

# Roughing It Smoothly<sup>®</sup>



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- Visiting a Land of Giants

## SPECIAL

- Phaeton 40 QTH Gets New Standard Features and Options
- Allegro Bus 36 QSP Downsizes and Keeps the Amenities





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SPRING 2008 VOLUME 5 NUMBER 2

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## Roughing it Smoothly®

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*On our cover:* Coby Hall (c. 1843) in Florence, Alabama, is on the National Register of Historical Places.

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### Editor's Note

If you are a golfer, you must visit Alabama soon to play the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, listed by *Golf Digest* as one of the 50 best golf destinations in the world. You will also enjoy Norm Spray's story on Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. There are many interesting profiles and a lot of serious tech talk, Danny Inman's popular column.

If you have suggestions and ideas for the magazine, please write to me at P.O. Box 292912, Tampa, FL 33687-2912 or call me toll-free at 877-538-7467. Editorial contributions are welcomed but not returnable unless you include return postage. Items accepted for publication are subject to editing. Send address changes to the above address or email them to fredthompson1941@hotmail.com. Subject line of email should say "RIS address change."



# Family Management

## BUILDING QUALITY

by Bob Tiffin with Lex Tiffin

There are 10 years between Van and Lex. Judy and I decided we really wanted another child and he has been a great blessing to us. Most parents can tell you about how different their children are and that is certainly true in our family. Lex was *really* different from Tim and Van. Those two didn't have any toys left after they had grown up. They literally tore them all up, either taking them apart to see how they worked or making something different with the parts. Lex took care of everything he had. His toys are still in the attic, and his little boy, Emmett, will probably play with them.

He loved to stay with my parents over weekends from the time he was a little boy. And that probably created the great respect for older people that he has today. Lex was never rowdy and has turned out to be a really fine young man. He is a good listener and is soft-spoken, a good combination when you are working with people.

Lex was born after Judy and I started Tiffin Motorhomes. In fact, he has been traveling in a motorhome since he was two months old. He took his first trip with us when we drove in our Allegro to South Bend, Indiana, for a show. All we had to do was start the engine and Lex would go to sleep. Two years later I sold the cotton gin after the ginning was finished that year. Starting in 1978, Judy, Lex, and I went to every Alabama football game except one. We did that for four years until Lex started to school. Then we had to drop going to the away games.

We have great memories of the Alabama-Rutgers game on October 11, 1980, at the Meadowlands. We drove our Allegro all the way to New Jersey to see Alabama play, and were rewarded when they beat Rutgers 17-13. Since we were playing Tennessee the next weekend, we decided to go to Williamsburg and Gatlinburg on the way to Knoxville.

We stopped for two days in Williamsburg and enjoyed going back two centuries in time as we watched the locals in colonial costumes. Judy bought Lex one of the three-cornered colonial hats and a little drum. He and another little boy who had the same hat and drum really drew a crowd every time they stopped and played their drums together. On our way down I-81 to Tennessee, the wheel on the tag-axle sheared off and I literally recovered it from the highway median. We spent the night at the next exit. Since it was going to take over a day to do the repair, I sent Judy and Lex on in our Blazer to spend some time in Gatlinburg, with plans laid to meet them Saturday on the parking lot at Neyland Stadium. I parked the motorhome in the agreed-upon location. Soon I saw the Blazer go sailing by with Lex in the window waving





at me. Judy found me, too, several minutes later. It was one of the longest vacations we had ever taken. It was even better when Alabama beat Tennessee 27-0. Lex traveled just about everywhere with us during those five years. For me, it was a great father-son experience.

Several years later we sent Lex to a four-week camp one summer in Rhinelander, Wisconsin. We traveled in a 27-ft. Allegro. After we dropped Lex off, we drove to Hartford, Connecticut, for Van's kicking camp. At that time, we were buying our chassis in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and hauling them on our own trucks. One of our drivers brought Lex home. He was 10.

*Editor's Note:* From this point, Lex is writing the story.

When I was 13, I began working at Tiffin Supply loading and unloading shingles, mortar mix, sheet rock, blocks, brick, and lumber. I worked every summer and during spring breaks from school. Alex (my grandfather) didn't put up with much foolishness. David (dad's brother) would sometimes cut up with us, but grandpa would always put things back in order.

Grandpa always wore a green coat, even if it was 80 degrees outside. I often stayed with grandpa and granny when mother and dad traveled on business. I really loved my grandparents. They were just like another set of parents to me. We were all really fortunate to have them. Grandpa expected his children and grandchildren to work at the store. Even though he made a good living, he was very frugal.

My introduction to working at Tiffin Motorhomes began in 1992 when I turned 17. Initially, I worked on the production line installing the driver and passenger seats. Later I moved to Final Finish to install wood floors as well as other jobs specific to that department.

When I graduated from high school, I enrolled at Northwest Shoals Community College near Red Bay. That's where I met Denisha. After we both finished two years at NWSCC, we married and transferred to the University of Alabama. In 1997, we both began our careers at Tiffin Motorhomes, Denisha in the bookkeeping department and I in quality control.

I was interested in building a quality assurance department from the beginning. At that time we did not have a formal approach for quality assurance. Department managers checked the coaches and signed off on each unit as it went down the production line. I went to the end of the line and inspected motorhomes and found problems. Then I went back along the line to determine where the problems were originating and the process that was causing them.

We started out with one inspector writing up problems, and then two inspectors who crossed each other in the line to get double coverage. Eventually I hired five inspectors in the main assembly plant. Then we moved to the welding shop where the naked chassis enters production. The inspectors check to be sure the steel members of the flooring system are in the right locations so that the boxes will fit when the unit gets to the flooring department. Engineering provides tolerance measurements

to quality control for checkpoints throughout the motorhome. They also check the wiring harnesses, which are installed in the welding shop, for the large number of variables. The inspectors feed their findings back to the engineers for both materials and process solutions.

As we get on the assembly line, one inspector watches both production lines (gas and diesel) comparing his check lists against the ongoing production. The check list is revised every month from the Excel documents we have developed. Both of the assembly lines' 19 work stations have quality assurance lists that are checked constantly throughout the day. When a problem occurs repetitively, the inspectors feed that information back to quality management and they determine how to present the data to production engineering to create a plan for correcting or eliminating the issue.

The most important production meeting takes place at 6 a.m. Monday through Friday. All of the department managers, plant managers, quality manager (Lex) or QC assistant (Wayne Williams), engineers, product design director (Van), general manager (Tim), and president (Bob) attend what has become known as the "6 a.m. Engineering Meeting." It is an information sharing and problem solving session. It is by far the key meeting of the day that makes things work at Tiffin Motorhomes. During this meeting, some of the most important decisions that drive our future sales are made. We are constantly developing improvement to our products.

The production line also starts at 6 a.m. The whole day is ahead of us and the directives from this meeting go throughout the TMH operation to make the necessary adjustments, assure quality, and keep the production process running smoothly.

When the production of a motorhome is completed, it is driven to the full body paint plant in Belmont, Mississippi, about seven miles from the Red Bay, Alabama, assembly plant. This plant also contains the ceramic tile flooring department and the electrical harness assembly operation. Our inspection process here is a little different from Red Bay. Each inspector has a hand-held laptop that displays inspection sheets for each phase of the paint plant production. With codes and a display of a motorhome, the inspector identifies the location of a problem and uses a pen to write directly on the screen. At the end of the day, the listed problems are tallied and compiled into reports which are used to study and correct the problems.

For example, in the sanding department the inspector uses the touch screen computer to identify any surfaces which are being prepped for painting that need more attention. The coach is then moved inside the paint plant to tape the windows. Any dirt or trash is blown off the roof which is then covered with plastic. The surfaces to be painted are handwashed with a special chemical just before it goes to the base coat painting booth. After the base coat is baked on, the coach is moved into pre-mask to prepare for painting the stripes. After that part of the painting process is completed, two inspectors check the pre-buff and pre-clearcoat.

*Continued on page 47*



## You've Been Packing!

You probably packed a little extra for whatever adventures you might encounter on your trip. If you're not sure of the axle end weight of your vehicle, your RV is most likely overloaded. The new Michelin<sup>®</sup> 305/70R22.5 XRV, with its expanded load capacity\*, is ready to take on more weight than ever.

\*The Michelin 305/70R22.5 XRV has a per-axle maximum load capacity of 15,660 lbs in singles and 27,760 lbs in duals at 120 psi cold pressure. You should always weigh each axle and check Michelin's Load and Inflation Tables to determine proper fitment and air pressure for your vehicle.





# Refining the Phaeton

Adding the Most Sought-After Features to the Industry's Most Popular Class A Diesel Pusher. The Phaeton 40QTH.



Text and Photography by Fred Thompson

Near the end of 2007, the marketing and design departments at Tiffin Motorhomes began to assess the features which were driving sales to a 16 percent year-to-date increase. The Phaeton was still riding a wave of popularity as the industry's best-selling diesel pusher in the Class A market.

Detailed studies of orders continued to show that buyers were demanding the eye-level, mid-ship 32-inch HD television. When the company first offered the 42-ft. Phaeton with the mid-ship TV at the November 2006 National Dealers Show, orders soared. Then the 36-ft Phaeton

with the mid-ship TV appeared at the November 2007 Show with the same result.

However, the most popular length in the Phaeton brand continued to be the 40-footer which was offered in two floorplans, neither of which had the eye-level, mid-ship TV. The feature mix was obvious. R&D and engineering went to work immediately to design a floorplan which put the buyers' favorite option into the Phaeton's best-selling length. The result was the **Phaeton 40QTH**.

Research also showed strong demand for the stacked washer and dryer rather

than the washer/dryer combo. And next on the list was the recessed location of the refrigerator in the driver's side slide-out, providing more walking and moving-about space in the galley area.

As soon as Tiffin's dealers saw the 40QTH with the mid-ship 32-inch HD television, the stacked washer and dryer, and the recessed refrigerator, orders started pouring in. Tiffin is already building over 15 QTHs per week.

Other features also continue to drive the Phaeton's popularity. Full ceramic tile from the cockpit through the bath, the



handsome Medium Alderwood cabinetry, Tiffin's exclusive HDMI television system which eliminated the little black switching box, and more main-floor storage than any comparable coach in the industry.

TMH continues to offer three interior decors for the Phaeton (Kona, Laguna, and Patina) and three handsome woods for cabinetry (Medium Alderwood, Natural Maple, and Cherry Bark), plus three choices in exterior full-body paint (NASA, Silver Sand, and Sunlit Sand). There are 12 exterior options, three options in the cockpit, eight options in the living-dinette-galley area, and six options in the bath-bedroom area. Even before you add your own decor, the Phaeton 40QTH is a coach which you can significantly personalize through the many optional choices.

### The Creature Comforts

With the slides out, the daytime quarters (living-dining-galley) of the 40QTH measure 12'5" wide × 21'3" long, measured from the face of the dash to the first hallway door. Because Tiffin's designers know that RVing is an outdoor adventure, they put 94 square feet of windows in the front compartment to bring the outside world in.

The airy feeling of the room is enhanced by the coach's seven-foot off-white vinyl ceilings and the light earth tones of the ceramic tile and wallpaper. The Laguna decor group in the reviewed coach included valance and pillow fabrics with a coffee cream background accented with unobtrusive pastel green and gold patterns. The living room is accented with purple throw pillows on one of the couches. When you get one of those overcast, dreary days, the room is brightened by five 18-inch fluorescent lights, three designer wall sconces, and two directional spot lamps over the starboard couch.

The standard 74-inch Ultraleather™ DE Sofa Bed is luxuriously comfortable, even with three adults. The optional 74-

inch Ultraleather™ Air Coil® Hide-A-Bed Sofa Sleeper is equally comfortable as a sofa or a queen-size bed. Inside its standard mattress cover is a three-inch thick inflatable bladder positioned over a four-inch air coil. It inflates and deflates in less than a minute.

The six feet of floor space between the two couches invites the owners to add their own decorating touches. In toying with the possibilities, we tried a 20 × 36 inch coffee table and a colorful six foot Persian rug that brings an even more luxurious feel to the room. Both can be easily stored in the basement when it's time to travel. With the large driver and passenger chairs rotated 180 degrees, the living room expands to accommodate eight. The floor

space is also large enough to put up a card table for bridge or board games, using the four chairs from the free standing dinette. How did we ever get along without double slide-outs ten years ago?

Accepting the risk of sounding monotonous, for the benefit of first-time readers of *Roughing It Smoothly* this writer feels the necessity to mention in each coach review the superb job the design engineers and craftspeople do in building the cabinets for all five brands of Tiffin motorhomes. Almost cavernous in their capacity, the cabinets do not obtrude into the room. Their design, fit, and finish would have made Ethan Allen proud. While visiting a Tiffin dealer last year, I was shocked to watch a 220-pound sales associate who



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Special thanks to Terry Elliott for prepping the coach for photography and to Crystal Page of *The Tradition of Charm* for graciously supplying decorative appointments.





was sitting on the couch reach up to the ledge of the cabinet above him and do full body lifts to demonstrate the strength of the cabinets and of the walls to which they are attached.

Just for the numbers, the storage space for the galley is 34.6 cubic feet, including three drawers with depths of 26.75 inches by 13 inches wide. Three more are 14 inches deep by 7.5 inches wide, all with full extension hardware. The total storage space in the wall cabinets mounted in the slideouts and the two smaller cabinets over and under the mid-ship TV is over 30 cubic feet. It is amazing!

The galley itself is a chef's delight. Compact, yes — but efficiently designed. The solid surface galley top is 22 square feet, plus a slide-out which adds another three square feet. A recessed solid surface top in a hutch-style cabinet adds still another two square feet. The area has electrical service which makes it convenient for a warming appliance or a toaster. A 19-inch backsplash uses the same solid surface material as the countertop. The galley's designer made the backsplash an attractive focal point with a routed Roman pattern accented with pewter medallions and solid surface insets that match the molding on the dinette table and the countertops.

Fluorescent lighting recessed into the overhead cabinets brighten the work area. A residential-style double bowl stainless sink is serviced by brushed nickel hardware, including a hot-cold lever, sprayer, soap dispenser, and a tall curved water faucet. The standard three-burner gas cooktop allows the chef to keep several preparations moving along together. A residen-

tial-style Sharp Carousel microwave-convection oven completes the equipment list. The countertop has two electrical outlets for coffee makers, juicers, mixers, etc.

Recessed into the slide-out, the four-door Norcold refrigerator blends into the cabinetry with its Medium Alderwood raised-panel doors. The slide-out location really served two purposes: it created more floorspace for the galley and opened the back wall of the living area for the wall-mounted television. It was a win-win design change. With the icemaker, the double-door freezer compartment still has 2.4 cubic feet of storage plus a door shelf. The five-shelf refrigerator section has three compartments for vegetable and meat storage and six shelves built into the doors. This feature-rich refrigerator is standard equipment with the 40QTH.

The free standing dinette table, when extended, is 26½ × 40 inches. The solid surface table has a stone finish accented with a double molding of complementary colors around its edge. The table extends then retracts eight inches into the 75.5 × 11.75-inch hutch which has a matching solid surface top. The hutch, which matches the Alderwood cabinets throughout the coach with its raised panel doors, offers significant storage space on both sides of the table. The 57-inch wide window over the hutch presents a view of your world while you dine.

The optional dinette table can double as a business center. Both 110v and 12v outlets under the table provide quick hook-ups for a laptop and printer.

The entertainment center in the Phaeton currently is un-





matched by its competitors. Triple H Electronics in Red Bay custom designed for Tiffin coaches a system using component audio-video cables and HDMI to distribute input/output data from a central, easily serviced black box (mounted under the floor) that receives HD broadcast *input* from the King Dome Satellite System which pulls programming from network satellites. Additional *input* comes from a high-def enclosed rotating TV antenna (another Triple H invention) receiving local programming broadcast in high definition, HD programming via cable service, and a 5-disc DVD-CD player with high quality picture and digital sound technology. The system transmits *output* to the coach's HD-ready Panasonic televisions and sound equipment. All of the described system is standard on the Phaeton with the exception of the hi-def TV antenna (\$140 MSRP) and the King Dome Automatic Satellite System (\$1,400 MSRP). The mid-ship and bedroom televisions are standard. Optional 32-inch TVs are available for an over-dash position and in the exterior wall of the galley slide-out.

When any of the televisions in the coach are turned on, you activate a selection screen which offers TV, DBS, and DVD. Clicking on your choice will activate the *input* source for (1) television reception from the hi-def antenna, (2) satellite reception (DIRECTV or DISH which you purchase separately), or (3) DVD-CD (movies or music) from the standard Panasonic 5-disc player.

You can carry your entertainment outside, too. The reviewed coach sported an optional 32-inch HD television mounted in the outside wall of the forward passenger-side slide-out. With

the 20-foot patio awning extended, you can enjoy your favorite team's game while you keep watch over the steaks on the grill.

Now let's take a look at the 40 percent of the coach where we spend about a third of our time: the bath and the bedroom. The area was thoughtfully designed. Nearly all of Tiffin's diesel pusher floorplans have baths with two lavatories. To say the least, it makes your bath multi-functional!

All of the features in the bath are generously proportioned. The elliptically shaped shower is 46 inches wide and 29 inches deep. Each solid surface lavatory is one piece with its continuous countertop, one of which is 24 × 37 inches and the other 24 × 26 inches, both with designer backsplashes made from matching solid surface material. Each lavatory cabinet offers two and three drawers and a large compartment. The 3'1" × 4'3" private toilet compartment is attractively appointed with chair rail and wainscot wallpaper, double medicine cabinets (one with a depth of 10 inches for large items), a magazine rack (why do they call it "the library"?), and theater lighting. The bath is separated on either side by sliding doors to make it a completely private compartment.

Just a couple of notes here about the coach's infrastructure that make it so liveable. The 2008 Phaeton comes standard with three Fan-tastic Vent fans: one in the galley area which can be used for removing cooking odors but also for cooling the coach like an attic fan would in your landside home. A second fan is located near the shower to remove the humidity. Both of these fans have non-numeric thermostats which can turn them off during the evening hours when it gets too cool. The third fan is in the





water closet and it does not have a thermostat. All three fans are controlled with wall switches, a standard feature on the 2008 Phaeton.

Other standard items are the two 15,000 BTU low profile roof air conditioners *with* heat pumps. On cool nights as low as 40 degrees, you can warm your coach with the heat pumps and save your LP fuel. If you haven't been in a new Tiffin coach in two years, you will notice that the noisy 14-inch return air duct in the roof is missing. With engineering that was done at Tiffin Motorhomes, air distribution (cool or warm) is now done through six-inch ceiling ports on the passenger's side of the coach. Return air is handled through the six-inch ports on the driver's side. The quietness of the system is remarkable when compared to the two 14-inch returns formerly located in the living and bedroom areas.

Another infrastructure item which is an option (but in this writer's opinion is a "must") is the central vacuum cleaner (\$350 MSRP). You will send your broom and dustpan to the museum after you try the central vac. It is easy to hook up and put away. The vac unit is located in the large basement storage area (driver's side).

With the slide-outs extended, the bedroom is 10'4" x 11'4", including the depth of the closet. The 40QTH comes standard with a queen pillow top mattress. Currently, most orders for the diesel pusher floorplans are specifying the optional queen or king Select Comfort Sleep System. The patented system employs sectional air compartments to deliver a firmness-softness factor which the owner can adjust to his or her satisfaction with a bedside control. The reviewed coach had the optional king size Select Comfort Sleep System (\$1,260 MSRP). Having used the Select Comfort for the last six months, I can highly recommend it. My sleep number is 70.

Tiffin really excels with its choice of fabrics. In the Laguna decor, the king-size satin-finish comforter has a coffee cream background with embroidered floral patterns. The comforter and its matching headboard have pale green borders with



rope trim. Solid surface end tables, wall-mounted reading lamps, and dual stereo speakers mounted in the overhead cabinets complete your comfort zone.

The bedroom is bright and sunny with a 28.5 × 18 sliding window which also has a knockout lever for the required rear escape hatch. Two additional windows on either side of the bed slide-out guarantee good cross ventilation.

A 75 × 14-inch wide dresser with solid surface countertop occupies the entire width of the starboard slide-out. Six 10-inch deep drawers plus a clothes hamper provide the needed space for storage. For items needed less frequently, you will find 11 cubic feet of felt-lined storage space under the bed, which can be lifted easily on air struts.

The bedroom entertainment center is located just above the dresser, a 26-inch HD Panasonic with connections for a second satellite receiver. The speakers for the sound system are located in the base of the storage system in the opposite bed slide-out. And speaking of storage, the coach has 14.6 cubic feet in the cabinets built into the slide-outs, and 57 cubic feet in the 65-inch wide wardrobe.

The stacked washer-dryer compartment is located on the starboard side in the rear corner. The clothes hamper is beside it (how's that for convenience?). The washer and dryer operate independently of each other, just like they do in your landside home. The Whirlpool equipment is covered by a nationwide service system. No matter where you are in the U.S., a phone call will bring a service person right to your coach. If you elect to use the washer-dryer space for storage, you can convert 25 cubic feet into a shirt-length wardrobe plus 13 cubic feet of shelves.

### The Cockpit

This particular coach was built on a Freightliner chassis which provides eight dial-based gauges: mph/kph, rpm, front and rear air pressure, fuel, battery, oil pressure, and engine temp. A digital-LED display bar positioned above the gauges presents the odometer, two trip meters, system checks, and system alerts.

The dash panel immediately to the driver's left contains the windshield wiper-wash controls, dual mirror controls with mirror heat, and the headlights-running lights, plus a rheostat for the brightness of the lighting of the dash instruments. Directional signals on the steering column activate the optional side cameras for ultimate driving safety. The cruise control is located on the same lever.

The dash panel to the right perfectly positions the color monitor for the side and back-up cameras for quick-glance viewing. The monitor has several tuning controls for contrast, brightness, and day-night use. This upgraded, but standard equipment version, also has an outside rear mike for an assistant to vocally help the driver park the coach. Two 12-volt power outlets are located just below the monitor to keep your cell phone charged or to provide power for after-market equipment such as satellite guidance systems or air pressure monitors. The optional Sirius-ready radio has very sophisticated controls for standard reception. However, we have found the satellite stations to be well-worth the nominal monthly fee. Sirius offers a wide variety of news stations, variety programs, and uninterrupted music ranging from country, bluegrass, soft rock, and popular oldies to symphonic, opera, and classical. Of course, you can always put your 5-disc CD player to work and listen to your personal choices.

Just above the ignition switch you will see the genset start/stop switch with its hours monitor. The dash HVAC controls have three large dials to select blower speed, vents, and temperature. Two lighted buttons select AC and recirculate.

On the wall console to the left of the driver you will find a bank of switches to control the docking lights, engine pre-heat, auxiliary genset start, horn (those optional Hadleys will let the 18-wheelers know where you are), step cover, radio, left/right windshield fans, and the recessed ceiling map light (you can really read maps at night with this light). New this year is the MCD full-width windshield visor which doubles at night as your privacy curtain. A full-width sun





visor also tucks away in the same hidden storage area behind the cabinets above the dash. Controls for both are on the wall console.

The wall console also has switches for the “thank you” flasher (like the truckers use when they pass you), the adjustable brake and gas pedals, and the exhaust brake. The 6-speed lighted Allison gear selector is in easy view at your finger tips. In the console just behind the gear selector, you will find the Atwood leveling system, which is very easy to operate in automatic mode or manual mode. For fresh-air driving, both the passenger and driver have large screened windows.

TMH consolidated all of the coach control modules neatly into one cabinet directly over the driver’s chair: A module to monitor the grey, black, and water tanks, and the LPG and house batteries; the Xantrex inverter; the Carefree of Colorado door and patio awnings; the King Dome satellite; and the two forward slide-outs.

As standard equipment, the windows on both sides of the forward section have the MCD sun visors and solar shades. At night, along with the MCD shade over the entry door, they also serve as the privacy curtains. Throughout the rest of the coach, the windows have the day-night shades.

Seating comfort for long-range driving is first-class and standard equipment in the Phaeton, perhaps another reason for its popularity. Both chairs have 8-way power controls, adjustable height arm

rests, adjustable angle seatbacks, and 180-degree rotation. A center console with two large drawers and cup holders serves both chairs. The driver also has a wall-mounted cup holder. The passenger console houses a second cup holder and switches for a personal map light and the step cover. On warm days when you are not quite ready to flip on the AC, the defroster fans, mounted in the upper left and right corners of the windshield, can be rotated 180 degrees to cool the passengers. Not to be overlooked, the passenger compartment has *four* heating and cooling vents for the ultimate arranging of the air flow.

A slide-out desk with a solid surface top may be one of the most convenient features in the coach. It can be used in motion or simply as a writing cabinet to take care of your correspondence (there are some of us who still don’t send email everyday, right?). A nice storage tray is concealed under the writing top. But, with 110v and 12v connections just under the table, you can use the slide-out desk for your laptop. In fact, many drivers install GPS software on their laptops and give the passenger a new job title: navigator.

### Now Let’s Explore the Basement

Check out a full-timer’s basement and you will know in an instant why a big one is important. But it is just as important if you want to take all your “stuff” to the beach or the ski equipment for four

people to the mountains. The Phaeton can handle it!

Starting on the passenger side, the first side-opening door offers 25 cubic feet of felt-lined storage, plus an outdoor jack for a land-based phone, 12-volt and 110-volt service, and a cargo light.

The second 40-inch door conceals an optional 38 × 89-inch slide-out tray. Accessible from either side, it offers 26 cubic feet of storage. Items stored in the tray must be no taller than 13.5 inches due to the chassis rails above.

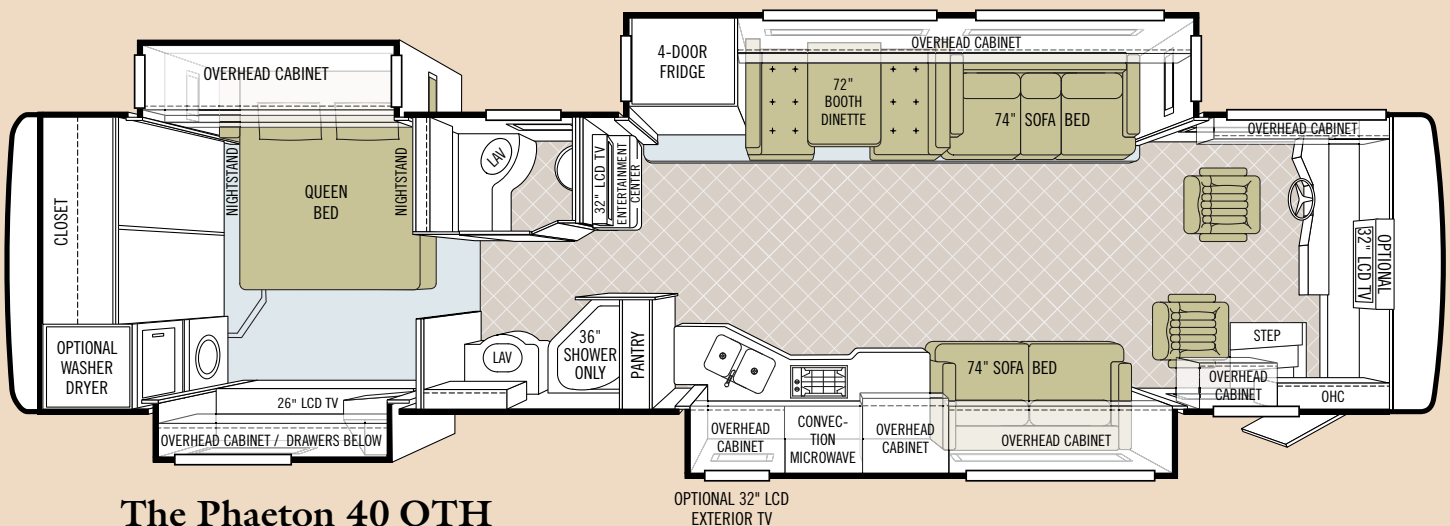
The next two doors (on either side of the coach) provide full across-the-basement storage totaling 100 cubic feet.

The fifth door conceals four house and two engine batteries which are within easy reach for servicing. A separate 5-cubic-foot compartment is the perfect place for a large tool box.

The last compartment on the passenger side houses electrical equipment, but still has about 2.5 cubic feet of storage for non-combustible materials.

Rounding the corner to the engine compartment, you will be impressed with what a clean installation the Tiffin engineers have made. The engine itself cannot be seen, only the radiator. Service points (engine and transmission oil, power steering reservoir, coolant, and air filter) are clearly marked and easily accessed. Fueling ports are located on both sides of the coach just behind the front wheel wells. As you turn the rear corner to the driver’s

*Continued on page 48*



**The Phaeton 40 QTH**



# SPECIFICATIONS: Model tested 2008 Phaeton 40 QTH, Quad Slide, Base MSRP\* – \$220,920 MSRP as tested with options – \$237,174

## STANDARD FEATURES

### Structural

Laminated floor, sidewall, and roof  
Steel / aluminum reinforced structure  
Full one-piece fiberglass roof cap

### Automotive

Allison 3000 MH six-speed automatic transmission with lock-up (torque converter)  
Cummins ISC 8.3 liter 360 hp, electronic/turbocharged diesel with 1,050 lbs.-ft. torque  
Raised rail chassis frame  
Air ride (4 air bags)  
55° wheel cut  
Air brakes with automatic slack adjusters and ABS  
Exhaust brake  
Adjustable fuel and brake pedals  
18-inch steering wheel  
Cruise control  
Fog lights  
Daytime running lights  
Emergency start switch

### Exterior

Fiberglass front & rear caps  
Dual fuel fills  
Large tinted one-piece windshield  
8.0 Kw Onan manual slide-out generator  
Atwood electric automatic leveling jacks  
Heated power mirrors with remote adjustment  
Single motor intermittent wiper  
Gel-coat fiberglass walls  
Full body paint  
Deadbolt front entrance door  
Double electric step  
Dual pane windows  
Exterior patio light  
Entry door awning  
Automatic patio awning  
Slide-out awnings  
Wheel liners  
Custom mud flap  
Exterior swing-out storage doors with gas shocks  
Single handle lockable storage door latches  
Lighted exterior storage  
Roof ladder  
Docking lights  
Heated water and holding tank compartments  
Four 6v auxiliary batteries  
2000 watt inverter with 100 amp converter & transfer switching  
Park ready telephone  
Black tank flush system  
Water filter  
Undercoating  
110v exterior receptacle  
110v / 12v converter  
Undercoating  
TV antenna  
Cable ready TV  
Two 15,000 BTU low profile roof A/C systems with heat pumps  
A/C condensation drains  
Roof ladder  
Sony® color back-up camera

### Driver's Compartment

Flexsteel® Ultraleather™ power driver seat and power passenger seat  
Padded dash  
Dual dash fans  
Full width power windshield shade  
Side solar shades and MCD privacy shades, driver & passenger  
Snack-beverage tray with drawers  
Step switch and 12v disconnect switch

Dual 12v dash receptacles  
Single CD player AM/FM radio  
Sony® back-up color monitor  
Fire extinguisher  
Computer slide-out tray in dash

### Living Area / Dinette

Booth dinette with solid surface table edging  
12v, 110v, & phone jack receptacles at dinette  
32-inch flat screen LCD HD-ready color television wall-mounted in entertainment center  
Custom infrared repeater  
74-inch Flexsteel® Ultraleather™ DE sofa bed (passenger side)  
74-inch Flexsteel® Cloth DE sofa bed (driver side)

### Kitchen

Solid surface counter top with residential stainless steel sink  
Solid surface sink and stove covers  
Under counter storage receptacles for sink and cooktop covers  
Single lever brushed nickel sink faucet and sprayer  
Built-in soap dispenser  
Convention / microwave oven  
4-door refrigerator with ice maker and raised panel wood insets  
3-burner cooktop  
Expand-an-Island  
One Fan-Tastic® power roof vent with 3-speed fan

### Bath

Two medicine cabinets with vanity lights  
Skylight in shower  
Solid surface vanity tops and bowls  
Custom raised panel bath door to water closet  
Glass shower surround and door  
Fan-Tastic® power roof vent with 3-speed fan in water closet  
Fan-Tastic® power roof vent with 3-speed fan in hall next to shower  
Fiberglass molded shower

### Bedroom

Wardrobe  
Four OH storage cabinets in bed slide-out  
Stackable washer/dryer ready closet  
Bed comforter with throw pillows  
Sleeping pillows  
Queen-size bed  
Pillow top mattress  
Under bed storage  
Night stands with 110v outlets  
Built-in dresser with solid surface top and 6 drawers  
Laundry hamper  
26-inch color LCD HD-ready television  
Carbon monoxide detector  
LPG leak detector

### General Interior

7-ft. ceilings  
Soft touch vinyl ceilings  
Ceramic tile floor in kitchen, living area, bath & entry landing  
Carpeting in bedroom & driver's compartment with Scotchgard®  
Raised panel hardwood cabinet doors and drawers  
Medium Alderwood cabinetry  
Complete HD-ready system (HD satellite receivers required)  
Complete cable wiring interfacing with surround sound & satellite receivers

Home theatre sound system with concealed speakers  
Day/night pleated shades  
18-in. fluorescent 12v ceiling lights  
Home theater sound system with concealed speakers  
12v disconnect switch  
Tank level monitoring system  
Smoke detector  
10-gal. gas/electric water heater  
Air driven step well cover  
Two ducted furnaces (one 30,000 BTU & one 35,000 BTU)

## OPTIONAL FEATURES ON THIS COACH

Automatic satellite dish (receivers and service contract required)  
Hadley air horns  
Automatic door awning  
Window awning package (two windows)  
One exterior slide-out tray  
Aluminum wheels  
Exterior 32-inch HD-ready television in galley slide-out wall  
Chrome mirrors  
Side view cameras  
Satellite radio (subscription required)  
Stacked washer/dryer  
Built-in vacuum cleaner  
74-inch UltraLeather™ Air Coil Hide-A-Bed – (driver side)  
Free standing dinette with built-in cabinets  
Paint protective shield  
High definition TV antenna  
Dual MCD windshield shade (required)  
Select Comfort queen mattress

## OPTIONAL FEATURES AVAILABLE

Combo washer/dryer  
DRIVER SIDE  
Leather Euro-recliner with computer table  
Two leather Euro-recliners  
74-inch Ultraleather™ DE sofa bed  
74-inch Cloth DE sofa bed  
74-inch Ultraleather™ Magic Bed  
74-inch Cloth Magic Bed  
74-inch Cloth Air Coil Hide-A-Bed  
Second exterior slide-out storage tray  
HWH hydraulic jacks  
Spotlight  
In-motion satellite dish  
Computer navigational system  
King bed mattress  
Select Comfort king bed  
Gas oven  
Natural maple cabinetry (simulated)  
Cherry bark cabinetry (simulated)  
32-inch front overhead HD-ready TV  
Dinette/computer work station

## MEASUREMENTS

Wheelbase – 266"  
Overall length – 40'5"  
Overall height w/roof air – 12'7"  
Interior height – 84"  
Overall width – 101"  
Interior width – 96"

## WEIGHTS & CAPACITIES

GVWR – 32,000 lb.  
Front GAWR – 12,000 lb.  
Rear GAWR – 20,000 lb.  
GCWR – 42,000 lb.  
UVW – 27,836 lb.

CCC – 4,164 lb.  
Trailer hitch capacity – 10,000 lb.

## POWER TRAIN

Engine – 360 hp Cummins ISC 8.3 liter, electronic, turbocharged diesel  
Torque – 1,050 lb.-ft. at 1,400 rpm  
Transmission – Allison 3000MH electronic six speed with two overdrives  
Tire Size – 275/80R 22.5 XZA1 Michelin  
Alternator – Leece-Neville 170 amps

## CHASSIS

Frame – Freightliner XCR Series  
Frame Design – Raised rail  
Anti-locking Braking System – WABCO 4M/4S ABS System  
Suspension (front) – Neway Air  
Suspension (rear) – Neway Air  
Shock Absorbers – Sachs tuned  
Leveling Jacks – Atwood Electric Automatic

## CONSTRUCTION

Body – Laminated floor, sidewalls, roof  
Roof – One-piece fiberglass  
Support – Steel/Aluminum reinforced structure  
Front/rear body panels – One-piece fiberglass caps  
Exterior side panels – Gel-coat fiberglass walls with full body paint

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Sleeps – 6-8 adults  
(bedroom, 2; dinette booth, 1-2; DS sofa sleeper, 2; PS sofa, 1-2)  
Fuel tank – 100 gallons  
Freshwater – 90 gallons  
Black water – 45 gallons  
Grey water – 70 gallons  
LPG tank – (35 gallons; can be filled to 80% capacity) – 28 gallons

## MSRP\*

MSRP is the manufacturer's suggested retail price and does not include dealer prep or options. Manufacturer reserves the right to change or discontinue models offered, standard features, optional equipment, and prices without prior notice. Dealer prices may vary.

## UVW

This is the approximate weight of the vehicle with a full fuel tank, engine oil, and coolants. The UVW does not include cargo, fresh water, LP gas, passengers, or dealer-installed accessories.

## DEALERS

To locate the Tiffin dealer nearest you, go to [www.tiffinmotorhomes.com](http://www.tiffinmotorhomes.com) and click on "dealer locator." If internet access is not available, call 256-356-8661 and ask the operator for the Tiffin dealer location nearest to you.

## PLEASE NOTE

All options may not be available on all models. Because of progressive improvements made in a model year, specifications, and standard and optional equipment are subject to change without notice or obligation.



## Customers Ask for Downsizing, Tiffin Responds: The New 36QSP Allegro Bus

When a significant number of TMH coach owners indicate their desires for specific features in a Tiffin brand, you can bet management is listening. Such was the case in creating the 36QSP Allegro Bus just released this month.

“A 40-foot coach is just too long for us. We want to downsize, but we still would like to have the luxury amenities offered on the Allegro Bus,” one customer said. Another was concerned about getting a 40-footer into state and national parks.

By executing a very carefully designed floorplan, Tiffin engineering pulled it off. Just as requested, it is still a four-slide floorplan. The prototype is loaded with nearly all of the amenities one could ask. In the living area, four stand-out features will grab your attention: (1) a standard 32-inch mid-ship, eye-level HDMI television built into a beautiful, but optional, black glazed hutch; (2) an optional free-standing dinette with an 18-inch wide hutch that houses a business center with slides for your keyboard and printer, a filing cabinet, and two large drawers; (3) an optional dishwasher; and (4) an optional 22-cubic foot double-door residential refrigerator with a slide-out bottom freezer drawer. An optional overdash 32-inch HDMI television also is included in this coach's package.

You would miss seeing it on a walk-through at a dealer's lot, so always be sure to ask when you see an Allegro Bus. I am

talking about the Aqua-Hot heating system for on-demand hot water and an even moist heat. Compared to the standard propane furnace, this is one of the nicest features you can add to your coach. On a cold day, say 38 degrees, the system will use about a quart of diesel fuel per hour. Of course, there are many variables that affect fuel consumption such as wind, lower temps, and your own temperature comfort level.

The living area of the 36QSP is very similar to that of a 40-foot Bus. Both driver's side slide-outs contain a 74-inch sofa and the same dinette space. With the refrigerator located on the passenger side, the slide on the 36QSP is 2'6" shorter. The couch is 14 inches shorter (60 inches) and the net difference in the length of the galley countertops is 16 inches. That also results in the Expand-an-Island slide-out cabinet being reduced in width from 17¾ to 9 inches. Measured from the center console in the cockpit, the living space is only 10½-inches shorter than the 40-foot Bus floorplans. The coach we reviewed had the optional Ultraleather™ Air Coil Hide-A-Bed Sofa Sleeper (really a full queen-size bed). The 60-inch sofa is Flexsteel's Ultraleather™ DE Sofa Sleeper which can easily accommodate two grade schoolers. Bottom line: so far you haven't given up much by opting for the shorter coach and the living area is really where you spend most of your time.

While we are still in the front section, let's check the basement. The 40-foot floorplans have room for two slide-out trays. The 36QSP has one. However, there is a 24-inch corridor accessed by its own door that extends all the way across the coach — plenty of room for skiing and fishing equipment! Otherwise, the basements in the 36- and 40-foot floorplans are very similar.

I have always liked Tiffin-designed baths, especially the proverbial “library,” otherwise known as the water closet. You don't give up anything here: the 36 × 50-inch library has a 36-inch wide lavatory-vanity with solid surface countertop and backsplash and handsome hardware, plus two deep drawers and a cabinet in the vanity and a double medicine cabinet. And, yep, it's got a magazine rack. Across the hall of the walk-through bath, you've got a 25 × 38-inch shower.

Enter the bedroom. The back wall is identical to the 40-foot floorplans: double sliding mirrored doors conceal a 65-inch wide cedar-lined wardrobe and a compartment for the optional stacked washer and dryer. You can also select a washer-dryer combo and gain a shirt closet above the equipment, or leave out the washer-dryer and gain a huge multi-purpose storage area.

The queen-size bed slideout is well appointed with double reading lights, windows for side ventilation, and electrical outlets in each bedside table. A king-size bed option is not available in the 36QSP.

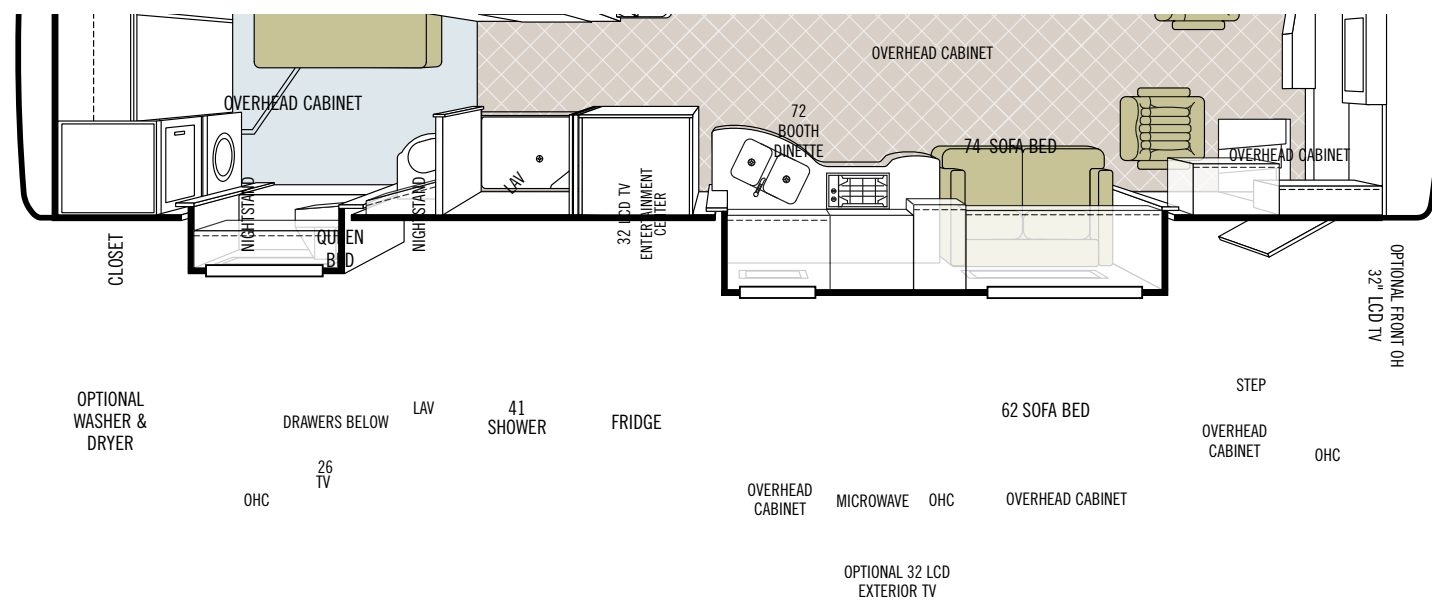
On the passenger side, there are noticeable differences in the 36QSP. The inside of the slide-out measures 46 inches compared with 75-inches in the 40-foot floorplans. That results in four drawers and a small hamper compared to six drawers and a hamper. However, remember there are two nice sized drawers in the water closet vanity. Plus, by using the air struts to lift the rear of the bed, you can access 10 cubic feet of storage. A second lavatory-vanity is in the forward corner next to the shower.

In addition to the appeal of a luxury coach in a shorter length, this particular coach was optioned with several other great features: in-motion, low-profile satellite dish; a high definition TV antenna; HWH automatic jacks; an inverter-solar panel electrical package; a slide-out tray; an exterior 32-inch HDMI television mounted in the exterior wall of the passenger slide-out; a 3000 pro sine inverter; a rearview mirror with compass and outside temp; handheld CB radio; extended drop-down awning; Diamond Shield protective film; and dual MCD windshield shades.

We have saved the best for last. The 36QSP is built exclusively on Tiffin's new Powerglide chassis which has nationwide service through Coach-Care. The Powerglide's design perfectly accommodates each coach built on it. For a full discussion of the Powerglide, see *RIS 4:4* (Fall 2007).

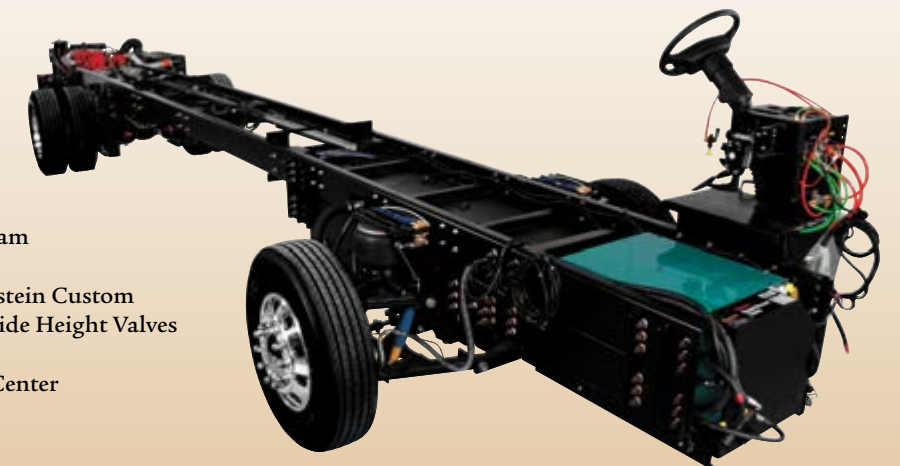
The base price of the 36QSP is \$272,300 MSRP. Options bring the total to \$301,035 MSRP.

The Allegro Bus 36QSP



## The 36QSP Allegro Bus Is Built Exclusively on Tiffin's Powerglide® Chassis

- Engine: Cummins ISL 8.9L Diesel, Turbo-charged, Aftercooled
- Transmission: Allison Electronic 3000 MH 6-Speed Automatic w/2 overdrive gears
- Compression Brake by Jacobs
- Electronic Cruise Control with High Idle
- Douglas Tilt/Telescoping Adjustable Steering Column
- VIP Leather Wrapped 18" Smart Wheel with Wiper Controls, ICC, Cruise and High Beam
- Polished Aluminum Wheels with Trim Kit
- Tuthill Air Suspension System Featuring Bilstein Custom Tuned Shocks and 4 Haldex Pneumatic Ride Height Valves
- Powder-Coated Chassis and Bracketry
- Actia Electronic Guages with LCD Message Center
- Vansco Multiplexed Electrical System
- Electronic Air Suspension Deflation System
- Dual Fill 150 Gallon Fuel Tank



The above items are highlight features. For complete specifications, please see your Tiffin dealer or call 256-356-8661 to request a Powerglide brochure.





### Last Month Bob Tiffin Joined 29 TMH Employees to Celebrate 30+ Years of Service to the Company

*Back Row:* Danny Inman, Danny Abbott, Wade Humphres, Jesse Vess, Hollis Hicks, Norris Lewey, Horace Stepp, Herbert Humphres, Melvin Dotson, J.C. Blackburn & Ricky Coats. *Middle Row:* Billy Nichols, Donald Holland, Rocky Warren, Billy Keeton, Walter Sparks, Larry Joe Hill, Mickey Collum, Bob Tiffin, Pete Blanton, George Embrey & Don Boyd. *Front Row Standing:* Phyllis Williams, Sylvia Massey, Barbara McDowell & Danny Osborn. *Front Row Kneeling:* Jack Elliott, Belton Johnson, Brent Bullard & Phillip Cavness.

### 2008 35TSB Allegro Bay Demonstrator For Sale

Fred Thompson, editor-publisher of *Roughing It Smoothly*, will deliver his 2008 35TSB Allegro Bay front-end diesel (FRED) demonstrator to its new owner on May 31, 2008. Readers of *RIS* are invited to submit their bids for Thompson's coach. On that date, the coach will have no more than 15,000 miles on its odometer. All service has been done at the Tiffin Service Center and Bay Diesel in Red Bay, Alabama. Interested parties should send a Letter of Intent to Purchase to Fred Thompson, 9302 Alanbrooke St., Temple Terrace, FL 33637. The cut-off date for receiving bids is May 15, 2008. Bidding will start at \$129,500. The MSRP on this coach is \$168,679.

VIN 4UZACLDUX8CZ59972

Model: 2008 35TSB Allegro Bay with ISC 300-hp front-end Cummins diesel

Silver Sand Full Body Paint with Pewter interior

Medium Alderwood cabinetry

6.0 Onan generator

Side cameras activated by turn signal

Mid-ship 32-inch Panasonic HDMI television  
Please refer to [www.tiffinmotorhomes.com](http://www.tiffinmotorhomes.com) for the floorplan and all other standard features which are too numerous to mention here. Or call 256-356-8661 and request a brochure.

#### OPTIONS ON THIS COACH:

- Two 15,000 Roof AC with heat pumps (upgraded from 13,000 units w/o heat pumps)
- King Dome automatic satellite (subscription required)
- Dual pane insulated windows
- 1800 watt Xantrex inverter (operates TV w/o generator)
- Sirius satellite radio (subscription required)
- Side sun shades for driver & passenger
- Power sun visors for driver & passenger
- 10 cf refrigerator with ice maker (this size allows for a large slide-out pantry and 3 additional deep drawers in galley)
- Vacuum cleaner
- Ultraleather 6-way power seats for driver & passenger
- Select Comfort mattress (queen)
- Ultraleather Air Coil Sofa Sleeper - DS
- Free standing dinette w/hutch and built-in cabinets

### NOMADS Seek New Members

We who read *Roughing It Smoothly* travel a great deal in our motorhomes and some of us tire of "playing tourist" after voyages of varying lengths. Sometimes, we would like to be able to stop and accomplish something which actually means something to someone—I mean to someone other than your grandchildren. Well, do I have a deal for you!

We of the nomadic nature—some of us full time and some not—live, travel, move around and enjoy a lifestyle which is not understood by many folks in this country. In our travels we see beauty which is absolutely incredible, but we also see areas and people who need help. Wouldn't you like to be able to stop and lend a hand without worrying about danger to your life, your loved ones, or your motorhome? Well, NOMADS is an organization that can help you do that.

NOMADS is a group of over one thousand RVers nationwide who are committed to lending a hand. What type of hand you ask? How long you ask? Well, NOMADS have: (1) hung sheet rock in Mississippi to repair damage done by Katrina; (2) made and hung curtains in Florida; (3) painted something in almost every state; (4) built an elevator shaft in a one-hundred-year-old church in Colorado; (5) built a cottage at a camp in Virginia; (6) put in RV hookups in Louisiana for Katrina relief volunteers; (7) painted murals; (8) refurbished homes in south Texas; (9) wallpapered; and (10) ministered to those who hurt. These jobs are done by men and women who may not know how, but who don't know the meaning of "I can't."

Most projects are three weeks, but sometimes there are shorter or longer opportunities. All NOMADS are encouraged to do a project every year and some do many more. Most NOMADS own an RV (although some are not fortunate enough to own a Tiffin motorhome). Those of us who do own Tiffin products have a large carrying capacity which lends itself to hauling a well-equipped shop. Then there are others of us who don't know what a shop is, but would love to become acquainted with one. People are astounded by the quality of work done by NOMADS, and all of us are learning on every project. We may not be as fast as a professional, but we take pride in every job and learn new skills every day.

Most NOMADS are retired. The average age is about seventy and we have active members who are well past eighty. Some of us can still walk and a few of us can walk and chew gum at the same time. Like I said, we mostly are over fifty (although we have one member who is nineteen) so we know what tired means. We work six hours a day and four days a week. Most of us need the other three days to recuperate. Nevertheless, people are always remarking about the quantity of work accomplished during a three-week project.

NOMADS is a division of the United Methodist Church, but one does not need to be a United Methodist to be an active

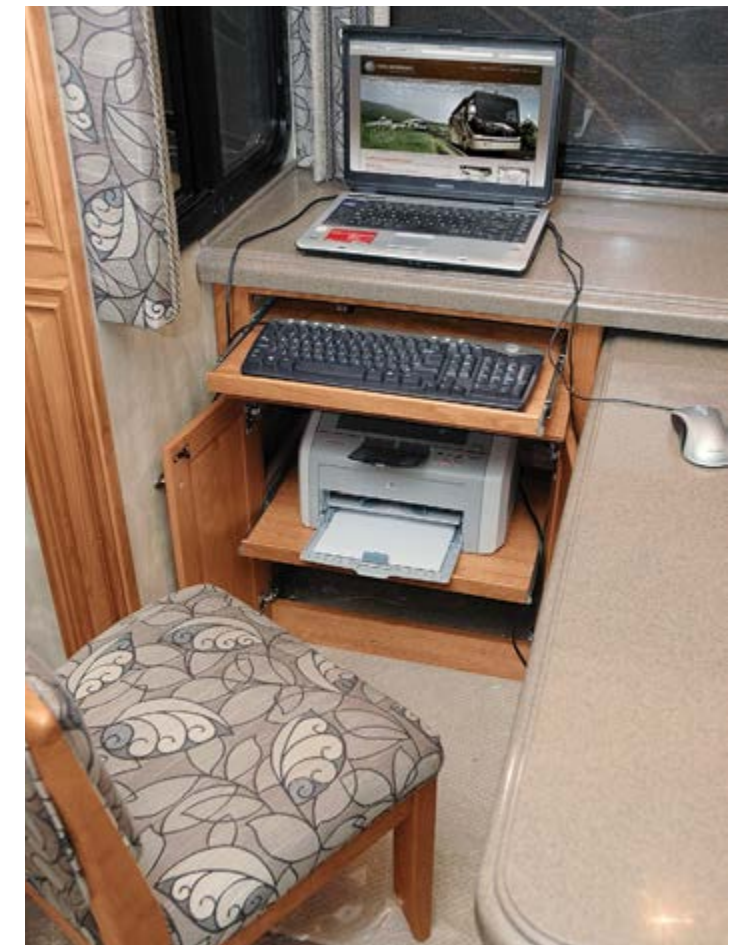
NOMADS. Each year NOMADS has to cancel projects because there are not enough members, which, of course, means WE NEED MORE MEMBERS. As a NOMAD, you will meet the best people in the world—some are NOMADS and some are the people for whom NOMADS work. Interested? Take a look at the NOMADS website — [nomadsumc.org](http://nomadsumc.org).

Tiffin owners are quality minded and NOMADS are quality workers. And besides — it's a ball!

James & Elizabeth Traviss, Winter Haven, Florida

### Freestanding Dinette Redesigned to Accommodate Business Work Station

First offered in January of this year, a newly designed, optional dinette/computer work station may be ordered on the 2008 Phaeton, Allegro Bus, and Zephyr models. The cabinet includes sliding shelves for a keyboard and printer plus space for your laptop or monitor. With this option, the width of the hutch is increased to 18 inches to accommodate a filing cabinet and two generously sized drawers. The dining table provides extra workspace.





## Rod and Marsha Schultz: *Campground Hosts*

“We just try to break the ice and make everyone’s visit to the Allegro Campground a pleasant experience. They have a lot invested in their coaches and we know they usually come here because they have to. Sometimes an owner can be pretty frustrated with a repair problem,” Marsha Schultz said in describing their job at the Tiffin Motorhomes’ Allegro Campground.

While the administrative part of operating the campground is the more formal part of their jobs, Rod and Marsha regard public relations as the real core of making things work smoothly at the Tiffin Campground which can now accommodate 107 coaches, 93 with full hook-ups.

The Schultzes married in 1972 and began their RV lifestyle shortly thereafter: a motorcycle with a little cargo trailer and sleeping in a small tent. Next came a pickup truck slide-in, then a 5th wheel that was custom-built with a 4-foot bathtub and a 100-gallon water tank. “I hated to sell that one,” Rod recalled. But he remembers in sequence each unit they bought: a pop-up, a travel trailer, another pop-up, a toy hauler (5th wheel), and then on March 6, 2003, the Allegro Bus in which they are full-timers.

With over 30 years experience in RVing, Rod and Marsha are a resource for travel information as well as technical knowledge to answer questions about camping in a motorhome. “There is no dumb question if you don’t know the answer,” Rod said. “Here at the campground we have welcomed the most experienced owners you can imagine and the greenest neophytes who have just acquired their coach and decided to become full-timers. One asked me, ‘What is a holding tank?’ – but that’s okay. We are all here to learn. I just drew a little diagram and showed

them how holding tanks work in a motorhome,” he smiled.

Rod and Marsha regard every Tiffin coach owner as an interesting person who has a great life story to tell. “Someone asked me recently, ‘Why do you stay with your job here at the campground?’” Marsha related. “The answer is really pretty simple: we enjoy the relationships and getting to know the customers who come back year after year.”

Rod is a “do-it-yourselfer” from way back. Soon after accepting the job at the campground in September 2005, Rod bought an electric smoker and set it up on the sidewalk outside the office. He learned how to smoke turkeys, chickens, ribs, and Boston butt and generously offered samples to campers, as well as lessons on how to do it when they got back home. One coach owner bought two electric smokers to replace the one that had burned out due to steady use while here at the campground and to leave Rod with a spare.

Just like the RVers they host, Rod and Marsha have equally interesting stories. Marsha grew up in Syracuse, New York. Her parents moved to Denver when she was 17 and she finished her last year of high school in the mile high city. Rod was born about 65 miles northwest of Sioux Falls in De Smet, South Dakota, a small town that distinguishes itself as the home of Laura Ingalls Wilder, author of the *Little House on the Prairie* books. After his dad, who owned a truck stop, made a trip to Denver, he returned home and moved his family there. After high school, Rod served three-and-a-half years in the Navy as an aviation fueling specialist aboard an Essex-class helicopter carrier.

Marsha became a beautician and Rod was working in a plant nursery, both businesses in the same shopping mall. They met at a New Year’s Eve party hosted by Rod’s parents, then became better acquainted at a Super Bowl party. They dated for two years before Rod asked Marsha to accompany him on a drive to the mountains on an unusually sunny, warm New Year’s Day.

Marsha picked up the story: “After a short walk, he got down on one knee and said, ‘I am 27 years old and it’s time for me to get married, and you can cook and clean very well. Will you marry me?’ I said, ‘OK.’” Two months later they were married on February 29. A step-cousin was married the same hour, but in the central time zone in another city. And, believe it or not,

*Continued on page 46*




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Marsha Schultz explains campground and service center procedures to Stephen Lester from South Dakota and Danny Lay from North Carolina, while Rod Schultz takes care of a coach owner’s question by phone.

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Text and Photography by Fred Thompson



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**C13** | 525 hp @ 2100 rpm, 1750 lb-ft torque @ 1200 rpm

**C9** | 400-425 hp @ 2200/2300 rpm, 1250-1350 lb-ft torque @ 1400 rpm

**C7** | 300-360 hp @ 2400 rpm, 860-925 lb-ft torque @ 1440 rpm



## The Solomons: *Changing Lifestyles*

Joe and Nancy Solomon are campground hosts at Tiffin Motorhomes' Allegro Campground in Red Bay, Alabama. They share the job with Rod and Marsha Schultz — a two weeks on and two weeks off arrangement that works well for both couples' lifestyles.

Joe Solomon grew up well acquainted with farming. His grandfather in the mid-1800s homesteaded a 1000-acre farm near DeSoto, Missouri, where he was born. He learned to love the land and often wished he could return to it. When times were difficult, his father went to work for the railroad and Joe followed suit in 1953 when he was 15.

When he was old enough, Joe joined the U.S. Air Force and eventually spent five years with the Air Police. When he was discharged in 1960, he returned to his Missouri roots and finished an apprenticeship as carman with the railroad.

He soon found greener pastures in construction, first in quality control and follow-up with new owners for a home builder and later in operating his own company. Tired of the numbing Missouri winters, Joe moved his family and the company to California, then to Arlington, Texas, and finally back to Missouri—because it was just home. Following a divorce, Solomon downsized into a motorhome and headed for the booming construction market in Florida. “At least I knew I wouldn’t get cold there,” he laughed in reminiscing.

An on-site construction accident put Solomon on the sidelines for nearly two years. But his whole life took a welcomed upswing in February 1999 when he met Nancy Hayes. A mutual friend asked Joe if he would like to meet one of her clients, a successful mortgage broker. Joe agreed and a dinner engagement was arranged. The appointed hour came and went. Joe waited, but no Nancy. Thinking he had been “stood up,” Joe was preparing to leave when an attractive brunette arrived, apologizing for her tardiness and explaining it was business that detained her.

Long conversations and many dinner engagements later, Joe and Nancy married on June 6, 1999. From a previous marriage, she had a son and daughter and two grandchildren. Joe had two children and four grands. The blending worked.

Joe loved to travel in his motorhome and wanted to show Nancy the country. She arranged for two months off. As the extended honeymoon ended and they returned to Florida, Nancy got out her calculator, pencil, and paper and told Joe, “This is

just too great a lifestyle to stop now. I’m going to figure out a way we can do this full time.” And she did!

In 2000 they pointed their coach to the northeast and headed for the Canadian Maritimes. Joe had landed in Newfoundland when he was in the Air Force, and wanted to go back and see the province. They visited New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia and then took the ferry to Newfoundland.

“For two weeks we toured the island,” Joe said. “The people were so friendly. Just before leaving, we stopped at a restaurant for lunch. We had run out of Canadian money and were using our credit cards. The owner explained that she did not accept credit cards, but wouldn’t let us leave. ‘You can just eat free this time,’ she said to our amazement.”

After buying a 2001 Allegro Bus in the Spring, the Solomons made their first trip to Red Bay to get a few things tweaked, and then left for Yellowstone where Nancy had found a hosting job in the employees campground. “It was the first season for the employees campground and the park management hadn’t developed a complete MO for the hosts. We sort of wrote our own job description. We arrived in late April, the employees in May. They left in late September and we left in early October. On June 13, we got nine inches of snow. A girl from Fort Lauderdale, I lay in the snow and made snow angels. It was a great experience,” she exulted.

“We nearly got snowed in when we left, but with the help of one of the rangers we managed to get to the main road,” Joe continued.




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Allegro Campground hosts Nancy and Joe Solomon enjoy sharing their full-timing experience with Tiffin coach owners who visit the Service Center. They gave up their Allegro Bus for a small farm near Red Bay.

Text and Photography by Fred Thompson



“Just as we pulled out of the campground, I saw this great bull elk with a huge rack standing in the trees. With snow on his antlers, back, and nose, he almost blended in with the snowy background. The scene was like a Christmas card—it’s engraved in my memory,” Nancy said.

In 2002 Joe and Nancy launched a trip to the Southwest to spend time planning an extended trip to the Northwest Territory, the Yukon, and Alaska. While in a campground in Tucson, they met Rod and Marsha Schultz who were full-timing in a 5th wheel. After vacationing together for several days, they exchanged phone numbers and decided to stay in touch. “Three months later we got a call from Marsha. They had just purchased an Allegro Bus,” Nancy said.

The Solomons worked their way north through Montana and entered Canada through Alberta to visit Banff and Jasper National Parks. “At a campground in the Jasper National Park, we saw the largest dog we had ever seen walking casually across the area,” Joe said. “We described ‘the dog’ to a ranger who confirmed that it was a timber wolf. The rangers had not seen one in years.”

Joe and Nancy met another couple in Edmonton who decided to caravan with them on the Mackenzie Highway to Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territory. “At Fort Providence we crossed the Mackenzie River. On the return south to connect with the Alaska Highway at Grande Prairie, the 18-wheelers were backed up waiting for the ice flow from Great Slave Lake to break up enough for the ferry to start running,” Joe related. “We just dry camped and made coffee for the truck drivers while we visited with them. Finally, in the early morning hours the ice broke loose. Our friends knocked on the door to let us know it was time to roll. But it took us several minutes to get ready. The truckers refused to go ahead of us and politely waited until we were ready,” he said.

When the Solomons reached the Alaska Highway, they turned northwest and headed for Dawson in the Yukon Territory. “The landscapes were so majestic that we rarely traveled over 30 mph,” Joe said.

Their goal this time was the remote Canadian village of Inuvik in the northwestern tip of the Northwest Territory. “Inuvik is over 100 miles north of the Arctic Circle,” Nancy pointed out on the map we were studying. The village of less than 3,000 is the northernmost village in Canada which can be reached by a road.

To explore their own personal interests, the travel buddies parted ways when they reached Alaska but met by coincidence several times over the next three months. By mid-September the Solomons had returned to the States through Washington.

On each major trip, Nancy insisted they go through Red Bay. On their comment card at the campground, she expressed their interest in working as campground hosts at the Allegro Campground. Their 2003 travels led them out West again to Yellowstone, Jackson Hole and Glacier National Park.

Unfortunately, Joe suffered recurrent back problems precipitated by the construction accident. Most of the time he was sidelined in a wheelchair or on crutches. Future trips seemed

unlikely and they decided to sell their Allegro Bus in December 2004, retiring to their home in Okechobee, Florida. The timing was great: Bob Tiffin called them in March to advise that TMH had an opening at the campground. It was a no-brainer. The answer was an immediate “Yes!”

“Everything seemed meant to be,” Nancy said. “We put our house up for sale and came to Red Bay and rented a little house behind the Piggly Wiggly. We had decided to wait for several months before buying. Maybe we wouldn’t like the job.”

But then they saw an ad for a 30-acre farm. “We’ll just go look, don’t have to buy, just look, we thought.” They fell in love with the place and it became the “Solomon Farm” in less than a week. Their house in Okechobee sold quickly.

The position for the second couple came open in late summer. Bob asked the Solomons if they knew anyone they would like to work with. “Yes, we do,” Nancy said. “We called Rod and Marsha

*Continued on page 48*

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# Golf Alabama



The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail: One of the 50 best golf destinations in the world.  
– Golf Digest

Story by Fred Thompson • Photography by Michael Clemmer

Ross Bridge, holes 17 & 18 leading up to the Gristmill and the Marriott Renaissance Hotel

Yes, the *world*. Not the Western Hemisphere. Not North America. Not the Southeast. The world.

Golfers in the same survey put the Trail among the top eight courses in the world for “quality of golf.” One golf writer said the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail is “arguably the finest collection of public golf courses in America.” The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the Trail “may be the biggest bargain in the country.” The *New York Times* called the Trail “some of the best public golf on earth.”

Today the Trail offers 468 holes of golf at 11 locations. The courses were built in some of Alabama’s most scenic locations and incorporate its lakes, rivers, valleys, and mountains into their landscapes. Generally located near the Interstate highways that criss-cross Alabama, or near its four-lane arteries, the courses have created a tourism bonanza for the state. In fact, golf tourism is one of Alabama’s largest sources of income.

The state’s moderate winter climate permits year-round play,

even in January and February. In a mid-November tour of the Trail, this writer spoke with golfers from nearly all of the northeastern states, as well as Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Missouri, and Arkansas.

Why do they come year after year to the RTJ Golf Trail in Alabama?

- The challenging and inventive designs of the holes.
- The superb maintenance and quality of the fairways and greens.
- The organizational skill of management in getting tee times.
- The scenic beauty of the courses with their locations near rivers, lakes, streams, waterfalls, hills and valleys.
- The reasonable prices.
- The clubhouses offering well-stocked pro shops, restaurants, and the epitome of Southern hospitality—rocking chairs on long front porches.
- The RTJ website for planning a tour and making reservations.

In short, the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail is a total golfing experience. Not just one great course that you play several times and go home. But 11 courses from which to choose. Out-of-state golfers often play at least four locations in a visit.

It is likely that a first-time visitor, after trying to perceive the concept of the Trail, will ask “How did the Trail come into existence? Whose vision created this fabulous experience?”

The establishment of the RTJ Golf Trail must be credited to a financial visionary and the leading golf course architect of the twentieth century.

David G. Bronner, an Iowan by birth, is an academic phenom who was teaching with a master’s degree in the School of Business and Finance at Minnesota State University at the age of 22. After deciding to further his educational qualifications, Bronner entered the University of Alabama and earned a law degree at 26 and a doctorate in business at 27. After teaching briefly in several graduate schools, he was appointed assistant dean of the law school at Alabama for the 1972–73 term.

Bronner’s stock continued to rise on the “Alabama Exchange.” At the age of 28, he was recruited as the chief executive officer of the Retirement Systems of Alabama (RSA), which at that time had \$500 million in funds and was owed \$1.5 billion by the state. His investment strategies by the end of 2007 increased the fund to \$35 billion, making it the largest financial organization in Alabama and the 13th largest pension fund in the U.S. Bronner’s skills and successes have been chronicled in most of the leading financial journals and investment papers.

Although his success has earned the confidence of Alabama’s seniors, he has occasionally raised their eyebrows. When he announced in 1990 that he was about to appropriate \$100 million to launch the world’s largest golf course construction project, many naysayers suggested his cranial fluid was leaking. Bonner was unperturbed. He was intrigued with a recent survey showing that 90 percent of America’s corporate leaders played golf. He was dismayed by the controversy that became an international scandal when the press discovered Birmingham’s Shoal Creek Country Club which was hosting the PGA Championship was a segregated club.

Bronner saw his grandiose scheme as an opportunity to change Alabama’s image, nationally and internationally, by transforming the state into a golf mecca that would make golf tourism a cash cow and draw corporate business as a corollary asset.

RSA’s assets were on the line. Failure was not an option. Bonner began to seek the top people in the U.S. golf industry to be his standard bearers. Bobby Vaughan, a former director of golf at Tanglewood in North Carolina, was hired to assemble the team for this massive project. Vaughan formed SunBelt Golf Corporation to develop, construct, operate, and manage all of the courses. Bronner knew from 20 years of experience that Alabama had one major asset to put into the mix: genuine hospitality. Characteristically, he demanded unsurpassed quality and top value to attract golfers from throughout the U.S., even the world.

Finding the right golf course architect to create 378 holes of golf covering over 100 miles was the most important aspect of the project. Bronner saved that job for himself. He wrote the same form letter to five of the country’s top designers. Robert Trent Jones, Sr., who had done Tanglewood, was on the list. In his letter, Bonner emphasized the immense scope of the project, including four 54-hole sites. Two ignored him, one responded negatively with a form letter, one discouraged the project. Jones, 84, called and expressed skepticism. He was at least semi-retired. But when Bonner explained his reasons for the project and the massive funds he had committed, Robert Trent Jones was hooked. In spite of the fact, perhaps because of the fact, that he was nearly 40 years older than Bronner, the two hit it off right away.

Born in Ince, England, Jones came to the U.S. with his parents in 1911. The family settled in East Rochester, New York. A fine golfer by the time he was ready for college, Jones attended Cornell and was allowed to design his own study program to become a golf course architect. The curriculum leaned heavily on landscape architecture, horticulture, agronomy, and hydraulics. By the time he was ready to graduate, the Depression had gripped the country and few areas had the funds to hire a golf course architect. After an apprenticeship with two other firms, Jones struck out on his own and designed the course at Green Lakes State Park near Syracuse. Being a state park, most of the labor was furnished by the WPA. In lieu of payment for his work, Jones agreed to a one dollar per year lease and then operated the course himself to create an income.

Other projects came along and he managed to establish a reputation that attracted President Eisenhower’s attention. He designed Ike’s putting green at the White House and later a hole with three tees at Camp David. He worked with famed golfer Bobby Jones on Atlanta’s Peachtree Golf Course, where to avoid confusion he was often called Trent. He further distinguished himself in Georgia by completely redesigning the 11th and 16th holes at Augusta National.

An accomplished golfer in his own right who had competed in several professional events, Jones believed that golf should be a “no risk–no reward” sport. His course designs challenge players with innovative use of bunkers, plenty of water hazards, and undulating greens that require thoughtful strategy and daring play.

After a 70-year career in which he designed over 500 courses throughout the world, Robert Trent Jones, Sr., had no peers. In 1987 he was the first golf course architect inducted into the Golf World Hall of Fame. Mr. Jones saw the completion of eight of the courses prior to his death in June of 2000.

After Bobby Vaughan and his staff were given the go-ahead, they launched the largest golf course construction project ever undertaken at one time anywhere in the world. The simultaneous projects employed over 700 pieces of earth moving equipment.

A unique feature seldom found on other courses, the four or five tee locations for each hole are based on ability level, not age or gender. For example, on the first hole of the Schoolmaster Course at The Shoals, the distance from the black tee is 453



yards, purple 421, orange 382, white 337, and teal 311. As one of the directors of golf said, “The Golf Trail is an incredible golfing experience for everyone. The courses will challenge the best golfers in the world, yet at the same time allow an enjoyable outing for the casual to beginning golfer.”

Taken from *The RTJ Trail Guide*, following are brief descriptions of each course along with photography courtesy of the RTJ Golf Trail and Michael Clemmer.

Many of the courses placed in several categories of the Zagat

Golf Survey “America’s Top Golf Courses.” The rating scale was 1–30 points. The top scale level was 26 – 30, and labeled “Extraordinary to Perfection.” The top ratings for RTJ Golf Trail courses are shown using the abbreviations below:

TRF	Top-Rated Facility	TC	Toughest Courses
TRS	Top-Rated Service	BP3	Best Par-3 Holes
TRV	Top-Rated Value	BP4	Best Par-4 Holes
TCA	Top Courses in America	BP5	Best Par-5 Holes
BOH	Best Opening Hole		

#### CAMPGROUNDS

Depending on which courses you select to play, you will find well-appointed campgrounds throughout the state. We visited the courses in Muscle Shoals and Huntsville, Birmingham and Montgomery, Greenville, and Mobile. We found very nice accommodations at the following locations. You can find each campground in Woodall’s for additional information.

- **Point Mallard Campground** in Decatur ( Muscle Shoals and Huntsville courses) Exit 340 on I-65
- **Birmingham South Campground** (Birmingham and Montgomery courses) Exit 242 on I-65
- **Sherling Lake Park & Campground** (Greenville course) Exit 130 on I-65
- **Wales West Train & RV Resort** (Mobile and Point Clear courses) Great indoor pool and spa for cooler weather. Fairhope, Alabama.

#### Hotels

Since this article is appearing in *Roughing It Smoothly*, I assumed its readers would be traveling in their motorhomes. If you do elect to do the Trail by car, you should review the Trail’s outstanding

collection of hotels and resorts. Go to [www.rtgolf.com](http://www.rtgolf.com) for information and reservations.

#### Restaurants

The Alabama Bureau of Tourism & Travel published a terrific brochure of the state’s best restaurants called “100 Dishes to Eat in Alabama Before You Die.” You can pick up a copy at any Alabama Welcome Center as you enter the state on an Interstate highway, or go online at [www.800alabama.com](http://www.800alabama.com) and request a copy.

#### Planning Your Trip

Plain and simple: the best way to plan your golfing excursion on the Trail is to visit [www.rtgolf.com](http://www.rtgolf.com)

#### Special Note of Thanks

The author wishes to thank Van Cooper, a course marshal at Oxmoor Valley who graciously gave four days of his time to travel with me and provide a knowledgeable introduction to the Trail.

#### The Shoals (36 holes)

The Fighting Joe course in Muscle Shoals in the northwest corner of the state opened in August 2004. It is the first Trail course to exceed 8,000 yards, measuring 8,092 yards from the black tees. Some say the spectacular 17th hole is the signature hole on the course, but the 18th green overlooking Wilson Lake on the Tennessee River will distract you with its beauty, if not

its treachery. Fighting Joe was listed as 27th in *Golf Digest’s* 50 Toughest Courses in the Nation.

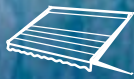
The Schoolmaster opened the Summer of 2005. This tree-lined course is more traditional golf with every hole in keeping with the natural topography along the Tennessee river. It is wooded, rolling, and spectacular.

Fighting Joe’s 18th green overlooking Wilson Lake on the Tennessee River.





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### **Hampton Cove (54 holes)**

At the northern boundary of the Trail, the Highlands Course, which emulates a Scottish Links, is one of the gems of the Trail. Thousands of Japanese black pines, oaks, dogwood, and crepe myrtles have been planted to enhance such features as an old mule barn beside the fifth hole.

Completely opposite in design, the River Course is the only RTJ design without a bunker. The Short Course is very open and links-like, with water in play on 11 holes and a large double green accommodating the 10th and 17th greens.

Zagat: TCA (Highlands); TCA (River)

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### **Silver Lakes (36 holes)**

Named by *Golf's Digest's Places to Play* as one of the nation's Great Value Courses in the public category, Silver Lakes is set on rolling terrain at the edge of the Talladega National Forest between Anniston and Gadsden. Silver Lakes features three championship nines plus a nine hole Short Course. The facility is anchored by a number of strong par fours that play to pedestal greens perched 30 to 40 feet above fairway level.

The Heartbreaker nine is labeled by some as the most challenging nine on the Trail from the championship tees. The

Backbreaker nine is a photographer's dream, boasting beautiful views of the Appalachian foothills from its elevated tees. The Mindbreaker demands shotmaking at its finest.

The Short Course may be the most demanding collection of one-shotters on the Trail. There's water in play on seven of the holes, including a 12-foot cascade beside the sixth green.

The Backbreaker and the Heartbreaker are listed as 22nd in *Golf Digest's 50 Toughest Courses in the Nation*.

Zagat: BOH





*Left:* The #1 hole on Hampton Cove's Short Course with its water hazards is characteristic of 11 holes throughout these very open links.

*Right:* A golfer tees off at Oxmoor Valley's Ridge Course hole #6. From the white tees, it is a 389 yard par 4. Straight across the ravine-water hazard is the safe shot. A long shot to the left could get a player on the green in two shots.



### **Oxmoor Valley** (54 holes)

Sculpted from the peaks and valleys at the southern end of the Appalachians within a few miles of downtown Birmingham, the Oxmoor Valley courses in 1992 were the first links opened on the RTJ Golf Trail. They offer scenic forests, numerous creeks, and challenging elevation changes. The Ridge Course, with its roller coaster fairways, heavy tree cover, and precipitous 150-

foot elevation changes, provides numerous postcard scenes..

The Valley Course, stretching two miles downrange along a slender valley, is dotted with picturesque lakes and beautiful rolling fairways. The Short Course is a delightful collection of 18 pure one-shotters which offer severe elevation changes and almost every hole plays downhill.

Zagat: TRV & TCA (Ridge, Valley)

### **Ross Bridge** (18 holes)

Opened in August 2005, Ross Bridge is the newest addition to the RTJ Golf Trail. Beautifully carved into the rolling terrain of Shannon Valley near Birmingham, these 18 holes will challenge even the best golfers.

Reminiscent of an old parkland style course, ten holes play along the banks of two significant lakes connected by a spectacular waterfall dropping 80 feet between the 9th and 18th greens. A gristmill integrated very naturally into the waterfall reflects the history

of this old mining site which was given to the Trail by U.S. Steel.

At the close of every day as the sun begins to set, golfers finishing the 18th hole are reminded of the game's Scottish heritage as a bagpiper in full regalia plays such airs as "Scotland the Brave" and "Balmoral." The performance has become Ross Bridge's signature.

Ross Bridge was listed as 39th in *Golf Digest's* 50 Toughest Courses in the Nation.

Zagat: TRF, TRS, TCA

*Left:* The #8 hole on the Silver Lakes Short Course is part of a demanding collection of one-shotters. Seven of the holes border lakes to challenge the golfer's approach.

*Right:* On a knoll facing the 18th hole, bagpiper Jim Golden, wearing kilts of the ancient McDougall tartan, plays Scottish airs at the end of the day as golfers head for the clubhouse. Already a tradition, the distinctive bagpipe tones at sunset add nostalgic reflection to the heritage of golf.







Grand National Short Course #16

### **Grand National** (54 holes)

The three courses at Grand National located between Auburn and Opelika in the eastern part of the state are listed among the nation's 40 Super Value courses by *Golf Digest's Places to Play*. Robert Trent Jones was reported to have said the site was the single greatest location for a golf complex that he had ever seen. The cornerstone of the complex is the Links Course, which is without a single weakness. The par four 18th is without a doubt

the strongest finishing hole on the Trail.

With 12 holes hugging the shore, the Lake Course is every bit as scenic as the Links. The Short Course, while overshadowed by the two main tracts, is a thing of beauty, with more than half the holes touching the lake. This 18-hole course of one shotters might be the finest anywhere in the country.

Zagat: TRF; TRS; TRV, TCA (Links & Lake); BP3 (Links & Lake); BP4 (Links)

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### **Capitol Hill** (54 holes)

Just north of Montgomery, Capitol Hill features three 18-hole courses. With more than 1,500 acres of golf and nature, the pure magnitude of this facility is amazing and allows each course to be drastically different from the others. *Golf* magazine called The Judge one of the 10 public courses in America worthy of hosting the U.S. Open, and rated The Senator among the Top 10 New Courses in the nation.

manicured bent-grass greens, holds over 160 pot-hole bunkers and mounds 20 to 40 feet in height. The Legislator, a more traditional course, plays in and out of pine trees and along the bluff. The Judge offers stunning vistas along the 200-acre glistening backwaters of the Alabama River. The first tee lies 200 feet above the fairway, overlooking the river and the Montgomery skyline.

Zagat: TRF; TRV & TCA (Judge, Senator, Legislator); BOH (Judge, Legislator); TC (Judge); BP3, BP4, BP5 (Judge)

Capitol Hill, Senator #3







Cambrian Ridge, Sherling #9

### **Cambrian Ridge** (36 holes)

Known by avid golfers as one of the most beautiful and most challenging stops on the Trail, Cambrian Ridge in Greenville is just 40 miles from Montgomery. If you are touring, it is well worth the extra jog for 36 holes of jaw-dropping golf.

*Golf Digest* named Cambrian Ridge as 13th in their list of America's Top 50 Affordable Courses. The Loblolly nine, with its

gently rolling fairways, cathedral-like pines, and water-fronted greens, exudes a stately, Augusta-like quality. The Canyon nine is a thrilling stretch of target-style golf. The Sherling may be the best nine on the Trail, with its 9th hole marching straight uphill past a deep ravine strewn with ochre boulders.

Zagat: TRV, TCA, BOH

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### **Highland Oaks** (36 holes).

In the state's southeast corner at Dothan, this 36-hole complex features some of the longest and most classically designed holes on the Trail. Each nine has a different personality. Highlands, the core nine, is relatively open, with several lakes in play. Marshwood has been made famous by its behemoth par-5 sixth, which

stretches to 701 yards from the tips. Named for its magnolia trees that dot its higher elevations, the Magnolia nine is reached by a 1000-foot long wooden bridge spanning a marsh filled with lichen-dappled trees. The Short Course, a nine-hole par-3, has demanding bunker placements, three water holes, and possibly the best Bermuda putting greens in the South.



Highland Oaks, Highlands #3





Magnolia Grove, Falls #18

**Magnolia Grove** (54 holes)

The Falls and Crossings Courses at Magnolia Grove in Mobile were named by *Golf Digest's Places to Play* as two of the nation's Great Value courses, and both courses were listed in America's Top 50 Affordable Courses. The landscapes include creeks, marshlands, and lakes, with each of the 54 holes carved from a thick forest of hardwoods and pines.

The Falls Course is characterized by large, liberally contoured greens, and massive, cloverleaf bunkers. The Crossings Course is a shotmaker's layout. It occupies hillier terrain than the Falls and features several pulpit greens sited well above the fairways.

Considered one of the best par-3 courses in America, most of the holes on the Short Course require forced carries over wetlands to bulkheaded greens.

**Lakewood Golf Club** (36 holes)

First built in 1947, the Lakewood Golf Club at The Grand Hotel in Point Clear showcases fairways lined with 200-year-old oaks and features the 14th hole on the Azalea Course, an island green surrounded by a four-acre lake which makes the approach shot to this par 5 very demanding. The courses are open only to

members and guests staying at the Grand Marriott Resort, Golf Club & Spa. The recent redesign by Bobby Vaughan brings all 36 holes on par with many of the great resort golf courses in the nation. Golf magazine has on several occasions named Lakewood Golf Club to its list of Best Golf Resorts in America.



Lakewood Golf Club, Dogwood #17

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# Super Service Is In His Business Plan

by Fred Thompson

Mehdi Hosseini and his family love the RVing lifestyle. As a very successful commercial building contractor specializing in municipal construction, he usually found at least part of the winters in Massachusetts too severe for outside work. "We bought a high-line Class A coach and headed for Disney for about six weeks right after Christmas. The kids loved it," he said.

But Hosseini was very disappointed with his dealer's and the manufacturer's inability to repair a major defect in his coach. The dealer finally corrected the problem by taking Mehdi's coach as a trade-in on another high-line coach, different brand. After reflecting on the situation for several weeks, he wrote a business plan for a *total service* RV dealership and took it to the bank. Even though he did not have Class A franchises secured, the bank endorsed his plan.

With a talent for speaking calmly and reassuringly, Hosseini convinced his banker there was a significant service void in the Northeast that would make his business an immediate success. In early Fall 2003, he acquired three+ acres on I-495 in Middleboro, Massachusetts, a prime, high-traffic location between Boston and Cape Cod. Aptly naming the new enterprise Crossroads R.V. Center, Hosseini wasted no time hiring an architect to design an efficient RV business facility. With a floorplan providing generous

accommodations for administration and sales, the experienced contractor broke ground a few weeks later with the primary concept that quality service will build an enduring business.

With strong emphasis placed on five well-lighted service bays, Hosseini equipped the center for gas and diesel engine work, chassis repair and service, transmission repair and service, and all appliance services. He hired Global Finishing Solutions, the world's leading manufacturer of finishing and paint spray booth systems, to design and install a sixty-foot, cross draft, pressurized spray booth equipped with color correction lighting and an optional cure package to raise the booth temperature to 125 degrees. PPG Industries installed a computerized paint matching and mixing system.

With plans for a grand opening in May 2004, Hosseini and his newly hired veteran sales manager flew to Louisville in late November 2003 where the RVDA's National Dealer Show was in progress. Several manufacturers demonstrated an interest, but Tiffin Motorhomes held back. Nick Palm, Tiffin's regional sales manager for the Northeast, explained: "The market was so hot that we had to say 'no.' We had such a strong demand for coaches from our existing dealers that we did not feel at that time we could supply a new dealer with enough product."





Palm decided in January 2004 to visit Crossroads R.V. Center while it was still under construction. “What we saw here was a major commitment to service,” Palm continued. “Mehdi’s drive to put service first was impressive. He had hired an architect to design a handsome building that facilitated an efficient operation.”

Palm headed back to Red Bay to ask Bob and Tim Tiffin and sales manager Jerry Williamson for a reevaluation of their earlier decision. Tiffin Motorhomes did not have a strong presence in the Northeastern market. Although he was new to the RV industry, Hosseini had an experienced sales manager, an excellent facility, and a commitment to service that matched the Tiffin philosophy. He also had an option on an existing building just a mile away that offered six more bays and several thousand square feet of retail area for parts, camping supplies, and after-market products.

TMH decided it was a match. Hosseini began planning for the grand opening. When the day finally arrived, Crossroads had three Tiffin motorhomes on its display lot. True to his word, Mehdi developed a fast track program to get certifications for his technicians. Today Crossroads has two master techs (RVDA certified) and 11 techs who are certified in several specialties. The certifications include both diesel and gas engines; Allison transmissions; Workhorse, Spartan, and Ford chassis; Aqua-Hot RV heating systems; a full-service body shop which can fabricate basement storage doors; a 78-ton lift for doing undercarriage work; frame realignment systems; and a state-of-the-art spray booth and paint system. In addition, Hosseini plans to be the first dealership certified to work on Tiffin’s new Powerglide chassis.

Palm is justifiably proud of the dealership. “Crossroads may be the only Tiffin dealer that was planned, built, and opened

from the ground floor up to enter the motorized RV business,” he said. Today Crossroads R.V. Center is the only full-line Tiffin dealer in the Northeast. When this writer visited the company in February, there were 14 Tiffin coaches in the display area.

“We had a small inventory to begin,” Mehdi recalls. “But by the end of the year, the company was outgrowing its service department. Then we opened our second facility about a mile down the road.”

Mehdi’s philosophy about service was borne of a family background in the construction business. Quality construction, excellent service, and fair treatment to their employees and customers made the Hosseinis’ business successful. Mehdi entered Northeastern University in Boston in 1979 and earned a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering. In due time Hosseini obtained full construction licenses, including federal and state licenses for constructing municipal buildings.

“The secret to this business – and any business – is to treat people the way you would want to be treated if your roles were reversed,” Mehdi said in that same calm, reassuring voice that had convinced his banker. “We have an excellent product. We don’t have to convince our clients that Tiffin coaches are their best buy. The product sells itself,” he continued.

“The third step is first-class full service. That means Crossroads will service your coach, your chassis, your engine, and your transmission, as well as repair coach damage from accidents.

*Continued on page 42*

*Left:* Crossroads RV Center is one of the few Tiffin dealers carrying all five brands in their inventory. *Above:* Quietly charismatic, Mehdi Hosseini loves working directly with the customers who visit Crossroads RV Center. *Right:* Nick Palm, Tiffin regional sales manager; Dennis Morin, Crossroads business manager; Mehdi Hosseini, Crossroads president and CEO; Rich Boucher, Crossroads sales manager; and Tom Delaney, Crossroads service manager





# The Belmont Paint Plant

## Tiffin's State-of-the-Art Automotive Paint Plant Produces Amazing Results

Text and photography by Fred Thompson

Have you ever tried to paint a large room in your home? You want it to be nearly perfect when the sunlight hits. Oh, the problems! Remove all of the hardware first: switch and outlet covers, door hardware, handles on the kitchen cabinets, towel racks, the list is nearly endless. If you are really a perfectionist, you spend at least an hour masking off the areas you don't want to paint. Then you put down rolls of plastic sheeting to keep the paint drips off the furniture and floor. Walls and baseboards must be cleaned. Cleaning reveals flaws in the sheetrock, requiring some filler and another hour of sanding. Now you are ready to paint.

An hour later, it's inspection time. Ugh!! A paint run to smooth out. A tiny bit of trash that you try to lift off with the edge of your mat knife — oops, that left a bad spot. Where you tried to carefully edge next to the molding with your brush. Awgh! It's uneven. That masking you did, how did that work out — oops again! The paint got under the tape where you didn't press the mask down firmly enough. Well, it looks like an hour or two to do repair.

The planning, the prep, the painting, the touch-up and repair, and the reinstalling of all the hardware you removed. That was quite a job!

You've got the idea. Painting is a meticulous process. Now, let's paint a Tiffin motorhome. On the average, two 40-foot walls 9½ feet high, two 8½-foot caps, four colors, about 15 rolls of masking tape and paper around the windows and exterior vents, a zillion pieces of hardware to remove, and that's just the

beginning. To make it interesting, let's paint 13 motorhomes a day!

Just the painting — what does it take? The operation is divided into three separate process areas: (1) Sanding. (2) Painting which includes prep, basecoat, pre-mask, stripe painting, repair, and clearcoat. (3) Repair and buffing. The entire procedure requires 150 employees: 40 in sanding, 80 in painting, and 30 in repair and buffing.

When the motorhomes come out of the assembly plant in Red Bay, they are driven to Belmont, six miles over the state line in Mississippi. The first stop is the undercoating building (you didn't have to do that when you painted your living room, did you?). In a specially designed building with a work pit underneath, Brad McCarley, wearing a "space mask" respirator and dressed in a NASA-style safety uniform, deftly coats 13 motorhomes a day (1).

The smooth fiberglass sandwich manufactured by Tiffin consists of four layers: fiberglass, bond, fiberglass, and gelcoat. Joe Pearson, supervisor of the sanding department, explains the critical process of sanding. "Sanding is necessary for the fiberglass surface to accept paint. We use 400 grit paper to make fine scratches in the surface of the fiberglass that are necessary for the paint to bond," he said.

Each fiberglass surface is wiped down with a liquid cleaner and then coated with dykem, a purple marking solution that assures the sanders will not leave any area unsanded. All plastic parts are treated with a special cleaner and sprayed with an adhesion

promoter and primed. After donning their PPEs (personal protective equipment: breathing mask, glasses, and earplugs), the sanders go to work using air-driven 5-inch DA sanding machines (2). Four or five sanders at a time will work on a coach. The middle of the unit to the top gets sanded first, and then from the middle down. The coach is blown off completely to remove the sanding dust and allow inspection of the entire surface by a quality management person. After the inspector marks sanding flaws, the sanding operators touch up the missed spots. After all the surfaces are blown off again, the coach is ready for the paint plant.

Pearson realizes that the quality of the work done in his department can make or break a good paint job. There are 36 people sanding; two utility persons, Darren Grissom and Roger Bullard, who are essentially problem solvers to keep everything working properly and the line moving; an inspector from quality management, Brenda Inman; and the department supervisor. The sanding operation was intentionally located in a building by itself, far removed from the painting building.

With sanding completed, the coach is moved into the Prepping Department, which includes the surface prep and basecoat painting. Utility person Ranae Scott oversees both areas. "We blow off the coach again and then tape off the top of the coach with a sheet of plastic. Its color will remain the natural gelcoat," she explained. "Next we tape off anything that should not be painted."

"All of the prepping is handled by 13 employees," she continued. "They wash down each coach with a spray chemical wash and then rub it dry with separate microfiber cloths to remove static from the surface. They cannot use hairspray in the area or hand lotions that would contaminate the surfaces to be painted. We try not to touch the surfaces with our bare hands because of the oil in our skin."

After blowing off the surface yet again, the coach is moved into the basecoat spray booth, a totally enclosed room 30 feet wide by 60 feet long. Computers control the air pressure in the booth, as well as the fans, heat, and bake cycle temperatures. Bright lights

line the walls with a computer-controlled air system bringing in air through the ceiling and downdrafting it out through the floor, a feature that is critical in preventing particles from floating in the air. The floors of the entire paint plant are continually traversed throughout the day by a cleaning machine.

After the huge doors are closed, four painters blow off the surfaces again and prime the metal surfaces. Tack cloth is used to remove any possible debris or fibers (3). A second pass with a de-ionizer gun removes any airborne micro-debris drawn to the fiberglass by static electricity. The painters are careful not to touch the surface with their bare fingers.

Finally, it's time to put on the paint! The four painters don their head gear and connect their Tyvek suits to hoses that keep them supplied with cool, monitored, pure air. With movements that mimic the conductor's arm at a symphony, they begin at the top of the coach and spray until it has a completely even coat (4). While spraying, the booth temperature is held at 74 degrees. A 10-minute 150 degree baking process is followed by a critical inspection and touch-ups wherever necessary. The whole process in the spray booth takes approximately one hour. Currently, two spray booth teams process 13 coaches a day.

During 2008, the basecoat colors are Sunlit, Sterling Silver, White Chocolate, and Performance White.

Anthony Lynch supervises 80 employees in five production process areas including prep, basecoat, pre-mask, striping, and clearcoat. He emphasizes that "every station must send a perfect job to the next station. You can't get a prepped area too clean."

Lynch and his utility person, Steven Howell, believe the pre-mask process may be the most critical in the painting sequence. The masks used to paint the stripes are adhesive-backed panels which have to be pressed firmly into place to prevent underspray at the edges. The sidewall designs require four panels which are unfurled and pressed into their respective positions, starting at the bottom of the fiberglass sidewall (5). Connecting the designs from panel to panel is a very meticulous task. The connecting







points are reinforced with masking tape **(6)**. The front and rear cap masks are less problematic since they are one-piece panels. “A good mask makes all the difference in a good striping paint job,” Lynch said. “Masking is our most difficult area of training.”

The next step in the painting sequence is the striping paint booth, where utility man Chad Murray works to help the painters attain the quality goals they have set. The striping designs require up to three additional colors, adding quite a flair to Tiffin’s coaches. After each color is applied, the painters do spot masking to protect the applied paint while the subsequent colors are added.

After the stripe painting is completed, the masks are removed **(7)** and inspectors go over the coach marking any flaws, some of which are so minute that this writer needed a magnifier to see them. While quality inspectors are currently finding an average of 15 flaws per unit, Lynch said they have set the goal for a maximum of eight. Flaws are corrected while the coach is still in the striping booth **(8)**.

Of course, when the flaws are corrected, the sought-after perfection for the full-body paint job is realized. The goal is to attain greater efficiency by having to repair fewer flaws. “We are making gains on our quality every day,” Lynch affirmed.

Until now the paint has a dull matte finish. The painters suit up again to apply the clearcoat, a finish which brings out the paint’s metallic luster and protects it against UV-caused fading **(9)**.

Once a week, maintenance crews on the night shift tear down the booths’ walls and floor coverings which are used to prevent paint build-ups on the booths’ primary surfaces. The booths are then pressure washed and the coverings are replaced. Floor and roof filters are checked and replaced when necessary – quite a job in itself since there are 300 filters in each booth.

After the clearcoat is dry, the motorhome moves into Final Repair. Clearcoat has a tendency to magnify tiny flaws which may not have been noticed prior to its application. It is also very difficult to get the desired thickness of clearcoat without creating a few runs. When paint flaws are discovered under the clearcoat, the sanding and repainting requires more skill since you are working over multiple layers. Working in the four booths dedicated to Final Repair are 12 of Tiffin’s most skilled painters – “the Michelangelos of motorhome painting” as one of the men kiddingly referred to them.

After the skilled touch-ups are completed, buffing is done to shine the areas that have been fixed. The buffers use fine grits between 1000 and 3000, then a buffing compound, and finally a glaze and polish **(10)**.

Final Repair, however, has several other responsibilities in getting the coaches ready to ship to dealers. With 30 employees supervised by Ricky McGee and his utility men, Josh Brown and Jackie Tate, the department’s crews remove all of the residual masking and the plastic covers on top of the coaches. Paint overspray is cleaned. All of the hardware removed for painting is reinstalled. A “blacking-in-station” paints all of the connective edging between the exterior paint and the interior of the storage areas. The watchword here is “detail, detail, detail.” After McGee gives



his final approval, the full-body paint process is completed.

The coaches then move to the shop next door that has become known as Final Finish. Actually, this department has two divisions: Red Bay and Belmont. “Final Finish does the cosmetic work,” supervisor Tony Lambert explained. “We do the detail work and Red Bay does the final clean-up work.” The gas and front-engine diesels get finished out in Belmont and the diesel pushers are completed in Red Bay.


“We have some very good specialists here who deal with installations and problems that cannot be practically handled in the standard production process,” Lambert continued. “For example, Daryl Ewing is our awnings specialist—over 10 years of experience (11). Lee Pounds knows Tiffin motorhomes inside and out and can fix just about anything. Mike Engell is our electronics specialist and takes care of anything in that area.”

“Awnings, lights, ladders, and mud flap installations, nagging electrical problems, damage problems that occurred during line production,” Lambert said. “If something isn’t working right, we usually can take care of it right here.”

Lambert took great delight in showing off the new water testing building. “Nozzles are aimed at every spot on the motorhome — 300 gallons per minute (12). And we are planning to put in some nozzles aimed at the underside. We blast it for 15 minutes to see if we can find a leak,” he smiled. The process is also high tech. Following OSHA standards, the water is recycled and used for about a month, then properly disposed.

The importance that Tiffin’s top management places on the Belmont operation is seen in its new plant manager, Horace Stepp. Now in his 33rd year with TMH, Stepp formerly managed the Red Bay assembly plant. He accepted the Belmont position in January of last year. “We needed a broader supervisory management operation,” Stepp said. “We broke the painting process into three departments with three supervisors, where we earlier had just one. We changed the utility people and their responsibilities. Restructuring was necessary to deal with our growth,” he explained.

Under his leadership, the water testing and undercoating buildings were added. The design of the new buildings produces better results while meeting federal standards. A new light, buff-colored flooring recently installed throughout the entire paint plant makes it easy to see and remove debris and trash that might flaw the paint jobs. A new conference room, a new fueling station, and a new paved area for parking the motorhomes ready for shipment are some of the improvements that Stepp has overseen during his brief tenure as the plant manager.

“We have a ‘to do’ list that we complete and revise all the time,” he said. “Right now we are working on improving the line flow within the plant. We expect to have a full-time painting trainer in the near future. We have to constantly train in all areas for continuous improvement. My list contains cross-training, safety, neatness, pride, and good housekeeping,” Stepp expounded with near-religious zeal. “Our most challenging task is keeping quality at a high level to meet the expectations of our customers and dealers,” Stepp said. 





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We are happy to announce that October 6-9, 2008, the Allegro Club is teaming up with Cold Springs RV to host a FALL FOLIAGE FEST in Weare, New Hampshire. Space for this rally will be limited to 95 coaches. We expect the available spots to go very quickly. We urge you to register ASAP. Call the Allegro Club office at 256-356-8522 for more information.

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## DEALER PROFILE

*Continued from page 35*

I believe that dealers who offer full service will survive downturns in the economy, even recessions. Our sales were down 6.4 percent through November 2007, but our service business was up 10 percent. We are relying on excellence in service to generate new sales and repeat business. In business for less than four years, we were not surprised to find that 10 percent of our sales came from repeat buyers," he said.

"Crossroads has accomplished a level of service in just three years that usually requires 15 years in most dealerships," Palm said. "Mehdi told me recently that while most dealers put 'Sales and Service' on their signs, he plans to put 'Service and Sales' on his new sign." There is no doubt that the new sign expresses the owner's business philosophy.

Crossroads offers road and campground service within a 100-mile radius of Middleboro. A well-designed service truck, stocked with a broad selection of parts and RV components and driven by a technician with 30 years of experience, makes the rounds of the area's campgrounds every week as well as answering calls from the road and rigs parked at owners' homes.

Hosseini ties service to sales. "Of course, we will service every owner's coach with the same level of excellence. But we provide priority scheduling to owners who purchased their coaches here," he explained. A service appointment is guaranteed within

48 hours of the owner's call. "We explain to those who did not buy their coach here that their service may be interrupted with a priority service appointment, and they understand," he said.

The Crossroads VIP Customer Care Program includes the priority service appointments, a 24/7 tech support line, 10 percent off parts and service rates, complimentary exterior wash with each service appointment, first oil change free, complimentary shuttle service up to 25 miles, preferred rates at a local hotel, a full tank of fuel and LP at delivery, a thorough client-tech review of all coach systems and equipment at delivery, and a quarterly newsletter to keep the program member abreast of all service and operation issues.

Hosseini and the entire Crossroads staff appreciate their customers so much that they do a Customer Appreciation Rally annually at Normandy Farms in Foxboro, Massachusetts. Normandy Farms has been voted several times as one of America's Top Ten Campgrounds. The rally is an all expense paid vacation for RVers who have purchased their coaches from Crossroads. It includes live entertainment, meals, full hook-ups, seminars by major manufacturers, and themed recreation by Normandy Farms.

In the Class A and fifth-wheel towables market, Hosseini has learned from experience that owners are willing to pay a little more for their initial acquisition if they can tap into a comfort level and guarantee that their RVs will be operating trouble-free most of the time. Having been on the other side of the fence as a coach owner, Mehdi knows the value and importance of making service a hassle-free and pleasant experience. Sales itself becomes a service function as a company associate assists each client in finding just the right recreational vehicle with the features to accommodate his travel style and plans.

As a businessman for 25 years, Hosseini realizes that the success of Crossroads is built on employee satisfaction just as much as it is on customer satisfaction. "The only right way to operate your business is to treat your employees in the same way you wish to be treated," he said. "A business is a family and that means we want the best for each other. If there is a job that will better a 'family member's' career, I will be the first to help him or her get that job. But I will do everything in my power to make his or her job here at Crossroads meet his career goals. I never want to act like a boss. We are friends working together to build a company that will benefit all of us," he continued.

Mehdi's "family" philosophy of business goes home with him. His wife, Kim Woodbury, uses her maiden name as the owner of a successful clothing store on Cape Cod. The couple have three children: Taylor, 11; Austin, 9; and Sheridan, 7. Mehdi's daughter, Layla, 23, is a fashion model with a bachelor's degree in communications. She appeared recently in Reebok advertising. The family earlier this year bought a condo in northern Vermont after they developed a passion for skiing.

What is the future for Crossroads R.V. Center? Is the Class A market recession-proof? Mehdi Hosseini believes that it is as long as service drives sales. **RIS**

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# Interviews from New Mexico, Montana and Colorado

by Harold Breuninger



## Irene and Douglas Dean

Former Hometown: Sayner, Wisconsin  
Interviewed at Old West RV Park  
Reed Point, Montana

- The Deans have a spotless 2003 Allegro Bus.
- They became full-timers in July 2003.
- Both Irene and Doug are retired school teachers; Doug taught mathematics for 31 years and Irene taught elementary school for 16 years.
- When Doug retired Irene told him “Me too”!
- They have been married 45 years.
- They have two sons—one in Missoula, Montana, and the other in Chicago.
- They have two grandchildren—a girl 5 and a boy 7.
- Doug does the majority of the driving.
- They travel from 200 to 300 miles per day.
- Doug does not make advance reservations and seldom knows where they will be staying when they start out in the morning.
- They have encountered no problems finding a campground even during the summer months.
- They started camping in the 1970s, first tenting with a pick-up. Then they went to a pop-up, a van, and two Gulfstreams before acquiring their Allegro Bus.
- When they were “young and carefree,” they took their over-loaded pick-up to Alaska and had a wonderful time.
- Doug’s father worked on the Alaska Highway and they visited the many places he had shared with them.
- They have visited Red Bay and were impressed with the service and enjoyed the factory tour.
- They enjoy golfing and country line dancing.
- They usually winter in Arizona.
- They had not signed up for *Roughing It Smoothly* but plan on correcting that oversight.



## Ed and PJ Bennett

Home: Las Vegas, Nevada  
Interviewed at Trailer Ranch RV Resort  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

- The Bennetts own a 2000 Allegro Bus.
- They travel with Abbie, an 8-year-old Shepard-Lab mix.
- They have been motorhoming for 30 years.
- They started out with various campers and progressed up to their present rig.
- They are both retired from Sun Micro Systems located in Silicon Valley, California.
- They travel anywhere from one to five months per year.
- Ed does all of the driving.
- PJ says that Ed would drive 500 to 800 miles a day if she left him to his own devices. She navigates and plans the routes and the stopovers in order to “control” Ed. They usually drive around eight hours between layovers as a compromise.
- They have been to Red Bay several times and continue to be impressed with the service they receive.
- They visit Santa Fe every Fall to attend the Santa Fe School of Cooking.
- One memorable experience was having their windshield hit with a bullet while traveling in Arkansas. It made a clean, neat hole and was probably a random or ricocheting shot.
- PJ enjoys cooking with Ed handling the outside grill.
- They both like to fish and Ed enjoys golfing.



## Bill and Jane Rolf

Home: LeRoy, Kansas  
Interviewed at Heron Lake RV Park  
Ft. Collins, Colorado

- The Rolfs are driving a well-maintained 1998 Allegro Bus.
- They acquired it one year ago from a friend and are very happy with their coach.
- Bill is a retired farmer.
- Jane retired recently after 34 years as district clerk for their local school system.
- They have a son living in Kansas City and a daughter in Garnett, Kansas.
- They have a total of six grandchildren.
- Their previous recreational vehicle experience dates back to the 1970s before raising a family and working took precedence.
- They now take four or five short trips per year and two lasting several months.
- They both enjoy powered parachuting and travel to “fly-ins” where 60 to 70 similar enthusiasts gather for the sport. Usually there are at least four or five other Tiffin owners attending.
- Bill does the driving. However, Jane has driven the coach just to get the “feel of it.”
- They have not been to Red Bay but are looking forward to doing so.
- A memorable occasion was the blowing of an inside rear tire doing extensive damage to the coach. The reason for the tire failure was not apparent so they replaced all wheels with new tires.

**Editor’s Note:** Harold Breuninger has been a contributor to *Roughing It Smoothly* from the beginning. Originally from South Carolina, he and Lynne are full-timers. His interviews give you a good flavor of Tiffin owners who travel the country extensively.



# Mike Jackson: *Mississippi River Pilot*

by Fred Thompson

Occasionally environment, opportunity, and innate ability come together at just the right time. Mike Jackson was born in 1953 in Homer, Louisiana, near where his father worked in the oilfields. While still a small child, his parents moved to Algiers, a suburb of New Orleans on the west bank of the Mississippi River. *Environment.*

His first wife's father, who was a river pilot, got him a job as an oiler in the engine room of a tugboat. It wasn't long before he was working for the cook, then as a deckhand. In a few months, Jackson had earned an Able Seaman Certificate and was well on his way to becoming a captain. *Opportunity.*

At 18 he qualified for an Uninspected Tugboat Operator's License for 200 gross tons. Over the next three years, Mike absorbed knowledge from every experience he had on the Mississippi and found time to study.

Shortly after turning 21, he stood for the exams to get his First Class Pilot's License, and came off with flying colors. His license permit allowed him to operate from the Gulf to the Huey P. Long Bridge, a coverage of 156 miles.

"To pass the exams, I had to draw the river by memory, describe each navigational light, be aware of the locations of sandbars and the shifting of sand, and know how to interpret the navigational reports from the Corps of Engineers. My license included a permit to operate 200 miles offshore to move barges," Mike said.

"Just for the experience, I hired on as a deckhand to make a trip through the Panama Canal. In another sailing, I worked as a deckhand taking barges into Puerto Rico," he said. "We arrived during a strike and the government was using scab labor to unload the barges. It was our job to move the barges back and forth along the dock for unloading. We began to hear pings against the steel and figured out pretty quickly they were shooting at us. We left the barges and got out of Puerto Rico!" Jackson recalled.

Just two years after acquiring his First Class Pilot's License, Jackson was ready to go for his Master of Rivers License. He passed the exams on his first try. *Innate Ability.*

Perhaps because of his age (at 23 he was the second youngest pilot ever to acquire the Master of Rivers License), the commander of the U.S. Coast Guard for the Southeast Region restricted his license to exclude passenger ships. Jackson appealed his decision in Washington. Shortly after, the commander called him and said, "Mike, you must have friends in Washington because they reversed my decision."

Now ready to begin an apprenticeship as a river pilot, Jackson placed an application with the Crescent River Port Pilots Association, one of four associations which train, qualify, and assign pilots to incoming and departing ships. By the time he



Sylvia and Michael Jackson enjoy a moment at the Allegro Club Vermont Rally in October 2006. *At right:* View from the bridge of a bulk carrier. Hazards could be lurking anywhere beneath the serene calm of the Mississippi.

was 24, Jackson was elected into the association which, with a membership of just over one hundred, might well be considered an exclusive fraternity. The safety of the ship's crew and millions of dollars in cargo depend on the skills of the river pilots. In the case of cruise ships, it is the safety of thousands of tourists.

In 1978 when he became a member, the apprenticeship was only six months. Now it is two years: one year serving with another pilot, and then a second year as a cub pilot beginning with smaller ships and moving up gradually in the year to larger vessels.

From Pilottown in the marshy delta where the Mississippi River approaches the Gulf of Mexico, arriving ships bound for the Port of New Orleans must board an experienced river pilot to navigate 106 miles of a river rated as one of the most difficult and treacherous routes in the world. The job requires a thorough knowledge of the sharp twists, hidden sandbars, sunken wreckage, local currents, tides, shoals, aids-to-navigation, landmarks, and weather conditions.\*

To board, pilots must climb onto moving ships via a 30-foot rope ladder leading up the side of the hull from the deck of a pilot's boat. This can be a dangerous undertaking, with the ship and pilot boat pitching back and forth and the ladder swinging from the ship. Once on board, a pilot acts as advisor to the captain, setting the ship's course and speed, while steering the vessel to avoid hazards and other ships. Often pilots must overcome language barriers to direct and coordinate the activities of a foreign crew.

From 100,000-ton tankers to cruise ships with thousands of tourists, the pilots guide vessels of varying shapes and sizes, each with different handling characteristics on the water. Pilots also have to deal with flocculation, a thick black muck called "sea jelly" which traps ships and only occurs in two places in the world — here and Venezuela.

The Crescent River Port Pilots Association has an incredible safety record of 99.95 percent. The pilots communicate constantly with each other and work to maintain that record. Nevertheless, in his 30-year career, Jackson witnessed some harrowing moments. At English Turn (a point on the river 13 miles south of New Orleans where the British turned back during the War of 1812), a small 650-ft. bulk carrier that Mike was piloting lost power. Adrift, it was headed toward several docks. A 65-foot push boat moved quickly from the docks and averted the collision.

The international rule for ships to pass one another is port-to-port. In a section of the river below Venice called Kamikazi Alley, as Jackson's ship was meeting another vessel, the helmsman requested a "two-whistle passage" (starboard-to-starboard) to which Jackson agreed. "At the last possible moment, the helmsman changed his course and tried to go port-to-port," Jackson related. "He struck my starboard bow about 10 feet above the water line and delivered a 30-foot gash. It was a million dollar repair job and even more loss of revenue since it took at least

three weeks to repair the damage."

But as the Crescent River Port Pilots report on their website, 99.95 percent of their pilotage is without incident. "It was really fun to go to work and maneuver the big ships," Jackson said.

A humorous incident occurred when Jackson had to call for assistance on the ship's radio. The person on the other end asked him to identify himself. Cooperatively, he answered, "This is Michael Jackson." The guy on the other end snapped back, "Yeah, right. And this is Mickey Mouse."

The largest ships that Mike piloted were the 100,000-ton tankers and the 4,000 passenger cruise ships from Carnival. Some of the private yachts exceeded 300 feet in length. One even had a 60-foot sailboat recessed into the side of the ship. "They often required us to put cloth booties over our shoes before we boarded," he laughed.

"In our association, 115 pilots have nice rooms at Pilottown. A chef cooks three meals a day. Pilots work a week on, then a week off. The pilotage rules require eight hours off between ships," Jackson explained. "So we had quite a bit of free time. Every 32 weeks, we got an extra week off, so that it amounted to three weeks in a row."

A freighter captain from Greece encouraged them to come to the Mediterranean. Mike and Sylvia arranged for extra time off and first visited the island of Crete. After arriving at the airport, they rented a car to get to their hotel. Spotting a cycle shop, they spent the rest of their time touring the island and its spectacular mountains on a motorcycle. Then it was off to Greece. "Each morning, the question was 'well, where do you want to go today?' We went to Germany and the Black Forest, Austria, Switzerland, and Paris," Mike said. "But Greece was the best part of the trip. The people were super friendly and helpful, the scenery was spectacular, and the whole country was so clean."

Now married to Sylvia for 11 years, Mike enjoys telling how the couple met. His barber of many years could cut his hair in 15 minutes. As the shop's patronage grew, Sylvia began working there and Mike asked her to cut his hair one day when his barber had several waiting for him. "Sylvia took 25 or 30 minutes to cut my hair, giving attention to every detail and chatting with me the whole time. But I liked the results and kept going back to her," he admitted. Eventually, Mike asked her out and Sylvia's

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\*Credit is given to the website of the Crescent River Port Pilots Association for this sentence and the next two paragraphs. [www.crescentpilots.com](http://www.crescentpilots.com) For additional information, click on "A Historical Perspective of Pilotage."






## OWNER PROFILE

*Continued from page 45*

attentiveness paid off when they were married two years later. They each had two children from their previous marriages, three daughters and a son. And now they have 11 grandchildren—nine girls and two boys.

They have a lot in common. Mike and Sylvia both love to hunt and fish. For several years they enjoyed a 30-ft. Grady White, an offshore boat with two 250-hp Yamahas. It had a galley, head, and bedroom. “After a six-hour open sea trip, we could spend the week in Destin. If the Gulf was too choppy, we would take the inland waterway,” Mike said. Now living on a small farm in Covington, Louisiana, they enjoy showing two horses in the Reining Class. One of their horses was formerly owned by Gov. Edwin Edwards, who occasionally exhibited in the same shows. Living in the country, they don’t have far to go for deer hunting.

With the weekly rotation as a river pilot, Mike had nearly 30 weeks a year free. They both decided to get CDL licenses to drive 18-wheelers. It was a great way to see the country and they enjoyed working together as a team. It sparked an interest which would soon come full circle.

With 30 years of service, Mike made plans to retire on December 31, 2005. He and Sylvia went immediately to Tampa and took delivery of a 40-ft. 2006 Phaeton, a purchase he had spent considerable time researching. Mike persuaded Sylvia to retire from her 18-year career as a beautician so they could travel more frequently. Their MO for travel now is the Phaeton pulling a pickup with a Harley in the pickup’s bed. Their most recent trip took them to Jackson Hole and Yellowstone where they spent ten days snowmobiling during the Christmas–New Year’s holiday. “The temperature each night hovered at 20 below zero, but we stayed toasty warm in the Phaeton,” Mike related. In warmer weather, they use the Harley for touring. Sylvia added with a wink, “If you ain’t got a Harley, you ain’t got a motorcycle.” 

## TIFFIN MANAGEMENT TEAM

*Continued from page 20*

Rod’s parents had married on February 29 thirty years earlier.

“My boss offered us a cabin in the mountains—with no plumbing,” Marsha continued. “He told me there was a bear head on the wall in the outhouse, but I didn’t tell Rod. After it got dark on our first night there, Rod went to the outhouse and then I heard yelling,” she laughed. “He came running to the cabin scared out of his wits telling me he had gotten so close he could see the color of the bear’s eyes with his flashlight. I couldn’t stop laughing!”

In August they went from Denver to New York on Rod’s motorcycle, their real honeymoon trip. “We left with \$100, camped out, stayed with friends and relatives, and got back home with five dollars,” Rod said.

In 1974 Rod accepted a position with Coors, but continued to work part-time at the plant nursery, acquiring talents that surface frequently with the plants Rod has in their motorhome today. He served as foreman for 16 years in the finishing department “where we blended, filtered, and packaged the beer.”

Concurrently, their first child, Sheila, was born. The Shultzes have four: Sheila, 34; Shelby, 29; Sheryl, 27; and Bradley, 25. The growth of the family was paralleled by growth in a new business. Mr. Schultz launched his two sons, Rod and Ray, into subdivision development in 1990 on the north side of Denver. The success of the business allowed Rod to leave Coors in 1994. The two brothers opened three subdivisions in 10 years.

“When Bradley graduated from high school in 2000, we began traveling,” Marsha said. At first they traveled in a fifth wheel, and then on March 6, 2003, they bought an Allegro Bus. “Our first trip in the motorhome was to Disney in Florida. On our way, we stopped by Red Bay to get a few minor adjustments,” Marsha recalled. “Rod liked Red Bay and we came back two more times. We wrote on our comment sheet that we would like

to work at the campground if that job should open up.”


Their travels continued as they found favorite spots in the Southwest, New Brunswick, and Florida. Two years later the campground host job came open and the Schultzes agreed to accept Bob Tiffin’s offer without hesitation and began a new phase of their lifestyle in Red Bay in September 2005. Their new job made them “semi-full timers.”

The work format for operating the Allegro Campground is two weeks on and two weeks off. They share duties with Nancy and Joe Solomon whom they met six years ago at a campground near Tucson. The Solomons preceded them at Red Bay by four months.

The new millennium added another dimension to the Shultz’s lifestyle: grandchildren. They have five boys and one cheerleader, with one more on the way. All the more reason to travel on their two-week breaks.

Marsha enjoys machine embroidery, a computerized hobby that allows her to put nearly any design on just about any fabric. She also teaches crafts at Allegro Club rallies. Rod reinforces his reputation as “The Candy Man” by keeping his porcelain chamber pot full of sweets on the counter in the campground office, offered to all who enter.

One of their greatest amusements at the campground is “pet watching.” C.J., the dog, who sits in the passenger seat sans seatbelt while the wife sits on the couch. Max, the parrot, who whistles at the ladies and barks like a dog at the men. The pot-bellied pig whose owners built a ramp for him to enter and exit the motorhome. The parrot who perched on the shoulder of the driver. The cat who insisted on going for a ride every day in the owner’s bicycle basket. And the dog owner, who, when asked “what kind of motorhome do you have?” would answer, “A 40-foot dog run!”

“This job has been a great opportunity for us to serve our fellow RVers. The more you do for others, the more it comes back to you,” Marsha and Rod agreed. 

## FAMILY MANAGEMENT

*Continued from page 6*

Inspectors check the paint carefully and mark spots for halos, trash, and body flaws. At the end of the line in final finish, the inspector refers back to his laptop to be sure the places marked were corrected.

One thing we have done to make the quality assurance process more effective is “how we look at problems,” or problem analysis. In the beginning, the four or five people who may have been involved with a particular problem attended a meeting and sat at a table facing one another. The problem was discussed and solutions vetted but the process was not physically near where the problem occurred. So we moved the meeting to the line and looked at the problem in the environment in which it occurred. We get to the root of the problem quicker and get more ideas on improving the method or process to eliminate the problem. It is always a stand up meeting and I think people really think better on their feet.

We used to have a quality assurance person who worked full time in the service center. Now he makes two trips a day to the service center to gather information from owners on the problems they are having with our newer coaches. These problems are communicated back to our engineers and to the production line to assure that corrections are made in the units currently being built.

As quality manager, my staff and I also look at prototypes being developed in R&D to see if a design might cause a quality problem in production.


The work I do as quality manager is very satisfying because of the people I work with throughout the plant. They know that the purpose of quality assurance is to build a better motorhome, make our customers happy, and make our own jobs more secure. Our employees really want to do a good job. If we can help them to improve how they do their jobs, eliminate consistent ongoing problems, and at the same time improve the quality of our coaches, then we have accomplished our purpose.

I also really enjoy working with my brothers whom I am getting to know more and more as we get older. We make suggestions in each other's departments that can better the company as a whole. We work as a team—Dad wouldn't have it any other way. All four of us have the same goal: to build the best quality and most dependable motorhomes on the market. This is what we strive to teach our employees every day.

Sometimes people ask me what is the future of quality control and quality management here at Tiffin Motorhomes. We have to look at quality with a set of standards that people on the line can easily understand and work by. Our engineers are writing work instruction standards for every engineering and production process. When this is completed, we can audit our standards after we compare our product against the standards we developed. We also have to improve on the components our suppliers provide by testing them thoroughly and providing

feedback. Jumping from one supplier to the next is not always the best solution.

Quality management is a very vital role in production. While our goal is to improve our product, we must also seek to constantly improve our own methods for assessing quality. At the end of the day, quality is a mindset of how people think.

At a personal level, like other managers in the company, Denisha and I have a motorhome built each year that we drive on several weekend trips and two vacations annually. You can work in and out of the coaches in production on a daily basis, but you really don't know how well they function until you live in them. Denisha worked at the plant for nine years in accounts payable until Emmett came along. Now 16 months old and weighing 29 pounds, he has created a new full-time job for Denisha. Just like my parents did with me, it's a great experience to take him along on our trips and make fond memories we can cherish forever. 



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## TIFFIN MANAGEMENT TEAM

*Continued from page 23*

and they started in September. Of course, it was easier for them to move to Red Bay because they were already full timing in their 2003 Allegro Bus.”

Joe had successful surgery on his back in April 2006. Soon after, the Solomons were able to build a barn. Today they have stocked their 30 acres with 15 head of cat-

tle, including Bubba, the bull, eight heifers, and six calves. They added two horses and enjoy riding whenever possible.

Joe and Nancy’s special touch is helping the TMH campers plan their trips to the far northeast and far northwest parts of our North American continent. An inveterate guitarist, Joe organized a Thursday night jam session in the customer lounge at the Service Center. Local musicians

come to pick, producing a pretty good mix of country and bluegrass. Campers often break out their instruments and join in.

At Tiffin Motorhomes, even the service center becomes a “family affair.” **RIS**

*Editor’s Note:* Oddly enough, that barn has a 14-foot wide by 14-foot high opening with a pull-through area that’s 60 feet long. Wonder why?

## REFINING THE PHAETON

*Continued from page 14*

side of the coach, a basement door hides a shallow compartment concealing an access panel to the engine air cleaner.

The next compartment provides storage for the 50-amp service as well as Tiffin’s exclusive Auto Transfer Switch, a patented device which provides a smooth transition from 12-volt power to 110-volt power.

The utility compartment is compact, clearly labeled, and efficiently designed.

It contains the water pump, water filter, hot water bypass, grey and black tank dumping valves, brass connections for city water and water tank fill, black tank flush connection, cable and tripod connections, and land-line phone jack.

The forward compartment next to the front wheel contains a well-labeled fuse panel, the windshield wash fluid reservoir, and the compressed air connection. Buy an air hose and you can check and air your tires without visiting a service station.

On a twin-rail slide-out, the coach’s 8.0 kw Onan Quiet Diesel generator is accessed for service through the front cap. Capable of powering both 15,000 BTU air conditioners at the same time, the generator can provide enough amps to power all systems in the coach.

When it comes to parking this 40-footer, a flip of a switch on your side console will turn on two powerful docking lights on each side of the coach. Using your side and rear cameras, you’ll find the back-in sites a piece of cake.

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## Driving the Phaeton 40QTH

First of all, the driver’s chair is just downright comfortable. The 6-way power seat with adjustable arm rests allows you to get into any conceivable position. The Cummins ISC 360-hp 8.3 liter engine provides more than adequate power. It propelled the coach with a strong even surge of power from a standing stop to 60 mph in just 25 seconds.

With Freightliner’s 55-degree wheel cut, tight turns on city streets and campground maneuvering were not a problem. With four airbags, the coach has a firm feel on the road and no road wandering was noticed in the steering. There was no significant nosediving when hard braking was necessary.

The interior quietness—almost free of road noise—made it possible to enjoy the surround sound stereo and conversation at normal levels while underway.

With the popular features that have been added to this floorplan, buyers may have to stand in line to take a delivery on this coach. **RIS**





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# Visiting a Land of Giants

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Text and Photography by Norman Spray

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**We could at times** glimpse mountains rising unimposingly ahead but there was nothing to foretell the immensity of the experience that awaited as our Allegro cruised effortlessly across San Joaquin Valley flatlands, following California Hwy. 180 east from Fresno to one of only two entrances into the Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks in the Sierra Nevada mountains.

Immense and awesome. As we were soon to learn, major attractions in these parks are described by words ending in “**est**,” as in **biggest** trees in the world, including the **largest** living thing on earth; the **deepest** canyon in North America; **highest** mountain in the lower 48 states; one of the country’s **swiftest** flowing rivers; some of the **loveliest** vistas imaginable. Some call the parks **best** in the **west**, a much-debated opinion.

About 40 miles east of Fresno, the road left the heating-up flatlands to begin an hour-long twisting, turning climb into those “unimposing” mountains, topping out at 6,589 feet at the Grant Grove Visitor Center in Kings Canyon National Park. On entry, we were given a National Park Service newsletter containing road and weather information, a map of these “twin” parks and their attractions. Reading it, we congratulated ourselves on entering Kings Canyon on Hwy 180 rather than going through Visalia and taking Hwy 198 to the Sequoia Park entrance some 30 miles to the south. Hwy. 198 enters Sequoia park at only 1,700 feet altitude at the Foothills Visitor Center. From there, the paved Generals Highway connecting the two parks abruptly takes you up almost a mile in elevation over 22 switchbacks and 200 sharp curves. The Park Service advises against taking vehicles over 22 feet long over the most tortuous section of the Generals Highway.

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Finding a way to picture the General Sherman tree to show its immensity is all but impossible. This shot focuses on the upper third of the tree. There is no way the camera can explain that the trunk of this tree is still, almost unbelievably, seven feet in diameter 160 feet above the ground.

Everything is mind-boggling big, wondrous, and beautiful in Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks, adjacent reserves some call Best in the West

## Into Kings Canyon

No such “advice” was offered for the Kings Canyon Scenic Byway route from the Grant Grove Visitor Center to the Cedar Grove Visitor Center and campgrounds 35 miles to the north and east. That turned out to be a wondrous trip, taking us first across Sequoia National Forest lands, then descending into the Kings River canyon and re-entering the boundaries of the park. Our 33-foot Allegro (pulling a Chevrolet Tracker) moaned and groaned some as we often geared down on downslopes. Billie, my erstwhile companion, sometimes added moans and groans of her own when she felt herself “hanging” over cliffs looking thousands of feet down to the river.

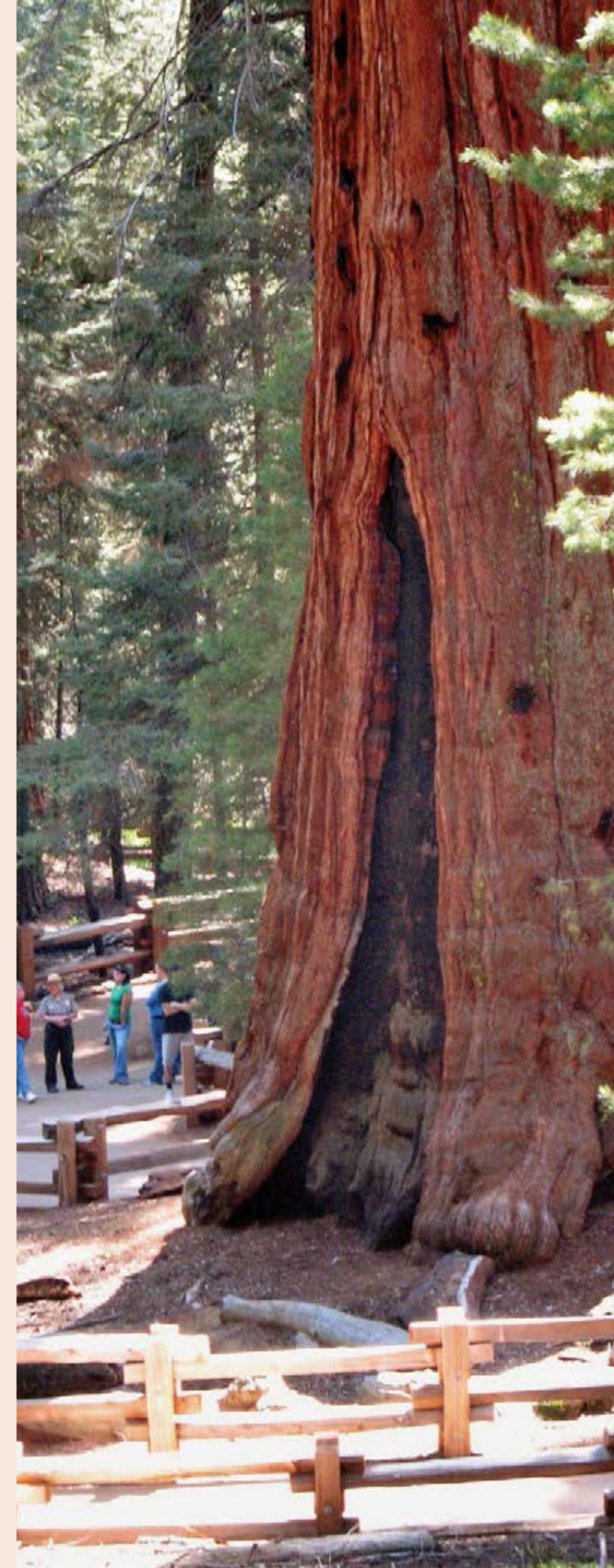
Views were spectacular, both through the windshield and at the few designated overlooks where we stopped. On the canyon floor, 2,500 feet below, the rushing, roaring, white-foaming Kings River tumbled through steep mile-high granite walls, reminding us that snow melt continued in the High Country. There were, in fact, only three more days left in the merry month of May and the road into Cedar Grove, closed from November until late April, was only now beginning to carry spring-time visitor loads.

## Camping in Cedar Grove

That early season timing worked to our advantage when we arranged for a camp site at the Cedar Grove Visitor

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The General Sherman Tree, 274.9 feet tall, has endured and survived many onslaughts during its estimated 2,200 years on earth, among them fires that actually have been found necessary for regeneration of the species. Like other large sequoias, the tree is encased in a thick layer of cinnamon-colored bark that helps protect against fire, which Sequoia National Park professionals think may have burned at the base of this tree maybe 100 or more times over the centuries. The most obvious scar, on the uphill eastern side of the tree, measures 12 feet at the base and forms a triangle, the apex of which is 26 feet up the trunk. Less-dramatic scorch marks on the south side of the tree extend more than 52 feet above the ground.







Center. “We’re not yet crowded,” the young attendant said. “Use the Sentinel Campground. Cruise it and take any open space you like.”

We found a few pull-through sites, one of which we happily occupied to avoid unhooking the Tracker. This turned out to be a naturally beautiful campground with incense cedar and redwoods well over 200 feet tall standing sentinel protecting quiet and peace as a nearly-full moon slowly moved overhead, silhouetting treetops under a soft, silvery glow. No hookups were available, nor are there any in the 10 campgrounds in the two parks that allow overnight RV camping. (Spigot water and restrooms are available in or near most campgrounds. In summer months, showers are available at seven of the camps. There are only three dump stations, all in Sequoia National Park, and only one of these is open year-round).

The following morning, we climbed the 35 miles back up the Kings Canyon Byway to the Grant Grove Visitor Center and Grant Village. There we parked the motorhome, unhooked the Tracker and headed out to see for ourselves some of the world’s most fascinating natural wonders, the giant sequoia trees that first attracted attention to this area and caused creation of the Sequoia National Park 117 years earlier. First stop was in nearby Grant Grove where the Grant Tree Trail takes one on a third-of-a-mile walk climaxing at the 40-foot diameter base of the General Grant Tree, a 267-foot behemoth that President Calvin Coolidge proclaimed “The Nation’s Christmas Tree” and President

Eisenhower later made the only living National Shrine honoring Americans who died in war.

### **Biggest Living Thing on Earth**

Next, we drove southward on the Generals Highway, stopping at the Redwood Mountain overlook to peer down on the world’s largest remaining sequoia grove, one where 15,800 sequoias over one foot in diameter grow on 3,100 acres. An hour later, we entered the Giant Forest in Sequoia National Park, an 1,800-acre grove home to 8,400 such trees, including three of the five largest sequoias in the world.

I stood under the greatest of these, the General Sherman Tree, with a group of tourists who made a 20-minute downhill hike to its base. Surrealistically, an awed, even reverent, church-like silence fell over this shaded group as a soft, chilly breeze swept upslope. There seemed little one could or needed to say. This magnificent specimen, the largest living thing on earth, stood before us displaying battle scars incurred in its estimated 2,200 years here and challenging each of us, in his own way, to comprehend its immensity. As eyes moved 275 feet up the trunk to focus on battered-looking upmost tips fading into a cloudless ice blue sky, I wondered if others in the group felt, as I did, somehow closer to the Creator of all things, big and small.

The spell, if that’s what it was, passed soon enough and excited chatting broke the silence. Some in the group ambled a little further down the trail to a “shuttle stop” to await a bus to



carry them uphill to the parking lot. Others struck out on the Congress Trail, a fairly-level two-mile loop through the sequoia grove which pioneering conservationist and naturalist John Muir named “The Giant Forest.”

### **Astounding Measurements**

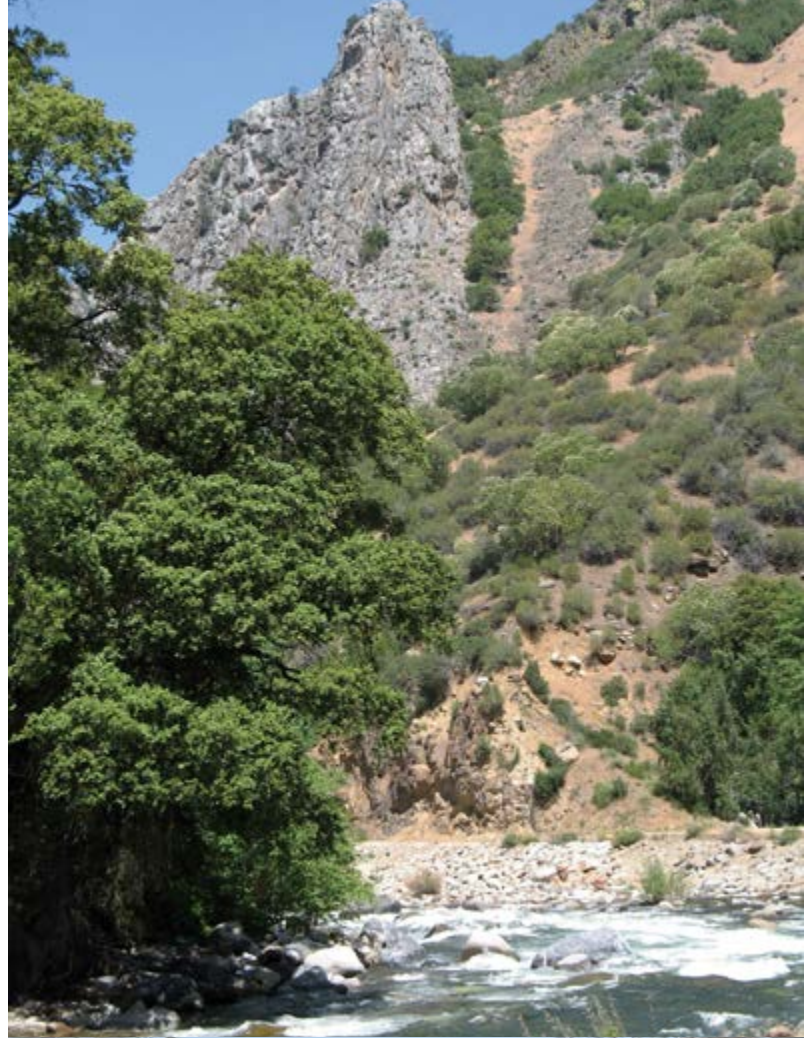
Among foresters, tree sizes are based on volume and it is that which makes the General Sherman largest of all the world’s trees. Other sequoias in the park are taller, in fact, and the General Grant tree in Kings Canyon National Park has a greater base diameter at ground level. A coastal redwood cousin in Northern California has grown to an astounding record height of 376 feet. Some cypress trees have basal trunks larger in circumference than sequoias but do not grow as high. General Sherman’s maximum diameter at the base is 36.5 feet, big enough to block every lane of a three-lane highway were it growing there. Though its base at ground level is larger, 40 feet in diameter, the General Grant trunk tapers to a smaller diameter much sooner than the General Sherman which has a trunk diameter of nearly seven feet 180 feet above the ground. General Sherman’s first large branch is 120 feet above ground.

Professionals who know say that works out to an organic mass volume of over 52,500 cubic feet. The nearest rival, the nearby Washington tree, has a nine percent lesser volume of 47,580 cubic feet.

Surrounded by other giants as they are (other conifer varieties typically grow much larger here than in other areas), I found it hard to grasp just how big these sequoia trees really are. Dr. William C. Tweed, a career professional in the National Park Service, helps when he writes that the General Sherman is as tall as an average 27-story building. The tree’s first significant branch could brush the roof of a 13-story building. And, Tweed adds, total volume would translate into 630,000 board feet—theoretically enough 1 × 12 planks that could be laid end to end to make a 12-inch wide walk 119.3 miles long. All in this one tree! Tweed reports that a branch which fell from the Sherman Tree in 1978 had a diameter of over six feet and a length of at least 140 feet, itself big enough to rank among larger conifers in other parts of the country.

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*Above left:* Kings Canyon is a story of water and rock, visible in this view of waters rushing down the South Fork of the river late in May. Flowing alongside the road to Cedar Grove Village, the river can be deceptively peaceful, tempting people to its banks to beat the heat or fish. But rifles and rapids mandate caution. Drowning is the number one cause of fatalities in the park. As gravity draws the river downslope, it is joined by creek after creek. By the time the South and Middle Forks join deep in the canyon, the Kings is a mighty river, worthy of the name given it by early Spanish explorers: El Rio de los Santos Reyes, “The River of the Holy Kings.” • *Above right:* Sheer granite cliffs, some rising almost a mile high, form walls of the narrow Kings River Canyon. None of the trails climbing out of the valley can be called easy, though they are laid out along the least demanding routes possible. • *Right:* This view from Redwood Mountain overlook on the Generals Highway looks down on the world’s largest remaining groves of sequoia trees, including the Redwood Mountain Grove where 15,800 sequoias cover 3,100 acres.





## Lowdown on the Sky High Giants of the Sierras

The Big Trees, the giant sequoias that are the No. 1 attraction in the Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, are by sheer volume the largest living things on earth. They may also be among the most fascinating.

In all the world, giant sequoias grow naturally only on moist unglaciated west-side slopes of the Sierra Nevada mountains, usually at mile-high elevations between 5,000 and 7,000 feet. Only 75 of these naturally-growing groves exist, scattered over nearly 200 miles. Of these, 39 (including all of the largest) grow within the boundaries of these two parks. Only eight groves exist north of the Kings River. (However, sequoia trees do grow in Europe and elsewhere, the product of seed harvested in the Sierra Nevada.)

Scientists and foresters are hard put to say with certainty how old these giants are but believe the oldest may have been around for up to 3,200 years, growing since the last Ice Age. On one thing they agree: the biggest trees are the fastest-growing specimen, not necessarily the oldest. The General Sherman tree, biggest of them all, is thought to be “only” 2,000 to 2,200 years old but adds 40 cubic feet to its trunk each year. That’s equal to the trunk of a 50-foot tall average tree that has a basal diameter of one foot.

Unlike many other conifers, the giant sequoia reproduces only from seed.

Also unlike others, it often holds seed cones on the tree for as long as 20 years.

A Big Tree may add as many as 2,000 egg-sized cones a year, eventually holding up to 40,000 cones, each containing 100 to 300 seeds so small it takes over 90,000 to weigh a pound.

Some seed are released each year by beetles and squirrels, particularly the small chickaree, but fall on forest litter with little chance to germinate. The real business of reproduction begins with fire. In recent years, foresters have learned that a hot low-burning fire has interesting effect. The heat seems to dry green seed cones which the sequoia has been hoarding and triggers release of millions of seed. These fall to a forest floor where fire has burned off litter and understory brush, leaving a clean seed bed fertilized by burned organic matter. The result often is a new crop of baby giant sequoias growing in open areas where the fire has eliminated brush that would otherwise shade out necessary sunlight.

Future fires usually thin out such a crop, giving a few surviving seedlings space needed to grow to giant status. New sequoias usually spend their first 500 to 700 years growing tall then, like some middle-aged people, fatten up their girth.

Fire (and its smoke) often can be seen in the sequoia groves in both these parks as foresters ignite “prescribed” burns. Visitors are informed in advance to prevent alarm and are,

in fact, encouraged to watch so long as they observe established safety rules. Those allergic or sensitive to smoke are given opportunity to leave the area.

These “prescribed burns” clean out fallen limbs, litter, and understory brush before the fuel source builds to the point a fire might roar out of control. Thick bark layers usually protect old sequoias from serious fire damage though most display ugly scars from forest fires long past, fires presumably most often started by lightning.

The General Sherman tree itself probably has endured 50 to 100 fires over its lifetime, writes William C. Tweed of the National Park Service.

This famed tree’s largest scar appears as a deep triangle with a 12 foot base that extends to a tip 26 feet high up the tree. Scar marks on an opposite side go up to more than 52 feet high.

Though many of these giant trees are centuries old, some are lost now and then.

Most commonly, they simply topple over, often without obvious cause. The trees have no tap roots but depend on shallow wide-ranging root networks. This may explain why the biggest sequoias usually are ones without close competing neighbors.

These are trees with a story—and it’s a big one, big in every way.



*Far left:* Four giant sequoia trees stand above the parking area at the Grants Grove Visitor Center and Village near the Hwy.180 entrance to the park. Their close grouping is a bit unusual. The largest of these giants, which have shallow, far-ranging root systems, more commonly stand alone free of close competition. • *Left:* Our 33-foot Allegro is dwarfed by big trees in the Sentinel campground near the Cedar Grove Visitor Center. Tree in the foreground most likely is an incense cedar, a species often mistaken for sequoia since both grow to immense size in this park and both have reddish-tinted bark.





Sequoia is the nation's second oldest national park (Yellowstone was the first), established by Congress in 1890. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Kings Canyon into being in 1940. Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks adjoin, and are administered by a single management team. Together, they occupy 865,257 acres, only a small portion of the 400-mile-long Sierra Nevada range along the eastern California border. Kings Canyon also abuts the Sequoia, Sierra, and Inyo National Forests

### The Three Worlds

Tremendous diversity in plant and animal life occurs within the parks. This is due largely if not entirely to the three “different worlds” resulting from altitudes that rise from a low of about 1,700 feet at the eastern Ash Mountain foothills entrance to the 14,495-foot pinnacle of Mount Whitney, highest point in the lower 48 states. Like the General Sherman tree, Whitney just happens to be a little higher than its mountain neighbors, many of which in the Whitney group and along the Pallisade Crest in Kings Canyon also top out above 14,000 feet.

Dramatic changes in altitude beget dramatic changes in temperatures and moisture, so much so that spring flowers may bloom from January to October as spring moves from the foothill exposures to the highest slopes. There are places where it never snows and places where snow seldom melts.

The blazing hot 1,700 to 5,000-foot “foothill world” is parched brown and desert-like by mid-summer. The far more user-friendly 5,000 to 7,000-foot “world of the trees” remains green and cool (temperatures rarely exceed 80 degrees on even hottest days) while the 7,000 to 14,000-foot “high country backpack wilderness world” (there are no roads above 8,000 feet) is always cool and can get downright cold even in August. Ice never melts in living glaciers on some high slopes.

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*From top right:* The Giant Forest Museum, a “must” stop for current and historical information about Sequoia National Park and its trees is itself surrounded by big trees. In fact, the popular two thirds-mile Big Trees Trail starts here. • U.S National Park Service Forest Ranger Mary Anne Carlton, veteran of 33 years service in Sequoia National Park, enthralles listeners with park lore as they wait the arrival of a shuttle that will bus them back uphill to the General Sherman tree parking lot. The shuttle service runs between key locations in the park during spring and summer. • To help visitors comprehend the immensity of the General Sherman tree, the National Park Service laid this stonework patio roughly matching the actual circumference of the tree: 102.6 feet in circumference at the base and 36.5 feet across in diameter. Despite careful measuring, though, this pattern becomes ever so slightly inaccurate each year. That’s because the General Sherman tree no longer grows upward but each year forms a ring about a quarter inch thick over the entire surface of the main stem of the tree. That doesn’t seem like much until one realizes that there is roughly 12,000 square feet of surface area on the trunk. Each year’s growth, about 40 cubic feet, equals the size of an average tree that is one foot in basal diameter and 50 feet tall! • The heartwood in sequoia trees is red in color, shown in this fallen log, but mature sequoia wood is more brittle than that of its redwood cousins, one factor that helped save remaining sequoia groves from clear cutting as happened to many redwood groves.







Parts of the parks are open year-round, depending on weather and road condition, but services and nature walks, campfire and other programs conducted by Park rangers are limited in winter months. Checking by telephone is a good idea when planning an early spring or late fall visit. Some roads may be closed.

Heaviest precipitation seems to occur during general storms between October and May in the “big tree” elevations between 5,000 and 8,000 feet. Several roads, including the scenic byway to Cedar Grove on the floor of Kings Canyon, are closed from sometime in November to April or early May.

By then, the foothill world will be rapidly moving into summer. Wildflowers that began blooming at the lower elevations in January may be fading or already have faded. But deep snow remains to make trails in the High Sierra a challenge best left to the experienced. Cross country skiing remains a popular activity in early spring. Snowmobiles are not allowed in the parks but may follow designated routes in the adjacent Sequoia National Forest.

For us and most first-time visitors, I suspect, it’s all about the trees in Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks. But many of the 1.5 million who come every year are drawn by other attractions: super camping, day hiking, nature trails, picnicking, fishing, backpacking wilderness experiences, horseback riding, ski touring, photography, birding, free Ranger and Campfire programs, and wildlife viewing, all amidst scenic wonders. For example:

### **Kings Canyon Attractions**

In Kings Canyon, the road to Cedar Grove is itself an attraction. Then, from the Cedar Grove Village, it’s only a three mile drive then a five-minute walk to Roaring River Falls, a powerful waterfall cascading through a narrow granite chute. A 1.5-mile trail across Zumwalt Meadow provides unparalleled views of high granite cliffs and Kings River. At Road’s End, where paving ends beneath high granite walls 5.5 miles east of Cedar Grove, several popular trails begin that lead to the river and points in the High Sierra. High country trails follow easiest routes up the granite walls and lead to spectacular views but challenge even fit and/or experienced backpackers. One nine-mile, five-hour round trip starting here takes the hiker to Mist Falls, one of the Park’s largest waterfalls. The 13-mile Don Cecil Trail starting only two-tenths-mile east of Cedar Grove Village climbs a slope past Sheep Creek Cascade, gaining 4,000 feet in elevation to 8,531. Even more demanding is the Hotel Creek Trail which starts two-tenths of a mile north of the Village and climbs 1,200 feet up steep inclines to the Cedar Grove Overlook.

From Grant Grove Village, near Kings Canyon’s entrance, it’s only a 2.3-mile drive (not recommended for motorhomes or trailers) and a fourth-mile walk to Panoramic Point’s spectacular view of the high Sierra and starting point for the four-mile round trip Park Ridge Trail. Skis or snowshoes will be needed in winter and often in early spring. The Grant Tree parking area, also near the Kings Park entrance, is starting point for the quiet 1.5 mile North Grove Loop Trail through big trees and conifers





and the 1.5 “Dead Giant Loop” that passes a huge fallen sequoia and a picturesque mill pond.

Other scenic, educational one-of-a-kind attractions are reached driving southeast on Generals Highway toward Sequoia National Park. These include a two-mile round trip hike to Buena Vista Peak; a drive into Redwood Canyon, home of the world’s largest grove of sequoias; a two-mile trail to the 8,209-foot summit of Big Baldy that overlooks Redwood Canyon; and Kings Canyon and Redwood Mountain roadside overlooks.

### Sequoia National Park Attractions

In Sequoia, we stopped at the Giant Forest Museum to learn about the big trees, park history, attractions, trails, and conditions. In addition to the General Sherman tree, many visitors enjoy walking the two-mile Congress Trail that loops through the heart of the Giant Forest sequoia grove and a two-thirds-mile Big Trees Trail that starts at the museum. Also beginning at the museum is a three-mile dead-end road (not recommended for trailers or motorhomes) to Moro Rock. On the “rock,” a steep quarter-mile staircase climbs to a granite dome for a breathtaking view of the Great Western Divide and the western half of the park. The road to the Rock passes through Tunnel Log, a fallen sequoia that was tunneled through (a bypass is provided for larger vehicles). This road ends at Crescent Meadow where summer wildflowers bloom in fragile meadows and visitors can take a mile-long trail to Tharp’s Log, summer home of the first settler in the Giant Forest. And the 71-mile High Sierra Trail to Mt. Whitney starts here.

Other popular trails include Tokopah Falls, which starts at the Lodgepole Visitor Center and campground roughly half-way between entrances to the two parks, follows the Marble Fork of the Kaweah River for 1.7 miles, and ends below granite cliffs and the Tokopah Canyon waterfall; and a 1.7-mile, 700-foot vertical climb to the rocky summit of Little Baldy.

At the southern end of the park, the winding, steep Mineral

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*Top left:* Here, the South Fork of the Kings River flows down narrow Kings Canyon. The V in the mountains first was carved by rivers flowing from the mountains toward the Pacific. The trough was widened and deepened during several Ice Ages. • *Bottom left:* There’s a roadside pull-out called “Junction View” on Kings Canyon Scenic Byway where visitors get this view of the confluence of the South and Middle Forks of the Kings River. • *Top right:* A visitor walking into a passage cut through a fallen sequoia near the General Sherman tree in the Giant Forest examines “inside” sequoia wood. There’s also a “tunnel log” in Sequoia National Park which cars drive through. There remain living redwood trees in Northern California which have been tunneled to permit the passage of automobiles through the tree trunks. No such drive-through living sequoias remain. The last was a famed sequoia in Yosemite National Park which toppled years ago. • *Bottom right:* Moss thrives on the trunk of a big redwood tree in the Cedar Grove area of Kings Canyon National Park. Though related to the sequoia, the redwood usually grows naturally only along the foggy California coast while the sequoia grows naturally only on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada. Sequoias have cinnamon bark but redwoods, like this one, are clad in gray.







Sequoia National Park visitors pass beneath many Big Trees on an easy 20-minute downhill stroll from the parking lot to the General Sherman tree, largest living thing on this planet and easily the “star” of the show in the Giant Forest.

King road open after May 25 (and not recommended for RVs) ends at 7,800 feet, making it the park’s highest road. Here begin many hiking trails into higher country, some of which remain snowy through spring. Visitors are warned to learn about mar-mots and how they often damage parked cars.

Another twisting road (no vehicle longer than 22 feet is permitted) leads to Crystal Cave, a complex marble cavern more than three miles long in which temperature is constant at 49 degrees. Public guided tours usually last about 45 minutes. No wheelchairs, baby strollers or walkers are allowed. Guided crawling, climbing and exhausting “wild cave tours” lasting four to six hours can be arranged at a cost of \$129 per person.

Not all attractions and activities are available year-round.

### Seasons in the Parks

*In the spring*, count on deep snow in the high Sierras. The road into Kings Canyon to Cedar Grove usually is open by mid-April but the Mineral King Road likely won’t open until Memorial Day. If snow has melted, as it usually has by May, Crystal Cave tours will be available and hiking along Moro Rock and Redwood Canyon trails should be okay. The major tree attractions in the Giant Forest and Grant sequoia groves will be accessible and inviting. Four campgrounds available to RVs are open year-round, three in Sequoia and one near Grants Grove in Kings Canyon.


*In summer*, July to early September, activities and temperatures peak. It’s hot and dry in the foothills but days are warm and nights cool in the inviting “tree world.” All roads are open, barring unforeseen circumstances, a Giant Forest shuttle is running, Ranger nature walks and programs and Crystal Cave tours are available daily.

*In fall*, mid-September through November, the crowds are gone. There are fewer Ranger programs. A few facilities close but many remain open. Sudden storms can drop snow as low as the sequoia groves so one needs to keep informed. The road down into Kings Canyon to Cedar Grove closes late in November.

*In winter*, November to mid-April, the sequoia groves are majestic, covered in snow. Even so, the Generals Highway is closed only briefly for plowing after winter storms. Four campgrounds are open. It’s a time for sledding, skiing or snowshoeing and there’s a designated snowplay area. Snowplay gear can be rented at Wuksachi Village near Lodgepole in Sequoia and at Grant Grove Visitor Center and Village in Kings Canyon. With winter storms an ever-present possibility, the prudent camper arrives with tire chains, layers of warm clothes, and emergency water and food.

No gasoline stations operate anytime in the parks and only Grant Grove Market sells cans of emergency gas. When the Kings Canyon Scenic Byway is open, gas is available at the Kings Canyon Lodge on the way to Cedar Grove .

Only those who hike, ski, or travel on horseback or pack animals reach the high country wilderness since no roads cross the Sierra Nevada within the parks. Over 723,000 of the parks’ acres are officially classified as wilderness. More than 800 miles of trails are marked, including the famous John Muir and High Sierra trails. Wilderness hiking and camping has become so popular, however, that the parks have instituted a quota system limiting the number of overnight campers permitted on trails between late May and late September. Permits are required. The idea is to minimize ecological damage.

When the time came for us to hook the Tracker behind the Allegro and descend again to the flatlands, it was with the humbling knowledge that we, small insignificant individuals that we are, had indeed walked among giants. You don’t just “see” the immense unique wonders of nature in Kings Canyon and Sequoia: you feel them, you experience them; and you come away knowing it was good. 

### If You Plan a Trip to Sequoia and Kings Canyon . . .

- Best place to start, if you have internet, is the parks’ web site [www.nps.gov/seki](http://www.nps.gov/seki)
- 24-hour park information number is: 550-565-3341
- Kings Canyon Park Services: 866-522-522-6966  
[www.visitsequoia-kingscanyon.com](http://www.visitsequoia-kingscanyon.com)
- Sequoia Natural History Association: 559-565-3759  
[www.sequoiahistory.org](http://www.sequoiahistory.org)
- For permits and information about wilderness camping: 559-565-2766
- For California road conditions: 800-427-7623
- For horseback riding/pack trip information:

#### Cedar Grove:

559-565-3464 in summer; 559-337-2314 off-season.

#### Grant Grove:

559-335-9292 summer; 559-337-2314 off-season.

#### Horse Corral in Sequoia National Forest:

559-565-3404 summer; 559-564-6429 off-season

559-679-3573 cell





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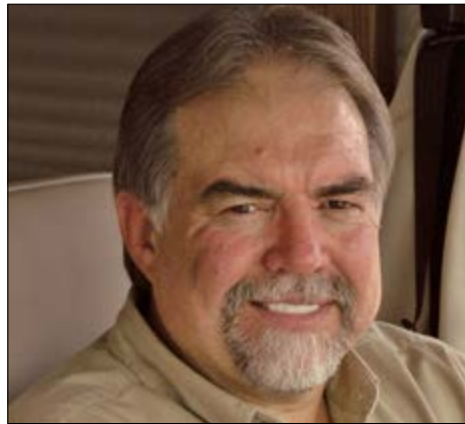
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**Inman's Answers**

As the editor of "Serious Tech Talk," Danny Inman, 32-year veteran with Tiffin Motorhomes, invites your questions.

Please use the postcard and send Danny your questions about your motorhome and its operation, especially those questions that may be useful to all of our readers. Address your letter to:

Danny Inman  
 Roughing It Smoothly  
 PO Box 292912  
 Tampa, FL 33637-2912

Danny would also like to hear your ideas, suggestions, and innovations that would make our motorhomes more useful and functional. If you have a photograph to send, please put the postcard and photo in an envelope and send it to the same address. Please send a SASE if you would like for us to return your photographs, disk files, and manuscript.

We look forward to seeing this column grow larger with each issue. For answers to urgent questions and problems, call the Parts and Service number at 256-356-0261.

**Dear Danny . . .**

We purchased our 2008 Phaeton in August (nice coach). This is our fourth motorhome, starting with a 1986 Allegro. I have a problem understanding why the awning extends straight out over the passenger-side slideout. The awning is level and holds water in puddles on top when it rains.

In 2007 the awnings had a slope so the water would run off. Can the 2008 awning be modified to have a slope like the 2007?

There is a channel on the right side that is at the roofline and makes it look like the engineers were undecided as to where to locate the awning.

Can a solar panel be installed on a Phaeton to keep the batteries charged without running the generator?

Gordon Hearn  
 Okeechobee, Florida

Dear Gordon,  
 On page 8 of the Carefree owner's manual, you will find instructions for adjusting the pitch of your awning. If you adjust it too much, the corners of the slide-out may rub against it and cause premature wear.

An after-market solar panel can be installed to keep your house batteries charged. Check with authorized dealers or a service center for the proper size for your coach.

I am a former owner of a 40-ft. 2002 Zephyr. I am interested in the Allegro Bus 43QRP, but only if it is built on a Powerglide chassis. I have an Alpine now and its chassis designed by Gary Jones is no question one of the best handling coaches on the market. I was glad to hear you had Gary Jones design your new chassis. Do you have a timetable as to when the Powerglide's tag axle will be available? Also can you offer any information on Onan's hybrid generator? I would like to have a subscription to *Roughing It Smoothly*.

Larry Norland  
 Crestview, Florida

Dear Larry,  
 We are currently getting independent testing and certification done on the Powerglide chassis with the tag axle. We expect to begin offering these units in May of this year.

Onan has not released a hybrid generator to TMH at this writing. They are trying to get a unit to us this year for testing.

Is there a reason for having such a small drain pipe for the fresh water tank? The motorhomes I owned before our 2001 Allegro were the same way. It takes a while to drain the tank. If the drain pipe were larger, it could drain much faster.

Bob & Lynn Schramm  
 Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

Dear Bob & Lynn,  
 We have incorporated a one-inch drain pipe within the last year. You will be able to drain our tanks within five to ten minutes depending on the size of the tank.

We purchased a new 2008 Phaeton four months ago and love it. We are full-timers. In the past week, two day-night shades have broken. Can't

tougher cords be put in these shades to begin with? They are a real pain to repair. Thanks.

Pam Heckman  
 Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Pam,  
 We are using the MCD roller shades on the Zephyr and the Allegro Bus this year. Owners seem to like them and they will probably be added to the Phaeton in 2009. We began using stronger cords on the day-night shades two years ago and they do break less frequently.

When will Tiffin integrate the popular EMS (Energy Management System) Intellic Powerline System? I have this great system in my Winnebago, and am waiting for Tiffin to start using it. Soon I hope! Could I be placed on your mailing list for *Roughing It Smoothly*? Great magazine!

Will Snell  
 Destin, Florida

Dear Will,  
 We have evaluated the EMS Intellic Powerline and have elected to continue with our present system until we can do more research on integrating it into our current engineering.

We have a 2004 Allegro Bay 36DB which we purchased new. The plastic line for the icemaker deteriorated due to the heat tape malfunctioning. I cannot get the refrigerator out to replace the plastic line. After removing all of the screws, the caulking used during manufacturing is holding the refrigerator in place.

Gary at Northshore RV tried to remove it but was concerned that damage would occur if too much pressure was put on the trim to break the bond between the plywood and the refrigerator. Do you have any suggestions on how to remove the refrigerator?

Frank L. Krenkel  
 Hammond, Louisiana

Dear Frank,  
 The caulking that you can get to needs to be cut away with a razor knife, as well as the caulking around the faceplate on the front of the refrigerator. Then you have to place force on the refrigerator to get it out. If molding or frame wood gets broken, you will need to order replacement wood. This is not an easy repair, but fortunately we have corrected that problem so that current installations can be removed easily.

We purchased a previously owned 1996 Allegro Bus six years ago. Recently, when lowering the

jacks (HWH 610), the left front jack goes down and then releases. It did this two or three times. I switched the ignition from accessory to off.

How do I correct this error? The jacks still work, but the warning light and buzzer will not shut off when all four jacks are in the up position. I was low in hydraulic fluid due to a leak in the solenoid of the left front jack. The 1996 diesel is built on a 39'10" Oshkosh chassis, serial number 40ZN6EL11T2902568.

Also, can you provide instructions on how to lube the slide-out. Do you have schematics available?

Robert L. Bullock  
 Lugoff, South Carolina

Dear Robert,  
 Most likely the electric solenoid is hanging and allowing the fluid to return to the reservoir. There is a magnetic pressure switch that will have to be replaced to correct the warning light and buzzer not shutting off. On the slide-out, first clean the shaft with a silicone spray and wipe the rubber seals with a dry silicone spray. No further lubrication is necessary.

We just purchased a 2008 Allegro 35TSA—beautiful coach!!! We are new to the Tiffin family. I have two questions. First, the televisions that came with the coach are not HD. I just saw a commercial stating that all televisions have to be HD by 2009, or you have to purchase an HD converter. Why did Tiffin not install the most updated equipment in the 2008 Allegro? Will the converters work in the 2008 Allegro? What can you tell me about the HD converter that I will have to buy?

Second, in the Allegro Club magazine, *Side Roads*, September 2007, an article titled "Tiffin's Entry-Level 2008 Allegro Offers High Ticket Features" discusses new features including an automatic satellite dish as well as a satellite dish tripod connection. Our 2008 did not come with those features. Is our coach pre-wired so that a satellite dish can be added?

We were not given a "walk through," so now

we find it necessary to read any information we can find, and we are getting valuable information from your answers in "Serious Tech Talk." Any information will be appreciated!!

Tammy Turner  
 Fernley, Nevada

Dear Tammy,  
 Your televisions will work with the HD converters. The converter will process the HD data and convert it to the televisions in your coach. Your coach is not prepped for the satellite, but it can be added easily. We will send you an orientation DVD for your coach which was recently published by Tiffin Motorhomes.

I have a 2006 Allegro 32BA purchased new in December 2006. I took two long trips last summer and logged 2,600 miles. In preparing the motorhome for winter storage, I discovered the water level in the two 6-volt batteries was below the plates. I brought the water up to the indicated level with one-half gallon of distilled water per battery. The batteries would not take a full charge, so I dumped the water and refilled them with new battery acid. Now the batteries will take a full charge.

My question is this: why after only 2,600 miles did the batteries lose so much acid? Could there be something wrong with the power converter/charger? I checked and the two-step voltage jack is not plugged into the power converter.

Dwight Caler  
 Capshaw, Alabama

Dear Dwight,  
 On the house batteries, the mileage on the motorhome does not matter as much as the time the unit was plugged into shore power. Any time the unit is plugged in, it is placing a charge into the house batteries. It is recommended that while the motorhome is being used that you check the water level in the batteries at least once a month. If you check your converter and it is putting out 13.5 to 14.5 volts, then everything is okay. If it is putting out more or less, then you probably

have a problem with the converter. The converter should operate fine without plugging in the two-step voltage jack.

We own a 2005 Allegro 28DA. I have a severe lower back problem. The factory struts on the storage doors did not open them high enough for me to gain access without pain. I put longer struts on all of the exterior doors and this made a big difference. I would like to recommend that TMH use the extended struts as standard equipment. They would probably help quite a few Tiffin coach owners.

Brad & Suzanne Lemoine  
 Fallbrook, California

Dear Brad,  
 It sounds like you have a good idea. As a word of caution: if a door is lifted up in front of a furnace vent, be sure you do not have the furnace operating. It could ruin the finish of the door.

We have a 2003 Allegro on a Workhorse chassis purchased new in May 2003. The fuel pump assembly has been replaced three times (6/03, 4/06, & 7/07). The first two times were under warranty. The coach has 28,000 miles on it. According to the Workhorse repair facility, I cannot have an external fuel pump installed. I believe it would be less expensive to replace an external pump and just leave the existing assembly in the tank. I was also told that the manufacturer's standard fuel pump assembly can electrically turn off the generator's fuel pump. Is that correct?

John Hemmi  
 Itasca, Illinois

Dear John,  
 An external fuel pump cannot be installed on the newer units with the new fuel injection system because it will not generate a high enough fuel pressure (psi) to operate properly. The generator has a pickup tube in the chassis fuel tank that is set to cut off fuel to the generator when the tank

**LET US HEAR FROM YOU**

"Serious Tech Talk" is a very important section of *Roughing It Smoothly* in which information sharing flows in both directions. Please continue to send your questions to Danny Inman on the enclosed postcard. A separate postcard is enclosed for "From the Road," a fun part of the magazine for readers to share their motorhoming experiences. If you choose to email us at: fred@bookproduction.com, be sure to put "Roughing It Smoothly" in the subject line of your email. If your communication requires an entire letter, mail it to us at: PO Box 292912, Tampa, FL 33687-2912. Tell us about the interesting places you've been, an unusual experience, a great destination, or just a good place to camp and hang out. Please share.

—Fred Thompson, editor



reaches a level of approximately one-fourth full. This is done as a precaution to prevent the owner from running out of fuel in a campground and being unable to start his engine.

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We bought a new Allegro 28DA in February 2005. Last summer we developed a terrible squeak under the linoleum tiles in front of the sink. One cabinet door is starting to split diagonally and two others are starting to split vertically where the boards were glued together. What can be done to take care of these problems?

Douglas Sloan  
Benicia, California

Dear Douglas,  
Send pictures to Tiffin's service and warranty department in Red Bay. They will make a decision based on the pictures. The warranty on interior cabinetry is one year. However, if the cabinet or doors have not been abused, we will replace them as a matter of "good will." As to the "terrible squeak" under the linoleum near the sink, TMH has three service techs working on the west coast. One of them will contact you to determine and repair whatever is causing the problem.

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I have a 20-ft. 1978 Allegro that only has 14,000 miles on it. We bought it from a lady who stored it in her barn after her husband died. The water lines had frozen and leaked and the tanks had sediment in them. But after I fixed those problems, everything is in good shape. It runs great and doesn't use a drop of oil. It is very trustworthy. I'd go anywhere in it. The aluminum still has a good shine on it and looks like new. People compliment us about how nice it looks. At my age, I don't think a new one is needed. I think we will keep it 'til the Lord calls us home.

It has one little problem. The Allegro sign on the door is approximately 18 by 5 inches. It's all aluminum construction, but it is weather cracked

and needs to be replaced. I hope you can help me with this. Have a happy day. Thanks.

Kenneth Daniel  
Longview, Texas

Dear Kenneth,  
This is an item that we have in our Parts Department. Call 256-356-0261 to order. Just have your year and model ready when you call.

---

We have a 2000 Allegro Bay. The sofa bed that we use for company sags so bad that most people "go to the middle" when they sleep on it. We hate to ask friends to travel with us because it is so uncomfortable. Our grandchildren had rather sleep on the bed that makes up from the dinette. Can it be replaced by a newer design? Thank you.

Ben and Shirley Davis  
Easley, South Carolina

Dear Ben and Shirley,  
We recommend you come to the factory in Red Bay to have the couch replaced. Most likely we have a Flexsteel Air Coil Hide-a-Bed that will fit the present slot in your slide-out. You can check with Tiffin Parts & Service to get a quotation for the replacement: 256-356-0261.

---

I have a 2007 Allegro Bus built on a Spartan chassis. While in use, both fans over the dash stopped operating. The 20-amp fuse appears okay and is located in the outside left front compartment and is labeled "dash fan." This is the only thing that the Tiffin service tech suggested I check. Any other suggestions for things I can check like other fuses, breakers, etc? Thank you.

Jim Sinquefield  
Paducah, Kentucky

Dear Jim,  
If the fuse is okay, then check the wire from the fuse that goes directly to the back of the fan switch. To check the connection, you will have to remove the screws holding the switch panel in

place. If the wire is plugged into the switch, check to see if 12-volt current is reaching the switch. If not, run a new wire from the fuse to the switch.

---

We have a 2000 Allegro 32-ft motorhome. We really love it, although we have had problems with the upper bunk straps breaking (where do we buy replacements?), the AC freezing up (it's fixed), and the fridge freezing up (it's fixed).

How do you close off the round heater vents to the bedroom and still heat the forward part of the motorhome? I sleep late in a cold bedroom and my husband rises early for coffee and wants to heat the forward area. I am not a fan of space heaters in such small areas.

Richard Brown and Georgia Lockhart-Brown  
Salem, Oregon

Dear Richard and Georgia,  
The upper bunk straps can be ordered from Tiffin's parts and service department. We also have vents in the parts department that can be closed. You will need your vehicle identification number (VIN) when you call to place an order. Parts & Service: 256-356-0261.

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I have a 2006 Allegro that has been great. However, the driver's side wiper "slaps" the windshield so hard on the return pass that the glass is etched near the top of the blade. The Tiffin Service Center put on new wipers while we were in Red Bay in September, but the problem persists. I need a fix for this before I have to replace a windshield.

John Kinder  
Hobe Sound, Florida

Dear John,  
A Tiffin dealer should be able to make an adjustment to the wiper mechanism to prevent the "slapping" effect. If the dealer's technician has difficulty making the adjustment to your satisfaction, ask him to call Tiffin's parts and service while you are there and get assistance.

## Reader Response

In the last issue of *Roughing It Smoothly* (4:3), you had a couple of people who were dissatisfied with their 454 Chevy. I have a 1996 Allegro 26-ft. on a 1995 Chevy P-30 chassis. It has a 454 engine. From the time I bought it new, I got almost 9 mpg. Before going to Virginia on a trip last year, I had the "Banks System" installed. It did not seem to run right when I took delivery, but I could not put my finger on the problem.

From Sacramento to Virginia and back, I got 5 mpg. I had a shop check it for me. They found faulty plug wires which were installed at the time the Banks equipment was installed. The shop installed new wires at considerable cost. I just took a 4,000-mile trip to Kansas and back and got 8.99 mpg.

John Volz  
Sacramento, California

I read the item regarding the old model Allegro front fiberglass clouding. I had a 1985 Allegro and went through the same problem. One day I was using Armor-All on my spare tire and dripped some on the fiberglass. When I wiped the Armor-All off, it left the area shiny. Since then I Armor-All the fiberglass and it stays shiny. It's also very easy to do.

Gary Tompkins  
San Diego, California





## The Life and Times of Tiffin Motorhome Owners

### My Tiffin Family

I must tell you about our experience with the Tiffin family. Our story begins in England. Geoff and I grew up in Yorkshire. We were the same age — just three months apart. We first played together when we were three. Then my family moved to another village and we didn't see each other again until we were 15. Our relationship at first was casual, friends. By 18 we knew we were meant for each other. But we had to wait a while because Geoff's career path led him to Leeds University where he earned two degrees in mining engineering. We married when we were 25 and in the ensuing years our family grew as we had two boys and two girls: Jane, David, Hilary, and Michael.

We became confirmed RVers (as you say) long before we left England. Our first RV experience was on a motorcycle with a tent. As the children came along, Geoff bought a caravan (you call it a travel trailer) and we pulled it with a Land Rover. It didn't have enough beds for all six of us, so Geoff improvised pipe frames and I made canvas sling bunks to attach to the frames. He worked for the government which gave us six weeks of vacation each year. We traveled and camped in our caravan and saw most of England, Scotland, and Wales. We crossed the channel on a ferry from Dover to Calais and spent many happy days in France and the Spanish Rivera. We would come back on the ferry from Cherbourg and land in Southampton.

His work in methane drainage often put Geoff in situations where there was deep water. He was concerned because he didn't know how to swim. So I taught him how to swim along with Michael, our youngest, who was 11 at the time. Not one to do anything half way, Geoff wanted to learn how to scuba dive. So off we went for lessons. I made my first deep dive when I was 42 years old.

Geoff was recruited by a U.S. company, Thyssen Mining, in 1978 because of his pioneering and successful methods in removing methane gas from mines. Our first home in the U.S. was in Golden, Colorado. On our vacations, we began camping across America in a travel trailer, realizing more each time just how wonderful this country is. When we came over, we registered as resident aliens, but we began taking classes to study the Constitution and U.S. history. We went before a judge who asked us questions for an hour, and in 1983 we became U.S. citizens.

Geoff continued his career with Getty Oil Company and then retired in 1989. We decided to look at motorhomes at a dealer in Loveland, Colorado. Geoff and I looked at just about every motorhome on his lot. Then I told him that I liked the good, solid "klunk" when I closed the door on that Allegro. And that's what we came home with!

We traveled all over the U.S. and Canada, and then decided to buy a park model in Fort Myers, Florida. Geoff said we were "reverse snowbirds." But we kept the Allegro to continue our travels. In April 1993, we drove to Key West and waded in the ocean up to our knees, then left for Alaska. We wanted to go from the farthest point southeast to the farthest point northwest in the United States. It was a magnificent trip. Believe me, we saw Prevosts, Monacos, and Foretravels broken down along the roadsides all along the Alcan Highway, but our Allegro had no problems — just a blow-out, and that wasn't the Allegro's fault! We returned from Alaska in late August.

Aside from Alaska, probably our most memorable trips were two

weeks in Washington, D.C., where we became regulars at the Smithsonian museums and the federal buildings, such as the Archives, as we learned more about the country that adopted us. And then the five-month trip following the western coastline of Washington, Oregon, and California was an incredibly scenic adventure.

In 1995 we bought our second Allegro, but after 18 months we traded it for this 1997 Allegro Bus which is almost 11 years old now. Geoff told me that we could go anywhere in the U.S. and Canada as long as we were in Klamath, California, for the salmon run from August 12 through September. He loved to catch those big 30+ pound salmon! But I caught the biggest one at 36 pounds! We took our bounty to a processing plant and had it smoked and canned so we could enjoy it throughout the year.

Sadly, my Geoff died in October 2006 when a stint in his artery burst. We were in Klamath and the salmon run had just ended. Our four children came and conducted a memorial service, with Jane taking the lead to honor and remember their dad.

True to his word, we traveled in all of the 49 states on the continent and every Canadian province except Labrador. We often came back through Red Bay to tweak this and that. And that's how our family expanded. I have known Norris Lewey since 1989. And Wade, and now his son, Jonathan (he's such a sweetheart). When I got here on this trip to Red Bay (February 2008), I made the rounds to see them, including Little Richard and Trevor Nichols. Trevor came by my motorhome and invited me to their Wednesday night Bible study at Grace Baptist Church. He picked me up and brought me back home. And when we arrived at the church, there were Wade and Jonathan. While I have been in the Allegro Campground this trip, the hosts, Rod and Marsha Schultz, and Joe and Nancy Solomon, have treated me like a dear aunt. When I reached my 78th birthday on February 15, the Solomons, Della Emerson, the Thompsons, and several others in the campground surprised me with a birthday cake and a good rendition of "Happy Birthday."

Ahhh, I've had such a wonderful life! Now I will use my Allegro Bus to visit my children and nine grandchildren — all but David. He and his wife and three children still live in South Wales. I don't drive the motorhome, that was Geoff's job. But one of the boys will move me from place to place and I will continue to be near each of them.

Barbara Weston, Weeki Watchee, Florida



Each contributor to "From the Road" will receive a *Roughing It Smoothly* T-shirt. Please be sure to indicate on your card or letter your size: Medium, Large, or Extra Large. We are looking forward to receiving a landslide of responses. Space is limited, so mail early!





# F R O M T H E R O A D

## The Life and Times of Tiffin Motorhome Owners

### Oregon's Coast Can't Be Beat

Have you ever traveled to the Oregon coastline and followed it from north to south, or vice versa? Our coast is the next best place to heaven. It's somewhat rugged, yet great for walks. And it's clean! Yes, Oregon has a Clean-the-Beach group (sanctioned) who regularly clean our beaches top to bottom. If you haven't come, you are missing the absolute best.

Our coastal restaurants have the best chowder in the world, especially Mo's Restaurant in Newport, Lincoln City, Florence and Otter Rock.

Our favorite campground is Whalers Rest Resort (Thousand Trails) near Newport which is open year-round. Nearby is the Oregon Coast Aquarium ([oregoncoastaquarium.com](http://oregoncoastaquarium.com)) featuring Passages of the Deep, an acrylic tunnel through the their deepest aquarium with fish swimming around you and above you. And just a short distance away is the Hatfield Marine Science Center ([hmsc.oregonstate.edu](http://hmsc.oregonstate.edu)). Migrations of the California Gray Whale can be observed from several coastal vantage points one week in December and one week in March ([whalespoken.org](http://whalespoken.org)).

At the northern tip of our state is Old Fort Stevens State Park, where World War II re-enactments will be held on July 19 & 20. The 66th anniversary of the Attack on Fort Stevens by a Japanese submarine will be observed on June 21 & 22. The park presents a Civil War re-enactment on August 30 & 31 and September 1.

These are just a few of the wonderful places we enjoy visiting in our home state.

Georgia Lockhart-Brown, Salem, Oregon

### Welcome to My Site

When asked the question about what I do—well, I'm never certain how to answer. I tell myself that I'm learning to dance. Each day I get up and dance with my circumstances. This life I have is not something I ever wanted or dreamed of having. The RVing life was Eddie's dream. Eddie was my dream.

When he died in July 2006, I found myself in new and challenging territory—alone and living in a 40-foot motorhome which I had never even driven. I believe the seeds of the new are to be found in the ashes of the old and so I chose to stay with the RV lifestyle and explore it for the opportunities it presents.

I'm, at best, a reluctant RVer. This lifestyle comes with a steep learning curve: batteries, inverters, generators, gray and black water holding tanks. It's a diesel pusher with an Allison transmission. Whatever that means. I barely know how to maintain my car. But I persevere in this strange and alien environment.

Sometimes life throws you a curve and you just have to pick up the pieces and figure out how to get on with it. I've had to wade through a lot of fear and trepidation; but, I don't like backing down from a challenge. I chose to learn how to drive this behemoth and late last year I found the courage to declare myself a full timer. I no longer have a permanent address. Home is where I park my rig each night.

Won't you join me for this exciting, new adventure?

[web.mac.com/patriceguillaume/The\\_Reluctant\\_RVer](http://web.mac.com/patriceguillaume/The_Reluctant_RVer)  
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## IMPORTANT Dometic Recall Information

Dometic Corporation is continually committed to maintaining a high level of satisfaction and excellence now and in the future. That is why Dometic is voluntarily recalling certain refrigerators that may have a potential safety defect. The recall affects Dometic two-door refrigerators manufactured between April 1997 and May 2003.

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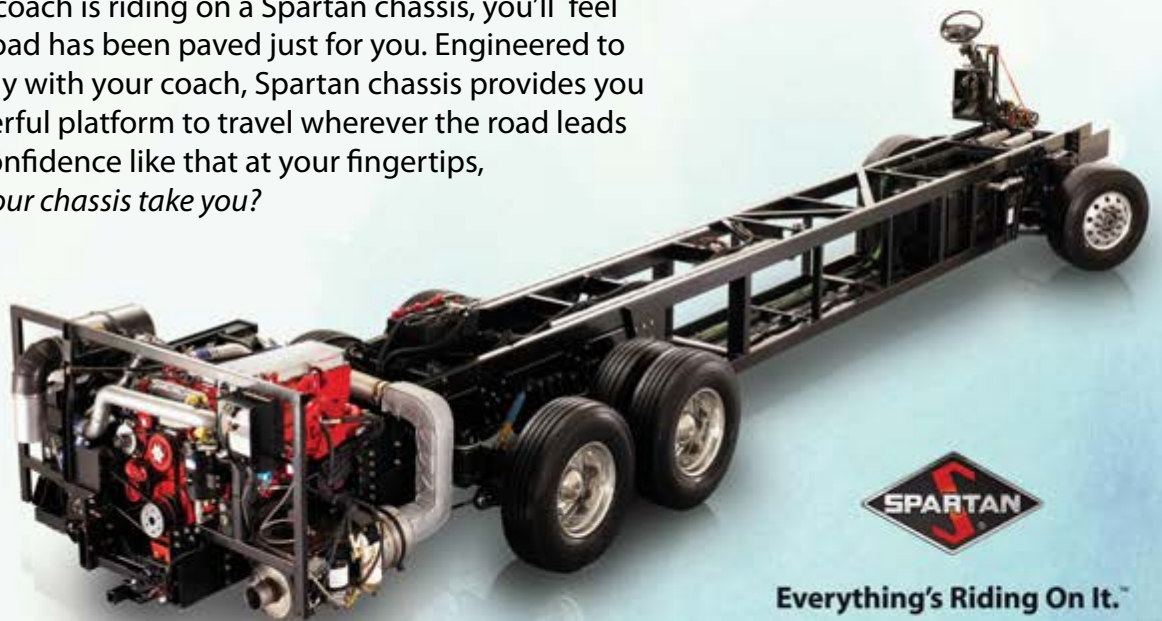
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