

Baby Boomers Push RV Ownership to Record

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ORLANDO, Fla. -- Russ and Jean Glines have picked the theme music to herald their transition from living in a 3,000-square foot country club home to full-time roadies in a 400-square foot recreational vehicle.

The Glines, 43-year-old mortgage brokers, are among a growing number of Baby Boomers who have pushed the number of RV owners to record levels, including some who hit the road full time while continuing to pursue their careers.

"There's two CDs by the Allman Brothers. We're going to put them in and turn the volume all the way up," Russ Glines said.

Baby Boomers have money, a sense of wanderlust and enough technology to run an office or stay in touch with family while on the road, said Rachel Parsons, spokeswoman for the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association.

Thanks to Wi-Fi, satellite Internet hookups, e-mail and cell phones, the Glines will continue to run their California-based mortgage company from their Country Coach Intrigue.

"We're looking forward to sitting in the Keys in Florida with our satellite dish hooked up and working like we were in our office in San Jose and going out for walks on the beach at night," Russ said.

Nearly 8 million households owned at least one RV in 2005, according to a study by the University of Michigan Survey Research Center. That's a 58 percent increase from 1980. About 384,400 RV's were sold in 2005, according to the RV Association.

More often than not, today's RV'ers are not the type who prefer sipping beer in front of the campfire, roughing it in communal showers in lieu of a nine to five job. Now it's all about luxury, said Bob Livingston, editor for Trailer Life Magazine.

"Older generations saw it as people who were escaping from society, who didn't want to hold down a job," Livingston said. "It was a substitute living, a cheap way to get by in parts that weren't very nice. It's totally different today. It's a luxury."

The typical RV owner is 35 to 54 years-old, owns a home, has an annual income of \$68,000 and travels an average 4,500 miles a year, according to the study.

"They're a very affluent group compared to the general population, very computer literate," said Joe Daquino, vice president of the Affinity Group, which publishes directories of RV parks and campgrounds.

Pop culture has even caught the road tripping bug. Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie drove a chic silver travel trailer cross-country on "The Simple Life," the sexy cast of MTV's "Road Rules" has a Winnebago and even Robin Williams is sporting one in a movie released this month, aptly titled "RV."

Mark and Crickett Gregorich rely on satellite Internet and cell phones from their National RV Seabreeze to keep their businesses going while they live on the road full time with two kids and a dog.

Mark, a 41-year-old Web site designer, and Crickett, a 32-year-old mortgage broker, sold their Orlando home last year and incorporate trips to historic sites, museums and state capitols while they homeschool or "roadschool" their sons, Adam, 11, and Lucas, 8.

"They've learned more from us visiting places and going to different museums and parks," Crickett said. "They're incredible with geography and history. It's just really cool."

The family started from the Florida Keys, driving up the East Coast to Maine last year. This summer, they're in the Southwest, where they recently visited the Benders Volcano in Arizona and pueblos in New Mexico. Next they'll hit Canada and Alaska.

Although experts say Boomers are largely responsible for the sales spike, there is also a surprising number of young families buying RVs in hopes of squeezing in more quality time with the kids.

Young families like the Gregorichs, who travel full time, aren't the norm. The average RV owners travel 28-35 days annually, according to the RV Industry Association. "There's a lot of younger families that want to show their kids what the country is all about," Livingston said. "It's not very convenient to drag a couple of kids and all their belongings from airport to airport."

Kevin Olson, 45, said RV trips are a great way for him and his wife to bond with their two teens, away from their fast-paced life in Minnesota.

"The casual atmosphere of camping, hiking and biking or just sitting around a campfire is what allures us to this activity," Olson said. "In the hectic society that we live in we find that these weekends we seem to be able to talk to one another more openly and in depth."

With summer creeping up, RV'ers are planning to start the bulk of their traveling, despite rising fuel costs. A typical Class A motor home gets about 10 miles to the gallon.