

HONEY, HAVE YOU SEEN THE REMOTE?

Intrepid reporter **James Vlahos** explores the raw, simple life of the American road, from behind the wheel of a 45,000-pound rolling castle.

MY LA-Z-BOY HAS A SEATBELT. My living room has wheels. I'm piloting a mobile McMansion—leather couches, cherry wood cabinets, flat-screen televisions, the works—across the desert south of Las Vegas. We're flying. The shower is doing 75 mph. The throw pillows are doing 75. A plump chicken is roasting in the oven; it's doing 75, too, and smells delicious. This evening I'll pull over, drop the stabilizing jacks and sit down for dinner. I'll fire up the air conditioners and maybe watch a DVD. In this outside RV, home is wherever I want it to be.

Gary Lewis, a driving instructor, looks on nervously from the passenger seat. Anne, my girlfriend, sitting behind him on one of the couches, seems apprehensive, too. Sure,

I've paid careful attention at Lewis's RV Basic Training outfit (motto: "what you really need to know to drive like a PRO!"), but I am skipping a land yacht as expensive—and nearly as big—as a house. This 2006 American Tradition isn't even ours; the manufacturer, Fleetwood, loaned it generously. Foolishly, perhaps. Before today, I'd never operated anything larger than a Buick Estate Wagon. "This is like learning to fly, but instead of starting in a Cessna you've jumped right into the cockpit of a 747," Lewis says.

I'm feeling slightly power drunk, but then supersize ambition is the point. In recent years a new generation of luxury motorhomes has hit the American road, surpassing all predecessors for technological sophistication,

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFF MINTON



At 42 ft. long, the roof of the American Tradition is too small to land an F/A-18. But park a couple of F-350 Crew Cabs, run laps, hold an Olympic fencing meet? Go right ahead.

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