

More than a vehicle, an RV is a lifestyle

By Tara Marion

They may tow their recreational vehicles behind their pickup trucks, but the RV lifestyle of three Kalamazoo area residents is anything but behind the times.

RVs are not only equipped with the latest conveniences, but home pages that cater to RV owners appear in great numbers on the World Wide Web—demonstrating that RVs are up to speed with technology.

“It’s a home away from home, and it’s an easy way to see the country,” said Sandra Cobine of Oshtemo, about her fifth wheel. Hominess is a characteristic that appeals to many RV owners.

“I enjoy the freedom and always having your own possessions with you,” said Morgi Stickler of Kalamazoo. “It’s just a different way to travel; we even have a cat that travels with us.”

Companionship and making new friends appeal to RV owners as well. “First and foremost, it’s a really nice way to meet people,” said Norm Dixon of Kalamazoo.

People at campgrounds are friendlier than they are in hotels, according to Stickler. “It’s not unusual at all to be sitting at a campground by yourself, and end up around a campfire with somebody that you’ve just met,” she said. As a result, Stickler and her husband have friends all over the country and in Canada.

“It’s nice to go someplace where people have a mutual interest,” Dixon said. “You get a different perspective on how people are and it’s a good recreational time.”

These RV owners meet people through their memberships in RV clubs as well. Cobine is a member of Coast to Coast, which entitles her to discounts at 500 campgrounds all over the United States.

Stickler and Dixon belong to a local flight of an international club sponsored by the owner of the dealership where they bought their RVs. The club has a wagon master, who is responsible for making plans and mapping courses for their trips.

“It’s up to the wagon master to handle all of the arrangements and make sure there are camping facilities available for a group our size,” Dixon explained.

Dixon’s wife is the secretary/treasurer of their club, which requires her to write a monthly newsletter, reporting on past and future camping trips, as well as information pertaining to the lives of club members. Dixon said he camps with the club once a month.

These three RV owners have fifth wheels, but Stickler previously owned a pop-up camper and a travel trailer. She bought the fifth wheel because it’s total self-contained and like a second home.

“We mainly bought it because my husband retired four years ago, and I’m looking forward to it in the next few years; we plan to take it south or west and stay three or four months in the winter,” she said.

Cobine previously owned a camper and purchased a fifth wheel because she has three children and wanted a larger RV for her family.

“We decided our next camper was going to have a bed in it that we didn’t have to fold it into a table every day,” she said. “That was one of our primary goals.” Cobine and her husband plan to travel when they retire, as well.

The reputation and styling of a fifth wheel appealed to Dixon. "I chose a fifth wheel because it affords us more room and it's easy to tow with a lot more stability," he said.

Cobine agreed that the fifth wheel is easy to tow. "It handles better on the road because part of the structure is literally over the bed of the truck, she added.

Stickler and Cobine offer the following advice to anyone interested in purchasing an RV:

- "Ask a lot of questions about the purchase of your RV and about the facilities. Ask about the guarantees and make sure you go to a reputable dealer," Stickler said.
- Check the underside of the unit before you buy it to make sure the construction is not rotted away," Cobine suggested. "Ask if there's a warranty or guarantee on the unit. Take your time to look and find what you like."
- "Start small and work your way up; they're easy to trade in," she added.

Dixon, Stickler and Cobine explained what they like best about owning an RV. According to Dixon, "It gives you somebody to share things with—companionship."

Added Cobine, "We bought an RV so the kids could go camping and know what it's like to do things outdoors; we love camping," she said.

"It's just nice to have your own shower and your own bedding," Stickler explained. "Even if it's no more than a bed, it's yours. And there's all the friends and the experiences that we get to have that I don't think you'd ever know about otherwise," she concluded.