

Dear Friends,

Greetings from **Las Vegas, Nevada.**

## **Death by Monaco**



We are spending the day at **Las Vegas RV Doctor** having major suspension modifications made to our coach. While we were in **Moab, Utah**, touring **Arches National Park** and **Canyonlands National Park**, our motorhome tried to kill us. The left rear control arm snapped in half which allowed the left end of the rear axle to move forward and back which resulted in dramatic and uncontrollable left to right rolling of the coach. Happily we were on a flat road with no other vehicles near us. We got it slowed down from 55 miles per hour to about 30 where we had some control as long as we were very light on the brakes. Tech support at Monaco was of almost no help, in spite of the fact that thousands of the rear control arms have cracked and broken. They suggested we crawl around under the coach and see if anything was broken. They knew darn well what was broken and could have directed us right to it, but they didn't. Once we found it, we tracked down a 4 wheel drive shop who was willing to try welding it back together again.

**THIS PROBLEM IS A DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING DEFECT IN ALL MONACO, HOLIDAY RAMBLER, SAFARI, AND BEAVER MOTORHOMES WITH FOUR AIR BAG SUSPENSIONS. IF YOU ARE DRIVING ONE OR KNOW SOMEONE WHO IS, URGE THEM TO HAVE BOTH REAR CONTROL ARMS REPLACED WITH AN UPGRADE KIT.** (The suspension in the eight bag Monacos is much more robust and does not have this problem.) Monaco no longer manufactures or supplies these defective parts, and they don't have a replacement part. How convenient!

A very heavy and well constructed kit can be had from Jim Walls and his partner, Scott, in Oregon at **Source Manufacturing, LLC, (541) 935-0308**. Scott used to be the head frame designer at Monaco and in fact, designed the eight bag system.

The terrifying part of this tale is that just a couple of days before we drove Interstate 70 from Denver over the Rockies to Grand Junction, Colorado. Much of this road is over high mountain passes with steep descents and thousand foot drop offs. Had these defective control arms failed on a steep downhill curve, there is no doubt in our minds that you would not be reading this email today.

## Danger in Mexico



Much to our surprise, we are having many of you asking, "What is the hazard in Mexico?" Rather than answering you one at a time, we thought we would share our opinions here in this newsletter.

There is a war going on in Mexico! The very rich and well armed drug lords are annoyed with any and all attempts to reduce the drug flow from Mexico to the U.S. The Mexican mafia obtains most of the drugs from Colombia and are quite willing to kill anyone who gets in the way of the drug traffic to the U.S. They have bribed a great many members of the Mexican police and they have killed many police who didn't take the bribes. The Mexican army (Federales) is at war with the drug lords and with the corrupt police. Innocent people, including American tourists, are being caught in the crossfire. The situation is particularly dangerous at large border crossings like Tijuana and Juarez.

Last Christmas we went to **Kino Bay, Mexico**. We knew full well of the dangers in the large city border crossings so we thought we could minimize the risk by crossing into Mexico at the very small town of **Sonoyta**. We spent the night before at Organ Pipe National Monument in Arizona and crossed the border early the next morning. It was our intention to drive at least 200 miles into Mexico without stopping. We felt we would be safe once we got away from the border. Well, that strategy worked, but it wasn't as safe as we thought. Just a couple of mornings before our crossing, some of the local Mexican police were having breakfast in the Sonoyta Cafe. Apparently, these police didn't take the bribes. Bad guys drove by the cafe and put 500 rounds of machine gun fire through the front windows killing two cops and a waitress.

Unfortunately, Mexico has been very successful in disarming the law abiding citizens and the tourists. If you are caught in Mexico with even one bullet, you're going to lose your RV and spend years in jail. So now only the bad guys are armed and it has caused a serious problem. Tourism is a major industry in Mexico and the tourists aren't coming. The Mexican mafia not only controls the drug trade, but they are now controlling about all illegal activity including demanding "protection money" from small Mexican business people. The population is being squeezed hard and many have also turned to crime. Camping out anywhere along the Baja peninsula is seriously dangerous. Murder, rape, and robbery is a real possibility. In Mexico City, you have to be nuts to leave your hotel after dark. Muggings are frequent.

As a side note, the bad guys of Mexico are NOT armed with American weapons. Of all of the guns confiscated, less than 10 percent were manufactured in the United States. The U.S. anti-gun

movement has dramatically exaggerated this issue.

Well, our annual Christmas trips to Mexico are over. It's not a safe place, we can't defend ourselves, and we certainly can't depend on the Mexican police to keep us safe.

## Why South Dakota?



Many of you have also asked why we chose to make South Dakota our official domicile. Here are the six major reasons:

1. No state income tax.
2. The great beauty of the Black Hills.
3. The friendly and helpful people.
4. The stable economy.
5. The lack of burdensome state bureaucracy.
6. Hart Ranch RV Resort.

Certainly, South Dakota is not the only state that does not have a state income tax. Neither does Texas, Nevada, Washington, and others. We had almost made up our minds to move to Nevada, but because their economy is in trouble, they are grabbing at many other sources of funds. South Dakota has a fairly poor farm economy, but it has always been that way. They have not suffered the boom and bust seen in many other places like Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Las Vegas. We may still buy investment property in Pahrump, Nevada, but our official location is **Rapid City, South Dakota**.

In most large U.S. cities, there is a bit of a dog eat dog attitude. Each person for himself. The country mentality of South Dakota is just the opposite. Drivers will slow up to let you in their lane. If you stand on a corner looking at a map, passersby will ask if they can help you find something. Strangers are not afraid to talk to one another. All in all, it's a slower and kinder style of life.

When you deal with a state or local government official in South Dakota, it's an amazingly pleasant event. In a matter of minutes, you can register any vehicle in South Dakota whether you live there or not. Generally speaking, it's easy, fast, and cheap. But there is one catch. If you have never paid sales tax on the vehicle you are registering, which would be the case if you bought it in Oregon where there is no sales tax, South Dakota will impose a one-time 3 percent excise tax of current book value. After that vehicle registration is remarkably inexpensive. To get a driver's license in South Dakota takes about 20 minutes and costs \$20 for five years. There was no written exam and a blind man could pass the eye test. You do have to prove that you have a legal residence in South Dakota. Our residence is Hart Ranch RV Resort. We went down to the Sheriff's office and asked to apply for a permit to carry a concealed weapon. They directed us to a volunteer at a desk in the hallway. Her response was, "Certainly." The required form took about five minutes and cost \$10 for four years. Yes, it's just that easy, but you have to prove that you have been living in South Dakota for 30 days or more and applying in the county that you're living in. The local Sheriff has to approve your permit. Happily, South Dakota is a "shall issue" state, that is they must issue a permit unless they can find a legitimate reason to deny it. To buy a gun in South Dakota requires a South Dakota driver's license and that's it. Buy as many as you want and take them home that day. There is no waiting period. Well, you're getting the idea. The state and local governments are very pleasant to deal with. There is a real minimum of bureaucracy.

Lastly, Hart Ranch is a delightful place to call home. It is a non-profit, member owned park. We

bought a second hand membership which included transfer fees and dues through the rest of this year for a total of \$500. That's an unheard of low price. We can camp for 21 days out of each month for the cost of \$2.50 per day. We are owners, not just members. For an additional \$100 per year, Hart Ranch will forward all of our mail to us wherever we are for just the cost of postage. All in all, it's a beautiful facility in a beautiful location at a beautiful price. It's an RVer's dream!

### **No Personal Pictures**

We apologize for the lack of pictures in this issue, but sitting in a waiting room while our motorhome is repaired, we didn't have access to all of our usual cameras and software. In the next issue, we will back up and give you dramatic pictures of Arches and Canyonlands National Parks.

Until next time, home is where we park it.

Chuck & Donna  
(530) 524-5020