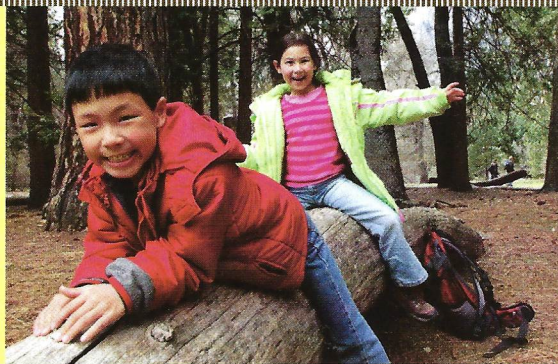


# LIVING WITH GREYHAWK

A WEEKEND TRIP TO THE NATIONAL PARKS PUTS THIS CLASS C INTO PERSPECTIVE







BY MITCHELL SAM ROSSI PHOTOGRAPHY BY MITCHELL SAM ROSSI

**W**ill it be Class A, B or C? It's difficult to decide what class of RV provides the most enjoyment. The bigger A's—those rolling palaces—while luxurious, can be intimidating to drive and impossible to park. They also come with peripheral restrictions. Some state and national parks simply cannot accommodate 40-something-foot mansions. If they do, the number of sites is often limited.

The Class B's—those cozy converted vans—can feel cramped unless you are a family of two. But these small campers can be the perfect vehicle for visiting national parks, wine touring the back roads of Napa, or antiquing through Maine in autumn.

On the other hand, the Class C mini-motorhomes, whose sizes range from 20 to 35 feet in length, offer the traveler a vehicle with the great combination of practicality, maneuverability and comfort.

We road tested a Class C from Jayco, referred to as the Greyhawk 30GS. Built on a Ford chassis, the 30GS is powered by a gasoline-fed Triton 6.8L EFI V-10 engine that produces 305 hp and an impressive 420 lb-ft of torque. Mated to a five-speed automatic Torque shift series transmission with overdrive, the numbers looked to give this 7-ton rig a bit of spunk. That was exactly what I wanted to investigate after first seeing a 30GS on the road.

I had been trying to find time to test a vehicle from Jayco's Greyhawk series when plans for a long-anticipated family ski trip fell through. As it turns out, one cannot ski without snow. My wife blamed global warming. I saw serendipity. Suddenly I had a free week to try out the 30GS before summer arrived. But with only five days' lead, deciding where to go was a problem.

As seasoned RVers know, it is nearly impossible to secure a camp site inside America's popular national parks without advanced reservations—very advanced reservations. That, I assumed, mattered only if you wanted a prime location. When cobbling together a last-minute camping trip, it is best not to be choosy.

#### SOURCES

JAYCO INC.  
(574) 825-5861  
www.jayco.com

YOSEMITE LAKES PRESERVE  
campgrounds  
(209) 962-0103

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK  
(209) 372-0200  
www.nps.gov/yose  
www.recreation.gov



Still, I wanted to head someplace worthy of taking the Jayco. So onto the website Recreation.gov I jumped, with the high hopes of finding a spot in, of all places, California's Yosemite National Park.

As one of the nation's premier parks, Yosemite welcomes over 3.5 million visitors annually from around the world. Many visitors stay at the famed Ahwahnee Resort or the quaint Wawona Hotel, while others pitch a tent, bring a trailer, or arrive in an RV. A majority of the campgrounds accept motorhomes up to 35 feet long, but rigs stretching to 40 feet are restricted to the Lower and North Pine campgrounds.

Like all camp sites in the park, those for the larger vehicles are reserved early and are highly coveted, making last-minute cancelations unlikely. Not wanting to drive a 30-plus-foot motorhome into Yosemite Valley without a guaranteed place to dock it, I decided to search for sites outside the park gates. There are numerous campgrounds in the surrounding areas, both privately owned and run by the U.S. Forest Service. I chose Yosemite Lakes Reserve, a private facility located just off Highway 120 and only 5 miles from Yosemite's western Big Oak Flat entrance.

With a place to stay and the 30GS stationed in front of my house, I began the complex task of packing. I don't know about other campers, but I never have enough time to prepare properly for my trips. And the spontaneity of this excursion only added to the disorder. As usual, I commandeered the living room to set out my equipment: fly fishing gear, outdoor stoves (at least two), hiking boots, folding chairs, marshmallow forks, canteens, dishes and cutlery, towels and rags, food and drink, wildlife books, binoculars, and so on.

For my kid, I always take along popcorn and her favorite DVDs in case the road is long and boring. (Since the 30GS is equipped with a 26-inch high-definition LCD TV in the living area and a home theater system with Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround Sound, I took a few of my own movies too.) And for my wife? Well, I learned long ago not to pack for

my wife. To all this, I added my sister-in-law and her two young sons. They, of course, brought more gear to fill the Jayco, more hands to try the amenities, and more bodies to test its roominess.

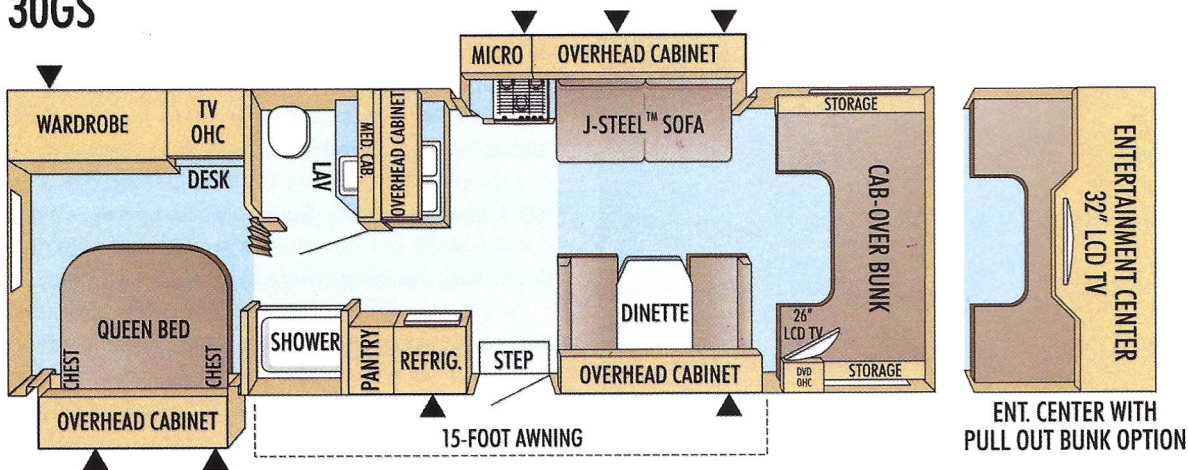
As the 30GS was equipped with a queen-sized bed in the slide-out aft quarters, a large cab-over bunk and convertible sofa, and a converting dinette area, I knew we had plenty of sleeping room for three adults and three kids. What I found disappointing, however, was the RV's lack of exterior storage. While the optional Customer Value Package would add a removable exterior gas grill that plugs conveniently into the rig's propane tank, I always take along my Coleman dual fuel, two-burner camping stove. I also take my new Primus Atle stove and grill. Granted, this might be overkill, but the Primus is perfect for frying up bacon, and the Coleman...well, it's backup, like slipping a compass into your pocket when you have a GPS unit on your belt.

The point is that none of the rig's exterior storage lockers were large enough to accommodate the stoves together. I had to place them in separate compartments. Worse, our Kelty collapsible camp chairs were too tall to fit in any of the outside bins. They ended up under the dinette benches while the kids' fishing poles were relegated to the shower.

In contrast, the 30GS's interior offered vast amounts of storage. Built of stern Northridge maple, the RV's cabinetry is akin to fine home furnishings. In the kitchen area was plenty of drawer space for our dishes and cookware. Below the sink and three-burner oven was even more storage. The split-level, 8-cubic-foot refrigerator/freezer gave us more than enough space to chill our food and drink.

In the rear bedroom the bed lifted on hydraulic dampers to reveal more storage. There were two closets and a stack of fair-sized drawers. Between the closets was a countertop "desk," a minor addition but as most RVs have no counter space in the bedroom, so it was welcome.

## 30GS







# LIVING WITH GREYHAWK

Once packed, we headed east toward the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range. With a 212-inch wheelbase, the 30GS handled our freeway transit easier than I anticipated. When there was finally an open highway ahead of us, I pressed the rig to a steady 65 mph. I'm a driver sort of guy. I like to drive things: sports cars, trucks, RVs, tractors, anything that has wheels. It gives me a sense—via my posterior—of how well a vehicle is built. I have to say, on my “wallowing” scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being race-car steady and 5 being a round-bottomed boat on a windswept lake, the 30GS rated a solid 2. It rode consistently solid and surefooted. A note on gas mileage: At the end of the trip, the 30GS averaged just over 9 mpg.

Beyond the city of Oakdale, California, and its neighboring green foothills, Highway 120 narrowed into a twisting ribbon that climbed steadily toward Yosemite Valley. Even in the tightening pass, the 30GS was a pleasure to drive. Only in a few occasions was a lower gear required to mount the steepening grade.

Although it measures 30 feet 10 inches from stem to stern, the Jayco was a breeze to maneuver through the small mountain towns that hung from the road. Added ease came from the backup camera and cabin-mounted monitor, another part of the optional Customer Value Package.

Arriving at Yosemite Lakes Reserve late in the afternoon, we found our site less than inspiring, as it was simply a grassy patch amongst a long, tightly packed line of other Class A and C RVs who, most likely, also had not tried to reserve Yosemite sites early enough. But the private grounds were exceptionally clean and the patrons friendly. There was a full-service store, a gas station, rentable bunkhouse cabins, trailers, and even a yurt village. For the kids there was a playground, a miniature golf course, hiking trails, and a beautiful clear stream that ran slowly along the facility's edge. Short of being within Yosemite, I would certainly return here.

Setting up the 30GS was simple, as both slide-outs are electronically operated. In the rear bedroom, the queen-sized bed slid back, revealing welcome floor space. The second slide-out moved the convertible sofa along with the stove and overhead microwave. This spread the dining area and provided both adults and kids plenty of legroom.

With six onboard yet space for only four at the dining table, two of us were required to balance paper plates on our laps and our drinks between our knees. It would be nice to see Jayco incorporate some type of side-tray or a sofa table, as is offered in some of the company's other campers.



Sleeping arrangements were a breeze. The queen bed easily accommodated my wife, 7-year-old daughter, and me. My sister-in-law took the fold-down sofa, while her boys scrambled into the cab-over bunk, claiming the high ground for themselves.

The clear drawback to camping outside Yosemite is the need to find transportation to and from the park, especially if one is resistant to hooking and unhooking the RV every day. Luckily, my sister-in-law offered to follow the 30GS in her Toyota SUV. Having a second vehicle gave us the freedom to head to Yosemite Village on our own schedule. From this central location we took advantage of Yosemite's free shuttle system. Utilizing low-emissions hybrid buses, the service provides a reliable means of getting around the valley and stops at stations at every significant tourist site.

Whether you come with a fully equipped RV or arrive on a motorcycle with only a bedroll, Yosemite National Park is a must for every avid camper. It may rank number 2 in the nation's most popular nature destinations (behind Yellowstone National Park), but with its glacier-honed granite monoliths, centuries-old Giant Sequoia trees, and amazing variety of free roaming wildlife, this 761,266-acre preserve is the quintessential camping experience.

Mark Twain once said, "If you don't like the weather in New England, just wait a few minutes." He could have said the same for Yosemite Valley. During our brief stay, we experienced everything from warm sunshine to snowfall—sometimes in the same afternoon. We saw mule deer, black bears, chickaree, Steller's Jays, bats, and a variety of wildflowers. That's the beauty of travel. Each moment brings an unexpected surprise.

I was not sure what to expect from Jayco's Greyhawk 30GS, but overall I was pleasantly surprised. For a Class C of this size, the 30GS was a breeze to drive. It easily accommodated our crew of three adults and three kids. The kitchen and sleeping quarters were well designed and remained comfortable throughout our journey. Sure, the rig had its drawbacks, but there were only a few things I would vote to change. As I have discovered with most Jayco products, the 30GS is built with exceptional quality and promises to reward its owner with years of trouble-free travel.

**GOOD & NOT SO GOOD**

**Good:** Drivability. The 30GS handled and pulled like a much smaller RV and felt ill at ease only on the worst roads. The Ford E450 chassis also came equipped with a great set of power-assisted, antilock brakes. In a rig this large (14,500 pounds), strong stoppers are a necessity. Jayco's cabinetry was another plus. Slamming the handcrafted maple cabinet doors of the 30GS produced a solid, reassuring thump. As my kid is a premier drawer-slammer, I consider myself an expert at judging quality by ear.

**Not So Good:** Exterior storage. When camping we take gear. Too much gear. We need someplace to put it. In this department more than anywhere else, the 30GS is lacking. It has outside storage compartments, but they are small and shallow. Our folding chairs ended up inside, and our fishing poles went in the shower. Note: It is not a good idea to place treble hooks in the shower. **RV**

The 30GS convertible dinette offers a combination dining area and bed. It also had storage beneath each sofa cushion.

