



Shock And Awe

Put reason and sensibility aside for a moment, and step inside the 2017 Foretravel ih-45, one of the most technologically advanced luxury coaches on the market **By Chris Hemer**

There's something about a 45-foot luxury motorcoach that seems to evoke emotional responses. First, there's shock: "Wow! How big is that thing?" Then, awe: "What a beautiful motorhome!" Followed shortly thereafter by dismay, sometimes even visible disgust, at the price tag. "Nearly \$1.4 million for a motorhome?! I could buy a really nice house with that!"

Indeed, you could. But then again,

a coach like this is intended to be your home, and an amazingly well-equipped one at that. Consider what it would cost to have your home built from scratch, then expertly painted, decorated and furnished to your specifications. Then, fit with the finest appliances, state-of-the-art electronics and audio/visual equipment, and you can see how it starts to add up — but that's only part of the picture. This particular home is also designed to transport you and your

family anyplace your heart desires in five-star resort comfort whenever you want. So, does all this justify a seven figure price tag? For most, no — but that's one of the reasons Foretravel Motorcoach of Nacogdoches, Texas, only builds around 18 of its bespoke ih-45 coaches a year. Step into one, and you'll instantly understand the appeal — you may even start a mental list of accounts and possessions that can be liquidated in order to cover the

ABOVE: Each Foretravel ih-45 paint job is custom and takes between 500 and 1,000 hours to complete. Among the changes for 2017 are a new front-cap design, new storage doors and a new basement design. Exterior television (not pictured) deploys from the rear of the forward slideout.



BELOW: Interior includes a new ceiling-recess design, Premier Ebony high-gloss laminate cabinets and contrasting furniture/countertops. Master suite features a king bed with nightstands and overhead cabinets. Television rises from large wardrobe area when it is switched on.



down payment. Do I really want to send Johnny to college? Nah, he can pay for it himself.

Established in 1967, Foretravel ranks as one of the original custom coach builders — and “custom” isn’t a word it takes lightly. Once the down payment is taken, Foretravel begins building your coach from the bottom up, starting with its own chassis, the Foretravel Travelride II. Aside from massive ¼-by-10-inch steel channel rails and ⅜-inch steel tubing modules, the Travelride II features some pretty impressive equipment. Two outboard airbags per wheel on the rear and one per wheel up front with an HWH Active Air system automatically sense changes in direction and brake dive, and instantaneously increases air pressure to the

appropriate bags to keep the coach’s attitude flat. There is one massive air-actuated brake disc per wheel, including the tag axle. Motivation comes from a Cummins ISX15 diesel engine generating 600 hp along with a massive 1,950 LB-FT of torque, routed through an Allison 4000MHR six-speed automatic transmission with a somewhat unique feature: A hydraulic retarder that takes the place of a traditional engine brake. Foretravel claims that, in its experience, the retarder works better than an engine brake and is completely silent in operation.

Of course, at this price point you can expect nothing but the best mechanical systems as well, so Foretravel equips its ih-45 with HWH fully automatic leveling and hydraulic actuation of the

flush-mount slideouts. What makes this latter feature unique in a Foretravel motorcoach is what the company calls Fore-Slide technology, a multi-step process unlike anything you’ve ever seen in an “ordinary” motorhome. When a slide is deployed, a panel in the floor opens, then drops, and the edge of the slideout settles in. The panel then raises to meet the slideout edge, creating a perfectly flat floor. Foretravel artisans even design the floor tiles so that the seam is almost invisible. Once the slideout is in place, a pneumatic bladder around the circumference of the box inflates, creating an airtight seal that prevents light, dirt and even sound from entering. It all happens like a carefully orchestrated mechanical play, except there is definitely no drama



here.

Most of what Foretravel builds is to the customer's order, but occasionally the company creates a show model to demonstrate what is possible, which is the case with the test unit you see here. Industry wide, there has been an uptick in interest for models that have sleeping accommodations for kids — and while the market Foretravel plays in doesn't ordinarily get these types of requests, they've been coming in frequently enough for the company to build its own interpretation of a family motorcoach. And as you might expect, it takes the concept several steps beyond, with two lavishly equipped bunk beds amidships and two full bathrooms. Each bunk is equipped with its own window, flat-screen television, Blu-ray player, color-changing LED accent lighting and appropriate outlets for gaming consoles. And, because both bunks feature solid, sliding doors, each area is equipped with its own air-conditioning registers as well. It's truly a kid's paradise — in fact, you'll probably forget you even have kids until mealtime.

Directly across the hall from the bunks is a bathroom fit for a prince or princess. Behind the porcelain macerator toilet with pushbutton activation is hand-laid tumbled marble subway tile, while the countertop is backed with glass mosaic tile in complementing earth tones. The vanity is small, but well-equipped, with a quartz surface and a brushed-nickel residential faucet, plus three drawers and a medicine cabinet. The showstopper here, though, is the spa-inspired shower, with a tumbled-rock shower pan, matching subway tile, residential fixtures and a thick glass door. In either bathroom, or anywhere in the coach, for that matter, you get a truly residential experience even when you're not hooked up to a city-water connection. That's because the ih-45 is fitted with a monster of a water pump — a Headhunter Mach 5 that is about the size of a half-gallon bottle and generates up to 20 gallons per minute in almost total silence. It's complemented by a Headhunter Puffer

accumulator tank designed to eliminate water hammer and reduce pump cycling, as well as to store pressurized water for flushing the toilets. Truly, you can't tell the difference between pump and city connection — it's that good.

The rear master bedroom is separated from the hall and living area by a pocket door — and both this and the one that isolates the rear master bathroom are pneumatically operated. Push a button, and the door in question slides shut in almost complete silence. The bedroom itself is appropriately equipped with a comfy king bed with nightstands, a padded headboard, and overhead cabinets. At the foot of the bed is a large wardrobe in a slideout with his and hers cabinets for hanging clothes, and a chest of drawers. You won't notice the 40-inch LED TV until you turn it on, at which point it rises silently from the countertop.

The rear bath is similarly equipped to the guest bath, except there is a large cabinet next to the toilet that conceals a stacked washer/dryer. What makes this space unique, however, you may miss completely unless you've owned a rear bath diesel pusher in the past: There is no step up into the bathroom. Ordinarily, some clearance is required for the coach's monstrous powerplant just below the floor — but Foretravel engineers found that, by changing the fan-drive system, they gained enough clearance to make a flat floor throughout.

The main living space in the test unit was fairly ordinary by luxury-motorhome standards, meaning that it has everything you would expect in

WHAT'S HOT 👍

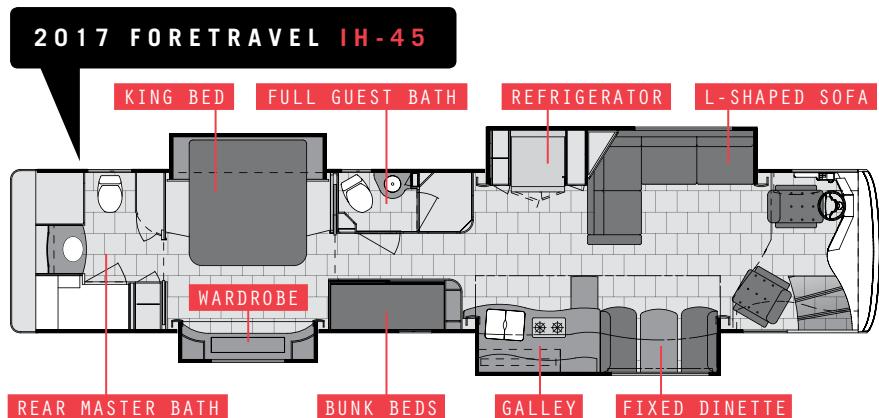
Gorgeous paint job, new front-cap design, superlative driving experience.

WHAT'S NOT 🙄

Too pricey for most.



a coach of this caliber. Top-of-the-line appliances, handmade cabinetry, quartz countertops and plenty of LED lighting made the inside of the ih-45 feel like a luxury high-rise apartment. But it's those small, sometimes invisible details that make the biggest difference. Multiplex panels to control the lighting are everywhere and are logically placed for the zone you're in — but even this technology is starting to become commonplace in the luxury RV segment. So, new for this year is iPad integration — where everything in the coach can be controlled and/or monitored through one of these popular tablets. To watch the two flat-screen televisions in the living area, for example, we first touched a button on the multiplex panel near the couch to lower the 48-inch unit from the ceiling above the cockpit. Then, we simply chose A/V from the tablet's main menu, selected the living-area icon and touched "TV." Doing so fired up the DirecTV box and turned on the main TV simultaneously. From here, we used the same menu screen to select "TV2" and then both TVs were on.





Galley features quartz countertops, two-burner induction cooktop, residential stainless convection microwave and stainless-steel sink with cover. Countertop extension is held closed by electromagnets during travel. Couch with extension has TV above for viewing from swiveling cockpit seats or dinette.

There are also icons for the bedroom and both bunks.

This is only a small portion of what the system can do. You can turn on/dim lights in any zone, raise/lower individual or all power roller shades, adjust the climate-control system (both A/C and AquaHot hydronic system, by zone) turn the water pump on/off, operate the generator, even dump the gray/black holding tank. You can also check the battery-charge level, monitor the six-security camera system (with DVR), change the color(s) of the infinitely

adjustable exterior LED light system, and more. How many times have you gone to bed at night and forgot to turn off a light or adjust the climate-control system up or down? With the convenience of iPad integration, you'll never have to do that again. Unless, of course, you forget to bring the iPad into the bedroom with you.

The coach's various systems can also be controlled by a single touch-screen panel behind a small door in the hallway, and it's easy to use. Categories are all laid out in buttons, such as

Climate, Water and Genset. Touch climate, and you can see what zones are currently activated (living room, kitchen, bed and bath), as well as set temperature and outside temperature. The home screen tells you, at a glance, what your freshwater and waste levels are, house and chassis battery voltage, even the performance of both legs in the 50-amp system (amps and volts).

Having so many systems in a relatively small space means accessibility for maintenance and troubleshooting is key. So, in addition to two

Specifications

Chassis

Model	ih-45
Engine	Cummins ISX15
SAE Hp	600 @ 1,800 rpm
Torque	1,950 lb-ft @ 1,200 rpm
Transmission	Allison 4000 MHR
Axle Ratio	4.30:1
Front Tires	Michelin 365/70R22.5
Rear & Tag Axle Tires	Michelin 315/80R22.5
Wheelbase	304"
Brakes	Air disc, all wheels
Suspension F/R	Independent front suspension with HWH Active Air, two air bags/ Rear four air bags/ Tag two air bags
Fuel Capacity	200 gal
Fuel Economy	5-8 mpg (average)
Warranty	Powertrain 24 months/24,000 miles bumper-to-bumper, 5 years/100,000 miles structural

Coach

Exterior Length	45'
Exterior Width	8' 6"
Exterior Height	13' 2" (including roof A/C)
Interior Width	8' 5"
Interior Height	7'
Construction	Aluminum framing in floor and roof; steel framing in walls; vacuum-bonded fiberglass side walls; CosmoLite one-piece, UV-resistant roof; structural block-foam insulation
Freshwater Capacity	135 gal
Black/Gray Tank Capacity	145 gal (one holding tank)
Water-Heater	Aqua-Hot Hydronic
LP-Gas Capacity	N/A
Air Conditioner	(4) 15,000 Btu w/heat pump
Furnace	Aqua-Hot 600D Hydronic, 65,600 Btu
Refrigerator	25.8 cubic foot
Inverter/Charger	(2) 2,800 watt
Battery	(3) Group 31 12-volt (chassis); (6) Group 4D deep cycle AGM (12-volt)
AC generator	12.5 kW Onan diesel
MSRP as tested	\$1,359,800

Wet Weight

(Water and fuel tanks full, no supplies or passengers)

Front Axle	18,000 lbs
Rear Axle	19,640 lbs
Tag Axle	12,580 lbs
Total	50,220 lbs

Chassis Ratings

GAWR	
Front	20,000 lbs
Rear	23,000 lbs
Tag	14,000 lbs
GVWR	
GCWR	54,000 lbs
ROCCC	74,000 lbs
	3,780 lbs



Each bunk bed features its own sliding door, flat-screen television, LED lighting, air-conditioning registers, Blu-ray player and gaming-console outlets. The guest bath rivals the best spas with its workmanship and materials.

cavernous pass-through storage bays with power-operated slide-out trays, other baggage doors conceal neatly arranged electronics and plumbing. Control modules with labels for the systems they control in one. Nine batteries with textbook cabling in another. The water system, with the pump, accumulator, filters and winterizing valves front in center behind another, separate door. On the street side, you can easily see and reach anything in the Aqua-Hot system, and the utility center is obviously the result of experienced hands. It's crafted from stainless steel and features a residential chrome faucet and soap dispenser, plus integrated hose reels for the power cord and freshwater supply.

But as much as the ih-45 satisfies the senses when it is parked, its mission in life is to eat up the miles, day after day, year after year — and it works beautifully in this respect as well. A new Silverleaf glass dashboard is a great addition for 2017, working as both an instrument cluster and a very handy checklist. If all systems are go, they're all green; if the jacks are down or the shorepower cord is still connected when the ignition key is switched on, for example, these will be displayed in red. Once you get rolling, it will show a speedometer, tachometer and, because it's user-programmable, anything else you'd like to keep tabs on. Of course,

the steering wheel offers a tilt/telescoping function, and the driver's seat is an expensive Knuedler air-ride unit with multiple power adjustments. The front passenger's seat is power adjustable, offers a foot rest and is heated as well.

Release the air-operated parking brake, select "D" from the shift console, and you're off. The view from the windshield is vast and commanding, but comparatively short in height; the effect is like looking through a large car windshield instead of an office-building window. Appropriate, considering that the Foretravel ih-45 drives like a car. The steering is remarkably accurate, the braking, especially when combined with the Allison transmission retarder is superlative, and the cornering completely flat. Within 10 minutes, it's easy to forget you're driving a 45-foot motorhome. And the fact that the driving experience is almost completely silent should lay to rest (no pun intended) any concerns about driver fatigue after many miles and hours behind the wheel.

Yes, a coach like the Foretravel ih-45 is much more than just an RV. It's a traveling technological tour-de-force, a comfortable home, and a driver's dream. Now ... just how well is your portfolio performing, anyway? **M**

Foretravel Motorcoach

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