

Roughing It Smoothly[®]

IN THIS ISSUE

- Big Bend National Park
- A 17,000 Mile Family Odyssey



SPECIAL

- The 2009 Allegro RED 36 QSA
- Porcelain Floors

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Roughing it Smoothly®

April 2009

Volume 6, Number 2

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PHOTOGRAPH BY GARY PLATFORD / NPS.GOV

Departments

President's Corner	4	On the Road With Rita	40
What It Takes to Survive . . .		Serious Tech Talk	42
News You Can Use	14	From the Road	46
Diesel Fuel & An Open Letter			
Tiffin Management Team	16		
Charles Spencer Builds Boxes			
On the Production Line	27		
Porcelain Floors			
Traveling With Your Pets	32		
Dealer Profile	33		
All Seasons RV			

On our cover: Big Bend National Park, Chisos Mountains, last light on west side of mountains. Photography by Laurence Parent, Austin, Texas

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Features

- The 2009 Allegro RED, 36 QSA — Tiffin adds the rear-engine diesel to its entry-level coach. See page 6.
- The incredible Big Bend National Park . . . the sunsets turn the buttes into an amazing light show. See page 18.
- Seriously, would you believe Bill and Judy Konvalinka use their 1915 Model T Ford as their tow car? See page 46.
- Tiffin Motorhomes high-tech production of porcelain floors for the Phaeton, Allegro Bus, and Zephyr. See page 27.
- Can a family of six travel happily for eight months in an Allegro 32 BA? See page 37.

Letters, We Get Letters. . . .

By the time you read this issue of *Roughing It Smoothly*, we hope to have completed our move to Monroe, Georgia. After 11 years in Temple Terrace, Florida, we are moving back to Georgia where our two sons and their families live. Our daughter and her family recently moved to San Antonio, Texas.

Don't stop writing! Your participation is the key to this magazine's great success. Here are some guidelines to help.

Traveling With Your Pets

You will notice in this issue our new column, "Traveling With Pets," written by Dr. John P. Pilarczyk, a veterinarian specializing in small animals who practiced for 38 years in Temple Terrace. Dr. and Mrs. Pilarczyk, who own a 2007 Phaeton, made an ambitious trip to Alaska last year and are currently wintering in Arizona. If you prefer to use the U.S. Mail, please address your questions to:

"Traveling With Your Pets"
Roughing It Smoothly
1403 Cedar Point Way
Monroe, GA 30656

The USPS is currently building a new post office near our home and we expect to have a post office box by the time the next issue is published. You can also send your questions via email to fredthompson1941@hotmail.com Please enter "Traveling With Pets" in the subject line.

From the Road

To tell us about your experiences on the road, you may use the postcard bound in this issue, send a longer letter to the address above, but using "From the Road" in the first line, or send an email with "From the Road" in the subject line.

Serious Tech Talk

To address your technical questions to Danny Inman, you may use the postcard bound in this issue, send a longer letter to the address above (put "Serious Tech Talk" in the first line), or send an email with "Serious Tech Talk" in the subject line.

Thanks and best wishes from Fred & Carolyn Thompson

Changes of Address

Please do not call to make a change of address. It is too easy to make a mistake while taking the information over the phone. We are often traveling when your calls come in and it is very difficult to handle the call on a cell phone while we are en route. Please use a standard change of address card provided by the post office or send the change by email. In the subject line, put "RIS Address Change."

First Time Subscribers

Tiffin coach owners may receive a free subscription by **writing** to *Roughing It Smoothly*®, 1403 Cedar Point Way, Monroe, GA 30656 or **emailing** fredthompson1941@hotmail.com. Please include your phone number, the last six characters of your vehicle identification number (VIN), and the year and model of your coach. If you sell your coach, please **email** stephanie.umfress@tiffinmotorhomes.com and give her your VIN, year and model, and the new owner's address. This will allow all service bulletins or recalls to reach the new owner.



What It Takes To Survive . . .

by Bob Tiffin

When Tiffin Motorhomes began building “campers” in December 1972, I really had not considered the idea that we were putting together a company to make our buyers’ dreams come true. I was fascinated with the building process and the product as well as the competitive marketplace that was quickly developing. By the time we had built a couple of thousand motorhomes, I realized our customers were investing their hard-earned money in our coaches in order to fulfill their dreams to travel throughout North America with a freedom they had never enjoyed before.

To travel confidently in their Tiffin motorhomes, owners had to know there was a strong company standing behind them—a company that could supply parts immediately, answer their questions, and get their coaches back on the road quickly when they needed repairs. It wasn’t long until we developed our travel motto, “Roughing It Smoothly,” and our service motto, “Wherever you go, we go.”

Not only did we get our new dealer network trained to make most repairs, we also opened a service center in Red Bay that soon set the industry standard for quality service. While nearly all manufacturers did some of their warranty work at their manufacturing plants, we made a commitment to offer service and repairs at our

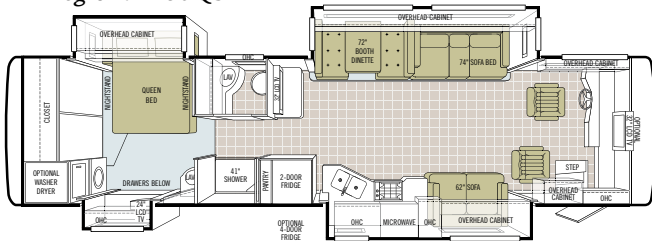


plant in Red Bay for any motorhome we had ever built. I have always believed that if you provide excellent service, sales will follow.

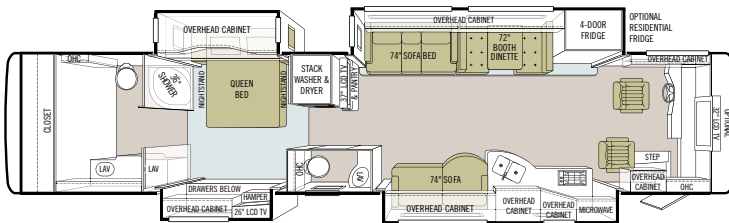
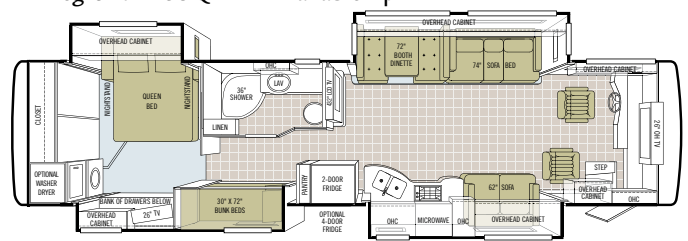
With all other manufacturers, you will have to find your favorite dealer or local RV repair shop to provide service after the warranty period ends. Sadly, in this severe recession that threatens to be the worst in 70 years, many coach owners have no company at all to stand behind their warranty work, much less any service or repair work to be done post-warranty. At least four prominent players in the Class A market have closed their doors.

I frequently travel two or three days at the end of each week to help our dealers with their shows, promotions, and rallies. On many of those trips, I fly with Southwest Airlines. Founded in 1971 by Herb Kelleher, Southwest has become the most profitable airline in the U.S. The company delivers a quality customer experience with good humor and a caring concern that I admire. Its management is far-sighted, frugal, and innovative. Going out on a limb, Southwest bought oil futures to keep its fuel costs much lower than competitors. After defining their markets carefully, Southwest bought Boeing 737 aircraft exclusively in order to lower their parts and maintenance costs, while other companies used a large variety of aircraft.

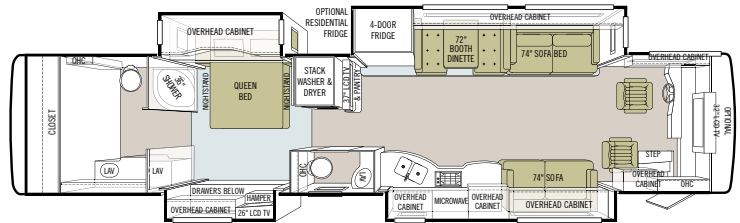
Allegro RED 36 QSA



Allegro RED 38 QBA – Available April 1



Allegro Bus 43 QBP



Allegro Bus 43 QGP

Recently, Southwest's chairman and CEO Gary Kelly paid tribute to chairman emeritus Kelleher: "He taught us to manage during the good times so we could survive the bad times." What a great tribute! Like Southwest, Tiffin Motorhomes survived the severe recession of 1979-81. There were weeks and months during that period in which we built only one motorhome per day. That experience helped to prepare us for the current situation.

Now, yes *right now*, the motorhome industry is facing the most serious crisis in its history. We prepared for this crisis, knowing it would come sooner or later. But we are not so proud that we can't ask for help. This time *survival depends on all of us*. We provide the best service in the Class A motorhome industry. But *we have to sell motorhomes* in order to continue to provide the level of support and service our owners have come to enjoy and expect.


RVers are attending shows in large numbers, indicating a strong interest in our new models. But only a few are pulling the trigger and buying. If you are interested in buying or trading up or down, *now* is the time to do it. Banks are looking for customers who have good credit. As I said in my last column, there are currently three major factors in the buyer's favor: (1) interest rates are down; (2) fuel prices are lower than when the recession began; and (3) inventories are high.

Tiffin Motorhomes is the benchmark for service in the U.S. motorhome industry. We have been here for you for 37 years and, Lord willing, we will continue to provide you with the non-warranty service that we believe you deserve as our customers. Together we can move forward, and we will. I believe there is a unique camaraderie in the Tiffin family that does not exist in the corporate cultures of other Class A manufacturers. It is a loyalty built on the trust we have in one another.

I want you to know that we have not been sitting on our hands for the last 15 months. TMH has used this time to improve our quality and our production techniques, and find more ways to reduce costs. In these difficult times, we have

continued to invest in improving your RVing experience in our coaches.

In product design, TMH has developed three new innovative floorplans this past year, plus one more we will introduce in late March (see opposite page below). Tiffin's R&D and engineering departments are working on new ideas and plans to make our coaches even more user friendly. Based on our customer surveys, we keep stirring the innovation pot to come up with exactly what you, our customers, want.

If you have visited the plant at Red Bay, you know that my office door is always open to our owners who want to come in and talk about their coaches or RV experiences. If you call and miss me on your first try, leave a message and I *will* call you back. If you're interested at all in buying a motorhome this year, **RIGHT NOW IS THE BEST TIME!** All of the factors are in your favor. Call me at 256-356-8661, ext. 2206, and let's talk. I will do my best to help you in any way I can. 



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THE 2009

Allegro



Text and photography by Fred Thompson

THE EVOLUTION OF A DIESEL PUSHER IN THE CLASS A ENTRY-LEVEL MARKET



RAINBOW OVER CERRO CASTELON, BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

PHOTOGRAPH BY PATRICK HOLLOWAY/NPS.GOV

The Allegro RED (rear engine diesel), also known as the 36 QSA, is the result of the ability of Tiffin's product development and marketing teams to take the company's most tested and popular motorhome features and move them both horizontally and vertically through the company's five brands.

The impact of Tiffin's innovative design and project development expertise became most evident following the marketing and sales success of the Phaeton. Over two years ago the Phaeton became the best-selling diesel pusher in the U.S. In the last 12 months, it has moved into first place for *any* single brand motorhome—diesel or gas. Initially, most of

Tiffin's Class A floorplans were 40-ft. coaches, but top management listened to the market and quickly incorporated its winning features into Phaeton coaches ranging from 35 to 42 feet in length. The 36-ft. floorplan hit a popular note and its basic design moved into a more feature-rich version in the Allegro Bus 36 QSP.

In 2005, Freightliner, Cummins, and Tiffin teamed up to introduce the Allegro Bay FRED. The Bay's front engine diesel was an immediate success with increases in fuel economy as much as 40 percent. Two years later the FRED was offered on the Allegro, bringing the diesel engine to the company's entry-level coach.

This year the Phaeton's winning

features again moved vertically when product development and marketing introduced the Allegro RED. TMH marketing uncovered a pent-up demand for an entry-level diesel pusher and introduced the 36 QSA. With its new kinship to the Phaeton, the Allegro RED received some preferential treatment over its other Allegro family members which included several new standard features—full-body paint, side view cameras, paint protective film, solid surface countertops, and the HDMI-LCD bedroom television.

At its first major regional show, public reaction to the Allegro RED was just what TMH marketing had hoped for. The combination of features reflected cor-

rectly what current owners had requested in surveys and potential buyers had asked for in shows over the past year.

"It has such a nice, clean look. We love the RED's simplicity."

"We want to downsize from our Allegro Bus, and this will allow us to do just that without losing our equity position."

A couple in their late thirties found the Allegro RED took care of their "punch list" at the right price. "This is affordable!" they said. "Our top two priorities are a diesel pusher and raised rail chassis to allow pass-through storage." When they saw the options, the 36 QSA was their choice hands down.

The facing sofas in the two forward

slide-outs are perhaps the most obvious interior feature in the trickle-down design from the Phaeton. All other Allegro floorplans offer a sofa and a barrel chair in the opposing positions. A 62-inch DE sofa on the passenger's side and a 74-inch DE sofa on the driver's side can be optioned with Ultra-leather™. In addition, the buyer can option a 74-inch Flexsteel Air Coil Hide-a-Bed sofa in either cloth or Ultra-leather.

Many optional features are offered on the RED which are not available on its Allegro sisters. The coach we reviewed included the 2000-watt Xantrex inverter, dinette/computer work station, central vacuum cleaner, stacked washer-dryer,

and Hadley air horns. Now, let's break it down and take a closer look at each of the coach's functional areas.

The Living-Dining Area

Practical, spacious, comfortable. Just a few of the adjectives that accurately describe the portion of the coach where you will spend most of your time. With a length of 19 feet and a width of nearly 12½ feet, the living-dining area becomes almost residential in size. Tiffin's design team does a great job of making this large room so multi-functional, while not allowing one of the areas to dominate.

With seating for five on the two couches plus two more using the full

rotation of the driver's and passenger's chairs, the living room provides a really pleasant area to visit with friends or just kick back and relax with a good movie or book. Both couches envelop you with medium-soft cushions, but place a good, firm pressure at just the right place on your back. Bullet lights above each couch focus the illumination just where you want it. Three polished chrome sconces add decorative lighting, bringing another touch of luxury to this handsome coach.

The optional Ultra-leather™ Flexsteel Air Coil Hide-a-Bed sofa brings a comfort level to sofa-beds never before achieved in this industry. The five-inch air coil base gives you the firmness found in a traditional sleep system with mattress and box springs. It is topped with an integrated three-inch inflatable bladder which gives the bed a variable softness based on how much air you opt to pump into it. The entire system is covered with the thick bedding material that you will find on any quality mattress. A small electric pump fills the inflatable section with air in about 60 seconds. The DE Sofa is perfect for two small children.

Six feet of floor space between the couches gives you the opportunity to add your own personal touch with perhaps an area rug and a coffee table, both of which can easily fit into your pass-through storage area when you are ready to travel. With a fully tiled floor from the cockpit to the bedroom, the whole area is easy to clean with the RED's optional built-in vacuum cleaner.

With opposing 45×26 and 40×26 inch picture windows over the sofas, you will enjoy bringing the winter sun into your living room. On warm summer days, you can reduce the heat with the coach's standard Roll-Ease solar shades, another feature which migrated to the Allegro RED from the Phaeton. All of the larger windows in the coach have both the solar and opaque privacy shades with the Roll-Ease beaded chain loops for raising and lowering as needed in just a few seconds. The valances, exclusively designed for this coach by Margaret Mia, incorporate three fabrics from the Papyrus decor. The Allegro brand also offers the Azure and the Matisse decors.

The Allegro exhibits Tiffin's fine cabinetry with raised panel doors offered in three hardwoods: Medium Alderwood, which is standard, or you can choose Natural Maple or Cherry Bark at a small optional charge. The wallpaper has the appearance of aged plaster in a Mediterranean villa and beautifully complements the fabrics in the valances.

Always a key feature in Tiffin's interior architecture, the simple, clean lines of the fascia make the extended slide-outs appear as an uninterrupted part of the living-dining area. Accessed through handsome raised panel doors, two large storage areas above the couches offer 11.6 cu. ft. of storage.

Not to be overlooked, the entertainment centers in this coach are first class. Using the HDMI-LCD Panasonic brand, the designers wall-mounted a standard 32-inch mid-section television just above a mission-style hutch with clean lines and a 16 × 33-inch countertop. The optional 26-inch front television gives occupants a choice for the best angle to view a program.



The center is enhanced with the optional Tiffin surround sound technology, a system recognized by owners as one of the best in the Class A market.

Custom designed by Triple H Electronics in Red Bay, the system uses 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 which pulls programming from network satellites. Additional *input* comes from a high-definition, enclosed rotating TV antenna (another Triple H invention) receiving local programming broadcast in high definition, HD programming via cable service, and an optional 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.

When any of the three 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 Panasonic 5-disc player which is included in the optional surround sound system price.

The Galley

While the purpose of creating the Allegro RED was to offer a more price-accessible coach with all of the primary features of TMH's diesel pusher brands, sacrificing good design and efficiency were never part of the equation. The galley design begins with a double-bowl stainless steel sink with solid surface countertop covers, stainless hardware, an optional microwave-convection oven, and a three-burner cooktop surrounded by 19 square feet of solid surface countertop. The buyer has the option of a gas oven or a 2.7 cubic foot drawer immediately under the cooktop which is an enormous storage space for pots and pans—indispensable for the gourmet cook who likes to take the whole kitchen along for the trip. On opposite ends of the galley, two stacks of three drawers are perfect for storing utensils, cutlery, dish towels, and cooking paraphernalia. Cabinets on either side of the microwave-convection oven offer a whopping 8.6 cu. ft. of pantry storage. A three-door cabinet above the dining table offers the perfect place for storing dishes with over five cu. ft. of space. A cavern-like opening under the sink reveals six cu. ft. of storage space.

A Fan-Tastic vent with thermostat and counter controls is mounted in the ceiling just in front of the cooktop. In addition to being a perfect exhaust system for cooking, it doubles as an attic fan for summer evenings. You can't miss the 14 cu.ft. Dometic refrigerator with optional wood panel inserts (only \$140 MSRP). This optional four-door unit with icemaker provides more than adequate refrigeration for a week's supply of groceries. With designed space for half-gallon and gallon jugs, special drawers for vegetables, lettuce, and meats, and recessed shelves in the doors, this system will please the most demanding cooks.

The Bath and Bedroom

The walk-through bath may be sealed off with two pocket doors into a separate compartment measuring 4 × 8 feet. The shower on the passenger side measures a generous 25 × 39 inches and opens into the aisle. The toilet and lavatory also are enclosed in a separate compartment. The vanity with a solid surface countertop and porcelain sink has three large drawers, a small cabinet under the bowl, and a huge medicine cabinet measuring 8" deep × 37" wide × 26" high. Four towel racks are conveniently placed. Fan-Tastic vents are located in the aisle next to the shower and in the enclosed toilet.

A full queen-size bed with a handsome headboard and pattern-coordinated comforter and pillows greets the tired traveler at the end of the day. Each side of the bed has an end table with magazine rack and 110-volt service. The aluminum-magnesium sconce lights are used again above the headboard as reading lamps.

The bed slide-out has a window on each side to provide pleasant cross ventilation. The four-door cabinet above the headboard offers an enormous 12 cu.ft. of storage space that is 24 inches deep. It is the perfect space for off-season bedding or plastic bins for the clothes you don't wear every day. The bed itself raises easily on a hinge to reveal another 8 cu. ft. of



felt-lined storage. TMH never misses a chance to put storage in the right places.

A second lavatory with solid surface countertop and porcelain sink offers nearly 1.5 cu. ft. of storage space. The medicine cabinet above the lavatory, enhanced with theater lighting for its mirrored door, provides 2 cu. ft. of storage divided by multiple shelves.

The passenger-side slide-out begins with a 4-drawer chest and clothes hamper capped with a 13 × 45.5 inch countertop served with a 110-volt outlet and a phone jack. A 19 × 30 inch window doubles as the coach's rear emergency exit. The top section of the slide holds a 26-inch HDMI-LCD television entertainment center with audio-video cables ready to connect an optional DVD and satellite receiver. A 2 cu.ft. cabinet next to the television can house the optional equipment or provide extra storage.

An unexpected option for a coach in this price range is the stacked washer and dryer in the back rear corner of the bedroom. The deeper we go the more the Allegro RED 36 QSA is looking like **a full-timer's dream**. If you should decide that you do not need a stacked washer and dryer, you can reward yourself with 33.5 cu. ft. of space to use any way you prefer: custom-built drawers, more clothes hanging space, a hobby area — you name it. The double closet with twin mirrored sliding doors occupies



the remaining rear section of the coach: 65" side × 24" deep × 63" high.

The Cockpit

Tiffin and Freightliner have done a great job designing the RED's instrumentation. In bright colors, the electrical display bar just above the instruments makes it easy for you to check system lights and warnings. A computer display provides a safety checklist before you begin your trip.

Below the computer and warning lights, Freightliner positioned two large gauges for MPH and RPM and surrounded them with six smaller gauges for fuel, PSI ① & ②, amps, oil pressure, and engine temp. The steering column position can be moved to accommodate your view of the dash and add to your driving comfort.

The left dash panel presents the controls for the two outside mirrors which regulate horizontal and vertical movement and heat. The wiper/washer switch is within easy reach. The light panel controls the headlights, interior instruments, and the master switch for the cargo lights.

The right dash panel displays Tiffin's exclusive Triple-vision monitor for the three exterior cameras. While most side camera displays are activated by the turn signal, you can touch a button to monitor traffic on either side and the rear before you signal your move to change lanes. The monitor can also be used to view the exterior of the coach at night to check security concerns. The cameras can be adjusted for day-night vision, contrast, and sound.

The right dash panel also presents the generator start switch, two 12-volt outlets, and a Sirius radio (subscription required). The automotive heating and air is controlled with three large, easy-to-read dials controlling fan speed, temperature, and vent selection. Seven well-positioned heating and air vents near the floor and in the dash put the air volume just where you want it.

The center console features two large cup holders with insets to stabilize the container. The console also has two full-extension drawers large enough to store your maps and even a Garmin.

Both the driver and passenger seats on the tested coach were equipped with 6-way power seats, a \$980 MSRP option that is well worth the cost. As noted earlier, they both can be rotated to face into the living area.

Attached to the sidewall under the window, the driver's console places the electronic gear shift pad right at your fingertips to access the six-speed Allison 2500 MH transmission. The adjacent air brake can be applied when the transmission is in neutral.

Just behind the gear shift pad you will find ten toggle switches clearly labeled and lighted. This RED was



equipped with optional dual Hadley horns (you will never be ignored). Toggling the switch will activate the horn pad on the steering wheel. The next two switches are the genset auxiliary start and the ICC flash, which flashes your running lights to thank other drivers for helping you pass or change lanes. The next row has two switches for activating the privacy (opaque) shade, which doubles as your sun visor, and the solar shade. Each shade covers the entire windshield. The third switch is the exhaust brake. The final row has four switches for the left and right fans (tucked into the upper left and right corners of the windshield), the radio master switch, and the map light. The Atwood auto-leveling jack control pad is located at the rear of the console.

The cockpit is nicely equipped with privacy and solar shades for the driver's and passenger's side windows, as well as the door. You will never have to suffer again from that blinding sun sneaking through the cracks between the sun visors.

Heating, Cooling, and Electrical Infrastructure

The coach we tested was equipped with the standard two 13,500 BTU air conditioners, which provided more than adequate cooling for the coach. The 35 QSA

also comes standard with the 6.0 KB Onan Quiet Diesel generator. Buyers may wish to upgrade to the 15,000 BTU air conditioners with heat pumps. The upgrade requires the 8.0 KB generator. Both upgrades cost \$2,240 MSRP. Some owners show a strong preference for warm air distribution through the quieter ceiling vents versus the propane-heated air distributed at floor level. The AC-heat pumps also have filters in each vent to reduce your susceptibility to allergies. Of course, the heat pumps offer a significant cost savings by conserving your propane fuel when you are in a campground with 50-amp service.

The test coach had the optional 2000-watt inverter which you will find very useful for dry camping and brief lunch-time stopovers while traveling. Some of the national parks do not have electrical service and invoke an 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. non-run time for generators. With the inverter you can still start your coffeemaker at six if you wish. The inverter will support a television and several outlets in the coach including the ones at the lavatories. If you are using aftermarket GPS navigation software on your laptop, the inverter supports the 110-volt outlet in the bulkhead in front of the passenger seat. Many GPS devices can be powered by 12-volts.

Exterior services for your patio are located in the second bay on the passenger side. All cargo bays are lighted with fixtures located immediately inside the door.

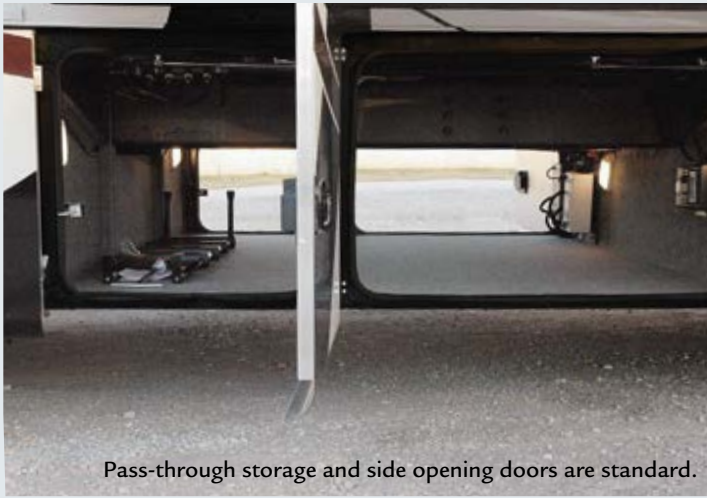
An Outside Tour of the RED

When you take a good, long look, I think you will agree the Allegro RED may have the cleanest, best designed front cap for 2009 in the Class A market. It is just plain elegant. The Allegro typography tied to the RED's logo is spaced perfectly between the dual headlights, bringing a new distinction to this entry-level brand.

Without the obvious front generator slide-out usually found on a diesel pusher, you will be surprised to find the Onan 6.0 Quiet Diesel concealed behind the front cap, but accessible through a flip-top door when you need to check the fluid levels. The concept is a good piece of engineering.

Moving down the passenger side, the first storage compartment houses the propane tank, which, like other Tiffin coaches, has been moved to a forward position along with the fuel tank to achieve better weight distribution and balance.

The next two side-opening doors conceal double-wide, pass-through storage, a feature you would have anticipated on a raised-rail diesel pusher. Few, if any, entry level Class A's can claim this feature at this



Pass-through storage and side opening doors are standard.



coach's price. With a width of 81.5 inches, by 95 inches across, and 29.5 inches high, you are getting nearly 130 cu. ft. of storage and carrying capacity. The two raised rails drop down 12.5 inches into the compartment. The cargo area is illuminated with four lights. A service panel on the front corner on the passenger side provides all of the connections for outside entertainment: 110-volt, 12-volt, house phone, and TV cable.

Two more storage bays on the passenger side contain nearly 14 cu.ft. of storage space, in addition to housing the chassis batteries.

On the driver's side beginning at the rear, the very shallow compartment has a removable back wall to allow access to the engine's large air filter. Nevertheless, it still provides 8.6 cu.ft. of storage space. The next compartment houses the coach's 50-amp cable, but still has about 5 cu.ft. of storage space. You can't have too much storage space.

The water cabinet comes next and it is well designed. With every pipe and valve labeled for the owner's convenience, the water cabinet is very easy to use. The next two doors open into the pass-through storage compartment. The last compartment on the front corner contains the coach's 12-volt nerve center as well as the connection for compressed air. All of the fuses are clearly labeled. The compressed air supply leaves you without excuse to check and correct your tire pressure each morning before you travel.

Driving the 36QSA Allegro RED

The coach is powered by a 340 hp Cummins ISB turbocharged, aftercooled 6.7 liter electronic diesel, mated with an Allison 2500 MH six-speed automatic with lock-up. It develops 660 lb-ft peak torque at 1,600 rpm, and 340 hp at 2,600 rpm. All that said on the technical side, the RED is a very adequately powered coach.

"Balanced" may be the best word to de-

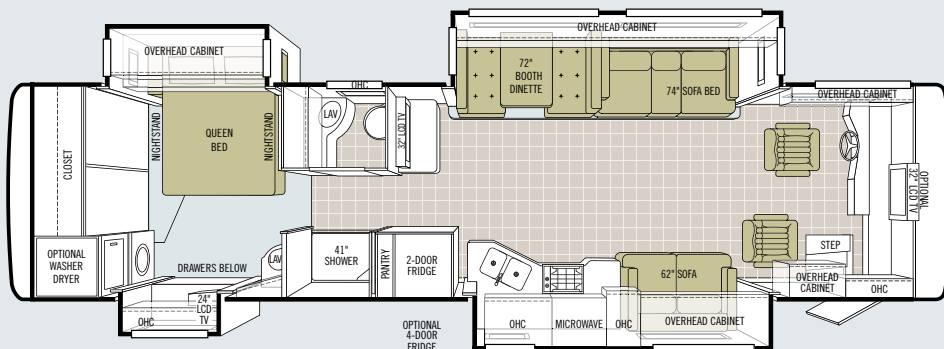
scribe the coach's smooth take-off and its even braking in unplanned stops. There was no perception in the cockpit that we were towing a 3,500 pound car. With a half tank of fuel, two-thirds of a tank of water, a tow car, and two adults on board, the RED handled a four percent, one-half mile grade with only a five percent loss of speed, starting at 60 mph at the bottom and finishing at 57 mph at the top. From a standing stop, the coach reached 60 mph in 40 seconds. From a 20 mph rolling start (as on an interstate ramp), the coach reached 60 mph in 35 seconds. In the rolling hill country of Franklin County, Alabama, I put the coach on cruise control and the transmission in "economy" mode. Entering uphill grades at 65 mph (1800 rpm), the RED would consistently top the hills at 55 to 56 mph (2350 rpm), and generally descended to 4th gear in the process.

As with the Freightliner chassis on the Phaeton, the coach's 55-degree wheel cut and 36'9" length make it very easy to handle in tight situations or in city driving.

I noticed almost no road wandering in the steering and the four Newey air bags combined with the tuned shocks gave us a nice, firm ride. The cockpit's interior quietness is just as good as the Phaeton's. You will enjoy your surround sound while traveling just as much as when you are parked.

The Allegro RED is another home run. TMH has packed the features in greatest demand into a coach that both full timers and summer travelers will appreciate. The competition will be lamenting, "Tiffin's done it again!" **RIS**

Allegro RED 36QSA



SPECIFICATIONS: Model tested 2009 Allegro RED 36 QSA, Quad Slide, Base MSRP* – \$177,380 MSRP as tested with options – \$191,870

STANDARD FEATURES

Structural

Laminated floor, sidewall, and roof
Steel / aluminum reinforced structure
One-piece moisture resistant molded fiberglass roof cap

Automotive

Allison 2500 MH six-speed automatic transmission with lock-up (torque converter)
Cummins ISB turbocharged, aftercooled 6.7 liter electronic diesel
Peak horsepower: 340 @ 2,600 rpm
Peak torque: 660 @ 1,600 rpm
Raised rail chassis frame
Air suspension (4 air bags)
55° wheel cut
Air brakes with automatic slack adjusters and ABS
Exhaust brake
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
6.0 Kw Onan Quiet Diesel generator
Electric automatic leveling jacks
Heated power mirrors with remote adjustment
Horizontal mounted, single motor intermittent wipers
Gel-coat fiberglass walls
Full body paint
Deadbolt front entrance door
Double electric step
Exterior patio light
Power patio awning
Slideout awnings
Chrome wheel liners
Exterior swing-out storage doors with gas shocks
Single handle lockable storage door latches
Ridged long-life storage boxes
Exterior storage compartment lights
Roof ladder
¼" thick single pane windows
Electric step
Heated water and holding tank compartments
Four 6v auxiliary batteries
50-amp service
Park ready telephone
External tripod satellite hookup
Black holding tank flush system
Exterior rinse hose / shower
Water filter
110v exterior receptable
110v / 12v converter
Undercoating
Digital / analog TV antenna
Cable ready TV
Two 13,500 BTU low profile roof A/C systems
Quiet A/C roof ducted system
A/C condensation drains
Roof ladder
Triplevision back-up camera
Side view cameras
Paint protective film

Driver's Compartment

Non-powered cloth driver and passenger seats by Flexsteel®
Entry floor light
Step switch and 12v disconnect switch
Lighted instrument panel
Single CD player & AM/FM stereo
ICC courtesy lights
Dual 12v dash receptacles
Padded dash
Dual dash fans
Tilt steering wheel
Full width power MCD solar / privacy windshield shades
Manual solar and MCD privacy side shades, driver & passenger
Fire extinguisher
Snack-beverage tray with drawers

Living Area / Dinette

Booth dinette with large pull-out storage drawers
12v, 110v, & phone jack receptacles at dinette
32-inch flat screen HDMI-LCD color television wall-mounted in entertainment center
Custom infrared repeater
62-inch Flexsteel® cloth DE sofa bed (passenger side)
74-inch Flexsteel® cloth DE sofa bed (driver side)

Kitchen

Solid surface countertop
Solid surface backsplashes
Double bowl kitchen sink with single lever satin nickel pullout faucet
Solid surface sink covers
Under counter storage receptacles for sink covers
Single lever brushed nickel sink faucet and sprayer
Microwave oven
10 cu.ft. refrigerator
3-burner cooktop with gas oven
One Fan-Tastic® power roof vent with 3-speed fan

Bath

Medicine cabinet
Skylight in shower
Fiberglass molded shower
Solid surface vanity top and bowl
Satin nickel vanity faucet

Bedroom

Wardrobe with automatic light
Four OH storage cabinets in bed slide-out
Stackable washer/dryer-ready closet
Bed comforter with throw pillows
Sleeping pillows
Wall-to-wall carpeting
Queen-size bed
Solar / privacy shades
Interspring mattress
Under bed storage
Night stands with 110v outlets
Built-in dresser with 4 drawers
Laundry hamper
26-inch color HDMI-LCD color television
Carbon monoxide detector
LPG leak detector

General Interior

7-ft. ceilings
Soft touch vinyl ceilings
Medium Alderwood raised panel cabinet doors and drawer fronts
Ball bearing drawer slides
Wall-to-wall vinyl tile flooring in kitchen, living area, bath & entry landing
Scotchgard® treated carpet and fabrics
Solar / privacy shades in living room
Complete HD-ready system (HD satellite receivers required)
Power roof vents
12v disconnect switch
Tank level monitoring system
Smoke detector
10-gal. DSI gas/electric water heater
Folding step well cover
Two ducted furnaces (one 30,000 BTU & one 35,000 BTU)

OPTIONAL FEATURES ON THIS COACH

2000 watt inverter
4-door refrigerator with ice maker
Air Coil Ultraleather™ Hide-A-Bed Sofa-Sleeper-PS
Ultraleather™ DE Sofa-PS
Automatic entry door awning
Freestanding dinette with computer work station
Surround sound system with DVD player
Microwave-convection oven
26-inch front television
Hadley air horn
Convection/microwave with 3-burner cooktop
Refrigerator wood panel inserts
6-way power driver-passenger seats
Automatic satellite (subscription required)
Stacked washer-dryer
Vacuum cleaner
Additional Fan-Tastic fan in water closet

OTHER OPTIONAL FEATURES AVAILABLE

Combo washer/dryer
74-inch Cloth Air Coil Hide-A-Bed HWH hydraulic jacks
Natural maple cabinetry (simulated)
Cherry bark cabinetry (simulated)
(2) 15,000 A/C with heat pump
8.0 Onan generator required w/above CB antenna
Washer-dryer combo
Freestanding dinette
Ice maker with 10 cu.ft. refrigerator

MEASUREMENTS

Wheelbase – 228"
Overall length – 36'9"
Overall height w/roof air – 12'7"
Interior height – 84"
Overall width – 101"
Interior width – 96"

WEIGHTS & CAPACITIES

GVWR – 29,500 lb.
Front GAWR – 12,000 lb.
Rear GAWR – 17,500 lb.
GCWR – 33,000 lb.
UVW – 24,900 lb.
CCC – 4,600 lb.
Trailer hitch capacity – 5,000 lb.

POWER TRAIN

Engine – 340 hp Cummins ISB turbocharged, aftercooled 6.7 liter electronic diesel
Torque – 660 lb.-ft. at 1,600 rpm
Transmission – Allison 2500MH electronic six speed with lock-up
Tire Size – Michelin XZE 275/80R 22.5 LRG
Alternator – Delco Remy 160 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 – 5 adults (bedroom, 2; sofa sleeper, 2; PS sofa, 1-2)
Fuel tank – 100 gallons
Freshwater – 90 gallons
Black water – 45 gallons
Grey water – 70 gallons
LPG tank – (30 gallons; can be filled to 80% capacity) – 24 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 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.

DIESEL FUEL — Essential Maintenance Prevents Engine Damage

by Marlin Saint, Tiffin Warranty Department

Why is there so much bad fuel? There is no good time to find out that your engine is giving you problems or that half its life span has been taken away because of bad fuel.

According to some estimates, eight out of 10 breakdowns to engines have been caused by contaminated fuel.

What are the most common reasons for contaminated fuel? There are two things that cause the most damage to a diesel engine: Water and Sludge. Sludge has many other names such as mud, dirt, algae, or BS&W. Some people think sludge is a kind of microbe. Diesel fuel actually has properties similar to milk. The bacteria in milk will, over time, create cheese from the milk. Microbes and bacteria in diesel fuel, left for a long period of time, will form wax and asphalt in the fuel.

Back in the days before diesel engines became so popular, there did not seem to be as many problems as we are having today. With the more advanced diesel engines came demands for more and more fuel. There was a time when diesel fuels remained in the refineries for a longer period of time and would naturally separate and settle, allowing the good fuel to be drawn off the top. With demand so high today, diesel fuel does not have time to settle, resulting in suspended water and other solids being passed on to you, the customer. Current fuel distribution methods also have a negative impact on the condition of fuel at the time of delivery. In most cases, brokers control fuel sales to major distribution centers and determine delivery dates. There is no telling how long the fuel has been in a delivery network and how many times it has been transferred. Distributors rarely filter the fuel as it is being transferred.

The quality of today's diesel fuels has not advanced at the same rate as the engine improvements. Diesel fuel begins to deteriorate as soon as it is produced. Within thirty days of refining, diesel goes through a process called re-polymerization and oxidation. This process produces varnishes and gums in the fuel by causing the molecules of the fuel to lengthen and bond together. The deposits drop to the bottom of the fuel tank and form asphaltene, also known as diesel sludge.

Now for the other problem that can rob your engine of its peak performance: water. Understand that most fuel has some amount of water in it from condensation or vents in the fuel storage tank. We need to realize that an extra burden has been placed upon diesel fuel as opposed to gasoline. Gasoline is a fuel only, while diesel serves the additional purposes of cooling and lubricating the injection system parts. These parts are tooled to within 0.0002 of an inch and any contamination means rapid wear. Water displaces the diesel fuel. When the fuel is displaced,

wear will occur because lubrication is not present.

Water that enters into the combustion chamber results in even more serious damage. When water comes in contact with the heat in the combustion chamber, which reaches temperatures in excess of 2,000 degrees, the water turns to steam and can explode the tips of the injectors. Water causes corrosion of tanks, lines, and injectors, and greatly reduces combustibility. It also produces more exhaust emissions.

What are the results from using fuels under these conditions?

- A. Sludge can accumulate in your tank and must be removed manually or with chemicals. In critical cases, a new tank has to be installed.
- B. Clogged filters that must be replaced
- C. Incomplete combustion in the combustion chamber
- D. Wasted BTUs
- E. Smoking engines
- F. Carbon build up in engine
- G. Shortened life of major engine parts
- H. Dirty engine oil
- I. Poor engine performance


How do you avoid the problems that occur with bad fuel?

There are plenty of additives on the market that are designed to improve and enhance the performance of today's diesel engine. If you use the right additives, you can achieve peak performance from your fuel.

1. Use an additive that will prevent the formation of sludge and corrosion on your engine. This kind of additive can be used for any type of diesel engine. When your engine is free of sludge and corrosion, it will perform better.

2. Use an additive that will prevent the formation of wax crystals in cold weather. All diesel fuel is susceptible to waxing which can clog up your engine. When temperatures drop into the 30-degree range, you must start adding this additive to your fuel.

3. Buy an additive that includes detergent for cleaning your fuel injectors. It's easy for injectors to become clogged with sludge and crystals. However, when you put a detergent-based additive into your fuel, the injectors will stay clean and you'll get better fuel efficiency.

4. Select a lubricant additive. Lubricants in your fuel will constantly bathe your engine, keeping all of its working parts moving smoothly. This will help prevent cracking, breaking, and erosion of parts and will help your engine last longer. 

AN OPEN LETTER to *Roughing It Smoothly* readers, Campers Barn RV Superstore of Kingston, New York, and Bob Tiffin

A lot of print has been dedicated to the Tiffin top ten dealers, and we can certainly understand why. However, we would appreciate equal time for all the other dealers who are just as important but are smaller and perhaps in geographically less productive areas regarding sales volume. Our experience purchasing a 40-ft. Phaeton has taught us that a lesser known, smaller dealer can equal or out-perform a top ten dealership in many ways.

We put five Tiffin dealers to the test including at least one of the top ten. Price, of course, was very important to us. After we had done our homework, we tested the knowledge of the sales persons regarding the Phaeton's colors, engine, performance, options, Tiffin quality, and other aspects including financing and warranties. We also checked the service facility within the dealership and the knowledge of the service manager. The final consideration, and perhaps the most important, was the general attitude of the dealership.

Campers Barn was the overall winner for us and we purchased our 2008 Phaeton in September 2007 at the best price, with the most options, and a friendly professional atmosphere that was evident throughout our very satisfying experience. Over a year after the purchase, we can confidently say that all the managers and staff are now friends and not just passing acquaintances.

We are so grateful for the opportunity to do business with Campers Barn RV and Bob Tiffin that we have declared ourselves

“ambassadors of Campers Barn RV and Tiffin Motorhomes, Inc.” We want to help them in any way we can.

In the fall of each year, Campers Barn puts together an “October Fest” to honor all their previous customers, and to display their RVs and dealership to new prospective buyers. What a fantastic feast they put on with prizes and great entertainment. We hope to see you there in October 2009.

Campers Barn did not have a 40-ft. Phaeton available at the time of the “Fest,” so we volunteered to show ours. It was an opportunity to give back to Campers Barn by sharing our story, showing off our rig, and conveying our enthusiasm for Tiffin Motorhomes and Campers Barn RV. We asked them to make us a sign to attract the attention of new customers. As we spoke with prospective customers, they listened about how much we love our motorhome, how well it is built, and most important, how we were treated like royalty by Bob Tiffin and Campers Barn RV of Kingston, New York.

We want to thank sales manager Gary Hosking, general manager Charlie Kane, service manager Chris Byron, business manager Robbie Pittelman, and especially Bob Tiffin for a great experience and the friendships that will last forever.

Best wishes to all for a happy, healthy, and prosperous new year.

Dave and Terri McClellan
Happy1_Lucky2@yahoo.com



Charles Spencer Builds Boxes

BUT HIS CUSTOMERS CALL THEM SLIDE-OUTS

Just 12 years ago you could find only a few motorhomes with a slide-out. At the turn of the millennium you might occasionally find a coach with two slide-outs. Charles Spencer's career at Tiffin Motorhomes merged perfectly into the evolution of this key feature in today's coaches. For the last seven years, Spencer has been the supervisor of the slide-out department.

"When we are operating at full production, we build 13 coaches a day, and sometimes every coach has four slides," Spencer said. "That's 52 boxes per day!"

Adam Wright, engineering department, checks with Charles (left) on a jig used to bore mounting holes in the slide-out wall for the HWH hydraulic system.



Seventy-five percent of Tiffin's 27 floorplans have four slide-outs. "You probably couldn't give a coach away today if it had only one slide-out," he laughed. "The slides just add so much space and dimension to the interior."

Spencer's career at Tiffin Motorhomes began in February 1985 in the welding shop. Born in Red Bay in 1964, he is a "home-grown product," as they say around here. "Looking back at how my career has gone over the last 24 years, I think I was in the right place at the right time," he noted. "I moved to welding side walls on the Allegro Bay. Then in the mid-nineties we started making a few slide-outs and I was put on the initial team that welded the component walls for the first boxes."

"We started building the parts for the boxes in the evening—floors, end walls, and back walls as separate units," Spencer explained. "Since a sidewall has to have a cut-out in it equal to the same area as the back wall of the slide-out, engineering designed the side wall to include the metal frames for the back wall of the slide-out. After the side wall comes out of the pressure laminating machine, the slide's back wall is removed and sent to the slide-out department."

With a supervisor and foreman working above him in the walls and slide-out department, Spencer in 1999 became the utility man, a position which requires the knowledge and ability to perform every job in that department.

"In 2002 the plant manager split the department in two and I became the foreman of the slide-out department," Spencer continued. "We started with 14 employees. My biggest challenge was to become a manager of people and not just a leader under a supervisor. I had to learn to deal with work problems as well as personnel problems. You have to balance the needs of the employees with the production goals that we have to meet on a daily basis. Moving from 14 to 45 people is a tremendous change. I learned that everyone is different and what works for one may not work for the next person."

Significant changes had to be made as daily production increased from one slide-out to a maximum of 52 boxes. "With each additional motorhome produced per day, we expanded our production by a factor of four. So you might say we were the fastest growing department in the plant," he observed. Employment in the department rose to 45.

"We had growing pains. Horace Stepp and Tim Massey, plant managers, and Brad Witt, director of engineering, helped me tremendously. We had to run some overtime in the beginning, but

our efficiencies continued to improve," Spencer said. "We did a lot of cross training to deal with absences when they occurred."

Spencer's concern for his employees is clear. "Safety and production must go hand in hand. By making safety a top priority, we actually put the employees' well-being first. But in doing that, you also increase your production and meet your departmental goals," he said.

His respect and appreciation for the employees in the slide-out department are obvious in his friendly manner shown as he works and speaks to each one. "We have really good people in this department," Spencer said. "They make me look like I'm a good supervisor. The people in my department made me who I am today."

Spencer's management style takes on a practical, down home, simple philosophy. "If you need to talk to an employee with regard to a personal problem or a production problem, your tone of voice and how you say it makes all the difference in the world. It's all about your ability to be a good communicator. Our employees *want* to do whatever is effective in making this department produce the best boxes possible," he assured me. "Right now, in this slow time, we have 14 employees and every one of them will do whatever it takes to build our boxes with zero defects."

The department works with engineering constantly to solve problems. "Some time ago, one of our biggest production problems was getting the boxes to seal properly once they were installed in the side walls. Leaks and tight seals were the issues," Spencer explained. "Leaks were eliminated by the technique we use to apply the silicone and by better trim design. Seals were improved by buying and testing every possible sealing product until we found the right one."

The production line at TMH begins at 6 a.m., but Spencer and his fellow supervisors arrive earlier to prepare for the day. Also beginning at six, a management meeting addresses the production, logistics, and supply issues for that day as well as long-term issues.

The logistics of "just-in-time" components rendezvousing perfectly at each station with a unit in the line puts extra pressure on Spencer's department since his people have to *build* each component. The slide-outs are not supplied items. If his department should fall behind, it will stop the line. In spite of the pressure, he maintains a surprising calm. Charles Spencer takes a low-key approach to supervisory management.

He grew up on his parents' 500-acre cattle farm. The family also operated two broiler houses, sometimes called "chicken houses," in this part of the country. The feeder houses, 40 wide by 400 feet long, produce approximately 17,000 birds in 8½ weeks with an average weight of eight pounds.

After two strokes, Charles' father had to scale back his cattle operation to 40 head, while Charles and his wife, Misty, took over the broiler operation that his mother had run. "Misty and I are the 'back-

bone,'" he said, "and Mom and Dad serve as the 'directors.' If we have a problem, we can talk with them and solve it pretty quickly."

Charles has two daughters by a first marriage: Tracy, 22, who is studying to be a registered nurse, and Erica, 20, who is a beautician. He and Misty married seven years ago and have one son, Logan Hunter, who is 3½. Six years ago Misty took over running the broiler houses. "She is a city girl from Tishomingo, Mississippi, but she enjoys the farm life and learned the business in no time," he said proudly. "We like to cook together, but she is by far the better cook."

Charles enjoys deer hunting on his own land. "It's really nice to get back in the woods, to observe and listen to what the Lord put here on earth for us — gobblers, deer, squirrels, chipmunks, birds, raccoons — just watching them when you sit there in the woods quietly," he said. "The biggest I have ever killed was an eight point buck. I field dress them," he continued. "We try to kill a deer for anybody that needs the meat."

During the gardening season of 2007, Charles watched a hive of bees come into a hollow tree near his house. "I noticed the garden's yield improve. Then the hive died off and the garden slowed back," he explained. "It really got my interest and I attended some seminars on bee keeping at Mississippi State University. I bought one hive and really got hooked on bee keeping. This spring I have three new hives coming."

From 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. Spencer is all business in the slide-out department at Tiffin Motorhomes: meeting schedules, ensuring quality production, helping employees solve problems. But at three, he heads back to the farm and his afternoon quickly turns bucolic. **RIS**

Charles watches as Jason Patterson mounts a vent cover to the exterior wall of a galley slide-out.



BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

Remote, wild, beautiful land of contrasts

Text and photography by Norman Spray

Many among the 350,000-plus who make the long drive to the Big Bend National Park in far Southwestern Texas each year are repeat visitors. They come again and again fascinated by scenic wonders surrounded by wide open spaces; solitude and quiet they find on the back trails; star-studded black skies; fossils and fossil history dating back to dinosaurs that lived here more than 60 million years ago; 75 species of desert mammals, 450 bird species, and over 1,200 species of plants and flora.

And, most exciting to some, are their adventures on or along the section of the nation's second largest river known as the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River. Floating by raft, canoe, or kayak over rapids coursing through narrow canyons cut through cliffs that tower 1,500 feet above is an exhilarating, unforgettable experience.

Then there are those visitors who see the open spaces between attractions as miles and miles of nothing. Boring. With little interest in geologic history, they subscribe to a theory that Big Bend exists because God had too many rocks when He created earth and dumped them in this remote corner. Rocks are a dominant feature here, to be sure, and they reveal much about times when most of the area was covered by a salty sea trough that stretched from the Arctic Sea to the Gulf of Mexico. But there's so much more to explore here. Taking a little time to get better acquainted with Big Bend attractions is sure to reward even the city-oriented skeptic. Spring is an excellent time to do it, whether your interest

is walking, backpack camping and hiking, river running, birding, biking, sky watching, or simple sightseeing.

It is true, however, that getting here may not be half the fun. This vast park, 1,252 square miles and 800,000 acres of it, lies over 100 miles from the nearest freeway. The nearest airport, Midland-Odessa, is some 230 miles away. Only two highways, both good paved roads, lead into the park. U.S. Hwy. 385 enters from the north and State Hwy. 118 from the west. The park itself is some 50 miles or more across.

Though 15th largest of all the national parks, Big Bend is one of the least visited. Traffic is so light you can go a half hour without meeting another car on the main roads. Crowding is rare. Together, the Big Bend National Park and Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River are the most representative area of the Chihuahuan Desert ecosystem in the U.S. Desert, mountain, and river environments result in inhospitable, lonely badlands but, paradoxically, also friendly forested slopes, deep sheer-walled canyons and river bottom green belts. Vegetation varies with elevation, which ranges from about 1,800 feet near the river to 7,800 feet atop the Chisos Mountains in the middle of the park.

Big Bend shares 118 miles of border with two Mexican States, Chihuahua and Coahuila. Though there are places where one literally can toss a rock into Mexico, the border is closed. It now is illegal for any Mexican national to cross into the park or any U.S.

citizen to enter Mexico from any place within its boundaries.

Motorhome travelers can reach most major Big Bend attractions on 123 miles of good, paved roads. However, 45 miles of improved but unpaved roads and 136 miles of primitive roads are best attempted in high-centered, four-wheel drive vehicles.

Of four campgrounds, only Rio Grande Village RV in the southeastern section has 25 sites with full hook-ups. Operated by Forever Resorts, Inc., it also books advance reservations (432-477-2251). A few of the 100 spaces at the Park Service's Rio Grand Village can be reserved (432-477-2271). Most spaces in this camp, like all other NPS campgrounds, are first-come, first-serve. These include 60 small sites at Chisos Basin in the Chisos Mountains in the middle of the park and 31 sites at Cottonwood campground near Castalon and Santa Elena Canyon in the southwestern section of the park. Flush toilets, drinking water, and dump stations are available at Rio Grande Village and Chisos. Running generators is not allowed after 8 p.m. Park officials recommend keeping motorhomes over 24 feet long off the steep, twisting mountain road to Chisos. At Cottonwood, no generator use is permitted and only pit toilets are available.

Springtime is usually pleasant here with temperatures ranging from a low of 45 to a high of 77 degrees in March; 52 to 88 in May; and 66 to 94 in June. But these are average across the park. It is not uncommon to swelter in 100-degree heat on the

desert floor. The park's single rainy season starts with thunderheads forming in June that usually produce little rain until July. On average, rainfall totals only about 10 inches a year. Desert areas may get only five inches, though, while Chisos Basin in the mountains may receive up to 20 inches. Anytime rain falls anywhere in the park, visitors are warned of the possibility of flash flooding in pouroffs, creeks, and gullies.

Best way to start a tour of Big Bend is to drive from either entrance to the Panther Junction Visitor Center and Park Headquarters in the center of the park. There exhibits provide a good overview of resources and recreational opportunities plus maps, booklets, and helpful guidance by park rangers. There'll also be a listing of guided hikes, evening slide shows, and workshops offered.

A 40-mile-wide "sunken block" makes up the main body of the park. In the middle of this block, the Chisos Mountains rise over the desert. Three "must-see" areas center around Visitor Centers at Rio Grande Village, 20 miles southeast of Panther Junction; Chisos Mountain Lodge and Visitor Center nine miles up the mountain to Chisos Basin; and Castolon Visitor Center (closed in summer) 32 miles southwest of Panther Junction at the end of the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive. Visitor Centers can direct you to all the trails and attractions in each of these areas. Ones you won't want to miss include:

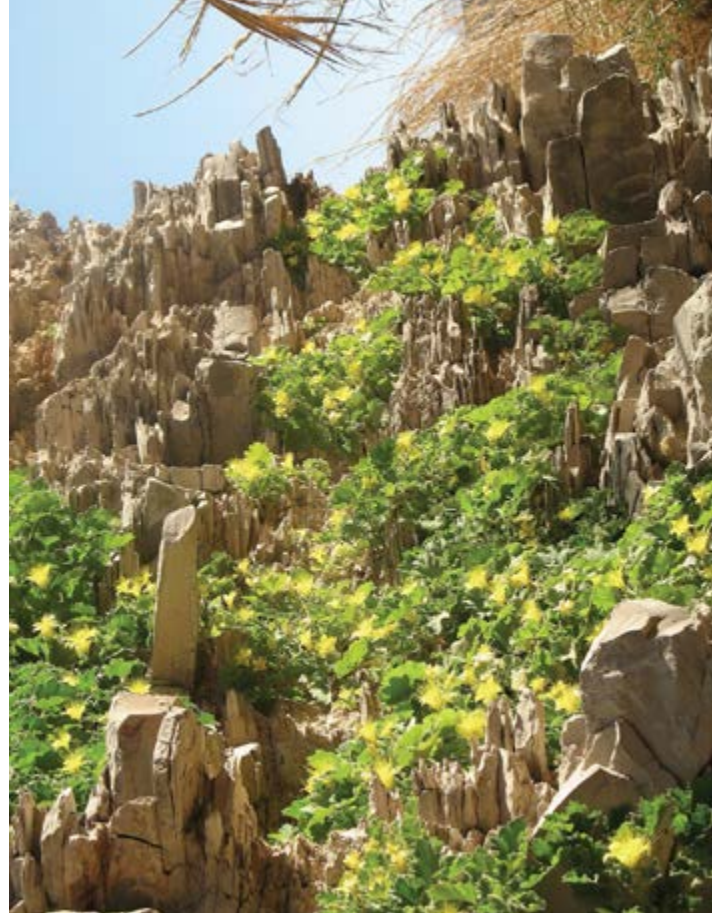
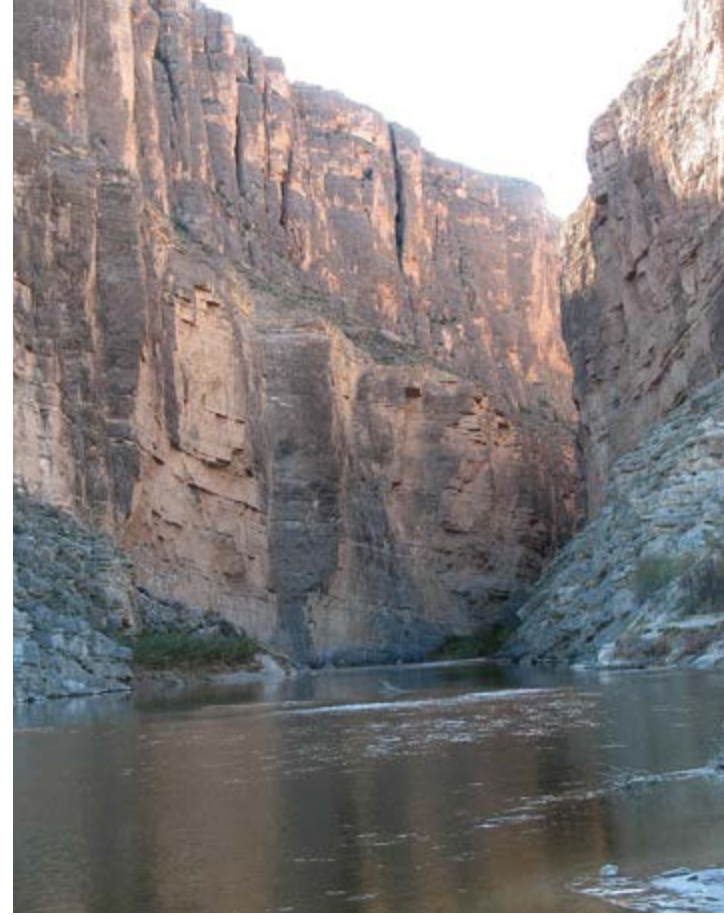


PHOTO COURTESY OF NPS.GOV



RIO GRANDE VILLAGE AREA

Rio Grande Village Nature Trail. One of the most popular nature trails in the park is an easy ¾-mile round trip to a bluff-top view of the Rio Grande starting from a trailhead behind campsite #18 in the park service campground. Following a self-guided leaflet, walkers pass 15-foot tall river-side canes on their way to a hill overlooking the river. Below is the valley green with woody grasses, big cottonwood, live oak, black willow trees, and grapevines. On the hilltop, it's another world: the scrub plant world of the Chihuahuan Desert and its creosote brush, dog cholla, ocotillo, and other cactuses. If there's been a little rain, there's a chance mound-building strawberry cactus will be brilliant in the spring with hot pink blossoms and delicious fruit.

Boquillas Canyon Overlook, Trail and View of Multi-colored Sierra Del Carmen Mountains. Scarcely a half-mile north of the Village store, an excellent paved road takes you four miles east to a trail to the entrance of magnificent 32-mile-long Boquillas Canyon, longest of the vault-like gorges the river has cut through mountains. Though beginning with a short climb, the trail descends via a sandy path to the river, ending near a great sand dune "slide" at the base of towering cliffs. The mile and a quarter round trip walk takes about an hour.

On the way to the trailhead, you'll want to take a turnout to the Boquillas overlook where there's a scenic bird's-eye-view of the river and the village of Boquillas in Mexico. When we stopped here, we found a display of crafted items atop a rock, obviously illegally placed there by a person who had slipped across the Rio to set up shop, probably before dawn's light. The purveyor was

The Big Bend Story in Pictures

On the preceding page: Rays from a setting sun turn limestone cliffs of Sierra Del Carmen mountains into a multi-colored light show. *Left to right above:* Where you'd think there's no chance for a beautiful plant, these flowers cheerily bloom. • This view of remote Mariscal Canyon shows how the Rio Grande River has cut narrow swaths through

nowhere to be seen but prices were listed for items that included stones, figures made from copper wire, and painted walking sticks. A "money jar" was there to accept payment. Forewarned that this could happen (which it did again later on the Hot Springs trail) and that purchase of any such item is illegal, we refrained. The wayward entrepreneur left an alternative, however, with a note that said roughly: "Donations are accepted for the school children of Boquillas." I could not help but wonder if hidden field glasses targeted us as we dropped a dollar in the jar.

One of the most delightful "light shows" imaginable occurs in the half hour before sunset just across the river against west-facing limestone cliffs of Mexico's Sierra Del Carmens. It's almost as if the mountains emit an aurora borealis of their own as dying rays of the sun turn the cliffs red, blue, purple, crimson, pink, and magenta in an ever-changing breath-taking dance of color. We found that once is not enough. What you see this evening is not the same as you'll see with tomorrow's sunset.

Hot Springs, Glenn Spring, Mariscal Mine. Only three miles upriver from Village RV park lies the Hot Springs Historic District, ruins of a health resort so remote it's hard to believe it

mountains over uncountable millenia. • The Rio Grande emerges from the sheer-walled Santa Elena Canyon. The passage is very narrow and the cliffs are 1,500 feet high. • Big Bend National Park visitor, Billie Huggins, on the trail to Hot Springs. Note prickly pear growing at top of cliff. Nature finds a way.

was successfully promoted and attracted people who came to cure all sorts of ailments in the early 1900's. That was the work of one J. O. Langford who claimed soaking in and drinking the spring's 105-degree water cured him of the ravages of malaria. He bought the spring in 1909, sight unseen. Later he built a six-room motor court, which still stands, and a bath house. Hundreds of people visited over the years, initially paying 10 cents a day or \$2.00 for a 21-day treatment to "cure" most any ailment.

Today hot waters from the spring bubble up into what was the foundation of the long-gone bath house. If you so desire, you can soak in the small pool formed by this cement foundation. Waters from the spring flow over the abutment into the river.

Those not interested in walking three miles can drive to within a third of a mile of the springs over an unpaved road not adequate for motorhome passage. Strolling from the trailhead to the spring, we passed remains of the motor court and cliffs adorned with native rock art pictographs and petroglyphs left by American Indians.

Ruins of two other deserted but once thriving communities in this section of the park can be reached by rustic roads. One,

Glenn Spring, was home for a factory where 40 to 60 workers rendered wax from Candelilla, a perennial plant abundant in the area. The spring that made all this possible still exists but the village was abandoned when only five years old after Mexican raiders attacked and killed several inhabitants and soldiers.

Ten miles south of Glenn Spring on the northern end of Mariscal Mountain lies the Mariscal Mine National Register Historic District. Here 20 to 40 workers dug cinnabar, an ore they heated to render mercury or quicksilver. From 1900 to 1943, this mine produced 1,400 flasks of mercury weighing 76 pounds each, almost a fourth of the total produced in the U.S. This came at great cost to the miners, many of whom died from mercury poisoning. Ruins of many buildings, including a Scott furnace that once stood 40-feet tall, remain but no one lives there. The mine closed for the last time in 1943, a year before the Big Bend National Park was established.

CHISOS BASIN, CENTRAL AREA

The Chisos Mountains, believed by geologists to have been shaped by volcanic activity between 20 and 38 million years ago, are today one of the most popular destinations in Big Bend National Park, especially when sweat pours at desert elevations. Visitors often are amazed that they can drive six miles up a twisting, steep mountain road (not recommended for trailers of 20 feet or RV vehicles over 24 feet long) and enter a cooler place where tall pines grow, slopes are wooded, and temperatures may fall a comfortable 20 degrees lower than those below.

In a bowl-like basin at 5,041 to 5,400 feet above sea level, you'll



The Big Bend Story in Pictures

Left to right above: Purple tinged prickly pear grows throughout Big Bend as do more traditional green-padded varieties. • Hot springs “pool” is in foreground. Rio Grande mild rapids can be seen in background. When river rises as much as three feet, the spring pool is inundated. • Hiking is the main reason to visit the Chisos Mountains. The Window Trail provides great photo opportunities, while the most

popular half-day trip is the Lost Mine Trail which takes you to a high ridge overlooking the desert to the southeast. • In Big Bend, Indian cliff art is found in many places. This petroglyph visible from the trail to Hot Springs is typical of a motif found at ancient sites in the area. The resemblance to dart points here are thought similar to points used between 1,000 B.C. and 200 B.C.

find the Chisos Visitor Center, a store, and a modern resort lodge that provides a marvelous view of the mountain range from each of its 72 picture-windowed rooms. Motel-type units and stone cottages also are available. Here, too, is the only full-service restaurant in the park. Nearby is the 60-space Chisos campground.

Rangers at the visitor center gladly direct you to the best trails in this area and advise of current conditions. Popular trails lead along Lost Mine Ridge to Lost Mine Peak (7,550 feet) where many have looked but none have found a rich Spanish mine that may exist only in legend; to Emory Peak, highest in the park at 7,825 feet; and to “the window” (4,600 feet), a “top of world” view of glorious sunsets that is one of the most photographed in the park, offering camera bugs a chance to frame a mountain panorama through “the window” between two peaks.

Mariscal Canyon, one of the three great vertical-walled canyons in the park, can be entered some 20 miles southeast of the basin—if you can get there. Mariscal is reachable by primitive roads passable only for high-centered, four-wheel drive vehicles, by hiking, or riding horseback, or by floating through on the river. Floating means negotiating “The Tight Squeeze,” one of the Rio’s most challenging rapids.

In this central area, and most everywhere in the park, there is rock—most of it sedimentary: deposited first as dust, sand, mud, or animal skeletons and hardened over eons into limestone, sandstone, and shale. Geologists think much of this rock was deposited during the Cretaceous period, some 65 to 145 million years ago, when the area was covered by a salty sea. Later in that period, some guess about 74 million years ago, the seas receded and lush, wooded, flowering wetlands followed, a land-

scape that supported dinosaurs and other giant reptiles.

Fossils proving existence of these prehistoric creatures have been found in many areas of the park. Remains of 29 such animals have been discovered in the Tornillo Flat area some 10 miles north of the Panther Junction Visitor Center.

A fascinating Fossil Bone exhibit in a shelter near Tornillo Creek bridge on Hwy. 385 details much of this work. Over 65 dinosaur species have been found in the Aguja Formation from this swampy period.

Remains of the largest known flying creature ever to exist, a giant Pterosaur with a 36- to 39-foot wingspan, were discovered in the park’s Javelina Formation in 1971. A replica of the wing bones unearthed then is exhibited at the Panther Junction Visitor Center.

Fossils of Brontosaurus, Allosaurus, Ichthyosaur and others have been found. In 1999, fossilized bones of an extremely long-necked Alamosaurus were discovered, also in the Javelina Formation. This herbivores monster was calculated to be 100-foot long and weigh 50 tons. Even so, he might not have been a match for the area’s giant 40–50-foot long crocodiles, remains of which have been found in the Aguja. Powerful jaws and teeth six inches long equipped them to feed on dinosaurs. Dinosaur bones covered with crocodile bite marks have been found.

SOUTHWESTERN SECTION

To visit popular attractions in Big Bend’s southwestern portion, turn south 10 miles west of Panther Junction onto Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, an excellent 22-mile paved road that ends at the Castolon Visitor Center and Cottonwood camp. Another eight



PHOTO COURTESY OF NPS.GOV



miles takes you to the Santa Elena Canyon Overlook. Still one more mile or two gets you to the Santa Elena Canyon trailhead.

Along the Maxwell drive, you'll see rock "dikes" on hillsides that look like huge man-built rock "fences" but are in fact igneous intrusions pushed as volcanic lava through cracks in surface sedimentary rocks. A paved road turnoff from the Maxwell road leads to the Burro Mesa Pouroff trailhead. En route to the "pouroff" that drains rainfall off a mesa, you'll see peaks, formations, and

bands of yellowish rock that are solidified volcanic ash, a material called tuff. Closer to Castolon, you cross an entire narrow canyon cut through this stuff named, appropriately, Tuff Canyon.

Santa Elena Canyon highlights this trip. The view across the flood plain from the overlook is good but best is to take the trail into the canyon. This trail was closed when we visited earlier this year as work was underway to repair damage caused by an uncharacteristic big-time flood in September 2008. Now the



NEW! Dometic Recall Information

Dometic Corporation has voluntarily extended the two-door refrigerator recall started in August 2006 by recalling additional refrigerators as part of a continual commitment to maintaining a high level of satisfaction and excellence now and in the future.

Previous Recall Announcement

This recall affects Dometic two-door refrigerators manufactured between April 1997 and May 2003.

Current Recall Announcement

This recall affects Dometic two-door refrigerators manufactured between June 2003 and September 2006.

The well-being of Dometic customers is of highest concern. A serious problem resulting in a fire may occur in an exceptionally small fraction of Dometic two-door refrigerators, but to address that potential risk, please contact us immediately for more information.

RECALL 06E-076, 06E-032

www.Dometic.com/Recall
Recall Hotline: 1-888-446-5157



trail is in good shape, ready for spring visitors. Read how Helen Moss describes a walk on this trail in Big Bend's *Official National Park Handbook* and you'll know why we're sorry we missed it and you'll not want to. Of Santa Elena, she writes:

" . . . If you go in by boat, the only way out is to continue through. The adventure calls for preparation, knowledge, hardiness, and considerable skill.

"But even a landlubber can stand in the canyon's primeval presence. All you must do is make it up the ramps and steps that climb the cliff face at the mouth of Santa Elena, then follow the foot trail down again into the canyon. Looking up from the base of the 1,500-foot walls, you see a vulture and a raven soaring side by side along the canyon's rim. . . . One rock fallen from that height and you are gone. One wild storm upstream

RIO GRANDE WILD AND SCENIC RIVER

How you float on the Rio Grande is up to you. You can go (for a fee) with a professional guide in craft provided by several outfitters in nearby towns. Or you can get a permit, free at any visitor center, and put your own craft in the water at any of several boat ramps. No craft, guides, or accessory gear are available for purchase, rent, or hire within the park.

Water levels vary, often changing from one day to the next, so always check about current conditions. If river levels are high enough, an inflatable raft is best since it is less likely than a canoe to be disabled by rocks. Sometimes, though, the river is so low that only canoes or kayaks can pass. Any float party should include at least two people. All items should be lashed in place to prevent loss if your craft overturns.

There are 40 species of fish in the river in and near the park, most of them small, but anglers do catch big blue, yellow, channel, and flathead catfish. Trophies include yellow cat up to 100 pounds and 30-pound cats are common. No state fishing license is required within the park but a free permit must be obtained at any visitor center before casting. Rangers will be glad to advise about best fishing spots and methods.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NPS.GOV

and you . . . are washed away forever. Yet you are somehow drawn farther and deeper into the canyon, into this jungle of dark green tamarisk and emerald Bermuda grass, through this labyrinth of water-polished boulders, to land's end and water's edge, to the very Beginning that laid these fossil oyster shells in this fierce rock.

"Here in the canyon's deep, vault-like isolation the sense of time, that ominous, inhuman distance of the Earth's past, may come over you as the imagined shadow of the wings of a prehistoric reptile, the Pterosaur, perhaps, from 65 million years ago. . . ."

Whether one comes to love Big Bend National Park, its diversity and its remote solitude, or leaves anxious to return to the hustle and bustle of cities, one thing is certain: this is a place like nowhere else.

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK INFORMATION

Park information and communication

Phone: 432-477-2251

Web sites:

www.nps.gov/bibe for the park

www.nps.gov/rigr for the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River

To reserve RV spaces in the park

► For full hookup at Rio Grande Village: 432-477-2293

► To reserve one of the few spots that can be reserved at the Park Service's Rio Grande Village campground (all other spots at this and other campgrounds are first come, first serve): 432-477-2271

Special services

To arrange guided float trips (outfitters supply float gear), Jeep, ATV and other guided adventure tours:

► Far Flung Outdoor Center, Terlingua 432-371-2633

www.farflungoutdoorcenter.com

► Big Ben River Tours, Terlingua 432-371-3033

www.bigbendriversstours.com

► Desert Sports, Terlingua 432-371-2727

www.desertsportsstx.com info@desertsportstx.com

► Big Bend Stables 800-887-4331

Campgrounds & RV Parks outside Big Bend NP:

Big Bend Motor Inn and RV Park 800-848-2363

Big Bend Ranch State Park 432-424-3327

Big Bend Travel Park 432-371-2250

Heath Canyon Ranch 432-376-2235

Longhorn Ranch 432-371-2541

Stillwell's RV Park 432-376-2244

Study Butte RV Park 432-371-2468

Terlingua Ranch Resort 432-371-2416

BIG BEND ATTRACTIONS OUTSIDE THE PARK

If you've driven hundreds of miles to visit Big Bend National Park, you're already in perhaps the country's least-populated, most isolated region. You've seen the park. Now it's hundreds of miles to anywhere else you want to be. So, since you're here, is there more to see and explore in this part of Texas where the Rio Grande makes a "big bend" on its 1,885-mile flow from the Colorado Rockies to the Gulf of Mexico?

There is—and you could be pleasantly surprised at what you find in Brewster County, largest in Texas but home to only 13,000 (1.4 persons per square mile) in an area about as big as the state of Maryland. Nearby attractions include:

Terlingua and Terlingua Ghost Town

Once literally an abandoned "ghost town," populated by one caretaker, Terlingua is today a historic district on Ranch Road 170 just a few miles outside the park's west entrance. A mercury mining town that produced 40 percent of the country's quicksilver in the 1920s, Terlingua was then home to nearly 2,000 people. It became a "ghost" in the 1940s after mining stopped and it remained "dead" until people began re-populating slowly in the 70s. The Terlingua Preservation Foundation now describes it as "an active community of artists, musicians, and free-thinking individuals."

You can see where ruins of miner's adobe shelters stand surrounded by creosote brush, rock, and cactus. Even most businesses in the town occupy historic and fragile structures left from earlier days. Hundreds of hand-dug mining shafts exist, their entrances covered with grates for safety. More than 400 graves are haphazardly fitted like jigsaw puzzle pieces in rocks and brush in the Terlingua Cemetery. Dangerous working conditions, gunfights and the terrible flu epidemic of 1918 put many in this final resting place but not one of them died from mercury poisoning, the Preservation Foundation proudly reports.

Terlingua enjoys present-day fame as the birthplace of chili cook-offs. The nation's first big chili cook-off, staged in Terlingua in 1968, precipitated organization of the Chili Appreciation Society International which now sponsors regional competitions. Terlingua's own week-long "international" chili cook-off, the granddaddy of them all, attracts thousands of visitors to this remote town each November.

Fewer than 300 people live in Terlingua Ghost Town, Terlingua, and its sister town, Study Butte. There's a full-hookup RV park, motels, river and jeep trip outfitters, restaurants, and cantinas. Among the latter is the Starlight Theater restaurant and bar in Ghost Town, built in 1931 to bring some culture to this remote mining town. Now the Starlight serves dinner every night, brunch on Sunday, and often presents live music as do other "waterholes" in town.

Ranch Road 170, Lajitas, Big Bend Ranch State Park

From Terlingua, drive just 15 miles farther southwest on Ranch Road 170 and you're in Lajitas, a 25,000-acre private estate resort

bordered by the Rio Grande. Buildings are old West frontier style with plank sidewalks and hitching rails. Here there's an 18-hole championship golf course, swimming pools, a skeet shooting range, and tennis courts. You can fish in the Rio Grande and arrange jeep trips and river rafting tours. The Maverick Ranch RV Park has 101 spaces, 60 of them pull-throughs (915-424-3471).

Lajitas is the eastern gateway to Big Bend Ranch State Park, the largest in Texas, with over 300,000 acres of Chihuahuan Desert wilderness and 23 miles of Rio Grande River frontage. Continuing northwesterly from Lajitas, Ranch Road 170 opens spectacular views as it plunges over mountains and canyons.

Stopping at the Warnock Environmental Education Center, just east of Lajitas, you'll find an archeological, historical, and natural history profile of the Big Bend region. You can get information about vehicle, hiking, or river raft access; maps, books, and other informational materials. Bus tours of the Big Bend Ranch State Natural Area are available on the third Saturday

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of each month. Reservations are advised. (915-424-3327).

Though it is a good paved route, RR170 takes you up and down steep 15 percent grades with extremely sharp curves. Take your dingy and leave the motorhome in camp.

The Big Bend Ranch State Park promises a wild west experience in a remarkably remote and unpopulated setting encompassing two mountain ranges, extinct volcanoes, steep canyons, and waterfalls. There are 66 miles of trails, some suitable for hiking only, others for mountain biking and horseback riding.

Food, lodging and Wi-Fi are available at the park's Saucedo Visitor Center Complex. You can rent bikes and arrange for guided horseback tours of some canyon trails. There are several places along RR 170 where you can put in your own float craft. Or you can arrange a trip with a professional outfitter (see box on page 24.)

Marathon, Stillwell RV Park, Heath Canyon River Access

If you enter or leave Big Bend National Park via the north entrance, you'll pass through Marathon at the crossroads of U.S. Hwy. 385 and U.S. 90. Perhaps the most imposing structure here is the Gage Hotel, built in 1927 to serve the needs of rancher and banker Alfred Gage. Now restored, its 37 rooms and three cottages are appointed with artifacts and authentic Native American, cowboy and Mexican furnishings. The lobby could be called a museum. The hotel's Café Cenizo and White Buffalo Bar enjoy a reputation as a place for fine dining.

One of the many friendly people we met here is 90-year-old Mazie Lee, a native of Australia, and widow of a U.S. border

ranger. She's a self-taught artist and wood carver who can be found on some days at the Chisos Gallery on Marathon's main drag. In the gallery on the day we visited, we were privileged to admire a heavy \$2,200 mahogany door displaying her beautiful carving. We also saw entrance doors she carved at St. Mary's Catholic Church and at the First United Methodist Church. One of Mazie's paintings hangs above the baptistry of Marathon Baptist Church.

Alpine, Biggest Town in the Big Bend

Alpine, some 20 miles west of Marathon on U.S. 90, is listed as one of the 50 safest, most economical places to retire in the U.S. With a population counted at 5,786 in 2000, it's by far the largest town in the Big Bend country.

Home of Sul Ross State University, Alpine is known for a love of the arts and culture. It has many art galleries, boutiques, gift, book, antique, and specialty shops. Exhibits and displays at The Museum of the Big Bend located on the Sul Ross campus provide insight to the cultural heritage and natural features of the area. The Big Bend Medical Center here is the closest hospital to the park.

Almost any time during the year, you can catch a stage performance in Alpine offered by Sul Ross University's Theatre of the Big Bend or the local talent Big Bend Players. In summer, Sul Ross evening performances are presented in an outdoor theater in the cool desert air. You can golf at Alpine Country Club Golf Course or take in a rodeo at the Turner Range and Animal Science Center. Alpine has four full hook-up RV parks and good restaurants.

Wherever you are in Big Bend country, you can count on black, starry night skies, wide open spaces, desert flats, and majestic mountain views. It's a long way getting here, but what's here makes it a unique and fascinating destination.



From top left: Mazie Lee, a 90-year-old Marathon artist and woodcarver, stands by the solid mahogany door which she priced at \$2,200. • More than 400 graves are arranged in a jigsaw-puzzle-like fashion at the Terlingua Ghost Town Cemetery, which is still used today. • Ruins of adobe shelters built by miners a hundred years ago are still scattered across the landscape.

Porcelain Floors

A QUALITY FEATURE FOUND IN THE BEST HOMES
ALSO IN THE PHAETON, THE ALLEGRO BUS, & THE ZEPHYR

by Fred Thompson

The surveys and feedback received at Tiffin Motorhomes continue to reflect a strong customer preference for top-quality residential features. TMH designers upgraded for 2009 the flooring in the Phaeton, the Allegro Bus, and the Zephyr to a porcelain tile found in America's finest homes.

Joe Pearson, supervisor of the TMH division that creates these fine floors, described a quality test that he made recently. He selected a one-inch dowel as a fulcrum and placed a piece of ceramic tile on it, as if he were making a child's teeter-totter. When he stepped on either side of the ceramic tile, it instantly snapped in two pieces. In the same test with the porcelain tile, he rocked back and forth for several minutes and the porcelain did not break.

The glossy finish of the porcelain floors is eye-catching as soon as you enter a TMH coach. The porcelain floors add a superior value to the decor far beyond the expense they add to the coach's base price.

The following picture story will take you through the manufacturing process and provide an increased understanding of why the industry has such a high opinion of Tiffin's construction techniques and methods.

The construction of a porcelain floor begins on an 8 × 40-foot table. The base for the floor is made of sheets of luan (1). Each sheet is routed to create a tongue-and-groove joint along the 8-foot length (2). The sheets are attached (3) to create a one-piece subfloor which ultimately can be moved as a single unit to the assembly line and mounted on the coach's solid OSB floor.

The porcelain technicians, Jamie Scruggs (blue shirt) and Michael Wilemon, select the floorplans for the day's production and transfer measurements from the spec sheets (4, 5, 6) directly to the luan subfloor.



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11



12



13



14

Stacks of the 13 × 13-inch porcelain tiles are placed conveniently across the luan subfloor (7, 8) along with uniquely shaped pieces (9) cut on the wet saw by Gary Raper (10).

Each technician mixes his own adhesive (or “mud”) and spreads it with a grooved trowel in perfectly even swirls (11). On this particular day, Scruggs was creating the floor for a 40QTH Phaeton and Wilemon was working on a 42QBH Phaeton with a rear bath.

At the stepwell, Scruggs has attached a carpenter’s square to the table to assure that the first tiles are laid perfectly (12). The accurate positioning of the remaining tiles depends on a correct beginning. Plastic spacers are placed at the corners of each tile for a continued perfect alignment as the floor is completed.

As the tiles go down, the acid test is whether or not you can slide a credit card across the joints without the card catching an edge. To assure each tile is seated correctly, two-gallon jugs of water are placed on top (13), a somewhat amusing but very effective technique. Adhesive is spread for only three or four rows at a time to make sure it does not get stiff before the tiles are placed. As the floor progresses (14), Scruggs goes back and adds the smaller triangles to fill in the edges of the floor.

While Scruggs is building the 40QTH, Wilemon lays the floor for the rear bath of the 42QBH on a separate assembly table (15) and then moves back to his primary

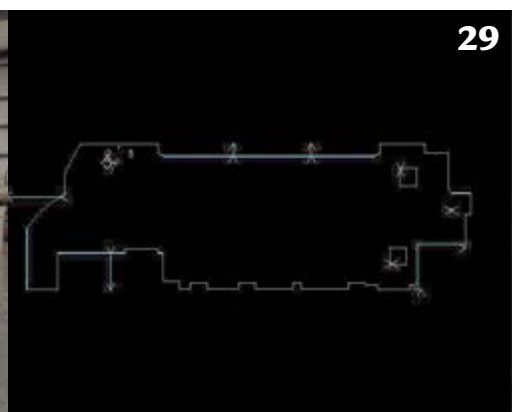
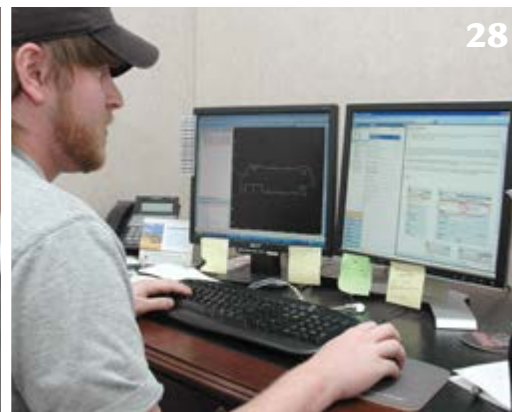
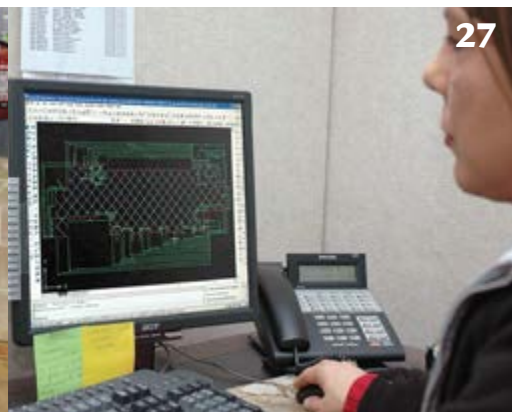
assembly where he starts at the stepwell (16). The job progresses quickly, taking little more than an hour to lay the main section (17).

The initial laying of both floors is completed before the lunch break. The photography for this feature began at noon on the first day of the photoshoot. Therefore, you will notice the grouting and cleaning process in the next set of pictures involves the floor for an Allegro Bus. Working together, Scruggs spreads the grout mixture into the joints with an amazing finesse and speed (18), while Wilemon comes behind him with sponge and water to remove the excess grout from the surface of the tiles (19). After a brief drying time for the grout, Wilemon runs a cleaning machine across the new floor. The machine has a sponge on a drum which applies a mild solution of detergent and vinegar (20).

With the vacuum lift crane, Jose Callabero loads the porcelain tile Allegro Bus floor (21, 22), as well as the smaller floor for the rear bath (23). A protective tarp covers the Bus floor and another Zephyr floor which he will haul to the production line in Red Bay (24).

When the Allegro Bus floor arrives at the Red Bay assembly plant, it is brought alongside the CNC water jet cutting machine (25). Nathan Hale, a six-year veteran at programming and operating CNC routers, uses a vacuum lift crane to unload the porcelain tile floor and places it on the steel grate of the water jet (26).


Critically accurate measurements must be made to create



the outside perimeters of the floor as well as the interior cut-outs for the supporting infrastructure. Tammy Roberson in the engineering department pulls all of the data (27) and transmits it to Brandon Credille (28), who converts it into a program to drive the CNC water jet (29).

Hale provides three reference points on the porcelain floor's position on the steel bed to the CNC's program (30), after which it will orient the cutting scheme to that position. The water jet emits a concentrated stream at 50,000 psi that is mixed with garnet grains. Its cutting power is phenomenal, slicing through the porcelain and leaving a smooth, polished edge. In frame (31), the jet has finished cutting the opening for the base of the driver's chair and is in the process of cutting the opening for the passenger's chair. In the following two frames (32, 33), you can see the white jet as it moves along the outside edge of the floor precisely cutting insets that will go around the rollers for a slide-out. The completed edge along the passenger side shows the stepwell, the base cutout for the passenger chair, and an inset for a slide-out roller (34). The completed floor rests on the water jets steel grate (35), which has two feet of water under it to absorb the force of the jet stream as it makes its cuts. Using the suction lift crane, Hale lifts the completed porcelain floor and loads it on the trailer to take it to the production line (36, 37).

On the production line, Terry Petree spreads the adhesive onto the motorhome's OSB flooring (38) in preparation for mounting the porcelain tile as a one-piece unit. Petree uses another suction lift crane to move the porcelain from the delivery trailer and guides it into place on the motorhome's floor in a matter of minutes (39). Notice that the stepwell is again used as a point of alignment reference (40). Brian Seahorn holds the right rear corner of the floor and brings it into alignment (41). The reasons for the cutouts made on the water jet become obvious as hardware such as a slide-out roller are screwed into place (42).

To fabricate and install a porcelain floor for a 40-ft. Allegro Bus has taken less than ten man-hours. When the motorhome is completed, the porcelain floor is one of the last items to be inspected before the coach ships. Occasionally, during the remaining construction and assembly process, a tile can get chipped or broken. In that case, a roto-saw removes the grout and one individual tile is chiseled out and replaced (43). The final step involves bringing the floor to perfection. Jose Callabero, using a mild detergent, gives the floor one last washing to remove any substances it may have picked up during the production assembly (44). He then dries the floor with soft towels to bring up the porcelain's natural gloss. It is a beautiful piece of craftsmanship! 



Traveling With an Older Pet Can Require Special Preparation

Hi Dr. Pilarczyk,
I read about your new column for *Roughing It Smoothly* and have the following question:

In December of this year we were traveling to my sister's home in Auburn, California in our RV (2008 Allegro Bay). With me was my husband John, sister Linda and our two dogs, Trixie (a Pekinese) and Sadie (a yellow lab mix). Sadie is age 15 years. Just as we got to Auburn, Sadie began shaking and fell to the floor, having a seizure. Prior to that time she had been healthy. Sadie could not respond to us or get up from the floor. Naturally, we were all upset and pulled over, asking a man for the nearest vet hospital. We were only blocks from a vet's office and went there. By the time the vet came out to our RV, Sadie was wagging her tail and beginning to come around. Eventually we continued with our trip and went to our vet on the following Monday. Our vet could find nothing wrong — blood tests came back fine, etc. We are just watching her closely now. My question: What if we had been out in the boonies with no nearby vet? What can a pet owner do when there is a sudden medical emergency and you're in the middle of nowhere? What is your advice when traveling with older pets? Thanks for your time. I look forward to your column.

Carole Cordoni

Dear Carole,
Unfortunately, there is no Medi-Vac airborne ambulance equivalent for animals. The best you can do is enroll in a first aid course for animals. They are offered in your local area. If your

dog has a medical condition, know as much about the symptoms and treatment of this condition as you can. You may have to play nurse practitioner if the need arises.

When arriving at a campground, always check with the campground owner for the nearest veterinarian. As I was traveling through the Yukon on my way to Alaska this past year, we stopped in Dawson City. While talking with the locals, I found out that the only veterinarian in town had an accident and recently passed away. To my surprise, the closest veterinarian was in Tok, Alaska, six hours away!

This presents a problem for the locals as well as travelers. If you have a very old pet, you may want to postpone traveling in some areas or check on the availability of veterinarians in your travel area. The Internet and American Veterinary Medical Association may be of help. Be prepared and know as much as possible about the area before you go.

Concerning Sadie's condition, my office manager had a 12-year-old black lab that began having seizures. We ran tests and all was normal. We referred her to a neurologist at the University of Florida. Older dogs may develop "acquired epilepsy." Her dog's seizures were controlled with Phenobarbital.

Be prepared and know what to do for a seizure. Make sure the pet is on the ground and cannot hurt itself. Do not stick your hand in its mouth. They will not swallow their tongue but they will bite down on your finger.

I hope this answers your question and that Sadie is doing well.

Dr. John P. Pilarczyk

Dr. Pilarczyk practiced veterinary medicine for 38 years in Tampa, Florida. He and his wife, Kay, travel most of the year in their 2007 Phaeton and are wintering in Tucson.



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He Could Have Been an Onion Farmer

The Story of a Farm Boy Who Became a Tiffin Dealer

Text and photography by Fred Thompson

Barry Chiron was born and raised in Florida, New York. Yes, that's right. Florida is in New York. And not only is Florida in New York, it is also in Orange County. But there are no orange trees in Orange County. This is onion country!

In the early forties, Florida was a municipality of 1,200 souls situated on less than two square miles. It is known for the vast onion fields that lie adjacent to the town, covering over 26,000 acres of extremely fertile, black muck left there by an ancient glacial lake and augmented by centuries of flooding and silting from the Wallkill River. With some justification, Florida calls itself the Onion Capital of the World.

With productivity of up to 30,000 pounds per acre in prime growing weather, onion farmers in strong market years did quite well for themselves. Their markets were just a short dis-

tance away: New York City, Philadelphia, New Jersey, southern New York, and southern New England. Most farmers lived in town and farmed in the small valley.

Barry Chiron had no interest in following his father's career path as an onion farmer. After a successful high school career, academically and in sports (baseball, basketball, track, and soccer), he left home to enroll at Clarkson College (now University) in Potsdam, New York. Potsdam is just a few miles from the Canadian border, and was about as far as Barry could get from

The All Seasons RV staff, from left to right: Sara Brown, Greg Kelley, Kevin Goodrich, Andy Mair, Frank Pannell, Jim Radel, Colt Kozisek, Dan Golden, Brian White, Dan Johnson, Wendy Shaffer, Shawn Knight, Jeff Howell, Barry Chiron, Sherri Taylor, Jennifer Radel, Michelle Hardy, Mark Farrell, and Sandy Golden.



Florida and still remain inside the state of New York. He had always made good grades in high school, but he still surprised his parents when he decided to major in industrial management and finance.

Near the end of his undergraduate career, Chiron attended a fraternity party and found himself engaged in a conversation with one of his business professors who encouraged him to go to graduate school. With the professor's connections to Indiana University, Chiron received a teaching fellowship and earned his master's degree in international finance and economics. After focusing on international banking, Chiron found the job market very limited and accepted a position with F&R Lazarus department stores in Columbus, Ohio, where the company had its headquarters.

"Lazarus had a phenomenal training program in retailing," Chiron said, "and that launched me into a completely different career than what I had prepared for in college." He was promoted to the basement fabric department, which turned out to be the place where he met his future wife, Beverly, whom he married in 1963.

In 1966 Chiron's management talent attracted an offer from a Cleveland-based company named JoAnn Fabrics. The company was expanding and Barry in 1969 became the youngest vice president of the fastest growing retail chain in the U.S. at the age of 29. He was in charge of store operations, advertising, and personnel as the company went on the NYSE as Fabri-Centers of America.

"It was an exciting job, but there was a big disadvantage," Chiron recalled. "I was traveling constantly, opening 50 to 60 stores a year, and gone sometimes as long as seven weeks at a time."

By the summer of 1973, the couple had three daughters: Kim, 10, Lori, 8, and Jennifer, 2. "When Bev took the girls to visit her parents for two weeks," he continued, "my father-in-law tried to convince me to take the family camping. I just wasn't into it. But I towed my father-in-law's 18-foot Airstream back to Cleveland as a compromise."

The next weekend a district manager and Barry took their families camping. "It rained, there were no hook-ups, and we had a great time," he exulted. "It was the first time I had spent 48 hours without distractions with my family in years. I was hooked." Later that year we bought a 21-foot Holiday Vacationer with rear bunks for the girls. "We spent the following summer in the camper at a lake campground. I would go to work from the campground and return to play with the girls at the campsite and at the lake. It was a great summer."

Then Barry and Bev began to integrate summer travel into Barry's business schedule. "In the next four years the girls were in 25 states and four provinces of Canada," he continued. "We found the highest waterfalls and the deepest canyons, we hiked, and we enjoyed the evenings' campfires. We had found a whole new lifestyle. After the children were older, we often made trips in a motorhome with Bev's sisters and brother-in-laws. It wasn't unusual to have six or seven traveling in the motorhome," Barry remembered.

Another camping friend, Chuck McDonald, can claim re-

sponsibility for changing Barry's career. While McDonald owned the distributorship for Onan generators with a large territory including Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan, he started an RV dealership in 1973 in Willoughby, Ohio, that he called Camping World. By 1977 his Onan company was demanding all of his time. "One evening around a campfire, Chuck made us an offer we couldn't refuse," Barry said, "and we bought the business. Bev and I left all of the perks of a high level corporate job to take on the mantle of 'entrepreneur.' Our friends kidded me about the reason for the big change. One insisted that Bev wouldn't agree to my buying a larger travel trailer, so I bought the RV dealership instead."

In August 1981 Barry came home and told Bev he was buying another dealership in Peninsula, Ohio. "I don't think she was too surprised. The timing was good for the business to expand to a second location," he said.

Chuck Schwartz joined the company as a partner and took over the management of the Peninsula store. "We had a great run at the Peninsula store, but Chuck had to retire in 1991," Barry related. In the late 1990's the Chirons felt it was time to consolidate their two locations.

"We went through five attempts to buy land and build but were unsuccessful at getting zoning changes—a very difficult process in this area," he explained. "Then one day as we were driving on SR 14, Bev yelled 'Stop!' Her sharp eyes had spotted an empty building for sale. I didn't see the potential, but she did."

The couple sat down with their girls and said, "Who wants to be in the RV business?" Kim and Lori declined, but Jennifer, who had a degree in elementary education, said yes. Bev was active in the business through 1999, but failing health limited her participation. She passed away in the fall of 2007.

Barry continued to relate the story. "We opened our new facility in January 2002. It was incredible how it all came together. Roy Meadows, a friend in the sign business transformed and themed the interior. I was over my head in the remodeling, and Roy further agreed to serve as our general contractor. Chuck Marzan was hired to design the store's layout and it has turned out to be extremely functional."

In the fall of 2003 the company got back in the Class A market when a Tiffin franchise for the area became available. "Mike Andes was the catalyst," Barry said. "He ran the ball and took care of us. We put together a really nice 'by invitation only' affair with dinner and entertainment to announce the Tiffin Motorhomes franchise. Bob Tiffin attended and we invited our most loyal customers."

Learned from his years with Lazarus and JoAnn Fabrics, Barry Chiron's marketing and retailing skills began to kick in to develop the direction his new company, All Seasons RV, was going to take. "The basic philosophy at Lazarus was 'we will take care of the customer first.' Sometimes that meant allowing the customer to return merchandise far beyond a reasonable amount of time," he said. "But it always paid off." Based on a book he read, *The Ultimate Question*, Chiron has added a key question to ask each customer after a service or buying experience: "Would you

refer us to your family and friends?”

“We are in business because our customers allow us to be in business,” he asserted. “That is where your repeat business is coming from—and no company can survive without it.” All Seasons RV established three levels of Loyalty Clubs based on the number of times a customer has purchased an RV. The clubs now have several hundred members. “Word-of-mouth,” Chiron says, “is the company’s best form of advertising. It gets you more business, or it gets you out of business,” he laughs. The company also offers seven training and maintenance seminars each year presented by the staff and manufacturers’ representatives.

Chiron defined four operational policies which he has adopted over the past 32 years. First, training is not an option; it is a necessity. “All of our multi-talented technicians are RVIA/RVDA certified, including Jim Radel our shop foreman. Jeff Howell is a certified parts manager. Sherri Taylor is a certified parts specialist and will soon take her exam to get the warranty administration certification. Michelle Hardy, our sales business manager, is a senior AFIP-Certified Finance & Insurance Professional,” Chiron said with a great deal of obvious pride in the accomplishments of the company’s employees. “We offer many opportunities in continuing education. When employees improve their skills, it brings a higher level of professionalism to the dealership.”

Jeff Howell agrees. He was selected by RVIA-RVDA to join a team of 12 professionals who worked at the Ohio State Center in Education and Training for Employment to develop DACUM guidelines and training materials for the certifications of RV Parts Manager and RV Parts Specialists.

DACUM is an acronym that stands for Developing a Curriculum. It is a process that has been used for over 40 years to conduct occupational analysis involving the men and women with reputations for being “the best” at their jobs. It is primarily used to create and update training and education programs.

All Seasons RV provides a training

room where employees can improve their skills and work toward certifications through online courses provided by RVIA and RVDA. Employees can also earn certifications using self-guided courses provided on CDs. Every new certification helped the company add new business. “Our certified techs in Aqua-Hot and in-motion satellite receivers bring us business from other dealers who do not have techs with those certifications in their organizations. Of course, while those RVers are here, they are also visiting our accessories store and our showrooms.”

Chiron’s second operational policy is based on delegation. “We don’t micro-manage. After training and experience, we turn the department or job over to the person selected for that position. They are given the authority and latitude to make decisions,” he explained. “We want each person to have the satisfaction of seeing the results of their work and time invested.” Again, Howell’s career path illustrates Chiron’s approach.

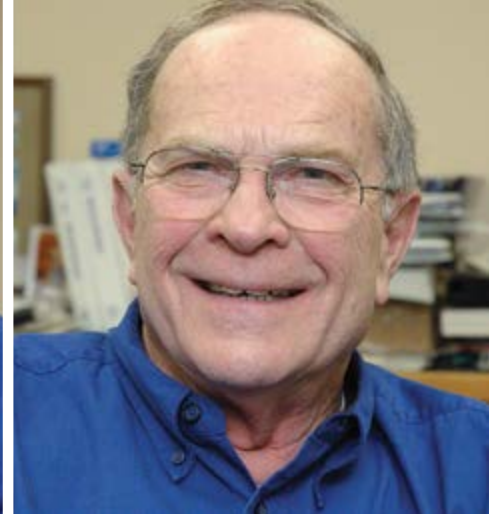
“I turned RV ACCESSORIES ETC, our RV supplies and aftermarket products store,

over to Jeff,” he said. “Historically, the RV industry is sales driven. When a customer enters our indoor RV showroom, he will quickly find the parts & service departments and the accessories store coming together at a central counter from which we greet everyone. I like to think we have changed the paradigm for this business by making it service and accessories driven.”

Howell has converted a 5,000 sq.ft. area into several focal centers, making products and accessories well-displayed and easy to find. Using a movable wall, he plans to add another 2,000 sq.ft. to the store this spring. During a well-advertised “Truck-load Sale” weekend once a year, Howell draws tent campers, boating, hunting, and fishing enthusiasts into the store with a flea market sales technique that puts everything on sale out on tables for easy browsing. “Most of these customers are not thinking about motorhomes or towables when they come to All Seasons RV,” Howell points out, “but they get a good exposure while they are here, and some end up buying an RV. All Seasons RV has an excellent location in that we are within

Barry Chiron, president and CEO; Jennifer Radel, general manager; Mark Farrell, sales manager; and Jeff Howell, store manager, pause during a brief meeting in one of their favorite Tiffin coaches, the 40 QTH Phaeton.





45 minutes of 30 private campgrounds and Corps of Engineers parks,” he adds.

Chiron’s third operational policy is to provide a physical plant that does a good job of serving both customers and employees. The original buildings had two ceiling heights: one was high enough for the Class A motorhomes and the other worked for towables. With careful planning, mezzanines were removed and garage doors were cut in both buildings to give access. The result was a showroom that flowed naturally.

A 12,000 sq.ft. pole barn behind the showrooms was torn down and steel was hung for a modern 10-bay service facility. Each bay is 20 × 50, providing space for slides to be extended on both sides of a Class A motorhome. The facility is warmed with gas-fired radiant heaters, making the service area very pleasant even when the Ohio winter drops the temps to zero. Two of the bays at the end of the building are separated by high concrete block walls to allow indoor washing and cleaning. The bays are also used for walk-throughs and deliveries.

Since nearly all motorhomes have wood cabinetry, the company decided to add a woodworking shop. “Refurbishing is an area we address really well, especially for Class C’s and towables, but we also do Class A’s,” Chiron said. Another 20 × 65-ft. bay is dedicated to body, roof, and sidewall work, but All Seasons RV decided not to provide paint and chassis work

For R&R, Chiron and friends travel to the Great Bear Lake near the Arctic Circle in the Northwest Territories. It is not uncommon for the fishermen to catch 35 lb. Lake Trout like this one.



onsite, leaving that to other specialists in the area.

The first three operational policies (training, delegation, and physical plant) are the foundation for Chiron’s fourth operational policy: the best service possible! “Of course, we service everything we sell. But we are equipped and trained to service any brand in the industry. One of my most rewarding days in this business came last summer. We had five motorhomes in the service bays. Two had 30-day tags and four out of the five had not been purchased from All Seasons RV. The owners could not get the service they needed from their dealers and they came to us. Those folks will some day be our permanent customers and probably buy here next time.”

Another important enhancement to the company’s customer service is its membership in Route 66 RV Network. Several years ago Steve Francis dreamed of getting independent and privately owned RV dealers to form an association to assure that each dealer’s customers would receive a high level of service regardless of where they might be in the U.S. when a problem arose. Francis wanted to enlist dealers with economic stability and many years of experience. The network attracted companies who wanted a national footprint. It provides owners an assurance that they are always close to a dealer who will treat them like their own dealer.

As the conversation went back to family ownership, I could see Barry’s face brighten with pride in Jennifer’s decision to join the company in 1993. “Jennifer has done OJT in nearly every position in the company except certified technician,” he beamed. “Now she is working as both general manager and service manager to bring a personal touch to our customers. It is fun to watch their responses when they learn that an owner is serving them.”

“I graduated in elementary education from Ohio University,” Jennifer began. “There were no full-time jobs open in this area. I tried substitute teaching in addition to working here, but that left the store shorthanded when I was called. A career at All Seasons RV just made good sense. I started in parts at the Peninsula store, moved to a finance position in Willoughby, and then took over the bookkeeping through 1997. After a stint in sales at Peninsula, I was promoted to sales manager.”

Her dad stepped in. “And in the middle of her learning all of these jobs, she presented us with two granddaughters: Graicen

Continued on page 41



A 17,000 Mile Family Odyssey

“GOING ON AN EDUCATIONAL TRIP in a motorhome with the children was always a dream,” Carole said, “especially after we began our studies in early American history.”

Carole and Paul Meitler decided a decade ago they would home-school their children. Now, with nine years of experience, the California couple is certain it was a good decision. Their four daughters, Katelyn, 14, Rebecca, 12, Christina, 10, and Rachel, 6, are in full agreement. Carole teaches most of their coursework, but the girls take some classes and participate in extra-curricular activities through private, Christian, home-schooling programs.

The couple wanted their girls to see the United States up close and personal, visit the key sites where history was made 240 years ago when the nation was taking shape, see the incredible national parks throughout the U.S., and, of course, see fabulous Disney World.

“Such a trip always seemed financially unrealistic,” Carole continued. “We’re not a wealthy family and traveling across the entire country just didn’t seem like something we could afford. On family vacations, we usually did not travel farther east than Colorado. But most of our country’s formative history was made in the eastern states, the original 13 colonies.”

The opportunity came unexpectedly, but it was welcomed. After planning to downsize, the couple sold their home more quickly than anticipated. Without a mortgage and with a man-

agement consulting job Paul could handle mostly through the internet, they began a search for the right motorhome to fulfill their dream.

“We borrowed a Class C to try out our idea. But it proved to be too small,” Paul said. “We test drove several Class A’s. Then we visited La Mesa RV in San Bernadino and found a 2005 Allegro 32BA. It was well-made and had the right design for what we were going to do. It was big enough for all six of us. Our research showed that the shorter length would allow us to get into many state and national parks where 40-footers were excluded.”

The couch had three sets of seat belts for the children to use while underway, but they needed one more. A friend who owns a mechanic-body shop business took care of that problem by installing another captain’s chair with a seat belt where the barrel chair had been located.

“Like a 16-year-old learning to drive, we were constantly looking in both mirrors to check our position with the white and yellow lane dividers and watching other vehicles. After a week or two, we were both really comfortable with driving it,” Carole said.

The Meitlers decided not to take a tow car since they were in touring mode, going from place to place every day. They did, however, get racks to take six bicycles along. “We saved a considerable

Text by Fred Thompson Photography by the Meitler Family



amount by not rigging our car for towing. But we did rent a car a couple of times,” Paul explained. While they were sightseeing in Washington, Philadelphia, and New York, the subways and other public transportation served them really well.

The girls adapted quickly to their smaller “home,” with Rachel and Christina sleeping on the smaller bed converted from the dinette, and Katelyn and Rebecca sharing the hide-a-bed sofa.

“Our girls were self-starters every morning,” Carole said. “They made up their beds and put everything away.” They admitted that downsizing from a 3,000 sq.ft. home to a 300 sq.ft. motorhome was family culture shock initially.

Carole is the family organizer. Since summer, fall, and winter clothing would be needed, wardrobe downsizing was necessary to make the available space work for six people. Plus, home-schooling did not stop during the tour. School supplies and books were tucked into the overhead storage compartments in the front slide-out. The internet played a major role in their on-the-road home-schooling. Katelyn took a biology class over the internet, and she and Rebecca both took online sign language and essay writing courses. As they traveled, Carole planned readings in history, civics, and science that coincided with the places they were visiting.

Since they were covering on average more than 2,000 miles each month, geography classes became far more meaningful. “We were often in the middle of what we were studying,” Carole noted. “A lot of times when you read it in the book, you don’t really pay attention to it. You just read it because you have to,” Rebecca admitted. “When you are going to visit that site the next day, then you really understand it so much more.”

“You’re walking through it,” Paul said. “You can stand in the room where the Declaration of Independence was signed, and you realize the flurry that was happening right at that moment.”

Paul and Carole quickly realized the monthly costs of living and traveling in the motorhome were not going to exceed the monthly costs of living in southern California. “Renting a small home here costs two to three thousand monthly,” Carole pointed out. “Our campground fees and gas averaged out to \$1,400 per month and our food didn’t cost any more than it did at home. I know now why Wal-Mart is happy for you to stay overnight at their Supercenters,” she laughed. “They hit our credit card for \$50 to \$200 everytime we spent the night there.”

Leaving in May 2008, the trip originally was planned for a long summer. But the benefits lead the Meitlers to extend the tour to the end of the year.

Since the Meitlers did not tow a car, bicycle travel was important for sightseeing in the national parks. • History came alive for the children in so many of the historical sites they visited, but Independence Hall in Philadelphia was very special since it was where the actual Declaration of Independence was signed. • Carole made sure the girls did not get behind in their studies during their eight-month trip. She customized their lessons to coincide with the sites they were visiting. • Mt. Rushmore National Park on the Fourth of July was on everyone’s “favorite list” of the places they visited.

By family member, the following paragraphs show each person's first four favorite attractions and sites:

Paul and Carole: Carlsbad Caverns, Rocky Mt. NP, Grand Teton NP, Mt. Rushmore on July 4th, visiting family and friends along the way

Katelyn: Washington DC, Mt. Rushmore on July 4th, National Air Show at Kennedy Space Center, Air Force Academy

Rebecca: Carlsbad Caverns, Niagara Falls, Mt. Rushmore on July 4th, Disney World

Christina: Mt. Rushmore on July 4th, Disney World, our family in Kansas, Washington DC

Rachel: Disney World, visiting family in Wisconsin and Kansas, St. Louis Arch, Mt. Rushmore on July 4th

It wasn't all literature, history, math, and essay writing. "In Florida, they got their great reward," Carole said. "They also got to see manatees swimming just a few feet away and a space shuttle launch."

To give everyone a better idea of some RV-life survival techniques, the girls made up and posted the following "rules" they developed over their eight months of travel.


- No running in the motor home (where would you run to?).
- We have a bathroom fan, use it if necessary (you know what I mean if you've ever lived in an RV!).
- No singing in the motorhome unless we all sing together.
- One person in the bathroom at a time, two in an emergency.
- No changing in the bathroom, we are all girls except Dad.
- While driving, only two people make their meals at a time (too squishy w/o the slide out).
- If you wake up first, read a book quietly, and don't start tickling your sister!
- If someone is in a bad mood, they are outside alone (unless we are driving, of course).
- If someone is in a bad mood *and* we are driving, it's either the bathroom or the back bedroom for them!
- Rotating "seating chart" for the "best seat" in the RV.
- Kid engineered rotating "sleeping chart" for the better beds.
- Mandatory outside time for kids as deemed appropriate by parents.
- Date nights (occasionally known as sanity breaks) for parents - absolutely required!
- Oh, and most importantly, make sure the sewer hose is thoroughly attached when dumping the black tank!

Rebecca teased about the "clothes burning ceremony" whenever the subject of their limited wardrobe for seven months came up for discussion. "We learned more about one another and how to live in a space where everyone can hear every conversation, whether or not you were meant to be a part of that conversation," she smiled.

The family arrived back in southern California before Christmas. "I drove up to our first stop in California, my parents home, the home I grew up in, and it was like no time had passed," Carole

reflected. "It's all over and all just a memory or was it really a dream? Perhaps my pictures will convince me it was real. Life is like that. Kinda weird, huh?"

Story Follow-up: The Meitlers spent Christmas with Carole's parents and stayed on into the new year with the motorhome parked nearby for extra space and sleeping quarters. They bought a home in February and moved in at the end of the month. Paul went to work in a "regular job" that required his daily presence at the office. Home-schooling on a slightly more structured basis resumed. The motorhome was put in storage until future long weekends and shorter summer tours can be planned.

"Would we do this again?" Carole asked rhetorically. "In a heartbeat! Even for me, it was the best education I've ever gotten." 

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Interviews from Arizona and Nevada



AJ & Irene Fraties

Former Hometown: New Castle, California
Interviewed at Las Vegas RV Resort
Las Vegas, Nevada

- The Fraties own a 2007 Allegro Bus.
- They have been full-timing three years.
- They bought a fifth wheel after their home sold the first day on the market, thinking they would travel and find a place they would like to call home. They fell in love with the lifestyle, trading in their fifth wheel for an Allegro Bus.
- They travel with three dogs and one cat, Spiro, Rocky, Jake and KC (Kitty Cat).
- Both AJ and Irene retired as professional management consultants.
- They have been married 23 years.
- Their three children live in California: a daughter in Belmont and two sons in Placerville and Roseville.
- They have three grandsons.
- AJ and Irene share the driving responsibilities.
- They winter in Casa Grande, Arizona.
- They follow the Pickle Ball circuit by finding out where the USAPA tournaments are being held.
- Besides Pickle Ball, fly fishing is their passion. Their favorite places to fly fish are the St. Joe River in Idaho, the Big Horn River in Montana, the Provo River in Utah, and the Trinity River in northern California, where Irene landed a 30-inch, 13 lb. steelhead.
- They have not been to Red Bay, but are looking forward to visiting next year.



Ernie & Eileen Bump

Hometown: Catskill, New York
Interviewed at Paradise RV Resort
Sun City, Arizona

- The Bumps own a 2003 Allegro Bus.
- They have been motorhoming for 29 years, getting hooked on the RV lifestyle after going on an RV trip with their friends.
- Ernie retired from the trucking industry and Eileen is a retired secondary school teacher.
- They have been married 34 years.
- They have two sons and four grandsons.
- They both share the driving responsibilities.
- This is their ninth season wintering in Sun City. They keep coming back because of the great people they have met at the resort.
- While driving their old Allegro, Ernie placed his uppers on the "dog house." Later they looked back at their Doberman, Gretchen, who was smiling back at them with Ernie's uppers placed perfectly in her mouth. They couldn't stop laughing, even as Gretchen chomped down and crushed the uppers.
- Eileen plays the dulcimer, creates and sells fused jewelry, sings in the choir (solo work also), crochets, and knits. Ernie is a skilled wood worker and makes Eileen's dulcimers, beautiful wood bowls and cheese cutting boards that have a piece of Eileen's fused glass inserted in the corner. They are both avid golfers.
- They have been to Red Bay. They state that all the people there are friendly and go out of their way to help you.



John & Jane Lacerda

Former Hometown: Raynham, Massachusetts
Interviewed at Meridian RV Resort
Apache Junction, Arizona

- The Lacerdas own a 2005 Allegro Bay.
- They have been motorhoming for 15 years, becoming full-timers in February 2005.
- John retired from the trucking industry and Jane retired as a senior secretary at a vocational school.
- They have been married 37 years.
- They have one son who lives in Billerica, Mass., and a daughter who lives in Lakeville, Mass.
- They have three grandsons and one granddaughter.
- John does all of the driving, trying not to exceed 400 miles per day.
- John's RV tip is to make sure that when traveling you pull your entrance steps in at night thus acting as a deterrent to uninvited visitors.
- They travel with "Manny," the stuffed gorilla who sits in the driver's seat of their tow car when they are traveling.
- They enjoy hiking (especially the "Moonlight Hike" at the Lost Dutchman State Park in the Superstition Mountains) and walking. John plays cards and has won several Texas Hold'em tournaments at the resort. Jane knits and crochets.
- They have been to Red Bay and are impressed with the friendly people and good service.
- They had not signed up for *Roughing It Smoothly*, but plan on doing so.

Editor's Note: Earl and Rita Warren retired four years ago from the Denver area and are full-timers in their 2007 Tiffin Phaeton. I first met Rita when she submitted an article for "From the Road." They've traveled to 32 states so far. Rita says, "One of the best parts of exploring our beautiful country is meeting the people who make it great." They take time to visit their four sons and families (three grandsons and two granddaughters with one more on the way) who live in North Carolina, Kansas, California, and British Columbia. "An American Flag flies in front of our coach with a 101st Airborne plaque. We have South Dakota Purple Heart license plates. If you see us along the way, please stop to visit. We'd love to get to know you!"

DEALER PROFILE *Continued from page 34*

and Lauren (now 8 and 5).” Jen’s husband, Jim Radel, is the shop foreman at All Seasons RV.

“The important thing now is for us to redefine what we do and work on the basics, so that when the economy improves we will be ready to move forward again on a much better footing,” Jen said.

With a career approaching 50 years, Chiron looks beyond his own company to find opportunities to improve the health of the industry. He is one of the founders of the Great Lakes RV Association. Barry has been on the RVDA Board of Delegates for three terms, as well as being the RV Dealer Rep on the Greater Cleveland Auto Dealer’s Association Board of Directors.

He supports the Go RVing Campaign, the RV Coalition (RVIA, RVDA, and the Aftermarket Association), and has served on the Committee of Excellence, Quality Task Force (QTF). The Go RVing Coalition conducted an extensive survey of RV customer experiences and was saddened to find considerable disappointment. The Committee of Excellence came up with five task forces to deal with customers’ concerns: quality, communication, warranties, parts, and training. Each task force was comprised of members from four different areas: OEM, chassis, RV manufacturers, and retailers. Chiron served on the quality task force.


“The survey of RV owners asked respondents to identify the quality issues with their RVs, and to make recommendations to correct the problems,” he explained. “Each task force had a variety of challenges. In each case, we had to define clearly the customer’s complaint,” Chiron continued, “and determine what was the perception versus the reality. We were a little surprised to discover that the two top quality issues dealt with water and electrical.”

The QTF report avoided accusational conclusions and concentrated on removing the common barriers between the division members. Manufacturers agreed to study warranty claims for the first two years of product life. Dealers agreed to do more thorough testing before releasing the RV to the buyer.

The survey results and his experience serving on the Quality Task Force led Chiron to add the SEAL-TEC system to the company’s inspection and acceptance of new recreational vehicles arriving from the manufacturers. With all of the windows and doors closed, the system pressurizes the coach. A technician sprays the exterior of the coach with a soapy water solution. If bubbles form, the leak is repaired before the unit goes out on the sales lot.

“I really have no plans to retire,” this energetic man tells me. “Jen has brought a new dimension to this company. She understands we must change and adapt to the economy. She has the hardest part of running the day-to-day operations. I never dreamed we would work so well together. Her taking over has allowed me to do what I like best: sales promotion, advertising, negotiating contracts with vendors and suppliers. I am an expense control fanatic. This industry works on very

tight margins. You have to make the best contracts possible to survive. Success is in controlling expenses while still bringing value to your customers.”

In addition to enjoying his business immensely and serving the industry at large, Barry Chiron is a trophy fisherman. “My outlet now is fishing Great Bear Lake near the Arctic Circle in the Northwest Territories. The lake trout in the picture weighed about 35 pounds. The outfitter’s regulations require catch and release. The Arctic Grayling is a powerful small sport fish we like to catch. The greatest part of the experience is the wildlife we see on these trips. A grey wolf came into our camp. We saw a bull musk ox that was the size of a small elephant. We walked within a few feet of an elk cow and calf. But the most exhilarating sighting was a grizzly that stood at least 10 feet tall when he reared up on his hind legs. We were only 75 yards away downwind. Life is good.” 

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Inman's Answers

As the editor of "Serious Tech Talk," Danny Inman, 35-year veteran with Tiffin Motorhomes, invites your questions.

Please use the attached postcard and send Danny your questions about your motorhome and its operation, especially those questions that may be useful to all of our readers. If you need more space, address your letter to:

Danny Inman
Roughing It Smoothly
1403 Cedar Point Way
Monroe, GA 30656

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 own a 2006 Tiffin Allegro 32BA motorhome purchased June 15, 2006, equipped with Goodyear G670, 245/70R RV tires. The placard to the left of the driver specifies 80 psi cold which is the pressure we have used since the tires were new.

Late November of 2007 we were returning from Jacksonville, Florida, and our left rear outer tire blew the sidewall. The tires at that time had a little over 8,500 miles on them.

On November 28 we were on our way to Houston, Texas, by way of Dallas and our right front tire blew the sidewall. This happened in Greenville, Texas. I checked the tires before each trip and left Forrest City with an indicated 80 psi. This happened at 14,110 miles. Unit is garage kept.

Not wanting to continue with a Goodyear on the front, I asked Wyatt Wrecker to bring two tires of the 245/70R RV size Michelin if they had them. The tires they brought did not show RV and were load level K, 4530 lbs. The Goodyear tires were load level F, 4080 lbs. They are also 1/2 -inch narrower than the Goodyear. They run well, but seem to be firmer. Will this be a problem? Should they be changed?

I might note also that when I weigh the unit it usually comes in at 19,800 lbs, plus or minus 100 lbs. Any comments or suggestions you might have will be appreciated.

Joe Calvert
Forrest City, Arkansas

Dear Joe:

Using the Michelin tires in front and the Goodyear tires on the back should not cause you any problems. The extra load capacity the Michelins offer on the front is good. The tire being a half inch narrower should not be a problem. If the ride seems a little too firm, you could reduce the psi in the Michelins slightly. When you replace the rear tires, you may want to use Michelins there also. You are well within the capacity of that chassis which is 20,500 pounds.

We have a 2008 Allegro Bus that transfers every crack and joint in the pavement to the steering wheel and transmits a very audible bang from each small rough spot. This can't be normal. Is the ride height out of adjustment and why would it be?

This bus had 2,500 miles on it (now) from the dealer (Oregon is that far from the factory). We just bought the unit in October and have only driven it 225 miles to a storage facility in Seattle, Washington, but we were very aware of this outstanding, surprising feature.

Marvin Hassebrock
Fairbanks, Alabama

Dear Marvin:

The chassis is set up from the factory to

carry 14,600 lbs. GVW on the front axle. If you are running the maximum cold pressure in your tires, you may be able to take it down 15-20 psi.

To be sure, weigh the front axle, get your tire specs, and consult your Michelin Tire Inflation Chart which was included in your owner's manuals. The maximum tire pressure is 120 psi and should only be used if your weight is 15,660 lbs. Since the max rating on your front axle is 14,600, you should only be running 110 psi. Most coaches like yours weigh in around 13,500 lbs, which means you should be carrying 100 psi, which will soften your ride considerably.

Your ride height could be at its maximum setting for that chassis which would also account for the hard ride you have been getting. However, this has to be adjusted by a professional technician at a chassis service center.

Is there any way to adjust the thermostat on my 2005 Allegro 34WA? Currently it has such a wide range that when it is cold outside it runs the furnace from too cold to too hot rather than keeping the coach comfortable. The difference between turning on and turning off the burner must be five to seven degrees. I have had the cover off the thermostat and it looks to be mostly solid state with a slide switch. I couldn't see any way to reset the temperature differential.

Ralph E. Baker
Bradenton, Florida

Dear Ralph:

The 2005 Allegro does not have an adjustable thermostat. If there is a heat source, such as a light or an electric heater, near the thermostat that is keeping the temperature from varying as much as it is in the rest of the motorhome, then you will have to remove the heat source.

The other possibility is a faulty thermostat. The variance should be three degrees, plus or minus one. The only way to correct this problem is to replace the thermostat.

Does Tiffin plan to introduce a floorplan in the Phaeton line that places the kitchen area forward? My wife likes the floorplan offered on the Allegro Bus 40QRP; however, that is out of our price range. We're hoping

for a Phaeton with a similar floorplan.

Donald Borey
Gonzales, Louisiana

Dear Donald:

We will be introducing new Phaeton floorplans for 2010, but they have not been released at this time.

This summer, in July, the solenoid that provides power for the slides failed. After being shown how to bypass it with a jumper, we returned from our trip out west to Red Bay. Your tech folks replaced it and we returned to our home near Atlanta. Now, after several short trips to football games, it has failed again. Any ideas on why? I can still jumper it, but wonder if it should be replaced by a heavier duty one.

John Haynes
Lilburn, Georgia

Dear John:

You may have gotten another faulty solenoid. Try replacing it again. There's probably not anything else that could go wrong.

We have a 2007 Allegro Bus with a Spartan tag axle and a 400-hp Cummins. A recent stop at Red Bay fixed the few items we had under warranty, then some welding was done under a recall, on the left side tag axle skirt. Within 100 miles from Red Bay, all instruments and gauges failed. I found a 20-amp fuse blown at the rear bumper area. I replaced the fuse and all was OK for 1,000 miles. Now the problem has returned. No instruments or gauges!

As the engine cools down, all is OK for about 70 miles, then goes bad again. I've checked the computer attachment and computer fuses—all okay and tight.

When things go bad, I get: Check Engine; Check Transmission; Check ABS; red lights come on; the warning horn won't stop! I need help.

George T. Holdcroft
Titusville, Florida

Dear George:

When the welding was done on the chassis, the technician should have disconnected the engine batteries. Check to be certain that all connections on the battery are properly tightened. A temporary loss of power or

ground from these batteries could cause this problem.

I have a 2003 Allegro Bus 35RP with a 330-hp CAT engine. When the engine is started in cold weather, I wait for the "Wait to Start" light to go out before cranking. As soon as the engine starts, the "Wait to Start" light comes back on.

Question: Should I turn the engine off, then repeat the procedure or leave the engine running? I have been leaving the engine running until the light goes out. Am I doing damage to the engine?

Dan Craig
Mt. Holly, North Carolina

Dear Dan:

Do not turn off and restart. While you are waiting on the initial "Wait to Start" light to go off, the air intake is being heated. When the light goes off and you start the engine, that warmed air is used up in starting the engine and cooler (or cold) air replaces it in the intake area. The system then starts attempting to reheat the air again in the intake area, causing the light to come on again. Once the engine warms up, the air surrounding the engine, and the air in the intake area, *stays* warm and the light goes off and remains off.

I have a 2006 Phaeton 40QDH. When raining, the rear view camera is useless from swirling water and residue. Is this common and what is the solution?

Jack Armstrong
Davenport, Iowa

Dear Jack:

That is a pretty common problem. An aftermarket hood is available in some RV stores.

As of 2007, I am the third owner of a 27-ft. 1987 Allegro. I pumped the gas tank out to get rid of stale gas, and put in 10 fresh gallons, the engine quit at the front gate as if it ran out of fuel. I put in five more gallons, it ran fine. The last owner kept good records, and never put over 67 gallons in the 80 gallon tank, leaving 13 gallons. It never quit on him. (1) Could the tank pick-ups (generator and engine) be reversed? (2) How can I tell?

(3) There are no air bags on this coach. Can I put them in by jacking up the front and stuffing them in through the spring coils? I have done that on cars before.

Frank Cunningham
Okeechobee, Florida

Dear Frank:

(1) There is a good possibility that they are reversed. (2) When gauge shows empty, and the generator is still running, they are reversed. The generator should shut off when the tank has a quarter tank of fuel left. (3) This is not a recommended method; but if you can install them without damaging the air bags, it will work.

I have a 1999 Allegro. The headlights are not very bright. I have changed the bulbs to halogen, but with not much increase in the distance of the light. The lens seems cloudy. Do you have any ideas?

Chuck Doubleday
San Jose, California

Dear Chuck:

This is a common problem with older units. Adding an extra set of aftermarket driving lights is the cheapest way to remedy your problem.

I own a 1988 27-ft. Allegro that is giving me generator problems. When I plug into power, my air conditioner operates normally. However, when I try to run the air conditioner off of the generator, it will not work. It will provide power for lights, but not air.

I plan to do some dry camping in early August and will need the generator. Can you tell me what to do to correct this problem?

Craig Brown
Arnold, Maryland

Dear Craig:

The genset is outputting enough power to meet the demand placed on it. Take your coach to an Onan generator shop. More than likely it needs to be serviced and the points and plugs replaced. You may also need to remove the carburetor and clean it.

You have computerized your way away from your customers. I have a 1978 Allegro, 20 feet long, with a 454 Chevrolet engine that

I can't find parts for. I need a steering stabilizer shock for the front end. I called the parts department and they told me to call back. I spent three long-distance phone calls for no apparent reason. You have solved my problems so far, but now I am getting the runaround. The part I need is Delco product #4984838. The part is approximately 15" long and 1 1/2" in diameter. One end is straight and the other end is 90 degrees.

Kenneth Daniel
Longview, Texas

Dear Kenneth:
If you have a 1978 Allegro, we think it's time for you to buy a new Tiffin motorhome. But just in case you decide not to, the parts for the older Chevrolet chassis are very difficult to find because of discontinued parts and the changing of parts numbers over the years. Our local Chevrolet dealership here in Red Bay was the supplier and repair dealer for the Chevrolet chassis on which we started building in 1973. They still have some of the component parts in stock from the earlier units we used. The part I think you are looking for is called an idler arm shock. The number to contact Page Chevrolet is 256-356-4482. Ask for David Grimes in the parts department.

I can't find any written material that tells the origin of the following: "Allegro," "Phaeton," the Tiffin circular logo, and the name of the town of Red Bay.

It would be nice, as a new Phaeton owner, to know the meaning and background of these names, terms, and design. Thanks!

John Guenther
Borden, Indiana

Dear John:
When Bob Tiffin first started the company, he wanted a name that would appear first in the category listings of the Yellow Pages. He asked his wife, Judy, to come up with some ideas. Since Judy is a pianist, the musical term "Allegro" came to mind, they both liked the sound of the word, and chose it to name the first coach built. Musically, it means "a brisk, lively tempo."

Originally, a Phaeton was a fancy, open four-wheeled carriage used during the 18th and 19th centuries, with or without

a top, having one or two seats facing forward. When the first automobiles began to replace carriages, nearly all of the manufacturers had a Phaeton model, which usually was a four-door, open-top model which could be closed. When Mr. Tiffin was looking for a name for a new line of motorhomes in 1997, he found to his surprise that the word Phaeton had never been trademarked. Now the name belongs to Tiffin Motorhomes.

Red Bay's name came from two sources: the red clay soil and bay tree, which is actually a wild magnolia.

Judy Tiffin selected a mariner's compass as the Tiffin logo design. A graphic designer at Lewis Communications added the "T" to the logo and put the "Roughing It Smoothly" trademark around the outside of the logo. That completed the design which now appears on every Tiffin motorhome.

The company's top-of-line coach, the Zephyr, was named after the *Pioneer Zephyr*, the first diesel-powered railroad train built by the Budd Company in 1934. As a promotional tool to advertise passenger rail service in the U.S., it set a speed record in May 1934 for travel between Denver and Chicago with a daylight-to-dusk run of 1,015 miles in 13 hours and 5 minutes. The word itself means "a strong west wind." TMH trademarked the name for use in the RV industry. Ford Motor Company owns the trademark for use on automobiles.

I have a 2007 Allegro 30DA. My question is this: The coach has an external switch panel on the left side above the entry door well. One switch is labeled 12-volt DC. When I have the coach plugged in to shore power, if this switch is in the off position, does the converter still charge the house batteries? Thanks, I enjoy your column.

Bud Jenkins
Cottonwood, AZ

Dear Bud:
The batteries will still be charged when the 12-volt disconnect is turned off

I have a 2008 Phaeton. It has four TVs that work great on the satellite, but when I

switch over to the antenna and program the TVs, every one of them programs different channels and sometimes one of the units will not pick up anything.

I would think that if the antenna picked up a signal that it should play on every TV regardless of the number of units. By the way, it played GREAT when I purchased the coach in February 2008.

Phillip Salter
Waynesboro, Georgia

Dear Phillip:
The atmospheric conditions may cause a variance in your reception when you program each of your four televisions, even if you are only 15 minutes apart in programming each one. You can retry when you have a clear day and very likely will get the same results on all four.

My husband and I bought a new 2008 Allegro Bay FRED in November of 2008. The cooktop is equipped with covers that we have to remove and find a place to store. Is there a way to make a one piece top that folds up against the wall out of the way? Thank you in advance for your answer.

Becky Meyer

Dear Becky,
We tried that design several years ago. Due to the weight of the solid surface material, we had problems with cracking and chipping of the solid surface material.

During our stint in the snow, we were dry camping for five days. When I left home, I had an adequate amount of propane in the tank...or so the gauge was reporting. Toward the end of our journey, I was starting to worry, because it was reading E on the tank. I could tell from the tank that the lower third still had propane in it (condensation line on the tank). However, when I went to fill it up, it only took 23 gallons of LPG. So the question is, what is the rule of thumb for the propane gauge? Even though it was reading E, it seemed to have sufficient propane left in the tank. Is there a lower threshold when the tank can no longer supply propane? So is this a level gauge or a pressure gauge? That may be the

more important question. Because if there isn't enough pressure, I know that a flame will be hard to come by.

Will Hutcheson
Livermore, California

Dear Will:
The LP tank has a float-type gauge inside that measures the propane. Over the years this has not been the most accurate measurement device. You fill the tank to 80 percent full of liquid propane because you will be burning the vapors above the liquid. You will burn off the first 50 percent of the liquid faster because you do not have as much vapor available. The last half of the liquid propane burns slower because the space above it has far more vapor, which is what you actually burn.

My 1992 Allegro Bay, built on an Oshkosh X-Line chassis, has developed a couple of problems which I have had difficulty trying to solve. I hope you can help me.

The heater blower switch has stopped working in all but the high position. The vent controls work okay.

Ford Motor Company made the steering wheel and speed control and issued a Safety Recall. I checked with Ford and was told they didn't put the steering wheel etc. on my chassis. The speed control has ceased functioning (I rarely used it) and when it did the horn wouldn't blow. I got the horn functional by taking the wire from the horn button and running it to the horn relay. The recall mentioned danger of fire.

Any advice you may have for me will be greatly appreciated.

Benjamin J. Canavello
Elberta, Alabama

Dear Benjamin:
The heater blower and dash assembly were installed by Tiffin Motorhomes. The problem could be in the dash control panel or the rheostat mounted in the front and under the hood. It controls the fan speed. Parts for the repair should still be available from Tiffin Motorhomes.

Oshkosh Chassis (now owned by Freightliner) installed the cruise control. While it did not come directly from Ford, it did use some Ford parts. It is going to take a technician

familiar with this system to trace down the faulty parts and find a replacement source.

Wouldn't it be a great idea to reserve a half dozen or so pages in your magazine for sales of Allegro motorhomes? I just happen to have a 38-ft. 1987 Allegro, always shedded, which will probably be for sale before long.

Gordon D. Johnson
O'Neill, Nebraska

Dear Gordon:
TMH decided at the beginning not to accept advertising from owners because it would compete with our dealers.

I own a 2007 Allegro 32BA. At our last campout in October, I opened the three drains; red, blue, and black, and let them empty. I couldn't find my socket to unscrew the nylon plug of the hot water heater at that time. After an hour or so, one of my camping friends loaned me a socket for the plug and when I unscrewed it, there was no water. I released the pressure valve, and no water. We had been using the hot water all weekend, and there was no sign of water or dripping underneath the coach. Where did the water go? I contacted Tiffin via email and telephone, and no one can solve the dilemma. I will "summerize" in 2 months. Hope you can help before Spring! Thanks!

Mike Volker
Norwalk, Ohio

Dear Mike:
Not having a chance to physically check your motorhome, I can only offer a theory. With the location of the hot water heater on the 32BA, and your opening all three of the drains (hot, cold, and the water tank) at the same time, you may have created a vacuum that pulled the water from the hot water heater.

Reader Response

I was reading the Vol. 5 #4 issue of *Roughing It Smoothly*, regarding the problem of James and Adele Hoelsher of Rochester, New York, and the vibration of their RV. Well, it happened to me in a 32-ft. Gulf Stream on the same Ford Chassis. My mechanic found nothing wrong, but said "have the wheels realigned." I thought he was nuts.

It happened again, twice. I took it to a truck alignment center, cost \$240. They made adjustments but not big ones. The problem went away and it steers better. So it is an alignment problem.

David Adams
W. Ossipee, New Hampshire

I have three design suggestions for Tiffin. We own a 2008 42-ft. Allegro Bus.

#1. The screens on the top of the entry screen door and the bottom of the passenger window prevent the rider in the passenger chair from clear vision of passing terrain/signs/traffic when traveling.

Suggestions #2 and #3 have to do with vertically challenged people. I'm five feet tall.

#2. The rounding of the counter in front of the sinks requires short people to bend forward to reach the faucets. This makes kitchen activities tiresome for the back.

#3. The bathroom mirrors are too tall. I'm able to see from the nose up when standing in front of the mirror.

Linda Kramer
Philip, South Dakota

Dear Linda:
Thank you for your suggestions. We appreciate the input our owners offer and try to incorporate them into the model changes and upgrades we make throughout the year.

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: fredthompson1941@hotmail.com, be sure to put "RIS From the Road" in the subject line of your email. If your communication requires an entire letter, mail it to us at: 1403 Cedar Point Way, Monroe, GA 30656. Share with us the interesting places you've been, an unusual experience, a great destination, or just a good place to camp and hang out. "From the Road" contributors will receive a free *Roughing It Smoothly* T-shirt. What's your size?

—Fred Thompson, editor



F R O M T H E R O A D

The Life and Times of Tiffin Motorhome Owners

More Snow Than We Expected

You will find attached a picture of our 2005 Phaeton 40QDH, taken in early February at the Upper Pines Campground in Yosemite National Park. On the night of the storm, power was lost to a lot of park facilities. We were expecting the snow (I always travel with chains), but not this much at the elevation we were located. We stayed an extra day to let the roads and non-snow savvy visitors clear out. We left on clear roads. It certainly needed a bath when we got home.

Will Hutcheson
Livermore, California



Motorhome Mama

For a few years now I've been planning to write a letter telling about the adventures of our 1988 Class A Allegro motorhome. We purchased it from Stenzel's Campers in Elmore, Minnesota, in the spring of 1995. We had never had a motorhome before, but our daughter, Lori, was taking part in the "Bicycle Ride Across America - A Sesquicentennial Expedition" put together by the "Iowa Boy," Chuck Offenburger, who was associated with the Des Moines *Register*.

This ride had 300 plus riders leaving Long Beach, California, on Memorial Day of 1995, and ending in Washington, D.C., on Labor Day. The bikers invited everyone they met to come to the state of Iowa in 1996 and enjoy its hospitality as it celebrated 150 years of statehood. I became one of the "Motorhome Mama's" serving as support drivers. Lori became engaged on this ride!

The Allegro's next outing was in the summer of 2004, when Lori, and now her two children, ages 7 and 5, along with some of the Iowa 150 people, biked the state of Illinois. This ride helped

prepare Kelsie and Cole to take part in the 2005 bike ride across America from Venice, Louisiana, into Canada. They had to take turns riding along with mom! I'm enclosing a picture of Lori and the children with their bike and myself at the wheel!

In 2006, we all took part in a Wisconsin Ride. My husband, Joe, also went along for his first bike ride. Kelsie made the comment that "Grandpa just didn't know how to be a part of motorhome travel." She told him that we had to take turns walking around 'cause there isn't room to just stand in the hallway!

Beginning this summer, the Lewis and Clark Bicycle Tour will be continued into 2010, finishing up next summer. Needless to say, we will need a larger motorhome, and I'm in the looking stage. But, oh, the wonderful memories that we have with our very first RV!

Linda Nydegger
Kensett, Iowa



Our Antique Toad

We bought our first Allegro in 2001 and decided it would be nice to have a small car to tow when we wanted to see the sites on our trips. Several years before we bought the coach our neighbor introduced us to the fun of touring in an old Model T Ford that he had restored. We joined the local Model T Club in town and found a 1915 Model T for sale. The car was complete and running so we decided to make the purchase and began a slow restoration. The Ford Model T was manufactured from 1908 thru 1927. Over 15 million Model T's were manufactured during that time. My wife frequently referred to the car as "the other woman" because of the time I spent completing the restoration; a man's affair with an automobile is real.

Well, now we thought this would be a perfect car to tow behind the coach since we planned to visit back roads and be in no rush on our adventures. Because the old car is not towable on its wheels (they are wood) the next investment was an enclosed trailer to haul the car. Amazing how a toad can cost so much when you want to equip it for towing.

In 2005 we bought a 32BA Allegro, we were now retired and wanted to do more traveling. The Model T became our primary tow vehicle. In July 2008 we made a trip to the Model T Ford Centennial Celebration in Richmond, Indiana. Over 940 Model T's were assembled at the Wayne County Fairgrounds; the most T's assembled in one place since they left the factory! After a week of touring many back roads in Indiana we headed for Kentucky and Alabama. If you are a horse lover, stay and visit the Kentucky Horse Park near Lexington. They have a beautiful RV park and horse museum.

At our campground stops we used the old car to visit local historical sites and places of interest. The campground at Red Bay became our home for a week while repairs were made to the coach. The Model T was perfect for daily trips to town and the surrounding area. An afternoon trip driving at 25 MPH on the Natchez Trace will be remembered for a long time. Amazing the things you see when driving that slow.

We began our trip in June and finally arrived home in mid-September after visiting twenty states, five national parks, and three national monuments. This is the start of a continuing adventure with our Allegro and the Model T. Hope to see you all on the back roads someday – just look for the Model T.

Judy and Bill Konvalinka
Sebastopol, California



Jon & JoAnn Buss' Maiden Voyage in Their Allegro Bus

We left New Richmond, Wisconsin, in January 2008 to drive to California for our first trip in our Allegro Bus. Tuesday morning, January 22, it was 15 degrees below zero.

I arrived home after doing errands, and carried out boxes of food and clothes to the motorhome. We pulled out about 1:00 p.m.,



and as I turned to the south, the sun came through the windshield in our eyes. I hit the shade button and my shade came down, but when I hit the right shade button, it would not move. Come to find out, my wife had hit her button at the same time, so we blew a fuse. My wife tried to hang a towel to shade her side from the sun. I called the dealer and was told the fuse was located under the two drawers in front. That night, I pulled out every fuse in there and they were all fine. The next morning, I called Tiffin Motorhomes and they told me it was in the basement compartment in front of the left front tire. Sure enough, there it was in big letters, Right and Left Shades. I checked my fuse supply, and of course there was not a 30-amp fuse.

The first night, we camped at the casino in Osceola, Iowa. I stepped out and sunk into 14 inches of snow. A big storm had gone through two days before. We noticed a lot of tracks in the ditches on the road through Iowa. I did not dare put out the slides or the levelers. If they had frozen to the pad, we would have been in trouble. I went in to register, and they said it would be \$20, or if I would join the club, they would give me \$10 to gamble with. So I walked way to the back of the casino and came back, and the attendant was going to write down the date. I asked if he could put down tomorrow's date because I wanted to have a bite to eat and hit the sack. He said "No problem."

We had a bite and went to make the bed but could not find the sheets. Fortunately, I had put sleeping bags in the closet the week before. It was 10:00 p.m. My wife asked me to go gamble now so we could leave early the next morning. I went, and, of course, lost the \$10 immediately. I thought I would try one more time and I ended up with \$200 net. The next morning, we pulled into a station on the freeway. I filled up and went in to purchase some 30-amp fuses, and the bill came to \$200.28. My good luck from the night before paid off!

We met my niece in the Wal-Mart parking lot in Emporia, Kansas. We stayed a little too long because it was dark when we pulled in to Wichita. When we called in earlier, the RV park said they had pull-through sites. After registering, I pulled around to

the site, but it was not at an angle, and there were two big elm trees on each side. I was pulling in when I thought I had better look out to see how close I was to the tree. There was about one inch between the coach and the tree. I stopped and went to unhook the car from the coach. As I dropped the hitch, the car started to roll backwards. I ran to jump in and apply the brake. I had forgotten to get in first and put the car in gear. After parking the motorhome, I thought of an item I needed from the car. As I was returning, my wife shouted "CAT!" Boy, was he in his glory! I would take one step and he would run five feet. He led me clear across the park to a wooded area next to a home. I finally shined the flashlight in his eyes and was able to capture him. I was about to wring his neck, but I thought I had better not so early in our

adventure. Besides, my wife would have killed me.

Thursday morning was beautiful. We proceeded west on 54 from Wichita to Liberal. The wind was getting stronger and stronger, blowing about 50 miles an hour. We were swaying a lot on the road. I decided to pull into a rest area, and as I did a trucker came up to the door. He said I had lost two doors way back about 15 miles or so. I looked down under the coach and all the doors were there, but the two doors behind the refrigerator were gone. I decided not to go back because I could have looked for days and never found them. We pulled out on 54 again. We went a few miles and came to a four-lane area. Several cars went by me, and then a truck. The next truck was an empty cattle truck. The third truck was pulling by and I saw pigs on the second level. As he got about 10 inches past me, a gust of wind hit and spread pig manure across my windshield. I started the wipers which spread it all over the window. I had to stand up to look over it. I pulled into the station in Guymon and looked for a long stick, but could not find one. I had left mine back home. I went into the store to ask about the stick and was told they didn't put them out anymore because they lose them. The clerk had a two-step ladder she said I could use. I now know why you take a ladder with you on your travels. Well, I went to the first water well and it was frozen, the same for the next two. The last one was open, but had a small hole. I ran back and forth. I couldn't get the pig manure to wash off, so I piled on the water and then used my ice scraper to peel it off in layers. I didn't get the windshield clean, but at least I could see out. We had quite a laugh about the whole experience. We made it to Tucumcari that night.

We called the dealer in Albuquerque to find out if they had those doors. Of course not, but they could order them and have them in two days. I then called Tiffin Motorhomes and had them ship the doors to my sister's place in Yuma, Arizona.

Meanwhile, my wife was reading the manual. She kept repeating to me, "It is not a good idea to learn about your motorhome as you go." She can be real irritating sometimes. We drove to Wilcox, Arizona, to stay Friday night. The next morning, I filled up with propane and asked for a truck wash. We pulled through and as I was going to hook up the car, it would not lock. I needed to release it and start again. I couldn't find the wrench to do that. We went back to the site in the RV park. The wrench wasn't there. I then walked the entire way through the truck wash. There it was on the floor. I suppose I put it on the bumper and the spray blew it off. It was a relief to find it. My wife said, "Where is your check list?" You know that sure hurts your pride.

We had a great time in Santee, California. My son and family live about 15 minutes from that beautiful park. We returned home the end of March. We are now planning to leave the 12th of October. I want to get out of here before it freezes. We plan to stop and visit Tiffin Motorhomes on our way to Florida this winter. There needs to be a manual for guys like me that explains in detail all the little items, with a DVD to show how to run your coach. Those manuals are written for mechanics. Anyway, we love to travel and are enjoying our Allegro Bus!

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