

# Gas crunch slows RVs

The bubble may have burst for recreational vehicles, and all about a three-letter word came up — gas. There are recreational vehicle owners bucking the trend, and there are dealers still keeping a stiff upper lip. But their ranks are thinning.

They're being replaced by RV dealers stuck with expensive inventories and no buyers, by campground operators stuck with idyllic settings and fewer people paying to admire them, and by owners who are just plain stuck — who say the fear of being stranded without fuel makes them leave their expensive playthings parked in the driveway.

And if you want to know whose side the smart money is on, consider that General Motors stopped producing their top-of-the-line RVs last year.

Or you could just take it from these folks:

- "I've had manufacturers calling day me day in and day out to take vehicles on a consignment basis, so that pretty much tells you where it's at," says John Livingstone, sales manager at Red Holman Pontiac. "Business is down considerably" from previous years. About six months ago, we made the decision that probably it was time to get out of the motor home business."
- Livingstone said they're still stuck with some of the stock they had on hand when they reached that decision.
- "We had planned on going out west this summer, to California where my son lives. But because of the gasoline and whatnot, we decided to postpone it and see what happened. People just don't go, and when they do go, they don't go far," said Ruth De, of Garden City. The Dees own a three-year-old El Dorado motor home that averages eight miles per gallon. The last time the Dees filled the tank it cost them \$25 — but that was at 65 cents a gallon.
- "It has been, it seems, a little slower. We don't see as many (RVs) on the road. I think it's going to have a definite effect, it's going to hurt us quite a bit. But to think positively, maybe the people who would go to California or Canada will just come up here," said John Graham of Otter Lake Hiawatha campground near Munising in the Upper Peninsula.
- An Upper Peninsula travel association spokesman says gasoline is readily available in the U.P., where the camping rush traditionally gets underway right about now. He says the price is generally only slightly higher than in the Detroit area, but he adds, "We had very adverse publicity about this joke — he's 50 feet from my office — who was selling gas at \$1.30. But he's the only guy."
- Meanwhile, state parks and private campgrounds located close to the heavily-populated southeast part of the state report record crowds. The practice of season-long campsite rentals — allowed only at private campgrounds — is reportedly booming.

**GAS JITTERS** haven't killed the enthusiasm of all RV owners. Charley Lane, also of Garden City, says "I use it every day. I take it to work."

His less elaborate, van-conversion camper gets 12 mpg, 18 on the highway, says Lane.

Recreational vehicle manufacturers and trade associations have begun to fight back with an advertising campaign. There's no arguing that it would cost the Dees more than \$90 to take their El Dorado to the Graham's Otter Lake Hiawatha campground and back, so the ad campaign is based on "PMFG," for passenger miles per gallon.

The campaign holds that five people can travel as fuel-efficiently to a single destination in one gas-hog RV as they can in five separate automobiles. It doesn't explain why those five people would want to travel in separate automobiles.

Manufacturers of the vehicles have come up with two new production styles that could once again increase the desirability of RV ownership.

Dowrating, that Detroit-invented word for making cars smaller, has been extended to making smaller RVs.

And, in a somewhat more unusual move, some RVs now being manufactured can burn both gasoline and propane, which is readily available as a liquid packed in pressurized canisters for use on RVs equipped with heaters or stoves.

It could be neither development will prove enough of an incentive to bring RVs out of the past they now seem doomed to share with tail-fins and 454 cubic inch engines.

Only time will tell.

## Metro camp offerings

Gas jitters may put you off buying a recreational vehicle, but if you've got one already, you may as well put the expensive toy to use.

At eight miles per gallon, a typical rating for large RVs, a trip to the Upper Peninsula and back will cost you nearly \$100. If paying that kind of tab doesn't bother you, so long. If it does, stay tuned for a partial list of closer campgrounds.

About half of the 13,912 campgrounds in the 72 state parks can be reserved — just to make sure you don't get there with nowhere to stay. Minimum stay is four nights, maximum 15. Applications must be received 15 days in advance and must include a \$3 fee in addition to the nightly rate, which ranges from \$2 to \$5. Availability of campsites can be found by phoning the DNR during working hours at 256-2760 in Detroit, or at 517-275-5151 in Roscom, or at 517-373-1220 in Lansing.

There are also more than 36,000 private campsites in Michigan. Some of those located close to the Detroit area are listed below.

- Codes included in the listing are A: electricity, B: bath toilet, C: showers, D: laundry, E: playground, F: swimming pool, G: beach, H: recreation building, I: store, J: boat launch, K: sanitation disposal station, L: hot/cold water, M: site sewage, N: Pets allowed on leash, O: ground tennis allowed, P: open year-round, Q: trailer rental, R: seasonal storage, S: refuse storage.
- King's Landing Campground charges \$4 a night, 71 sites: ABCDEFGHIKNOPLR. 313-793-2068.
- Beech Grove in Emmet charges \$6 a night, 85 sites: ABCDEFGHIKNO. Phone: 313-392-7042.
- Hilltop in Lapeer charges \$4 a night, 24 sites: AGILNO. Phone: 313-664-2782.
- Crazy Horse in Port Huron charges \$6 a night, 160 sites: ABCDEFGHIKLMNOPRS. Phone: 313-982-4070.
- The Moore County RMA in Petersburg charges \$7 a night, 150 sites: ABCDEFGHIKLMNOP. Phone: 313-856-4972.
- Green Briar in Brookline charges \$6 a night, 200 sites: ABCDEFGHIKNOPLR. Phone: 313-555-4952.
- Frankensmith RV Park charges \$6 a night, 142 sites: ABCDEFGHIKLMNOP. Phone: 313-653-6664.
- Holly Hills in Holly charges \$5.50 a night, 145 sites: ABCDEFGHIKLMNOP. Phone: 313-624-8421.
- Wayne County Fair in Belleville charges \$4 a night, 200 sites: ABCNO. 313-697-7002.
- P.J. in Stockbridge charges \$5.50 a night, 125 sites: ABCDEFGHIKNO. 517-565-3044.
- Holiday Beach in Port Sanilac charges \$5 a night, 84 sites: ABCDEFGHIKNO. 313-622-8142.

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## County dust control interrupted

Gas shortages may cause clouds of dust in front of many Oakland County homes.

Calcium chloride, used to control dust on gravel roads, is in short supply because of the independent truckers' protests against high gas and diesel fuel prices.

Deliveries have been sufficient so far to meet commitments for the first applications ordered by 777 customers countywide, said John Grubba, managing director of the Oakland County Road Commission.

"With three applications to go, however, we can only promise to either complete them or grant refunds on the basis of 25 percent of amounts paid for each application not applied," he said.

\$405,000 has been paid in advance for dust control on 493 miles of county unpaved roads, including orders by the Avon, Highland, Holly and Oakland township boards and many smaller orders by associations.

"We have taken steps to get supplies regardless of interference with regular deliveries, and thus far have been successful," said Grubba.

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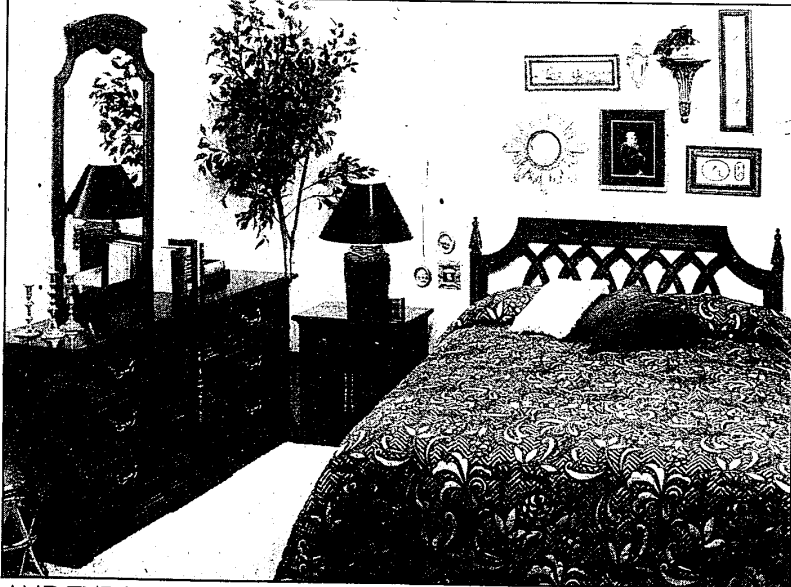
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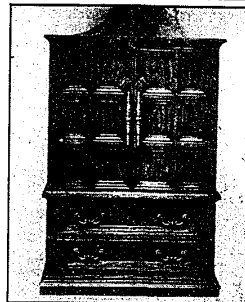
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