear.

Suddenly, the 450- to 600-pound bruin responded in a most unseemly manner — it turned tail and bolted. Essentially, it was doing so because it had not been surprised at close range with cubs, and it was not “habituated.”

Habituation is a term that describes an animal’s familiarity with people, usually through feeding, and is a condition with which I am familiar. In 1967, Montana’s Glacier National Park recorded its first fatal maulings. In a single night the inconceivable happened: Two women were killed by two bears, one at Trout Lake, the other miles away at Granite Park Chalet.

I was one of the rangers discharged to find the body at Trout Lake, and then later, to kill the bear. Today, because Glacier is celebrating its 100th anniversary, significant landmarks are being reviewed.

The park is taking this time to reflect on its past as a coming of age. Everything that has made our 10th national park what it is now will be discussed and acted out with special talks, hikes and hotel hootenannies. And because of the overwhelming fascination the park’s visitors have with bears, management of the park’s 300-plus grizzly bears will undoubtedly top the list.

Certainly things have changed and I, too, mark this year as a coming of age. For me it is a retrospection because I worked in Glacier for 13 seasons, have written books about the park and have had to resolve in my own mind whether it is worth having wild grizzly bears roaming freely.

Though Janie and I now spend several weeks each year camped in Glacier, compassion was some years in the making. But there is balm in the park’s overwhelming beauty, and it has magical powers. It compels us back and though we sleep in the

security of our hard-sided RV, we have no reservations about exploring any portion of this 1-million-acre park. But are we visitors (2 million of us) really safe? And should Glacier preserve the Great Bear?

At long last I believe I can answer those questions.

And now it is spring and the park is emerging from a deep sleep. The 50-mile-long Going-to-the-Sun Road has just opened and we want to be among the first to drive to Logan Pass, elevation 6,646 feet, for there is an awakening here that rivals any place in the world for absolute beauty. Our June visit is timely, for park crews have just cleared the famous road of its winter snows, meaning Logan Pass can now be accessed from both sides of the Continental Divide.

Going-to-the-Sun is an experience, from either direction. Our approach is from the east and quickly the road takes visitors past the Mount Jackson overlook. Fifteen minutes later it cuts into the side of a cliff face followed by several famous mountain peaks such as Going-to-the-Sun Mountain. Once, most of these peaks were given Anglo names, but that was soon changed



A boardwalk at Logan Pass Visitor Center offers snowy views, including Mount Reynolds in the fog-obscured background.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

406-888-7800,
www.nps.gov/glac.

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK



(more coming of age) and, today, some names call to mind Native American use. Indians, for instance, used Sun Mountain as a site for their vision quests.

Though snow still covered much of the Logan Pass parking lot, we find a free spot and then begin a mile-long hike to Hidden Lake Overlook. The snow is firm and the soles of our boots dig in. Here and there long days of sunlight had melted wide swaths of ground so that it was free of snow, allowing dense mats of glacier lilies to rear their heads. Point your camera in almost any direction, click the shutter and you've probably created a memorable image.

The trail climbs and we soon find the huge print of a grizzly bear, and our antennae go up. We check our bear spray, and then we pull out our binoculars. Scanning the slopes, we pick up the image of a griz-

zly bear in the distance. It is churning sod to expose the bulbs of glacier lilies, a preferred spring food. It is, in fact, doing just what an unhabituated grizzly bear is supposed to do, not always the case in the past, and we turn to exchange thoughts.

Unfortunately, it took twin tragedies to put an end to the problems that had built up in the park over the years. Garbage, and huge amounts of it, had amassed, contributing to unnatural bear behavior. A lab analysis of the bear we killed revealed it was a 17- to 18-year-old sow, but most significantly, it revealed that the emaciated bruin had glass embedded in its molars. How did it get there?

Several weeks after the fatal maulings I returned to Trout Lake with the chief ranger and together loaded up 17 burlap sacks of tin cans, raw food and glass bottles — all the capacious Huey helicopter would hold. Literally, the campground at Trout Lake had become one huge garbage dump. Soon, this would change.

Returning our attention to the bear in the distance, we raise our binoculars for another look, but the bear is gone. Perhaps it had sensed our presence.

That night we returned to our camp at Many Glacier and remained there for several days, hanging out at and around our RV. We hiked to Iceberg Lake (appropriately named), and then, another day, we tried to make it to Grinnell Glacier, but there was

too much snow, so we returned and made the mile-long hike to Fisher Cap Lake to look for moose. Often we see them there.

Another night we had dinner at the nearby Many Glacier Hotel, and stayed around to enjoy the hootenanny, a performance in which the young hotel employees sing and perform skits related to the park.

Yet another night after enjoying an outside cookout — and after making sure we've returned every single item to our RV, as required — we attended a naturalist program in the campground amphitheater. As always, the ranger-naturalist attempted to break the ice, asking visitors where they were from. Then he fielded questions, and invariably the first: "Where can we see bears?"

Many Glacier is one of the best places to see black bears and grizzly bears. From the parking lot near the Swiftcurrent Motel and immediately adjacent to the campground, you can see grizzlies feeding along the distant slopes of Mount Altyn. With a spotting scope, watch as they scoop away huge rocks trying to find a marmot. Bears are magnificent animals, and their power is stunning, something park interpreters mention constantly. Rangers also discuss appropriate bear country behavior, and that educational talk is another factor that has helped prevent unfortunate incidents. In fact, statisticians now say you are safer hiking the park's backcountry trails than you are driving to the park.

Several days later we again returned to Logan Pass and parked our dinghy. We wanted to hike the Highline Trail to the west side Loop and we could do so independently by relying on Glacier's new shuttle system, which has free service back to Logan Pass.

A mile into the trail we encountered a small band of goats, which instantly panicked. We stepped aside and the goats scurried past us, then charged onto a steep-sided slope where cliffs provide them with escape terrain. We continued hiking and about three miles into the hike the trail ascends Haystack Butte, where we saw a "bachelor herd" of bighorn rams. In the summer, the males separate from the ewes and lambs and group together. Haystack is always a good place to see them, as well as the golden mantled ground squirrel and the hoary marmot, both not long out of hibernation that June day.

Unfortunately, the one mammal we

could not find was the pika. Scientists say these tiny members of the rabbit family are like the canary in the mine. They're an indicator species and when climate change produces temperatures they cannot tolerate, these tenacious residents of the arctic-alpine zone will disappear. Scientific monitoring is another function of this World Heritage Park, and as such is responsible for evaluating a variety of conditions such as climate change.

Park scientist Dan Fagre says his computer models suggest all glaciers will be gone from this northwestern Montana park by 2020. It will, however, still be appropriate to call this 1-million-acre expanse Glacier National Park, for there will remain the glacier-carved valleys, the lateral and terminal moraines, the arêtes and all those beautiful high-alpine lakes called tarns.

About eight miles out from Logan Pass and three hours later, we can see Granite Park Chalet. Below me are more fields of glacier lilies and several small tarns where I once saw a sow and her two cubs splashing in the shallows. In years gone by a trail ran near the tiny lakes, but was permanently closed to better separate bears and people, the objective of today's Bear Management Program.

Fifteen minutes later we hike onto the porch of this historic old chalet, and pause to enjoy the spectacle of Heaven's Peak. Years ago on a fine spring day I climbed that mountain and when I approached the top I saw a magnificent bull elk, which bugled, a sound normally associated with the mating season. Maybe he was just plain happy to be where he was; and, yes, I believe animals have emotions.

Much has changed at Granite Park since 1967, and if you were here back then at dinnertime you would have seen employees throwing scraps of food over the balcony to an open dump ground below. The purpose, of course, was to attract grizzly bears so guests could see them, but once bears get the smell of food, there's no stopping them. Unfortunately, a young lady was in the campground and she paid the ultimate price of backcountry neglect. About 10 miles away, up and over Heaven's Peak at Trout Lake, the other incident occurred.

The dual maulings created a national outcry demanding an evaluation of backcountry conditions, and the implementation

of a Bear Management Plan, previously lacking in substance. Today, it is working — doing its job of keeping people and bears separated. Campgrounds are immaculate and no one feeds bears anymore. Sure, there's still a risk, but at least you know you are dealing now with wild bears and not ones that have become habituated to people, and that makes a tremendous difference. Sadly, that is not something people in the '60s understood, but it is something you will know soon after you drive into Glacier, for signs and literature are everywhere.

But so is the balm of Glacier, and you will sense it immediately. You'll sense it as magenta-colored rays of sun warm jagged peaks still encasing fields of snow; where herds of bighorn sheep stare back from fields of glacial-strewn rocks; where quiet streams of water suddenly become raging torrents and carve their way through ancient beds of layered limestone. You'll sense it, too, when you launch a kayak in a serene Kintla Lake, smell the fragrant fields of wildflowers, or sit back and watch the lazy clouds drifting over the lofty chain of mountains forming the Continental Divide. There's balm, too, when you see a wild grizzly bear splashing in a small tarn colored the bluest blue you may ever see.

For that reason, and because most bears now run when you encounter them, and because the grizzly bear is so symbolic of the wilderness of this incredible park, I would never want to see them eliminated. Understanding the remote odds of now encountering a problem bear, I explore uninhibited.

And now it is midafternoon and we still have four downhill miles to go to our destination, which is the west side Loop. Here, one of the new shuttle buses will take us back to our car at Logan Pass and as the driver navigates this sinuous road it will be impossible not to appreciate the fact that Glacier has overcome challenges created by changing times and now performs its mandate precisely. It has preserved a portion of our American heritage and 100 years from now will undoubtedly look, feel and smell just about the same as it does now.

Open your heart and mind to all of Glacier's spectacles and you will find that this park is appropriate for the times — and that we modern-day RVers are the beneficiaries. ♦

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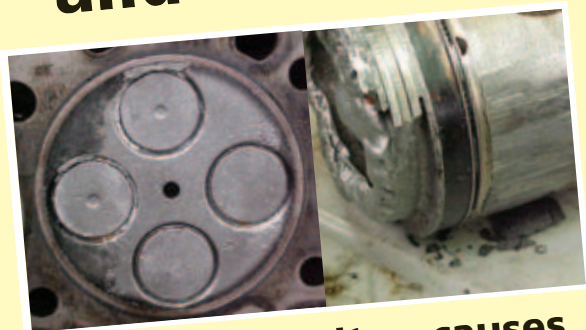
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ACRES OF HISTORY

VIRGINIA'S LOWER JAMES RIVER PLANTATIONS HAVE TIES TO CIVIL WAR, U.S. PRESIDENTS

by PAMELA SELBERT

Many years ago, while touring historic plantation homes along the Lower James River near Charles City in eastern Virginia, among them some of the country's oldest and finest residences, my husband, Guy, and I spent an unforgettable afternoon with one of the owners. Meeting Malcolm "Mac" Jamieson, owner of Berkeley — the "most historic plantation on the James" — was a rare treat.

Berkeley, we had read, is noteworthy for a number of reasons: It hosted George Washington and was the birthplace of Declaration of Independence signer and three-time Virginia governor, Benjamin Harrison V, as well as President William Henry Harrison. There was also a Civil War connection, which especially intrigued us.

I had called the plantation prior to our visit and was told that Jamieson (at that time in his mid-80s) was at home and would be happy to talk with us. When we arrived, Jamieson, a charming gentleman, was waiting, surrounded by books and soft drinks in a screened gazebo in the garden outside the main house, eager to tell us the history of Berkeley, in which he had played an interesting role.

He explained that nearly two and a half cen-



Among features at elegant Shirley Plantation, which is one of the oldest in Virginia, is the "flying staircase," top, which has no visual means of support. An interpreter stands at the front of Shirley, which is a 48-foot cube shape and features a pineapple finial on the roof.

PHOTOS: GUY LOUIS SELBERT (INSET); VIRGINIA TOURISM CORPORATION



Clockwise from above: Evelynton was purchased by Edmund Ruffin Jr. in 1847 and remains family owned. Sherwood Forest Plantation's claim to fame is that it was home to two U.S. presidents: William Henry Harrison and John Tyler. Shirley Plantation welcomes visitors and conducts numerous guided tours daily. Berkeley Plantation hosted President George Washington and was the birthplace of two men of note: Benjamin Harrison V, three-time Virginia governor and Declaration of Independence signer; and President William Henry Harrison. Westover Plantation is considered one of the nation's finest examples of Georgian architecture.



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turies after Berkeley was settled as a land grant, his father, Scottish immigrant John Jamieson, a drummer in George McClellan's Union Army during the Civil War, had camped here with the general's 140,000 troops, and had fallen in love with the plantation. Twice during the two-month stay, said Jamieson, President Lincoln had come to confer with McClellan and review the troops. Also there during that time, in 1862, one of McClellan's generals, Dan Butterfield, had helped his bugler, O.W. Norton, compose "Taps."

In 1907, 42 years after the war had ended, Berkeley came up for auction and John Jamieson bought the house and 1,400 acres for \$28,000. But the former drummer boy never lived there, and when his son inherited the property in 1927, the plantation, which had been abandoned since before the Civil War, was in ruins,

"with sheep living in the basement and 3 feet of manure on the floor," he said.

Over the next few years Mac Jamieson and his wife, Grace, cleared the land and replanted the extensive gardens, restored the home to its former glory and opened it for tours in 1938.

On our recent visit we learned that Mac Jamieson had died in 1997, and Berkeley is now run by his son, Malcolm "Jamie" Jamieson, who was in Richmond for the day.

Office manager Tammy Radcliff showed us through the mansion. Furniture and other décor are from around the time it was built (1726), and include a Chippendale table made from a single piece of mahogany and numerous 18th-century antiques.

Radcliff explained that in September 1619, 38 immigrants had sailed from



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ACRES OF HISTORY

England to settle an 8,000-acre Virginia land grant to be called "Berkeley Plantation and Hundred." They reached America on Dec. 4, held a short religious service and designated the day to be "yearly and perpetually kept holy as a day of Thanksgiving to Almighty God." This was more than a year before the pilgrims reached New England and held their own celebration, she said. An Indian massacre wiped out the Berkeley settlement in 1622.

The plantation was then sold several times before being purchased in 1691 by Benjamin Harrison III, attorney general and treasurer of the Virginia colony and founder of America's first commercial shipyards on Berkeley's three-mile riverfront. The plantation's next owner was Harrison's son, Benjamin IV, who was also active in colonial affairs, serving as county sheriff and as a member of the House of Burgesses.

Benjamin Harrison V was born at Berkeley soon after it was completed in 1726. He also held numerous public offices, including three terms as Virginia's governor and as a member of the Continental Congresses. He was a signer of the Declaration of Independence and played an active role in the American Revolution.

Altogether, five generations of Benjamin Harrisons lived at Berkeley, where the 10 presidents entertained included William Henry Harrison ("Old Tippecanoe"), third son of Benjamin V, who left to pursue a military career and later was governor of the Northwest Territory before being elected president in 1841. His grandson, Benjamin Harrison, became the 23rd U.S. president in 1888.

On this recent occasion it was 5 p.m. — Berkeley's closing time — but Radcliff insisted we visit the "Taps" monument and gardens, which we had to ourselves, before leaving. Berkeley is a quarter-mile from the wide silver swath that is the Lower James, and in between are some of the most elegant displays of flowers and ornamental shrubs and trees you can imagine. As we stood admiring the view toward the river, we heard someone approaching, a middle-age man dressed for gardening. We wondered if he was a curator.

"Yes," he said with a smile. "I'm Jamie."

The current owner had returned — and we found him to be every bit as charm-

ing and entertaining a raconteur as his father had been.

Nearby is Edgewood Plantation (built circa 1849), which was once a part of Berkeley Plantation. Edgewood, a fine example of Carpenter's Gothic architecture, was used during the Civil War as a lookout post for Confederate generals when they camped at Berkeley. The estate is now a B & B and guided tours are available.

Unfortunately, not all of the plantation homes on the James River are open for tours. Westover, built about 1730 by William Byrd II, is closed to tours, but the grounds and gardens are open daily. The house is considered to be one of the nation's finest examples of Georgian architecture. Of special note is Westover's unusually steep roof and tall chimneys in pairs on each end.

Evelynnton, originally part of the Westover Plantation, is currently closed to the public. The plantation was purchased by Edmund Ruffin Jr. in 1847 and is still family owned. Ruffin's father is remembered for having fired the first shot of the Civil War at Fort Sumter in April 1861.

Sherwood Forest, an elegant if sprawling three-story Colonial-style mansion, has the distinction of having been home to two U.S. presidents. Previously owned by William Henry Harrison (who died a month after taking office), it was purchased by John Tyler, the 10th president, in 1842; he retired there three years later.

Tyler's descendants still live at Sherwood Forest, an unusual dwelling, as it's just one room deep but 301 feet long, the longest wood frame house in the U.S., said current owner Kay Tyler as she showed us around. Tyler is married to William Tyler, great-grandson of the former president — who was 55 when he left office in 1845.

The 27-acre grounds at Sherwood Forest may be toured, but the mansion is now open only by appointment.

Elegant Shirley Plantation, one of the oldest in Virginia, welcomes visitors and offers numerous guided tours daily. On this recent occasion Robert Randolph Carter was eager to tell us about the plantation his ancestor Edward Hill I had purchased in 1660. Carter and his brother, Charles (who recently died), and sister, Harriet, are their family's 11th generation to live at Shirley Plantation.

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ACRES OF HISTORY

Sir Thomas West had bought the 4,000-acre plantation in 1613, and “by the time settlers arrived at Berkeley it was already producing tobacco for export to England,” he said. When West died of disease on a trip from England to the New World several years later, his wife, Cessalye Shirley, for whom the plantation was named, sold the property to investors. There it remained until it was purchased by Edward Hill.

Edward Hill III began construction in 1723 on the stately Georgian mansion that stands today, for his daughter, Elizabeth, and her husband, John Carter (son of Robert “King” Carter, considered the wealthiest man in Virginia). Their son Charles’ daughter, Anne, married Revolutionary War hero “Light-Horse” Harry Lee in 1793. Anne and Harry’s son, born in 1807, would become the famous Civil War general Robert E. Lee.

Anne Lee began a tradition that continues to this day. When a girl in the family becomes engaged, Carter said with a smile, she scratches her name with her diamond — to make sure it’s not a fake — on a pane of window glass in the dining room. Brides-to-be for generations have etched their names on the glass and into history, most recently Harriet Carter, who received her ring in 1995, he said.

Carter gestured to a favorite artifact on display, a framed letter from General McClellan to then-owner Hill Carter in July 1862, saying that Shirley would be “spared destruction” because the family had allowed it to be used as a field hospital for Union troops and had helped care for the wounded.

The house itself, a perfect 48-foot cube, is part of a complex that includes a separate brick kitchen, laundry, smokehouse, corncrib, dovecote and stable. The mansion has several unusual features, among them a “flying staircase” with no visible means of support, which leads to the two top floors (a series of iron straps carry the load). The stairs, Carter pointed out, have been in daily use since 1738 yet have never needed repair.

Also unusual is the 3-foot-tall finial, a decorative pineapple carved from wood, on the peak at the center of the roof. Pineapples, said Carter, are the traditional symbol for “welcome.” ♦

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The Jacksons visited La Línea de la Concepción, a busy coastal town at the end of a peninsula in southern Spain.

A GAP FILLED WITH MEMORIES

A BRITISH COUPLE AND THEIR SON SAVOR THE SIGHTS, SOUNDS AND SMELLS ON A YEARLONG VACATION THROUGH EUROPE BY MOTORHOME

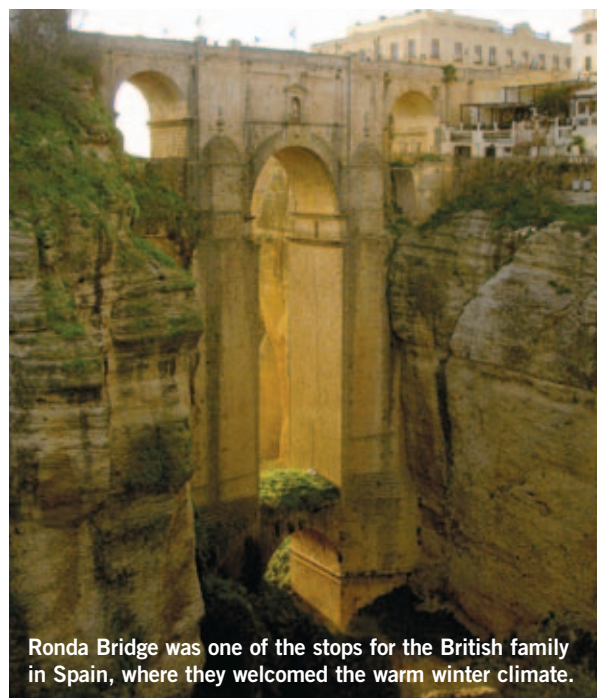
by H.D. JACKSON

Taking a “gap-year” vacation is no longer exclusively for young college students wanting to see the world before they settle down and start a career. These days, whatever the age — single or married, working or retired — many are finding the idea of dropping out of the rat race for an extended vacation very appealing and very possible, and many are organizing their lives and finances to do just that. And when backpacking has become a little too much like hard work, a motorhome is just the right vehicle for the adventure.

We live in Britain. We had never owned a motorhome, and were complete novices, but my husband, Simon, and I thought this looked like a great way to travel. Our son’s teachers happily entrusted his education to us, and we spent an entire year in our 35-foot Damon Intruder (affectionately known as The Beast), traveling through Europe together on our very own Family Gap Year.

Because we were already in the U.K. it was easy to catch a ferry across the English Channel and begin our year out in France. If visiting Europe from the United States you have the option of starting in any European country.

You could arrive in any major European city and rent



Ronda Bridge was one of the stops for the British family in Spain, where they welcomed the warm winter climate.

PHOTOS: H.D. JACKSON



The British family loosely planned a route for its gap year vacation, and Rome, above, was part of it. In the Spanish woods, below, they viewed a fiesta. The family — Simon, H.D. and Jack Jackson — enjoyed their yearlong adventure in their 35-foot Damon Intruder, which they affectionately called The Beast. The Jacksons conceded that it does take a lot of organizing to plan such a trip, but they say once the decision is made, you're halfway there. They would also tell those planning a gap vacation to prepare to be sidetracked, because the unplanned stops may end up being among the best.





Son Jack shared the chores in the galley. He also programmed the family's satellite navigation system.



Plitvicka National Park was among three unspoiled national parks in Croatia the family visited.



Florence, Italy, was on the family's must-see list. But they also made time to venture off the beaten track in Italy.

a motorhome from a rental company. However, it's best to shop around as, upon researching this on the Internet, we found, for example, that renting from a smaller company in Germany might be a better and less expensive option than from a large company in Switzerland.

With one company, the motorhome can be collected at Frankfurt Airport complete with bedding, all equipment, necessary documentation and a short instruction course, and it can be returned there at the end of the tour, while with other companies the arrangements are not so convenient.

Another option is to visit www.motorhomeholidayswap.com, where you can literally swap motorhomes with owners from other countries for an agreed length of time, enabling each party to have a much less expensive vacation.

If you are considering freighting your own motorhome to Europe, it is not as difficult or as expensive as you might think, but there are certain factors to consider. The most suitable and popular motorhome to drive in Europe is a Class C. You can use a roll-on, roll-off ferry, or ship the coach in a container. It helps if it will fit into a standard 10-foot-tall container box as custom-built containers are expensive. The cost to ship is based on length, width and height; a motorhome shipped in a standard container from Brunswick, Ga., to Zeebrugge, Belgium, would cost about \$2,900 one way. You would then fly over and collect your coach when it docks, but airfares can vary so consider choosing a departure port close to a suitable airport.

Using a shipping broker can be a big



help. Most recommend emptying your rig and shipping your contents over in a separate container; it's easier and quicker than purchasing new contents in an unfamiliar country. The LP-gas tank must be completely empty and you must have a green card proving that you have insurance in Europe. Some seasoned travelers leave their rigs stored in Europe, fly back home for a while, and then return to continue touring at a later date.

Passports, international driver's license, green card, maps — yes, it's a long list, but don't despair; there are some excellent Web sites and books available to help you through the paperwork and planning.

We found that traveling over borders was extremely easy; passports and basic vehicle documents are usually all that are required.

In general, roads and campsites in the U.K. and Europe are not designed for huge RVs. Campsites are relatively small by U.S. standards; most have electricity and water but don't usually have sewer service. Tank-emptying facilities are generally available, as are showers, toilets and washrooms.

We used the "ACSI CampingCard" book to find suitable campsites, although Alan Rogers' European campsite guide also covers camping and caravanning sites. All the campsites we visited are listed in the back of my book, "Europe in a Motorhome, A Mid-Life Gap Year Around Southern Europe."

ON THE ROAD

We left the U.K. in October, which as in the

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A GAP FILLED
WITH MEMORIES

U.S. is our autumn, and had no definite route planned, but there were certain places we wanted to visit. These included Rome, Florence, Pompeii, Capri and Sicily in Italy; Dubrovnik, Croatia; and Barcelona, Spain. So we loosely planned our route to include our hit list, although those plans changed as we stumbled upon so many other places that just had to be seen.

We wanted to visit the World War II sites in Normandy, France, first, then travel down through France, pass over the Pyrenees Mountains and enter Spain. We were happy to leave the cold weather behind and decided to go straight down to southern Spain, with its warm winter climate and interesting towns and coastline.

By late December we had worked our way to Granada, Spain, and had settled into an easy routine. Our son, Jack, had taken over navigation, including programming our satellite navigation system — an essential tool — and he shared all the chores in the motorhome.

We met some wonderful people along the way and at Granada we learned from fellow travelers that there is not only the spectacular Alhambra Palace to tempt you, but also a brilliant motorhome park, with gray-water emptying facilities, 6,000 feet up in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. We determinedly chugged the RV up to that icy car park, from where we could look out across the tops of frozen, white mountain ranges, and catch the small hopper bus that ran every half-hour and took us down to the ski resort of Pradollano for some Christmastime skiing.

Life was going well and by January we had reached Tarifa, almost the southernmost point in Europe, where we could watch the antics of kite surfers as they played on the perpetually windblown sea, or simply look across the Strait of Gibraltar to beautiful Moroccan mountains.

Portugal now beckoned and the gentle Algarve coast in February was delightful, but before long it was March, we still had a long way to go and our year was disappearing fast.

We scooted back across southern Spain, catching the unmissable Barcelona, and wandered across the south of France, enjoying the flat cycling around Narbonne, before entering Italy on the scary but amazing E-80 motorway. We gripped our

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A GAP FILLED WITH MEMORIES

seats and Simon gripped the steering wheel as we hurtled like lemmings on the way to the edge along that scary bit of Italian road until we had left the Apennine Mountains behind and headed into beautiful Tuscany country. Florence, Pisa, Rome, Pompeii and, of course, stunning Capri — all had to be seen as we worked our way down through Italy, along with those “off the beaten track” finds that make motorhoming so special.

At the bottom of Italy we took the easy “roll-on, roll-off” ferry to Sicily. We loved this island of fabulous scenery and friendly people, which is wonderfully quiet and green in April. We visited not only some great wild camping areas, but also many ancient sites, including Syracuse and the volcanic island of Stromboli.

Three weeks later, leaving Sicily behind, we headed up the eastern Italian coast, only stopping at Venice for a few days before rounding Trieste and setting our sights on a new country. We hadn't known what to expect from Croatia but it turned out to be one of our favorites.

Friendly, and unspoiled, with a stunning coastline and superb national parks, the country offered us plenty to see.

We started with the Istrian Peninsula, and picturesque Rovinj. Once again, we parked at a campsite and used our bikes to explore locally, before moving on down the coast, wild-camping in sheltered bays, snorkeling in clear, blue seas, and visiting the totally natural Paklenica, Krka and Plitvicka national parks. These are ab-

solute gems and would be wonderful at any time of the year. Inexpensive to enter and entirely unspoiled, the parks allow you to feel totally at one with your surroundings.

It was now early June and we had reached the great walled city of Dubrovnik. The weather was getting almost too hot and we knew that it would soon be time to start heading north. Weaving our way up through inland Croatia, we came across a small town called Varazdin. With its open

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A GAP FILLED WITH MEMORIES

squares and baroque-style houses, this was a haven, and we stopped there for a while before continuing up through Croatia and into Slovenia.

Slovenia was another easy country to travel in; with quiet roads and well-organized towns, it had an Austrian feel to it. We headed to the Spas of the Mura region first, before working our way across to the capital city called Ljubljana, and then into the Julian Alps, where we parked at Lake Bohinj, the pearl of the Alps, to try some of the many water-sports available there. This is also a great area for walking, with its forested countryside, dramatic gorges and well-marked paths.

The end to our year was getting closer and as we crossed into Austria, and then Switzerland, we felt like taking the next road south and going round again. The motorhome was now our home. (One day we will become full-timers.) Jack would be getting back into school in September and we still had to find somewhere to live on our return to England.

But we decided to make the most of our remaining weeks and after visiting Geneva we detoured to Chamonix in France, where we stopped for a few days at Mont Blanc and visited the huge glacier at the Mer de Glace; yet another sidetrack before we took a leisurely drive back through France, enjoying wild camping again, until at last, by late August we had gone full circle and were back on the ferry heading toward England.

We had an amazing time and I recommend it to anyone. It does take a lot of organizing and it is a big decision to make, but once you've made it, you're halfway there.

For us it was a voyage of discovery. By the end of the year we had a million memories. Our world had grown, our lives had changed — and our son had done it all with us. Everywhere we went we learned something new. What stars are we looking at? How did that glacier form? What is this insect? How do you ask for a coffee? What's this festival celebrating?

I think the seed is sown for our son, Jack, to become a traveler, one of the next generation of motorhomers, and I think it will suit him very well — a good reason for taking a mid-life gap year with your kids and exploring Europe in a motorhome. ♦

THE 2010 RV-OOPS AWARDS

FROM DUMB TO DUMBEST, WE COUNT DOWN
THE TOP 10 MOTORHOME MISHAPS

by LARRY MACDONALD

“What’s the dumbest thing you’ve ever done while RVing?”

That’s the question I’ve been asking motorhome owners during the past year. About half of the people I interviewed reported some real doozies, while the other half reported minor mishaps such as leaving something behind when vacating a campsite.

During a dozen years of RVing, my wife and I have left behind three doormats as well as dog toys, clotheslines, faucet fittings, sewer pipes and a wheel chock. We now have a cardinal rule: Scan the campsite after pulling out the rig. Since adding that simple procedure to our departure checklist, we haven’t lost a thing.

And that’s the way it is with most RVing mishaps: A simple procedure can often prevent the dumb thing from happening in the first place. Notice the emphasis here is on dumb *things*, not dumb RVers. We’re mostly a brilliant bunch, but let’s face it, stuff happens! The good news is that we are able to learn from others’ mistakes and hopefully, by taking the necessary precautions, not repeat those mistakes.

I ranked what I considered the 10 most serious motorhome mishaps on a continuum from “Dumb” to “Dumbest” (No. 10 to No. 2) with the “Absolutely Dumbest Thing” (No. 1) deserving of the top RV-Oops Award.

It’s not entirely coincidental that the dumbest things were also the most costly things. Nor is it entirely coincidental that all of the award recipients are males, since everyone I in-



interviewed was male. More research is needed to determine whether female RVers might do different dumb things or, wouldn't it be lovely, no dumb things.

DUMB THINGS

No. 10 It was raining on Herb's last day of camping in the fall. He rolled up his wet awning and left it that way until his first camping trip in the spring. When he unrolled the previously white and blue fabric, it had been transformed into earthy shades of black and green, covered with exotic fungi that thrive in dark, damp conditions.

Herb's solution was simple but tedious: Scrub for four hours with detergent, trying not to look up when cleaning the underside. Since that mishap, he always ensures that his wet awning is opened and dried before storing for an extended period.

Helpful hint: If you ever find yourself taking a shower while cleaning the underside of your awning, try detaching the two support bars at the bottom and allow them to slide under the unit until your awning is more like a wall than a ceiling. This two-person procedure may require some bracing in order to apply pressure on your scrub brush.

No. 9 Gerry was parking his relatively new Class A motorhome alongside the curb in a small town. Unfortunately, the sloping street tilted the top of his unit toward the sidewalk, enough to rub against a metal street sign. Oops! A 4-foot scratch on the side did not quite match the swirled paint job.

Gerry sat on the roof and pushed the offending sign away with his feet while his wife slowly edged their motorhome forward until clear of the sign. He later visited a body shop that made it look like new again. Gerry commented that he was now super-cautious about street signs when parking curbside: "never again."

No. 8 Steve was backing his Class C motorhome into a campsite with his wife in the passenger seat. He heard shouts coming from an adjacent campsite and stopped to see what all the commotion was about. He had backed over a small cedar tree, which was lodged at a rakish angle under the rear quarter section. In his haste to extricate his

RV from the tree, Steve pulled forward. Oops! The partially uprooted tree ripped off the lower side and rear aluminum panels.

After sheepishly replanting the tree, Steve used a handful of metal screws to temporarily reattach the panels. His final fix involved a pricey visit to the body shop. Since the mishap, Steve always ensures that his wife is watching behind the rig to give directions when he backs up. He even purchased a set of headphones so they can communicate without shouting or arm waving.

Helpful hint: If your rig ever gets entangled in tree branches, always stop and assess whether less damage will occur by judiciously cutting off branches rather than simply pulling away and hoping for the best.

No. 7 Gary was driving his Class C along a freeway when — Kaboom! — the sound of a cannon reverberated at the back of his rig. Pulling over, he found that one rear tire had exploded, throwing a large chunk of rubber through the wheel well, tearing out an interior cabinet, and making a major mess of the rear bathroom. Gary seldom checked his tires, but hindsight suggested he should have.

He covered the hole with a plastic tarp and limped to the closest tire store, where he purchased six new tires. He later visited a body shop and cabinetmaker to repair the damage. Gary's walk-around now includes a close inspection of all tires for proper inflation, cracks and wear.

DUMBER THINGS

No. 6 Malcolm decided that his 5-year-old coach battery was due for replacement. He turned off the circuit switch, removed the battery and purchased a new one. After installing the battery, he turned on the circuit switch and soon thereafter heard a sizzling sound. He then noticed steam coming from the battery compartment and little red caps flying through the air. Oops! Malcolm had inadvertently put the battery in backward, attaching the positive cable to the negative terminal, and vice versa. His engine battery virtually cooked his new one.

After he and his battery cooled down, Malcolm bought another and asked his electrician friend to help him hook it up

properly. I should mention, in Malcolm's defense, that both his battery cables were colored red, which is unusual. Red cables usually go to positive, black to negative. But color doesn't really matter to the battery; putting it in backward does.

Helpful hint: Before removing a battery, always draw a diagram showing positive and negative terminals and all attached wires, noting color. If you should have two red cables, wrap black electrical tape on the negative cable before disconnecting.

No. 5 After dry camping for a week, John drove his Class A to a campground 10 miles away to dump his tanks, leaving his car behind. He didn't know it but the rear attachment bars for his car were not secured in the upright position. They had fallen down and were dragging on the highway, grinding them into stubs about a foot shorter than their required length.

John secured the badly mangled bars in the upright position until he could find a welder to jury-rig extensions. At his first opportunity, John purchased a new tow bar.

Helpful hint: When removing your towed vehicle, immediately lock the tow bar so your rig is ready to move.



DUMBEST THINGS

No. 4 On the last day of camping, Fred rolled up his awning and hit the road. Unfortunately, he neglected to secure it with the locking latches on each of the two support bars. It pretty much stayed in place until he got up to cruising speed. Kaboom! The wind had unrolled the awning, tearing the worn canvas and ripping the support bars from their attachment points on the side of his coach.

Fred rolled up the mess as best he could, using rope to hold the dangling bars against the side. He then drove slowly

Never underestimate the healing power of laughter.



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home, where he permanently removed the awning. I asked, "Do you miss your awning?" He replied, "Only when it's rainy or sunny."

Helpful hint: Arrival and departure checklists can prevent many mishaps. Simply write items to be checked (such as "lock awning") on a card and attach it to your sun visor. It only takes a minute to review these items after arriving or before departing.

Another helpful hint: Checklists only work if you use them.

No. 3 Ernie arrived at a campground in his Class A and disconnected his dinghy vehicle. He then attempted to back into a rather tight spot and ran his front tire up onto some small rocks alongside the concrete parking slab. Kaboom! His tire deflated rapidly. He backed off of the rocks, glancing at his rear-view screen to ensure the way was clear. Crunch! (The sickening sounds of Kaboom and Crunch are often associated with the unexpected, and mostly avoid-

able, costs of RVing). The corner of his rear bumper hit a light standard, breaking it off and causing serious damage to the rig's undercarriage.

Ernie was not having a good day. After swearing a few times, he installed the spare tire. He later bought a new tire and visited a body shop to repair the damage.

Helpful hints: Try not to drive on rocks, especially sharp ones. And rear-view cameras don't always show everything behind your rig. Obstacles close to the rear corners may not be in view.

No. 2 Randy was driving his Class C into a shopping center on a rainy day and chose to enter the underground parking area. His rig fit easily into the entrance but the farther he proceeded into the darkened lot, the lower the ceiling became. Crunch! His air-conditioning unit wedged itself tightly under a concrete beam.

Randy managed to back out but the air conditioner shroud was smashed beyond repair and water was leaking inside



the rig. His less-than-satisfactory solution was to remove the air unit and replace it with a carrying case large enough to cover the hole. Randy now shies away from underground parking, regardless of how hard it's raining.

Helpful hint: It's important to know the height of your rig, plus a comfortable margin for error, and to be constantly aware of overhead obstacles such as entranceways, wires and branches. Even the horizontal "height pipes" suspended at the

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THE 2010 RV-OOPS AWARDS

entrances to some parking lots can cause damage if they impact your vehicle.

ABSOLUTELY DUMBEST THING

No. 1 Frank bought a used Class A motorhome and drove it for thousands of miles without a problem. One day while cruising along, an acrid smell preceded a loud Kaboom! and immediate loss of power. The engine would not turn over.

Frank called for a tow to the nearest garage, where the mechanic diagnosed a "seized engine," likely caused by overheating because of a lack of oil. Oil? Frank wasn't sure the last time he or anyone else had



checked the oil. A potentially fine camping trip ended with he and his family renting a car and returning home until a rebuilt engine could be installed. Frank still drives his motorhome but now checks the oil regularly.

So there you have it, the RV-Oops Awards for 2010. The names of recipients were changed to protect the guilty. Everyone would no doubt agree that their mishap would never happen again, at least not to them.

It's been said, "Experience is the best teacher." But when it comes to mishaps, "Knowledge of someone else's experience is the best teacher." Why? Because it won't cost you a dime.

The author is busy compiling next year's awards. If you've done something dumb (and who hasn't?) during your tenure as an RVer, perhaps you'd like to share your story so that others can learn from your mishap. If so, send an e-mail to CaptnMac@shaw.ca, indicating what dumb thing you did, how you resolved it and how you might have avoided the mishap in the first place. Who knows? You might make the RV-Oops Awards list in 2011. ♦

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NEW REAR-SLIDE DESIGN ESTABLISHES AN INNOVATIVE BENCHMARK IN CLASS B MOTORHOMES

by FRED PAUSCH

2010 ROADTREK SS-IDEAL

WHAT'S HOT

Novel rear slide; roomy bathroom; good task and general lighting; responsive, quiet Mercedes-Benz turbodiesel engine; excellent visibility; heated mirrors; 5-cubic-foot refrigerator.

WHAT'S NOT

Fold-down spare tire mount offered only as an option; large tabletop that impedes seat to entry aisle use; lack of convenient, durable shelf near the bedside.

The Daimler Sprinter story has become a new chapter in the RV evolution tome for its abilities and economies and judging by the enthusiastic reception of dealers and owners alike, it figures to remain a significant player in the Class B arena.

Roadtrek revealed its latest and most ingenious Sprinter-based design, the SS-Ideal (which incorporates a slide into the 144-inch wheelbase) at the National RV Trade Show in Louisville, Ky., in December. It received runner-up honors in the "Best of Show" category by RV Business — no small feat in light of the competition from manufacturers of coaches, some more than twice the size of the comparatively diminutive SS-Ideal.

In travel form, the SS-Ideal bears no trace of Roadtrek designers' latest innovation, maintaining Daimler's highly

recognizable tall aerodynamic shape, panoramic windows and signature fall-away hood. However, in camp, much to our amusement, there was a jaw-dropping reaction by passing campers as we swung open the rear doors, exposing what appears to be a second rear wall. With onlookers' curiosities now piqued, the wall extended with a flick of a switch to create a whole new exterior look. After closing the weather-resistant rear doors against the slide and securing them with a retaining strap, we added 3 feet of additional interior floor space by day and a comfortable 54-by-74-inch bed by night. Creating the amenities of a 22-plus-foot coach in just 19½ feet was a Roadtrek design goal nicely met. The slide also houses a large full-width exterior compartment for oversize items. Unfortunately, our SS-Ideal did not come equipped with the (must-have) optional (\$416) "Continental"-style fold-down spare tire mount.

THE TOUR

Opening the large sliding side door truly brings the outdoors in and reveals features that make this coach something special, beginning with the enlarged bathroom. This is the largest bath of any Roadtrek floorplan and it works well. Additional shoulder and hip space has been provided when privacy is needed and also allows for a standing or sit-down shower. A new fixed basin with countertop space replaces the Pullman-style pullout basin setup found in the SS-Ideal's brother, the SS-Agile. Watertight storage and plumbing access is provided under the sink and the handy molded shampoo and soap ledge can also provide some personal support while maneuvering in this wet bath. Drawing the exterior sliding door curtain and opening the double bath doors into the aisle can create a more private dressing area to step into after a shower, and a small but powerful exhaust fan handles humid conditions and aids in drying the shower and curtain. A macerator pump is built in for convenient holding tank dumping without having to store a bulky 3-inch hose.

Opposite the bath is the galley module, where Roadtrek has recently partnered with Granite Transformations to produce an engineered-surface countertop. The man-made surface, which is composed of natural stone, quartz, recycled glass and a polymer binder, looks like granite but is lighter than the real thing. It passed our unexpected strength test when the single-basin sink cover accidentally slipped from wet hands and survived a fall to the floor without even a chip.

The galley base cabinet module is divided to conveniently store a pair of reclining lawn chairs on the sliding-door side of the cabinet. A pantry provides general galley storage on the aisle side. A single but useful-size drawer is provided

Roadtrek designers' latest innovation is apparent while in camp. The rear doors are opened, and a switch activates a rear wall that extends out the back. The galley features an engineered-surface countertop that looks like granite but is lighter. Optional cockpit captain's chairs swivel to face the inside of the cabin, where a pole table can be set up.





Preparing the bed is an easy process. Seat back cushions are removed, the couch seat bottom slides out, the seat back is folded down and the cushions are filled in to create a comfortable bed that is 6 feet long. The bed sits within the 38-inch-deep by 55-inch-wide rear slide. An enlarged bathroom, below, is the largest bath of any Roadtrek floorplan. Bottom, with a Mercedes-Benz turbodiesel engine, the SS-Ideal provides a quiet and responsive ride.



for cooking and serving utensils, with another under the fridge. What can't be packed in the galley cabinets can be stowed in one of the overhead cabinets and cubbies that rings the interior. The construction and handsome finish of the cherry cabinetry has the appearance and operation of cabinetry we've seen in high-end coaches.

Excellent task and general lighting is provided as well as an over-counter task and night light combo fixture not often

offered. A double-burner range is protected by a recessed glass cover when not in use, providing additional countertop space. A multi-speed Fan-Tastic fan in the roof pulls double duty as range hood and general ventilator. The convection/microwave oven resides above the new 5-cubic-foot three-way power refrigerator. It completes a compact but very functional galley capable of allowing two chefs to work side-by-side. The optional (\$2,860) LP-gas auxiliary AC generator suspended behind the rear axle can supply 120-volt AC power when it is not available at the campsite.

Roadtrek offers two seating arrangements in the SS-Ideal, which we endorse for any compact rig. The optional (\$611), manually adjusted, OptimaLeather cockpit captain's chairs swivel to face the cabin; a floor socket is provided to set up the single-leg pole table. Another floor socket in front of the rear couch creates meal or game seating for up to four with a pair of fold-down end seats using cushions from the bed.

Audiovisual entertainment comes in the form of an optional (\$910) 19-inch flat-screen TV connected to the (standard equipment) home theater system. The system includes 5.1 surround sound, dual

center speakers, DVD, CD, AM/FM stereo and dual-use rear speakers that can be switched between the home theater system and in-dash stereo system when traveling. The TV rests in an AV cabinet above the wardrobe, which neatly arranges all AV switches and cable/antenna connections for easy access and DVD storage. The TV slides out on a swivel mount, allowing viewing from either seating location, then stows out of the way.

Preparing the bed is a simple matter of removing the seat back cushion, sliding the couch seat bottom out, folding down the seat back and then filling in the cushions to create a very comfortable 6-foot-long bed. The 38-inch-deep by 55-inch-wide slide is equipped with a pair of overhead reading lamps, and thanks to the 54-inch height, three windows and white walls, it doesn't feel like you're sleeping in a cave. Two fold-down plastic drink holders are supplied on each side wall for couch use and can serve as a makeshift nightstand, but we hope that Roadtrek will add a more convenient and durable shelf for eyeglasses and other small items. Toss in a couple of TV pillows and you have the best seat in ... the ... Zzzzzzz.

SPECIFICATIONS

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SUSPENSION, F/R: IFS/LONGITUDINAL LEAFS
FUEL CAP: 26 GAL
WARRANTY: 3 YRS/36,000 MILES

COACH

EXT LENGTH: 19' 5"
EXT WIDTH: 6' 8"
EXT HEIGHT: 9' 7"
INT WIDTH: 5' 9"
INT HEIGHT: 6' 4"
CONSTRUCTION: STEEL SKIN AND ROOF, FIBERGLASS AND COMPOSITE WALL AND ROOF INSULATION
FRESHWATER CAP: 30 GAL
BLACK-WATER CAP: 20 GAL
GRAY-WATER CAP: 11 GAL
WATER-HEATER CAP: 6 GAL
LP-GAS CAP: 10 GAL
FURNACE (1): 16,000 BTU
AIR CONDITIONER (1): 11,000 BTU W/HEAT STRIP
REFRIGERATOR: 5 CU-FT
INVERTER/CHARGER: 750 W/45 AMP
BATTERY: (1) 12-VOLT CHASSIS, (2) 6-VOLT COACH
AC GENERATOR: 2.5 KW LP-GAS
MSRP: \$97,100
MSRP AS TESTED: \$106,236
WARRANTY: 4 YRS/48,000 MILES

WET WEIGHT

(WATER AND HEATER, FUEL, LP-GAS TANKS FULL; NO SUPPLIES OR PASSENGERS)
FRONT AXLE: 3,700 LBS
REAR AXLE: 4,360 LBS
TOTAL: 8,060 LBS

CHASSIS RATINGS

GAWR, F/R: 3,970/5,360 LBS
GVWR/GCWR: 8,550/13,550 LBS
OCCC: 490 LBS

GAWR: GROSS AXLE WEIGHT RATING
GVWR: GROSS VEHICLE WEIGHT RATING
GCWR: GROSS COMBINATION WEIGHT RATING
OCCC: OCCUPANT AND CARGO CARRYING CAPACITY RATING

ROADTREK MOTORHOMES INC.
 888-762-3873,
 WWW.ROADTREK.COM

Driving the Sprinter is a pleasure. It's so quiet and responsive, you might not believe you're driving a diesel until you roll down the window, lean out and listen closely for the Mercedes-Benz heartbeat. Add the paddle shifter for the five-speed automatic transmission and you have a spirited ride across town or across the continent, with the added ability and benefit of a second family vehicle. Stability control increases driver safety and makes independent braking corrections whenever the system senses an under or oversteer situation that might negatively alter your intended course.

Excellent visibility, heated mirrors, comfortable seats with optional (\$871) in-dash navigation and rear camera (\$234), iPod/MP3 connections with Bluetooth cell phone connectivity and superb fuel economy (22.5 MPG) make the journey easy to enjoy.

We couldn't ask for a motorhome with better road manners — even with minimal buffeting from passing commercial truck traffic — and we had no trouble handling grades of 7 percent.

With features and conveniences of a larger rig and the ability to travel off the beaten path to destinations larger coaches can't venture to, the SS-Ideal is not a rig that you can load and load ... and load. With very specific total cargo capacity maximums, savvy owners will always be cognizant of weight. They'll need to strike a sensible and safe balance between cargo loading and water supply, the two items having the greatest impact on weight yet easiest to adjust, compensating for the weight of extra passengers and/or trailer hitch weight.

Will the new slide design morph to other Roadtrek models? Roadtrek isn't talking. Regardless of that, the SS-Ideal will provide a premium outdoor experience. With a feature-rich list of appointments, a novel slide, Mercedes-Benz reliability and talented craftsmen, Roadtrek has proven again you can leave a smaller travel footprint wherever you go without sacrificing creature comforts.

Our thanks to Rick Vara and the staff of the beautiful full-service Newport Dunes Waterfront RV Resort and Marina in Orange County, Calif., for their hospitality during our stay. ♦

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

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

TIPPING POINT

ROADMASTER
TAMES A TILTING,
HIGH-CENTERED
MOTORHOME

by BRAD CLAYTON



The Itasca rounds a curve after installation of Roadmaster anti-sway bars and steering stabilizer.

The motorhome industry transitioned to a 7-foot interior ceiling height several years ago to gain the visual impression of more interior space. It worked. But one of the trade-offs soon became obvious, at least in some coaches built on leaf-spring chassis: excessive body roll, or a tendency to tilt uncomfortably on curves.

It should be no surprise that a coach that stands 12 feet 3 inches tall might heel over, at least moderately, on curves. Nevertheless, it came as a surprise with a 2008 Itasca Sunrise 35A built on a Ford F53 chassis. During a test drive with par-

tial tanks of fuel and LP-gas, little water and no personal supplies, the motorhome showed only a modest tendency to tilt on curves and corners, and its overall road manners were good.

LOADED TO THE MAX

Loading a coach to its maximum gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) — 22,000 pounds in this case — can be expected to affect handling, but not this much! On curves, a different motorhome emerged; body roll was uncomfortable on curves even at lower than posted speeds. In left-hand curves on uneven, crowned roads, the

amount of lean to the right often progressed to the white-knuckle stage for the co-pilot.

The apparent causes of excessive body roll in this case included an excessively high center of gravity for a coach built on a leaf-spring suspension, inadequate sway bars and a rather long rear overhang. With other motorhomes, the need for better stability will vary with driver sensitivity and with different chassis and coach designs.

Late-model air-bag-suspended diesel pusher motorhomes tend to be equally as high centered as our test coach, but usually have better road manners due to the

dynamic stabilizing effect of their air bag suspensions. The Itasca was fitted with Bilstein shocks, which are quite good, but shocks are not a significant factor in controlling body roll.

The quest for solutions led us to Roadmaster Inc. Renowned initially for its tow bars, the company expanded into anti-sway bars (also known as anti-roll bars or stabilizer bars) and steering stabilizers.

THREE ANTI-SWAY BARS

For the 35-foot Itasca, with its 22,000-pound GVWR, Roadmaster prescribed two of the company's anti-sway bars: a 1½-inch-diameter bar for the rear — in addition to the stock 1½-inch Ford rear bar — as well as a 1¾-inch-diameter front bar replacing the stock Ford 1½-inch unit. Thus, we were looking at three bars instead of two for this chassis, and it needed all three.

The company also recommended the Reflex Steering Stabilizer, which consists of a hydraulic damper inside a spring that is attached to the frame at one end and to the steering tie rod at the other. While it has no effect, per se, on body roll, steering characteristics can have an effect on a driver's response to body roll, and is essential for driving comfort in any motorhome.

Roadmaster anti-sway bars are made of grade 4140 cadmium-plated chrome moly steel for more stiffness, whereas the stock Ford bars are 1020-grade steel, according to Roadmaster. In addition, polyurethane bushings used at all pivot points by Roadmaster are more rigid than the stock rubber bushings, increasing effectiveness of the bars.

STAYING UPRIGHT

Anti-sway bars attempt to keep the coach as firmly upright in relation to the wheels as is reasonably possible. The Roadmaster rear bar more than doubles resistance-to-body-roll at the rear, and the front bar increases resistance substantially over the stock bar. Roadmaster says roll stiffness is increased 30 percent with each additional ½-inch in bar diameter.

The company recommends its Reflex Steering Stabilizer since it applies return-



Roadmaster front stabilizer bar replaces stock Ford bar, utilizing polyurethane bushings.



Roadmaster steel brackets are fitted below rear axle, using existing U-bolts.



Steel brackets provide a platform left and right for attachment of the Roadmaster bar below the rear axle. U-shaped brackets, center, are bolted to the frame for connection with tips of bar.



The Roadmaster and Ford rear stabilizer bars are attached to the axle and frame independently, using separate linkage.



Reflex Steering Stabilizer consists of a steering damper inside a coil spring, designed to return wheels to center.



Polyurethane bushings permit less flex between bar and frame brackets.



The larger Roadmaster rear bar encircles the stock Ford bar and more than doubles roll resistance.



Roadmaster front anti-sway bar is fitted forward of the axle while the Reflex Steering Stabilizer is attached to frame behind axle and to tie-rod end (center, rear).



Roadmaster front bar is thicker than stock bar and utilizes stock frame linkage.



Reflex Steering Stabilizer, bolted to frame (right) behind axle and to steering tie rod (center), exerts spring pressure to re-center steering and dampen steering motion.



Position of tie rod bracket determines neutral position of stabilizer.

to-center spring pressure and a steering damper effect anytime the wheels are turned out of straight-ahead alignment.

After having driven the Itasca for several thousand miles, a considerable portion of it on secondary roads that were crowned, uneven and narrow, we were well-acquainted with how far this motorhome would tilt on curves and in driveways, and how difficult it was to estimate what would happen on the next bend in the road.

INSTALLATION

We arranged with one of Roadmaster's dealers, T&D Auto and Truck in Plainville, Mass., to install the components, which

took about three hours. Installation of the rear bar was mostly a bolt-up procedure, beginning with two steel brackets that were attached below the axle. Eight nuts on the U-bolts that attach the axle to the springs were removed, allowing placement of the brackets. The nuts were reinstalled with plenty of threads showing.

The bar was attached at four pivot points utilizing polyurethane bushings and clamps — two at the axle and two at the frame. Four holes were drilled through the frame for attachment of linkage brackets used to connect the forward tips of the bar to the frame.

Installation of the forward bar was a direct replacement, using new steel brackets with polyurethane bushings. The tips of the Roadmaster bar were connected to the frame using the stock Ford linkage.

ON THE ROAD

We separated our driving test into several stages, first with the Roadmaster anti-sway bars in place. Later we connected and disconnected the Reflex Steering Stabilizer several times so it could be evaluated separately.

Our initial impression of the difference created by the anti-sway bars didn't take long; we were barely out of the driveway. As we exited the installation shop driveway through the rain gutter into the street, the coach did less of the whipsaw motion we had come to expect.

While heading through the town toward a country road, the effect was apparent on pavement undulations: The usual wobble from side to side was greatly reduced. While anti-sway bars will not eliminate body roll, they can greatly reduce it, and we noticed this effect immediately.

The real test was on a winding road. In each curve, a moderate amount of body roll would occur, and then we could feel the buildup of the bars' resistance. We began to realize and trust that we could drive winding roads at reasonable speeds with a feeling of confidence.

After several thousand more miles of backroads, this impression endured; the bars had made a dramatic improvement and had turned a coach that was very uncomfortable to drive on anything but flat, mostly straight pavement into one that could handle mountain roads with com-

fortable and predictable handling.

Oddly, crosswinds did not affect this motorhome as much as we had anticipated, based on the amount of body roll that had been occurring on curves. During crosswinds up to 40 MPH we had to reduce speed but didn't feel like we had to get off the road. Even so, the Roadmaster bars held the motorhome more upright, and made driving in strong winds more comfortable.

STEERING

Roadmaster markets the Reflex Steering Stabilizer as an effective measure for handling front-tire blowouts, rut tracking, inadvertently wandering off the edge of the road, potholes, driver fatigue and crosswinds.

The unit consists of a hydraulic damper inside a spring that is attached at one end to the frame and at the other to the steering tie rod. The spring exerts no pressure when the wheels are straight forward. When they are turned, the unit applies pressure to return to center. And it dampens rapid steering movement.

The unit is a simple bolt-on installation, after which a bit of tweaking may be necessary if the stabilizer spring pulls steering slightly to the right or left while driving straight ahead. Adjusting the tie rod bracket to achieve the neutral position is easy, using a $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch socket wrench.

One of the most noticeable effects of the Reflex unit on the Itasca occurred during strong, constant crosswinds, which we encountered on several occasions, including an interstate highway trek westward across Texas. The effort needed to constantly steer into the wind was noticeably reduced, along with driver fatigue. The unit also helped quell the effects of gusting crosswinds and pavement ruts by reducing the frequency and amount of steering correction.

The suggested retail prices for the anti-sway bars are \$678 front and \$918 rear. The Reflex Steering Stabilizer carries a price of \$384 for the unit plus \$118 for a mounting bracket. ♦

FOR MORE INFORMATION

ROADMASTER INC.
800-669-9690,
www.roadmasterinc.com.



BEFORE



AFTER

WINNING THE BATTLE WITH ROOFTOP MOLD AND MILDEW

TAKE YOUR MOTORHOME'S FIBERGLASS ROOF FROM GRIMY TO SHINY IN LESS THAN 3 HOURS

by E. DON SMITH

Many high-end coach manufacturers use one-piece fiberglass roofs, which are a major upgrade over lower-cost rubber roofs. One of the advantages of glass roofs is a long, maintenance-free life, but they still require some cleaning to keep them looking their best.

Many owners assume that because the roof is fiberglass it will be immune to mold or mildew, but that's only partially true. While the dense fiberglass itself will not support mold growth, the roof will eventually get dirty and that dirty layer consists of bio-matter such as dirt and pollen that will eventually create a surface thick enough to allow unsightly mold and mildew to grow on it.

The good news is that fiberglass is very easy to clean because of its durable nature, and this allows you to utilize a wide variety

of cleaners to make your fiberglass roof look new. There are a few cautions about working on the wet roof of a motorhome that you should be aware of before you begin.

The first one is safety. While cleaning the roof you are going to be working on a wet and soapy surface that is not only smooth and difficult to walk on, but also 12.5 feet off the ground. If you aren't comfortable working in this environment, you should leave this job to the local detail shop (most Camping World Service Centers offer motorhome detailing). It's also a good idea to have a second person on the ground in the event there is an accident, or to help toss up your cleaning supplies when needed.

The next area of concern is the paint on the motorhome. As you clean the roof, all those chemicals and mold will run down the side of your coach. Because you and your water source will be on the

roof, it's difficult to ensure that the dirty water won't dry on the paint. It helps to have a second person on the ground with a separate water hose to help rinse the sides of the rig. Depending on the amount of direct sunlight and the temperature, this may not be required.

Working in the shade in moderate temperatures (less than 80 degrees), we did not encounter a problem with dirty rinse water on the paint. However, if you are working in direct sunlight and it is 90 degrees or hotter, you need to be very careful and maintain

a good flow of water while rinsing or else paint damage could occur. Many of the chemicals used are caustic and if they are allowed to dry on the paint they may cause permanent streaks. A good flow of rinse water will ensure that the dirt and chemicals are completely removed.

In order to clean the roof of a full-size coach, expect to spend 1.5 to 2.5 hours, depending on the initial condition and your stamina. You'll need about two 32-ounce bottles of pre-mixed

GETTING STARTED



STEP 1: First, walk around the entire motorhome and wet it down with water. This will help prevent soap and other contaminants from sticking to the paint when rinsed off the roof.

STEP 3: Thoroughly wet the fiberglass roof using a hose end nozzle and spray a small area with the cleaner of your choice. Using the long-handle scrub brush, begin working the brush and soapy water on the surface. Depending on the condition of the roof it could take one, two or even three attempts to fully remove the grime. Then rinse fully, ensuring that there is sufficient water to carry the dirt and grime off the rooftop and down the side of the coach.



STEP 4: If you encounter areas that are very difficult to clean you may have to resort to using the short-handle brush or a Mr. Clean Magic Eraser. When using the Mr. Clean product we noted that even the most stubborn stains disappeared by using only light pressure. Be patient and work on small areas at a time for best results. We found that keeping the sections to 3-foot or 4-foot squares worked best.



STEP 2: Next, gather up your cleaning supplies and safely make your way onto the roof. If your roof is covered with leaves or other debris, remove them before you begin.

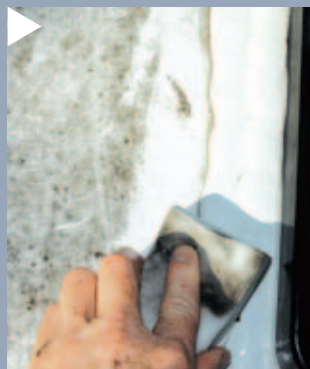


cleaner or 1 quart of concentrated cleaner. In order to tackle our long-overdue roof cleaning project, we used Simple Green, Thetford Premium RV Black Streak and Bug Remover, and Camco Full Timer's Choice Black Streak Remover. Since the roof is fiberglass just like a typical shower stall, there are other brands and types of cleaners that will also work well. Just remember most of them are not made to be used on painted vehicles so be careful if you use these types of products. We found all products

tested did an equal job of cleaning.

You will need a short, stiff bristle brush as well as one mounted to an extension pole for easier cleaning on large areas. Another product that we found extremely helpful is Mr. Clean Magic Eraser. We suggest you buy a box or two for those really tough stains. You'll also need a water hose long enough to reach around the entire motorhome as well as a ladder or other way of accessing the roof.

STEP 5: Another area that can be difficult to clean is the sealant used around roof openings such as skylights and roof vents. Avoid using a brush on this semisoft sealant and instead use the Mr. Clean Magic Eraser. One or two passes with one and the sealant will look bright and white just like new. Plus the Eraser foam pads prevent any chance of damaging the sealant.



STEP 8: Continue the process one section at a time over and over until completed. We found it best to start cleaning at the front of the coach at the opposite end that you use for climbing on and off the roof. This prevents you from walking on the clean surface as you make progress.



STEP 6: While you're on the roof, clean the exposed sections of the slide covers if your coach is so equipped. If you suspect that the entire slide cover is dirty you can plan ahead by opening them up (extend slide) before you begin the project and do a thorough cleaning. Again, we found Mr. Clean Magic Erasers worked best on this soft material.



STEP 9: This is also a good time to clean the various covers and skylights on the roof. They are likely dirty and in need of a good cleaning as well. Since they are made from materials that differ from the roof we suggest a soft sponge and the same cleaner you use on the roof or you can use Mr. Clean Magic Erasers.



STEP 7: After you finish cleaning one large section, it's easy to see how much better it looks than before. The cleaner and generous use of the scrub brush simply dissolve the grime, which easily rinses off.



STEP 10: After you've cleaned the entire roof, stand back and enjoy the view. It should be sparkling clean and look nearly new. The final step of the process is to walk around the motorhome and rinse it off one more time to make sure that there isn't any residue on the paint. While you're at it, why not take the time now and do a full soap and water wash of the coach; that way the whole motorhome will be clean from top to bottom.

As you can see, cleaning your motorhome's fiberglass roof is a relatively fast and easy process that can be repeated year after year, as needed, without any damage to the roof or the need for any additional maintenance. ♦



PIPING HOT

We have a tip that may be of particular interest to those RVers who boondock in chilly weather. The main furnace duct/register in our RV is located behind the driver's door and in front of the living room slide. Consequently, when the slide is in and the furnace comes on, it blows most of the hot air into the space behind the chair and the slide. As the hot air rises, it goes to the ceiling and above the slide. This makes for very inefficient heating of the room. In this day of high LP-gas costs and in the interest of keeping the planet green, we bought a 4-foot section of flexible aluminum clothes dryer pipe and fashioned it to cover the duct and direct the hot air into the living area rather than be wasted in the far corner.

Now, we spend about a third less on heating, our unit is warmer where we need it and my wife likes it directed right at her feet. Also, we don't need to run our generator as much because battery usage is reduced. Now the furnace fan cycles less frequently using this handy gizmo.

EARL AND LIZ ANDRUSIAK | INDIO, CALIF.

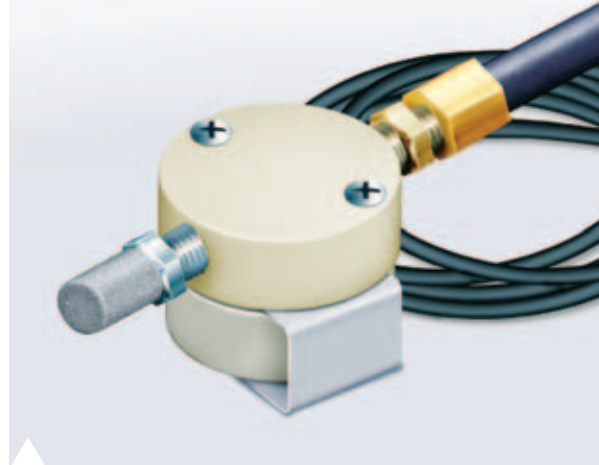


CAP KEEPER

The valve stems for my motorhome's tires are inside a hole in the wheel, which makes it easy to drop a valve cap behind the wheel. It takes a lot of crawling and searching to find it. To avoid this, I made a tool out of a dowel and a piece of flexible plastic tubing into which the valve cap will fit snugly.

I loosen the valve cap by hand, then slide the tubing onto it to unscrew it the rest of the way. An added advantage is that I know where the cap is when I'm ready to replace it.

ROBERT FALK | LOS ANGELES ♦



AIR'S NOT APPARENT

Last month I was setting up camp when a fellow RVer noted that I was making a lot of air noise while dumping my air-bag suspension to lower the coach. Long story short, I located an air muffler that screws in to the two dump solenoids. Mine were ¼-inch national pipe thread (NPT). They can be purchased from McMaster-Carr or Grainger's and other places that carry air mufflers or exhaust mufflers. Now I can't hear any air noise from inside the coach and it's barely noticeable outside the coach.

DANNY LINDSTROM | SALINAS, CALIF.



VENTING

When I installed a backup camera on my RV I couldn't find a suitable hood to go around it. Then, one day it hit me — use a dryer vent. I took the flapper door out of the dryer vent and cut the end off to make a flat mounting surface. It fits great and looks good, too.

**JASON BECK
BIG BEAR, CALIF.**

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

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

techsavvy

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

HANDS-ON | by DAVE RIGGS

LET THERE BE LIGHT

Revolution LED replacement bulbs from Star Lights transform existing fixtures into long-lasting energy savers



Until recently, ubiquitous incandescent lighting fixtures found in motorhomes could only be superseded by fluorescents, which required a hardware swap. Once LEDs came on the scene, it was only a matter of time before replacement bulbs would become widely available — allowing the use of existing fixtures.

Star Lights Inc., a company that introduced the Smart Light motion-activated fixture a while back, now offers replacement LED bulbs in wedge and bayonet configurations.

The first bulb we tried was the wedge version, which has a flat tail with two embedded wires and is pushed into the receptacle built into the fixture. This type of fixture is becoming more common among motorhome builders. Called the Revolution Wedge, the Star Lights replacement is physically much bigger than the incandescent bulb and is rated at 160 lumens. A common wedge bulb (No. 921), used in motorhome lighting fixtures, is rated at 21 candlepower; the Revolution Wedge, by comparison, offers 12.7 candlepower.

While there is a noticeable difference in overall illumination, the LED version will last up to 50 times longer and uses a fraction of the energy. That's a valuable consideration when boondocking. The fixture's diffuser helps level out the playing field somewhat, and we found that we could easily live with the reduction in light output. We did like the natural

light color of the Revolution Wedge bulb.

The bayonet LED version has a slightly higher rating at 15.9 candlepower (200 lumens), although a 150-lumen version is also available. This will probably be compared to a common 1141 incandescent bulb that is also rated at 21 candlepower, but uses a little more power than its No. 921 counterpart. We had no problem living with the output of this bulb in our fixtures, either.

Keep in mind that the LED replacements may be too large for some twin-bulb fixtures. In ours, there wasn't enough room between the two receptacles in our wedge-bulb fixtures.

For years we've opted for fluorescent lighting to reduce energy demands while RVing in primitive areas. Those people who find fluorescent lighting visually too cold will probably like the warmer tones of the LED, especially the natural light versions.

The Revolution bayonet bulb is available in a black or white housing and sells for \$19.95; the 200-lumen model has a \$24.95 price tag, as does the wedge-style counterpart (white housing only). Obviously, there's a big difference in the cost of a standard incandescent bulb and one of the Star Lights. And the initial investment could be costly if you have a lot of fixtures. But you'll probably never replace the LEDs.

For more information, call 800-883-5444, or go to www.starlightsinc.com. ♦

Compressor Conundrum

SEEKING COMPENSATION FOR REPAIRS SHE BELIEVED SHOULD HAVE BEEN COVERED BY HER EXTENDED WARRANTY PLAN, A READER ASKED HOT LINE TO GET INVOLVED. SHE WROTE:

Last July I was heading out for a five-week trip in my 2000 Class A motorhome. The night before departure, I checked out my coach and all was running well. Shortly after leaving home the next morning the dash air conditioning stopped working. Rather than postpone the trip, I drove to California. I found a Chevrolet dealership (Crest Chevrolet) in San Bernardino, Calif., and the service technician determined the A/C compressor had leaked and failed and that a new one needed to be installed.

I presented them with my Good Sam Extended Service Plan and they called in the repairs. The service technician was told that these repairs would not be covered because seals are not covered on a motorhome more than 5 years old. My Good Sam contract states that for the dash air conditioning assembly, all parts are covered except for hoses and lines.

According to the technician at Crest Chevrolet, the compressor was leaking from the compressor case and it was necessary to replace the A/C compressor. I was provided a copy of a diagram showing the entire assembly that was replaced, and there is no seal or gasket that could have been replaced. It's a single unit. A seal did not leak; the compressor failed and leaked.

I had prior commitments and couldn't stay and wait for an appeal, so I paid the bill (\$1,350.02) and filed an appeal at my first opportunity. My appeal was denied. I respectfully request Hot Line's help in obtaining the amount due me under this contract. Thank you.

MARY TRAETTINO
SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ.

Traettino seemed to be at the end of her



HOT LINE IS OFTEN CALLED ON WHEN WARRANTIES HAVE EXPIRED AND OWNERS BELIEVE THAT DESIGN OR MANUFACTURING ISSUES HAVE CAUSED THEIR PROBLEMS.

patience in trying to get her cooling problem resolved. Hot Line contacted Good Sam ESP and requested further consideration of her claim. Some time later, we received a follow-up letter from Traettino that filled us in on the conclusion of her case. It read:

I received a check from Good Sam ESP for the full amount owed to me (minus the \$500 deductible). There was no explanation included with the check. In any event, I have been paid and I do appreciate Hot Line's efforts on my behalf.
M.T.

APPLIANCE APPEAL

Unable to make any headway in resolving a longstanding problem with his motorhome's refrigerator, a reader asked for Hot Line's assistance. He described the situation as follows:

In November 2005 I purchased a new Class C motorhome. In December of the following year the Norcold refrigerator (model N611) in my coach stopped working while I was in Arizona. I called Norcold and they sent me to Dillon's RV City in Apache Junction, Ariz. Norcold told the folks at Dillon's to replace the thermister, which had to be ordered. While the motorhome was in the shop they also did the one-year warranty work.

Unfortunately, while waiting for the part, my wife fell during a hike and severely injured her head. She needed an operation and wanted it done at home. I put my wife on a flight back to

New Hampshire and then told Dillon's I needed to drive home immediately. I paid them \$111 for their work.

Once my wife was OK I took the coach to Campers Inn in Merrimack, N.H., and had the thermister replaced. We didn't use the rig again until February 2008; two days into the trip the refrigerator stopped working again. The same thing happened to us on a trip to Arizona in December 2008.

Last summer I took the coach to a local service center and Norcold told them to replace the thermister. Two days later it stopped again. Norcold said to replace the circuit boards — that didn't help either. Finally, I called Norcold and was told the refrigerator was no longer under warranty and there was nothing they could do for me.

I think this refrigerator was defective from the start. I hope Hot Line can help me.

MARK LAWRENCE | GILSUM, N.H.

Hot Line is often called on when warranties have expired and owners believe that design or manufacturing issues have caused their problems. In many instances, manufacturers have been very obliging in making what are considered goodwill accommodations to readers after we have intervened. We contacted Norcold Inc. on Lawrence's behalf, and soon afterward received a copy of the company's letter to Lawrence. It read:

Thank you, Mr. Lawrence, for your patience. A check in the amount of \$511 was sent to you. We trust this will restore your faith and confidence in the good name of Thetford Corp. and Norcold Inc. Please let us know if we can assist you in the future. As always, we will do our best to resolve any issue as quickly and completely as possible.

THERESA CARRIERO
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
NORCOLD INC.
SIDNEY, OHIO ♦

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

Deep-Cycle Battery Maintenance

In the February issue I noticed conflicting advice on how to keep batteries charged during storage. Your column says not to leave a coach plugged in or the float head will permanently damage the batteries. Powertrain says to use a Battery Tender or trickle charger/maintainer to keep the batteries charged.

I thought modern converters work similar to the Battery Tender in that they are perfect for long-term storage of batteries. I've used Battery Tenders on my car batteries for years with excellent battery life. I have an updated converter in my Barth coach that uses Charge Wizard technology. It gives good house battery life, too. Can you resolve this dilemma?

STU ALLEN | STAUNTON, VA.

It isn't a dilemma, Stu. It just depends on how the battery maintainer works. If it works like the typical converter in most coaches, the batteries will sulfate in and become permanently derated. If it works like a three-stage charger and takes the batteries up to their maximum acceptable voltage periodically and then goes back to float voltage or shuts off, the rig can stay plugged in to 120 volts AC.

Float voltage is not fully charged on any new battery. Float voltage is around 13.5 volts. Fully charged voltage is in the neighborhood of 15 volts. That's a big difference. If a battery isn't taken up to its maximum acceptable voltage at least once a month, it will sulfate in at whatever voltage is available.

The Xantrex TrueCharge 40+ and its successor TrueCharge2 converter/chargers have a storage mode setting that puts the batteries through the first two charging stages (bulk and absorption), and shuts off every 21 days. When the rig is in use the mode is changed, and the third stage (float) is invoked until the charger senses a need to put the batteries through another charging cycle. A charging cycle commences when either low voltage is sensed or the coach is disconnected and reconnected to 120 volts AC. Most inverter chargers with

three-stage chargers operate similarly, but they may not have a storage mode.

In addition, lead-acid, deep-cycle batteries should be equalized periodically with very high voltages in the neighborhood of 16 volts DC. Equalization is done manually, and the batteries should be monitored for excessive gassing. The Xantrex chargers have an equalization provision, as do many inverter/chargers.

MICHELIN X ONE XRV TIRES

There was an interesting test in the November 2008 issue on the Gulf Stream Crescendo 324. I focused on three sentences. "Larger single rear wheels reduce weight and rolling resistance." "We zeroed in on fuel economy, even though we were infatuated with the Michelin single rear tires." "These 22.5-inch tires have a much wider footprint, and added a little refinement to the ride."

I have a 2007 Fleetwood Bounder on a 2006 Ford chassis and the mileage is not the greatest. Is there an aftermarket axle, or something, that would adapt to my Bounder that would be like the Crescendo? If so, then do you think it would be worth the expense? My Bounder is a 33R with 208-inch wheelbase.

**L. GRANT SCOTT
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLO.**

I've been watching the development of the Michelin X One XRV rear tires, Grant. You'll note they are 445 millimeters wide. That's about twice as wide as a single rear dual tire, and they're mounted on a 22.5-inch wheel with a rim that's 14 inches wide. That would be a 22.5 x 14 wheel! Visit www.michelintruck.com/michelintruck/tires-retreads/xone/xOne.jsp and www.michelinrvtires.com/michelinrv/tires-retreads/tireInfo.do?treed=X%20One%20XRV.

If they hold up in coach service as well as they have held up in truck service, they'll solve a lot of problems, including ease of inflation. They offer a significant reduction in rolling resistance and only two sidewalls to flex instead of four. As an engineer, the concept of single rear wheels to carry dual loads is exciting.

With respect to converting your Bounder, wheel manufacturers are be-

ginning to offer retrofit wheels for some chassis. Hub loading and wheel offset are factors that must be considered. If the X One XRV rear tires are as good as Michelin claims, more and more coach manufacturers will build on chassis that are originally equipped with them. Freightliner featured such a chassis at the recent National RV Trade Show in Louisville, Ky. You'll probably find it more economical and cost-effective to buy a new coach originally equipped with them and trade in your Bounder.

ROOF BUBBLES

I just bought a Class C motorhome, and it has bubbles on the roof. The bubbles are long — ranging from 1 to 3 feet. Is this normal for thermoplastic polyolefin (TPO) roofing? The dealer says it is normal, and it won't fall under warranty. I've already paid for the motorhome, but haven't taken it off the lot. There were other mistakes from the factory that the dealer is repairing before I take delivery.

Please help. This is my first coach.
JAMES BOHAN | CANYON LAKE, TEXAS

Beware, James, bubbles are not normal. A TPO roof is like a rubber roof. Both are usually glued to a wood substrate.

Bubbles are indicators of sections

**IF A BATTERY ISN'T
TAKEN UP TO ITS
MAXIMUM ACCEPTABLE
VOLTAGE AT LEAST
ONCE A MONTH,
IT WILL SULFATE
IN AT WHATEVER
VOLTAGE IS AVAILABLE.**



that weren't properly glued to the substrate. Traveling will just make them worse. Airflow over the roof creates a small vacuum, which will make the bubbles bigger. The existing bubbles probably appeared during the trip from the factory. Bubbles are very difficult if not impossible to repair. Removing the TPO material and properly replacing it is the best fix. If you accept the vehicle with the bubbles, you should get a price concession that will allow you to have the TPO roof replaced.

OVERHEATING

In 2001, I bought a used 1999 Monaco coach with a Cummins diesel engine. It had sat on a dealer's lot for almost a year. From the start the engine ran hot on long climbs. The dealer told me to slow down and get the RPM up. In 2008 I had a bad oil leak, and Cummins had to pull the radiator. Animal nest debris that came out from between the radiator and the transmission oil cooler filled a large bucket. It was packed in tight. No one at the Cummins shop could believe it. After years of hosing the radiator and thinking it was clean, the engine now runs cool.

JIM CONNELL | NUEVO, CALIF.

Motorhomes sit in outside storage for long periods of time, Jim. Squirrels, mice, birds and other animals like to build nests in them when no one is around. I've seen similar nests in auxiliary generator housings, engine air cleaner housings, heating and air conditioning intakes and ducts, and other places. I'm not surprised that one of these creatures found the space between your transmission oil cooler and your radiator a safe place to probably raise a family.

Relatively new coaches don't overheat. When they do, there's usually a good explanation. After checking cooling clutches, fan belts and other related parts, blocked radiators are a common cause. Sometimes it's just road debris that can be flushed out. Animal nests are much denser, and usually well constructed. They are harder to remove.

Inspecting between radiators and air conditioning condensers and transmission and engine oil coolers will usually find animal nests. Getting rid of them may require removing one or more components to gain complete access. I once found a similar nest inside an air cleaner housing. It had at least a winter's supply of acorns. Needless to say, the motorhome engine would not start.

OBSOLETE TIRES

My motorhome was originally equipped with 8.75R16.5LT LRE tires, which are almost impossible to find. I'm told that 16.5-inch tires have been obsolete for some time. What do I do next time I need tires? If 16.5-inch tires are no longer available, should I downsize to 16-inch wheels? Do you know if 16-inch wheels are available in the older Ford bolt pattern? What effect will downsizing have on me and my motorhome?

BOB JOHNSON | VIAN, OKLA.

You won't be downsizing at all, Bob. A 16-inch wheel and a 16.5-inch wheel have almost identical outside diameters. That caused inexperienced tire mounters to try to put 16-inch tires on 16.5-inch wheels with disastrous results. The only difference in the tires is the diameter of the hole in the tire doughnut. The LT225/75R16 tire has almost the same outside diameter and width as the 8.75R16.5LT LRE tire. All you need to convert to the newer 16-inch tires is 16-inch wheels, which may or may not be available for your motorhome.

Alcoa has been making 16-inch forged aluminum wheels to fit many older motorhomes. I don't know if the company makes them for your particular chassis, but I do know it makes them for most Chevrolet and GMC chassis once longer wheel studs are installed. The Alcoa wheels have greater load-carrying capacity than the steel wheels they replace. That's important, because many 16-inch steel wheels do not have adequate load-carrying capacity to replace the 16.5-inch steel wheels.

HOUSE BATTERIES

I have a question about house batteries. My 2000 Fleetwood Jamboree Class C motorhome has two 6-volt house batteries. Can I replace the 6-volt batteries with one 12-volt battery? Will it harm anything in the coach? Will it hurt the inverter, etc.?

**MICHAEL MURPHY
FRANKLINVILLE, N.J.**

You can replace the 6-volt batteries with one 12-volt battery, Michael, but you will cut your battery capacity by more than half, and your inverter won't produce 120 volts AC for very long. It would take at least two 12-volt, deep-cycle batteries to equal the capacity

of the two 6-volt deep-cycle batteries.

The 12-volt batteries would have to be wired in parallel, which would allow them to prey on each other. They would also cost more than two 6-volt batteries. That's why we recommend 6-volt deep-cycle batteries wired in series for house batteries. They are commonly referred to as golf-cart batteries.

GOING DOWN THE ROAD

My first Coach & Chassis column was published in the May 1984 issue of MotorHome, and this is my last. For 26 years I have discussed a number of motorhome problems and potential solutions every month. Being a professional engineer, I took particular interest in overloading and weight distribution, both of which were largely being ignored by the motorhome industry.

The motorhome industry has matured, and weight information is now widely available, but good weight distribution is still elusive. That's why I tell all prospective motorhome buyers to weigh before you buy, and to get individual wheel weights so you can evaluate weight distribution and determine usable payload. If you don't, your motorhome ownership could be plagued with tire failures and other issues.

With the complexity of modern-day motorhomes, and the need for codes and other computer information, it has become more and more difficult to diagnose reader problems without shop information. There are good shops, and there are not-so-good shops. Look for shops that employ ASE- and RVIA-certified technicians. Those technicians have specialized and up-to-date training that helps them diagnose and solve motorhome problems.

My shop in Sandusky, Mich., services new motorhomes using computer data, but we still remanufacture classic 1973 to 1978 GMC motorhomes, and make them almost new again. They seem to fit the current downsizing and fuel-efficient trends. Those are among the many reasons I still drive the GMC motorhome I bought new almost 35 years ago. Should you see me going down the road, toot your horn, and don't forget to wave. ♦

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

GM Gas Engine Loses Power

I have a 1992 motorhome on a GM P-chassis with a 7.4-L engine and throttle body fuel injection. When under a load, such as going up an incline, the engine loses power at a specific throttle position. Using a scan tool, this occurs at 65 percent throttle, regardless of speed, RPM or load. The computer timing retards at this point from about 28 degrees to 11 degrees. If I reduce throttle, the power comes back. This only occurs in closed loop; if the engine is cold it doesn't happen until about one or two miles of driving. I have replaced the knock sensor, MAP sensor, throttle position sensor, fuel pump, fuel filter and normal tuneup parts. There are no codes and no scan indication of problems with the above items and fuel pressure remains within specification. As you can imagine, this is very frustrating when trying to maintain speed on hills. I appreciate any light you can shed on this situation.

DON GORDON | PORTLAND, ORE.

This TBI model's factory setup is infamous for running too lean, which causes high combustion temperatures, which in turn can cause spark knock, and the knock sensor retards the timing. Shops sometimes modify the fuel pressure regulator, increasing the pressure setting to 10 to 12 PSI. Most likely it's somewhere around 5 to 7 PSI (which is within GM spec). The regulator is spot-welded from the factory and needs some modification to adjust it; the hard part is finding a new fuel pressure gasket. When the fuel pressure is raised, the engine will no longer run too lean, and

should perform much better and run cooler, so exhaust manifolds will last longer and it should have much better pulling power.

NEW DIESEL SMOG RULES?

I am aware that there are new restrictions on over-the-road diesel trucks, both new and old, in California. Is there a change in the emissions standards for older diesel motorhomes?

**MICHAEL KORNDER
FERNDALE, CALIF.**

There is a requirement for fleet operators to update their engines on trucks used in California, but owners of motorhomes are exempt. Smog tests for 1998 and newer vehicles are also being phased in for light-duty diesel vehicles that have a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) lower than 14,000 pounds. The California Air Resources Board Web site is www.arb.ca.gov/homepage.htm. Other states that

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have smog checks for diesels include Nevada, New York and Colorado.

SPEEDOMETER/ TRANSMISSION PROBLEM

We have a 2009 Damon Challenger on a Ford F53 chassis with a speedometer and transmission problem. The speedometer is fine for a while, then it begins to bounce up and down with the transmission shifting up and down. It's really bad when going 60 MPH and the speedometer indicates 15 MPH and then the transmission downshifts to a low gear. When the speedometer went to zero, the transmission acted like it was in NEUTRAL. I had to stop, put it in PARK, turn the engine off, restart and limp to a dealer. It's almost brand-new and has been in the shop three weeks. Help!

PHIL TAYLOR | CONROE, TEXAS

The vehicle speed sensor (VSS) sends a speed signal to the computer, which uses it to determine shift points, etc. The VSS is mounted in the transmission and can be replaced externally without taking the transmission out or apart. Originally, I e-mailed Taylor to tell him it is probably a bad VSS or the connector or wiring to it, and asked him to let me know what happens. Later he replied: "You nailed it! Ford found the sensor and connector to be defective. Took a while for it to consistently act up, but it finally did."

HIGHWAY VIBRATION

Last February I purchased a pre-owned 2008 Coachmen Freelander 27-foot Class C with 19,000 miles on it. I replaced the dry-rotted Michelin LTX tires with new Goodyear Wrangler HT tires. Driving below 60 MPH was great, but the ride deteriorated above 60 MPH. The driver and passengers feel a vibration or shake from the road regardless of where they are seated in the coach and/or road surface quality. The problem persisted after multiple tire balancing attempts and Goodyear warranty replacements. In August, I upgraded to a 2008 (left over, still brand-new on the dealer lot) Winnebago/Itasca Cambria 30-foot Class C motorhome. It came with dry-rotted Michelin XPS Rib tires, so I replaced

them with new Goodyear Wrangler HT tires. I experienced the same deteriorated ride above 60 MPH. After multiple rebalancing attempts, Goodyear warranty replacements and a "Hunter Road-Force" balancing (\$50 a tire; the tire is matched to the wheel based on computer-determined balance dynamics), the problem continued. I decided to return the Goodyears and upgrade to new Michelin XPS Ribs, which are what Winnebago originally equipped this new RV with. I now have 6,000 miles on the new coach, and I am still experiencing the same ride issue. Both RVs ride on a 2007 Ford E-450 Super-Duty chassis with a V-10 engine, the longer 176-inch wheelbase, and use LT225/75R16-size tires. The old coach had metal wheels with stainless inserts; the new coach has Alcoa forged-aluminum wheels, and a Firestone air-ride assist rear suspension. I keep my tires at 80 PSI, but have also tried slight variances in pressure. Since both RVs have had the same issue I am beginning to think it may be normal for Class C's to ride this way above 60 MPH. Since most RV driving involves highway

speeds of 60 to 75 MPH, this is very irritating. Do you have any suggestions?

DAVID HERNANDEZ | MIAMI

I'm quite skeptical about "dry-rotted" tires after only a year or two. Did you check the manufacturing dates stamped in the sidewalls? Have you driven any other coaches that are considered by others to be within acceptable vibration limits? I'm also curious if the vibration was noticed prior to the Goodyears being installed. I strongly suspect that the vibrations are being caused by the driveline (prop shafts). They should be checked for run-out, shaft working angles and proper phasing. A good driveline shop should be able to sort this out.

FUEL GAUGE PROBLEM AND MICROBES

I have a 2005 Beaver 40-foot Monterey with a 400 Cat engine and 28,300 miles. Your advice helped me and my dealer get the fuel gauge working due to a wiring problem, and all systems appeared to be accurate upon leaving the RV repair facilities. I went straight to a busy truck fuel station to fill the

tank. My dash fuel gauge indicated slightly less than half full. My Aladdin system showed I had burned 58 gallons of fuel, my personal mileage records indicated 56 to 58 gallons and the tank held 66 gallons total, so fairly close. Then 25 miles into this new fuel, the dash gauge suddenly dropped from full to half, then climbed to three-quarters, dropped to half again and then went past full to pinned. I returned to the RV repair facility in East Little Rock, Ark., and reported the problem. They rechecked the wiring connections at the sending unit and at dash, and all systems were OK. They contacted the manufacturer of the sending unit and were told it was algae in the fuel tank, which they said is becoming a problem in diesel fuel that affects the sending unit. They said algae sends out a slight electrical charge that interferes with the unit, giving an incorrect fuel level. I started adding 1 ounce of Biobor JF per 40 gallons to the fuel at the beginning of each refill, following recommendations of the sending-unit manufacturer. Ever since, the fuel gauge has been working.

PAUL BRODDICK | LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

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Thanks for writing, Paul. Microbial growth in diesel fuel tanks is a real concern, especially in warmer climates. Usually it causes problems with filter and injector clogging, but it can affect the sending unit too. Over-the-road trucks typically don't have a problem, because the fuel is constantly being refilled, but motorhomes tend to be driven less and sit more. Therefore, I recommend using Biobor and equivalent products to prevent this problem.

FUEL PUMP PLUNDERER TIP

This regards Mr. Crawford's letter in the October 2009 Powertrain column ("Fuel Pump Plunderer"). I have a similar powertrain configuration (1997 GM P-chassis with a 7.4-L Vortec fuel-injected engine) and experienced this problem several years ago. The dealers replaced two sender/pump assemblies before I convinced them that they should let me assist the mechanic.

After the second pump failed, I had the mechanic measure the distance from the top of the tank mounting flange to the bottom of the tank. We then compared that to the distance from the sender/pump mounting flange to the bottom of the fuel pickup. The two dimensions were almost identical, thus when the pump was installed the fuel-filter sock acted like a plug and insufficient fuel would get to the pump, causing overheating and failure. When we replaced the burned-out unit I had the mechanic bend the pickup tube to provide a half-inch of clearance to the bottom of the tank in the installed position and this cured the problem permanently.

C.L. DEMRICK | VIA E-MAIL

Thanks for writing and sharing your solution. Fuel-filter socks are porous and having them lie flat on, or near the bottom, of the tank is normal. Otherwise, the full contents of the tank cannot be used. It's possible that the pickup was jammed against the bottom, but I suspect that bad fuel pumps that were around for too long may have caused the problem. GM finally fixed the fuel pump problem and you may have gotten a good pump the last time. ♦

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For national or regional RV rallies, trade shows, expositions and other events. \$35 per line, four-line minimum, 40 characters per line.

BOLDFACE TYPE

Please note first line is boldface at no charge. Add \$5 per line for additional boldface type.

PRIVATE PARTY

For individuals selling personally-owned item, such as an RV, truck, auto, campground membership resale. \$25 per line, four-line minimum, 40 characters per line. No charge for phone number. For ad with picture, add \$45 (black-and-white or color print acceptable, no Polaroids, negatives or slides). Limit one photo per ad.

OPTIONS

For your ad to appear in red type:
 Add \$50 for Commercial ad.
 Add \$25 for Private Party ad.

HOW TO PLACE AN AD

Use our form or your own stationery. Please include your name, address and phone number.

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MotorHome Classifieds
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 Ventura, CA 93002-9912

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Jeff and Pam Johnston
Eugene, Oregon



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