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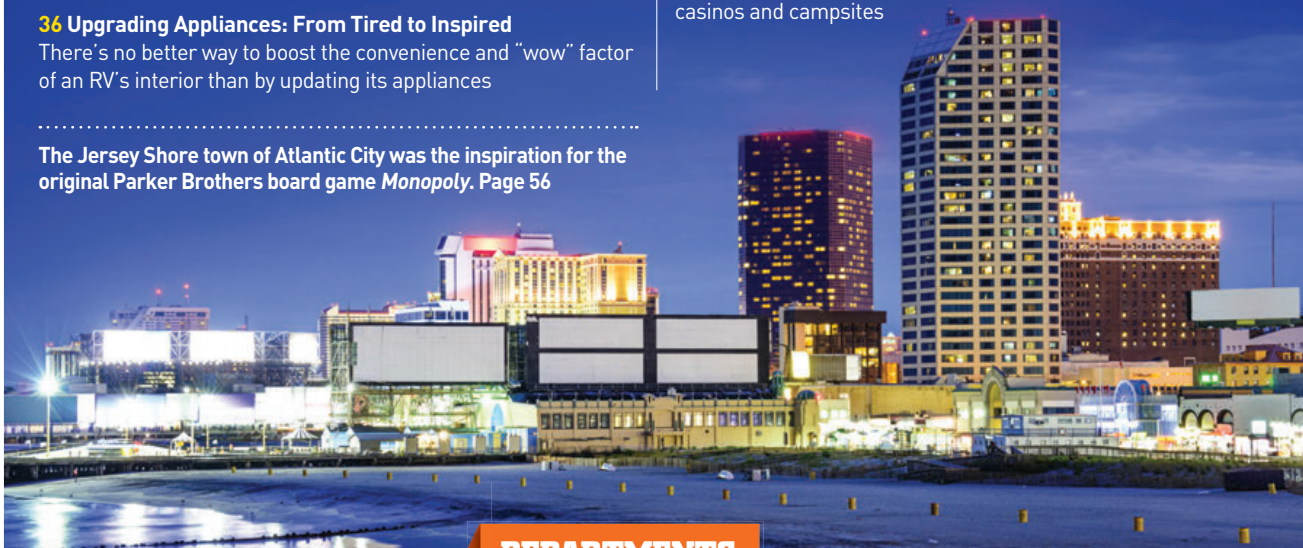
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➤ The four-season Highland Ridge Roamer RT288FLR is built for the long haul. Page 26

On the cover: The Oliver Legacy is easily pulled by the Toyota Tacoma through Ventura, California's fertile farm country. Photo by Scott Hirko

The Good Life

Following the snowbirds or full-timing affords unique opportunities to have way too much fun



As I sat under my neighbor's awning in a nice Palm Springs-area RV resort watching the Super Bowl (at presstime), my love for the RV lifestyle was reinforced many times over. The camaraderie of our friends gathered in front of the outside TV and the enjoyment of the potluck fixin's spread over multiple tables kept the day moving right along. Although the game was good and kept our attention focused for the most part, it was hard to resist talking RVs.

The group was made up of full-timers and retirees; my wife, Lynne, and I were the only ones who still work. But we were on a monthlong trip, so we felt like we could assimilate nicely. Most of the people we talked to have made a science out of personalizing their RVs. Many have made modifications and changes in systems and appliances, like the ones showcased in Kristopher Bunker's roundup starting on page 36. The majority of these owners have creatively made changes that support their individualism. For example, one couple has completely replaced the furniture inside their fifth-wheel with residential-type components. Another couple changed out galley items to suit their culinary needs. What I learned is that you're never done, especially if you enjoy tinkering.

I spent almost a year outfitting our new fifth-wheel with appliances, accessories and systems that suit our tastes; we thought we were done. No such thing! After a few days in the park, I realized that if I am going to work from an RV office, I needed to get set up properly for efficiency. We've become way too dependent on instantaneous communications, and since RV park Wi-Fi can be hit or miss (to put it mildly), a data card from a wireless carrier was mandatory. All this high-tech connectivity made me laugh. It seems everyone worries more about staying in touch, yet we are surrounded by devices that make it almost impossible to be isolated. I think we worried less when we relied on pay phones to call home sporadically.

But we're still making changes. In the first week away from our stationary home, we made two trips to a big-box home-improvement store, another one to an electronics/computer store, a trip to Camping World and ordered twice from Amazon. I figured that we would eventually run out of things to buy for our fifth-wheel, but in talking to our full-timing friends, that's just not going to happen.

Beyond the opportunities that make our RVs more comfortable, following the snowbirds or full-timing gives us the platform to explore life in a much more adventurous fashion. Living in an RV seems to make the days fly by; there's simply more fun to be had than time allows. 📞

— Bob Livingston, publisher

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16 FREE DAYS IN '16

The National Park Service celebrates its 100th anniversary this year with 16 entrance-fee-free days, including National Park Week, April 16 through 24, 2016. Visitors will enjoy gratis admission at all 409 park sites.

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North to Alaska

Thank you for Peter Lewis' January and February articles, "America's Last Frontier" and "True North." They brought back good memories from almost 10 years ago. After researching for more than three years and armed with a copy of the latest *Milepost*, we followed almost the same route as Peter, except for Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, and we kept on driving up to the Arctic Circle. In all, we spent 40 days and more than 6,000 miles on the road. Here's a look at our trip: www.yongkieandpokie.com/alaska.

Yongkie Hurd, Beaverton, Oregon

Like Peter Lewis, I dreamed about driving the Alaska Highway for a long time. Finally, in the summer of 2015, I did it. My wife didn't want to go, so I invited my brother, also in his 70s, to come with me. We left the Lower 48 at International Falls, Minnesota, and drove diagonally across Canada to the start of the Alaska Highway. We went as far as Fairbanks, then down to Denali, Anchorage, Homer, Seward and Haines. Coming back, we took the Cassiar Highway south to the Yellowhead Highway, then crossed the border into Washington on Route 97.

Because of time constraints, we made the entire 10,000-plus-mile trip in six weeks. Two or three months would have been better. The Alaska Highway itself had a lot of construction, with mud and rough gravel. Even the paved parts were plagued with bumps and dips, known as frost heaves, which will really jar your truck and trailer.

I made reservations at campgrounds in Anchorage, Homer and Seward, but that really wasn't necessary. We were able to find campsites all the way up and back with no problems. Because of what I had read, we went well prepared with mosquito netting and bear spray but weren't bothered by either.

We saw black and grizzly bears, caribou, sheep, porcupines and one

75 Years and Counting

Congratulations to *Trailer Life* on your 75th anniversary. The Pacific Trailer Club is also celebrating 75 years in 2016. Our club formed in 1941, the year *Trailer Life* launched, and has been in continuous operation since then, even during World War II. The founding club members met and enjoyed camping experiences, as you can see from these photos taken in Pomona, California's Ganesha Park in 1941.

We, the present members, carry on our club's great tradition. Take a look at www.pacifictrailerclub.com.

Larry Bohne, Murrieta, California



more moose than I wanted to see. As we were headed south on the Cassiar, a teenage female moose jumped out of the bushes right in front of my truck. I managed to slow down, but the impact crunched the front of my truck to the point where I couldn't open the hood (I drove the rest of the way home that way). I was relieved to see the moose get up and walk into the woods.

The next time I go, I want to take the ferry from Juneau to Whittier and Kodiak, then back to Homer. It is all laid out in the Alaska Marine Highway System's ferry schedule.

Martin Wood, Jacksonville, Florida

My wife and I did a similar trip to Peter Lewis', towing our Arctic Fox travel trailer from Colorado all the way to Deadhorse, Alaska, and back. Like the author, we took two months for the trip, from mid-June to mid-August in 2015, enjoying many side trips along the way and traveling more than 10,000 miles. We also ran into forest fires but were able to go north out of Prince George to drive the full length of the Alaska Highway. It is definitely a signature trip, and we look forward to heading north again.

Mike Dziekan, Lyons, Colorado

We enjoyed both Alaska Highway articles, especially as we plan to take the trip in 2017. We are wondering how to schedule campground reservations on a round-trip that will cover 6,000 miles. Do the campgrounds hold reserved sites for several days?

Bill and Linda Herlth, Canon City, Colorado

Peter Lewis replies: *Our trip totaled 9,000 miles and lasted two months, and we didn't reserve a single campsite in advance. Sometimes the available sites were not ideal, but none were unlivable. We were flexible, not needing shorepower every night, and our rig is short. If you need power and haul a sizable trailer, advance planning may be more critical. I doubt that campgrounds will hold sites; we didn't try.*

My suggestion is to stop at the first visitor center you see as you cross into British Columbia, Yukon and Alaska, and pick up the free RV park and campground guides. If you want to reserve a site, call the RV park when you know where you will be that night, bearing in mind that cell service can be spotty; think about doing this as you approach larger towns. The Milepost helps, but it only reviews advertisers. Visitor centers

are widespread and are an excellent resource, as the staff members can be very helpful. Also, pick up the latest Good Sam RV Travel & Savings Guide and take advantage of the campground search tool on www.goodsamclub.com.

True Blue Containers

Gary Wescott's "Seen at SEMA" article in the February issue mentions that Wavian Jerry Cans come in red for gas, yellow for diesel and blue for water. For portable fuel containers, blue is the designated color for kerosene.

Fred Donner, Falls Church, Virginia



Good-Bye, Bicycles

The photo of the fifth-wheel on the opening page of Emily Fagan's "Deep in the Heart of West Texas" in the February issue brought to mind something that happened when we were returning from a summer-long trip to Alaska in 2012. We had our bicycles on the back of our trailer, like in the picture. A couple of hours from home, a locking pin on the bike carrier failed, ruining both of the bikes and the carrier as they dragged on the pavement.

The carrier had been new at the beginning of the trip, so we contacted the manufacturer for warranty replacement, since one of the components failed. When the manufacturer learned that the carrier was out of sight on the back of our trailer and not on the back of our tow vehicle, they limited replacement to the carrier only, and not the bikes. The lesson learned is to double-check all components of the carrier often, before and during trips.

Dave Kennedy, Glade Park, Colorado

Get Your Ash in Gear

I just read Ken Freund's "Engine Oils" Performance Corner column in

the February issue. Diesel engines often require a low-ash oil to avoid premature clogging of the DPF, but I can't find any mention of ash in the article. My current and previous tow vehicles have particular requirements for ash content, and I bet so do many of the vehicles your other readers drive. Using any other oil may cause problems for maintenance, vehicle longevity and warranty coverage.

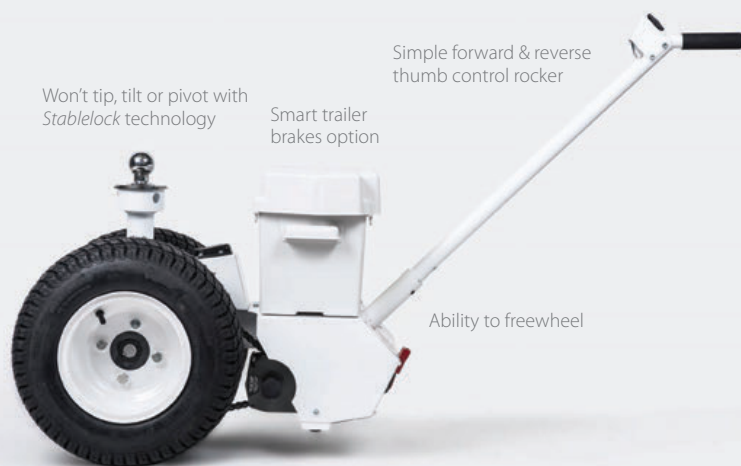
Jim Davis, Pittsboro, North Carolina

Ken Freund replies: *Performance Corner's space limitations did not allow discussion of all engine oil variations. As you point out, Jim, low-ash oils are important in diesel engines that have particulate filters. This is especially true as engines get older and wear, and begin to burn more oil — more oil consumption results in more ash deposits. Remember, it's OK to switch brands, as long as the new brand meets the engine manufacturer's specifications and is the correct type and viscosity.*



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Ready for Re-Tire-Ment

I am amazed at the number of articles, comments and technical questions about RV tires and failures, including February's "Spin Control" letters.

After having catastrophic tire failures when tire pressure was correct and the trailer was not overweight, a very wise camper counseled me to buy Michelin XPS Rib tires. We have run XPS Rib LTs on our dually truck and tandem-axle

fifth-wheel for more than 225,000 miles without a road failure. Although the tires can cost twice as much as others, you pay up front and save down the road.

I'm told the XPS Ribs have steel in the sidewalls as well as steel belts. The steel makes it difficult to detect an underinflated tire visually. Checking tire pressure on the road is essential at every pit stop. We do this with an infrared temperature gauge. Comparing

the temperature of tires, wheels and bearings to the other tire assemblies gives us peace of mind and safe travels.

It also is important to check the date of manufacture, since UV and ozone can cause premature failure. When we aren't traveling, our trailer's wheels are covered.

Paul Odegard, Cincinnati, Ohio

Ken Freund's "RV Tires 101" article in the December 2015 issue noted that ST tires "are designed for the specific needs of trailers," but later states that "many trailer owners have experienced multiple tire failures and have decided to use LT tires instead of ST types." The February issue published two letters from readers who are switching from ST to LT tires because they consider their ST tires to be unsafe. I'm ready to replace the tires on my 28-foot Keystone trailer (ST205/75R15 tires in a Load Range C), and you've successfully clouded the ST-versus-LT issue.

Ned Hune, Springfield, Ohio

Ken Freund replies: *ST tires are designed for slightly lower speeds than LT tires, and their chemistry is designed to resist the damaging effects of the sun more, because these tires tend to sit around in storage more than truck tires. They also have somewhat different load ratings. In a perfect world, there would be no defective tires or tire failures caused by them. However, that is not the case, and trailer owners have in a number of cases switched from ST to LT tires because of these failures. That does not nullify the design differences between the two types of tires, which I explained in the article.*

One guy says that all tires from China are junk, another says to put on Maxxis, and another says he has LTs on his trailer to avoid blowouts. With all of this advice, I think I will just get a truck camper and avoid the ST tire issues.

Barry Vanslager, Granger, Indiana 🚚

TALK TO US! Write to: *Trailer Life*, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036 or email info@trailerlife.com. Please include your full name and location.

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Spring Indian Market Days

Cahokia Mounds near St. Louis hosts an annual April event with Native American arts, crafts, music and food

article by Pamela Selbert

Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site near St. Louis, Missouri, preserves 2,200 acres of the archaeological remnants of one of the most sophisticated prehistoric Native American civilizations. Each year the site hosts a unique event, Spring Indian Market Days, scheduled for April 22 through 24 this year.

Thirty American Indian artists from across the country will sell and display their works of art and native crafts, including jewelry, beadwork, copper and silver work, paintings, wood carvings, pottery, drums, flutes, kachina dolls and baskets. All items are American Indian-made by members of different tribes including Navajo, Chickasaw, Hopi, Cherokee, Muscogee, Choctaw, Santo Domingo, Taos, Laguna and Oneida. At least

10 artists will be at the event for the first time, so lots of new items will be displayed this year.

Booths will be set up throughout the Interpretive Center, in the auditorium, lobby and exhibit gallery. In addition to the many one-of-a-kind items for sale at a wide range of prices, a variety of traditional Native American food will be available.

Flute-making demonstrations, flute playing and storytelling sessions take place on Saturday and Sunday. On both days, nine-year-old musician Makani Mato-toyela of the United Cherokee tribe will perform original pieces on the electric keyboard.

Spring Indian Market Days runs from noon to 5 p.m. on Friday, and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. There is no admission

(Top) A family observes the large diorama inside the excellent Interpretive Center at Cahokia Mounds. The display makes visitors feel like they're walking through the ancient American Indian city. (Above) One of many displays of artifacts at the site.

charge, but suggested donations are \$7 for adults, \$5 for seniors, \$2 for students and \$15 for families. Volunteers will be on hand to answer questions, and maps, audio tours, and guided and self-guided tours will be available.

Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site is 8 miles east of downtown St. Louis in Collinsville, Illinois, off interstates 55/70 (exit 6) and 255 (exit 24) on Collinsville Road. The site is open Wednesday through Sunday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site
618-346-5160, www.cahokiamounds.org

Cahokia RV Parque, Cahokia, Illinois
618-332-7700, www.cahokiarvparque.com

Cozy Portable Cabin

Maybe you've been thinking about purchasing a cabin in the woods — well, here's one you can take with you. Escape Homes makes tiny mobile houses handcrafted by architects and built to order in Rice Lake, Wisconsin. Designed for extreme climates, the unique cabins are towable and feature windows galore.

Featuring a glass entry door and floor-to-ceiling windows, the 29-foot Traveler has cedar-wood siding and steel-accented trim, and inside boasts a daybed, a sleeping loft and a bathroom with a toilet, shower and vanity. The living area has a fireplace and a big-screen television, and the full kitchen comes with a 30-inch LP-gas range, a 30-inch refrigerator, a microwave, a stainless-steel sink with a designer faucet and a 42x30-inch dining table.

The 35-foot Traveler XL sleeps up to eight with the addition of a second oversize loft and is available with cedar siding or engineered wood in gray. Interiors on both models include tongue-and-groove pine walls or painted drywall, and hardwood or laminate flooring.

The smallest design, the Vista, is 25 feet long and sleeps two. Two Sport models with seamless aluminum exteriors and diamond-plate interior cabinets are available, including one configured as a 28-foot toy hauler with an 8-foot ramp door.



The company claims the RVIA-certified trailers can be towed to and parked at any RV campground. Standard hookups include 30-amp electric, ¾-inch water and 3-inch septic connections. On-demand hot water is part of the package, and optional water and holding tanks are available. Solar power, stone countertops, and a washer and dryer are optional.

Base MSRPs for the cabins-on-wheels range from \$39,900 to \$74,500.

Escape Traveler, 844-696-3722, www.escapetraveler.net

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National Park Audio Guides

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West Virginia's Outdoor-Adventure Retreat

For families seeking loads of high-adrenaline adventure all in one spot, West Virginia's Ace Adventure Resort is the place to be. The active-vacation destination offers river rafting, kayak tours, rock climbing, stand-up paddleboarding, a mud obstacle course, disc golf, paintball and even exploring a mining-era ghost town, plus 20 miles of hiking and biking trails. Ace's 5-acre lake-turned-waterpark (open May through September) has zip lines, waterslides, inflatable toys and a climbing tower. From June 2 through 4 this year, the resort hosts the Mountain Music Festival, a weekend of bluegrass, rock, soul and funk.

Located near the town of Minden on 1,500 wooded acres in the state's southern hills, the resort is adjacent to New River Gorge National River, known as the Grand Canyon of the East. Part of the National Park System,



70,000-acre New River Gorge has spectacular waterfalls and overlooks, and wilderness exploration on foot, horseback and fat-tire bicycles.

Adventure-seeking RVers can camp at Ace's full-hookup sites (call for reservations) or 34 miles away at Summersville Lake Retreat (888-872-5580, www.summersvillelakeretreat.com), a Good Sam Park. New River Gorge National River provides seven primitive first-come, first-served camping areas, and a new full-service campground is expected to open this year near Sandstone Visitor Center. Other public campgrounds in the area include Babcock State Park and Lake Stephens County Park, and two U.S. Army Corps of Engineers facilities at Summersville Lake.

Ace Adventure Resort, 800-787-3982, www.aceraft.com

NEWSWIRE

DEALERS



SylvanSport Expands Network

SylvanSport, manufacturer of the Go pop-up camper and Go Easy utility trailer, added three new dealers to its network of distributors: Epic RV in Sacramento, California; Toy Hauler Liquidators in Fresno and Rocklin, California; and Northside RVs in Lexington, Kentucky.

"We have been very methodical when selecting dealer-partners, and they love the Go. Not only is it a lightweight camper, but it is also a utility trailer, a toy hauler and so much more," said Earl B. Hunter, vice president of sales at SylvanSport.

SylvanSport CEO Tom Dempsey said, "Today's enlightened campers are driving smaller vehicles, demanding much more versatility and expecting superb, long-lasting quality. The SylvanSport Go is the perfect complement to what you might find on an RV lot today."

RV PARKS



Elite Resorts' New RV Community

Elite Resorts, manager of three RV parks in Florida and Connecticut, has unveiled plans to develop a 46-acre water-accessible upscale RV community near Tarpon Springs, Florida, intended for angling and RV enthusiasts. According to Ed Mayer, president of Elite Resorts, the \$15 million project will be located in Pasco County on the Anclote River and the Gulf of Mexico. The RV community will feature 340 brick-paved RV lots with 100-amp service and a full complement of resort-style amenities. Lots will be available for sale this fall.

Said Mayer, "With RV sales increasing for the fifth consecutive year and some 10 million RVers on the road, the demand for upscale, amenitized parks is huge." The company also has plans in 2017 for a 122-acre Florida campground on the shores of Lake Okeechobee and the Kissimmee River.

ACCOLADES



Park of the Year Award

Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park at Kozy Rest in Harrisville, Pennsylvania, received the 2015 Medium Park of the Year Award from the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds, which represents more than 3,000 campgrounds across the United States. The Quigley family lives at the campground they have owned for 15 years. Recent additions include a camp store, a dog park, a trackless train, playground equipment, and a jumping pad and jumping pillow, along with 50-amp electrical upgrades at RV sites.

Open from April 15 to October 31, the Kozy Rest campground is set on 34 wooded acres and has 170 sites, 10 cabins and two yurts. The park is part of the network of Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park Camp-Resorts, which are known for kids' activities, theme weekends, organized crafts and games, cookouts, dances and special holiday events.



South Dakota Landmark Celebrates 75 Years

South Dakota is honoring the 75th anniversary of the completion of America's "Shrine of Democracy," Mount Rushmore National Memorial, along with the National Park Service's 100th anniversary, with yearlong events at the memorial and across the state.

One of the celebrations includes the Activity 99 scavenger hunt around the Black Hills. For a chance to win a free-admission pass to America's national parks, travelers can visit select Black Hills attractions, take a photo or get a staff signature at each stop, and present the completed activity list to a park ranger by January 13, 2017. Check www.nps.gov/moru/getinvolved/activity-99.htm for details on the scavenger hunt or email blaine_kortemeyer@nps.gov.



Class B-Plus Wonder

Leisure Travel Vans has announced that its new Class B-plus Wonder, built on the Ford Transit chassis, will be available this fall. The Manitoba-based company says the contemporary-designed motorhome is packed with indoor storage space. Inside, a hidden 28-inch TV and Blu-ray player, oversized chairs and a queen-size Murphy bed add comfort, while white-matte surfaces create an overall expansive feeling. In the galley an integrated wardrobe, microwave and two-door 6.7-cubic-foot refrigerator/freezer are hidden from view. A recessed shower complements the full-size bathroom, and walnut-colored cabinetry matches the rest of the Wonder's interior.

The gross vehicle weight rating is 10,360 pounds on the 3.2-liter, 185-horsepower, six-speed-automatic turbo-diesel-powered chassis. MSRP starts at \$105,820.

Leisure Travel Vans, 877-992-9906
www.leisurevans.com/wonder



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The Art of the Deal

1959 to 1968: From humble periodical to publishing empire

Trailer camping was on a roll in 1959, and no one understood that better than Arthur J. "Art" Rouse, whose publishing vision and business savvy made this magazine what it is today. That was the year Rouse took the wheel at *Trailer Life* and started turning the modest monthly into the preeminent consumer publication for enthusiasts of recreational vehicles — or "RecVs," as *Trailer Life* called them in the 1960s.

Rouse, who had been running a Southern California ad agency and looked like he stepped out of an early *Mad Men* episode, jumped on the RecV bandwagon after borrowing a travel trailer to take his family to Lake Mead in Nevada and Arizona. "I had never been much of an outdoors guy," he later said, but that first camping trip won him over, to put it mildly. Rouse outfitted his car with a hitch and started living the trailer life full tilt, convinced that if he channeled his

passion for camping into his newly acquired publication, readership couldn't help but grow.

Doing double duty as publisher and editor in the '60s, Rouse tapped a crew of equally driven writers to infuse *Trailer Life's* pages with all things RecV. He put new camping vehicles to the test, as well as tow vehicles that even Don Draper would find worthy (remember the "luxury" Oldsmobile Toronado?). He reported on technical innovations, installed the latest

devices, shot photos, sold ads and wrote a monthly column, all while tirelessly promoting *Trailer Life*.

Rouse spent his last dollar buying the magazine. To make ends meet, he enlisted the help of his wife, Harriet, and three kids, paving the way for what would become a family business. As camping on wheels really caught the public imagination, and the RV and campground industries gained momentum, so did *Trailer Life*, with readership growing more than tenfold in the '60s.

The timing couldn't have been better when in 1968 the publisher of a couple of competing magazines — *Trailer News* (originally *Trail-R-News*) and *Camper Coachman* — offered to sell both publications. Rouse, by then sporting what would become his signature mustache, was in a financial position to say yes. In a stroke of luck, the deal included the then-two-year-old Good Sam Club, and, as they say, the rest is history. 🚐



Remembering Art Rouse

(Above, clockwise from top) Rouse hauled a 20-foot Kenskill up California's San Marcos Pass with a Buick station wagon for a 1964 road test. The previous year's September cover featured Rouse, his wife, Harriet, and a Streamline Count at Malibu's Paradise Cove. Both publisher and editor in the early days, Rouse bed-checked a '59 Lakewood and put the '67 Toronado through its paces. (Right) All smiles at *Trailer Life's* 1966 Golden Wheel Awards.





Golden Giveaway: Win a free night's stay at any Good Sam Park, including Oregon's Emerald Valley.

SCRATCH 'N' CAMP

Good Sam and Camping World celebrate 50 years with a \$5 million camping giveaway



Good Sam and Camping World are giving away \$5 million worth of free camping nights as part of the brands' twin 50th birthday celebration this year. Shoppers who make a purchase at any of the 115-plus Camping World locations through September 11 receive a Golden Giveaway scratch-off card. Thousands of lucky scratchers will win a Free Night of Camping Certificate worth up to \$25 at any of the more than 2,100 Good Sam Parks across North America.

Free camping isn't the Golden Giveaway's only prize. Five scratch tickets will award Coleman travel trailers, and the grand-prize winner receives the keys to a 2016 Thor Windsport Class A motorhome.

For members of the Good Sam Club, the camping giveaway is a bonus. Members already get a 10 percent discount on nightly stays at Good Sam Parks, which uphold uniformly high standards for amenities, appearance and cleanliness.

www.campingworld.com/goldengiveaway

Spring Cleaning with Good Sam

Members will exchange their barbecue tongs for trash bags during Good Sam Club Cleanup Days, May 14 and 15. Each year Good Sam members and chapters head outdoors in force to pick up litter, prune branches, paint fences, restore hiking trails and whatever else needs doing.

Volunteering for the 21st annual Cleanup Days is as easy as contacting the campground or public area you or your group would like to tidy up and coordinating an activity. After filling your trash bags, you can drop them in the dumpsters at Camping World, cosponsor of the spring-cleaning event.

As a thank you, participating chapters are eligible for a random drawing. To enter, email a photo displaying your group's hard work to gsclubsupport@goodsam.com by May 31 and include the chapter's name and the Cleanup Days activity, location and number of participants. Each member pictured in the winning photo will receive a \$25 Camping World merchandise certificate. www.goodsamclub.com/community



Idaho's North Kootenai Sams: Sprucing up the Panhandle.

Club Events

2016 Good Sam get-togethers

Taste of Southern California

April 22 through 24

Golden Village Palms RV Resort
Hemet, California

North Carolina Campout

April 28 through May 1

Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park at Daddy Joe's
Tabor City, North Carolina

Southwest Washington FunFest

May 9 through 13

Washington Land Yacht Harbor RV Park
Olympia, Washington

Rayne Frog Festival

May 11 through 14

Frog Festival Pavilion
Rayne, Louisiana

Old Fashion Dirt Track Weekend

May 27 through 28

Perris Auto Speedway
Perris, California

Campout for Charity 2016

June 3 through 5

Iroquois County Fairgrounds
Crescent City, Illinois

Western Weekend – Above and Below

June 3 through 5

Grand Canyon Caverns
Peach Springs, Arizona

Good Sam Fun Weekend

June 10 through 13

The Villages at Turning Stone
Verona, New York

Jenny Brook Bluegrass Festival

June 23 through 26

Tunbridge World's Fairgrounds
Tunbridge, Vermont

Oregon Jamboree Music Festival

July 29 through 31

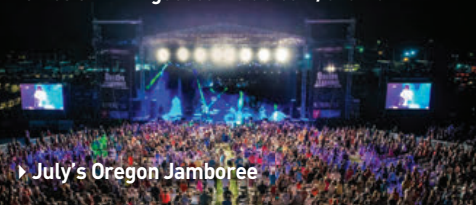
Sweet Home, Oregon

Great Prosser Balloon Rally

September 23 through 25

Wine Country RV Park
Prosser, Washington

► Find the full schedule of upcoming Good Sam regional events and State/Provincial Rallies at www.goodsamclub.com/events.



► July's Oregon Jamboree

PHOTO: JON CURRIER



◀ **THE START OF SOMETHING BIG** In 1968, two years after the launch of the Good Sam Club, the club began negotiating with RV parks across North America to offer discounted camping to members. This year, as Good Sam celebrates its 50th anniversary, members enjoy 10 percent savings on overnight RV stays at more than 2,100 Good Sam Parks — from Fairbanks, Alaska, to the Florida Keys.



Peeling Decal Club

When the exterior decals on her fifth-wheel trailer started to peel away, an Indiana reader flipped through back issues of *Trailer Life* to find a letter she remembered reading in RV Resolutions:

► My husband, Ken, and I had to have the decals on our Keystone Montana removed and replaced at a cost of \$421.39. Having read "Disappearing Decal Dilemma" in the March 2013 issue and knowing that others have had similar problems, I would like to request full reimbursement. Can you help?

Amy Lambertson, Alexandria, Indiana

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

RV Resolutions petitioned Keystone RV Company on Amy Lambertson's behalf and received the following reply:

Mrs. Lambertson has agreed to work with Keystone to resolve this complaint. Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention. Please know that Keystone stands ready to assist with any future questions or concerns, should the need arise.

Michelle Diaz, Owner Relations
Keystone RV Company, Goshen, Indiana

A Current Affair

A California couple enjoyed 13 trips in their new trailer before experiencing the following electrical problem:

► After a camping trip, we returned home and connected our Lance trailer to a 20-amp, 120-volt AC circuit, using the dealer-provided 30-amp power cord with the appropriate adapter. When we attempted to use the trailer plugs, there was no power present. The ground fault circuit interrupter was not in the open position, and the microwave showed no power. Turning the refrigerator to the automatic position activated the LP-gas cycle.

The circuit breakers were checked and found to be in the closed position. Voltage was present at the plug connection to the trailer's power inlet. The 12-volt DC fuses were also checked, and none were found to be open. Using the appropriate setting on a voltmeter, I was able to determine that 120-volt AC was present at the 30-amp main breaker on the inlet side, with all circuit breakers in the open position, including the main.

The main 30-amp breaker was then closed, and there was 120-volt AC present on the aluminum bus bar. Closing the water-heater breaker with the remainder of the breakers open, there was voltage present on the bus bar. However, when the remaining breakers were closed, jointly or indi-

vidually, the voltage on the bus bar was at zero volts, and the voltage on the input side of the 30-amp main breaker was also at zero. When this occurred, it was clear that the electrical problem was between the input side of the 30-amp main breaker and the trailer's exterior plug.

We bought the trailer in May 2014 at Niel's RV in North Hills, California, and we decided to return there for diagnostics. The dealership determined that there was "a short inside the exterior inlet." We authorized repairs, and the power inlet was replaced with the same type as was on the trailer originally, Conntek.

We asked the dealership to return the replaced parts to us. The white or neutral wire had been overheated, melting and burning the insulation. Similarly, the black supply wire experienced local overheating of the copper. It is apparent that the original attachment of the wires to the power inlet box was improper, as evidenced by the flattening of the insulation. This would occur only if the wire clamp was applied to the insulation rather

than the exposed copper. The clamp was burned, and the neutral prong on the inlet box was also burned. The clamp screw marred the prong surface, confirming that the insulation was secured between the clamp and the flat surface of the prong. This fastening arrangement did not ensure a conductor-to-conductor connection.

Although our trailer is no longer covered by the warranty, we ask that Lance reimburse us for the \$252.30 we spent to repair the trailer.

Donald C. Miller
Newbury Park, California

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

Shortly after RV Resolutions sent a letter of inquiry to Lance Camper, we received the following response:

Lance issued a refund check in the amount of \$252.30 as payment for the repair. Don Miller confirmed that he received his refund and was pleased with Lance's response to the matter.

Cory Day, Customer Service
Lance Camper Manufacturing
Lancaster, California 🚐

NEED HELP? » RV Resolutions is a forum for the settlement of conflicts between consumers and RV dealers and manufacturers, accessory suppliers and service providers. After exhausting all other resources without success, please send a typed letter to *Trailer Life* RV Resolutions, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Include copies of appropriate bills and correspondence as well as a self-addressed, stamped envelope.



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Jayco, Circle 114 on Reader Service Card

Oliver's Twist

This Tennessee-based manufacturer builds low-volume, high-quality fiberglass trailers with some very unexpected features

Products for consumer use are almost always designed to satisfy the needs of the largest demographic. It just makes sense. If you want to sell a lot of the products you build, target them at the widest possible audience. And if you want to make the highest possible profit, use established manufacturing methods and readily available parts. It's a page torn right out of the *Business 101* textbook, and one that is almost completely ignored by Oliver Travel Trailers.

Oliver is different in almost every way from most other manufacturers. For one thing, it's located far from the RV capital of Elkhart, Indiana, in Hohenwald, Tennessee, about 80 miles southwest of Nashville. It shuns traditional construction methods that typically use a combination of steel, aluminum, wood and fiberglass in favor of a two-piece, hand-laid fiberglass composite body mounted to an aluminum frame. And unlike some other small trailers that offer little in the way of features or options, Oliver trailers come standard with high-end components such as marine-grade stainless-steel latches and hinges, thermal pane windows, quad shock absorbers and Michelin LT radial tires, and offer a number of

extraordinary options for a trailer this size. Clearly, this trailer was built not for the biggest slice of the demographic pie but for that single-digit percentage of discerning buyers searching for a small, well-equipped, high-quality travel trailer.

For this test, Oliver provided us with its newest and largest travel trailer, the tandem-axle Legacy Elite II, featuring another unique aspect: the floorplan. Throughout the years we've had numerous readers ask us if there were any small trailers designed to sleep two — a son and father, or two brothers, for example, but not necessarily a couple — and this one fills the bill. One of two floorplans in the Legacy Elite II lineup, the Twin Bed model features two beds at the rear of the trailer,

bisected by a nightstand. Granted, these beds aren't very wide or long (the trailer itself is only 7 feet across and has no slideouts), so those over 200 pounds or taller than 6 feet 2 inches should probably not apply.

The beds are comfortable, though, and the nightstand offers a large drawer with a Fiber-Granite top that looks like a solid surface but is as light as plastic and offers a neat trick: hidden storage. Lift it up, and you'll hear the familiar tearing sound of hook-and-loop fasteners giving way as the top releases to reveal storage underneath. It's a great place to store belongings like wallets and jewelry out of view. Above the curbside bed is a 24-inch LED television that is watchable from bed (if you position yourself so that your feet are at the rear wall) or from the small dinette.

The amidships galley offers pretty much everything you're going to need, but look closely and you'll find that it's better equipped than most. The test trailer had the optional Fiber-Granite countertops plus a stainless-steel sink, a residential high-rise faucet, a European SMEV two-burner stove with a smoked-glass cover, and not just any microwave but a Summit stainless-steel commercial microwave that looks as though it was plucked from the kitchen of Gordon Ramsay. Below the kitchen counter are four good-sized soft-close drawers crafted from real



The Toyota Tacoma and Oliver Legacy Elite II are a good match for off-the-grid adventures. Note the 160-watt solar panels on the trailer's roof.



wood with dovetail joints.

On the street side is a sizable pantry that looks like a picnic cooler turned on end; inside are two shelves and plenty of storage room for most trips. There's also a two-place dinette with removable back cushions that converts into another twin bed. The test trailer was equipped with the 4 Reading Light Package that places LED lights on flexible stalks above the dinette and the beds. They are perfect for reading and are high quality, featuring metal construction.

All the way at the front, behind a full-length-mirrored door, is the wet bath. Obviously, this is not a large trailer, so the bathroom is commensurately sized, but it is roomy enough for the business at hand, so to speak. The low-profile porcelain toilet has the shower pan at its base, and there is more than enough room to move around while bathing. The sink's metal faucet and hose pull away from the countertop to clip on to the shower wall. The fiberglass is very rigid, and the hardware used is very sturdy, so the arrangement

(Above left) The interior offers two comfortable twin beds, a well-equipped kitchen with optional Fiber-Granite countertops and plenty of storage. An entertainment package includes a 24-inch LCD TV with a Furrion AM/FM radio, a DVD player, Bluetooth compatibility and four speakers. **(Above right)** The two-seat dining area converts into another single bed.

actually works quite well. And unlike some wet-bath units we've tested, this one has no shower curtain, which makes for more room and keeps wet vinyl sheeting from encroaching on you while using the toilet. Below the Fiber-Granite countertop and small stainless-steel sink are toiletry shelves, and a covered holder keeps the toilet paper dry while showering. There is also a mirror, a towel hook and a towel bar, under which is the central-heat vent, so your towels will stay toasty on cold mornings. Nice touch. A small overhead fan keeps the area well ventilated.

To the right of the bathroom is another door for the large storage compartment, which has plenty of room for hanging clothes and stowing extra blankets, pillows and the like.

There is really very little not to like about the Oliver's interior, as far as function is concerned, and you can tell

that the designers made comfort and convenience their main priorities. Day/night shades are standard but operate differently than what you may be accustomed to. The European-style shades are housed in a valance that surrounds each window, with the day shade deployed by pulling up from the bottom of the frame, and the nightshade pulled down from the top of the frame. It works very nicely.

The trailer has two master-switch panels, one at the entry door and one at the center of the living area on the curbside wall for all of the interior/ exterior lights. The switches feel robust and are clearly labeled with large white lettering that's easy to read, even if you're farsighted. Other thoughtful features include interior cabinet lights that emit a purple glow around the edge when the cabinet doors are closed but the lights are on, interior courtesy



The test trailer was equipped with some very useful options, including four 6-volt Trojan batteries on a slide-out tray (far left) and an aluminum storage basket with generator quick-disconnect (left). The LP-gas cylinder enclosure and power A-frame jack are standard.

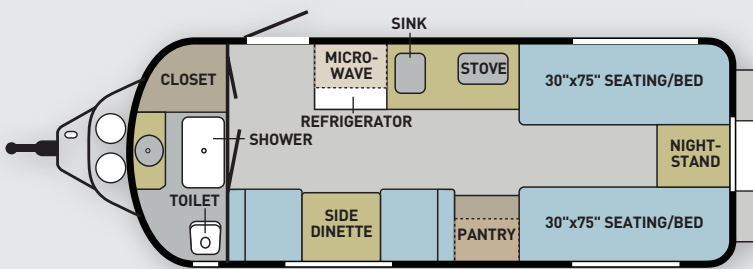
lights, exterior courtesy lights and even a switch for the refrigerator fan.

Elsewhere, there are switches for some very cool options on our test trailer, including the WiFi Ranger RV Pack (repeats and strengthens any accessible Wi-Fi signal) and a Wilson 4G cell-phone amplifier to make it easier to stay in touch with friends and family while at camp.

In fact, about the only thing we'd change is the interior decor. Although the "Expresso" upholstery, available faux teak flooring (\$1,000) and throw pillows are nice touches, the walls are stark fiberglass, and the cabinet doors are all mirror finish. They are available in black, but we don't think that would look much better. Obviously, tastes in style are subjective, but if this were our trailer, we'd opt for different interior cabinet door inserts, some wall coverings and maybe a few other touches to make it feel homier.

Outside are more features you're unlikely to find on other travel trailers at nearly any price point. Perhaps most notable is the large molded-fiberglass enclosure up front that houses two 5-gallon LP-gas cylinders (optional 7-gallon cylinders were in the test unit). The compartment's rubber latches are quite substantial but also stubborn to use; perhaps with time and wear they'll become easier to operate. And the cover makes it impossible to employ a traditional weight-distributing hitch, although Oliver does offer the Anderson No Sway hitch as an option. In any case, with only 500 pounds of hitch weight on

OLIVER LEGACY ELITE II



the test trailer, we didn't find a weight-distributing hitch necessary.

In front of the LP-gas compartment is an electric jack (one of three that come standard for quick leveling) and an unusual 7,000-pound-rated cast-iron Bulldog coupler with Collar-Lok. This coupler attaches to the ball differently from standard connectors. The ball coupler opens up, and when the ball is securely in place, it closes around it. A collar then slips over the assembly to prevent it from opening, and is secured via a standard-issue clip.

Our trailer was also equipped with the optional aluminum storage basket (\$400) with portable generator quick-disconnect (\$469), which makes it possible to put a generator up front and plug it directly into an electrical port in front of the LP-gas cover. An optional LP-gas quick-connect up front (\$170) makes it possible to run a propane generator, while the rear quick-connect (\$170) makes it easy to fire up a propane grill.

The most obvious difference be-

tween the test trailer and other travel trailers was its roof — or more specifically, what was mounted to it. Many manufacturers offer a small solar panel as an option to help keep the battery charged, but Oliver steps it way up with a serious solar package consisting of two 160-watt panels, charge controller and Blue Sky IPN Pro Remote Meter (\$2,550). Add the 2,000-watt Xantrex inverter (\$900) and four Trojan T-105 6-volt batteries on a slideout tray (\$500), and the trailer is able to camp off the grid for many days without any power concerns. Granted, it's expensive, but for the right buyer, having this kind of freedom is practically priceless, and it saves a trip to a solar specialist to have a system installed after the sale.

The rest of the roof's surface was occupied by the standard Coleman Mach 8 13,500-Btu air-conditioning unit, MaxxFan Deluxe remote-control roof vent and an optional Winegard RoadStar Omni-Directional Antenna (\$250). Oliver offers a list of other unexpected optional equipment, so visit its website for more details.

On the road, the 23-foot 6-inch Oliver towed like a dream. It tracked

(Below, left and middle) Fiber-Granite tops lift to reveal hidden storage. (Below right) An exterior storage compartment has adequate room for most supplies and comes standard with an outside wash station. Dump-valve handles are secured behind the storage door.



beautifully, and owing to its shock-absorber-equipped suspension, it didn't bounce around like some small trailers do. The aerodynamic body contributed to good stability during crosswinds and a towing fuel-economy figure of 13.1 MPG in our testing.

You really couldn't ask for a more capable and comfortable tow vehicle for a small trailer than the 2016 Toyota Tacoma, significantly updated this year with a new Atkinson-cycle 3.5-liter V-6 engine, new six-speed automatic/manual transmissions and an all-new body. Toyota offered us a few different models to choose from, and we went for the Double Cab model in TRD Off Road trim, finished in the popular Quicksand paint scheme.

Rated to tow 6,400 pounds in its 4WD configuration, the Tacoma had more than enough oomph to pull the Legacy Elite II with its 4,600-pound dry weight and 5,120-pound tested weight. And even though the trailer's 7,000-pound GVWR is 600 pounds beyond the Tacoma's stated

The forward wet bath is efficiently laid out and contains a molded vanity with toiletry storage, a Dometic porcelain toilet, and a towel bar with a central-heat vent underneath.

maximum capability, this is largely academic; the Oliver doesn't have enough storage space to take on 2,000 pounds (or 1,300 pounds to tow rating, in this case) of cargo anyway. Outfitted with the optional towing package (\$650), which includes a Class IV hitch receiver, automatic transmission cooler, engine oil cooler, power-steering cooler, 130-amp alternator, 4- and 7-pin connectors and Trailer Sway Control, the truck had little trouble pulling the Oliver. In fact, it was easy to forget the trailer was back there.

This new Tacoma, especially in TRD Off Road trim, is arguably the best looking truck Toyota has built. Its grille is large and aggressive without being overbearing (like some full-size trucks), and angular bodywork combined with black overfenders and silver/black aluminum alloy wheels give this truck an



all-business appearance to match its extraordinary capabilities.

The TRD Off Road model is no ordinary 4x4; it comes with technologies proven to be effective on one of the world's most competent vehicles, the Toyota Land Cruiser. Among these are an automatic limited-slip differential that can be locked electronically for maximum traction, and the five-position

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The Tacoma's TRD Off Road Package comes with 16-inch Machined Contrast alloy wheels, black overfenders and Bilstein shock absorbers, plus functional features like Multi-Terrain Select, Crawl Control and an electronically locking rear differential. The interior is simple and practical, with good ergonomics and an overall feel of quality. The optional Premium and Technology Package includes dual-zone climate control, heated front seats and other features.

Multi-Terrain select, which allows you to adjust the traction control system based on the type of surface you're driving on (Mud & Sand, Loose Rock, Mogul, Rock and Dirt, Rock), plus something you're unlikely to use unless you're a serious off-road enthusiast: Crawl Control. This interesting feature allows you to conquer severe and/or difficult grades without drama; simply select 4WD Low and choose the speed at which you'd like to "crawl," and the truck's 4WD, ABS and other systems handle the rest — all you do is steer, as the truck plods its way over rocks, ruts and brush. Even if you never use it, it's nice to have — and besides that, the TRD Off Road package bundles in excellent Bilstein shock absorbers that give this macho truck a very civilized ride.

The Double Cab configuration nets four full-size doors and a full back seat, which is nice if you anticipate having passengers. It's perfectly sized for kids and preteens, and will accommodate 6-foot adults if the front seatbacks are not positioned too far rearward. It's a little snug, but it's doable. The seats themselves are firm but supportive, and despite an automotive-enthusiast magazine that claimed the seating position was "lousy" (it probably shouldn't review trucks), we never understood what they were complaining about.

In fact, with heated front seats and dual-zone climate control as part of the Premium and Technology Package (\$2,330), we were always comfortable. The P&T package also includes rear parking sonar, Blind Spot Monitor and Rear Cross Traffic Alert, although

we found these last two features to be unnecessary, as the Double Cab is practically all windows and affords excellent visibility.

Overall, the cabin is well executed. The steering wheel is thick and leather-wrapped with satisfying welts at the 10 and 2 o'clock positions. The switchgear is smooth and has great feel, and ergonomics are very good. About the only thing we thought could be improved was the audio system. The volume knob is at the bottom left of the touch screen, which means your knuckles can inadvertently make contact and change the station. And it seemed like the bass and treble adjustments are too assertive; they have to be dialed way back to make decent sound.

Toyota engineers spent a lot of time reducing the Tacoma's Noise, Vibration and Harshness (NVH), and you can tell. The new V-6 is powerful but quiet and very smooth all the way up to redline. The automatic transmission is likewise smooth and offers a manual-shifting gate that is perfect for those times when you're navigating a twisting, undulating road and the transmission wants to keep upshifting. Even when driving into a headwind, we couldn't detect a trace of wind noise — which surprised us, given the truck's blocky profile.

If you're the sort who takes pride in camping in out-of-the-way places, it's hard to do better than this combo. The Tacoma TRD Off Road has the chops to get you where you want to go, and when properly equipped, the Oliver Legacy Elite II gives you the freedom to stay for a long time. 🚐

SPECIFICATIONS

OLIVER LEGACY ELITE II TWIN BED

Exterior Length	23' 6"
Exterior Width	7'
Exterior Height	8' 6"
Interior Width	6' 7"
Interior Height	6' 6"
Construction	Two-piece custom-molded shells, aluminum frame, enclosed holding tanks, heated drainpipes
Freshwater Cap.	32.5 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	32.5 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	18.5 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	4.28 cu-ft
Furnace	20,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu
Inverter	2,000 watt
Batteries (4)	Trojan T-105, 6-volt
Tires	LT225/75R16
Suspension	Leaf springs with shock absorbers
Weight (water and propane full, no supplies)	5,120 lbs.
Hitch Weight	500 lbs.
Axle Weight	4,620 lbs.
GVWR	7,000 lbs.
GAWR (2)	3,500 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	1,880 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$48,500
MSRP, as tested	\$57,462
Basic Warranty	1 year

Oliver Travel Trailers

888-526-3978, www.olivertraveltrailers.com
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2016 TOYOTA TACOMA DOUBLE CAB TRD OFF ROAD

Fuel Economy, Solo	18.2 mpg (combined)
Fuel Economy, Towing	13.1 mpg
Engine	3.5-liter V-6
Horsepower	278 hp @ 6,000 rpm
Torque	265 lb-ft @ 4,600 rpm
Transmission	6-speed automatic
Axle Ratio	3.91:1
Fuel Cap.	21.1 gal.
Tires	P265/70R16
Suspension, Front	Coil-spring double-wishbone with stabilizer bar
Suspension, Rear	Leaf-spring with staggered outboard shock absorbers
Brakes	Disc/drum with ABS (front/rear)
Tow Rating	6,400 lbs.
Length	17' 8"
Wheelbase	127.4"
MSRP, base	\$33,730
MSRP, as tested	\$37,819
Basic Warranty	3 years/36,000 miles comprehensive

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WALK-THROUGH: HIGHLAND RIDGE ROAMER RT288FLR

Home on the Open Range

Highland Ridge's four-season Roamer hits the road with residential amenities and upscale appointments

A quick look at the history of Highland Ridge RV reveals an impressive lineage. Although relatively new to the recreational vehicle market, Highland Ridge was originally known as Open Range, which began constructing RVs in 2007. The company is a subsidiary of Jayco, which purchased Open Range's assets in 2014 and formed the new division. That means that each Highland Ridge product is built up to the standards of the world's largest privately held RV manufacturer and backed by a transferrable two-year bumper-to-bumper warranty.

Now that the "new company" jitters have been alleviated, it's time to look at one of the results: the 2016 Highland Ridge Roamer RT288FLR, a 33½-foot triple-slide travel trailer. With its robust construction, the RT288FLR is built for the long haul. A steel I-beam frame combines with 12-inch on-center 2x2-inch aluminum floor joists and a 2x3-foot aluminum header to offer a stout foundation. The gel-coated skin and PVC roof

material are insulated using R-9 block foam and R-14 batten insulation, ensuring protection against more extreme weather. For colder climates, the Roamer features 4-inch in-wall ducts that extend into the enclosed underbelly, where an innovative return system allows forced air to flow freely around the tanks, resulting in a much more efficient heating process than the usual pressurized airflow.

But a comfortable temperature inside is nothing if the trailer isn't properly appointed. Upon entering the RT288FLR, it's difficult to discern what to notice first. Is it the elegant island kitchen, topped with smooth Corian countertops, a dual-basin stainless sink and upgraded fixtures? Or is it the supple sofa spanning the rear of the trailer? Perhaps it's the dual theater seats, with equally comfortable coverings, integrated cup holders and a storage space that's ideal for holding DVDs.

Wherever you decide to focus, the Amish-crafted cabinetry, Beauflor flooring and darker tones add to the aura of luxury. Those darker hues are



The attractive kitchen island is centrally located to the living area, making it a great place to interact with guests during meal prep.

offset by the front window, which has a perforated covering to let the light in, revealing a practical, open floorplan that is just as capable of hosting a family with small children as it is of entertaining an impromptu adult dinner party at the campsite.

The theater seats and sofa (which opens to a queen-size flip-out bed with an air mattress) are joined by a free-standing table with four chairs, providing comfortable seating for up to nine occupants — even more if they don't mind getting cozy.

The theater seats are naturally prime real estate when it comes to watching the 32-inch LED TV, which is situated on an angled wall, a configuration that is workable but not ideal. The view from the rear sofa is a bit difficult to take in from across the room, so that area will likely become more of a conversation nook than TV land. This is a bit of a concern because the stereo/DVD control unit is above the couch, away from the TV, a puzzling design choice that will have occupants clamoring for the remote control once they have parked themselves in the theater seats well away from the DVD player.

Buyers who don't opt for the optional electric fireplace (\$653) below the TV will have a large space to fill. Our test trailer didn't have the fireplace, and we were constantly asked if it were missing something.

Space for food prep is always a concern, but the island configuration offers more than enough space for chopping, slicing and dicing, and there's a decent amount of space next to the range. A



The front window features a perforated covering to help brighten the interior. Exterior standards include an electric A-frame jack and an Equa-Flex suspension.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER

pantry and 8-cubic-foot refrigerator (adorned with that attractive Amish cabinetry) handle food storage, and cabinets in the island and beneath the counter hold dishes and nonperishables.

The amidships bathroom is spacious, with the toilet set at an angle to maximize space. The counter is large enough for teeth brushing and personal grooming. There's a towel cabinet that holds less than expected, the reason being that it's a shallow cutout of the angled bathroom wall. Overall, the room was a bit dark for our liking; even necessitating switching on the lights in the middle of the day, though the 34-inch radius shower was a pleasant way to overlook the relative darkness.

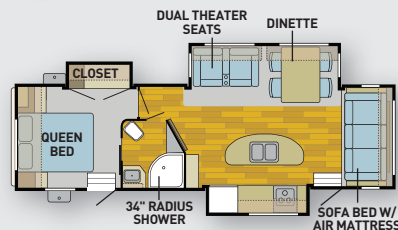
The bedroom offers a level of residential comfort, beginning with the comfortable, walk-around queen bed. The attractive pendant lights hanging from the shelves above the bed would be a more useful addition if they could be articulated to illuminate the book you're reading instead of the nightstands. The closet is large and spa-

cious, with a built-in shoe cabinet and drawers in one corner. Combine the closet with the cabinets and drawers around the bed, and storage shouldn't be a problem.

The Roamer comes with two mandatory option packages (yes, we know that's an oxymoron): Executive (\$4,350) and Four-Seasons (\$725), both of which include add-ons you'd likely opt for in any case, including the Corian countertops, crown molding, LED ceiling lighting, enhanced insulation, and heated and enclosed underbelly. The exterior has a power A-frame jack, a large pass-through storage compartment, a rear-storage tray and a nifty hookup station for city water, black-tank flush and exterior shower hookup that is situated next to the 50-amp power hookup.

The RT288FLR sleeps four comfortably and offers plenty of floor space for air mattresses or sleeping bags, making it a good choice for RVing families who prefer upscale luxury, or couples who enjoy residential amenities with the potential for overnight guests. 🚐

QUICK INFO



Exterior Length	33' 6"
Interior Width	8'
Exterior Width	8' 4"
Interior Height	7'
Exterior Height	11' 8"
Freshwater Cap.	50 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	31 gal. / 62 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
UVW	7,815 lbs.
Hitch Weight	1,000 lbs.
GVWR	9,778 lbs.
Base MSRP	\$43,196

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OASIS IN THE DESERT

Las Vegas is known for its flashy lights and energy along the Strip, but a tamer flip side makes it a family-friendly destination with museums, entertainment, adrenaline-pumping rides and dining for every budget

Nestled in Nevada's Mojave Desert is the bustling resort city of Las Vegas. Of course, no visit here would be complete without taking in the sights and sounds of the famed Strip. But there's more to Vegas than the nonstop action of that 4-mile stretch of roadway lined with elaborately themed hotels and casinos. The city has reinvented itself as a destination for top-notch dining, entertainment and family fun.

A RETREAT FROM THE GLITZ

Oasis Las Vegas RV Resort is located at the southern end of the Strip and truly is a retreat from the glitz and glamour. Sites are beautifully landscaped with full hookups. There are two pools — the family pool is fronted by a sandy beach and a small cascading waterfall, and a hot tub awaits at the adults-only pool. With an 18-hole putting course and sanctioned horseshoe pits, there's

plenty to keep everyone occupied. Pets are welcome, and several dog pens are scattered throughout the park, with waste bags provided.

Additional amenities include free Wi-Fi, an on-site fitness center, a café serving breakfast and lunch, and a fully stocked convenience store open daily from 7 a.m. until 9 p.m. The resort is guard-gated 24 hours a day, providing a comfortable, safe home away from home for RVers.

THE BEST WAY TO TRAVEL THE STRIP

With the slow-moving, densely packed traffic on the Strip, it's not ideal for RV travel. There's no shuttle from the Oasis, but a cab ride to the Strip will cost about \$25. Insider tip: Ask the front desk to call a cab for you. Oasis has a list of taxi services that are familiar with the resort and will pick you up at your campsite.

You may want to walk from one casino to the next, but don't underestimate the expanse of the Strip or the Vegas heat, especially in the summer, when temperatures regularly soar over 100 degrees. Four miles may not seem like much, but walking it can be tiring. Wear comfortable shoes because those casinos are nowhere near as close to



each other as they look. Another tip: Some casinos have vending machines that sell ballet flats. While not particularly supportive, they can be a lifesaver if you opted for fashion over function.

Be sure to drink plenty of water. You're in the desert, and you're going to dehydrate fast. You can always pop into one of the casinos along the way to cool off, rest your feet and rehydrate.

You can't hail a cab on the Strip, but taxis line up outside the various hotels, so you can easily find one there. Another transportation option is the monorail that runs along the outskirts. The zero-emission train allows you to travel quickly and easily between the MGM Grand and SLS hotels with several stops in between. The monorail runs Mondays from 7 a.m. until midnight, Tuesday through Thursday from 7 a.m. to 2 a.m., and Friday through Sunday from 7 a.m. to 3 a.m. Buy tickets ahead of time at www.lvmonorail.com.

FAMILY FUN

Those who assume that Vegas lacks culture haven't visited the many museums in the city. Check out the Pinball Hall of Fame, the Mob Museum, the Discovery Children's Museum, Las Vegas Natural History Museum and the National Atomic Testing Museum.



(Above left) A 55-foot-tall steel-sculpted praying mantis greets visitors at Downtown Container Park. Spanning nearly 19,000 square feet, the quirky shopping center is made up of an assortment of boutiques, bars, galleries and eateries. **(Above right)** Temptation is great at Hershey's Chocolate World, offering more than 800 varieties of mouth-watering treats.

For the ultimate step back in time, a visit to the Neon Museum is a must. This walking tour takes you through an artfully arranged junkyard of abandoned neon signs that chronicle the city's past, one bulb at a time. Tours are offered daily and led by expert guides who share the colorful history of Vegas. To book a tour or a photo shoot, visit www.neonmuseum.org.

Other free entertainment options include the choreographed fountains outside of the Bellagio Hotel and Casino and, indoors, the Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, a 14,000-square-foot floral display that changes with the

seasons. Chocolate lovers will be in four floors of chocolate heaven at M&M's World, and Hershey's Chocolate World, featuring an 800-pound chocolate sculpture of the Statue of Liberty.

For less sedate activities, try the Adventuredome at Circus Circus — a huge 5½-acre indoor theme park — or riding the 550-foot-tall High Roller observation wheel at the Linq's outdoor shopping promenade. KISS by Monster Mini Golf, an 18-hole glow-in-the-dark miniature-golf course showcasing the distinctive white-faced hard-rock band, was here when we visited but has since moved to the Rio.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF LAS VEGAS CONVENTION AND VISITORS AUTHORITY





Two very different experiences: The Las Vegas Natural History Museum (far left) with its “Treasures of Egypt” and science exhibits, and the Mob Museum — aka the National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement (left) round out the variety of things to do and see in Vegas.

Chasing an adrenaline rush? Check out the Big Apple Coaster at New York-New York. Or zoom overhead on SlotZilla at the Fremont Street Experience, a 12-story, 114-foot-high zip line. Note that the Fremont Street Experience is known for its party crowd, so it may not be suitable for children. If you’re feeling really courageous, leap from a platform 855 feet above the Strip at SkyJump Las Vegas in the Stratosphere. Or indulge your inner speed junkie by driving a Ferrari, Lamborghini, Aston Martin, Porsche or Audi at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway with Exotics Racing. For a different kind of driving experience, take the controls of a bulldozer or excavator at Dig This Las Vegas.

You’ll also find Downtown Container Park, an open-air shopping center that’s made from reconstructed shipping containers and modular metal cubes. It features boutiques, unique restaurants and live entertainment. A giant praying mantis sculpture sits at the entrance and is perfect for photo ops. Inside, a kid-friendly courtyard features a playground complete with a treehouse. While you’re in that part of town, take photos of the street art and graffiti in the Arts District.

Las Vegas is also home to one of the country’s most popular spots for rock climbing and bicycling: Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. Just 20 miles from the Strip, the canyon features massive sandstone cliffs and awe-inspiring 3,000-foot-high red-rock formations that make the area a draw for outdoor enthusiasts of every fitness level. You can also hike at Mount Charleston or kayak on Lake Mead, both of which are about 40 miles outside of town. Hoover Dam, considered one of the 20th century’s top 10 construction achievements, is about 35 miles south of town.

(Far right) The Neon Museum preserves a collection of iconic Las Vegas signs, and the campus includes an exhibition space known as the Neon Boneyard. Tours are popular — especially those at night, when the signs glow in all their neon glory — so book in advance. Each of the 150 signs has a story about its role in Vegas history and chronicles trends and changes in sign design and technology.



Helicopter and Jeep tours of the dam and Lake Mead that leave from Vegas are available.

SIPPING AND SAVORING FOR EVERY BUDGET

Beyond the adult beverage to-go cups you see tourists carrying on the Strip, there’s a sophisticated cocktail culture in Las Vegas. Attend a 90-minute Master Sommelier seminar at the Bellagio, or take a Mixology Training and Tasting Class at the Monte Carlo.

Park on Fremont is a bar, beer garden and restaurant in the newly revitalized Fremont East district downtown and offers quirky drinks in an artsy ambience. The decor features an antelope sculpture with gold machine-gun antlers. Park’s most popular cocktail is the Unicorn, made with Ketel One Citroen vodka, simple syrup, mint, ginger beer and lemon juice.

If you’re a wine fanatic, a visit to Pahrump Valley Winery is in order. It’s about an hour’s drive from Vegas,

.....
**THOSE WHO ASSUME
THAT VEGAS LACKS CULTURE
HAVEN’T CHECKED OUT THE
MANY MUSEUMS IN THE CITY.**
.....



HEATING THINGS UP

It's no secret that Las Vegas, in the basin of the Mojave Desert, gets hot ... with summertime temperatures rising past 100 degrees. The city enjoys an average 310 sunny days per year, and the inland desert is free of tornadoes and ice storms.



and you can take a tour and then sample several different wines over dinner at the upscale Symphony's Restaurant. To enhance the experience, it's recommended to leave the kiddos at home.

Las Vegas has more celebrity chefs than any other city in the world and many Michelin-star-awarded restaurants, so fancy food is abundant. But there's no shortage of low-key, down-home eating either. Whether it's an all-you-can-eat buffet, a glamorous date night or a wallet-friendly family meal, there's a restaurant to satisfy every taste and budget.

Craving steak? Head to SW Steakhouse at the Wynn for real Japanese Kobe beef. Golden Steer is the oldest steakhouse in Vegas. Other great choices include Oscar's Beef, Bazaar Meat at the SLS hotel and Craft Steak at the MGM Grand. Burger lovers should try Burger Bar at Mandalay Bay, Gordon Ramsay BurGR at Planet Hollywood, I Love Burgers at the Palazzo or BLT Burger at the Mirage.

Got a brood to feed? There are too many buffet options to list them all, but a few to consider are the Bacchanal Buffet in Caesars Palace, Wicked Spoon at the Cosmopolitan, Spice Market at Planet Hollywood, and the Rio's Carnival World and Seafood Buffet. If you're looking for something a bit healthier or meat isn't your thing, Go Raw Café and VegeNation are among the good vegan eateries.

CLOSE TO HOME

If you'd rather avoid the frenzied pace of the Strip, there's lots to do near Oasis RV Resort. Nearby Silverton Casino, where the locals like to play, has a

117,000-gallon aquarium stocked with more than 4,000 exotic fish where you and your kids will get a kick out of watching sharks and stingrays up close. Adults will enjoy cooling down with a Frappuccino from Starbucks or a margarita from Mi Casa Grill Cantina.

Bargain hunters will definitely want to visit the Las Vegas Premium Outlets, where prices are reportedly marked down 25 to 65 percent on designer and name brands. Popular shops include Guess, Michael Kors, Calvin Klein, Banana Republic, DKNY, Charlotte Russe, Hot Topic, Billabong and more.

After a day of gaming and shopping, stop by the South Point Hotel, Casino and Spa and grab a bite at Steak 'N Shake, enjoy seafood tableside at Big Sur Oyster Bar or treat yourself to an intimate night out at Michael's Gourmet Room. The property has a 16-screen movie complex, too, and all movies are just \$5 all day on Tuesdays. A gelato



The High Roller observation wheel at the LINQ's outdoor shopping mall whisks visitors 550 feet up in glass-enclosed cabins for a standout view of the city.

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bar complements the usual movie snacks. There's also a 64-lane bowling center and a 400-seat showroom with headliner entertainment and live bands.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Las Vegas has so much to offer. There's something for everyone, no matter what your lifestyle or budget. But many people are overwhelmed by everything there is to do. Do your research and have a plan, so that you don't fall victim to sensory overload. Ask at the front desk and check www.vegas.com every day for rotating deals on a variety of entertainment, including unconventional theatrical Cirque du Soleil and magic shows, tributes, comedy and concerts.

Most importantly, come prepared to have a great time — whether that means hanging out by the pool, enjoying one of the city's excellent restaurants, appreciating the great outdoors, finding a fantastic bargain or sharing an exciting adventure with the kids. 🚗

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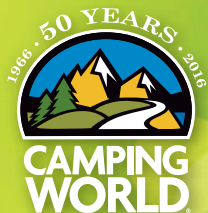


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UPGRADING APPLIANCES: FROM TIRED TO INSPIRED

There's no better way to boost the convenience and "wow" factor of an RV's interior than by updating its appliances

For many of us, the main draw of RVing is convenience. Naturally, it all begins with a love of the outdoors sprinkled with a healthy dose of wanderlust, but it's the lure of a residential experience at the campground or RV park that sends us to the dealership, rather than loading up the family vehicle with tenting equipment.

RVs, for the most part, deliver that convenience in spades, offering owners a warm bed, their own personal bathroom facilities, multiple means by which to store and prepare food, and even entertainment options. But what if you want more?

Chances are, your RV is already equipped with a bevy of appliances that make life on the road easy to live. And chances are, those same appliances were installed by the

manufacturer, who may or may not have selected them due to their cost and availability. You probably don't settle for entry-level appliances in your stick home, so why should you do so in your RV?

You don't have to. Much like with a residential home, upgrading your outdated or inadequate appliances can be quite easy, considering you have the resources. But, unlike your residential home, you have to be very careful not to exceed your RV's gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) when adding larger, heavier appliances.

All things considered, there are few more effective methods of instant gratification than installing a new refrigerator, microwave, range, washer, dryer and even dishwasher, all in the name of adding to the convenience — and comfort — of your RVing lifestyle.

REFRIGERATORS

► One of the first places to look is the old refrigerator in the galley. More than likely, your trailer's current unit is a smaller RV-style model that utilizes absorption technology and can be powered either by LP-gas or shorepower. These units, known as two-way refrigerators, have served RVers well for many years. Combine that with the fact that they are designed to handle the rigors of the road, and it's easy to see why they continue to be the most popular refrigerator type — and the technology and capacity continue to evolve for even more effective cooling measures. This segment is dominated by Dometic and Norcold (a division of Thetford) because the two manufacturers truly understand their products and deliver in terms of quality and features.

If your RV has the space, you may wish to consider swapping out the current refrigerator for a residential model. There are a number of light-weight models available that are great candidates for an RV galley. This is where a tape measure and a realistic eye come in; pay special attention to counter depth as well as overall width. Residential-type models often offer

larger capacity when compared to comparably priced RV-type fridges. The fact that they rely on a compressor rather than absorption means they can stay cooler, even when the temperatures inside and outside the RV heat up, and they can reach that optimum temperature faster. This also means they use more power, which will likely necessitate the addition of an inverter, additional batteries and some electrical know-how, as well as the new fridge, so plan accordingly. Also, these units may not be as tolerable to the bumps and rolls on the road, nor to the unlevel surfaces we sometimes encounter.

It's up to you to decide which type of refrigerator to consider, but the trend of outfitting an RV galley with a residential-type fridge continues to gain traction. The fact that you can easily add more features (such as an in-door icemaker or water dispenser) for less overall money only works to bolster that fact. Popular manufacturers include Amana, Frigidaire, Kenmore, KitchenAid, GE, LG, Samsung and Whirlpool.



(1) With a hefty 18.3 cubic feet of food storage, Thetford's Norcold 2118 PolarMax is the largest RV refrigerator on the market. **(2)** The unique bottom drawer on Dometic's 9-cubic-foot Super Hybrid functions as a freezer or fridge. **(3)** Dometic's 13.5-cubic-foot Elite comes with three crispers, a built-in icemaker and a manual lock so the doors won't swing open during travel.





MICROWAVES

► Microwaves are a much more straightforward swap. Your RV is most likely already equipped with a microwave of some type. If you're looking for more versatility, there is a variety of options available that require just a small amount of research. Again, taking size and power consumption under consideration here is a must.

A popular option is to replace a standard unit with a convection-type microwave, which offers aspiring RV chefs more cooking options. A convection microwave combines the convenience of cooking in a microwave with the benefits of a convection-type oven, allowing for a quicker, more evenly cooked final product that can even be browned or crisped rather than zap-fried. Keep in mind that convection microwaves often take up a bit more room than conventional microwaves due to the larger cooking area inside. You should also pay close attention to the energy consumption on these models, as they tend to be a bit more power-hungry and may trip a breaker or two before you get the hang of things.

Many electronics manufacturers make microwaves, and Dometic, Furrion, Samsung and Whirlpool are good choices for the RV sect.

(1) Whirlpool's countertop microwave monitors humidity and adjusts time and temperature accordingly. **(2)** Part of its RV Chef line, Furrion's convection microwave fits above the range.



RANGES

► The RV range (combination cooktop and oven) has been largely unchanged for more than a decade. You have your standard two to four burners (in varying degrees of intensity) that can be topped with an accordion-style cover for travel, all above an oven that can sometimes be difficult to regulate due to its proximity to the burners above. And let's not forget the "joys" of bending down to light a stubborn pilot to get breakfast going.

There have been some improvements, however, from more even cooking temperatures to safety features and especially to the pilot-lighting process. Whether it's for an upgrade or simply to replace a unit that has seen better days, you have plenty of options for making the swap. Keep in mind that many stock RV ranges are between 17 and 22 inches wide, so use that as a starting point and break out the tape measure. These types of ranges are usually LP-gas powered. The popular "piezo" lighting feature doesn't require any power, as it works much like the igniter on a gas barbecue.



Smaller and lighter than residential cooktops, Thetford's three-burner TopLine Euro mounts flush with the counter. The glass lid doubles as a work surface.

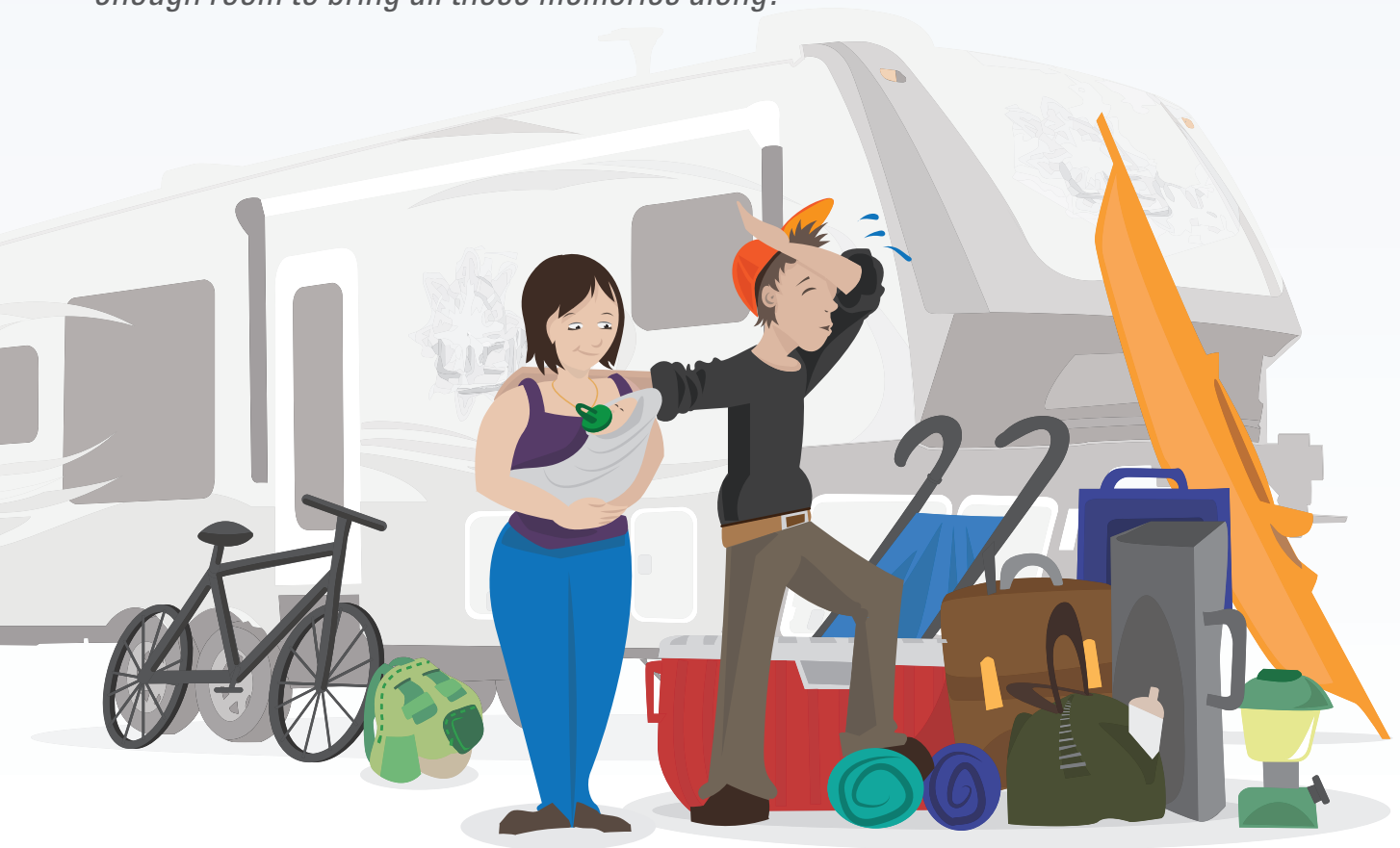
Companies like Atwood (and its Wedgewood brand), Dometic, Suburban and Thetford offer solid RV models that vary in features, such as sealed burners, stainless exteriors and enhanced temperature controls. If you're looking to up the ante, or perhaps even to bake a cake in the galley, higher-end models come with appropriate performance levels and price tags. Dometic's imported SMEV range is one of the best we've tested (see "One Hot Italian" in the March 2015 issue).



Offered in a variety of sizes and finishes, RV ranges from Atwood **(3)** and Suburban **(4)** feature compact sizing, residential styling, built-in broilers, enhanced high-output burners and match-free "piezo" ignition.

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INDUCTION COOKTOPS

An alternative to replacing the entire range unit is to purchase a separate induction cooktop. Induction cooking is achieved via a copper coil being “charged” with AC current beneath the surface of the cooktop, which is generally glass or ceramic. The result is a magnetic reaction that ultimately heats the vessel on the cooktop as opposed to the cooktop itself, which works faster than more traditional methods (as long as the cooking vessel is ferromagnetic or has a ferromagnetic coating). Plus, since it uses the vessel to complete the magnetic “circuit” necessary for the heating process, once the pot or pan is removed, the surface cools almost immediately.

This type of cooktop is quite trendy and expensive, and is not compatible with your RV’s existing range. It would therefore necessitate a complete overhaul of your galley’s countertops. As a result, many opt for a portable-type induction cooktop, such as from True Induction, Nesco or Fagor. Integrated induction cooktops are available from some manufacturers at the factory level; perhaps most notably, True Induction cooktops are options in select Winnebago models.



(1) Fagor’s uCook portable induction cooktop delivers fast heat, whether it’s on the kitchen counter, the dining table or the picnic table. **(2)** Furrion’s built-in induction cooktop boils fast, simmers evenly and cleans up quickly.



DISHWASHERS

What, a dishwasher in an RV? Why not? Again, we’re talking about maximizing convenience here, not living off the grid on a 5-gallon jug of water. That said, something like a dishwasher (or washer and dryer) is best used only when hooked up to campground water, power and sewer, lest you’d like your freshwater supply depleted and your holding tanks filled in a hurry.

If you’re replacing an existing dishwasher (lucky you!), the new unit needs to maximize the use of a small amount of water (generally in the 2- to 5-gallon range) in addition to being compact enough to fit in the existing space left after removing the old model. Both Fisher & Paykel and

Vesta offer suitable built-in models; Fisher & Paykel’s DishDrawer uses as little as 2 gallons of water per cycle, while the Vesta checks in at between 2.4 and 4.2 gallons of water per use. Furrion’s new RV Chef collection of appliances includes two stainless-steel dishwashers, one of which is a compact model.

Keep in mind that a smaller dishwasher will handle smaller loads; the Vesta can wash up to six four-piece place settings. That’s a large capacity for RV purposes but a far cry from the seemingly bottomless load capabilities of a standard residential unit. Adding a built-in dishwasher where there was none before will again take some

creative thinking. Remember that a dishwasher runs off 120-volt AC power and also needs to be plumbed into the sink drain — in addition to cutting some of the cabinetry in the galley. This is a job best left to the pros, unless you are extra-comfortable with plumbing, carpentry and electrical work.

A less-invasive dishwashing option is a countertop model. Vesta makes a unit that nearly mirrors the capabilities of its built-in but doesn’t require any cabinet modifications; you simply hook up to the kitchen faucet, hit the button, and away it goes. The downside is, you now have a countertop appliance to store, and the noise can certainly be a bother — but, my, how those plates shine!



(3 and 4) Like its built-in cousin, Vesta’s countertop dishwasher cleans and dries up to six four-piece place settings at a time. **(5)** Furrion’s stylish new dishwasher combines water-saving technology and sound-dampening insulation. A more compact model is also offered.

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WASHERS AND DRYERS

RV washers and dryers have been around for quite some time. The convenience afforded by not having to lug your dirty underwear down to the laundry room — not to mention the constant scavenging for quarters — makes this investment well worth it for many RVers. Keep in mind that we're discussing swapping out old appliances for new ones or finally installing units in an RV that has already been plumbed. While it is possible to retrofit your RV for a washer and dryer (where there's a will, there's a way), it's difficult without the factory preplumbing option. Splendide is a wildly popular manufacturer of laundry units, as is Dometic, and Camping World includes offerings from Equator Advanced Appliances.

Washers and dryers come in three configurations: stackable,

1



all-in-one and portable, though we'll concentrate on the stackable and all-in-ones for brevity's sake. And, if given the choice, you should opt for a vented model, even though that will necessitate using a vent to the outside cut into the side wall. Again, if your rig is plumbed for it, you're ahead of the game. Nonvented models certainly do the trick, but they can sometimes take longer to dry clothes and can really add to the condensation inside your RV.

A popular configuration for RVs is the all-in-one washer/dryer combo. A single appliance washes, rinses and then dries your laundry, eliminating the need to switch loads between cycles. This convenience comes at a price; the capacity is small, these units draw a ton of power, and a single load can take up to three hours to complete. For some RV owners, that still beats a night on the town with the local laundry's finest.

For RVs that have the space, perhaps the most desired option is the stackable variety; a separate dryer is stacked (securely, with brackets) on top of a washer. The units generally can handle about 12 pounds of laundry, though loading them up to capacity will increase energy and water usage, as well as wash time.

Upgrading RV appliances is easy when you do your homework and are aware of dimensions, weights and power consumption. Then let your imagination run wild. The right models for your new look are out there, often in your choice of colors and finishes. 🚚

2



.....
(1) Equator's compact washing machine has the features of a residential washer but with a lighter weight and smaller footprint.
(2) Stackable washer-and-dryer sets, like Splendide's Ariston line, appeal to RVers with space to spare and loads of laundry.

Atwood
 800-546-8759
www.atwoodmobile.com

Camping World
 888-626-7576, www.campingworld.com
 Cooktops: Atwood, Fagor, Nesco, Suburban.
 Dishwashers: Equator, Vesta. Microwaves:
 Dometic, Whirlpool. Ranges: Atwood,
 Suburban. Refrigerators: Dometic, Thetford.
 Washers and dryers: Equator, Splendide.

Dometic
 800-544-4881, www.dometic.com

Fisher & Paykel
 888-936-7872, www.fisherpaykel.com

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 888-354-5792, www.furrion.com/kitchen

Splendide
 800-356-0766, www.splendide.com

Suburban
 423-775-2131, www.suburbanmanufacturing.com

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TAMING THE MOUNTAINS

BD Diesel's Variable Vane Exhaust Brake grants truck owners much more control when descending grades while towing a heavy trailer

Pulling a 16,000-pound-plus trailer or fifth-wheel has its challenges, especially when climbing long grades and descending steep and winding mountain passes. Fortunately, diesel engines have plenty of power to handle the uphill chores, but descending grades without building speed to unsafe levels can overtax the tow vehicle's service brakes, which

generally leads to brake fade. While the Big Three provide exhaust braking on their newest models, earlier trucks were missing this important feature.

Fortunately, automatic transmissions are smarter than ever, and in the case of the Ford, for example, the Tow/Haul mode works in conjunction with the high compression of the diesel engine to handle slowdown fairly effectively on up to 5 percent grades;

it's the 7 to 8 percent grades or greater that can create braking problems, especially if the trailer brakes are not very effective. In most cases, you'll never get the transmission out of second gear, creeping down long grades at a slow rate of speed.

Many owners of certain year Ford and Chevy diesel trucks that were built before exhaust braking was offered can now install the new BD Diesel Variable Vane Exhaust Brake without major modifications, since all the auxiliary braking is handled electronically. This exhaust brake is available for 2011 to



1) Two OBD-II devices can be used with an aftermarket splitter. Unfortunately, not all vehicles will accept multiple devices. **2)** BD's Variable Vane Exhaust Brake installation kit is simple and comes with everything needed.



3 and 4) Mounting the three-position exhaust-brake switch needs to be exact, with a small slot cut into the plastic so that the switch will not rotate in the hole. **5)** Removing the plastic pieces from under the dash is very simple. Be mindful not to pull too hard in the wrong direction, which may cause the plastic to break or crack. **6)** BD's OBD-II connector is a diagnostic scanner that can be installed without removing any devices.

2014 Ford and 2000 to 2006 Chevy trucks.

The BD device requires just basic hand tools, by utilizing factory connections and the stock variable gate turbo (VGT) on the engine for a plug-and-play installation. A three-position switch is mounted in the dash that allows the driver to "customize" braking for the particular grade. BD Diesel's

patented exhaust brake electronic module is designed to close the turbocharger's vanes during deceleration, providing up to 120 retarding horsepower and 60 PSI of back pressure at approximately 3,000 RPM. The ability to command transmission downshifts while improving braking capabilities will result in a noticeable difference on steep or downhill grades.

7) Be sure to use the kit's cable ties to secure the OBD-II connection before installing it up under the dash and out of the way. **8)** Before installing any of the connectors, examine each individual piece for corrosion and broken plastic pieces. **9)** Removing the original connectors from the vehicle requires a little bit of finesse. Pulling too hard can cause a connector to break off the tabs. **10)** Secure all wires under the dash with the supplied cable ties. A loose wire can be cut in half with either a brake pedal or an emergency-brake lever. **11)** BD's plug-and-play connectors eliminate mistakes and are quick and easy to install. **12)** When installing the shift-lever connector just behind the hazard-lamp switch, be sure to route the wiring harness out of harm's way.





We installed the BD device on a 2011 Ford F-350 dually with a 3.75:1 rear axle ratio and a 6.7-liter "Scorpion" Power Stroke diesel, the first year Ford offered this engine. The engine runs quietly and is very powerful, but it lacked the ability to hold back our truck and fifth-wheel combo on 7 percent and greater descents, and at times created a white-knuckle experience. Keeping the transmission in second gear at 3,000 to 4,000 RPM with a top speed of about 25 miles an hour was the only option for enough control, and to save the brakes. If we were to shift to third or fourth gear, the truck and trailer combo would continue to pick up speed at an alarming rate. The only option at that point was to keep braking every few seconds to prevent the truck and trailer from rapidly building up too much speed.

15) Engine heat can cause failure of the latches on the connector to the turbo. To prevent separation, use cable ties when re-installing. **16)** Be sure to tighten the plenum bolts during installation, then torque them to 89 inch pounds (7 ft-lbs). **17)** Before installing the connector to the three-way switch, take a moment to cable tie the wires to keep them out of harm's way. While reinstalling the plastic shroud under the dash, make sure that the wire harness is not pinched where the panels meet up. **18)** Removing the rear bolts to the plenum is time consuming. A second set of hands proved to be beneficial for holding the oil and transmission dipsticks to the side.

13) The mass-airflow sensor is critical to the engine's performance. If any of the latches are broken when removing the connector, be sure to cable tie them together so they will not separate. **14)** Routing wires past the brake pedal can be critical. Make sure that there is enough slack where the brake pedal moves up and down so the wires will not get pinched.

The hands-on portion of installation was not complicated, but following the directions was a big challenge. The small black-and-white, non-descriptive pictures were difficult to follow, but thankfully the plugs and/or connectors needed to complete the install were specific, which prevented the wrong connector from being used in the wrong place.

The first 21 steps proved to be the easy part, consuming about 1.2 hours with no surprises. Steps 22 through 26 were quite a bit more difficult and stirred up a few "colorful" words. Perhaps having a diesel mechanic complete this task would be wise.

One source of frustration was working with the truck's plenum, or intake, which needed to be removed to



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gain access to the turbo's connector. Some of the 15 itty-bitty bolts in the intake plenum were darn near impossible to remove and replace. When the bolts were finally taken out, the removal of the plastic plenum required a few gymnastics, since the clearances were so close.

We found that removing the fuel-filter assembly proved to be very beneficial, but disconnecting the turbocharger oil-control solenoid connector was even more difficult, mostly due to the tight space to work in. To complicate the process further, the locking tabs that keep the connectors together snapped off before we could get them apart. Using a cable tie will help ensure that the connection will not come apart.

Next, we reinstalled the intake manifold plenum and torqued all 15 bolts to 89 inch pounds (7 ft-lbs). The following few steps were quite simple, requiring the connection of the mass airflow sensor (MAF) and positioning of the supplied cable ties to ensure the entire wiring harness was secured to the recommended locations across the firewall. We then connected the positive and negative cables to the starting battery on the driver's side, turned on the ignition without starting the engine and checked that the three-position switch mounted in the dash was functioning properly.

The test drive started by taking the truck on a familiar route without using the newly installed BD Variable Vane Exhaust Brake. When letting off on the throttle, the truck rolled quite easily without much resistance on

19) Installing the electrical connection was challenging because of limited working space. Check that the connectors are secure and will not pull apart before reinstalling the plenum. **20)** Make sure to use the factory heat deflector on the new connectors at the turbocharger. The tremendous heat from the turbo can melt the connectors, if they are not well protected. **21)** Dielectric grease should be used on the connectors at the mass-airflow sensor and the turbocharger connector. This small packet is supplied in the installation kit.

level or hilly roads and steep grades. Next we ran the same route with the exhaust brake in the number one position with new BD exhaust brake without the trailer. The difference was very noticeable. The truck, even at low RPM, had considerably more rolling resistance, and the brakes were not needed as often by comparison. With the selector in the Downshift mode, it literally felt like the brakes were applied every time the truck downshifted at roughly 3,000 RPM, which is in the optimal RPM for this engine's effectiveness. Using the Manual Downshift mode on the truck customized the stopping experience. We did notice, however, when in the Manual mode, the shifting wasn't always completed without a second or third try.

With the 17,000-pound fifth-wheel trailer attached, we headed out on the same route. The 4 to 5 percent grades were not challenging with the BD exhaust brake engaged. On the 7 and 8 percent grades, the BD system improved slowing control at a significant rate. We could definitely feel a noticeable difference holding back the load with no brakes applied while running in second gear. We negotiated the 7 percent grade in third gear and could definitely feel the combo starting

to pick up speed at 3,000 to 3,500 RPM, but nowhere near as quickly as running in stock form.

Stopping at the bottom of the 7 percent grade with the BD system set in the Downshift mode was quite impressive. Coupled with the truck and trailer brakes, it felt like we could stop in half the distance than we could have without the BD exhaust brake engaged. If used properly, especially on steep, winding downhills with Downshift mode engaged, brake fade should prove to be a thing of the past.

One thing to watch for when this system is installed on trucks with emissions equipment is a possible DTC fault code that may appear under prolonged extreme conditions, which relates to diesel particulate filter (DPF) sensor output.

Modern truck performance is aided by technology, and enhancing these advancements with the BD Variable Vane Exhaust Brake will prove to be important for safe travel on grades when pulling trailers and fifth-wheels. The kit for the Ford retails for \$627 and is covered by a one-year limited warranty. 🚛

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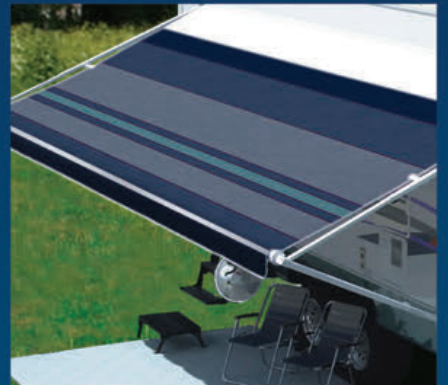
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CANADA'S WEST SIDE STORY

Off the mainland coast of British Columbia, Vancouver Island's Comox Valley charms visitors with its friendly communities, gentle climate and alpine-to-shoreline geography



As full-time RVers from Canada, my wife, Sandy, and I have spent the past seven winters in the sunny climes of the Southwest, usually at RV resorts in Arizona. We always look forward to reuniting with fellow RVers we've met over the years and, of course, visiting the various attractions near the resort. Time passes quickly, and come springtime, we begin to plan our leisurely travels north.

Most of our recent summers have been spent on British Columbia's Sunshine Coast (see "Follow the Sun to British Columbia" in the July 2014 issue). Since we had pretty much seen and done everything within that area, the time had come to consider a new location, with new attractions, to spend the upcoming summer. A logical choice was the province's Comox Valley, midway up the eastern side of Vancouver Island. We knew some folks who had moved to the valley

from other parts of Canada, and they had only positive things to say about it — plus, it's only a short ferry ride across the Strait of Georgia to visit friends on the Sunshine Coast.

Our route north had us departing on a ferry from Anacortes, Washington, spending a few hours admiring the natural beauty of the San Juan Islands and arriving at the port of Sidney near the southern end of Vancouver Island. From there, it takes about three hours to drive north on Provincial Highway 19 to the Comox Valley.

If you're an RVer planning to visit this area, keep in mind that ferry fees for a sizable RV can be expensive, so you wouldn't necessarily want to bring your RV for just a short trip. But why would you? As we discovered, there is so much to see and do within the Comox Valley that we barely scratched the surface during our four months there.

Wooden boardwalks traverse alpine wilderness along the wheelchair-accessible Paradise Meadows Loop Trail at Strathcona Provincial Park.

(Right) Baynes Sound flows next to the seaside hamlet of Fanny Bay, famous for its beach-cultured oysters. Panoramic views from the Mount Washington chairlift take in the Beaufort and Vancouver Island ranges, the Pacific Ocean and the Strait of Georgia, as well as the Comox Valley.



DOWN IN THE VALLEY

Our first stop was the Vancouver Island Visitor Centre, just off Highway 19 on the way to Courtenay. When I asked the friendly clerk what we absolutely had to see if we were just there for the weekend, she immediately replied, “Comox Marina, Goose Spit and Mount Washington.” When I then told her we were actually there for the entire summer, we ended up with an armful of brochures and booklets, covering everything from arts to wildlife (the writer in me wishes there were zip lines here!).

The valley’s indigenous people, now known as K’ómoks, called the region the “land of plenty.” Abundant animals and plants allowed them to thrive here for thousands of years before Europeans arrived in the mid-1800s. By the early 1900s, a railway line from the provincial capital of Victoria was extended north to the Comox Valley, and the city of Courtenay was established. Courtenay proudly celebrated its centennial during our visit last summer with parades, hoopla and a museum exhibit.

The town of Comox and the village of Cumberland are also nestled in the valley between the majestic Beaufort mountains and the expansive Strait of Georgia. Denman and Hornby islands, and several rural communities add to the mosaic of things to see and do in the valley. With a population of nearly 70,000, the area has had one of the fastest growth rates in British Columbia

during the past five years. No doubt contributing to that statistic is its moderate year-round climate, alpine-to-shoreline geography, endless recreational opportunities and the friendly folks who live here.

One of the best ways to learn about an area’s history is to spend some time in a museum. Exhibits at the Cumberland Museum and Archives emphasize coal mining, which drew early settlers to the Comox Valley. The Comox Museum shows a more extensive timeframe from the early exploration of Vancouver Island through to modern times. For those seeking additional information, the Courtenay Museum and Palaeontology Centre displays locally found skeletal remains of prehistoric reptiles, while the Comox Air Force Museum showcases the history of Canadian military aviation.

A handout from the visitor center lists eight full-service campgrounds within the valley, ranging from beachfronts to forests (see “Comox Valley Campgrounds” on page 54). Our choice was Cape Lazo RV and Campground, just minutes from downtown Comox and

no more than a half-hour’s drive from anywhere in the valley.

Proximity to the Strait of Georgia gave us opportunities to search the shore for intricate shells and that oh-so-perfect beach stone, while seagulls and herons scoured the water’s edge for their own tidbits. This waterway, named by 18th-century explorer Captain George Vancouver, serves as a conduit for migrating whales and salmon, as well as cruise ships sailing the Inside Passage to and from Alaska.

Just up the road, Canadian Forces Base Comox operates routine flights of military aircraft, including Hercules transports, search-and-rescue helicopters and air-cadet training gliders, which often shifted our gaze skyward. As a bonus, we were able to watch aerobatics at the annual air show from our campsite — on a lounge chair while enjoying a cool one!

TAKE A HIKE

More than 60 miles of designated hiking trails are available throughout the valley, most of which can be biked as well. From energetic treks through

Canada’s counterpart to the Blue Angels and Thunderbirds, the Canadian Forces Snowbirds wing over the Comox Air Show.



PHOTO BY MARK KARDOS



At the regional park near the tip of Goose Spit, sails punctuate the sky along the popular beach.

alpine wilderness to leisurely strolls within local parks, there is something for everyone.

Our favorite, conveniently located near our campground, is a half-mile circular trail in the Northeast Woods-Lazo Marsh Conservation Area. A canopy of towering firs and cedars looms over the sun-dappled trail, flanked by waist-high ferns and emerald salal bushes. Here, plucky chickadees feed on seeds from an outstretched hand, and redwing blackbirds flit among the cattails. For more ambitious nature lovers, miles of well-marked trails lace the adjoining second-growth forests, north and south of the marsh.

Just south of Comox, the narrow Goose Spit peninsula extends more than a mile into the ocean. While serving as the summer training center for the Royal Canadian Sea Cadets, it also provides one of the valley's most popular sandy beaches. At low tide, one can hike to the tip and back along 2½ miles of gently sloping shoreline. Near the tip, recreational boaters often gather to enjoy the fine white sand and relatively warm surf near a makeshift tiki hut. Sea Cadet sailing regattas frequently occur just offshore.

Bird watchers appreciate the mudflats on the lagoon side of the Spit

where sandpipers, oystercatchers and other shorebirds are common. Several tables are available for those who want to observe these avian picnickers while enjoying their own snacks.

Nearby Mount Washington is a mecca for winter skiers, as well as for summer hikers and bikers. We particularly enjoyed a guided walking tour of pristine Paradise Meadows where our expert guide pointed out alpine plants and animals, including friendly gray jays and raucous ravens. Not to be missed is the scenic chairlift ride to the mile-high summit, offering spectacular views of the Beaufort Range and the Strait of Georgia. On a clear day, Mount Baker in northern Washington can be seen in the distance.

ON THE WATERFRONT

"Comox by the Sea" is an appropriate slogan, considering the town overlooks the world-class Comox Marina, a popular stopover for visiting boaters. We often strolled along the extensive pier, admiring the many luxury sailboats and motor yachts at the docks. From the pier are views of Goose Spit, the Beaufort mountains and Comox Glacier. Whether it's purchasing freshly caught seafood directly from local fishermen at the dock or renting a kayak, paddleboard, catamaran or even a cruising



GETTING THERE

The following ferry lines transport passengers and vehicles, including recreational vehicles, to Vancouver Island.

BC Ferries, one of the world's largest ferry operators, has routes from Vancouver and Powell River to the Vancouver Island cities of Sidney, Swartz Bay, Nanaimo and Comox. In the Comox Valley, the company's ferries cruise between Buckley Bay, Denman Island and Hornby Island. 888-223-3779, www.bcferries.com

Black Ball Ferry Line operates the M.V. *Coho* across the Strait of Juan de Fuca between Port Angeles, Washington, and the capital city of Victoria's Inner Harbor. 888-993-3779, www.cohoferry.com

Washington State Ferries, managed by the state's Department of Transportation, runs a ferry from Anacortes, Washington, through the San Juan Islands to Sidney, north of Victoria. 888-808-7977, www.wsdot.com/ferries

GETTING AROUND

The Comox Valley is about a three-hour drive up Provincial Highway 19 (the Island Highway) from the ferry landings in Victoria, Sidney and Swartz Bay, and a shorter trip from Nanaimo. A detour to scenic Highway 19A (the Old Island Highway) passes through the seaside communities of Fanny Bay and Buckley Bay on the way to Courtenay, the valley's largest city. The Vancouver Island Visitor Centre in Courtenay is a must-stop. 250-400-2882

www.discovercomoxvalley.com

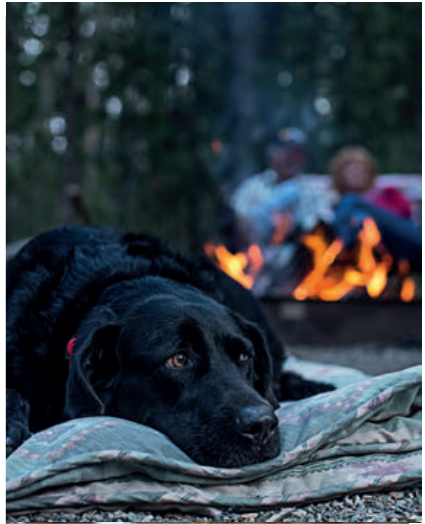
PHOTOS BY MARK KARDOS



(Left) Bald eagles and their winged brethren flock to the Comox Valley. The valley hosts the province's second largest population of wintering waterfowl. (Right) The ferry from Anacortes.



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yacht, you can find it here.

Kayaks and paddleboards can be rented at several other locations within the valley, including our campground. During one sunset paddle in the Courtenay River estuary, we got up close and personal with harbor seals and bald eagles. Fishing charters, whale-watching tours, scuba-diving excursions and boat cruises are all available, and booking them in advance is recommended during summer.

ARTS AND CULTURE

Art galleries and studios that sell unique paintings, carvings, handcrafted pottery and jewelry are scattered throughout the valley. Many of these items, as well as locally grown produce, are on display at weekly farmers markets in the valley's urban centers, as well as on Denman and Hornby islands. On several occasions, we visited these enchanting islands by ferry to take in a self-guided art tour, nibble on all things blackberry at an annual festival and frolic in the temperate aquamarine waters of Tribune Bay, nicknamed Little Hawaii. For those seeking traditional First Nations artwork and crafts, many examples are on display and available for purchase at I-Hos Gallery between Courtenay and Comox.

The Comox Valley is known as the Valley of Festivals for good reason. In

addition to Comox's popular Filberg Festival, which features music, food and art from more than 100 artisans, other festivals celebrate everything from jazz, seafood and authors to bluegrass, dance and mushrooms, to name a few. Another fun one is the Comox Nautical Days Festival, just two blocks from the Filberg Festival and staged at the same time — on the first Monday in August (British Columbia Day) and the weekend that precedes it. Watch nautical demonstrations and competitions, and shop at more than 100 arts-and-crafts booths.

If winemaking can be considered an art, several vineyards in the valley are intent on producing a Rembrandt. Fertile soil and a moderate climate have contributed to the production of internationally acclaimed, award-winning wines, and the best part is, tastings are free.

Were we ever bored? Not a chance, although occasionally we managed to simply relax beside our trailer, recharging in preparation for the next adventure. The valley has many more ways to play, including golfing, tubing, windsurfing, rock climbing and lawn bowling — the list goes on. Last July's *What's On Digest* for Comox Valley listed multiple events occurring nearly every day, so there's no excuse for boredom in this land of plenty. We're joyfully anticipating our return visit this summer. 🚐

COMOX VALLEY CAMPGROUNDS

The Comox Valley is said to be Canada's sixth warmest region, and the valley's campgrounds are busy during summer, when the days are warm enough to enjoy an outdoor swim but not unbearably hot. If you plan to visit in July or August, consider making reservations in advance.

BLACK CREEK

Pacific Playgrounds

877-239-5600, www.pacificplaygrounds.com

Saratoga Beach Resort

877-337-5511, www.saratogabeach.com

BOWSER

Deep Bay RV Park

250-757-8424, www.deepbayrvpark.com

COMOX

Cape Lazo RV and Campground

888-558-3946, www.capelazo.com

COURTENAY

Maple Pool Campground and RV Park

877-330-9386, www.maplepoolcampsite.com

Puntledge RV Campground

250-334-3773, www.puntledgerv.com

Seal Bay RV Park

250-339-1837, www.sealbayrvpark.com

FANNY BAY

Lighthouse RV Park

888-757-8765, www.lighthousevrvpark.ca

A short drive beyond the Comox Valley's northern boundary, Salmon Point Resort welcomes RVers to the town of Campbell River.

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GEMS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

From Atlantic City to Cape May,
the Garden State's classic seaside strip glimmers
with beaches and boardwalks, casinos and campsites

article and photography by Jeremy and Stephanie Puglisi

The sun is barely above the ocean horizon, and already the Cape May promenade is teeming with cyclists enjoying the scenic 2-mile stretch of paved boardwalk that runs along the beach in this quaint Victorian seaside town at the southern point of New Jersey.

We fall in line on our own bikes, after reminding our boys to stay to the right and avoid sudden stops. Every half mile or so, we depart from the boardwalk to meander through the quiet side streets, packed with charming homes and bed-and-break-

fasts, then circle back around to the seashore. Bicycles are allowed on the promenade until 10 a.m., and we want to enjoy it while we can.

This is our favorite way to start each morning in Cape May, a destination we grew to love as a dating couple and which still calls us back every year now that we have three young children. On some mornings, we follow up our leisurely bike ride with a pancake breakfast at Uncle Bill's Pancake House, a beachfront restaurant staple in Cape May. Other mornings, if we are in the mood for something lighter, we pop into Avalon Coffee Company to grab breakfast sandwiches and fruit cups, eating at the outdoor picnic tables.

We break into our days slowly while vacationing at the Jersey shore. A morning at the beach is meant to be savored, offering warm sun, light breezes and the therapeutic sounds of waves and seagulls.

Originally settled as a whaling and fishing community, Cape May emerged in the mid-18th century as a popular resort destination for Philadelphia's elite. It had become one of America's most famous vacation spots by 1878, when a massive five-day fire destroyed most of the town's homes and businesses. Reconstruction was fast and focused, resulting in a town full of Victorian-style buildings. Throughout the last century, preservation efforts have maintained the architectural integrity of Cape May, and it became a National Historic Landmark in 1976.

Present-day Cape May is a destination that draws in every sort of traveler: the young honeymooners searching for romantic candlelight dinners and moonlit horse-and-buggy rides, the families looking for sandcastle contests and mini golf, and the retired couples hoping to capture beautiful photographs of sunsets and migrating birds.

Towering above the community of Cape May Point, the Cape May Lighthouse invites visitors to climb its 199 steps for a small fee. The lighthouse stays open late on nights with a full moon.



Along Beach Avenue in Cape May, wraparound porches and gingerbread flourishes adorn the Victorian-era dwellings, now mostly bed-and-breakfast inns.



CAMPING IN CAPE MAY

Before owning an RV, we would spend our visits to Cape May in one of the hundreds of bed-and-breakfasts peppered throughout the town. When we bought our first pop-up camper six years ago, we were thrilled to find an amazing assortment of campgrounds and RV parks just outside of the downtown area.

Seashore Campsites, just 4 miles from the Cape May beaches, has emerged as our family favorite, and even though it is a big and bustling place, the landscaping and campsite layout somehow make it feel cozy. We love staying here in September, when the tourists have all gone home but the sun and ocean temperatures are still warm, especially since they keep the pool open until October 1.

About a mile farther away from the ocean, a bit north on U.S. Route 9, is Holly Shores Camping Resort, another family camping favorite. Like many campgrounds along the southern coast of New Jersey, this one has its fair

share of upscale seasonal campsites. The remaining sites are a bit tight, and the best ones are booked far in advance.

On some visits we decide to forgo the pool, spa and organized activities, and stay at the Depot Travel Park, which places us within walking or biking distance of the best shopping and dining in Cape May. It is a great no-frills option, in spite of being a bit quirky. Don't expect to make online reservations or even leave a voice mail. They do not accept credit cards, and guests are required to mail a check within two weeks of booking.

The south Jersey shore has many other appealing options for RV camping (see "Garden State Getaways" on page 60), but we always choose Cape May as our base camp for exploring area attractions all the way up to Atlantic City, 50 miles and less than an hour's drive to the north.

BIRDS, BUTTERFLIES AND BOARDWALKS

The beaches along the southern portion of the New Jersey coast are a diverse bunch, and at times we gravitate toward the ones with bustling boardwalk attractions. The iconic Jersey shore experience includes a Ferris wheel ride, funnel cake and a few games of Skee-Ball in the arcade. You can find all of these things in Wildwood, about 20 minutes north of Cape May. But there you will also find a great many college students and a bar on every corner, so we tend to head a bit farther north to Ocean City, a barrier island with a small

Opened in 1946 and now an Atlantic City icon, White House Subs has served celebrities from Frank Sinatra to the Beatles.

MORE THAN THE SHORE

Beyond pristine beaches and promenades, there's plenty to see and do in the communities that line the South Jersey coast, including the following four diversions.

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE

Cape May County Zoo and Park

609-465-5271, www.cmczoo.com

A visit to this beautiful zoo is absolutely free, and because it is within a county park, you can also enjoy the picnic area, playground and walking trails.

GALLOWAY

Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge

609-652-1665

www.fws.gov/refuge/edwin_b_forsythe

Birders come from all over to see migrating species pass through. Visit the nature center, drive the loop road and hike the trails with binoculars in hand.

MARGATE CITY

Lucy the Elephant

609-823-6473, www.lucytheelephant.org

At 135 years old, America's oldest roadside attraction is also a National Historic Landmark. Tours of this six-story-high wooden elephant run on the half hour.

SMITHVILLE

Historic Smithville and Village Green

609-748-8999, www.historicsmithvillenj.com

This quaint town is packed with shops and eateries, and special events run throughout the year. We love to stop for dinner after a hike at the wildlife refuge, just minutes away.

Another South Jersey icon, Lucy the Elephant was built in 1882 to attract prospective property owners to Margate.



population and sleepy feel.

If you arrive in Ocean City early enough, hop online for fresh homemade doughnuts at either Browns Restaurant or Oves Beach Grill, both situated at the northern end of the 2.5-mile boardwalk. It is a local tradition to argue about which doughnuts are better, and our money is on Browns, but you will have to decide for yourself.

The wide, pristine beaches here are perfect for young children, and at low tide our boys love splashing in the small pools that form along the shoreline. We enjoy our long, competitive games of paddleball on the hard-packed sand. Picking up a Pro Kadima paddle set at one of the sundry shops in town before heading to the beach is a tradition for many returning visitors.

After a long day in the sun, we always head to Ike's Famous Crabcakes for the quintessential seafood-shack experience. The fish and chips are crispy, flavorful and fresh. The crab-cake sandwiches are legendary. We also enjoy the more adventurous

menu items like fish tacos and crab quesadillas.

Our day in Ocean City is never complete until we visit Playland's Castaway Cove, a fixture on the boardwalk for more than 50 years. We purchase our sheets of tickets and rip them up in strips of four and five, laying out the family strategy for riding the Tilt-a-Whirl, Scream Machine, Gravitron and Double Shot. The pirate-theme shooting gallery hasn't changed in decades, and we are instantly transported back to the summers of our youth when we would fork over a pile of dollar bills and fire air rifles at targets for game after game.

Other days we stay closer to the campground, enjoying the beautiful Cape May beaches. You could spend the day at any of the popular beaches that run along the stretch of Beach Avenue, but our favorite place to get sandy requires venturing away from the promenade and driving out to Cape May Point State Park, home of Sunset Beach, the Cape May Lighthouse,

The authors and their sons explore one of three nature trails at Cape May Point State Park.



a World War II bunker and miles of nature trails that meander through wetland marsh and coastal dunes.

We bring our binoculars, and even though our birding knowledge is limited, there is always a stunning amount of wildlife to enjoy at the Cape May Point. We count egrets, herons and ospreys. If it is October, we join the dozens of



▲ World-class comedians, musicians and magicians light up the stages in Atlantic City year-round. Shows sell out, so if you go, be sure to purchase tickets ahead of time.

REACH THE BEACH

To get to the southern Jersey shore from the New Jersey Turnpike, take the Atlantic City Expressway to the Garden State Parkway and drive south. From points south, consider taking the ferry between Lewes, Delaware, and North Cape May (RVs are welcome aboard). Otherwise, take Route 40 to Route 55 South and follow it to where it ends at Route 47 South, then continue to the Garden State Parkway and head south. Cape May is at the end of the parkway, accessible by one of two main bridges.

Cape May-Lewes Ferry
800-643-3779, www.capemaylewesferry.com

New Jersey Tourism
800-847-4865, www.visitnj.org

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Down south in South Jersey: Cape May's southern tip is the southernmost point in the state.

birders who gather to watch one of the world's largest hawk migrations, which passes right through Cape May. Hundreds of hawks swarm in the sky above, and as they swoop down, we hear the cacophony of shutter clicks from all the cameras set up to catch an image of one of nature's great shows.

And then there are the monarch butterflies. Tens of thousands of monarchs pass through Cape May every September and October on their way to Mexico. We ask the locals where they seem to be gathering, and often we are directed to the even more remote beaches of the Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area. We walk quietly through the beach plum, bayberry and scrub oak laden trails, and even if we don't spot the monarchs, we are sure to see a variety of migrating songbirds on our hunt.

BEYOND THE BEACHES

After a full day at Cape May Point State Park, we find ourselves walking through the Washington Street Mall, a pedestrian thoroughfare lined with fudge shops, souvenir stores and specialty boutiques. Cape Atlantic Book Company has been providing visitors with great beach reads for decades, and you can find the perfect Jersey shore postcard at Whale's Tale, another longtime resident on the mall.

At the end of the mall, on the corner of Ocean and Washington streets, we spot the horse and buggies from the Cape May Carriage Company. Our boys will beg for a ride, and sometimes we give in, purchasing tickets and settling in to enjoy the 30-minute tour, always packed with fascinating local history. Prior to the boys' arrival in the world, we loved a good ghost tour and can't wait to

enjoy one again in the future.

On other evenings, if we can get away from the kids, we drive north to Atlantic City where the Borgata, Caesars and Tropicana casinos offer us the chance to get dressed up, do a bit of shopping, try out our luck at the gaming tables and then enjoy dinner at one of the many amazing restaurants. We debate endlessly about whether we will eat at Cuba Libre, Morton's or the Borgata Buffet.

Sometimes when we are feeling casual, nothing but a White House special from the famous White House Subs on Arctic Avenue will do. We sit in the orange booths that haven't changed since we were teenagers and scan the hundreds of celebrity photos lining the walls. Afterward, we walk off the sandwiches by strolling through the outlet shops on Atlantic Avenue and drooling over the outdoor gear at Bass Pro Shops.

Cape May is a town for foodies, and we avoid the pub-style restaurants that line Washington Mall and instead make reservations to enjoy surf-and-turf at the Peter Shields Inn, comfort food with a twist at Freda's Cafe or upscale Creole at 410 Bank Street. Many restaurants are BYOB in this town, so we love picking up a few bottles of wine from the Cape May Winery to enjoy with our meals.

After decades of vacationing along the southern Jersey shore, the magic still hasn't worn off for us. The combination of beaches, boardwalks, wildlife, wine and food has kept us coming back again and again. And each time we leave, heading north toward home or south toward another RV destination, we blow our beloved Cape May a kiss and whisper, "See you soon." 🚐



Seashore Campsites and RV Resort

GARDEN STATE GETAWAYS

More than a dozen RV parks dot the Atlantic coast on New Jersey's southern shore. Go to www.goodsamclub.com/travel to search for them all.

CAPE MAY

Depot Travel Park

609-884-2533

www.thedepottravelpark.com

Clean and tidy, this no-frills RV park is perfect for those that want to be near the downtown area of Cape May.

Holly Shores Camping Resort

877-494-6559, www.hollyshores.com

A bustling family-owned campground with fantastic amenities and theme weekends.

Seashore Campsites and RV Resort

877-817-5697, www.sunrvresorts.com

A beautiful family-friendly Good Sam Park less than 5 miles from downtown Cape May. It's also big-rig friendly, but some sites are tricky to get into.

GALLOWAY

Pomona RV Park and Campground

609-965-2123, www.pomonarvpark.com

If you want to be just minutes away from the Atlantic City casinos and restaurants, this top-rated Good Sam Park is your best bet.

OCEAN VIEW

Ocean View Resort

609-624-1675, www.ovresort.com

Midway between Atlantic City and Wildwood, this campground is minutes from the Sea Isle City beaches. It has an on-site pool and lake, as well as a full roster of amenities and activities.

TUCKERTON

Atlantic City North Family Campground

888-229-9776, www.campacn.com

About 30 minutes north of Atlantic City and 15 minutes from the beaches of Long Beach Island, this Good Sam Park has a swimming pool, spray ground and tons of recreation options for families.

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WOW SUPER COUPON

PITTSBURGH RAPID PUMP® 3 TON LOW PROFILE HEAVY DUTY STEEL FLOOR JACK

Customer Rating ★★★★★

LOT 68049/62326 62670/61253 61282 shown

SAVE \$85

\$84.33

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Platform Assist

Hatchlift's super-stout RV Bedlift Kit provides under-mattress storage access without having to use the ol' noggin for support

DIFFICULTY 1 2 3 4 5

TIME TO COMPLETE 1 HOUR

TOOLS NEEDED MEASURING TAPE, DRILL WITH BITS, SCREWDRIVER OR SCREW GUN, WOOD FOR TEMPORARY SUPPORT

One of the most precious commodities in any RV is storage space. While owners take advantage of every nook and cranny, the storage space under a platform bed is generally regarded as highly valuable to house bulky items. The use of gas struts facilitates access, but the factory hardware tends to fail too quickly, leaving the very real possibility of being clunked on the head. Compound that with the use of heavier mattresses, as owners and factories opt for more comfortable beds, and the need for a stronger lift system is paramount to take full advantage of the potential storage space. Hatchlift, a company that cut its teeth on high-quality compartment door struts, is now offering RV Bedlift Kits designed to handle the extra weight.

After replacing the bed in our fifth-wheel trailer with a much heavier, residential-style foam mattress, the factory struts were overtaxed to the point of failure, making access dangerous. We turned to Hatchlift for a solution and installed a specific Bedlift Kit that made the platform amazingly



The new Hatchlift struts hold the bed platform open for easy access and facilitate closing. Specific struts can be ordered to accommodate a heavier mattress.

light to pull up and push down — and handled the weight in the open position with little fear of having the wood structure falling on our heads. The nice feature with the Bedlift Kit is that the struts are also designed to assist with closing the platform so that it doesn't

slam against the base structure and risk potential injury.

Before purchasing the Bedlift Kit, it's important to identify the type of platform and how it hinges, and the size and weight of the mattress. The company's comprehensive website will



1) Wood blocks are supplied with the Bedlift Kit to add strength for the brackets and/or to align the wall of the bed structure with any trim. **2)** The top bracket can be installed directly to the platform, if it's thick and strong enough, or, as in our case, metal backing plates were installed by the fifth-wheel manufacturer to provide additional support.

guide you through the process.

To install the struts, a number of accurate measurements must be taken. Angles and bracket positioning are critical to ensure that the struts move freely, and Hatchlift has taken all the guesswork out of this process. Concise instructions identify just about every configuration, and the only way to mess up is to breeze through the process without following the steps precisely.

The kit comes complete with all the hardware necessary for the installation. Wood blocks are provided to support platform bases that are less than solid, or take up space to align any trim with the surface of the main structure; in our case they were not needed. You'll have to find a piece of wood that's long enough to prop the platform open 39 inches from the floor, which gives you plenty of space to work under the platform. Having a helper ready to catch the platform, should the wood support scoot out of position, is wise.



3) The bottom bracket is installed using wood screws. Here, there was plenty of wood backing to facilitate a strong connection. 4) Gas struts are snapped on the ball ends of the upper and lower brackets.



From here, it's just a matter of installing the lower and upper brackets using the $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch wood screws and snapping on the struts, after going through the steps to make sure the platform opens and closes without binding. The mattress and bedding must be in place to test the operation of the struts.

Hatchlift RV Bedlift Kits sell for \$53 to \$62 and will quickly become one of the best investments you'll ever make, especially for those who've had the misfortune of supporting the platform with their heads. 🚚

Hatchlift Hydraulic Lift Kits

303-233-6083, www.hatchlift.com

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Two Nash Travel Trailers are parked on a dirt path in a lush forest. The trailers are white with blue and orange graphics. The background is filled with tall trees and green foliage.

Nash Travel Trailers

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Long-Lasting Soap Dispenser

Rather than frequently refilling the dish-soap dispenser in our RV, I devised a system to draw soap from a gallon refill container I placed under the sink. I started by pulling out the dispenser's original reservoir and replacing the short hose with one that was long enough to reach the gallon container. Next, I ran the new hose from the dispenser into the container. The hose keeps the container securely in place.

Dennis Baldwin, Holland, Michigan



Sewer-Hose Storage

I recently bought a foam mattress pad for my RV that came in a clear plastic bag-type container with a zipper closure at the top and a carry handle. I know many RVers try to find adequate storage bags for sewer hoses and fittings. Up until now I've used extra-large plastic grocery bags, but they tear easily and don't have a way to secure what's inside from falling out. This zippered bag is the perfect solution. It works great and is easy to clean.

Jim Pennino, Camdenton, Missouri



Out-of-Sight Shoe Rack

We have an EverGreen Bay Hill fifth-wheel that has plenty of storage but nowhere to keep extra shoes. My wife, Barb, tells me that I bring along too many pairs when we are traveling. We came up with the idea to hang the shoes on a shoe rack that attaches to the end of the bed platform. When the bedroom slide is closed, the shoes can't fall off the posts, and when opened, the bedspread hides them from view. The one I made will hold six pairs of shoes. I used a piece of 1x4-inch pine stock and 3/4-inch dowels (cut to 2 1/2 inches), and drilled holes for the dowels at an upward angle. Now we have no more shoes lying around. The bright-purple color was my wife's idea!

Don Frank, Glendale, Arizona 🚚

To send your submission, write to 10-Minute Tech, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036 or email 10minutetech@trailerlife.com. Please include an illustration or photo, if applicable. *Trailer Life* will pay \$35 for original 10-Minute Tech ideas.

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Even though the Mass Fidelity Core wireless-speaker system is a diminutive 6 inches square, it has the power of a big sound system — with definitive left and right stereo separation, no matter where you're listening. It's small enough to hold in the palm of your hand yet delivers smooth highs, clear midrange and booming bass. The compact size and Bluetooth connectivity make Core speakers ideal for RV use with smartphones, tablets and PCs. Up to eight speakers can be synchronized and placed in separate locations, even outside your RV, to stream online sites or play your personal music collection. The system creates its own music network, so there's no interference from outside sources.

MSRP: \$599

800-367-0596, www.massfidelity.com

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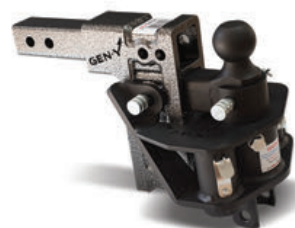
Towing Unshackled

Smoothing out the ride in a heavy-duty Ford, Ram, Chevy or GMC pickup can be as easy as replacing the factory shackles with Sulastic's Rubber Springs. These leaf-spring shackles have the spring hanger pin encased in special shock-absorbing rubber that provides a torsion effect, reducing suspension harshness under heavier loads, especially when encountering potholes, broken pavement and speed bumps. Sulastic claims the replacement spring shackles give HD trucks the ride of a half-ton without compromising load-carrying or towing capacity. Shackles come in pairs and can be installed with hand tools in less than an hour. They are also available for midsize pickups, both imported and domestic.

MSRP: \$399

210-492-4469, www.sulastic.com

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Transformer Hitch

Perhaps one of the most innovative weight-distributing hitches on the market is the 15,000-pound-capacity Gen-Y GH-524 from Easy Hitch. The Class V adjustable-height ball mount converts from weight carrying to weight distributing in seconds. The U.S.-made hitch combines Gen-Y's boxed cast-steel, 2-inch drop-type adjustable drawbar and Versa-Ball shank as the base for conventional weight-carrying needs with both 2- and 2⁵/₁₆-inch ball sizes. Sliding the spring-bar receiver head over the Versa-Ball and locking it in place with two 5/8-inch pins quickly turns the Gen-Y GH-524 into a weight-distributing hitch. The kit comes with spring bars and trailer A-frame brackets.

MSRP: \$589.99

574-218-6363, www.genyhitch.com

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Ready to Roll

Protecting what's in the bed of your truck can be important when it's left unattended, which is where BAK Industries' Revolver X2 tonneau cover lets you rest easy. A new-and-improved version of BAK's original aluminum rolling tonneau cover, the Revolver X2, locks to the tailgate to provide good security, and its strong aluminum back can support 400 pounds spread evenly across the surface. The vinyl lining resists dents, scratches and wear, and the unique "no-profile" design not only looks sleek but ensures lower drag coefficients for improved fuel economy, according to the company. Backed by an extended three-year warranty, the Revolver X2 clamps onto the truck-bed rails with no drilling required.

MSRP: From \$899. 818-365-9000, www.bakindustries.com

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Emission Controls

Automotive emission controls have quietly evolved and advanced over the years, to the point that new vehicles produce a tiny fraction of the pollutants they did 50 years ago. But that seldom makes the evening news; Volkswagen's recent legal problems have pushed automotive emission control systems into the limelight. Strict federal, state and local regulations apply to most vehicles on the road today, and "bending" the rules while trying to produce ample power along with low emissions is what got VW into trouble.

It's important to understand how these rules affect us, and our vehicles. California, with its "smog" (smoke and fog) problem in low-lying Los Angeles, has been a leader in the fight against air pollution. The U.S. government regulates vehicle emissions through the Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA. EPA rules allow states to abide by federal regulations or the stricter California laws, and about 14 states now choose the Golden State standards.

Types of Emissions

Vehicle emissions fall into several categories: evaporative and crankcase fumes, toxic tailpipe gases, and "greenhouse" gases, the latter of which is mainly carbon dioxide (CO₂). Evaporative emissions are caused by the vaporization of fuels, which occurs whether the engine is running or not. This is much more of a problem with volatile gasoline than with less-volatile diesel fuel. Therefore, gasoline tanks are fitted with vapor canisters and control valving, which capture the fumes and return them to the engine to be burned when the vehicle is driven.

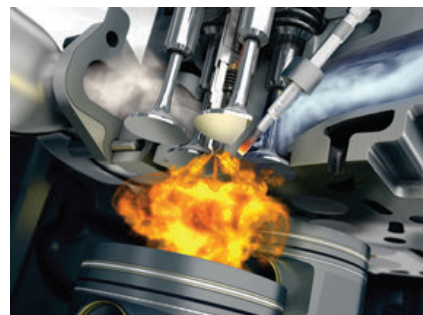
Crankcase emissions are caused

by cylinder pressure from combustion, forcing gases (known as "blowby") past the piston rings into the crankcase. Engines at one time vented these to the atmosphere. This was actually the first vehicle emission to be controlled, with the introduction of positive crankcase ventilation (PCV) valves, circa 1963, and they are still used today.

Carbon monoxide (CO) and unburned hydrocarbon (HC) are toxic tailpipe emissions that are regulated. When engines run with an excessively rich air-fuel ratio (too much fuel), CO emissions climb. When an engine runs with an air-fuel mixture that is too lean, it results in a misfire, which allows unburned HC to pass through the engine.

Oxides of nitrogen are also regulated. NO_x emissions consist of nitric oxide (NO), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and nitrous oxide (N₂O). NO_x is what causes the brown haze that is often seen over cities, particularly in hot weather. When the temperature in the combustion chamber reaches a critical temperature of around 2,900 degrees F or higher, NO_x is formed in much greater amounts than at lower temperatures.

Exhaust-gas recirculation (EGR) systems are the main method of reducing NO_x during combustion. EGR redirects a small percentage of the exhaust back into the combustion chamber to reduce the amount of



Modern diesel-engine glow plugs not only improve starting but also reduce emissions.

oxygen available, which in turn lowers combustion temperatures. Catalytic after-treatment also reduces the amount of NO_x in the exhaust stream.

Carbon dioxide emissions are also regulated through fuel-economy rules. Essentially, CO₂ output is an indication of efficiency, and the most effective ways to reduce its production are to downsize engines, improve aerodynamics, reduce rolling friction and lighten vehicles. Turbochargers are being utilized to help offset decreases in engine displacement.

Gasoline Emission Controls

Over the years, gasoline engines' efficiency has steadily improved and emissions have been lowered by utilizing scientifically designed combustion chambers that optimize the fuel burn. Large cylinder bores have also been determined to increase emissions, so crankshaft strokes have been increased instead to get similar displacements. Variable valve timing, cylinder shutdown and various other strategies also raise efficiency.

Carburetors don't lend themselves to computer control as well as electronic fuel injection. To reduce emissions, fuel-delivery systems have evolved from carburetors to throttle-body injection (TBI), with injectors in the throttle body, to electronic-port injection, with injectors in each intake port just outside the combustion chambers. The latest systems are gasoline direct injection (GDI), which injects gasoline directly into the



Diesel exhaust fluid (DEF) is required by most new selective catalytic reduction (SCR) emission control systems. DEF comes in various size containers and is available in bulk at truck-stop fuel pumps.

combustion chambers at just the right time, similar to diesel injection. Fuel is injected at high pressure (up to 200 bar), which produces an optimum swirl effect and cools the combustion chamber, allowing higher compression and greater efficiency.

Primary among external gasoline emission controls is the catalytic converter, introduced in the mid-1970s. The catalyst usually contains the precious metals platinum, palladium and rhodium, which makes them expensive. Early ones were designed to convert CO into CO₂ and eliminate unburned hydrocarbons.

In 1980, three-way "cats" were introduced, which also reduced oxides of nitrogen by carefully controlling the air-fuel mixture to stoichiometric (chemically ideal) with oxygen sensors, a design that's still used. Oxygen sensors vary their voltage output reading based on how lean or rich the air-fuel mixture is at the moment. They are inserted into the exhaust system downstream from the engine and allow the computer to adjust fuel mixtures.

To allow afterburning of unburned fuel, air-injection pumps introduce air into the exhaust, downstream of the engine.

Spark timing also has a strong effect on exhaust emissions. Advancing timing increases power up to a point where it drops off rapidly. However, over-advanced timing also raises NO_x emissions, so timing, where adjustable, should be set to stock specs.

Diesel Emission Controls

Diesel engines have different exhaust emissions than gas engines, the main difference being that all-too-familiar black smoke many emit, which contains soot composed mainly of carbon particles, known as particulate matter (PM). Particulates have been found to be harmful to lungs and therefore are being regulated on new vehicles. For many years, diesel-engine emissions were basically unregulated. That has all changed, as methods of exhaust "scrubbing" have been developed. Engines have also been modified to reduce emissions. High-pressure com-



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mon-rail fuel-injection systems atomize fuel more effectively, which allows more complete combustion. Bosch has systems up to 2,500 bar (36,260 psi) that very effectively vaporize the fuel.

A diesel engine's air intake is unthrottled, so more air is available and CO emissions aren't generally a problem. With the advent of turbochargers and high-pressure injection, unburned HCs are less of a problem, too. That leaves NO_x, which is controlled with EGR within the engine, and PM, both of which are further reduced by downstream exhaust after treatment.

Diesel Particulate Filters

Diesel particulate filters (DPF) were introduced to capture the tiny soot particles in the exhaust. Under ideal conditions, DPFs trap from 85 percent to almost 100 percent of the soot. When the filter is full, many DPFs burn away soot buildup from fuel and motor oil by operating a special fuel injector in the exhaust, upstream of the filter.

This process converts soot to ash and is known as filter regeneration. Cleaning may also be required to remove ash deposits.

Regeneration occurs at higher speeds, and vehicles driven mainly in city traffic may need periodic highway trips to clean the DPF. Ignoring the regeneration warning light and not driving above 40 miles per hour may render the DPF unusable. Some newer diesels activate parked regeneration, operating the engine at around 1,400 RPM while parked, to increase exhaust temperature. Owners should avoid parking in dry grass, which may ignite due to the heat of the exhaust system components.

SCR Systems

Selective catalytic reduction (SCR) systems are the latest and most effective practical technology in vehicular use for controlling harmful diesel exhaust emissions. SCR injects a liquid-reductant chemical mixture of urea, known as diesel exhaust fluid

(DEF), through a special catalyst into the diesel's exhaust just upstream of the DPF and SCR units. DEF is a nontoxic fluid made from purified water and aqueous urea. It is rapidly broken down to produce the oxidizing ammonia needed in the exhaust stream.

SCR's chemical process is known as reduction, where the DEF reducing agent reacts with NO_x, assisted by the catalyst, to convert pollutants into nitrogen, water and tiny amounts of CO₂, which are all naturally occurring in air. These gases are then emitted from the tailpipe. SCR can achieve NO_x reductions up to 90 percent. Ultra-low-sulfur diesel (ULSD) fuel was introduced to make DPF and SCR systems last longer and work more effectively.

SCR catalyst internals are made from ceramic materials such as titanium oxide, and their active catalytic components are typically base-metal oxides such as vanadium, molybdenum and tungsten, zeolites or various precious metals. Two common SCR

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designs are honeycomb and plate types. Plate catalysts have less backpressure and are less likely to plug up than honeycomb units, but plate designs are larger and costlier.

DEF is required by the SCR system and must always be in its storage tank. Low DEF triggers a series of visual and audible warnings to the driver. Once the tank reaches nearly empty, power may be reduced, and the starter may even lock out the next time an engine start is attempted.

Proper storage of DEF is required to prevent the liquid from freezing at temperatures below 12 degrees F, and most DEF systems have heating devices. The in-vehicle tanks are designed to withstand freezing.

DEF also has a limited life. According to a 2014 Ram service bulletin, the fluid degrades to the point where it will be less effective and may trigger a trouble code and illuminate the Check Engine light much more rapidly in hot weather. The bulletin lists

approximate shelf life as 36 months at 50 degrees F, 18 months at 77 degrees, 12 months at 86 degrees, six months at 95 degrees and only two months at 104 degrees. The bulletin also warns that DEF should not be placed or stored in steel (except stainless), aluminum or brass, as it will rapidly corrode and may damage the SCR system.

The DEF tank filler opening has a blue cap and is designed so a diesel fuel nozzle won't fit, to ensure that only DEF is introduced. DEF is available in various sizes and types of containers from filling stations, truck stops, dealerships and auto-parts stores. Buying DEF in bulk from a pump at truck stops is one of the least expensive and convenient options. A handy DEF locator can be found online at www.finddef.com.

An in-tank sensor can detect the proper fluid chemistry and prevents users from adding water instead of DEF. Emissions systems have a number of self-checks that can detect tampering, removing or disabling of components.

Smog Tests

Passing smog tests is a concern for vehicle owners in many areas that require them. The engine and exhaust system must be in good operating condition, and it's wise to perform any scheduled maintenance or do any needed repairs before going for a test.

Ensure that the Check Engine light is off and correct any problems ahead of time, then put miles on the vehicle to reset the monitors. Make sure you have fresh, good quality fuel of the right type. Take the vehicle out for a test drive on the highway and, if possible, load it down on a long upgrade and run it hard to clear out any soot and carbon deposits. Schedule the test so that you can drive in and run the test while the exhaust is still hot, as this can improve results.

The Future

Emission regulations are bound to get even stricter in the future, as manufacturers develop more hybrid, fuel-cell and electric vehicles. 🚗

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CO ALARM SOUNDING

Q We are having a problem with the carbon monoxide (CO) detector's alarm sounding in our fifth-wheel when using our Onan generator. This happens when staying overnight at rest areas and truck stops when the three slides are in and not sealed tightly, as they are when fully open. Could that explain why exhaust from the generator, or from trucks parked next to us, could be entering our RV and setting off the alarm?

When the slides are closed, you can see golf-ball-size gaps to the outside, especially in the corners of the kitchen and living area. Is that normal to have these gaps, and, if so, how do we combat this, other than by not using our generator?

Elaine Schneider, via email

A First, I want to start out by saying that CO alarms should be taken very seriously. CO is a silent killer that can cause you to fall asleep and never wake up. It comes from incomplete combustion, whether it is from a furnace, generator or other engine source. Whenever an alarm is set off, you should open the windows immedi-

ately, and if the alarm doesn't stop sounding, exit the RV until you find the source of the CO. This is not something you want to take any chances with.

A quick check for the source is to run the generator at home with no one in the RV and the slides in, to see if the alarm goes off. If so, have the exhaust system of the generator inspected for leaks or damage.

In any case, it's not normal to see golf-ball-size gaps in the slideout-room seals. Those seals are supposed to keep out rainwater, bugs and the like. Have a service technician inspect your slideouts for proper function and suggest a remedy for those gaps.

Sealing the trailer properly should prevent CO from your RV's generator or idling trucks from entering.

— **Ken Freund**



RAM INTEGRATED BRAKE CONTROLLER

Q I have a 2014 Keystone Outback 32-foot travel trailer, and I am currently pulling it with a 2015 Ram 2500 4x4. Before I got the Ram, I was pulling this trailer with a 2013 Ford F-150. While pulling with the F-150 and an aftermarket trailer-brake controller, the trailer brakes were excellent. If I cranked up the gain on the controller, I could nearly lock the trailer brakes, if desired. Since using the Ram with its integrated brake controller, the trailer's brakes are almost nil, even when set to the maximum braking power.

I have taken it back to the dealer, who says it is working properly. I tried

it on another new 2015 Ram with the same result. I have adjusted the brakes on the trailer twice to the point where they are almost dragging. When I step on the brake pedal, I can hear the trailer brakes engage, but they only drag slightly. I am ready to try installing an aftermarket brake controller but am concerned that it may affect the computer in the truck in some manner.

I talked to another RVer last summer who was pulling a fifth-wheel trailer with a 2014 Ram, and he had no problems with the brakes.

W.F. Andrews, Gaston, South Carolina

A This is a known problem with the integrated brake controllers. Many

of the problems are due to the fact that they were not set up properly initially.

Before giving up on it, go through the Settings menu using the electronic vehicle information center (EVIC) system buttons on the steering wheel. Scroll down to System Setup and scroll right to select it, scroll down to Trailer Brake Control and scroll right to select it, then go through the options to select the appropriate one. This is described in the owner's manual.

After it's set up for the correct type of brakes and the weight of the trailer, you can fine-tune the gain settings on the controller. To optimize the trailer's braking performance, try starting with a gain of 5.0 to 6.0, and go up or down from there as required. — **K.F.**

THE TECH TEAM



KEN FREUND: Ken is a former ASE Certified Master Technician, service manager and shop owner who has authored numerous books on automotive repair.



JEFF JOHNSTON: Jeff served as technical director of *Trailer Life* for 20 years and has been an RV enthusiast, mechanic and writer since he could hold a wrench.

WINTERIZING WOES

Q We have a 2012 Cruiser RV Fun Finder 265RBSS that we tried winterizing per the manufacturer's directives. The suggested method was to fill

the freshwater tank with RV antifreeze and draw the fluid into the plumbing with the water pump.

After dumping 9 gallons of antifreeze into the tank, I still couldn't draw fluid. So after pulling down part of the underbelly pan and exposing the freshwater tank, I could see that the fluid level was below the tank pickup port. After calling the manufacturer, I was told to use the siphon port on the pump, which worked well and used only 1 gallon to winterize the necessary lines.

Now my question is, how do I flush the antifreeze from the freshwater tank without drilling a hole in the tank bottom to drain it?

Robert Northrup, via email

A There should be a drain valve at the lowest point (low-point drain), and you should be able to recover most of the antifreeze from there and save it for later. Otherwise, you might be able to siphon most of it out with a tube going in through the opening for the water pickup. It may help to park on a slope that moves the water to the side. After recovering as much antifreeze as possible, fill the tank with water and flush it. Then refill with water and a box of baking soda to freshen the system, and drain and flush again with fresh water.

The freshwater supply port is supposed to be at the lowest point on the tank. I'd take the trailer to a dealer's service center and see if they can correct it. At the very least, they can install a T-fitting in the low-point drain port and draw the freshwater from there. Not being able to use 9 gallons of your fresh tank is crazy. — **K.F.**

BATTERY DISCHARGE

Q I have a 2015 Cougar XLite 28SGS fifth-wheel with an auto-leveling system. Even with the battery switch in the off position, the leveling system has power. If the trailer sits for a month without being plugged in, the battery goes dead. I changed to a different battery with the same results. Is this normal?

Alan Layman, Toledo, Ohio

A Apparently, on some trailers, including yours, they wire them that way. If there is a draw, and it makes one battery go dead, then installing another and having that go dead would indicate it's not a faulty battery.

It shouldn't be too difficult to modify the 12-volt DC wiring somewhat to change where the leveling system picks up its power. Follow the heavy cable from the control unit back to the power panel and the battery-disconnect switch terminals. With the battery disconnected, remove the cable that powers the jacks and connect it to the side of the disconnect relay that has power only when it's on. Make sure there is circuit protection. If you are not familiar with wiring, an RV electrician should be able to do it. — **K.F.**

TOYOTA TOWING

Q We are looking for a trailer to tow behind our 2008 Toyota Tacoma Double Cab shortbed with the 4.0-liter engine, the towing package and the TRD Off-Road package. The tow rating is 6,500 pounds. The dry weights of the trailers we are looking at are between 4,200 and 4,800 pounds, and they have electric brakes and a hitch-to-bumper length of 25 feet. The extra trailer weight I would add (clothes, food, camping gear) would be less than 500 pounds.

I live in Georgia and do not have any high mountains nearby, though my wife and I would like to travel out West in the trailer we select. Can you give any thoughts on how to know if my truck can handle such a weight?

George Adkins, Augusta, Georgia

A Before going any further, you need to look at the placard on the trailer that lists the gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR). This is the weight that you should be using to determine if you are within limits, in cases where you can't weigh the trailer on a scale fully loaded and ready for travel.

Dry weight does not include water, which can be very heavy, or batteries, cargo, etc. A manufacturer's "dry"



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weight often doesn't include optional equipment, which can get a lot of people into overloading trouble. That being said, if you find a trailer with a GVWR of 6,500 pounds or less, you'll be fine. — K.F.

TIRE FAILURES — HELP!

Q I have had three travel trailer tires fail recently. I need new tires. What manufacturer should I trust?

Tim Hebert, Columbus, Indiana

A There's a little more to it than that. It would be helpful to determine why the tires failed in the first place before doing anything else. You didn't mention what kind of RV you have, how old it and the tires are, how heavily the RV was loaded, and so on.

Refer to my "RV Tires 101" article in the December 2015 issue, and check the manufacturing date on the remaining tire and spare, if you don't have the failed tires. They may have failed due to age and deterioration.

Weigh the RV when it's fully loaded and determine how much weight is carried by the tires. Compare that to the ratings on the existing tires. Usually, the tires have sufficient ratings but may have been run underinflated at some point.

Check with your RVing friends and choose a name brand, and ask the dealer where the tires are made first. Most trailer tires are imported — it's gotten to be nearly impossible to find any made in the United States. I also suggest checking axle alignment and adding a tire-pressure monitoring system. — K.F.

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BENT-AXLE BLUES

Q We have a 2015 Keystone Summerland travel trailer. On a recent trip, I noticed unusual tire wear on the rear axle. I took the trailer to Camping World, and the mechanic thought the problem was a bent axle. Keystone refuses to honor the warranty, saying the leaf springs are flat because the trailer was overloaded.

I took the trailer fully loaded to the

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While every effort is made to maintain accuracy and completeness, last-minute changes may occasionally result in omissions or errors.

scales, and the axle weight was 5,700 pounds. The axles are rated at 3,500 pounds each; we were 1,300 pounds under the gross axle weight rating (GAWR). Have other trailer owners had a similar problem? What can we do to correct this?

Robert Hartnell, Zephyrhills, Florida

A We've heard from a number of trailer owners about bent-axle problems. If just one axle is bent, it's quite likely that the axle was bent from curb or pothole damage.

If the axle was bent from severe overloading, it should be bent on both ends in such a way that the tops of the wheels lean inward, which would indicate overloading. However, if that were the case, then both axles should be bent the same way, as the suspension distributes the weight. Therefore, while I don't buy into the manufacturer's argument, I do suspect that the axle was bent by a cause that isn't considered a warrantable claim. A bent spindle might also be the problem.

As a possible cure, there are specialty suspension shops that can adjust solid axles that are bent the wrong way. This is a highly specialized skill, so you'll probably need to look around a while and perhaps drive a few miles to find such a shop, but they may save you considerable cash with a repair instead of an axle replacement. — **K.F.**

MORE GAS-ENGINE TOWING

In response to John Giller's "Fifth-Wheel Towing with Gas" letter and your reply in the December 2015 RV Clinic about towing with a 6-liter V-8, I have been towing with my 2015 GMC 2500 6-liter V-8 since December 2014. It has a 4.10:1 axle ratio and does a great job. I have a 31-foot Komfort double-slide that weighs around 10,500 pounds, loaded. I live in Oregon and travel a lot of hills with no problems at all.

Jim Blasi, Winchester, Oregon

Gasoline-powered vehicles are good tow vehicles, Jim, as long as the operator doesn't overload the vehicle or

use it in a manner that is not consistent with its design. The diesel-use question comes into play when towing extra-large and heavy trailers, in which case a diesel may be the best option. In some cases, it's the only option, once the trailer's weight surpasses a gas-powered truck's maximum tow rating. — **Jeff Johnston**

TRAILER BATTERY DEPLETION

Q My husband and I have a 2012 Holiday Rambler Aluma-Lite 218RD trailer. There seems to be an electrical problem. A typical scenario is this: we charge the trailer at home and then take a four-hour trip. Our destination does not have hookups. About three hours after our arrival, the battery level is less than 50 percent. We use our generator, which brings it back up. By the next morning, the batteries are completely drained.

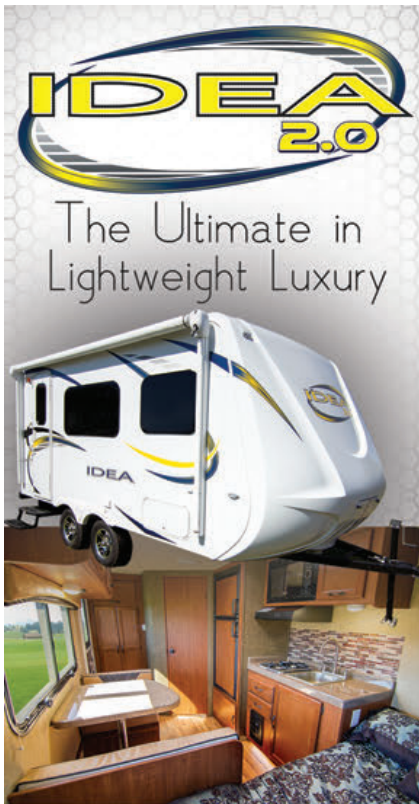
We have two 12-volt batteries that have been checked by three different service people. We feel that we must have something draining the batteries, but we don't know how to find out what it is. Can you give us some suggestions?

Judy Hodges, via email

A This question comes up a lot in RV Clinic, Judy, and a look through some back issues will reveal others with the same type of problem. Checking the answers may help you as well.

The best things to check first are all electrical connections, to look for damage or corrosion. Have your trailer's charger tested for proper output, because if it's defective, it can never fully charge the batteries. Have the batteries checked by a professional battery technician to test for a dead cell, as that can draw down the rest of the good cells.

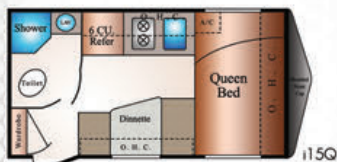
Finally, with all interior 12-volt-powered devices turned off, add an ammeter to the circuit at one of the batteries, and then have someone pull one fuse at a time until you see a change in the current draw. That can help you narrow down the source of any extra current drain. — **J.J.**



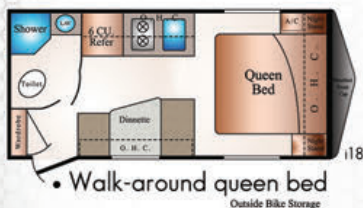
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END-CAP ENCORE

Q I've read previous RV Clinic questions on oxidizing end caps, including the letters in *Trailer Life's* November 2015 and January 2016 issues. I have a 2012 Cedar Creek fifth-wheel and have tried everything to get the front cap to shine. I have spent hundreds of dollars on products to restore the shine, and have buffed, polished, waxed and even purchased a dual-action polisher to help, but nothing works. Now I have a surplus of product that I will never use.

Any more ideas?

Terry Wilding, Belle River, Ontario

I read with interest the January RV Clinic Q&A, "End Caps Revisited," concerning Keystone Outback end caps. I have a 2013 Outback Terrain 299T. I took delivery in May 2013, and by April 2015 the finished surface seemed to have "melted" off the cap. In this case there is nothing left but what appears to be gray primer.

The dealer and I both have contacted Keystone with negative results. I even included photos so Keystone could see the damage. I'm at a loss as to how to proceed, but it appears that I am not alone with this issue.

Thanks for bringing this issue to the RVing folks.

Jim Panter, Memphis, Tennessee

Our 2013 Cruiser RV Fun Finder also has an oxidizing issue, as do all the others I have seen in campsites and on dealers' lots. We bought our RV new and have washed and waxed it religiously, in addition to covering it when we were not camping; the end caps still oxidized. Fun Finder won't admit to any defects or even answer our questions.

Terry Rohde, Watkins, Colorado

A Unfortunately, as you've all discovered, once the fiberglass and gel-coat have dulled and oxidized, there's not much you can do to bring them back. It's a shame that it happened after just two or three years of use.

The best thing you can do is have the end cap, or caps, repainted by a shop familiar with fiberglass RV work. Well cared for, the paint should last a long time. With luck, the manufacturer can still supply you with replacement decal graphics, as needed, although you might have them painted on for better longevity. — J.J.

JERKY FIFTH-WHEEL RIDE

Q I have a 2013 Wildcat 31-foot fifth-wheel attached to a 2012 Ford F-250 Super Duty shortbed. With the shortbed, the dealer installed a roller fifth-wheel hitch. After several trips, I'm tired of the jerky, seesaw ride.

Should I change the fifth-wheel hitch in the bed to a better-quality roller type, or can I just change the pin box to an aftermarket one for the nice ride my wife and I need? I'm not crazy about always rolling the bed hitch forward and back.

Tim Smith, Pflugerville, Texas

A The easy answer here is to use a SuperGlide automated sliding hitch by PullRite. This hitch is designed to automatically move back in the truck bed when you turn, and it slides back to towing position when you straighten out. This hitch is a tried-and-proven product with a great track record.

That takes care of the manual hitch-movement hassle. As for the jerky ride, there are several different fifth-wheel-hitch pin boxes with

The best thing you can do is have the end cap, or caps, repainted by a shop familiar with fiberglass RV work. Well cared for, the paint should last a long time.

suspensions that can help smooth the truck-to-trailer impact reaction. Many of these new models simply bolt on in place of your current pin box. An RV-accessory shop can handle that work for you and can also make brand recommendations. An Internet search will turn up a variety of options that can help smooth your towing. — J.J.

RV MATTRESS ACCESS

Q We are in the market for a new king-size RV mattress to replace our old one. Do you have any suggestions on where to shop? We normally spend five or six months a year traveling in our RV.

Bert Troxler, Metairie, Louisiana

A The best place to start is with an Internet search, Bert. A number of websites carry RV mattresses, including www.campingworld.com and www.mattressinsider.com. The latter can even create custom mattresses to suit your specific needs.

For additional information, Chris Hemer's "Sweet Dreams" article in the June 2014 issue covers replacement RV mattresses and where to get them. — J.J.

GENERATOR PURCHASE

Q We have a 2015 Jayco 27RLS travel trailer, and we want to buy a generator to power it. I have read that I should use an inverter generator instead of a standard generator to protect the electronics in the trailer. Is this true? Or can I use a standard generator with a good surge protector?

What size generator do you recommend? My wife wants to be able to run the air conditioning when dry-camping.

Ron Gay, Caroga Lake, New York

A Yes, an inverter-style generator is best for protecting electronic devices. A surge protector won't provide the same type of protection. To run an air conditioner along with a few other accessories, you should look for a generator in the 3,000-watt range — or more, if you want (continued on page 81)



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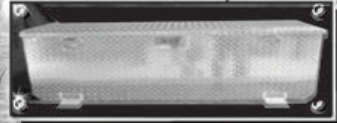
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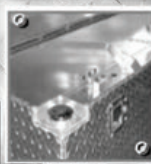
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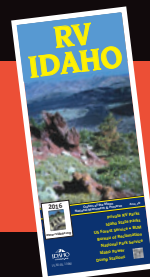
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(continued from page 77)

extra power capacity. The 3-kilowatt will do the job, though, as long as you don't get greedy with high-amp-draw devices. — J.J.

FIFTH-WHEEL HITCH SELECTION

Q I am moving up from a travel trailer to my first fifth-wheel. In the process of researching fifth-wheel hitches, I came across the Andersen Ultimate Fifth-Wheel Connection. It seems to have many advantages to a conventional fifth-wheel hitch — light weight, no grease, nice ride, according to many who have it, and easy to put into and remove from the truck. I was wondering if you have seen it or plan a review of it?

Ron Callahan, Bartlett, Illinois

A We haven't done any reviews of that hitch, but it looks fairly simple, being a ball-mount on a fifth-wheel hitch base. This hitch will call for a gooseneck-style agricultural or commercial ball mount on the trailer, so that's going to need to be an aftermarket item that your dealer can install.

All things being equal, the ride will be the same for this hitch as with a conventional fifth-wheel hitch because both are solid hitch-to-truck mounts with no cushioning, so we're puzzled about how the improved ride quality comes in.

As for the "no grease" part, as stated on the manufacturer's website, you may want to rethink that. There are very few devices with metal-to-metal moving parts that don't need to be lubricated. If you want the hardware to have a long, functional service life, lubrication will indeed be part of the plan. — J.J. 🚚

HAVE A QUESTION? » Email our experts at rvclinic@trailerlife.com or write to RV Clinic, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Include your full name and hometown. Selected letters will be answered in the magazine, but time does not permit individual replies. No phone calls, please.

Skipping Stones

A 30-minute ferry ride across the waters where Green Bay and Lake Michigan connect docks at a geological marvel



Reading my notes made during a week in northern Wisconsin, I hunted for some structure among scribbled bits of conversations. Unfortunately, randomness was the rule — like meeting Tom Wilson.

It was June. I was riding the car ferry that runs between Washington Island and the northern tip of the Door

Peninsula, where the waters of Green Bay meet the open waters of Lake Michigan. It's a 30-minute ferry ride across this "treacherous" strait, known to French explorers and local Indians as Death's Door. Supposedly, the bottom here is scattered with shipwrecks. It was sudden changes in weather that did them in, big ships and canoes alike.

Even now, they have times when they can't run the ferry, but it's rare. A deckhand told me, "It's not that we cannot handle weather, it's the icing down in the winter that can be a problem. We get water freezing on the deck and cars sliding around on the ice ... not good," he said.

The ferry makes 21 round-trips a day in the summer; in the winter, it makes two.

When I am on a ship that's under way, I can never settle in as a passenger, even on a ferry. I usually head for the wheelhouse to visit the skipper. So far, they have always been welcoming and gracious. One time, on a tour boat that operates out of Knoxville on the Tennessee River, the skipper gave me the wheel, saying that if I could navigate an RV across the country, I could probably get his \$2 million ship safely between the bridge stanchions ahead. The correlation escaped me, but I did it.

So, headed for Washington Island, I was in the wheelhouse of the *Arni J. Richter*, a four-season boat known as the "ice breaker," where I met Tom Wilson. He is a dentist. He was sitting in what I would call the captain's chair, looking relaxed and comfortable, as if he belonged there. The captain, Bill Jorgenson, was at the helm.

Tom rides the ferry every Tuesday and Thursday — he's been doing it for years. When the ferry gets to the island, his first patient of the day is there to meet him, and they drive to Tom's office. At the end of the day, his last patient



(Top) Cars wait to board the ferry to Washington Island across the strait known as Death's Door that connects Green Bay and Lake Michigan. (Above) Skipping stones on the island's pebble-covered Schoolhouse Beach is a favorite pastime.

takes him back to the ferry. The rest of the week, Tom attends to patients in his office on the peninsula.

Tom told me that Washington Island is about 35 square miles and has more than 100 miles of paved roads. Many tourists bring their cars on the ferry, and bikes and mopeds can be rented. The island has 710 full-time residents, and that number swells to a couple thousand during the summer. The campground here has 100 sites for tents and RVs, and is open from May through October.

Arriving at the island, Captain Jorgenson eased the ferry into its slip. Tom and I disembarked and headed our separate ways. He was off to fight tooth decay. I took his advice and joined the sightseeing tour, the Cherry Train, one of two open-air trams that tour the island for 90 minutes a couple of times a day, more frequently on weekends. I learned some island history and heard a couple of legends.

We visited Schoolhouse Beach, nature's answer to those who complain about sand in their shoes. It's actually a geological marvel, and it is said that there are only five beaches like it in the world. It is made up of millions of white limestone rocks, the largest about the size of a hockey puck, with the edges rounded off — perfect for skipping. Over the centuries, nature has polished them so they are uniformly smooth.

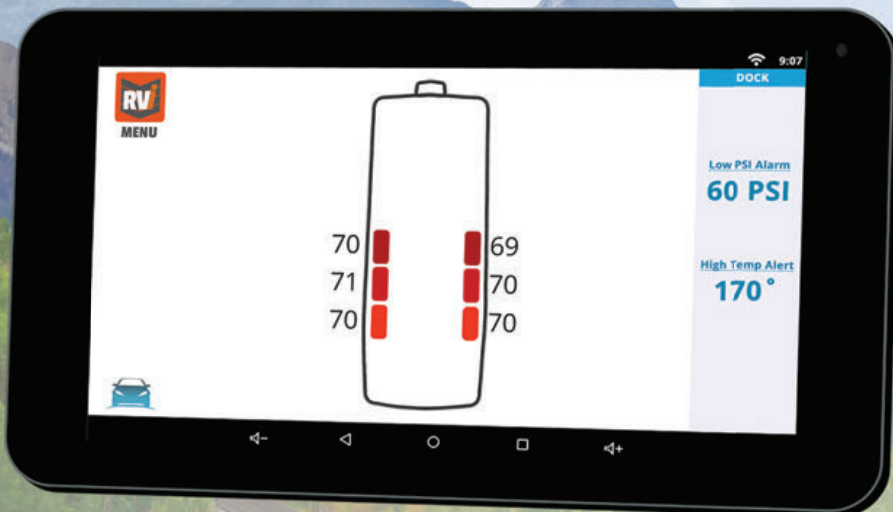
People have walked off with so many of these rocks that a sign is now posted asking people not to do that.

Welcome to America's Outback. 📡

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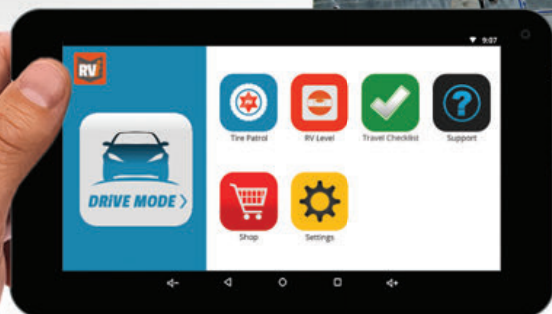
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