

AutoMate RV Club Newsletter

Issue #5, Autumn 2003

Editor: Jim Stephenson

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

AUTOMATERS DESCEND ON PASO ROBLES

What a wonderful time we all had in Paso Robles during our Fall Rally October 2-5 at the brand new Wine Country RV Resort! Resort owners Bill and Julie Mundee and Ken and Lynn Mundee took very good care of us. Bill Noble did an excellent job in locating this park and making all the arrangements before he and Kathy departed for the East Coast. David Tavernetti provided the behind the scenes leadership necessary to assure that all went smoothly. Thanks to both Bill and David for a job well done.

Fifty one rigs and 104 AutoMaters gathered under sunny and warm afternoon skies to renew old acquaintances and make new friends. The festivities began with an ice cream social on Thursday evening. On Friday morning we were treated to a very special "omelet in a bag" breakfast organized by Lorraine and Bill Morgado. Lorraine and Bill, along with committee members Bill and Koletta Warnick, Teri and Al Caparelli, Andy and Jan Anderson, and Pete Bryan prepared omelets for everyone. Many thanks to them.

Four local wineries shared the fruit of their vines with us on Friday afternoon followed that evening by a pizza dinner and karaoke evening of group singing. On Saturday many members ventured out to the local farmers market, flea market and other central California mid-coast attractions while others toured wineries. Saturday evening was enjoyably spent with a catered roast beef dinner and Bingo organized by Bob Cohen with Diana Storm calling the numbers. Thanks Bob and Diana. And as always, there were lots of ever widening circles of chairs scattered around the resort and filled with AutoMaters sharing experiences and good times with each other.

PLEASE NOTE: President Betty Pollack and Dave Pollack will be out of the country from November 27-February 6 with very sporadic email communication. Vice President Bob Livesey will be serving as Acting President during that time. Matters which would normally be directed to Betty should be directed to Bob during this time.

Betty

Newsletter Notes

We decided to once again send you this edition by snail mail, in addition to posting it on the Website (in both PDF and Word formats). We hope that by placing a hard copy in your hands you will find the "rag" a little more useful. As you will note however, we will not devastate the budget by printing in color. If you are out on the road and can't wait for snail mail to catch up to you – go online, however be aware that some articles will not be posted! The more technically sensitive information is reserved for members only. Contact the Editor if you require extra or E-Mail versions of those articles.

So the idea is to make this publication more useful to you. Now the hooker is that we want you to take part in the process. I am happy to report that no less than ten members have contributed to the first two editions this year. Several more (and even one non-member) have provided inputs for this one. What we want now to do is to encourage more of you to send in your ideas, your script and your requests. The more we all join in this effort, the more useful this quarterly publication can be.

Jim

WebPage Notices:

www.automatervclub.com

So for a while at least, we'll have the Newsletter in both hard copy and most of it posted on the page.

This is of course in addition to the photos of the Fall (and past) Rallies, the maintenance tips, forms for membership, club clothing and name tags. We also have a Travel Chat and a Guestbook. A few members have availed themselves of this opportunity to tell of travel plans, or to post adds for equipment for sale (or wanted).

We'd like to see more activity in this area, or to receive suggestions for additional features.

U-bolts

No – we haven't heard the end of this. We continue to get questions on this issue, and so Tom Wieland was good enough to contribute the following article to enhance our collective knowledge.

Thanks Tom!

Removing – Tightening U-bolts

Members Only

This technical article was included in the printed snail mail edition of the Newsletter, but is not available in the Website version. If you need an additional copy please contact the Editor.

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WHO TO CONTACT FOR THINGS

Changes of address, (phone or email)	Barbara Luthin
Payment of Dues and Rally Fees	Sue Tavernetti
Purchase of Club Items	Bob Cohen (or via the WebPage)
Newsletter/ Webpage	Jim Stephenson
Technical Manual input	Bob Cohen
Outreach to New AutoMate owners	Julie and Ross Stewart
<u>Spring Rally:</u>	
Physical Arrangements	Bob Livesey
Parking Committee	Andy Anderson
Speakers & Vendors	Dave Pollack
Sunshine Committee cards	Kathy Noble
General Inquiries and issues	Betty Pollack

MEMBERSHIP DRIVE A SUCCESS

Our Club is now 223 members strong thanks to the efforts of Outreach Chairs Julie and Ross Stewart and their committee. Members of the Outreach Committee are: Jim & Marlene Duffy, Gary & Laurie Wermuth, Jim & Linda Freeman, Jim & Beverly Neal, Ted & Carol Martin, Mick & Judy Serra, Matt & Florie Matthews, Ed & Marlene Weber, Pat & Wally Dinsmore, Irv & Arline Baptist, Pete & Mary Ann Bryan and Terry & Carolyn Glaeske.

This committee contacted over 130 AutoMate owners and invited them to join the club, and many of them did just that.

If you meet an AutoMate owner during your travels, please introduce yourself and find out if they are members. If not, please invite them to join. You can obtain membership applications by contacting Julie and Ross at julierv@aol.com and be sure to reference AutoMate in the subject line. Alternatively you can download the form from our webpage www.automatervclub.com.

PREPARING FOR SPRING 2004 RALLY

Preparations are well underway for our March 25-28, 2004 Rally at the Merced County Fairgrounds in Los Banos under the leadership of Vice President Bob Livesey.

Here's a preview of what's in store. Dave Pollack is lining up a broad array of speakers and vendors on such topics as: truck add-ons and maintenance, rig maintenance

and trouble shooting, water purification systems, housekeeping tips, rig brakes and suspension maintenance and repair, holding tank deodorization and maintenance, heater maintenance, tire selection and maintenance, and more. The committee is hoping to get a vendor to weigh rigs to determine actual weight distribution on each wheel. Ted Martin and Bill Morgado are assisting. And of course Dan Wilson has been invited to present his annual Q&A session.

Some very special social events are being planned. Ross Stewart will organize a tri tip BBQ dinner including Jan Anderson's special Santa Maria beans. A festive Hawaiian luau dinner is also under consideration. Andy Anderson and his parking committee will again help everyone get settled. And many others are assisting with the various activities. With such great volunteer involvement, this rally promises to be a very special one. Thanks to all who have come forward to help. If you'd like to help with any of these activities, please contact either Bob Livesey at relivesey@earthlink.net or one of the above mentioned members.

On the business side, the Annual Meeting will be an especially important one. The Board of Directors is unanimously recommending that the Membership approve a plan to incorporate the club. This means adopting Articles of Incorporation and revised Bylaws that meet the requirements of California's non-profit corporation law. Look for more on these proposals in your January newsletter.

So SAVE THE DATE. Thursday March 25-Sunday March 28, 2004, and look for registration materials in your January newsletter.

FALL RALLY 2004 PLANNING TEAM FORMED

Dale and Joleen Clark, Pete and Marlene Coffman and Jim and Sharon West volunteered and have been appointed as a team to plan the Fall Rally 2004. This social rally will be held in Northern California in accordance with guidance from the Spring 2003 Annual Meeting. With such advance planning and competent leadership, this rally promises to be another winner!

Members' suggestions for locale and activities are welcomed. Please contact any member of the team with your suggestions.

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE FORMED

The Board of Directors has appointed the following members to serve on the Nominations Committee: Bob Cohen--Chair, Betty Pollack, Andy Anderson, Ross Stewart

and *yet to be announced*. The Committee welcomes your recommendations of candidates for the offices of Secretary and Vice President.

Fall Rally Attendees

"Who was the person parked in space #30 at Wine Country RV in Paso Robles? (at least I think it was #30) I have your wheel chock that you left on your site." Contact me at 209-295-7070 or spritz@volcano.net."

Andy Anderson

PS – Andy has fixed the chock, and is anxious to return it to the rightful owner!

EAT MY DUST

This summer we drove the paved roads of British Columbia. Last summer the operative word was gravel. The "Trans Labrador Highway" is touted to be the "last great gravel highway in North America", though "great" and "gravel" seem to be at the opposite ends of the adjective spectrum. We decided to drive the entire length of it in order to reach Goose Bay, Labrador where we would catch the ferry to Newfoundland. Were we nuts or what? Obviously, since ferries depart regularly from Nova Scotia where gravel roads are as common as spinning wheels and hoop skirts.

Traffic was light along the Trans Labrador as we thumped and bumped along at 40 mph. During the two-day journey, (which included an overnight stop at Churchill Falls), we saw less than two dozen vehicles: trucks, cars and graders which are used to push the gravel from the edge of the highway back on to the roadbed. Dust rose behind us like a rooster's tail. Dust penetrated the AutoMate through every crack and crevice coating everything, even the inside of the cabinets, with a layer of grit. Dust found its way into the trailer wheels making our wonderful hydraulic disc brakes less than wonderful. At an RV repair shop a brake guy vacuumed out the dust and kept muttering world like "astonishing" and "remarkable" and "where did you say you've been?"

Jim says he prefers dry dust to the wet kind like we found on the Alcan and Yellowknife Highways, which glues itself to the rig in unsightly gobs. I disagree. Mud doesn't find its way inside the rig for me to clean up. But then mud is a guy kind of thing.

Mary Stephenson

UltraFab Units (aka the forward jacks)

If you're like me, this may be an area of your rig on which you haven't had to do much work yet, other than a little greasing. Stan Miller (AutoMate owner, but not a Club member) alerted me to a very handy article he has now included in his WebPage. Go to:

www.stanmiller.info/pages/photo/photo-ultrafab.htm and check out his information. While you're at it, spend a little time looking at the rest of Stan's page, which includes an excellent photo history on the construction of an AutoMate.

These are great references, and we thank Stan for sharing this with club members.

Tiny Tips

For enhancing AutoMate ownership!



Want an outdoor carpet, but don't know where to store it? Strap a piece of 6" plastic pipe under the rig – we were able to get just over 9 feet from front of the basement to just behind the stairway entrance. A 9 x 12 foot carpet (good quality) wraps around a ½ inch piece of pipe (screws and duct tape) and slips in. A plastic cap completes the job. Carpet was about \$75, and the rest was roughly \$20.

If anyone wants more details of this or any other "Tiny Tip", please contact the Editor or other Author. If you have ideas to contribute – let's hear them!

Mexico

Hola – it's time to make plans for Mexico this winter! Although my first plan was to write an article on this important subject, I decided that there is so much good information available that I would simply provide a list of the best links to help you with your planning:

- The book "**Mexican Camping**" by Terri and Mike Church (known as the Bible), available from Amazon.com or the publisher Rolling Homes Press. *An outstanding and honest description of camping and travel conditions. Be sure you ask for the latest printing!*
- The CD "**Mexico ...on the Road In**" available from publisher Dot Bell, who keeps this valuable camping and travel guide current via the internet at www.ontheroadin.com. *There will be an update available with the latest on road conditions in Baja following the recent storms; should be available by about December 1. Order on the internet and pay \$20 via Pay Pal. Good campground guide!*
- Highways magazine article in October 2003 titled "**Run for the Border**". *This fresh article seems well written and accurate.*
- **Vagabundos del Mar Boat and Travel Club** – focused on fishing on the Baja, but one of the best sources of information **and Insurance** for Mexican travel. They are located in Rio Vista, CA (800) 474-baja, info@vagabundos.com or www.vagabundos.com *With 13,000 members over many years, probably the best overall source of info and help with Mexican travel, visas, insurance, etc.*
- And if you're really desperate, read the Mexico section of our WebPage at www.travelswithjimandmary.com. *If you happen to be on the Baja this winter, search the beaches for us and our AutoMate!*

Favorite Parks

In the last edition David Tavernetti shared with us one of his suggestions as the San Lorenzo Park in King City. On the way to the Fall Rally, Mary and I tried it, and we fully agree with David's report! We thought we would share one of our favorites.

The Red Bluff RV Park is located right off Highway 5 as you return from your northern wanderings, and just one comfortable day's drive from home for many of us who live in central or northern California. The park has been open for a number of years, but has the feeling of "new". Everything is flat and spacious. For us the appealing feature is that not only do they allow you to wash your rig, they encourage it! There are dual hose bibs at every site, and while you are washing away in preparation for your arrival home, they will come by and

fill your propane bottles. If you don't like to arrive home clean, you can spend your time in the pool or at golf, boating, fishing, skiing, visiting Lassen or Shasta, or attending the Bull Sale. Something for everyone. Although we haven't used them, there are several restaurants within walking distance.

Rates just went up to \$27, but the Good Sam discount applies. Call (530) 529-2929, and then look for the Antelope Blvd. Exit (also called 99S). The park is ¾ of a mile east on Antelope Blvd., and then a few hundred feet north on Chestnut Ave to the entrance on the left. There are fuel stations and a Less Schwab tire center on the way.

FACTORY NEWS

In the last edition we reported that the factory website was up and running. Didn't last long and it went down again. So a few days ago I took a run down to Los Banos to see if I could learn what was going on.

I had an interesting visit to the factory, couldn't be more surprised. The place was **vibrant with activity** - working on producing the new line of Toy Mates which Bill has teamed up with Dan Gamel to produce. These are 24' TT units for carrying ATV's around in the desert. The first one has left for the shows, and they are currently producing 10 more for sale! The design incorporates AutoMate type of designs and furnishings, although none of the frills like air suspension or disk brakes. I understand they will be priced at about \$24,000, and that there will be a 27 foot version later. I overhear an estimate of 3/400 per year.

Who knows but it might provide a bread-and-butter base to keep the factory alive! They intend to continue with AutoMates, although one person said that the 5 or 6 currently on order have been put off for several months in order to launch this new project. There were also a couple of the changing room vehicles they have been making for the Hollywood market. There was very little repair work going on, although Ray was still making appointments - Dec. 11 being the first one available. And there were three used AutoMates on the consignment lot in case anyone hears of someone trying to find a used unit.

IT AIN'T COOL, MAN

Any woman can tell you that the most "uncool" thing a guy can do is ask for directions or assistance. But sometimes extraordinary circumstances call for extraordinary actions which is what happened to us last summer.

One Monday night while camped at a particularly grubby KOA in Seattle, Jim opened the freezer to help himself to his evening bowl of ice cream

"Ye gads," he said. "This stuff seems a bit soft."

Not being a fan of night-time ice cream, I paid little attention. Tuesday morning while hubby dumped the tanks and emptied the garbage, (all nice male occupations), I dove into the freezer for some lamb chops. The package was not a frozen solid lump like I expected but wet and sweaty and going a bit soft.

"Ye gads," I said. "I think there is something the wrong with the freezer."

Ever the optimists, we hoped that the fault lay with the refrigerator's electrical innards and that the darn thing would get cold again once it switched over to propane. Or if it was really on the fritz, we would find a repair shop or one of those roaming RV repair people in their little vans and get it fixed along the way. Since we didn't want to spend one more night at the KOA where the drizzle had turned into a steady rain, we hitched up and headed out - our destination, the Long Beach Peninsula in the very south-western tip of Washington.

At a rest stop we checked our freezer and the news was not good. Everything was definitely on meltdown mode. The darn thing was broken. Time to make some decisions!

We could buy an igloo cooler, fill it with ice and head for home.

We could hope that there was a repair shop in Astoria, which is just across the Columbia River in northern Oregon.

Or we could try to get the darn thing fixed before heading for Long Beach. To my amazement Jim suggested we drive to the nearest town and **ASK** someone where to go.

Around noon we pulled into Raymond, a town we had visited on our way north earlier in the summer. It was a small, dreary place, dead center in the middle of nowhere but it had an information booth, a real low budget operation, where a lonely volunteer handed out maps and sold espresso coffee. An unlikely place to learn about refrigerator repairs I thought, but Jim bounded out of the truck like a man on a mission. In a few minutes he was back with scribbled instructions on the back of an envelope. Evidently the guy on duty knew of an RV place just down the road.

We headed south out of Raymond and few miles later found it. I didn't mention that asking for help was not always a bad thing. At Bob's RV Repair and Park, (fifteen bucks a night), we saw a few rigs and a huge building off to the side. We looked inside but there was nobody home so we walked around to the back and found another building with a stairway leading to the second floor. Jim did the male equivalent of "yoo hoo, anybody home". A man poked his head out of his office and invited us to come upstairs. Yes, he used to repair RV's but he was now into building boats. But he knew all about Dometics and he was willing to take a look at ours. As soon as he opened the back door of the refrigerator, we saw yellow gunk, (chromium dioxide) and smelled the ammonia. What we learned next was not good. The unit could not be repaired, only replaced. He didn't have one in stock but he could order one from only a handful of dealers in the northwest. Since he didn't do this

type of work any more he was willing to walk Jim through it. If we only replaced the cooling unit, that could be done inside the rig. If we put in a whole new frig it would have to come in through the window. Me lift a refrigerator through a window? Not in my lifetime.

We then followed Bob back up to his office where he got on the phone and began contacting his Dometic network. After what seemed an eternity he finally found someone who had our model in stock. If we could get to Portland before five, we could park in the repair shop lot and more importantly, transfer our perishables into the their freezer. Tuesday morning they would replace the cooling unit, model # 1082.

We made tracks for Portland like a couple of hounds chasing a fox. At four that afternoon we pulled into Laurelhurst Heating and Air Conditioning. The owner, a friendly grubby guy, told us to park next to the building where there was a power and water source. Before hooking anything up, we emptied the Dometic and headed inside the shop. The shop freezer, (a top of the frig model) was crammed full of ancient packages of ground beef, boxes of donuts and two bottles of vodka. By removing the vodka we managed to shove all our perishables inside but the door kept popping open. We found some duct tape on a counter, taped the door closed and hoped we had solved the problem.

A repairman named Eddy began work the next morning. Before undoing one screw he treated us to a lengthy diatribe on his religious beliefs. Some mysterious force had sent us to him and if the Lord was willing he would get everything fixed including our spiritual lives. For once I held my tongue, smiled and nodded as if everything he said made perfect sense. Might he sabotage the work if he figured out what I was really thinking? Unlikely but did I want to take that chance?

The Dometic ended up face down on the floor on a piece of plastic. The ammonia odor was overwhelming as Eddy began removing the back panel, which consisted of coils and other mechanical stuff. Jim watched with interest as Eddy worked methodically and carefully for more than a couple of hours and concluded that Bob back in Raymond had been right. He could have done this job himself but when you're paying out \$800.00 maybe it's better to let an expert do it. Then if breaks down, you have a warranty.

Before we left, the friendly grubby owner told us that top on the "never do" list with these refrigerators is to turn them on if the rig is not level. And we had been doing just that. The day before we leave on a trip, Jim parks the AutoMate on a gently sloping street. I load the freezer and turn it on. But not anymore. We learned a lesson the hard way, eight hundred dollars worth!

Jim continues to marvel at the series of coincidences that led us to Laurelhurst in Portland. Coincidences? I don't think so. It all began when Jim asked a couple of simple questions. "Do you know if there are any RV repair places around here?" "Can you tell me how to get there?"

If a refrigerator isn't cool, that's a bad thing. The same is true for a guy until an extraordinary unforeseen

event occurs that makes him change his thinking. But only temporarily. To rephrase Henry Higgins – "why can't a man be more like a woman?" Do the unthinkable – ask somebody! Let's hear what our women readers think! Anecdotes will be printed in the next newsletter.

If you're ever in Oregon and have problems with your refrigerator, (or any other heating or cooling glitches) call the guys at Laurelhurst, (503) 236- 2678 and they'll fix you up.

Mary Stephenson

AutoMate For Sale

Death of the owner has brought a "hardly used" 2002 - 33' unit onto the market. Let the Editor know of any interest, and I will put you in contact with the family.

Space reserved for your article:

and in the next edition there will be lots of room! So please get me your articles. The closing date for the Winter Edition will be December 15.