



*By Elaine Marze*

In view of current gas prices many people are deciding they are not content to just sit in front of their televisions dreaming of traveling. Instead, they are joining the record numbers of people who are exploring America in a recreational vehicle (RV). Prior to retirement lots of people begin researching the selection of RVs that are available and map out their destinations in anticipation of joining their compatriots on highways, country back-roads, and in campgrounds.

Are you looking forward to becoming one of the senior road warriors who go adventuring, seeking new sights and new experiences? Ever gaze wistfully at motor homes and campers as they leisurely pass you by on the highway? Ever wish it was your home-on-wheels displaying those cute, “I’m spending my kid’s inheritance” bumper stickers? If the answers are “yes” there are a few things to consider.

The first requirement is, of course, to choose what kind of recreational vehicle that suits your wants and needs. Taking a trip in a rental RV may be a wise decision before purchasing one. The vast selection of campers available includes fifth wheel trailers, motor homes, bumper pulls, cab-over and pop-ups. Deciding on the kind, style and size to buy is probably the most pressing decision for people considering part or full-time RVing.

Those who are unsure about how they will like RVing or

who only have limited time available to travel should consider buying a cheaper pre-owned camper of 28 feet or less until they decide they’re serious. And, because hooking up and setting up does require some “educating” it is smart to travel with seasoned campers the first few times. Taking advantage of a friend’s experience and advice could save you tearing your steps off (forgetting to raise them); denting your top (trying to go under low awnings) and other little “accidents” you can avoid by learning from their mistakes.

One lesson we learned early on is that though it may seem like a good idea, riding in a pull-behind trailer is not a good idea. On one of our first convoy trips through the mountains with several other RVs, a friend developed a migraine headache. When we stopped for fuel, my husband told her to lay down in their fifth-wheel and rest until we got to our destination.

I advised Joann not to do it, but she listened to my husband instead of me. She got in the camper and we started off – circling around switch-back mountain curves. Joann told us later that it was only a few seconds before she knew it was a mistake. She tried to get off the bed to make her way back to the door so she could signal

“Stop” – or, she later decided jumping might be an option. She knew she had to get out of that camper one way or the other because now she was nauseous in the extreme in addition to the

*(continued on next page)*

*The realization that each day you get to choose where you want to go and if and when you want to go there is invigorating.*

headache. But every time she stood up, she would get thrown back on the bed or into a wall or onto the floor. Finally, she was reduced to crawling. In the meantime I kept telling my husband to pull over so we could check on her, but he couldn't find a good place to park. Long story short, as the lead RV, it was an hour before he stopped. When Joann's husband opened the door she fell out on the ground, vomiting! It was a while before she spoke to the man who advised her to ride in the fifth wheel instead of the truck, but she credited me with saving her life by hounding him to stop and check on her.

Comfort-driving while pulling a rig comes with experience. The more time spent on the road, the more RVers are apt to upgrade to longer length campers with slide-out rooms that make all the difference in living comfortably with a homey feel. Slides also add weight for pulling so it pays to know your towing capacity.

Personal tastes differ, but it seems to me that the prevailing opinion among experienced campers is that bumper-pulls are great for parking at a lake for a week, but for people who are going to be on the road a lot, the maneuverability is much less than that of a fifth wheel.

Fifth wheel trailers are very popular with full-time RVers, but do require a certain kind of truck and hitch to pull them. One reason for their popularity is that fifth wheelers are easier

to navigate in tight spaces, and the truck hitch makes them more stable. For drivers this provides an advantage in turning corners, backing up and maneuvering in and out of camp sites.

Motor homes are especially popular with families. Certainly two advantages are that they provide easy bathroom access and television. And, with advancing age, also comes the inability to stay seated for long periods of time due to RLS

(Restless Leg Syndrome) and circulation problems so motor homes provide more mobility. Generally, the price of a motor home is more than that of hitch trailers, and there is the need for a tow vehicle unless owners want to rent a car when they reach their destination or unhook to drive somewhere. The main disadvantage to motor homes is their gas mileage, and adding that extra vehicle towing footage is a turn-off for some drivers.

A motor home is not as easy to navigate as a fifth-wheel, and particularly the longer ones need room turning corners. My husband has climbed behind the wheel

of more than one luxury motor home to literally free it from a rock and a hard place after the driver got stuck. Be particularly careful in Hot Springs and Eureka Springs, Arkansas, and be forewarned that when you know a town has narrow, winding streets carved from a mountain, either park it or be sure of your



**We spent Christmas in a Nashville, Tennessee campground (waiting on the birth of a grandbaby) and enjoyed a white Christmas along with a surprising number of other RVers.**



**Camping in Westcliffe, Colorado provides beautiful views.**

driving capabilities. Inexperienced drivers might want to stop at an RV park coming into town instead of touring the town in a long motor home.

My husband and I owned several fifth wheels over a 20 year time period. We eventually upgraded to a 34 foot fifth wheel with slides but now own a motor home partially due to having grandchildren. Three of the grands regularly travel with us and a motor home allows us more freedom for playing games during trips, easy access to the microwave, and they can make as many trips to the bathroom as they want without “Papa” having to pull over. We miss the ease of unhooking the fifth wheel and taking the truck around various locations, but for now the motor home best suits the needs of our expanding family. It also gives our mothers a place to “stretch out” while traveling since one has had a knee replacement and the other has a bad back.



**Ben and Elaine Wreyford are fairly new to RVing, but they have already taken their two-year old granddaughter, Olivia (Livi), on a camping trip. They bought a 2005 30ft. Cardinal Fifth Wheel with two slides, and with two newborn grandbabies they will be needing the extra room.**

If you travel with pets during hot weather it is vital you have generator capabilities so you can spend time sightseeing or dining while your pet is safe and cool in an air-conditioned RV. Otherwise, pet owners must order fast food while traveling and wait until they park and hook up to electricity to leave their furry or feathered friends.

Reasons for traveling the country in a camper for weeks and months at a time are as diverse as the roads we traverse. Freedom is one reason – freedom from yard work, community and neighborhood obligations, regular household chores and everyday responsibilities. The realization that each day you get to choose where you want to go and if and when you want to go there is invigorating. The constraints of time and responsibilities normally restricting personal preference have been left behind for a while.

RVing can be the solution for depressed and unmotivated retirees, especially men. A man who retires to a recliner and becomes a physical and emotional burden to his wife receives new purpose when challenged with adventure as a road warrior. It can be a brain boost and spirit stimulus to make decisions about generators, diesel versus gas engines, mapping routes, outdoor cooking and making travel plans. Campgrounds become to adults what playgrounds are to children, and you never know who you will run into while RVing.

There were only a few RVs at the campground in Westcliffe, Colorado so while my husband got us hooked up at the campsite, I went to the facility bathroom and didn't bother locking the door. I was therefore very surprised when the stall door opened and a woman stood there apologizing for intruding. She finally shut the door, then quickly reopened it and said, “Aren't you Elaine Marze? It is you!” I affirmed and requested a few moments before we renewed old acquaintance.



There are wonderfully diverse campgrounds all around the country. Some of us are inclined to camp at state parks whenever possible. Their rates can be half as much as KOA and privately owned facilities, and many have hiking trails, playgrounds and are located near lakes. Sunday church services are held at many RV parks. Be advised that some state parks do not have full hook-ups, but

dump stations are available.

After seeing documentaries about dirty hotel sheets many women share my feelings about loving our RVs because we can go to bed on our sheets while knowing that any germs in our “room” came from us and not a multitude of strangers.

People ask about the advantages and disadvantages of convoy RVing. The best advice I can give is: know your traveling companions and be sure you are compatible. If you like to mosey along, stopping wherever the urge leads you, and you are traveling with people who are determined to get from one destination to the other in the least amount of time, you may not enjoy the trip. We prefer traveling with three or four other RVs to traveling with a convoy of 20 or more although we have done that. With the larger groups you need a leader who is reminiscent of the old wagon train masters. Even with careful pre-planning it is difficult getting into the same campground, and fuel stops are nightmares when you have so many trying to fill up at once.

It is smart to have at least another RV traveling with you because we have been with people who ran out of gas, had flats and mechanical trouble. Cell phones do not work in all areas so having another couple along can come in real handy. One of our group ran out of gas in the desert so my husband unhooked our fifth wheel to make better time and drove an hour to get gas.

*(continued on next page)*

*In addition to giving seniors new interests, traveling truly broadens their horizons, promotes a new lease on life, and renews a spirit of adventure...*

One advantage to driving a diesel truck is that you can carry cans of extra fuel in the back whereas hauling gasoline can be risky.

In addition to giving seniors new interests, traveling truly broadens their horizons, promotes a new lease on life, and renews a spirit of adventure that may have waned with decades dedicated to work, family and financial responsibilities. Adult children and grandchildren report there is a tradeoff involved when Grandma and Grandpa begin regular traveling. They may miss having available baby sitters and Sunday dinners at Grandma's house, but the trade-off is in a younger spirit, less reliance on their children for



**Where's the fish? Colton Clemons and Hagen Marze (both two years old) have the pole, hook and worms and they are ready for the "big one"!**

emotional support and amazing travel stories.

As one young professional said of his RVing parents, "They're not sitting around waiting for us to call anymore. They're busy doing their own thing, and now the last thing they want to talk about is their ailments."

So join the fun. There is a lot of country out there that we have not seen – yet!

**Elaine Marze is a published author, and former newspaper journalist**

**who writes travel, feature and humorous articles for various publications. She also designs / edits business newsletters and advertising. She can be reached at [elmarz7@yahoo.com](mailto:elmarz7@yahoo.com).**