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## Vintage RV enthusiasts to rally for Havasu Balloon Festival

By BRANDON MESSICK Today's News-Herald Jan 14, 2016



Brandon Messick/News-Herald photo

Joe Weaver, of the GMC Pacific Cruisers Club, checks under the hood of a 1970s GMC Coach at the Lake Havasu Marina on Thursday. The Pacific Cruisers will join dozens of other GMC enthusiasts for a Balloon Festival rally this weekend.

GMC sold a series of coaches throughout the mid-1970s that remain popular among RV enthusiasts to this day. With a 455 Oldsmobile engine, front-wheel drive, torsion bar suspension in the front and airbag suspension in the rear, they don't make them like this anymore.

Only a few thousand GMC coaches were produced between 1973-1978, before the vehicle's design shifted to something less powerful, and more aesthetic. The GMC Coaches produced during those five years, however, maintain a fan following to this day – and many of those fans will be descending on the Lake Havasu Marina this weekend to rally for the city's annual Balloon Festival and Fair.

The rally will host several groups of old-model GMC Coach enthusiasts, including the southwestern "Pacific Cruisers," the California-based "Forty-Niners," and other groups from as far away as Kansas City and Wyoming.

"They ride ten times better than a modern RV," said Ken Booth, of Havasu. Booth is a member of the Pacific Cruisers. This will be his third GMC rally, and by far the largest. Dozens of Coaches will arrive at the Lake Havasu Marina's outer parking area this weekend, as group members cook with Dutch ovens, gather around fire pits and gather to discuss tips and techniques for maintaining and repairing their old vehicles.

"I've been in this club for 12 years, but it's been going on a lot longer than that," Booth said. "Every time people see a modern RV, they just drive on by – it's just another shoebox. When people see (our GMCs), they all want to have a look inside."

Bobbie Schultz, president of the Pacific Cruisers, arrived in Havasu on Wednesday to prepare for the rally. "These vehicles are collectible, and people love the original design," she said.

Schultz said that the Pacific Cruisers will be bringing 35 coaches alone, and she's glad to be in Havasu. "I'm excited," Schultz said. "We love the area, and the drive here was very pretty. The Booths have been trying to get us to come here for years. I've been looking forward to the trip."

The rally-goers will enjoy island views of the balloon ascension at dawn, followed by breakfast, and visits to the festival itself throughout the weekend.