

- **Slide-out Mania • Shasta 30'**
- **Trek 28: Fiesty 4-Banger**



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Inside the Big Sky
Montana



Ever since its beginnings, the motorhome industry has been fairly predictable. New coaches that became popular tended to put on weight and expand in size. It appears that the trend to stretch coach lengths is a response to buyers who feel as though they can't have everything they want inside smaller motorhomes. European manufacturers have been successfully building rigs that are small on the outside but surprisingly large inside, although American enthusiasts have never been turned on by what they perceive as a more Spartan, practical approach used by overseas builders. Nor has the price of fuel in the United States dictated such drastic down-sizing.

Contrary to popular opinion, not all European coaches are stark, and you don't have to be Houdini to make the fixtures work for human bodies. Safari Motor Coaches took some of that European ingenuity and went out on a limb, so to speak, by designing a motorhome that has the attributes of a small coach and the livability expected by American enthusiasts. The Trek Class A motorhome, which was conceived by company President Matt Perlot, mates a full-blooded Isuzu truck chassis with a boxy-looking body. Although the Trek feels like its super-nimble European counterparts, it is actually a full-size 28-footer without a gas-guzzling V-8 engine.

At first glance, one might think that the Safari designers have the easiest jobs in the world. Sleek lines and aerodynamics are obviously missing from the exterior contours of the coach.

Trek 28'

Safari uses American new compact motorhome powered by a fiesty

by BOB LIVINGSTON



expertise and a bit of European ingenuity in a four-cylinder, diesel-powered Isuzu chassis

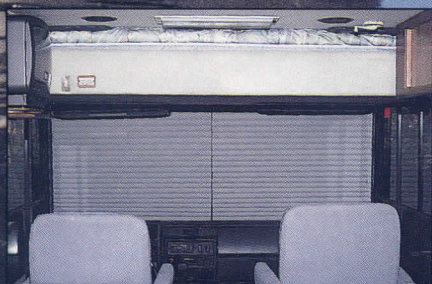


photos by author

Once inside, though, you will quickly realize that the Trek, at a modest 28 feet in length, is almost unmatched in livability when compared to similar-size coaches.

Safari targeted families as a potentially strong market when it created the Trek. According to Perlot, "The Trek motorcoach is a totally new design, specifically targeted at the new generation of younger actives. They are reaching an age when their lifestyle choices will center on the environment, outdoor pursuits, travel and family recreation. The baby-boomers will have the time and money to satisfy their lifestyle choices. The decade of the '90s belongs to them."

One advantage of a boxy body with a high ceiling becomes apparent when you take a tour inside the coach. The available space is not restricted by curved walls



High ceiling allows plenty of headroom when bed is closed (far left). When down, bed becomes queen-size sleeping area (left). Sofa and table occupy front area of coach.

and radically sloped front ends. Bus conversion designers have known this all along and have never felt inhibited by the lack of aerodynamics.

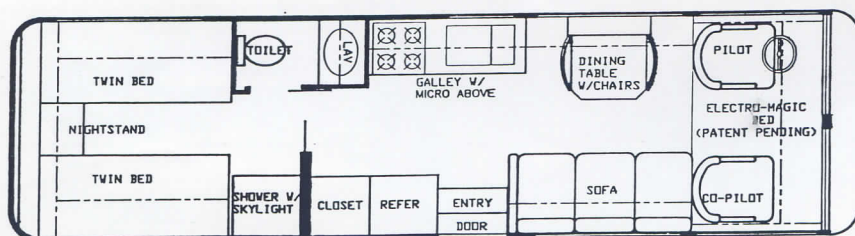
Combine the ability for maximum space utilization inside 28 feet with a practical floorplan featuring unique sleeping capabilities, and the Safari Trek makes a much weaker case for longer, less nimble motorhomes. The key to making this coach work is the retractable bed over the cockpit that houses an honest-to-goodness queen-size mattress. Add a free-standing dinette and a comfy sofa up front, a center kitchen and modified split bath, and you have a coach that will easily sleep a family of four without converting beds, or six if the sofa is used.

Livability

It's not too often that we get excited over the sleeping arrangements when the main sleeping quarters (twin beds) are allocated to the kids, and we are stuck with a dinette or a fold-out sofa; however, we were simply ecstatic over the facilities inside the Trek. Safari's ace-in-the-hole is its front bunk, which is much more than a flimsy platform with a piece of foam atop,



Galley counter is limited (above), but the cook can use the nearby table for additional food preparation area. Television, tucked in next to the bed, is easy to view from the front bed or sofa. Driver's position and dashboard layout are both very civilized, considering that the cockpit components are those of an Isuzu truck.



suitable for one individual who weighs no more than 150 pounds. This front retractable bed is rock-solid and probably the most comfortable bed we have slept on inside a motorhome, fixed or otherwise.

The secret to making close quarters work well is to use single areas for multiple purposes, as the Europeans do. In the Trek, the front of the coach shares duty with the cockpit, the front seats and the bed. As a driving compartment, the cockpit functions beautifully (more about the cockpit later). The passenger seat can be turned toward the living room to supplement lounging facilities, and, of course, by night the front bed can be positioned for sleeping.

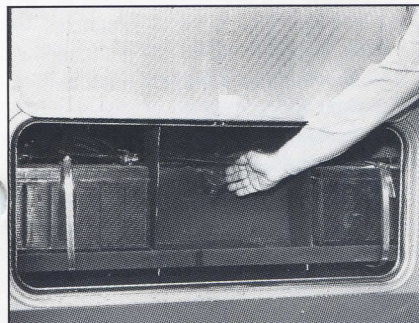
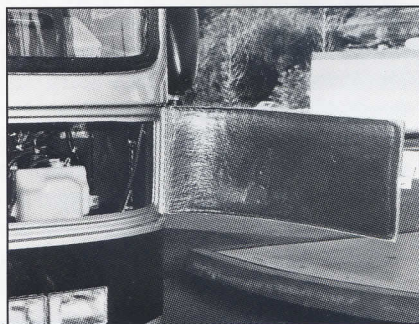
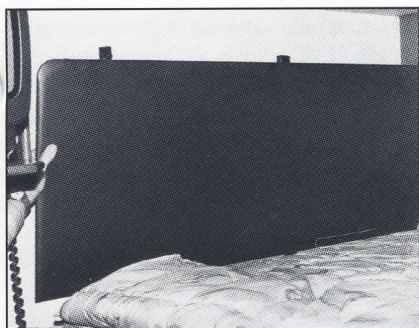
You may envision the drudgery of moving around components to make room for the retractable bed, fetching the bedding so the mattress can be made up for the night; strong case for a stationary bed, right? Well, try pulling a couple of pins and pushing a button! That's all that it takes to make the bed in the Trek, and you don't have to schlep around a longer coach to accommodate the convenience of fixed beds.

The front-bed platform is connected to a system of poles with geared tracks. A powerful, 120-volt AC motor moves the bed into position. Prior to lowering the bed, the operator simply reclines the front seats and lowers the pleated shades

that cover the windshields. The AC generator must be started to power the motor if hookups are not available. Once the bed is fully down, headboard-style, side-window covers on hinges are flipped into position and held in place with magnets that attach to the poles.

We used a queen-size Trivasak sleeping system on the mattress, which worked very well. The bunk swallowed up the bedding, out of the way, when in the closed position. The combination of the newly designed Trivasak (see accompanying sidebar) and the large bed made sleeping heavenly. Strategically placed lights allowed reading in bed, and the color television, mounted on a pedestal, was in easy view while lying down. A ladder is provided for climbing up to or down from the bed, but we found that the sofa provided a natural step and opted to leave the ladder home.

Although the front bed is very pri-



photos by author

Unique headboard unfolds and attaches to bed track with magnets (top). Doors adjacent to hood access (center) swing out to allow access to service points. Fuel tank and batteries are on right side under compartment door. Large opening in tank (without long filler neck) makes fueling easy.

vate, there are no coverings for the driver and passenger windows (below the bed), so occupants who parade around the evening in their skivies, or less, may give the neighbors quite a show. We see no reason why some sort of window covering can't be designed for these side windows.

Even with the front bed down, the living room can still be used for reading, lounging or watching television. The curbside sofa is a quality piece of furniture, and the wood dinette opposite it is very stylish in appearance. In order to make the best use of the table, the driver's seat must be moved

SAFARI TREK 28' SPECIFICATIONS

Performance

Fuel consumption*	13.82 mpg
Engine coolant temp	
Level	184 deg
Uphill	186 deg
Trans oil temp	
Level	188 deg
Uphill	193 deg
Engine oil temp	
Level	218 deg
Uphill	228 deg

Acceleration time

0-60 mph	45.5 sec
40-60 mph	20.0 sec

* Fuel consumption recorded at 55 mph, 1000 feet elevation, predominantly flat highway. Ambient temperature 60 degrees F. Uphill test in second gear, 6 percent grade, full throttle.

Chassis

Manufacturer	Isuzu
Engine	3.9-liter diesel
Horsepower	126 @ 3000 rpm
Torque	242 @ 2200 rpm
Transmission	4-speed auto
Axle ratio	4.55:1
Tire size	215/85R 16
Load range	2680 - 2860 lbs single/ 2470 lbs dual @ 80 psi cold
Wheelbase	178"
Brakes	Front disc/rear drum
Suspension	Leaf springs
Cooling system	HD
Fuel capacity	33 gal

Coach

Ext length	28'
Ext width	7'6"
Ext height	10'2"

Int width	7'2"
Int height	6'6"
Frame construction	Aluminum
Insulation	Styrene/fiberglass
Freshwater cap	50 gal
Waste holding cap	30 gal
Sink/shower holding cap	30 gal
Propane cap	35 gal
Water system type	Demand
Hot-water cap	6 gal
Furnace (1)	25,000 BTU
Air-conditioner (central)	10,000 BTU
Refrigerator	8, 10 cu ft
Toilet	Freshwater
Converter	50 amp
Batteries (4)	105 amp-hr ea.
Generator	5.2 kw
Base sugg. retail price	\$65,562
Price as tested	\$68,680

Wet Weight

(Water, fuel, propane tanks full; no supplies or passengers)

Front axle	4,880 lbs
Rear axle	6,740 lbs
Right side	5,420 lbs
Left side	6,200 lbs
Total	11,620 lbs

Chassis Ratings

Front gawr	5,290 lbs
Rear gawr	8,760 lbs
Gvwr*	13,250 lbs

* Owner may add up to 1630 pounds in weight of passengers and supplies to motorhome equipped as test coach without violating chassis maximum gawr.

Gawr: gross axle weight rating

Gvwr: gross vehicle weight rating

forward (power controls). The table accommodates two diners on free-standing chairs; it can be expanded by using the extension sections stored in the closet and a couple extra chairs that are stashed under the sofa. We found that, by adding one leaf to the table, two people could sit on the sofa in fairly good comfort while hunkering up to the table. That way, we could accommodate the entire family while freeing up the area below the sofa for storage.

Exceptionally large windows are placed on each side wall in the living room. While they provide a great view to the outside, they—along with the front cockpit windows—make it more difficult to heat the coach during cold weather. The coach is outfitted with a 25,000-BTU forced-air fur-

nace that shares the floor registers with the central air-conditioning, but the heat loss from the windows is hard to compensate for. Therefore, the furnace must cycle frequently to maintain a fairly cozy atmosphere when temperatures drop below freezing. Temperatures plummeted to 10 degrees F at night during our trip, and the furnace had to put in plenty of overtime.

Safari could correct the heating problem by adding heavier window coverings and upgrading the furnace. Both changes are in the works, according to company representatives. The air distribution is very good, and when Safari comes up with the right numbers, the central heating/air-conditioning system should provide good comfort levels year-round. Also,

because people sleep close to the front windows, the cold glass and frames sweated profusely due to body heat. Each morning, the windows would have to be dried with a squeegee and towels. Again, heavier window coverings would help.

On the plus side, none of the water pipes froze during the cold spell. Apparently the heat from the floor ducting, which is sandwiched between the floor and underbelly, does a good job of protecting the holding tanks and the plumbing. The drain pipe for the shower did freeze, even though it was wrapped heavily with fiberglass insulation. Since its P-trap is exposed to the elements underneath the coach, it would be a good idea to add heat tape to this small section of pipe or add a cup of RV antifreeze to the drain each night.

The center portion of the rig, on the driver's side, is devoted to a compact kitchen. Although there is virtually no counter space, we had little complaint. The table is close enough to use as an auxiliary counter, and with the addition of sink covers (not in the test rig) the work space would be adequate. Since the microwave/convection oven was used almost exclusively for preparing meals, we didn't miss a sprawling countertop. The use of shelves in the overhead cabinets and storage space in the galley structure itself was quite adequate for a large amount of foodstuffs. We packed for a week and found enough room for all of our supplies, in addition to a good selection of cookware.

Across from the galley, the largest-available flush-mounted refrigerator almost looks out of place inside such a small coach, but it certainly was appreciated since it could be stuffed with a tremendous amount of food, especially in the freezer portion. Next to the refrigerator is the only wardrobe in the rig, but it has a double set of rods, which makes good use of the limited space.

As mentioned earlier, Safari is trying to lure families into the Trek, but with a simple change in rear-bedroom format, the coach can be set up to suit the needs of couples. The obvious layout for families is the one with twin beds because two kids can have their own beds (you know how kids fight when forced to sleep on one

bed). A double bed can be ordered for couples who prefer not to climb into a bunk, saving the bunk for guests. If the occupants want to sacrifice walk-around space, even a queen-size bed can be fitted into the room.

Depending on how you look at the floorplan, the shower can be considered either as part of the bedroom or as part of a split bathroom. The toilet and lavatory are positioned inside a small room that can be enclosed by a sliding door. A second sliding door closes off the front of the coach just aft of the wardrobe. Therefore, the person taking a shower in the large shower stall can take advantage of the entire back end when cleaning up. Unless you are an exhibitionist, you might want to have a second sliding door that would segregate the shower and toilet room from the rear bedroom, following a more traditional split-bath approach. That would keep the people using the rear of the coach from being roused out when those taking a shower want privacy.

Just a few notes on the bath facilities: The shower is exceptionally large, and the use of a skylight provides an abundance of elbow- and headroom. There's even a place to store soap and shampoo—a pet peeve of ours because too many RV manufacturers don't figure we use such items when showering. Also, the toilet and lavatory sink, while situated inside very tight quarters, are plenty usable, even for full-size adults.

Command View

Needless to say, large windows promote great visibility, and the view afforded the driver of the Trek is fabulous. When sitting in the plush, six-way power seat, the driver has excellent control over the instrumentation and has a comfortable position in front of the adjustable steering wheel. The Japanese have an uncanny ability of refining a truck dash into one that seems almost like those in passenger cars. The Isuzu dash, originally designed for commercial truck purposes, is anything but crude and unfinished looking.

The dash sports basic instrumentation such as a speedometer, a fuel gauge, a coolant temperature gauge, and a bank of idiot and reminder lights. Most of the controls are on

smart stalks on each side of the steering wheel, which are very handy. Surprisingly, the dash is set back from the windshield, but the driver still feels like he/she is right up there in full control. There are no blind spots in the sideview mirrors, and with such window area, it's hard to miss anything on the road that is near the coach. To be sure, the rearview monitor can be used.

The disadvantage of large windows is having to fight the sun at times. We were able to successfully block the oncoming sun with the front visors, but the side windows, being devoid of curtains, allowed too much sun to enter. We would like to see some sort of sunshade rigged up for the side windows. While we are nit-picking, we loved the position of the automatic-transmission shifter that was mounted in the console on the floor, but there is no place to hold a beverage cup or munchies for the driver. Great for the diet, but hard on those who can't drive without exercising their jaws.

Diesels have a tendency to run cold, which was evident by the temperatures we monitored during our 10-day journey (see specification chart). That's good for the transmission and engine, but hard on our toes. If the coach is to be driven in very cold weather, we suggest that Safari offer some sort of radiator cover that would allow the engine to run hotter and provide warmer air from the heater. Many truckers either cover the radiator grille with vinyl or have louvers that are actuated by a thermostat. Now we know why.

Drivability

Now, about that pint-size Isuzu diesel. Granted, this coach is not a rocket ship, but it does get you where you want to go, even in the mountains. The 3.9-liter, turbocharged diesel is a fiesty little devil with a lot more capability than expected. Tied to the four-speed automatic transmission, the chassis will propel the coach—all 11,620 pounds of it—at highway speeds with nary a whimper. Top speed is close to 70 mph on very flat highways with a slight tailwind. It will cruise at 60-65 mph with no problem. Drivers just have to get used to driving much of the time with the accelerator pedal on the floor.

Most rolling hills can be taken at highway speeds; short, moderate grades will slow the coach to 45 mph and the steeper climbs will make it chug along at 35-38 mph. If the driver operates the overdrive lockout switch faithfully, the coach will cruise right along in the hills. The engine seems to work best by disengaging the overdrive when coach speed drops to 48 mph. If the climb isn't too steep, it will hold at 45 mph. Steeper grades require downshifting into second gear and running the engine right up to its governed rpm. We didn't generate too many obscene hand signals from impatient drivers (except while negotiating very steep grades leading to mountain resorts) because we used turnouts frequently, rather than aggravate frustrated drivers.

The payback for slowing down a bit and enjoying the sights is good fuel mileage. Under controlled conditions, the Trek was good for 13.82 mpg. When we drove it hard in the mountains, the mileage dropped to 12 mpg, which is pretty darn good for the little engine moving a 28-foot motorhome.

While drivers must change their thinking about speed, conceding that they will not be the first off the line or up the hill (which is good for the blood pressure, too), they won't be sacrificing handling characteristics. The Trek has a very controlled, tight feeling. While the ride is a little more bumpy, the payoff is in solid handling.

The Trek, though not exactly a sports car, does feel good under almost all conditions. Contrary to the impression you might get from its profile, the Trek maintains a straight path with few steering corrections. Surprisingly, the coach fares well when passed by 18-wheelers and in windy conditions. Add the short turning radius and good ground clearance, and the Trek makes a great touring coach, whether in heavy traffic conditions, on narrow country roads or in secluded campgrounds.

Towing a small car behind the Trek is not recommended, even though the motorhome probably could do it. We would drive the car independently of the motorhome when negotiating very steep grades. Since the coach is so nimble and can easily double as an errand vehicle, we think towing a car would be a wasted effort.

Isuzu equips its chassis with disc front and drum rear brakes that do a very commendable job of stopping the certified weight (13,250 pounds). Compression braking is limited with a diesel engine and automatic transmission, so the chassis is fitted with an exhaust brake that can be manually operated by the driver. Pulling the right-hand wand on the steering column activates the exhaust brake, which make a considerable difference in downhill stopping. The throttle control must be completely disengaged to operate the exhaust brake.

Construction

To begin with, the Isuzu chassis is a rugged piece of equipment, backed by millions of brutal miles in commercial use. Safari employs the same construction techniques used in building its larger, more costly motorhomes. The floor is framed in aircraft-grade 1½-inch aluminum tubing and is attached to the steel chassis. Below the aluminum frame is an underlayment of marine-grade plywood and polyurethane sheeting. Marine-grade plywood sits on top of the frame, covering the high-density insulation. A plywood subfloor is added, and it is covered by carpet and padding.

The walls are comprised of aircraft-grade 1½-inch aluminum, high-density insulation and interior paneling. Outside, .040-inch sheets of aluminum, with a baked-enamel finish, are riveted to the frame. Front and rear caps are fiberglass, the storage compartments (not basement, but very large) are made of galvanized steel, and the skirts are stainless steel. According to Safari, there is no wood exposed to rot or corrosion and the stainless-steel skirts are designed to resist road tar, rock chips and rust.

Access to the engine service points is very good with the exception of the radiator fill. The front hatch opens (the test coach was missing a latch to hold it open) and hinged side panels swing out to improve accessibility.

The fuel-tank filler can be easily reached by opening the right-side front compartment door. Filling the tank is very simple since the operator does not have to contend with a long filler neck or foaming fuel. The batteries flank the fuel tank in the same compartment.

Learning to love the compact Safari takes an adjustment in attitude. The Trek is not a fast machine, but even though it really slows down in the mountains, the coach gets you where you want to go in comfort and is fuel-efficient when compared to gasoline-powered coaches. The Trek is a refreshing change in the right direction. It offers incredible livability for its size, has some luxury but not enough to make paranoid maniacs out of its owners when the kids track in mud, and the unit costs just \$68,680, loaded to the hilt with options.

The Safari Trek was one coach we hated to give back. TL

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MOTORHOME

SAFARI

MEMOTO: Bob Livingston
TL Enterprises

DATE: April 9, 1991

SUBJECT: May Trailer Life Test Article

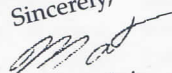
Dear Bob:

Thanks for a great article and test of our new Trek. Your enthusiastic response to the Trek was very gratifying and a great validation of our purpose.

We also appreciate the thorough test and pointing out the few problems that you did find. The furnace has already been handled, the side curtains have been added, and the power vent has been added in the kitchen to improve the night time ventilation in the motorhome. We have also added a cup holder, and snack tray to make sure that life's little pleasures are well attended.

A couple of quick corrections. The Trek has a .080 aluminum skirt, rather than the stainless steel mentioned. This is to keep the weight down and provide very large capacities. I would also add that the unit has a 17,600 pound GCWR for a towing capacity of over 4000 pounds. We have towed extensively with the coach and found that it does so very willingly and in fact, will tow quite a heavy car. We have also found that as the Isuzu engine thoroughly breaks in, the fuel economy continues to improve, and the power improves dramatically. We have letters coming in from our owners indicating great improvements in both areas. Again, thanks for a great test.

Sincerely,



Mat Perlot
President
MP:pv

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