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On The Cover: Brilliant bluebonnets are just one example of the colorful wildflowers that dominate the landscape of Texas Hill Country in the spring (see story on page 24). Photo by Mary Zalmanek.

MOTORHOMES ARE GREENER

It's amazing how often I get castigated for being an RV enthusiast. I'm OK with the green movement since it makes sense that we preserve our natural resources and control pollution. But I get very defensive when some uninformed onlooker rakes me over the coals for traveling in a big motorhome — or any RV, for that matter. I get my hackles up when I hear, "How do you sleep at night knowing that you're burning a gallon of fuel every 7 to 8 miles while traveling down the road?"

Frankly, I tell my inquisitive friends that I feel pretty good about my "ultra-low-carbon footprint," to use terminology most green supporters seem to embrace.

That comment will either incite my adversaries or raise an eyebrow in disbelief. By the time I'm done with my dissertation, though, most of these people become quite satisfied that RVers are, indeed, perhaps the ultimate environmentalists. Most of my examples are from years of experience and not backed with exact numbers — so I decided to run a little test on two recent trips.

On the RV trip, my wife, Lynne, and I journeyed to Refugio State Beach just north of Santa Barbara, Calif. The sites at this quaint campground on a beautiful shoreline are limited in length (up to a 34-foot motorhome) and have no hookups.

By comparison, my son, Kevin, and I traveled (no RV) a few weeks earlier to attend the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) show in Las Vegas. Both places are close enough to Southern California to make a long weekend trip practical.

Here's how the two trips stacked up:

We drove to Refugio, which was 120 miles round trip. At 7 MPG, we burned 17 gallons of fuel. I figure the plane, which was two-thirds full, burned about 40 gallons for each person en route to Las Vegas. Driving to the airport and back home required an additional 6.5 gallons of gas.

Score one point for the RV.

With the use of a Water Counter



(see Hands-On, November 2010), we monitored every drop of water during the four days we were in camp. Showering every day, using the toilet, washing dishes, etc., consumed only 51 gallons of water — for the entire trip! This was an easy point for the RV; with three nozzles in the hotel room shower, each of us probably used that much water every morning before breakfast.

Score: Two to zero, RV.

While camping, electrical power was provided by our batteries and inverter. Using a very accurate 12-volt DC energy monitor, power use was logged at 116 amp-hours for the trip. That averages out to 29 amp-hours per day. Power was consumed by running the water pump, the furnace, TV and satellite receiver on the inverter and lights (all of which are fluorescent or LED). Batteries were recharged daily using our solar system.

To its credit, the hotel had energy-saver bulbs — and everything ran on 120-volt AC power, including the drapes. We also had to run the air conditioner since the weather was warm. The ocean breeze took care of daytime comfort inside the RV. I think it's fair to give the electrical power point to the RV.

Score: Three to zero, RV.

We used about two gallons of propane to run the stove, refrigerator, water heater and furnace. Granted, I'm not sure how the water was heated in the hotel — but after considering the power to run the elevators, the small refrigerator in the room and all the power to wash the linens and towels on a daily basis, we'll give another point to the RV.

Score: Four to zero.

While there are other factors to consider, traveling in a motorhome is the clear winner in any green contest.

I rest my case — and have no problems sleeping at night. ♦

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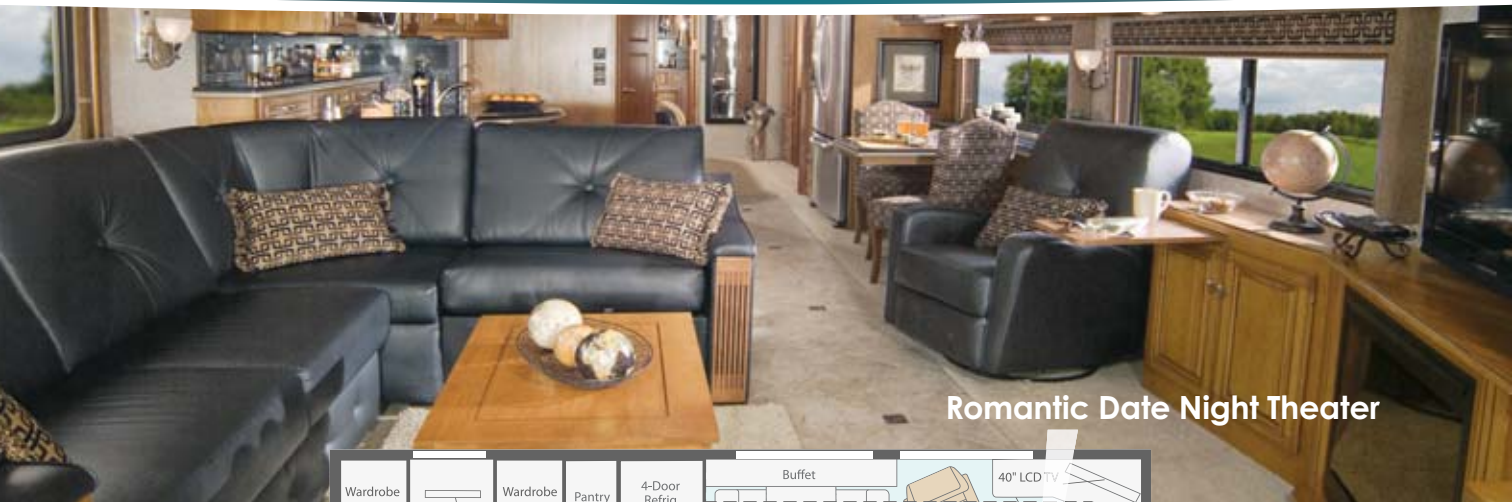
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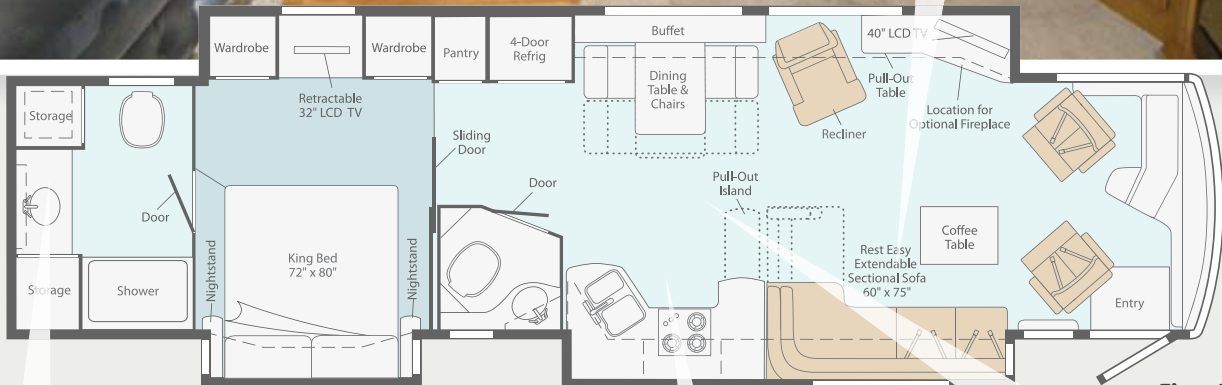
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“HOW DO YOU STAY SAFE WHILE RVING? WHAT METHODS DO YOU EMPLOY TO ENSURE YOUR SAFETY AND TO MINIMIZE THE RISK OF CRIME?”

That's the question we asked in our November 2010 issue, and here are some of the replies we received.

CHOOSE RV PARKS WISELY

We select the RV parks listed in the Trailer Life RV Parks and Campgrounds Directory prior to stopping each day, and call ahead to make reservations. Selecting those RV parks from the directory, we have always been safe. We always leave our porch light on at night. We make sure we are locked up, and our dinghy is locked and key removed.

For those who feel they need protection, I recommend they get professional training on how to use their items of protection. Too many people without proper training have injured themselves.

BEN AND LIDIA SHEPHERD | COLORADO SPRINGS, COLO.

ONE BIG DOG HELPS

On a recent trip to Las Vegas in our 34-foot Pace Arrow, we parked on the driveway of a relative and settled in for the night. At about 2:30 a.m. we heard a scratching noise near the door. At the first sound, our 102-pound German shepherd-malamute mix was on his feet and barking. The next sound we heard was feet hitting the pavement as the suspect fled the scene. So one big dog is a good method to minimize crime while RVing.

ED AND RUTH HAMLIN | APPLE VALLEY, CALIF.

REGAINING A SENSE OF SECURITY

In February 2009, we were in an RV park in Destin, Fla. After dark, a thief broke into our coach while we were out to dinner. He stole our laptop computer, my wife's jewelry and my handgun — as well as our sense of security. I decided that if we were ever going to enjoy our coach again, we would have to take precautions. Here are some steps we took.

I purchased a small safe from Staples and installed it in one of the wardrobes in the bedroom. I reinforced the bottom of the wardrobe and used tamperproof fasteners to secure the bolts through the bottom of the safe and the wardrobe. My wife purchased security combo-lock cables for her laptop computer and portable printer.

I purchased components to make a security system similar to the ones used in residential homes. It cost less than \$300. It has a central control station with a portable alarm panel, a remote alarm siren and two motion detectors. A friend sent me an ad for an exterior motion detection light for RVs. This is a Smart Light 1000 made by Star Lights. It mounts where the standard entry light is and uses the same wiring.

I keep a handgun but only in the coach. I served in our military and am licensed (in most states) and comfortable with its use. I do not recommend this for everyone.

RON MIERSEN | LAINGSBURG, MICH.

DON'T GET BURNED; MAKE A LIST

After having watched our motorhome burn to the ground, my wife and I want to tell



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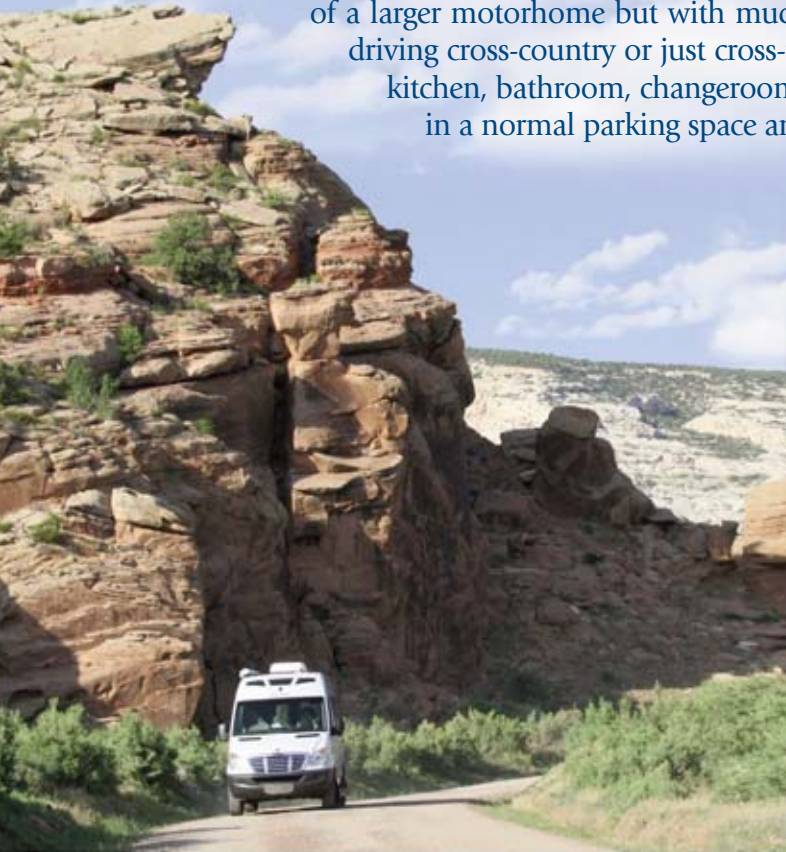
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JOHN GARNER
MOUNTAIN HOME, IDAHO

EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS

In reply to Lou Da Rosa ("American Pride," P.O. Box, October 2010), I would suggest that he both travel overseas and read other countries' magazines to see what is happening. While there may not be anything wrong with "buy American," I have yet to meet anyone (or any company) that knows everything or is perfect. By looking outside the U.S. there may be something better. The U.S. does use Mercedes-Benz units. Then there's Fiat and Volkswagen.

GRAHAM TREDINNICK
SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

EUROPEAN DESIGN BENEFITS

I too am proud to be and buy American ("American Pride," P.O. Box, October 2010), but the inference to European design does not mean foreign built. The fact is that Europeans design more into a smaller space. The roads are narrower and windier than in the U.S. so they need to keep size down and they have been very innovative in being able to provide better storage and use of space. We in turn have benefited from their technology, which can be seen in RVs manufactured here in the U.S.

WAYNE RUSTIGAN | SANTA CRUZ, CALIF.

NO WEIGHT PROBLEM HERE

We take exception to James Paul's letter "Overloading Concerns" (P.O. Box, November 2010).

We own a 2005 Pleasure-Way Plateau built on the Sprinter chassis and have never been overweight. Last summer we weighed our vehicle as we left British Columbia on a 117-day trip to the East Coast. Fully loaded with full fresh water, LP-gas and fuel tanks, we were under our gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) by 440 pounds.

While one Sprinter-type vehicle may be bordering on overload, it is unfair to generalize. If we were to follow Paul's thinking, we could say the same about Class A's. A recent review of a 45-foot Class A listed only 460 pounds available

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EHLERS' INNOVATION PRAISED

I want to compliment MotorHome for publishing the article, "A Motorhome Remodel With Flair" (November 2010) but more so, Mr. Kenneth Ehlers for his simplistic approach as to how he and his wife re-designed the interior of their Flair at a very modest cost. It would do well if some of our motorhome manufacturers would hire Mr. Ehlers and some of the other innovative "in-the-field" motorhome owners who would provide them with the expertise and common sense approach to the design and production of a practical motorhome. Please pass on to Ehlers my congratulations on a thoughtful and excellent job well done.

HAL RICHARDS | SUN CITY, ARIZ.

BUILD MOTORHOMES HERE

Regarding "China-Built Class A Planned" (Noteworthy, November 2010): With the unemployment problems here in the U.S. and Americans struggling to find jobs, I think it takes an arrogant, self-serving person to go to China, build motorhomes there and then expect American RV owners to buy their product. I truly think people like Bill Horvath and other corporate moguls need to wake up to the fact that we don't need them or their type of business. This country needs loyal American corporations that care about America and her citizens. I hope they go broke. They shame the RV industry.

DARREL DIXON | ALBANY, ORE.

Editor's Note: Please see News Briefs on page 15. Yutong has put this project on hold.

QUESTION:

Would you buy a foreign-made motorhome? What factors would influence your decision?

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escapes

edited by PATRICIA MARROQUIN

EVENTS | NOTEWORTHY | NEWS BRIEFS | WHEELS & GEAR | CROSSROADS

Artists, photographers, writers and conservationists

have been inspired by majestic Mount Shasta's beauty for decades. In 1874, naturalist and Sierra Club founder John Muir wrote this about the Northern California landmark: "When I first caught sight of it over the braided folds of the Sacramento Valley, I was 50 miles away and afoot, alone and weary. Yet all my blood turned to wine, and I have not been weary since."

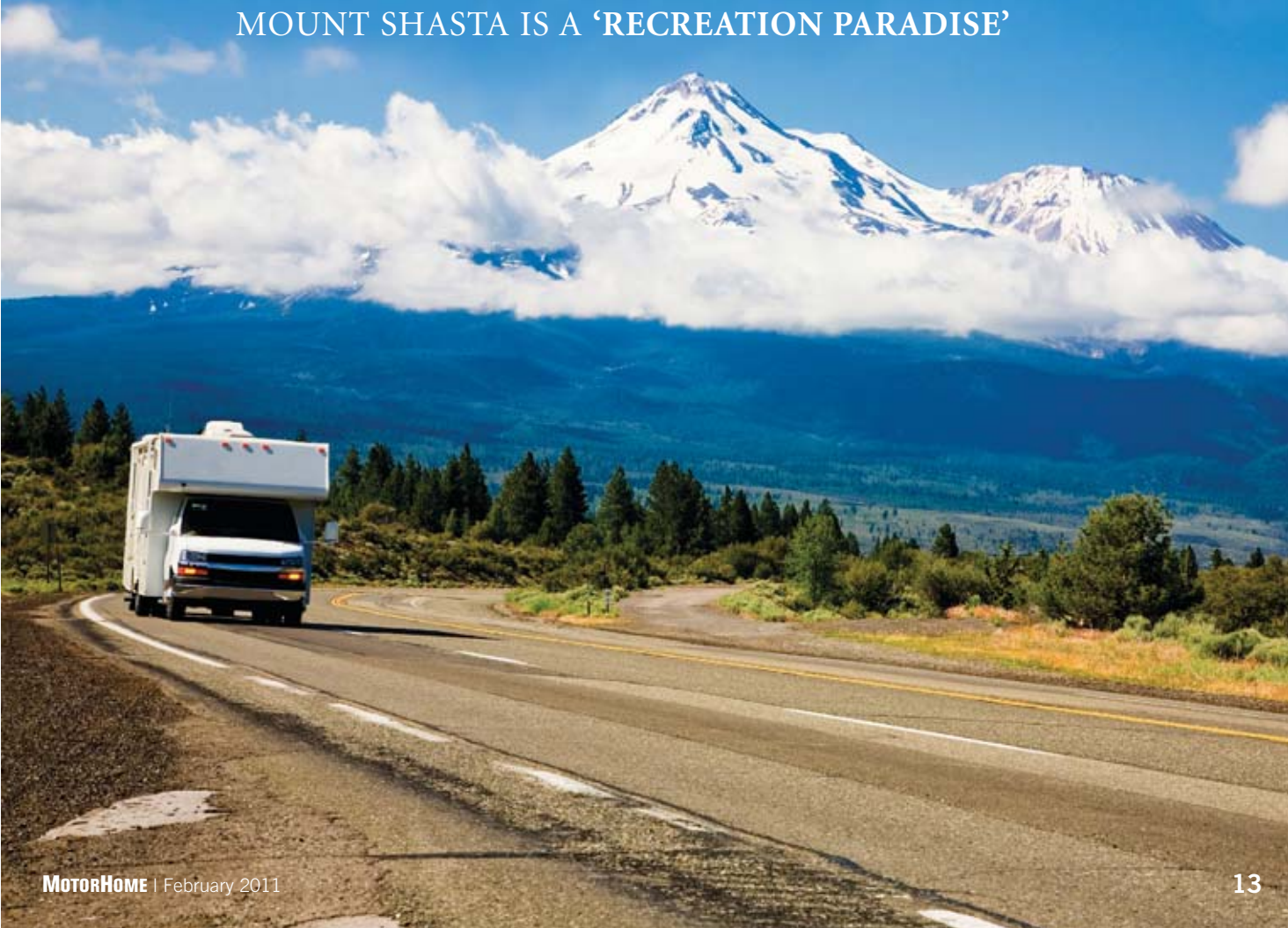
Chances are you won't tire of viewing the 14,162-foot mountain, the seventh-highest volcano in the U.S. Mount Shasta served as a prominent feature along the historic Siskiyou Trail, a route for Native Americans between California's

Central Valley and the Pacific Northwest. Today, that "trail" is Interstate 5, which offers access to the city of Mount Shasta, midway between San Francisco and Portland, Ore.

The region has been called a "Recreation Paradise," with several state parks, Lassen Volcanic National Park, the Trinity Alps and the California Coastal range to explore year-round. In addition to skiing, snowboarding, golfing, fishing, mountain biking, rock climbing and hiking, the city of Mount Shasta offers art galleries, a museum and a fish hatchery. With all of the area's activities, there's nothing sleepy about this dormant volcano. For more information, call 800-926-4865 or visit <http://mtshastachamber.com>. — *Patricia Marroquin*

VIVACIOUS VOLCANO

MOUNT SHASTA IS A 'RECREATION PARADISE'





FEB. 18-27

Celebrate the “*joie de vivre*” of the French fur traders who helped establish the Red River Colony and the French-Canadian community in Western Canada at the 10-day **Festival du Voyageur** in the French Quarter of Winnipeg, Manitoba. With snow sculpture contests and an entire park devoted to larger-than-life sculptures (you’ll be greeted at the entrance by one that’s 50 feet long and 18 feet high), other fun contests such as “beard growing,” regional artisans and food, there truly is something for every age group that celebrates the history of the region and the beauty of the winter season; 204-237-7692, www.festivalvoyageur.mb.ca.

FEB. 9-13 Arizona snowbirds are expected to flock to the 52nd annual **Tubac Festival of the Arts** in Tubac, Ariz. Tubac is a popular spot for golfing, hiking and bird-watching, and the art festival has been a great complement to these activities since 1959. Browse the work of hundreds of visiting and resident artists and craftspeople as they showcase their work for the juried art show while musicians perform New Age music and other genres. A food court supplements Tubac’s many restaurants, and several campgrounds and RV parks are in the surrounding area; 520-398-2704, www.tubacaz.com.

FEB. 18-20 The best nationally known traditional cowboy performers, including musicians, poets and artists, will gather at the **Spirit of the West Cowboy Gathering** in Ellensburg, Wash., where Don Edwards, Waddie Mitchell and Dave Stamey are just a few of the weekend’s entertainers. To complement the songs, stories

and rhymes there will be a Gear & Art Show, workshops that include Dutch oven cooking, beading without a loom, a kids’ corral, spinning, whiskey-making and tasting, a fiddle contest and many dances; 888-925-2204, www.ellensburgcowboygathering.com.

RV SHOWS

FEB. 4-6
Hamilton RV & Camping Show
Hamilton, Ontario;
888-331-8885

FEB. 9-13
Houston RV Show
Houston;
361-749-4436

FEB. 10-13
Edmonton
RV Exposition and Sale
Edmonton, Alberta;
888-858-8787

FEB. 10-13
Minneapolis/St. Paul
RV, Vacation & Camping Show
Minneapolis;
763-383-4414

FEB. 11-13
Las Vegas Sportsmen’s
Boat, RV & Travel Show
Las Vegas;
702-348-1570

FEB. 19-20 Enjoy northern Georgia’s pleasant temperatures and stunning scenery at Unicoi State Park and Lodge near the Alpine village of Helen when you attend the 36th annual **Fireside Art & Craft Show**. At the event, held indoors, more than 60 of the Southeast’s most talented artists display works that range from fine art to well-made, unique crafts. The park offers miles of hiking and biking trails, a gift shop specializing in handmade quilts and local pottery, and plenty of RV sites; 800-573-9659, ext. 305, www.gastateparks.org.

FEB. 20 Rev up your engines for this year’s “Great American Race,” the **Daytona 500** in Daytona Beach, Fla. It’s an adrenaline-pumping experience for motor vehicle enthusiasts. RVers will find that the number and variety of RV sites far exceed those at other major sporting events. Many of the sites offer prime views of the racetrack so that you can watch the cars whizzing by

with all the comforts of your motorhome at your fingertips. There are also more affordable sites if you have tickets to the event and need a place to park your motorhome for the night that’s right by all the action; 800-748-7467, www.daytonainternationalspeedway.com.

FEB. 26-27 Discover the many uses for gourds other than being part of your dinner at the 6th annual **Celebration of Gourds** at Expo New Mexico in Albuquerque, N.M. This free event is being combined with the Xeriscape Expo for gardening-related products and services, so you’ll have all the resources you need to start thinking about your spring planting back at home. Browse a wide variety of gourd art and take classes to learn how you can create your own, buy seeds to start your own gourd garden, or try your luck at the raffle. Best of all, you can camp right at the Expo in full-hookup sites; 505-892-0124, www.newmexicogourdsociety.org.

FEB. 18-21
Springfield RV Camping
and Outdoor Show
West Springfield, Mass.;
413-781-2267

FEB. 24-27
Central Florida RV Show
DeLand, Fla.;
813-741-0488

FEB. 24-27
Jacksonville RV Show
Jacksonville, Fla.;
813-741-0488

FEB. 25-27
Atlantic City
RV & Camping Show
Atlantic City, N.J.;
732-616-2922

FEB. 25-27
North Carolina
RV & Camping Show
Charlotte, N.C.;
804-425-6556

FEB. 11-13
Richmond
Camping RV Expo
Richmond, Va.;
804-425-6556

FEB. 16-20
Chicago RV &
Camping Show
Rosemont, Ill.;
847-934-8300

FEB. 16-20
Detroit Camper &
RV Show
Novi, Mich.;
517-349-8881

FEB. 17-20
Austin RV Expo
Austin, Texas;
512-366-7135

FEB. 18-21
Northeast RV Show
Suffern, N.Y.;
845-343-2772



YOGI'S BID NEWS

Leisure Systems Inc., the franchiser of Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park Camp-Resorts, has completed what it calls the first-ever rewards auction in the campground industry. The auction ran last fall as a new benefit in its Club Yogi Rewards customer loyalty program.

Club Yogi Rewards has more than 40,000 members who earn Club Points for spending in any Jellystone Park in the U.S. and Canada. Points remain in a member's account and can be redeemed for free nights at any Jellystone Park location or Yogi Bear branded merchandise.

The latest innovation — auctions — gives members access to a Web page where they can bid their points for auction items. The winning bidder's points are redeemed but all other bidders' points go back into their personal accounts.

The inaugural auction package included a free four-day, three-night stay at any of the 74 Jellystone parks and \$200 worth of free gasoline. Jim and Geraldine Milliron of Louisville, Ky., were the winning bidders.

Leisure Systems says that auction events will occur in the future. **Jellystone Parks, www.campjellystone.com.**

DIRECTORIES COMBINE

Campground directory publisher

Woodall Publications Corp. announced that the 2011 Woodall's North American Campground Directory has been combined with the 2011 Camp Club USA Directory. The new combined directory, which will be complimentary with every Camp Club USA (CCUSA) membership, provides a comprehensive listing of campgrounds along with essential information on participating Camp Club USA parks.

The new directory offers a wide range of information for CCUSA members, including detailed state and provincial maps showing participating CCUSA locations, along with locator maps of all of the nearly 1,200 participating Camp Club USA campgrounds, full park listings, and information on how members can access their CCUSA discounts. The directory also contains ratings of more than 8,000 privately owned parks across North America, ensuring RVers find the most enjoyable and appropriate site for their individual travel plans.

Woodall Publications Corp., 800-323-9076, www.woodalls.com.



News Briefs

Nexus RVS LLC, a startup manufacturer of RVs, is establishing its production operations in Elkhart, Ind., and plans to create as many as 90 new jobs by 2013. The company, which manufactures Class B and Class C motorhomes, will invest more than \$2.8 million to lease and equip an existing 109,000-square-foot manufacturing facility, according to a news release. Nexus RVS was co-founded last summer by Claude Donati, who has more than 15 years of experience in the industry. He most recently served at **Gulf Stream Coach Inc.** in Nappanee, Ind., as the vice president of the manufacturer's motorized division. "We are excited to be helping customers enjoy the RV lifestyle," said Dave Middleton, vice president and co-founder of Nexus RVS. Nexus RVS will produce 23-foot to 32-foot motorhomes that will sell for \$55,000 to \$60,000.

China's **Yutong Bus Co.** has put "on hold" its plan to build the En Route, a Class A motorhome for the U.S. market ("China-Built Class A Planned," Noteworthy, November 2010). In an e-mail, Bill Horvath, project manager for the Motorhome Division, stated, "After much research and cost analysis, and looking at the market size that exists today, plus some still uncertain economic conditions, the decision was made to take a 'wait and see' position. In late spring or early summer of 2011, we will again check market and economic conditions in North America and re-evaluate our decision."

Results of a **Campfire Canvass** survey by the **Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA)** indicate that more new buyers are coming into the RV market and that seasoned RV owners are still as passionate as ever about RVing, even in difficult economic times. According to survey findings released late last year, 16 percent of the respondents said they bought their first RV during the past year. This is an increase over the previous year, when 12 percent of the respondents said they were first-time buyers. Among those surveyed, 90 percent cited the affordability of the lifestyle as a major benefit to owning an RV. Forty percent said they are considering another RV purchase, with 21.8 percent looking to buy in the next year and 43.9 percent within the next two years.



PHOTO: RVIA



A FLASHLIGHT WITH LEGS

It's always a good idea to be prepared for emergency situations when you're on the road, and emergency lighting is an integral part of that preparation. Although it might look like something out of a "Star Wars" movie, the **Gorillatorch Flare** by Joby, a 100-lumen LED flashlight, has all of the components for a great emergency-lighting solution.

Users can choose low, medium, high, flashing white light, steady red light or flashing red light. The red lights are perfect for sending a hands-free emergency signal. A unique feature of the Gorillatorch is its flexible, magnetic legs, which can attach to any magnetic surface and at various angles (even upside down!). Three AA batteries provide up to 240 hours of operation, depending on the setting.

At \$34.95, you'll want to keep the lightweight Gorillatorch Flare in your coach for those roadside repairs and emergencies.

Joby, 888-569-5629, www.joby.com.



ADVENTURE-READY IPHONE PROTECTION

When you make an investment in an expensive electronic device, it's worthwhile to protect it with a durable case. The **Ballistic HC** case for the iPhone 4G offers adequate protection and then some from whatever wilds it might encounter while accompanying an RVer.

A hard shell with a built-in screen protector offers the first essential layer of protection, followed by an optional gel layer that wraps around the shell, and finally an inward-facing holster with a belt clip. The shock-absorbing nature of the materials helps to isolate the phone from vibrations and protect it during falls.

The Ballistic HC is so rugged that it might have you wanting to test its limits, but its sleek black case certainly belies its "designed to survive life" motto. It retails for \$49.99.

Ballistic, 954-832-3502, www.goballisticcase.com. ♦



STEALTH SAFE

If keeping your valuables safe and secure while traveling is a priority, an RV safe is a must.

One option are the high-quality, cost-effective **RV floor safes** manufactured by Stealth Safe Co. Installation is easy — cut a hole in your motorhome's floor to accept the safe, place the safe in the hole, bolt it from

the inside using two bolts, extend the two flanges under the metal or wood, and secure with two screws. The safe should fit snugly and securely and can then be covered up with carpet or a rug, away from prying eyes.

The RV floor safes come in two sizes (Q200 and Q350 models) and use either a key lock or electronic digital lock. Prices start at \$190.

Stealth Safe Co., 800-248-7233, www.stealthsafeco.com.

PONY TALES



PHOTO: LARRY E. EVERITT

For some sweet, old-fashioned fun visit C.W. Parker Carousel Museum in Leavenworth, Kan., and take a ride on Parker No. 118, a brightly colored antique carousel that twirls to the music of a band organ. The “carry-us-all,” a play on words thought up by carousel manufacturer Charles Wallace Parker, was built in 1913 and now fully refurbished offers lively spins on 24 horses, a pair of rabbits, a chariot, three kiddie

ponies and a lovers’ tub, for a total of about 35 seats.

Parker, of Abilene, Kan., began his long love affair with carousels with the purchase of a used one in 1892. In 1911 he moved his factory into a new building in Leavenworth and ran it until his death in 1932. His son, Paul Parker, kept it going until 1955.

During its 44 years in operation, C.W. Parker Carousel Co. built about 1,000 merry-go-rounds for amusement parks and carnivals all over the world. Sixteen of the carousels are still in operation, including 40-foot-diameter, all-wood No. 118.

During their heyday — 1910 to 1920 — there were about 1,500 wood carousels operating in the U.S. After World War I most were made of aluminum and later, fiberglass.

C.W. Parker Carousel Museum is located in downtown Leavenworth near the Missouri River; RV parking is available. **For more information**, call 913-682-1331 or visit www.firstcitymuseums.org. — *Pamela Selbert*

STEAMED AND STOKED



PHOTO: MARY ZALMANEK

Ely, Nev., isn’t just another small town on America’s Loneliest Highway. For railroad enthusiasts, it’s a place where big dreams come true.

Nowhere else in the U.S. can train buffs get behind the throttles of locomotives on mainline track. Nevada Northern Railway rents steam and diesel engines for a 14-mile ride through hills and tunnels. Each year, 100 people pay \$695 to drive the 100-year-old, 100-ton coal-fired steam engines (\$495 for diesel) and to blow the whistle at road crossings. Since it’s a National Historic Landmark, part of the fee is tax-deductible.

Executive Director Mark Bassett compares their Railroad Reality Week to Tom Sawyer getting his buddies to whitewash the fence. “People pay a

lot of money to come and work like a dog on the railroad for a week.”

If you’d rather leave the driving to experts, climb aboard for daily Excursion or Saturday Specialty Trains. Seasonal events include the BBQ Dinner Train, the Chocolate Express, magical Polar Express rides to the North Pole, and in October, the Haunted Ghost Train with headless horsemen and aliens in UFOs.

The Smithsonian calls this railway complex the “most complete, most authentic” of all historic railroad sites in North America.

For more information, call 866-407-8326 or go to www.nnry.com. — *Mary Zalmanek*

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'BAY OF QUIET WATERS' AND DIVERSE ACTIVITIES

Known around the world as a winter launching point for snowboarders and heli-skiers, the small village of Nakusp in British Columbia has been rapidly growing in popularity among the RVing community because of the variety of activities it offers. People are quickly discovering the benefits of visiting this Selkirk Mountains community, located about 237 miles north of Spokane, Wash., at the junction of Highways 6 and 23. The village of Nakusp rests on the east bank of the picturesque Upper Arrow Lake. This region of the Columbia Mountain Range (two ranges over from the Rockies) produces truly dramatic contrasts, as people swim, kayak, water ski and bathe in natural hot springs at the base of glacier-capped peaks, where snowshoeing, snowmobiling and skiing dominate the landscape.

With rugged mountain passes and 148-mile-long lakes, some RVers anticipate the journey almost as much as the destination. Touring one of the small historic mountain towns, photographing ice fields, riding the free British Columbia ferry system, stopping to enjoy the cliff and lakeside viewing areas — all help to break up the monotony of many hours behind the wheel. Unlike most trips to distant vacation spots, boredom for the driver will not be a problem en route to Nakusp.



AROUND THE LAKESIDE MOUNTAIN VILLAGE OF NAKUSP, BRITISH COLUMBIA, THERE ARE HOT SPRINGS, COLD SNOW SPORTS AND A WARM WELCOME FOR RVERS

It's a scenic journey to Nakusp, British Columbia, with a view of Slokan River from a highway rest stop. In British Columbia, all inland ferry rides, including this one out of Galena Bay, are free.



With a glacier as a distant backdrop, guests enjoy the heated pools at Halcyon Hot Springs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

HALCYON HOT SPRINGS VILLAGE AND SPA

888-689-4699,
www.halcyon-hot-springs.com.

NAKUSP AND DISTRICT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

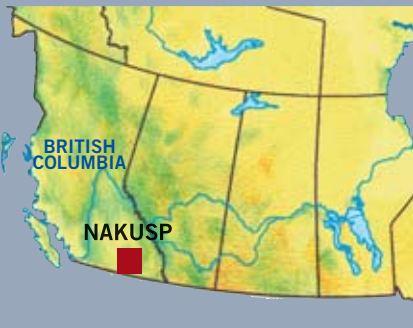
800-909-8819,
www.nakusparrowlakes.com.

NAKUSP HOT SPRINGS

866-999-4528,
www.nakusphotosprings.com.

TOURISM BRITISH COLUMBIA

800-435-5622,
www.hellobc.com.



The nomadic Lakes Indians, whom archaeologists believe inhabited the area for more than 3,000 years, named the area Nakusp, or “bay of quiet waters,” and primarily subsisted on hunting and gathering. By the mid-1800s Europeans came to the area and traded steel tools, guns and blankets with the Lakes Indians for the furs of various animals, including caribou, mountain goat, mountain sheep, beaver, lynx and bear.

The cultivating of natural resources was a significant part of the area’s history during the 1900s as paddle-wheel boats were constructed and employed to transport ore from mines along the lakes to smelters. These large bodies of water also enabled efficient transport of raw logs to the sawmill, helping to meet a growing demand for lumber. Additionally, it was soon realized that the local climate, supply of water and relatively long growing season made for bountiful fruit orchards of berries and apples.

Today the area still produces some

timber and fruit but has become a major tourist destination for its striking scenery, various outdoor activities, lack of crowds and pleasant temperatures.

Upon arrival, RVers are often happily surprised to learn how accommodating Nakusp can be to the motorhome crowd. Within the village, RVers with smaller-size motorhomes can find sites in the municipal park campground and oversized parking can normally be found directly on the waterfront at the public beach, although there is no overnight camping there. This is especially convenient for those who do not tow a dinghy, as it is only a short walk to the village center with shopping, museums, a visitor center, waterfront Japanese garden and more.

Boating is a natural activity for a community with so much water, and RVs with boat trailers can easily launch from the public wharf and large boat ramp. Boat charters and guided fishing trips launch from the marina at the south end of



There are full-service RV sites at the Nakusp Hot Springs campground. The area’s naturally heated hot-spring pools attract locals and tourists alike.



Kayaking on Arrow Lake allows visitors to explore its many waterfalls, coves and beaches.



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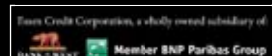
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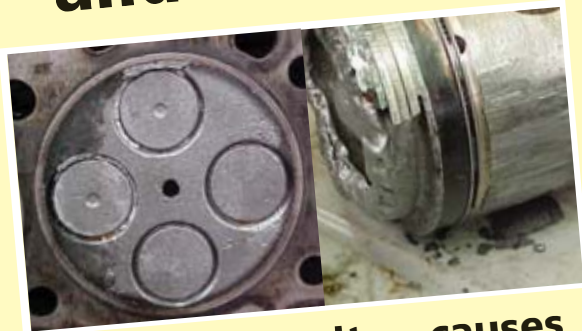
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'BAY OF QUIET WATERS' AND DIVERSE ACTIVITIES

Nakusp, and anglers from all over the world know this lake's reputation for producing trophy-size Gerrard rainbow trout, Kokanee trout, Dolly Varden and ling cod.

In addition to being known as the "bay of quiet waters," the area is also called the "valley of hot springs." Locals and tourists alike spend hours in the naturally heated waters of the many hot-spring pools. Two of the favorites, Nakusp and Halcyon Hot Springs, have incorporated campgrounds with full-service RV sites. Halcyon Hot Springs also has a spa, overnight accommodations, an upscale restaurant and private lakefront cottages for sale. The more spiritual crowd will be drawn to the Medicine Water Healing Retreat at Coyote Springs.

Hiking trails can be found in all directions and for all fitness levels, from leisurely walks circling the village to strenuous backcountry multiday hikes. Saddle Mountain Lookout Trail is one of the most popular moderate hikes for its striking views of the village, lakes and surrounding glacier peaks as hikers ascend above the tree line to the forest service lookout tower. Art

lovers will appreciate the local culture with an enjoyable stroll called the Nakusp Art Walk that winds through many local businesses and highlights local artists.

Although they will not be mistaken for Augusta National, two nine-hole golf courses that rarely experience crowds and provide unmatched lake and alpine scenery will please golfers. The Nakusp Centennial Golf Course is located only two minutes south of the village and offers 2,760 yards, par 34, slope 114 (men's) and 110 (women's) ratings. Fauquier Golf Club, located on the south end of Upper Arrow Lake, can even be reached by water with its boat launch and provides RV parking on-site for a small fee.

With so many miles of lakeshore, flat-water kayaking is a great way to explore the many coves, waterfalls and sandy beaches of Arrow Lake. Smiling Otter Wilderness Adventures offers exhilarating white-water trips on the Slocan River, about 49 miles south of Nakusp, for the more adventurous.

Another favorite activity is sightseeing. Whether you prefer driving winding mountain roads, photographing glaciers, viewing

picturesque waterfalls or watching the local wildlife, you will not be disappointed. Black and grizzly bears wander down from the mountains when the fruit ripens and can be spotted near orchards. The inland salmon known as Kokanee can be viewed spawning in shallow creeks during September. Stay vigilant and you may spot bighorn sheep, elk, mountain goats, lynx and mountain lions. For a panoramic view, heli-sightseeing tours may also be arranged.

If you're not up for going on a poker run in a snowmobile, in early December the Santa Claus Parade with caroling and hot refreshments is a highlight for children and adults alike, and an annual winter fishing derby allows participants the opportunity to try to catch "the big one." Indoors, the Arrow Lakes Arts Council produces fine musical performances and plays throughout town.

Nakusp may be more difficult to reach than other better-known destinations, but that also helps to preserve its unique character and limit the crowds. If you are ready for an RV adventure, make Nakusp your next destination. ♦

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✓ Bluebonnets

It was Mission Accomplished for the author, who met three goals in one trip. She viewed bluebonnets in full bloom near Enchanted Rock State Natural Area. She witnessed Austin residents, urban bats, in flight. And she savored famous Central Texas barbecue.



by MARY ZALMANEK

TEXAS HILL COUNTRY BUCKET LIST ACHIEVED



✓ BATS



✓ Barbecue

Lady Bird Lake in downtown Austin is a popular rowing spot. At Congress Avenue Bridge, spectators gather at dusk to watch up to 1.5 million bats emerge. The birds make up the world's largest urban colony of bats and have earned Austin the unofficial title "Bat Capital of the World."



Ansel Adams once said, "Sometimes I do get to places just when God's ready to have somebody click the shutter." That's how I felt when we arrived in the Hill Country region of Central Texas at the peak of the best wildflower season in decades.

With camera in hand, I wanted to make the most of our two weeks in the Hill Country. I referred to my well-used copy of "1,000 Places to See in the USA & Canada Before You Die" by Patricia Schultz. I also collected brochures at several Texas visitor centers and asked friends and strangers to recommend their favorite attractions. Bluebonnets, bats and barbecue topped my must-see list. I left our agenda open to check out anything else that looked interesting.

When we arrived at Buckhorn Lake Resort in Kerrville, conversations buzzed with a common theme: where to find the most abundant wildflowers. According to Gary Regner's online Texas Wildflower Report, parts of western Llano and eastern Mason counties experienced what was likely the best bloom in more than 50 years in mid-April 2010.

As soon as we unhooked our dinghy, we ventured out in search of the famed flora. We drove the loop north of Fredericksburg, starting on State Highway 16 and returning on Ranch Road 965 past Enchanted Rock State Natural Area. Bluebonnets were in full bloom along the roads, in

fields and nestled among rocks. The sight alone was reason enough to tour these and other backroads in the Hill Country, and the fragrance of these flowers was further reward. It was heavenly. I clicked the shutter.

Our enchantment with the area continued when we stopped at Enchanted Rock State Natural Area. The rock is a huge pink granite dome that rises 425 feet above ground. We followed the short, steep Summit Trail to the top of the rock. One of the largest batholiths (an underground rock formation uncovered by erosion) in the United States, it is surrounded by oak woodlands as far as the eye can see. This is a good place to stretch your legs and get the lay of the land. RV parking is not allowed.

Even in the Hill Country's pastoral setting, it was an unexpected delight to see cows with black bodies and white faces starkly contrasted in fields of colorful bluebonnets. Still more surprising were the random mixes of unusual animals, such as zebras and greater kudus. Exotic animals from Africa, Asia and Europe were introduced to the Texas Hill Country more than 60 years ago. According to the Exotic Wildlife Association, this area is now home to more than 100,000 exotic animals. Some of these animals are endangered or even extinct in their country of origin. To see them in abundance, you can go to the Exotic Resort Zoo



Buckhorn Lake Resort in Kerrville is centrally located for exploring Texas' Hill Country. At the park, conversations centered on where to find the most abundant wildflowers.



A peace treaty between German settlers and the Comanche Nation is commemorated in Pioneer Garden at Marktplatz in Fredericksburg.

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TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

in Johnson City and take a guided safari tour. More than 500 animals from 80 species live on 137 wooded acres containing small lakes and streams.

No. 1 on the "Twenty Things to Do in the Texas Hill Country Region" travel guide published by GO TEXAN is to "See the bats." Since bat watching isn't a usual tourist attraction in my part of the country, I was intrigued.

Millions of Mexican free-tailed bats make their homes in caves and tunnels and under bridges. The Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin is home to the world's largest urban colony of bats, making Austin the unofficial "Bat Capital of the World." The estimated 1.5 million bats perform a valuable service for the city by eating 10,000 to 30,000 pounds of insects each night. Just before sunset, spectators gather on the lawn near the bridge, at the viewing area atop the bridge or on boats on Lady Bird Lake to witness nature's spectacle. While waiting for the show to start I read the information about bats on a kiosk. Here's a fascinating fact: About 750,000 pregnant female bats migrate from Mexico to the bridge each spring. Each one gives birth to one bat pup. This made me wonder why the males stayed behind in bachelor colonies, but that's a story for another time.

The stories of Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson are well told at LBJ Library and Museum, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and LBJ Ranch. I'd never been to a presidential library, but based on the enthusiastic recommendation of a stranger at an RV park, we decided to go. We may remember the '60s as the good old days, but a walk through LBJ Library reminds us of the troubles and triumphs of the period. The exhibits educate visitors about the "greatest outpouring of legislation in America's history" that occurred during the LBJ administration. Laws were passed to end discrimination, fight poverty, provide medical care, protect the consumer, care for the environment and promote the arts. Displays include many of the gifts given by visiting heads of state and accepted by President Johnson on behalf of the American people, including ceremonial swords from Morocco and Saudi Arabia and Chinese tomb sculptures from the T'ang

At Brewbonnet Biergarten in Wildseed Farms, visitors can taste Texas wines and beers or try the famous peach ice cream.



Colorful azaleas are in full bloom at Zilker Botanical Gardens, set on 30 acres in Austin.



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February 25-27 • Charlotte, NC

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February 25-27 • Atlantic City, NJ

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March 18-20 • Raleigh, NC

New Mexico RV & Travel Show
March 25-27 • Albuquerque, NM



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Dynasty. A seven-eighths-scale reproduction of the Oval Office looks exactly as it did during Johnson's presidency.

Our time at LBJ Library made me want to explore the 12 other presidential libraries on future travels. This is the only one that doesn't charge admission, so I'll have my wallet ready for the others.

The First Lady's Gallery at the library chronicled Lady Bird's many achievements. In one video, LBJ told his Cabinet, "You know I love that woman and she wants the Highway Beautification Act, and by God we're going to get it for her." Lady Bird was well-known for her dedication to making the United States a more beautiful place. The first first lady to plant cherry trees in the Tidal Basin area of Washington, D.C., was Helen Taft, in 1912. She planted two. During 1965's National Cherry Blossom Festival, Lady Bird accepted 3,800 more cherry trees from Japan.

We learned more about this famous first lady's passion for beauty at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Established in 1982, its mission is to "increase

the sustainable use and conservation of native wildflowers, plants and landscapes." A giant dragonfly sculpture on the side of a limestone cistern greeted us, giving a hint of things to come. The 279-acre wildflower center has fanciful outdoor art nestled among the 16 unique native gardens.

Zilker Botanical Gardens and Wildseed Farms are two must-sees for flower lovers. Admission is free for both. Set on 30 acres, Zilker Botanical Gardens has been called "the jewel in the heart of Austin." When we were there, the azaleas were in full bloom. A visit to the Japanese garden caused me to lament the limitations of photographic technology. I got a nice shot of a Japanese pittosporum, also called "mock orange," but unfortunately I couldn't capture its magnificent fragrance.

Wildseed Farms near Fredericksburg is the largest working wildflower farm in the U.S. Children and adults alike wandered the gardens, clicking their shutters and inhaling the fragrance. A field of brilliant red poppies was all the invitation we needed to stop and explore.

With its rich German-Texan heritage and charming shops, Fredericksburg is a town worth exploring. The Marktplatz in the center of town commemorates the peace treaty between the German settlers and Comanche Nation. This treaty is thought to be the only one with Native Americans never broken. Shopping in the Historic Shopping District on Main Street offers art galleries, restaurants and unique boutiques. We bought Buddy Biscuits for our favorite pooch at Dogologie, where dogs are welcomed with a cool drink and a treat.

While staying in Kerrville, we played golf at Hidden Springs Golf Course near Harper. The rolling hills, towering trees and bubbling brooks provided a challenging course in a picturesque setting. Several features make this course unique, including three cannons mounted atop a hill overlooking a creek, exotic animals fenced on the far side of the 13th fairway, and a Stonehenge-like gathering of large white rocks.

Texans must have a strong affinity for the mysterious stones of England. Fifteen miles west of Kerrville, Stonehenge II in

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TEXAS HILL COUNTRY BUCKET LIST ACHIEVED

Hunt is about half as tall and nearly as wide as the prehistoric original that sits on the Salisbury Plain in England. In 1989 landowner Al Shepperd cleverly constructed these stones with steel, metal mesh, plaster and concrete. He added two 13-foot Easter Island heads after visiting the Chilean isle.

After all that nature and history, we worked up quite an appetite. The description of Central Texas barbecue in "1,000 Places to See" made our mouths water. Not only was Cooper's Old Time Pit Bar-B-Que in Llano a favorite of President George W. Bush, it was also in the heart of bluebonnet country. The line to get in the restaurant stretched to the parking lot when we arrived, but it moved quickly. We selected our smoked meats from the large pit out front, added potato salad, cole slaw and beans to our trays, then joined other diners at long picnic tables. The praise Cooper's receives from its devotees is well-deserved.

Barbecue joints are plentiful in Texas, and everyone has his or her favorite. I asked five people and got five different recommendations. Just about every one of them added, "And you must go to the Bluebonnet Café in Marble Falls for pie." Depending on where you are, that could be a long drive for dessert. Since we'd heard the wildflowers were good along the way, we made the trip. The cherry and apple pies looked good, but I chose a sinfully delicious slice of peanut butter pie.

After picking up several brochures on Texas Wine Trails, we decided to visit one of the 28 vineyards in the Hill Country. We'd never tasted Texas wine, and Gary Gilstrap explained why. Gilstrap, winemaker and owner of Texas Hills Vineyards, said "Even though we make a lot of wine in the Hill Country, we don't export wine. We import drinkers." It would appear that this strategy is working. In 2007 Orbitz named the Texas Hill Country the second fastest-growing wine destination in the nation. Many special events throughout the year, including a wildflower festival in April and the harvest in August, continue to draw satisfied crowds.

Texas Hill Country in the spring is the right place at the right time. It's when the bluebonnets bloom and the bats return. Since the weather is perfect for a picnic, pick up barbecue and head for the park. Remember to bring your camera.

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MAGIC SHOW

FIND VINEYARDS, ICE CREAM AND THE ‘NIAGARA OF THE WEST’ ALONG SNAKE RIVER’S ROUTE THROUGH IDAHO’S HAGERMAN VALLEY

by DAVE G. HOUSER



I'm submerged in a bubbling pool of warm mineral water at Miracle

Hot Springs between Hagerman and Twin Falls, Idaho, staring up through wisps of steam at popcorn clouds drifting across a seamless blue sky.

It is all about water, this journey of 130 miles or so from Boise to Twin Falls that finds me and my brother Al tracing Snake River through verdant Hagerman Valley — aptly nicknamed “Magic Valley.” It is a route defined by the Snake, largest and longest tributary of the mighty Columbia River, which rages like a torrent when squeezed through steep-sided canyons and yet flows as smoothly as molasses along Hagerman’s flat bottoms, flanked here and there by fields of potatoes, grain and sugar beets.

A 30-mile stretch of the route along U.S. Highway 30 between Hagerman and Twin Falls reveals so many water features — rushing streams, tumbling waterfalls and seeping springs — it has been appropriately designated Thousand Springs Scenic Byway.

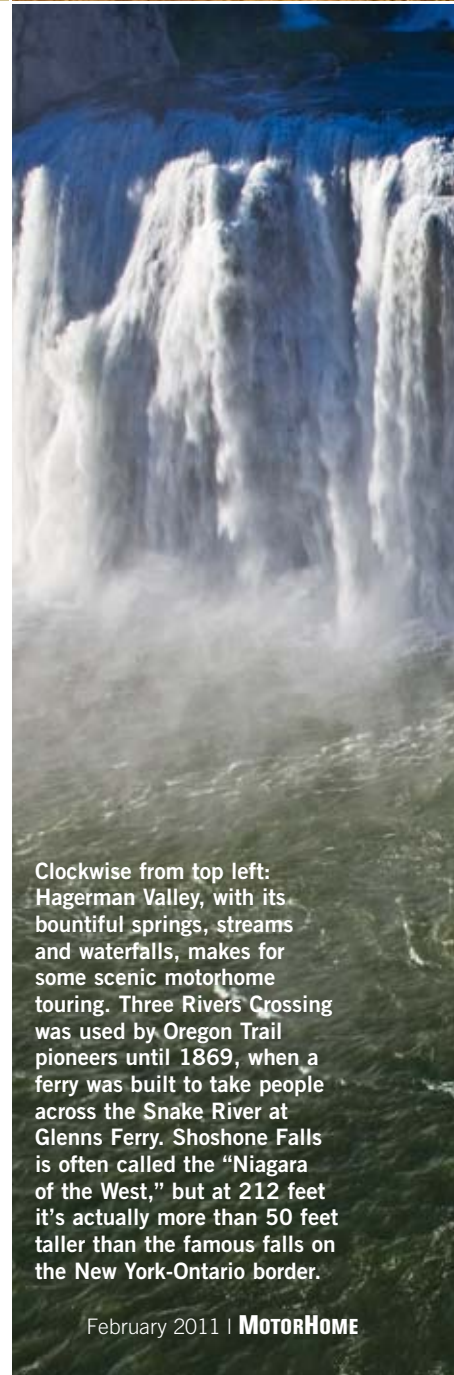
All of this cold, clean, highly oxygenated water is not only a joy to fishermen, water sports enthusiasts and sightseers, it is also the source of more than 70 percent of the country’s commercially produced trout. Some of it, too, is diverted for irrigation purposes — to help grow those famous Idaho spuds and other crops.

Our trip gets underway in the city of Boise, Idaho’s small but vibrant and inviting capital, where we enjoy strolling downtown streets dotted with fountains and sidewalk cafés. Like many other visitors, we must also have a look at the famous blue football field at Bronco Stadium, home to the national powerhouse Boise State Broncos.

While water will soon become the dominant theme of the journey, the first of our three days dawdling along the Snake is spent clambering about in ankle-deep sand at Bruneau Dunes State Park, south of Mountain Home.

Notable as home to the tallest single-structure sand dune (470 feet) in North America, the park’s dunes rise from a horseshoe-shaped basin about 3.5 miles across formed by an ancient meander channel of the Snake River. Hiking the huge mountains of sand is the most popular activity in the park, but lake and marsh habitats at the base of the dunes also provide opportunities for swimming, fishing and bird-watching. Located far from any city lights, Bruneau also has an observatory for stargazing. It is one of two public observatories in Idaho, and we ultimately visit both of them. We overnight at the park’s Broken Wheel Campground, an attractive layout of 80 serviced campsites (\$22 a night) plus some cabins.

The following day unfolds in and around Hagerman, a farm town and tourist center of about 800 people. Divided into six units, Thousand Springs State Park



Clockwise from top left: Hagerman Valley, with its bountiful springs, streams and waterfalls, makes for some scenic motorhome touring. Three Rivers Crossing was used by Oregon Trail pioneers until 1869, when a ferry was built to take people across the Snake River at Glenns Ferry. Shoshone Falls is often called the “Niagara of the West,” but at 212 feet it’s actually more than 50 feet taller than the famous falls on the New York-Ontario border.



Swimming, boating, tubing and just kicking back are a few of the water-oriented activities made possible by the slow-moving Snake River.



holds creeks, springs, waterfalls and gorges. We locate the Billingsley Creek and Malad Gorge units but even after following directions from several locals we never do find picturesque Niagara and Crystal Springs as signage for this state park is sorely lacking.

During our search for the springs we do encounter state and national fish hatcheries. While there isn't much of interest to visitors (watching fish grow isn't terribly exciting), the hatcheries are indicative of the region's importance in both the breeding and commercial production of trout.

Hagerman is well-known among paleontologists as home to Hagerman Fossil Beds, which contain the world's richest

known fossil deposits from the late Pliocene Epoch (about 3 million years ago) and the largest concentration of fossilized horses in North America. It is also known for the Hagerman Horse, a beast not considered a true horse but a closer relative to the Grevy's zebra of Africa. Protected now as Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument, the 4,400 rugged high desert acres are regularly studied by a National Park Service (NPS) paleontological team that conducts digs at one or more of about 600 active sites. Visitors are not welcome to dig — and there isn't much to see — although you can hike along portions of the Oregon and Emigrant Trails that thread alongside

Snake River and through the monument.

We learn that a reconstructed skeleton of the Hagerman Horse along with other important fossils can be seen at the NPS Fossil Beds Visitor Center in Hagerman, so we drop in for the obligatory photos of each other posing with the famous fossils. We also get word of the area's best restaurant and, ready for some lunch, we soon find ourselves in the company of Kirt Martin, the ebullient and talented owner/chef of Snake River Grill.

The fame of this Le Cordon Bleu-trained chef extends far beyond Hagerman. Martin once hosted his own nationally televised show, "Cooking on the Wild





Hiking to the top of the tallest single-structured sand dune in North America (470 feet) is a popular endeavor at Bruneau Dunes State Park, where visitors can also fish and bird-watch.

Side,” on the PBS Outdoor Channel. He has also written cookbooks, produced videos and carried out product/recipe development for major food companies. He paraded out a number of tasty creations, with my favorite a delicately smoked sturgeon filet. Martin specializes in wild game and fish and Snake River hides a healthy population of the huge sturgeon, which typically reach 6 feet in length and weigh as much as 400 pounds.

History buffs will find legendary pioneer trails in the Hagerman area. Our visit to Three Island Crossing State Park on the Snake at Glenns Ferry provides a bonanza of information of this important aspect of

the nation’s history. The park’s Oregon Trail History and Education Center features some fine exhibits, including a nicely restored covered wagon and other pioneer artifacts.

Oregon Trail pioneers knew this spot well as it was the most famous river crossing along the 2,000-mile route from Missouri to Oregon. Pioneer travelers used Three Island Crossing from 1841 to 1869, when Gus Glenn constructed a ferry just upstream. There’s a full-service campground at the park but we opted for an evening at Hagerman RV Village, a grassy, well-shaded Good Sam park with full hookups.

Referring to a map available at the center, we crossed to the south side of

Opposite left to right: Wine enthusiasts won’t want to miss tasting Snyder Winery’s prize-winning chardonnay, riesling and syrah. While Clear Springs Foods in Buhl produces the lion’s share of the region’s trout, it also provides a home for a 6-foot sturgeon that entertains visitors. Delightfully old-fashioned, Clover Leaf Creamery puts its all-natural milk in glass bottles. The snack bar has many ice cream flavors to choose from, even potato.



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the Snake and followed Slick Ranch Road to locate the rutted remnants of the Oregon Trail. These old tracks, so vital to the westward expansion of America, seem somehow hallowed to us.

In this region of Magic Valley, the Snake River creates a microclimate ideal for grape growing. We see (and taste) the results at Carmela Vineyards, a classy wine estate snuggled next to the river in Glenns Ferry that produces a number of varieties including riesling, chardonnay, merlot, pinot noir and cabernet sauvignon. Carmela also features a restaurant, nine-hole golf course and small but first-rate RV park.

On our way to the town of Buhl, the "Trout Capital of the World," we discover yet another winery, Snyder Winery, where we taste some of Russ and Claudia Snyder's prize-winning chardonnay, riesling and syrah wines while enjoying a big view overlooking the valley.

Curious about the trout business hereabouts, we drop in at Clear Springs Foods in Buhl, where we learn that "water, people and technology" have combined to make

this company the world leader in the commercial trout industry. It raises, processes and ships the lion's share of 40 million pounds of trout produced annually in the region. We explore a network of ponds where trout are raised and check out the resident visitor attraction — a large, lazy sturgeon of some 6 feet in length.

Trout may be the big thing in Buhl but the town gets our vote for producing the best ice cream we've tasted in years. It comes from the contented cows of Clover Leaf Creamery. Housed in a landmark art deco-style building from the 1930s, Clover Leaf does everything the old-fashioned way. The cows eat grass and that's it. And they still use a processing line from the 1930s to put milk and cream in glass bottles. Remember those? There's a snack bar up front where you can choose from umpteen flavors of ice cream, including potato. I can't recommend the spud cone but you really should give it a try — seeing as how you're in Idaho.

We're on to Twin Falls next, where we tie up at Twin Falls 93 RV Park, a spiffy

60-space Good Sam campground near the junction of Highways 30 and 93 just west of the city. With a population of 41,000, Twin Falls is the largest community in Magic Valley. It is a city very much connected to its river, which cuts a mighty swath through 500-foot-deep Snake River Canyon on the city's northern flank.

We find there's plenty to see and do here and lead things off with a visit to Shoshone Falls. Called the "Niagara of the West," these are magnificent falls by any measure, but Shoshone can put up some impressive numbers — tumbling 212 feet to the canyon floor, more than 50 feet farther than the famous falls on the New York-Ontario border. The falls offer some great photo possibilities, especially as rainbows rise from the swirling sheets of water. The site is RV-friendly with plenty of parking.

Namesake Twin Falls, just upriver, would be more appropriately named Mono Falls since a dam constructed in the early 1900s diverted one of the cascades. It is not on the city's short list of visitor attractions.

Herrett Center for Arts and Science at the College of Southern Idaho is, however, on that list. It is an engaging combination of museum, art gallery, planetarium and observatory. Here you can gaze upon a fully reconstructed mammoth skeleton and stargaze through one of the world's largest wheelchair-accessible public telescopes. The 24-inch computer-controlled Ritchey-Chretien reflecting telescope at Centennial Observatory is indeed a large and very powerful scope by any standard. There's a busy schedule of evening events, including astronomy talks, free public star parties and family nights.

Faulkner Planetarium next door features the expected sky/star tours but also wildly exciting computer-generated light shows created around concerts from legendary rock bands that play most evenings at 8:15 p.m.

On the final morning of our Magic Valley adventure we make an early hike along the rim of the Snake to have a look at the famous, or perhaps infamous, Evel Knievel Jump Site. This is where, in 1974, the showy daredevil unsuccessfully attempted to clear the quarter-mile-wide canyon on his rocket-powered "Skycycle." The dirt ramp that remains fails to impress — just like Knievel's jump.



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Looking for a bit more action, we join an Idaho Guide Service pontoon boat ride on the Snake, departing from Centennial Park, right beneath the towering Perrine Bridge. The 1,500-foot-long, four-lane truss arch bridge stands nearly 500 feet above the river. Unique in that it is the only structure in the country from which BASE jumping (jumping from a building, antenna, span or earth) is allowed year-round and without a permit, the Perrine sees a lot of action from jumpers who come from the world over to dive into Snake River Canyon. We are crossing our fingers that we might catch jumpers in action, and, as luck would have it, we do when a trio of BASE jumpers, deploying compact sporting chutes, bail from the bridge right above us. They soar and then spiral down for a controlled landing on the riverbank. Wow!

Nature takes the stage next as our captain delivers us to Pillar Falls, where we walk along the dramatically sculpted canyon bottom. The river roars and rushes in and out among the boulders all around us. It is a watery and wonderful climax to our Magic Valley meanderings. ♦

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GETTING LOST IN LOESS



PHOTO: DAWN SNYDER



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LOESS HILLS NATIONAL SCENIC BYWAY IN IOWA OFFERS A SHOWCASE FOR NATURE CENTERS, MUSEUMS, SCENIC VISTAS AND THOSE ‘SUGAR CLAY’ DUNES | by PAMELA SELBERT

Paralleling the serpentine course of the Missouri River as it glides along Iowa’s western border is a 200-mile-long swath of odd hills — the Loess Hills — ranging in height from 60 to 340 feet, and made of soil as fine as talc. Locals call it “sugar clay.” In winter, the time of our recent visit, the imposing dunes are camel-hued. But spring through fall, when trees and shrubs atop them are leafed out, as we’ve seen them on other occasions, the knobby hills are as lushly green as emerald.

Farms and small towns are scattered among the dunes, which in places stretch to 15 miles across, but some of the 640,000 acres have been designated as state and county parks and preserves. A designated national scenic byway winds a meandering path over and around the hills, showcasing the magnificent landscape, which includes many worthy stops.

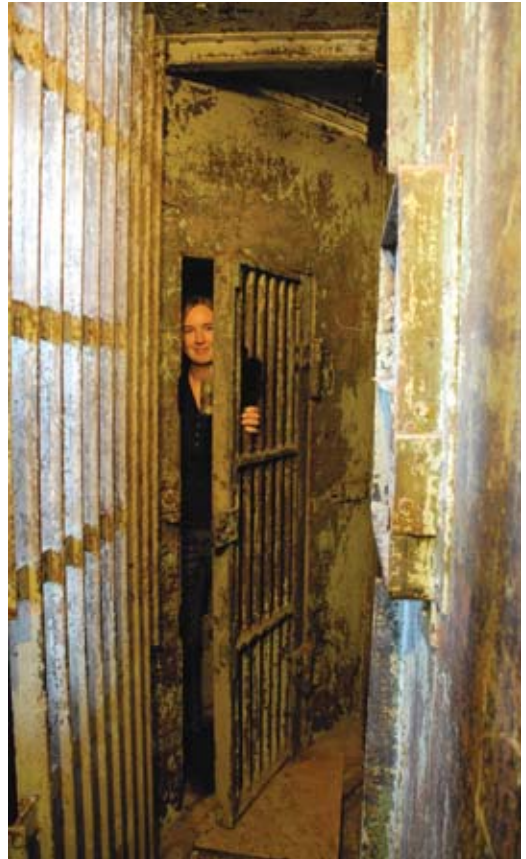
We suggest allowing at least three days for the drive — a cobble of roads — that begins on Iowa Highway 12 in tiny Akron, about 30 miles north of Sioux City, and continues south to Hamburg, two miles from the Missouri state line. Overall, the byway crosses seven counties, runs through nearly two dozen towns and passes numerous points of interest (nature and interpretive centers, museums and archaeological sites, and dramatic vistas with interpretive placards). There also are more than a dozen well-marked (though often unpaved) “excursion loops” of varying lengths off the main route.

In Akron on the Big Sioux River (just east of the Missouri), a kiosk in the city park on Highway 12 provides information about the hills and byway; a small campground is here. Other local attractions include Dunham Preserve with a riverside trail; Akron Area Museum; and the 1905 Akron Opera House, restored and open for performances.

Ahead to the south is Westfield, which claims a small but fine Loess Hills Interpretive Center. Exhibits tell the story of the hills, which began to take shape toward the end of the last ice age. For thousands of years winds from the northwest ferried the soil here, laying it down along the east bank of the ancient waterway that would become the Missouri. Although similar dunes are found elsewhere around the world, only in China are the loess deposits higher than Iowa’s.

Eventually a natural community unlike any other grew up on the dunes, and before the ice age ended such creatures as woolly mammoths, giant sloths and giant beavers roamed the hills. Artifacts discovered are evidence that for about 6,000 years humans have

Opposite page, clockwise from top: Adjacent to Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center are three miles of trails, where hikers take a break for a nature talk. All of the center’s exhibits, for children and adults alike, are devoted entirely to Loess Hills. Wooded RV sites in the area put visitors right in the middle of nature. Top right: Chrissy Canaglia peeks out of the solitary confinement cage at Historic Squirrel Cage Jail in Council Bluffs. The unusual three-story rotary jail has pie-shaped cells. At Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center in Sioux City, giant bronze statues of Lewis, Clark and Lewis’ dog Seaman greet visitors.





Top left: The sculpture outside the Western Historic Trails Center in Council Bluffs is actually a map in stone of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. It traces the journey from the Mississippi to the mouth of the Columbia. The 11,000-square-foot Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center features 12-foot-high murals that depict the famous expedition, as well as artifacts and exhibits. The Loess Hills landscape shows the stark beauty of the dirt hills, which were once completely covered and now only partially covered by prairie.

been here, among them the agrarian Mill Creek culture, which lasted from about A.D. 1100 to 1250.

Until the mid-19th century the dunes were covered with prairie grasses; Lewis and Clark mentioned them in their Corps of Discovery journals. Wildfires had kept trees from gaining a foothold. But after white settlers arrived and established farms and built roads, fires were controlled and no longer kept the trees out. Now, most of the hills are stunted, thickly in places, with a variety of species, and only a small fraction of Loess Hills' vast acreage is prairie. Nonetheless, many of the plants and animals that live there are not found elsewhere in Iowa.

Continue south into Woodbury County, where 1,069-acre Stone State Park (open April 15 to snowfall, November or December) is a steep climb into dense forest and prairie-topped ridges. Dakota Point and Elk Point offer spectacular views high over Iowa, Nebraska and

South Dakota. RV sites with electricity and water are here, but only for motorhomes up to 30 feet, because of the terrain.

Just south of the park entrance is Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center, a first-rate facility with 14,000 square feet of exhibit space devoted entirely to Loess Hills. A 4-foot-high ceramic New-

foundland, decorated with local flora, sits by the front door, "gifted by prairie-loving dogs Duchess and Megan with the assistance of their parents." The center, named for a local Episcopal deacon and nature lover, is packed with exhibits, many of them interactive, to fascinate all ages: several aquariums, a walk-through burrow that replicates underground life in the hills and artifacts from Paleo-Indians. Three miles of hiking trails wind through the woods, connecting with the 10-plus miles of trails in Stone State Park.

Ahead is Sioux City, where Sergeant Floyd River Museum and Welcome Center in a former



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers vessel is an excellent resource for travel information. It's also a fine museum, with artifacts; paintings; dioramas; a forensic reconstruction of Sgt. Charles Floyd, the Corps of Discovery's only fatality (of a ruptured appendix; Clark diagnosed it as "beliose chorlick"); and an ancient 13-foot Native American dugout canoe.

Just across the parking lot the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center and Betty Strong Encounter Center welcome visitors with a twice-life-size bronze of the captains and Lewis' dog, Seaman. At the 11,000-square-foot interpretive center, artifacts, exhibits and 12-foot-high murals depict the famous expedition as "soldiering and serving" with Lewis and Clark.

The Strong center, also 11,000 square feet, hosts free crafts, photo and art exhibitions and other programs, and includes an auditorium and activity room. "Searching for York," a 29-minute film, explores possibilities about the life of the slave who had belonged to Clark's family and took part in the expedition, though little is known about him.

Atop Sergeant Bluff, a short drive south, is the 100-foot stone monument to Sgt. Floyd, marking his fourth burial site. Erected in 1901, it was the first registered National Historic Landmark in the U.S.

The route continues south past Fowler Forest Preserve near Smithland, a farming community of trim white homes, where Smithland Log Cabin Museum is located, and into Monona County. The Loess Hills Wildlife Area, Turin Loess Hills Nature Preserve and Sylvan Runkel State Preserve are here, as is Turin Man Archaeological Site, where half a century ago 6,000-year-old human remains were discovered, the earliest known to exist in Iowa.

Preparation Loop, a 15-mile side trip, heads south from Turin, the "heart of the Loess Hills," to 344-acre Preparation Canyon State Park, which encompasses what was once the town of Preparation. In 1853 Charles Thompson left the Mormon wagon train bound for Utah after receiving a message from the "Spirit" and with about 60 Mormon families organized the town. When he turned out to be a charlatan, many of the families proceeded to Utah. Today hiking trails lace the park.

Loess Hills State Forest, south of

Preparation Canyon, spans 11,000 acres in Monona and Harrison counties, and includes a nature center (which is also forest headquarters) at Pisgah. A small city campground is near the center.

From this petite burg drive west about five miles along Fountainbleu Loop to Murray Hill, and hike up through prairie grasses to one of the finest overlooks in the hills.

At Logan the byway continues on U.S. Highway 30 (Lincoln Highway) to Harrison County Historical Village and Iowa Welcome Center. Historic buildings and Indian artifacts are displayed at the village, and byway information and gifts are available at the center.

Continue west along Highway 30 to 544-acre Wilson Island State Recreation Area on the Missouri, where spacious wooded RV sites are available, and to nearby DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge, which in fall hosts upwards of half a million migrating showy-white snow geese. The DeSoto Visitor Center displays about 200,000 artifacts salvaged from the steamboat Bertrand, which sank here in

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February 1865 en route to Fort Benton (during the steamboat era more than 400 of the vessels were claimed by the Missouri between St. Louis and the Montana town).

The Bertrand, launched just three months earlier, is believed to have been carrying twice her registered weight of 250 tons when she hit a snag near Omaha and went to the bottom. She was found nearly a century later 28 feet underground near an old oxbow in the river. Much of the cargo recovered from her hull consisted of farming tools, but there was also whisky, ale, even intact jars of pickles in brine. The excavation site can be visited.

Return to the byway and continue south into Council Bluffs. The RV campground at Lake Manawa State Park just south is convenient to the town, which was first called Kaneshville, then renamed Council Bluffs in 1853. By that time thousands of gold seekers and pioneers had made it a crossroads to the West.

Attractions here are numerous, including Union Pacific Railroad Museum, Western Historic Trails Center, Grenville

Dodge House, Kaneshville Tabernacle replica (Brigham Young was made president of the LDS church at the original) and the intriguing Historic Squirrel Cage Jail, one of only three such facilities still in existence.

Each floor of the three-story rotary jail, opened in 1885 and shut down by the local fire marshal in 1969, was divided into pie-shaped cells. The whole “squirrel cage” turned on a central axle like a lazy Susan, making it possible for just one jailer to guard the prisoners. Guided tours are available.

Continue south to Glenwood, then east to Glenwood Lake Park, where Mills County Historical Museum displays a grass-covered earth lodge and artifacts of the “Glenwood Culture Nebraska Phase” Native Americans, here from about A.D. 950 to 1300.

Nearing Hamburg the byway passes 1,992-acre Waubonsie — Wa-Shawtee State Park, a world of gaudy color in fall and high overlooks with fine views any time of year. The last short stretch of byway crosses the chocolate Nishnabotna River outside Hamburg, population 1,200, the

“Cornerstone of Iowa,” according to a sign.

The drive officially ends here though the Loess Hills stretch a short distance into Missouri, but east of the road a mile or so. Distance molds them into a long ridge shadowed purple by clusters of trees, mostly junipers. But up close the dunes are mocha-hued, and under a cloudless sky on a winter afternoon it’s easy to imagine they aren’t hills at all, just a string of camels dozing in the sunshine. ♦

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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AIR SUPPORT

INSTALLING SMI'S AIR FORCE ONE DINGHY BRAKING SYSTEM MAKES TOWING SAFE AND STRESS-FREE

by CHRIS HEMER



The SMI Air Force One system contains the operating unit (center), air cylinder (bottom), coach air tank assembly (right) and all necessary hardware, plus written instructions and an installation DVD.

After purchasing the motorhome of your dreams and selecting a dinghy vehicle to tow behind it, your next consideration should be a dinghy brake system. While it is a common misconception that the coach's brakes are adequate to slow both vehicles, the truth of the matter is that towing any vehicle behind a motorhome, no matter how small, will increase stopping distance. An increase of just a few feet can be the difference between a near miss and a bad accident. That's why many states, as well as provinces in Canada, require a supplemental braking system on a towed vehicle.

There are many good dinghy brake products on the market today, and your selection may be based on price, ease of installation and a number of other factors. For a diesel-fueled motorhome with air brakes, a popular choice is the Air Force One system from SMI Manufacturing of Evansville, Ind. Designed specifically for air brake systems, Air Force One provides braking to the towed vehicle (dinghy) by utilizing a small amount of air from the coach's brake system to operate the dinghy vehicle's brake system.

Unlike some systems you may have

heard of that tap into the motorhome's rear brakes (which could void the manufacturer's warranty and violate DOT regulations), the SMI Air Force One system isolates the motorhome's air supply from the dinghy through the use of a ¼-gallon "ping tank" or reservoir and a common air brake relay valve. With this design, if the line were to become severed, the only air that would escape would be from the ping tank; there is no danger of losing air pressure in the coach system, nor will motorhome braking be affected.

The air from the motorhome is routed to an operating unit that mounts under the hood of the dinghy vehicle. This patented device creates vacuum utilizing the venturi effect; there is no vacuum pump in the operating unit nor are there any moving parts. The vacuum generated by the operating unit is used in the dinghy vehicle's power brake system (to mimic operation when the dinghy vehicle's engine is running), while air pressure is applied to a cylinder that depresses the vehicle's brake pedal. The key benefit of this system is that it provides immediate and proportional braking power to the dinghy the instant the motorhome's brake pedal is de-

pressed. Another advantage of the Air Force One is that although there is an initial investment in time and money for installation, towing is effortless from that point forward. Connect your tow bar, connect the air line and breakaway, and off you go. And the components in the towed vehicle are hidden from view, so it's a very clean installation.

The following is an installation on a 2008 Fleetwood Revolution that was performed at Bill's RV Service in Ventura, Calif.

The Air Force One system retails for \$1,099, and installation time is typically three to six hours, depending on the motorhome and the dinghy vehicle. Once the system was installed, the SMI unit worked as promised on the motorhome and towing a 2007 Chevy Avalanche.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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SMI MANUFACTURING INC.

800-893 3763,
www.smibrake.net.



Step 1. The mounting bracket that SMI supplies for its coach air tank assembly isn't designed to be mounted flush (there are fasteners on the back side of the bracket), and there was no room to attach it to the frame via the mounting tabs. So the technician traced the mounting bracket pattern, used a hole saw to cut 1 3/8-inch holes on the outside of the frame rail (not the chassis frame rail), then drilled 1/2-inch holes through the centers.



Step 2. The fasteners were then inserted through the bracket and into the holes from the inside of the motorhome frame and locking nuts installed from the outside. Now the coach air tank assembly was securely mounted.



Step 3. The coach air tank assembly consists of a 1/4-gallon "ping tank" or reservoir and an air brake relay valve. Here, it is shown mounted to the inside of the coach's frame. Five-eighths-inch nuts were used as spacers to allow clearance for the fasteners on the backside of the assembly bracket.



Step 4. Next, the motorhome's air tanks are drained and the service brake line to the air manifold is cut. A supplied T fitting is then installed.



Step 5. A 1/4-inch air line is inserted into the push lock fitting on the top of the T fitting, and routed to the pressure protection valve on the coach air assembly.



Step 6. On the Spartan chassis, the spring brake/quick release valve is threaded directly into the bottom of the service relay valve. In this case, the fitting between the spring brake and relay valve assembly (arrow) will be removed and a close nipple/T fitting inserted. The original fitting will then be reinstalled in the T fitting.



Step 7. First, the two lines running from the spring brake valve to the air cans on either side of the drive axle are disconnected (as shown). The lines attached to the spring brake valve are then disconnected so the valve can turn freely while being removed.



Step 8. Here, the spring brake/quick release valve has been removed.



Step 9. A 3/8-inch NPT nipple is inserted into the service relay valve, followed by a supplied T fitting.



Step 10. The spring brake/quick release valve is then reinstalled on the T fitting and the air lines reattached to the valve and air cans.



Step 11. A 1/4-inch line is connected to the T fitting, and routed to the relay valve on the coach air assembly labeled "SER." Another 1/4-inch line is connected to the push lock connector on the relay valve labeled "DEL." This line will be routed to the rear of the coach for the towed vehicle connection.



Step 12. Here, the line from the “DEL” port on the relay valve has been routed to the rear of the coach and connected to the supplied L bracket.



Step 13. The SMI operating unit uses the coach’s air to create vacuum for the towed vehicle’s braking system, and also contains a breakaway reserve air supply. The unit must be located in the engine compartment in an area that is easily accessible and away from any extreme heat sources, such as the exhaust manifolds. On this Chevy Avalanche, we found the perfect spot on the inside of the driver’s-side fender. Note that the red bulkhead fitting will go to the air cylinder to be mounted inside the towed vehicle, and the blue fitting will go to the air connection to the towed vehicle.



Step 14. The supplied L bracket is mounted to the front of the towed vehicle, with the fitting aligned as closely with the coach fitting as possible. A length of ¼-inch air line is run from this connection to the blue bulkhead push lock connector on the operating unit.



Step 15. The breakaway switch is mounted at the front of the vehicle as well, and the electrical connections made. The orange and black wire from the breakaway switch (also mounted on the front of the vehicle) is attached to the supplied fuse holder and to a 12-volt DC power source, in this case, a post on the fuse box. The blue wire from the operating unit is also attached to the breakaway switch, and the white wire to ground.



Step 16. The vacuum line from the brake booster is cut and a T fitting and check valve installed. The check valve prevents vacuum in the line from bleeding off through the engine’s intake manifold when the engine is not running. The vacuum line preinstalled on the operating unit is cut to length as needed, then attached to the Tee.



Step 17. To mount the air cylinder, a small “X” is cut in a firewall grommet, and a line from the red bulkhead push lock connector on the operating unit is run into the passenger compartment. The air cylinder is clamped to the brake pedal arm, and a cable anchor installed in the floorboard, just above the carpet edge and in line with the air cylinder. The anchor is necessary because, as the cylinder pushes down on the brake arm, the cylinder itself is forced upward. The anchor holds it in place.



Step 18. Our Avalanche towed vehicle had what SMI refers to as a dead brake light switch — that is to say, the brake lights are inoperable when the ignition key is in the ACC position. To make the brake lights on the Avalanche work while it was being towed, it was necessary to purchase what is called a “normally open air pressure switch” for an additional \$20. The switch is installed in the air supply line between the operating unit (red bulkhead push lock connector) and the air cylinder. A 12-volt DC fused power source is connected to one post on the switch, and the red wire from the two lead loop (for the brake light monitor, next step) is connected to the other post. The switch was then mounted under the dash using nylon ties. SMI provides tech support on an individual basis for customers who own vehicles with a dead brake light switch.



Step 19. SMI supplies a brake monitor light that attaches via hook-and-loop fastener to the rearview mirror of the towed vehicle and connects to its brake light switch. When the brakes are activated, the bright, blue LEDs are visible on the motorhome’s rearview camera monitor. This is a clever touch that saves the trouble of wiring a monitor light inside the motorhome’s cockpit. The harness (or two-lead loop) can be disconnected when not in use and stored in the glove box. ♦

2011 THOR MOTOR COACH FOUR WINDS 31K

RV New Math: 32-foot floorplan + sleeping for 7 + 99 cubic feet of cargo storage = a good time anywhere

Having the ability and accommodations to bring friends along on the family camping trip can add a new dimension of fun to the experience and the 2011 Thor Motor Coach Four Winds Class C provides that ability.

First on a long list of features are the lowered mid-coach entry steps. With the first step just 14 inches off the ground, the dropped threshold body line eliminates the need for an electric step.

In the entry, overhead cabinetry conveniently houses the coach's systems monitor panel and controls for the (standard) 4-kW generator. The main cabin is split functionally with the Leatherette U-shaped dinette and fabric sofa bed/seating located on the streetside and the linear galley curbside. The booth-style dinette allows everyone to join in at meals and other entertainment, later transforming to sleep two. The booth has seat belts for three and is a choice location for chatting while traveling. It shares the coach's only slide with the sofa bed, which sits directly below the full-width queen cabover bunk and offers a clear view of the standard 32-inch LCD TV located next to the entry. If additional dining or work space is needed, the sofa bed also employs a handy armrest pullout laptop desk to work at or eat from. Overhead storage cabinetry is provided above the sofa bed with additional space for oversize items in the TV cabinets.

This galley design places the 6.3-cubic-foot two-door refrigerator behind the cockpit using the pantry cabinet to create clearance for the swiveling cockpit seats. A three-burner stove-and-oven combo handles cooking needs with help from a microwave in the upper cabinetry. Abbreviated



countertop space is augmented with a fold-up extension as well as twin-basin sink covers. A bank of full-extension drawers is supplemented by under-sink storage; more storage is found in the upper cabinetry. The entire cabin is bathed in natural light from the (standard) moon roof with sliding shade.

Handsome cinnamon maple cabinetry surrounds the cabin and is complemented by the matching wood fridge door inserts, faux granite laminate countertops and the stone-patterned vinyl floor.

The split bath divides the cabin from the bedroom with an aisle shower that has a swirled-glass sectional shower door curbside, and an enclosed toilet room and vanity streetside. The shower accommodates 6-foot bathers comfortably with an additional 6 inches of headroom from the domed skylight.

The vanity with its small oval stainless basin provides modest storage but the full-width medicine chest offers six generous shelves of storage with additional linen storage above the (standard) china commode.

High on the list for many is an easily accessible rear bed and this floorplan provides a walk-around queen with innerspring mattress that resides on the platform created by the cavernous exterior storage compartment below. Because of its design, Jack 'n' Jill hanging wardrobes are used on either





SPECIFICATIONS

CHASSIS: FORD E-450	WHEELBASE: 223"
ENGINE: TRITON 6.8L V-10	FRESHWATER CAP: 40 GAL
FUEL: 55 GAL	GRAY-WATER CAP:
GVWR: 14,500 LBS	29/22 GAL (DUAL)
LENGTH: 32' 7"	BLACK-WATER CAP: 31 GAL
WIDTH: 8' 3"	LP-GAS CAP: 10 GAL
HEIGHT WITH A/C: 10' 10"	BASE PRICE: \$89,610
INTERIOR HEIGHT: 6' 10"	

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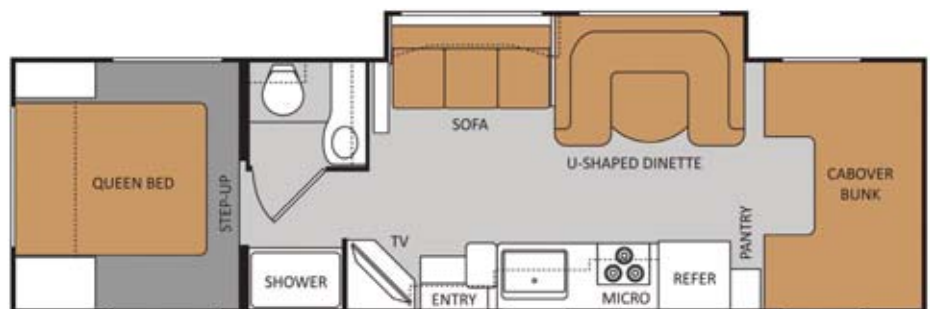
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side of the bed and are connected by overhead storage cabinets. Jill gets the better deal with a slightly wider closet and an additional bedside drawer. Jack gets a recessed wall mount for the optional 19-inch LCD TV at the foot of the bed or at the exterior hookup point and both are equipped with cable connections.

Full-width exterior storage in this coach is a highlight with a lighted 4-foot by 8-foot by 27-inch rear garage accessible on three sides. A covered storage well in the floor protects the spare tire from the weather while three other draining wells with lids offer wet or dry storage, one using a 2-foot by 4-foot free-standing picnic table as a lid. Smaller Rotocast compartments complete the advertised 99 cubic feet of exterior storage.

Using Ford's venerable V-10 Triton three-valve engine, five-speed TorqShift transmission, shift-altering "Tow-Haul" mode and 5,000-pound hitch receiver, this Four Winds should have no trouble transporting families to new landscapes in comfort while properly introducing friends to the RV lifestyle.

Our thanks to Sher Lyckman and the staff of Giant RV in Southern California for providing this motorhome for our review. ♦



SKYLIGHT, SKY BRIGHT



Step 1. Over time, the elements can take their toll on your skylights, making them dull and brittle. In the case of this motorhome, the skylight is almost completely opaque and admits little light.



Step 2. The first step is to determine the location of the original fasteners so you'll know what tool you'll need to remove them. These square-head screws are common in RV applications, and the driver for them is available at most hardware stores.

HOW TO REPLACE YOUR AGING SKYLIGHT TO LET THE SUN SHINE IN

By CHRIS HEMER

Replacing your dull, cracking skylights isn't difficult if you know how they're installed, and what products you'll need to complete the job. The only tools you'll need are a plastic putty knife and a square-drive or other appropriate screwdriver. To prevent leaks, you'll also need two-sided sealing tape and Dicor Lap Sealant. The staff at Bill's RV in Ventura, Calif., showed us how it's done. With a little elbow grease, you'll see the light in no time.

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Step 3. To make the job go a little more quickly and easily, you may opt to get a suitable driver tip for your cordless drill.



Step 4. Once all the screws have been removed, use a screwdriver or putty knife to carefully scribe a line around the edge of the old skylight. It isn't necessary to push very hard, as the sealant usually doesn't become hard or brittle. In any case, exercise caution here, as you don't want to damage the aluminum or rubber roof membrane.



Step 5. Use a screwdriver or putty knife to pry the old skylight free.



Step 6. Ordinarily, the skylight will come out in one piece, but this one was so brittle, the flange snapped off and had to be removed separately.



Step 7. Many RVs have an inner skylight as well as the outer, shown here, which helps create an insulating double-pane window effect. However, because the outer skylight has protected it, it is still in good condition and doesn't need replacement.



Step 8. Some of the old gasket may be peeled away by hand, depending on its condition, ambient temperature and other factors. Carefully remove stubborn material with a plastic putty knife.



Step 9. Next, carefully place the two-sided adhesive sealing tape around the perimeter of the skylight. Bill's RV buys this tape in bulk, but Camco offers a Universal Vent Installation Kit that includes the tape as well as screws (available through Camco and Camping World). It doesn't matter if you cover the holes; you will drill through the tape later, anyway.



Step 10. Once the tape is placed, remove the paper backing.



Step 11. Place the new skylight over the opening. Note that the old sealant is still present; while it's not pretty, it is still pliable, and trying to remove it all could damage the rubber roof membrane.



Step 12. Begin screwing the skylight to the roof, using the holes as a guide. It isn't important to line up the new skylight to the original holes; for one thing, the odds are good you won't get the exact same skylight (as in this case — note the new one has square corners, the old one had rounded corners), and for another, you're just inserting new screws into the substrate below the rubber surface. Once the sealant is applied, both new and old holes will be covered.



Step 13. Dicor Lap Sealant is used to ensure a leakproof seal. This product is self-leveling, remains flexible, and is UV-stabilized to slow down deterioration. Be generous with it; no one is grading you on appearance, and you want to make sure both the edges and the screw holes are properly sealed.



Step 14. The finished replacement skylight is ready for years of dependable, leak-free use. ♦



2011 PLEASURE-WAY PLATEAU TS

Class B Built on Mercedes-Benz Sprinter Chassis Is a Retreat and a Treat for Two

When determining which motorhome will best serve a buyer's needs, the purchase decision ultimately comes down to what works well in most circumstances. If the ability to accommodate guests overnight occasionally isn't at the top of your list, but luxury, comfort and maneuverability are, then Pleasure-Way's Plateau TS for two may be the way to go.

This Class B, built by the veteran Canada-based manufacturer, rides on the fuel-efficient Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis and boasts high-end and handcrafted features such as Corian countertops, Ultraleather fabric, memory foam bed cushions, solid maple cabinetry and a Thetford china bowl toilet.

At nearly 23 feet, the Plateau is surprisingly spacious and has a bright yet cozy and intimate feel throughout. With just one sleeping area instead of two, the living quarters aren't cramped or tight. This enabled Pleasure-Way to go larger. For example, the Norcold double-door refrigerator is 6 cubic feet, whereas previous units had 3.8-cubic-foot fridges. And there's a storage area in back under the floor that's roomy enough for lawn chairs and golf clubs.

Although the Plateau sleeps two,

there's room, and seat belts, to bring three more travelers along for the ride.

Pleasure-Way says typical buyers are couples who have owned large Class A motorhomes in the past but now want to downsize. They may be going from a one-driver situation to shared-driver circumstances and have no need for a larger motorhome. They also don't generally buy the Plateau for its fuel economy, but they get it anyway. The diesel-fueled Plateau gets 17 to 20 MPG on the highway.

Entry to the motorhome, with an interior height of 75 inches, is via a sliding door behind the passenger seat. There are two color schemes to choose from that add to the classy, elegant feel: cognac maple (new for 2011) cabinetry with Desert Sand Ultraleather fabric or Hard Rock Natural Maple cabinetry with Stone Harbor Taupe interior.

Throughout the Plateau are easy-to-clean linoleum floors. This is a change from previous models, when permanent carpeting was found beyond the galley. Pleasure-Way responded to its customers with allergies in making that alteration, however small carpet mats are provided for front and rear placement if desired.

The split galley contains all the

amenities for those intimate dinners for two or, if friends stop by, meals for four. An attractive curved Corian countertop and a two-burner, flush-mounted LP-gas stove are situated on the curbside. Opposite are the refrigerator and above it, the optional (\$455) convection microwave.

The enclosed private wet bath with a radius door that offers extra elbow room is located behind the driver's seat. Other lavatory features include a large window, towel bar, Corian vanity top, mirrored medicine cabinet, shower, under-sink cabinets and the china bowl toilet.

The rear of the motorhome holds the sofa bed as well as ottomans on either side of a rectangular tabletop, providing a compact dining space for four. With the touch of a button the sofa reclines into a 70-inch by 76-inch queen bed, created with the placement of a double-sided maple board. Sweet dreams are afforded with the memory foam cushions.

Also at the rear is an optional (\$1,560) 19-inch LCD flat-screen TV and DVD/CD player, all set into an elegant solid maple cabinet.

Pleasure-Way prides itself on improved quality by producing as many of the interior components in-house as



SPECIFICATIONS

CHASSIS: MERCEDES-BENZ SPRINTER

ENGINE: 3.0-L V-6 MB BLUE TEC

TURBODIESEL

GVWR: 11,030 LBS

LENGTH: 22' 9"

WIDTH: 7' 10"

HEIGHT: 9' 8"

INTERIOR HEIGHT: 75"

WHEELBASE: 170"

FRESHWATER CAP: 30 GAL

GRAY-WATER CAP: 35 GAL

BLACK-WATER CAP: 12 GAL

LP-GAS CAP: 12 GAL

BASE MSRP: \$103,870

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possible, including cabinets, Corian countertops and even privacy drapes.

The Plateau is brightened with new-for-2011 LED lighting, which consumes less energy and provides brighter light than halogens or fluorescents.

Storage is ample in this Class B. In addition to the previously mentioned rear storage area, there are a full-length wardrobe closet next to the lavatory with a 22-inch clothes bar and multiple drawers and shelves in the 6-foot-long kitchen cabinet.

Driver and passenger travel in comfort in swiveling Ultraleather seats. The steering wheel telescopes and tilts using a single lever. Exterior paint is Arctic White; Brilliant Silver (\$2,275) is an available option. The exterior also features a 13-foot Fiamma awning.

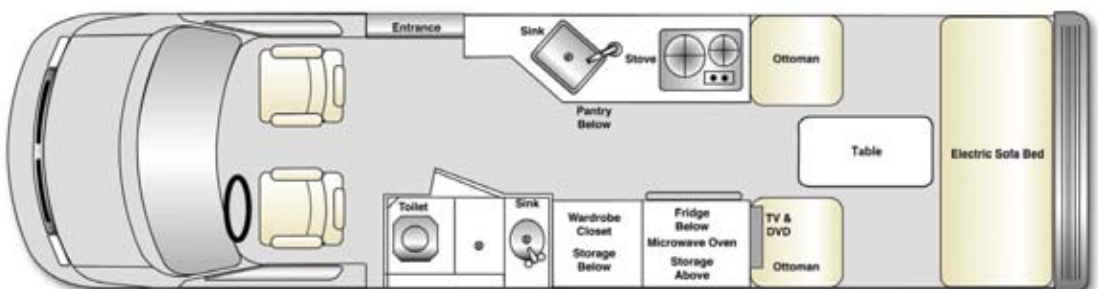
With its Sprinter base powered by the Blue Tec 3.0-L V-6 turbocharged diesel combined with a five-speed electronically controlled automatic transmission, the Plateau TS has been dubbed the

“Plateau a Go-Go.”

This year, Pleasure-Way marks a quarter century of building Class B motorhomes. With all the new features for 2011 in this model and Pleasure-Way’s commitment to improving on the

past, it’s evident that this 25-year-old manufacturer won’t be content to hit a plateau and remain there.

Our thanks to McMahons RV of Southern California for providing this motorhome for our review. ♦





WATER WORK

I wanted to add an external water filter that has a replaceable cartridge to the incoming water connection of my Holiday Rambler Admiral Class A motorhome. The filters are far less expensive and last longer than the hose-end type. In addition, there is no unsightly filter hanging down outside the RV.

The original incoming water connection was in the wastewater compartment and I happily moved it to the next compartment, which contains the electrical hookups.

I found a location between the two adjacent compartments that allowed me to drill a 1½-inch hole to pass a short galvanized nipple through. The filter housing is an under-the-sink unit purchased at a big-box store for less than \$21.

I screwed the 3½-inch pipe nipple into the filter unit and fit two rubber washers next to the housing as spacers and to give some cushion to tighten and hold it against the wall for support. At the inlet I used a few PVC pipe fittings to make a turn downward and adapt to the pressure regulator that I relocated from its former position. All of this is in the

rear compartment that also houses the electrical cord, expansion tank and TV connections. I think this is far more sanitary than before.

In the forward compartment I put an electrical lock nut to hold the ¾-inch pipe firmly. Next was a 90-degree elbow and a 2-foot piece of reinforced plastic hose that loops down and attaches to the original water line connection.

This whole arrangement may be removed easily if needed. The total cost was \$50.
ROGER STRUTHERS | BASS LAKE, CALIF.



AIR BORN ▲

If you've ever tried to top off your high-pressure RV tires at a fuel station using those wimpy coin-operated air stations, you might appreciate this tip.

I have attached a hand valve and quick disconnect to the accessory air manifold that comes with RV chassis utilizing air brakes. Accessories such as air horns and air seats are typically attached to this manifold.

I now carry an air hose, inflation chuck and blowgun with me and I can inflate those high-pressure tires up to 130 PSI, rafts and tubes at the lake, and use the blowgun for whatever.

Refer to your chassis manufacturer's manual or consult your RV service company if you cannot locate the manifold.

The valve adds a measure of safety and convenience. Should an air hose break it can be shut off at the source or the quick connect can be replaced without bleeding down the system.

**DANNY LINDSTROM
SALINAS, CALIF.**



SHOWER POWER

When we dry camp in our motorhome we use a Stearns Sun Shower, which is primarily used by campers, backpackers and others. By hanging one of these in the shower, we can easily monitor the amount of water used. They come in several sizes — ours has a 3-gallon capacity and is sufficient to furnish showers for two adults.

When taking a "navy" shower and turning the water on and off, there is usually a shock of unpleasantly hot or cold water when it comes back on. The water placed in this bag can be easily controlled and the temperature will remain constant long enough for a couple of showers.

WILFORD CLARK | ASHLAND, ORE. ♦

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Quick Tips, MotorHome's monthly column of useful, handy and simple tips by fellow RVers, is looking for submissions. Please send your favorite do-it-yourself ideas to: MotorHome Quick Tips, 2575 Vista Del Mar Drive, Ventura, CA 93001, or e-mail info@motorhomemagazine.com. 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 & POWERTRAIN



HANDS-ON | *by* BOB LIVINGSTON

LUXURIATING IN Z'S

Relief Mart's Tempflow three-layer, Biogreen memory foam mattress employs a patented airflow system

Since we spend about a third of our lives in bed, it's pretty important to make sure we're sleeping on a good mattress. All too often the factory-installed mattress in our motorhome interferes with a good night's sleep. Even though we covered our stock mattress with a foam topper, we still woke up stiff and sore — and tossed and turned all night. Recently we replaced our rig's bed with a Tempflow RV6000 memory foam mattress and our home mattress with the top-of-the-line RV8000 memory foam mattress from Relief Mart, and they have transformed our sleeping into pure luxury.

The Tempflow RV6000 mattress is made up of three layers of different foam densities, which the company found provided the best combination for extreme comfort and the support needed to wake up without a backache. To make up the mattress, the top inch employs a 5-pound-density, ultra-pressure-sensitive Biogreen memory foam to give an extra soft surface feel. Specialized Polyflex foam is in the middle, retaining a comfortable and supportive transition to the firm orthopedic polyurethane base. The total height of the Tempflow RV6000 mattress is 6 inches. Tempflow RV8000 is plusher memory foam made up of 1.5 inches of the ultra-pressure-sensitive 5-pound-density Biogreen, followed by 1.5 inches of firm Biogreen memory foam. The total height of the Tempflow RV8000 mattress is 8 inches.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 61





Almost Out of Warranty

HAVING BEEN DENIED CONSIDERATION FOR TIRE AND ALIGNMENT ISSUES BECAUSE HIS MOTORHOME WOULD SOON BE OUT OF WARRANTY, A READER CONTACTED HOT LINE FOR HELP. HE WROTE:

I bought a 2010 Four Winds Hurricane Class A motorhome in June 2009 from Camp-Land RV in Burns Harbor, Ind. From the ride home until now, I have felt uncomfortable with the ride and handling of this coach. When I looked under the motorhome I noticed severe wear on both front tires — severe to the point they were dangerous. I immediately had the coach aligned and found that the toe was set to more than 2½ inches out. The coach had been pulling to the right, according to the alignment shop, due to excessive tire wear.

Since the motorhome had only 2,700 miles on it, I thought this should be covered under warranty, so I contacted Camp-Land. The dealer told me it was a manufacturer issue and passed my request on to Four Winds.

Martin Johnson, regional service manager for Four Winds, replied to Camp-Land RV with an e-mail dated May 18, 2010, denying my request for replacement of the tires, stating “Once an owner takes possession of a unit, they must have it aligned after they put all their belongings in the coach. Also, with this being very close to a year out of warranty this problem should have been addressed within the first month or two to be given any consideration.”

I think that no matter how the motorhome is loaded there is no way the alignment could be that far out. Besides, the coach is still within its 12-month/12,000-mile warranty peri-

IT IS COMMON PRACTICE FOR AUTOMOTIVE BATTERIES TO HAVE A TWO-PART WARRANTY: A SHORTER TIME PERIOD FOR FREE REPLACEMENT AND A LONGER ONE FOR PRORATED WARRANTY CONSIDERATION. LOOK FOR BATTERIES WITH THE LONGEST FREE REPLACEMENT WARRANTY.

od. I have since bought new Michelin tires for the front because those old tires were too unsafe to drive.

If there is anything Hot Line can do to help me it would be greatly appreciated.

DANE HARTMANN | MONEE, ILL.

Because Hartmann's motorhome was still covered under warranty, Hot Line petitioned Four Winds for further review of his request. Though we did not hear back directly from Four Winds International, we did receive a follow-up letter from Hartmann. It read:

After exhausting all resources with Camp-Land RV and Four Winds I wrote to Hot Line requesting help. I am pleased to say that a short time later I was notified by Four Winds that it would take care of my complaint and refund me for the tires and the service I had done to correct the alignment problem.

I received a check from Four Winds shortly thereafter for \$1,062. I feel that if I had not contacted Hot Line for help on this matter nothing would have been done. I am now finally enjoying my motorhome every chance I get and I feel safe while driving it. Thanks, Hot Line.
D.H.

PRORATED BATTERY PROBLEM

Unhappy with the manner in which a

prorated credit was calculated for his motorhome's 2-year-old batteries, a reader turned to Hot Line for direction in obtaining a resolution. He wrote:

In August 2008, I bought two SL131SA batteries for my motorhome from Batteries Plus in Charlottesville, Va. The batteries came with an 18-month free exchange/30-month warranty.

About two years later I was having problems starting my motorhome so I took out the two batteries and brought them back to the store. The manager checked the batteries and said one of them had a bad cell. He then offered to put them on a machine to check them and get back to me a few days later.

When I returned to the store to pick up my batteries I was told that both batteries were bad and that I would need two new ones. The store manager said that my old batteries were under warranty but they would have to be prorated. Since I paid \$90 per battery I thought the prorating would be about \$40 per battery. When the manager told me I would be receiving a \$13.49 credit for each battery toward the purchase of the new batteries I thought he had the numbers inverted. From that point forward the manager and I were no longer seeing eye to eye.

In order to leave the store, I had to pay \$171.15 for the new batteries. I felt as though I was being held hostage — the old batteries were in the back of the store, the new batteries had been loaded into my truck and I had to pay the bill or the manager was going to have me arrested. Therefore, I had no alternative but to pay the bill.

I hope this was an isolated incident and that the manager made a mistake with the paperwork and that Batteries Plus will consider sending me a refund.

**MARK MANGANO
NORTH GARDEN, VA.**

It is common practice for automotive batteries to have a two-part warranty: a shorter time period for free replacement and a longer one for prorated warranty consideration. Once the free exchange period ends and prorating kicks in warranty credit drops quickly.

Buyers should look for batteries with the longest free replacement warranty before purchase.

In order to get to the bottom of Mangano's dispute with Batteries Plus, Hot Line contacted the company for its side of the story. A representative responded to Mangano as follows:

The standard industry practice for prorating batteries is that the battery is replaced during the free replacement period, however as soon as the prorated period is broached, its value to the consumer quickly diminishes. For example: On an 18/30 warranty period, the consumer would get a 100-percent-free replacement at month 18, but at month 19 the customer would have to pay approximately 60 percent of the cost of a new battery in order to get the benefit of the prorated warranty. I checked your specific situation and your batteries were prorated at the correct calculation.

Regarding your concern about my manager having you arrested if you didn't buy the batteries, my understanding is that a well-meaning employee (trying to reduce your wait time in the store) placed new batteries in your vehicle before they were paid for. You were actually leaving the parking lot with the product not having been paid for — an unfortunate confluence of activities. My policy is that if customers leave the premises with product, they are required to pay for it. By no means are customers otherwise required to buy batteries from my stores.

I appreciate you informing me of your concerns; I hope I've been able to adequately address them. While I understand the prorated policy would be a bit grating were I to believe my out-of-pocket expense would be relatively minuscule, I'd like to assure you that Batteries Plus adheres to consumer protection law and industry practice and I continually remind my store employees to treat others as they would like to be treated.

Your letter has afforded me the opportunity to brush up on this issue, which has also been beneficial.

MORT MUMMA
PRINCIPAL, BATTERIES PLUS
CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA. ♦

TO CONTRIBUTE TO HOT LINE, please refer to Contact MotorHome, on page 10.

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Parking Brake Problems

We own a 2001 Gulf Stream Conquest 34.5-foot Class A motorhome with a 7.4-L Vortec engine and Workhorse chassis. I have a problem with the parking brake that is driving me crazy. Since 2007 the parking brake has seized four times, totally unexpectedly. When I park the motorhome and then get back in and put it in DRIVE, it won't move. Twice the parking brake has had to be disabled in order to be able to get the motorhome moving again. That means we were driving without a parking brake and every time we stopped the wheels had to be blocked. The two other times this happened we had to be towed into a service center. The overall cost has been about \$2,000 in repair bills and the worst is that no one seems to have any idea what is causing the problem. The only explanation we have received from the service center mechanics is that an electrical switch had to be replaced.

On a trip this summer the parking brake seized once again and the only available service center was a GM light truck and car dealership. The mechanic who checked it out said he cleaned everything and that the parking brake seemed to be working OK. However, when the motorhome was moved out of the bay and we were about to leave, I noticed a line of oil on the pavement. The mechanic went under the motorhome again and noticed that the switch, which has an oil line going to it, was leaking and he said it should be replaced. The part was ordered and the repair was made the same day. However, the very next day, as we continued our trip, when I shifted into PARK the motorhome kept on rolling. We were once again without a parking brake and

only able to continue our trip by using my wife as a "wheel blocker."

I have discussed this problem with several motorhome mechanics and have been given different advice from each one. Some have told me that I should use the yellow PARK BRAKE button on the dash to trigger the parking brake while others have said that I should not use the yellow pull button. One mechanic advised me to put tape over the yellow button to prevent it from being used at all.

On reviewing what has happened, I believe that there is a problem with the motorhome electrical system, but I have no idea what it might be. Would it be possible to separate the parking brake system from the rest of the electrical system? I believe something in the motorhome electrical system is interfering with the parking brake system. I have a capable mechanic in the area who will do the work, but he needs some guidance on what steps to take to properly

WORKHORSE RECOMMENDS A YEARLY INSPECTION OF THE AUTO-PARK BRAKE SYSTEM FOR LOOSE CONNECTIONS, CORROSION OF COMPONENTS, ADJUSTMENTS, RESERVOIR FLUID LEVEL, FLUID CONDITION AND SYSTEM OPERATION.



fix the problem. I have also contacted the local Gulf Stream dealership, but the service repair waiting period is several months. I need your help with trying to remedy this situation once and for all.

**DIETER LOBERMEIER
HONEY HARBOUR, ONTARIO**

We get a lot of reports of problems with the Auto-Apply parking brake system, which is very common and has been used on trucks, buses and motorhomes for about 20 years. The auto-park brake system (option J71) is used on all Workhorse Custom Chassis P-chassis models with 4L80E Hydramatic Transmissions and gross vehicle weight ratings (GVWR) higher than 15,000 pounds. This brake replaces the foot parking brake and parking pawl used on similar lighter units as the parking pawl on the 4L80E transmission is rated at a maximum of 15,000 pounds.

The parking brake is a drum type mounted on the rear of the transmission. When the brake shoes are applied against the drum, it stops rotation of the prop shaft, which stops the rear wheels from rotating. A spring-loaded chamber mechanically applies the brake. A hydraulic cylinder that obtains pressure from an electric-powered pump releases the brake.

The parking brake is applied when the shift lever is put in the PARK position. This is done by the PARK NEUTRAL switch and relay, removing a 12-volt DC power supply to a normally open solenoid valve. The valve dumps the oil pressure that holds the spring compressed and the spring mechanically applies the parking brake. When the shift lever is moved to any gear position, 12-volt DC power goes to the solenoid valve and it closes. At the same time, an electric-powered hydraulic pump pressurizes a cylinder that compresses the spring and releases the brake. Operation is similar to spring parking brakes on air-brake-equipped units.

For a parking brake to meet Department of Transportation (DOT) standards, it must fail in a safe mode such that the parking brake is applied if any failure occurs. This means that any failure will result in the parking brake ap-

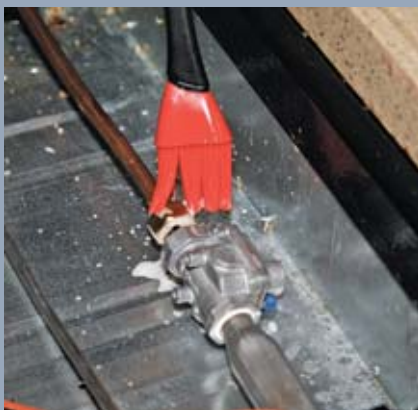
LP-GAS, ALSO KNOWN AS PROPANE, IS ONE OF THE GREAT ENABLERS OF THE MOTORHOME LIFESTYLE IN TERMS OF REFRIGERATION, A WAY TO COOK AND A HEATED INTERIOR, AT LEAST WHILE DRY CAMPING.



The fuel has a less important role if the motorhome is connected to electricity, but the need for knowledge of how to use it safely is just as important.

Propane is stored as a liquid under pressure, which varies but can exceed 200 PSI in your motorhome tank. The pressure regulator reduces it to about ½ PSI before it flows to your appliances. The regulator is sensitive to dirt and debris and should be protected by a hood.

Even at such a low pressure, the gas will leak if piping joints are not properly installed and tightened, creating danger of an explosion. If a leak is suspected at a connection, paint it with a soapy solution. If bubbles appear, the joint must be tightened or repaired.



It's important to know that the detector is functional; test it before each trip, utilizing a small source of propane such as a portable lighter. Ignite the propane flame, and while continuing to press the trigger, blow out the flame and aim the nozzle in the area of the propane detector for about five seconds. When the detector alarm sounds, press MUTE repeatedly until the device clears itself.

If a propane leak is detected, vacate the coach, turn off the gas at the tank, and wait until the alarm ceases. Arrange for a technician to test the system. Aside from a propane detector, the best detector is the human nose, especially since our sense of smell can be used in various areas in and around the coach; propane odor is very pungent.

On a regular basis, a gas pressure leak-down test should be performed using a manometer or a pressure gauge. This is the best way to determine if there is a leak. Improper pressure can adversely affect performance of all your appliances.

During filling of fuel or the propane tank, all propane appliances should be turned off, assuring that flames are out and automatic igniters are disabled.



RV tanks are fitted with stop-fill devices that prevent overfilling. Nevertheless, service personnel always open the so-called 20 percent valve to monitor filling. When the flow of invisible gas from the valve (arrow) turns to liquid (a white stream), filling should stop, even if it precedes the automatic stop-fill. ♦



Motorhomes are equipped with gas-detection devices, powered by the 12-volt DC system of your motorhome. The devices are designed to detect propane inside the coach and sound a warning before it increases enough in volume to create danger.



plying, or not releasing. For example, any loss of power to the solenoid valve, including a dead battery or poor wiring connection, can cause the brake to apply, by design. This fail-safe feature also prevents a parked vehicle from rolling down a hill after a system failure.

Workhorse recommends a yearly inspection of the system for loose connections, corrosion of components, adjustments, reservoir fluid level, fluid condition and system operation. The cause should be determined on any failure encountered. The unit should be inspected to make sure that added items such as reverse bells/lights or any other added equipment are not installed on the same circuit or wiring as the auto-park brake. An electrical overload resulting from such added items has caused the parking brake to apply or not release.

All P-chassis with automatic transmissions and hydraulic brakes without a parking pawl have the auto-park system to comply with DOT standards. This includes motorhomes with Allison transmissions other than 1000 series. The system has a light and buzzer that warns drivers if adjustment is needed.

Any loss of electrical power to the solenoid valve will cause the parking brake to apply. There are numerous problems that can result in loss of power to the solenoid valve. Additions of add-on electrical items using the parking brake wiring system have caused unintentional brake application. Contaminated fluid such as water freeze-up can cause the brake to apply. Loss of fluid pressure caused by leaks can also cause the brake to apply.

Parking brakes can be mechanically released if a failure causes a no-release condition. A qualified technician can remove the cable pin, which will release the parking brake, but the coach will not have a parking brake and cannot be parked without blocking the wheels.

Workhorse Custom Chassis made chassis wiring improvements; have your dealer refer to Bulletin 80101-T dated May 2001. One of the changes was to separate circuits used for auto-park brake and signal lights, so that a shorted or improperly wired towed vehicle will not interfere with the auto-park brake.

Workhorse recommends the following maintenance to reduce failures: Check the

reservoir fluid for level and contamination at every oil change and check the system for any leaks. Adjust the cable, and inspect system components for corrosion, loose or damaged wiring and proper functioning annually.

DISCHARGED DINGHY

We have a 2005 Seabreeze 32-foot Class A motorhome and we purchased a 2009 Chevy LS HHR for our dinghy. The instructions in the owner's manual state to set the parking brake and turn the ignition key to ACC and shift the transmission to NEUTRAL and release the parking brake. To stop battery drain, it says to remove the No. 8 fuse for towing. I performed these functions. After towing the vehicle several hours, we experience a discharged battery in the dinghy. We have returned the vehicle to the dealer and they could not find the reason for the drain. We returned the car to Express Performance Center, where we had our towing package installed, and they also couldn't find the reason for the battery drain. We would appreciate any help or information to solve this problem.

JAMES WILLIAMS | CHULA VISTA, CALIF.

This is a very common problem among those who tow dinghies. If you have added an auxiliary braking device that is powered by the dinghy battery, that's probably the culprit and you'll need a charging line. To check for a draw, you put a digital ammeter in series with the battery when everything is shut off and the ignition is in the unlocked position. Then remove fuses one at a time until any draw goes away. This procedure identifies the circuit(s) causing the problem. You can look in the owner's manual or at a wiring diagram to determine what is on these circuits.

INTERMITTENT ELECTRICAL PROBLEM

We have a 2004 Four Winds Hurricane with a Triton V-10 gas engine with 28,000 miles. In the past 2,000 miles it has developed a problem. Driving on a freeway or highway the engine feels like it loses about 20 percent power, the oil pressure gauge goes to the top, the temperature gauge goes to hot, and the SERVICE ENGINE SOON light comes on. We pull over, turn off the engine and all goes back to normal immediately, except the service engine light

stays on. It's not actually overheated and will run for anywhere from 10 to 1,200 miles before it happens again. Lately it has happened in the first 20 miles of a trip. Ford says it cannot re-create the problem, so it cannot fix it. Do you have any suggestions as we really can't go on a trip of any distance with this problem.

DIANA LESTER | FALLBROOK, CALIF.

It may be an over-voltage charging problem. Whenever the SERVICE ENGINE SOON light comes on, the computer stores one or more codes. You need to have the trouble codes read and look up what they mean. You can buy a code reader quite inexpensively to do this, or pay a shop to do it.

BURNING RUBBER ODOR II

I had the same persistent burning rubber odor as Mr. Gosz (Coach & Chassis, August 2010). It drove me nuts for over a year. Each time we stopped I detected a very strong odor of burning rubber from the area of my rear axle, up into my engine compartment, and around the front of my tow car. It was so strong I expected to see a tire burst into flames at any time. Once stopped, you could smell the odor for five or 10 minutes and then it would dissipate. I checked hoses, belts, each pulley and tensioner, tires and towed-car wheel bearings but could never find the source or anything hot.

While at Newmar for other service I mentioned the burning rubber odor. They found that when towing my car at highway speeds the inside edge of my hard rubber wheel well liner on the right rear was loose and being sucked onto the side of my inside dual. Apparently the tow car changed the air flow just enough to cause this to happen. A little trimming and a few fasteners cured the problem. If Mr. Gosz has hard rubber wheel well liners he might want to check them for any evidence of rubbing.

MEL LINVILLE | HEPHZIBAH, GA.

Thanks for writing. I'm sure it will help some folks.

OIL QUANDARY

I have a 2008 Pace Arrow Class A motorhome with a Workhorse Chassis 8.1-L GM engine. The manual says to use 5W30 oil. I put on about 2,500 miles per year. I

change the oil in the spring before any use and in the fall before storage. I have been using Valvoline Durablend 5W30 synthetic blend oil. What is your recommendation regarding the oil for this engine — standard oil, synthetic blend or full synthetic oil?

WILLIAM WARDZINSKI | ERIE, PA.

Synthetic blends offer better protection than conventional oils, and full synthetics provide even better protection than blends, assuming that all are made by reputable companies. Based on the fact that you change your oil twice a year and only put about 2,500 miles on the coach, any of the oil types you mentioned should be satisfactory. It is a good idea to change oil before storage, as this prevents sludge formation, and corrosion from acids and moisture in old oil.

MYSTERIOUS MIST REDUX

I read with interest “Mysterious Mist” (Coach & Powertrain, September 2010). It was particularly interesting to me because I recently encountered the same problem with my 2003 Holiday Rambler Endeavor with 330 Cummins. Unfortunately the crankcase ventilation tube was not the problem, but perhaps I can save them some time and trouble by telling my story.

I too was seeing diesel fuel spray on my towed vehicle, as well as soaking on the back side of the mud flap that extends across the rear of my coach. After consulting many mechanics and doing some research of my own on the Internet, I learned that the injector pumps on these engines are prone to leaking. I was quoted a repair cost of \$6,000 by an independent truck repair shop to replace the entire injection pump with a rebuilt one. I then took my coach to a Cummins factory shop in Charlotte, N.C., where they too quoted me \$6,000 for repairs. But after much discussion, the service manager offered to replace the distributor module of the pump (where the leak was coming from) instead of the entire pump, for \$1,500. Apparently this is not a job they like to do, and only after much discussion was it even offered. But the end result was a job exceptionally well done. Not only did they fix the leak, but they also cleaned the side of the engine. This coach has never run so well. I hope Dave and Bettie don't have the problem I had, but if they do my experience just might give them a leg up on the

TANK TIP

If you don't know the capacity of a holding tank and it is rectangular, you can measure it and calculate the capacity. There are 231 cubic inches in a gallon. So multiply the length, width and height in inches and then divide the result by 231 to determine how many gallons it holds.

right solution.

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Thanks for writing. I'm sure some other readers who have this leak problem can save some money too.

OIL FILTER CORRECTION

In Coach & Powertrain (“Oversize Oil Filters,” December 2010), you gave several part numbers for high flow oil filters that are supposed to work on Ford 6.8-L V-10 engines. My coach is a 2010 Forest River Sun Seeker 2860DS.

I bought the Fram PH977A filter and when I got out to the coach the filter had a smaller hole for the housing fitting than the original factory filter. I have installed a standard Fram filter for now as the parts house could not match that Fram number with the Ford V-10.

Thanks for all the good information on motorhomes over the years.

BRUCE D. HAHN | LOVELAND, COLO.

Yes, thank you for writing. Several readers have reported this situation and I apologize for any inconvenience this has caused. I relied on a counter staff employee who has been correct in the past. The later-model filters have a different diameter and metric thread. The regular oil filter for the Ford V-10 engine is the FL-820S, which has a 22mm by 1.50 pitch thread and the flat sealing O-ring is 62.54mm in diameter. Larger filters that will fit the Ford V-10 engine's 22mm by 1.50 pitch thread and have a 62.54mm flat sealing O-ring include Fleetguard LF3315, NAPA 1087, Wix 51087 and Fram PH3616. ♦

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Uniquely, the top layer of both mattresses is ventilated and bonded to a channeled base below. The holes align with the open channels to produce a full airflow circulation effect (patented airflow system) that dissipates excessive body heat, something users of memory foam mattresses have complained about. The Biogreen foam uses a hypo-allergenic and environmentally friendly visco-elastic memory foam that is inherently resistant to dust mites, and has been tested to have zero off-gassing emissions. Additionally, its breathable design helps prevent formation of mold and mildew, one of the reasons the company guarantees the mattress for 20 years. A nice bamboo cover gives the mattress a luxurious look — and makes it simple to add sheets. The bamboo cover is also breathable, which augments the temperature-moderating design of the mattress.

Memory foam is not new. It was originally developed for NASA astronauts undergoing G-force testing. The dense foam conforms to all the curves and bumps of your body without bottoming out — eliminating pressure points symptomatic of a standard mattress. When you get up, the foam returns to its original shape. There's a unique feel to the Tempflow bed, especially after sleeping on a cheap RV mattress. Because it contours the body, moving around does not disturb your partner, which promotes better sleep. Overall, the comfort level is amazing. For us, acclimating to both mattress models only took one night each, and we were hooked. We found that the patented airflow system worked as promised, as neither of us felt hot sleeping on the mattress. Adding a memory foam pillow (\$49 to \$149) enhances the sleep experience.

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Fred and Rachel Pausch
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Fig. 1 Saturn



Fig. 3 Asteroid Gaspra



Fig. 5 Mercury



Fig. 7 Jupiter



Fig. 2 Neptune



Fig. 4 Phases of the Moon



Fig. 6 Mars

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