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NOVEMBER 2010

## MILLION-DOLLAR BABY FORETRAVEL'S PHENIX 45'

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PHOTO: BOB LIVINGSTON

# FORETRAVEL PHENIX 45'

THE COMPANY THAT C.M. FORE BUILT FROM SCRATCH LIVES ON AS A PURVEYOR OF LUXURY CUSTOM MOTOR COACHES

*by* BOB LIVINGSTON





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acogdoches may be recognized as the oldest city in Texas, but to the RV crowd, it's the birthplace of Foretravel, one of the oldest motorhome marques in the business. It was 44 years ago when C.M. Fore sketched out a plan for a motorhome for his son's high school project, which led to the birth of the first Foretravel. Since then, Foretravel has built a legendary name among the motorhoming fraternity, dealing almost exclusively from its plant in East Texas.

Fore no longer rides herd over the company, leaving the legacy of building quality coaches to new owner Lyle Reed and a small investor group. Since that change in ownership, there's been quite an evolution at the Nacogdoches plant. What used to be rock-solid coaches with very conservative design and décor (the company was one of the last to offer slideouts, for example) have been transformed into some of the most luxurious motorhomes on the road.

Today, it takes a minimum of \$550,000 (suggested retail price) to get into a new Foretravel, with the Phenix coach price tag reaching seven figures. Those understated interiors of yesterday that gave way to top-notch fit and finish and engineering prowess have been allocated to the archives. Foretravel coaches now rival bus conversions with wow factors left to the whims of potential owners. And quality has reached a pinnacle in the world of high-tech motorhome manufacturing.

We were given the opportunity to evaluate the company's flagship product, the Phenix, a handsome coach that measures 45 feet long and is graced with

**SPECIFICATIONS**

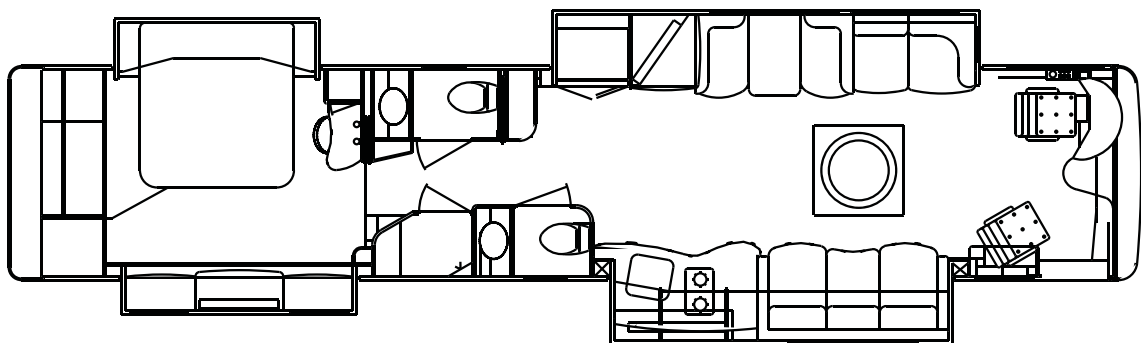
<b>CHASSIS:</b> PROPRIETARY	<b>HEIGHT:</b> 12' 5"
<b>ENGINE:</b> CUMMINS ISX 650 HP	<b>WHEELBASE:</b> 304"
<b>FUEL:</b> 200 GAL	<b>FRESHWATER CAP:</b> 135 GAL
<b>GVWR:</b> 52,000 LBS	<b>GRAY/BLACK-WATER CAP:</b> 145 GAL
<b>LENGTH:</b> 45'	<b>MSRP:</b> \$1,061,740
<b>WIDTH:</b> 8' 6"	

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four slideout rooms. The uniquely designed 1½-bath floorplan cleverly positions both bathrooms in the aisle that separates the rear bedroom from the rest of the coach. Strategically placed doors allow the bathroom on the streetside and the opposing shower to be incorporated into the bedroom suite, allowing guests access to the other bathroom without sacrificing privacy.

Once you leave bathroom territory walking toward the front, you'll be entering space devoted to the living room, kitchen and dinette. Foretravel offers a few floorplans as starting points; from here the customer works very closely with the company's custom design team consisting of a design engineer, an ASID interior designer and a graphic artist. The end result is a collaborative effort between the company and client, and a one-of-a-kind motor coach.

The coach is built from the ground up, starting with a proprietary chassis that rides on an independent front suspension with air bags on all four corners, disc brakes





with ABS and a tag axle. The structure consists of a welded steel chassis, 1½-inch rigid extruded plastic-foam-insulated laminated steel side walls, an insulated laminated floor with a layer of sound-proofing material between two pieces of plywood, a trussed insulated laminated subfloor and cargo bays, and an insulated roof made of aluminum. A one-piece fiberglass covers the roof and the side walls; front and rear caps are all fiberglass. The motorhome is finished with a luscious full-body BASF paint job.

Power comes from a 650-HP Cummins ISX engine coupled with an Allison 4000MHR transmission with Foretravel's signature retarder. The high-performance drivetrain combined with the substantial weight of the coach and the responsive suspension plant the motorhome firmly on the pavement, making for comfortable driving and precise handling.

Once the driver is belted into the Knoedler Air Chief seat and the passenger sinks into the mini-couch with power controls, it's hard to leave the cockpit — especially after using the copilot chair's heat/massage feature. The passenger can also control the navigation system or don headphones to use the personal monitor/TV/DVD player that's on an articulating arm.

Forward visibility is excellent and the three-piece mirrors virtually eliminate blind spots. Just in case, the driver can use the backup monitor that provides views of both sides, front and rear — and can dig-

itally process the images and show a bird's-eye view all around the coach, which is very handy for close maneuvering. Long hauls are easy to make, especially when backed up by a 200-gallon fuel tank.

Even the most diehard road warriors eventually stop for the night, and once the four flush-fitting slides are deployed using the HWH hydraulic system and sealed with the air bladders, the interior opens up into a palatial home. Multidimensional ceiling panels, gorgeous African Bubinga wood cabinetry and stunning tile floors with mosaic handiwork blend harmoniously with the plush furniture and wall coverings — featuring remote-controlled MCD shades. Lighting is superb and manipulated by a system of multiplexed buttons throughout the interior.

Opposing couches and the dinette booth provide the lounging and eating environment up front. The couches and booth are covered in soft Ultrasuede and have a very soothing feel. A 42-inch LCD TV hooked to a Blu-ray player and high-end home theater system is easily viewed from most of the seating positions.

Tucked between the curbside couch and half-bath is the galley. Any perceived lack of counterspace is offset by all the necessities for modest cooking stints using the twin-burner stove, convection/microwave, solid-surface countertops complemented by tile-covered backsplashes and plenty of cabinets to store foodstuffs — although we assume owners of this coach frequent restaurants. Cold items are handled in the home-style, 120-volt AC

refrigerator with water and ice dispensers in one of two doors. Dishes can be washed in the stainless sink with designer faucet or placed in the dishwasher in a drawer.

Separating the living area and galley from the bedroom suite are the aforementioned half-baths and walk-in shower. Inside these half-baths are a china toilet and beautiful lavatory with oval sink, designer faucet and enough carefully placed tile to create a stunning pattern. The rearmost bath opens directly across from the shower stall. Exquisite hand-laid tile — again creating very artistic patterns — high-end fixtures and a large skylight give this shower uncontested luxury status.

The striking wood and contrasting walls, carpeting, ceiling sculpture, window coverings and bedspread provide pure eye candy to the occupants of the bedroom. There are plenty of cabinets to store clothing and personal items, and the rear closet with mirrored doors opens to a spacious area with enough room to contain the stacking washer/dryer. A king-size SlumberEase mattress system makes breakfast in bed almost mandatory.

Outside, the Phenix has all the amenities expected of a million-dollar coach. Exterior compartments abound with one outfitted for hooking up utilities and two pass-through bays. The outdoor entertainment center can be located in one of the storage bays, or as in the model reviewed, the large flat-screen TV was placed in the front curbside slide to save cargo space. The rest of the under-floor storage areas can handle up to 4,480 pounds of supplies and toys, after counting the weight of all the liquids. Plus the coach can tow up to 18,000 pounds of dinghy vehicle (or trailer) with a hitch weight up to 2,700 pounds. Of course, that number will be dependent on overall loading.

There's not much missing in a motor coach of this caliber. If there is, the owner either forgot to include it in the plans or didn't know it existed. Foretravel has come a long way since the subject coach of Fore's son's high school project. Over the years, the brand has attracted a loyal following, and even though the Fores resisted change for the sake of change, the models progressed nicely, albeit slowly, over the years. Today Foretravel coaches have become a viable player in the field of custom coaches earmarked for discriminating buyers. ♦