

# Roughing It Smoothly®



## IN THIS ISSUE

- Acadia National Park
- The Oregon Coast
- My Town: Tuscumbia, Alabama

## SPECIAL

**NEW FOR 2008, p. 26**

**Tiffin Upgrades Entertainment Centers with Cutting Edge HD Technology, p. 36**

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## Home Office Is Where the Allegro Bus Is

'Mud Logging' Firm Converts Motorhome into Traveling Executive Office



It's probably safe to say that most Allegro Bus owners purchase their motorhomes for vacation travel or even full-time occupancy after retiring from the business world. For Ron and Charlotte Riley, it's different. Very much **in** business, they've converted their 2007 42-ft. QDP into 24-hour executive offices to help them meet the always exacting and some-

times immediate service requirements of customers who drill oil and gas wells in West Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma.

Ron is president and Charlotte is comptroller of Riley Geological Consultants, Inc., a firm specializing in hydrocarbon well logging, commonly known as "mud logging" in the petroleum industry. The company operates 18 specially-

*Above:* Ron Riley, president of Riley Geological Consultants, discusses an incoming report with wife and comptroller Charlotte at her work station occupying a driver-side slide-out.

Text and Photography by Norman Spray



Ron and Charlotte Riley outside their Allegro Bus. The Bus (note satellite receiver atop) is equipped with three different means of internet access, allowing the Rileys to manage their company without interruption while on the road. That's also their truck beside the Bus. They tow it behind the 2007 Allegro Bus.

equipped "mobile laboratories" manned by geologists on location at drilling sites across their service area. The geologists analyze underground formation cuttings "captured" in returned drilling mud. They are the first to detect the probability of success at a drilling location.

With these units working over hundreds of miles away from the home base in Slaton, TX, the technical and financial management of their service requires on-demand response at any hour. "Drilling is a round-the-clock operation," Ron says.

"We have to be available, no matter what time it is or where we are."

To do this and yet travel either for business or pleasure, the Rileys have placed two computerized workstations in the living area of their 42-ft Bus. Their communication systems access from any location the internet and the company's computer network, often while the Allegro office rolls down the highway at 70 mph.

"Without this capability, we'd be as home bound as a dairyman who has to milk his cows twice a day," Ron says. "As it is, we're in the office wherever we go."

There have been times when that has been a very good thing. There was the call Ron got at his desk while Charlotte was driving them toward their ranch near Mora, New Mexico, for instance. It came from a geologist employed by an oil company who had contracted Riley Geological for mud logging. "What are you doing?" the geologist asked.

"That's bad news for me," he complained when Ron told him the Allegro Bus was on the road to New Mexico. "I'm unable to get on your web site to check the log on the well we are drilling in Garza County, Texas. It's critical and I was hoping you'd be in the office to help me out."

Logs routinely are posted on the Riley Geo web site in separate mailboxes for each drilling location, but access is restricted to authorized persons using specific passwords. Ron suspected the geologist's password had not been "set." Using Internet in Motion, a cellular system that connects even when rolling, Ron set the password and had the log in the geologist's hands in about two minutes. "How'd you do that and you out there on the highway?" the geologist wanted to know.

## What Is Mud Logging?

Mud logging is one of hundreds of technological improvements made in the oil and gas drilling industry over the past half century or so.

"In the long-ago old days," says Ron Riley, president, "drillers simply bored or pounded a bit through sub-surface formations until they hit hydrocarbons or gave up. Sometimes oil and/or gas exploded to the surface, sending thousands of gallons up in a classic gusher. This precipitated joyous shouts of 'Eureka!' but was also hazardous and wasted huge amounts of oil and/or gas before wells could be brought under control."

"Today's drillers pump heavy viscous 'mud' into the hole with and behind the bit to stem or choke the flow of oil or gas reservoirs encountered. As the bit cuts through underground strata, pieces of the rock, shale, sand or other formations are

brought to the surface in returning 'mud.' Analyzing these fragments at 10' intervals is the work of mud loggers like us. With our specialized TRU-GAS® detection equipment, experience, and expertise, we can determine the following: (1) the relative porosity and other characteristics of a given strata; whether it is or is not likely to yield hydrocarbons; and (3) confirm whether it is in fact a pay zone. TRU-GAS® Detection Systems designed by our own Bob Thrasher and manufactured in our Research and Development Center combine with MainLog® computer software to deliver the industry's most precise oil and gas detection."

"We are always the first to detect hydrocarbons," Riley said. "At that point, we mud loggers get to be the ones to yell 'Eureka!' It makes no difference how long you've been in the profession, it's that moment that makes mud logging an exciting profession."

That geologist has since become a drilling operator who contracts Riley Geological for every well he drills where mud logging is specified.

On another occasion, Ron got a call from a driller wanting to get into computer archives for historical logging data. This time the call came when the Allegro was in an area with poor cell signals. Ron asked the customer to give him five minutes. Charlotte pulled the bus to a stop beside the road, Ron ran up the self-acquiring Hughes Direcway® satellite dish on the roof, and in two minutes the Ground Control® positioning system had locked onto a satellite signal. Ron pulled up the requested data from network archives and had it in the hands of the customer within 10 minutes.

Much of the modification needed to build an office in their Allegro Bus was done by Ron and/or technicians in the home shop where the company's fifth-wheel mobile labs are fitted with the equipment—much of it proprietary—that Riley geologists use to analyze "cuttings" brought to the surface in drilling mud. Both office desks and flooring were fabricated in this shop.

Ron's work station uses space originally occupied by a couch on the passenger-side slide-out in the living area. Charlotte's desk across the room replaced the dinette on the driver-side slide-out. On his side, Ron installed tongue-in-groove oak flooring that makes it easy to roll his office chair about the space. When it's time to eat, they bring out the TV trays.

Ron and Charlotte are impressed with how their diesel-powered Allegro Bus performs both on the plains and in the mountains. Charlotte, who does much of the driving, is particularly impressed with handling characteristics. "It's even smoother and easier than the 2003 model 38-ft. Allegro Bus we had previously," she says. "It's a dream to drive. And we're very comfortable and at home in it anywhere."

For a couple growing a business rather than retiring from one, always being in the office removes much of the pressure and stress that can result when events demand time away from home base. Recently, for example, payday for all Riley field people came while Ron, Charlotte, and some of their technical people were manning a company exhibition booth at a convention of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists in Wichita Falls, some 200 miles from Slaton.

"Before we built the mobile office, payroll would have put us in a tizzy to get home to an office to accumulate and process data," Ron says. "As it was, no sweat. We just stayed on the parking lot where we camped, ran up the satellite dish, accessed the web and pulled in all the payroll data. We reviewed and processed it, then emailed information for each employee's pay to a payroll company we employ. In minutes, they'd made arrangements for direct deposits to each employee's bank account."

Always being in the office may sound like a little too much work and too little play for some but, says Ron: "For us, it works. We can do what we have to do and play some, too. Obviously, since it is our second one, we think it would be hard to find a vehicle more adaptable for our use than the Allegro Bus." **RIS**

## Effective Communications Make Office on Wheels Work

Rapid transfer, processing and handling of data from far-flung well drilling sites is a must for Riley Geological Consultants, Inc. Mobile labs housing geologists at 18 drilling sites constantly record drilling activity every hour of the day. Mud logging information is transmitted via satellite to the company's web site and stored in separate "mail boxes" for each well.

Customers anywhere in the world can use computers to retrieve this information and monitor drilling activity at their particular wells in "Real Time" as long as they have access to the internet.

The management "nerve center" for all this activity and more, including payroll and financial data, is Riley Geological President Ron Riley's desk in the 42-ft Allegro Bus. He and his wife Charlotte, who is company comptroller, manage to stay in complete control and are instantly responsive to customer needs even when their "executive offices" are speeding down Oil Patch highways.

Riley has installed three separate systems in the Bus to access the internet and, through it, Riley's computer network. These include:

- Use of a cell phone card which is plugged into a computer to connect to the cellway internet. In the Riley Allegro Bus, the computer is a small Sony Vaio. It rides in drawer space in front of the passenger seat. Least expensive of internet access systems installed on the Bus, it works while the Bus is rolling so long as a good signal is available. Riley uses an Alltel Passport 1xEVDO PC connection card by KYOCERA.

- An Internet in Motion® digital cellular system with a cellular antenna that is installed on the bus' roof; a processing modem only about 5"×5" in size; and a Parker Vision Wireless Router that makes a WiFi signal available at both work stations and allows laptops to stay on the internet while being used anywhere in the Bus. Manufacturer's suggested retail price for this system is around \$2500, Riley says.

- The fastest internet service by far is via a Direcway® self-acquiring satellite disk mounted atop the Allegro Bus. It can be raised or lowered at the touch of a button. A linked positioning system made by Ground Control® automatically seeks out a strong satellite signal and locks the disk onto it in minutes, Riley says.

Alltel provides Riley's cell phone service. Strong (nearly three watt) Telular cell phones are used in the "executive office" Bus and at each mobile lab on drilling sites. The mobile labs at drilling locations also use Direcway® satellite dishes for internet access but economics demands these be manually positioned for signal reception.