Maybe it was the Carpenters’ singing that broke the cassette deck. The deck in David Fischer’s 1982 Excella Airstream motorhome hadn’t worked the last time he’d tried it, but testing fate with his Carpenters tape might have been asking for it. Deck aside, he’s put some serious miles on the Excella — dubbed the “Volley Trolley” — chasing pro volleyball tournaments around the country for years without much trouble.

We’ll get to his original Trolley going up in flames in the desert a bit later.

Fischer is now the associate head coach of the women’s indoor and beach volleyball teams at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, and he knows his spikes from his digs. For a 12-year stretch, he and his partner Jack Quinn hit pretty much every American Volleyball Professionals (AVP) beach event in the country — and sometimes out of the country. And from 2004 until 2010, the motor for those trips was an Airstream home on wheels.

“Usually I’d map out a loop of about a half-dozen AVP events, with some weekends off for smaller tournaments. Then I’d grab my friend Jack, sometimes a few others as well, and take off for anywhere from three to eight weeks. When we got ambitious, we drove from LA to DC, left the Volley Trolley at my sister’s in Virginia, then flew to Ukraine and Switzerland for a few weeks before heading back to finish up the cross-country journey,” says Fischer.

Cross-country volleyball touring can get a mite crazy, as Fischer can attest. Once, during a stay in New York, he realized that his schedule was tight. “I was driving through the California desert when a little electrical fire became a big fire. I pulled over and had a few friendly truck-drivers and families help with their extinguishers, but everything above the floors basically went up. I was carrying the belongings of a couple friends, and I had to text them that we all three had become Buddhists — no possessions. They were fantastic about it and we’re still friends — just ones with fewer possessions.”

But a little desert motorhome roast didn’t fry Fischer’s Airstream ambitions. He found his current Excella in 2009 and it’s been rolling ever since (after getting the curtains, carpet, and upholstery touched up in Ensenada by a “carpenter/upholsterer/flooring dynamo named Ramon”).

Fischer and his volleyball roadies never felt compromised by a motorhome’s restrictions. “The beds are comfortable, the fridge works great, and the stove has four burners. The scenery and sound system make up for the lack of a TV, and we would just keep finding things to do,” he says. “People are incredibly helpful to motorhome travelers — everywhere we went we found people who, given the chance, really seemed like they wanted to help out, or even to join our tour.”

Fischer brought his volleyball savvy (and his Airstream) to the University of Louisiana at Monroe in 2012, where he was head beach volleyball coach for three seasons, leading them to a couple of national tournament appearances. Then his current coaching gig in North Carolina beckoned. “Coaching, like teaching, is incredibly fun, rewarding, and time-consuming,” he says. “We schedule travel, constantly recruit, counsel players on nonathletic issues, design and order
customized gear, market and run camps, maintain relationships across multiple university departments, understand NCAA compliance, exchange film with fellow competitors, and fundraise. I keep busy — but I wouldn’t trade what I’m currently doing.”

A coach’s duties don’t stop him from playing. He plays locally at least once a week and still loves volleyball as much as ever: “Indoor volleyball is mostly about getting a group of specialized players to buy into a system, fire up, and take down their opponents in a loud and glorious battle. The jumping and balance in the air are fun to do, and the floor moves are bruising but satisfying,” he says.

“I also love the preposterousness of beach volleyball — the notion that two people think they can cover an entire volleyball court is funny to me. Because beach volleyball involves fewer people and elements like wind, experience is hugely important. In general, when there’s a beach volleyball game, bet on the older team.”

The Excella won’t be on any AVP tours soon, but it’s ready for what’s next. Fischer is even having it polished and updated a bit.

“One of the best things about being an Airstream owner is that I can travel in any direction with minimal planning. I could sell it, and I have no need for it, but I’m a sucker for the ‘see more, do more, live more’ Wally Byam slogan. I recently enjoyed ‘Travels with Charley’ by Steinbeck, where he circles the U.S. in a makeshift motorhome and writes what he sees. The plan is to keep it.”

Fischer didn’t say if he’s getting the cassette deck repaired. But it’s probably best to keep that Carpenters tape in its case. 📧