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TRAILER LIFE

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AUGUST 2014



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- Schoodic Peninsula, Maine
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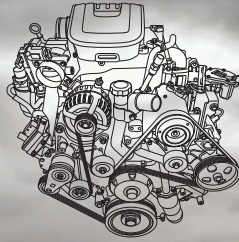
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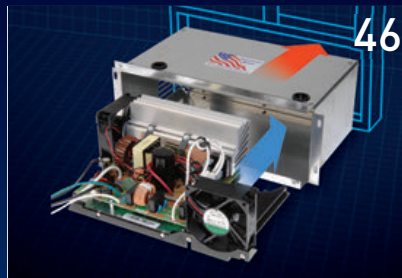




34



44



46

FEATURES

18 Follow the Sun to British Columbia

From Saltery Bay to Desolation Sound, far-western Canada's Sunshine Coast welcomes RVers to spectacular scenic beaches, ancient forests and 280 sunny days a year

24 Montana's Ghost Towns: From Boom to Bust and Back

Leave the modern world behind in a couple of Wild West gold-mining communities where you can almost hear each building whisper its secrets

34 Spaced Out in Huntsville

Southern hospitality awaits in this north Alabama city that houses many of the state's antebellum homes and America's most extensive rocket collection

39 GoldRush Durango Klondike

This new bath-and-a-half fifth-wheel from KZ RV promises greater flexibility for entertaining and long-term travel

44 Arctic Fox 27-5L

Northwood Manufacturing delivers stout construction and a long list of amenities with its half-ton towable Silver Fox Edition fifth-wheel

46 Power Up

Converters are designed to provide 12-volt DC current and charge batteries — but not all are created equal

51 Home Alone

Preparing your house before leaving in your RV



Tin Hat Hut is the halfway point of the Sunshine Coast Trail and offers a 360-degree view of rugged mountains and the Powell River backcountry. Page 18

DEPARTMENTS

6 Driver's Seat

Knowing How Things Work

8 Letters

Readers respond loud and clear

12 Around the Bend

News, events, places and trends

16 RV Resolutions

Trailer Life is your referee

56 New Products

Goodies to improve the RV lifestyle

58 Performance Corner

Tech, accessories and news

61 Hands On

ThunderWorks ThunderShirt for pets

62 RV Clinic

Answers from the *Trailer Life* tech team

70 10-Minute Tech

Now why didn't I think of that?

74 America's Outback

Branson, Missouri



≡ Element of surprise — two new trailers from EverGreen and two more on the way. Page 13

On the cover: The KZ GoldRush fifth-wheel and 2014 Ford F-350 prepare for fun on the California coast. Photo by Scott Hirko

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Knowing How Things Work

A little knowledge can make a big difference when we're on the road



With the summer travel season in full swing, we're relying on our RVs to take us to our favorite destinations and provide all the comforts of home without interruption. RVs are not inherently perfect because of the complexity of multiple systems that must work under extreme conditions (read: rough roads and lots of bouncing around). While I've said this before, it bears repeating: RVs must be serviced regularly to maintain system integrity — and knowing how things work will give you a leg up over troubleshooting woes.

Case in point: the battery charging system. Everyone knows that RVs use batteries to power the 12-volt DC electrical system, but it's surprising how many owners have no clue how they get charged. When surveying owners, we discovered that they typically know there's a "contraption somewhere" that charges the battery when plugged into 120-volt AC power but are usually unaware that most onboard converter/chargers are not designed to keep batteries conditioned properly.

As you'll ascertain in the article "Power Up" on page 46, standard fare converters provide only a float charge. If you never camp unhooked, you'll likely not be bothered by batteries that are damaged by sulfation — a process that limits battery capability.

But if you want to have ultimate versatility—and use your RV independently of hookups — you'll be happy to learn that modern multistage charging leads to better battery efficiency and increased longevity. Without battery power, things like the refrigerator, furnace, water pump and lights will cease to operate — deal breakers when trying to enjoy a trip.

Keeping our rigs in tiptop shape while on the road is only part of the equation; securing our stationary homes is equally as important. While technology has made it easier to monitor our possessions, there are a number of basic (or old-fashioned) things that can be done to make our stationary homes look lived in while we're away. The article "Home Alone" on page 51 has some sound advice combining modern technology and common sense. The bottom line: Smartphones are incredibly useful as communication devices that keep tabs on our homes, but having a neighbor or friend physically check the premises is also a vital part of the process.

Changing gears, literally, take a look at Performance Corner on page 58. The right axle ratio can make a big difference in towing efficiency, but you have to strike a balance between good solo mileage and getting up the hill first.

It's all part of knowing how things work. 🚐

— Bob Livingston, publisher

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COME UP AND SEE ME SOMETIME

Vaudeville and movie star of the 1930s Mae West, born August 17, 1893, had a custom-made chauffeur-driven housecar. It's on display at the RV/MH Hall of Fame in Elkhart, Indiana.

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TrailManor Fervor

As owners of a TrailManor camping trailer and subscribers to your magazine, we would like to thank you for featuring the 2417 Sport in your June issue. It is a great trailer. For a non-canvas RV and easy towing, you can't beat it!

Perhaps the best feature is the online TrailManor Owner's Forum where owners exchange information, modifications they have done and problem solving. It is a terrific resource.

Linda Worden and Dennis Ketcham
Hudson Valley, New York

Thank you for featuring the TrailManor on your June cover and in your magazine. I own a 2010 model 2619 and love it.

Karen Anderson, via email

We are new TrailManor owners (model 2417) and love it! Thank you to author Chris Hemer for sharing the great advantages of TrailManor with the world. It is efficient to tow because of low fuel consumption, easy to park in a residential garage and has tremendous interior living space. Bravo!

Peter Howe, Keene, New Hampshire

Unusual Trailers

In your June *Letters* column, Mr. Wilcox mentioned Safari Condo Alto trailers. They are very well made (in Canada) and should be selling down here in my opinion. Check out the website (www.safaricondo.com).

Secondly, regarding Chris Hemer's test of the TrailManor 2417KS Sport, he states, "The low counter height takes some getting used to while preparing meals and such, but those who appreciate the versatile nature of a trailer like this one shouldn't be bothered by this." We owned an Aliner trailer for two years that also featured low cabinets to accommodate its fold-up status. My wife is 5 feet 1 inch tall, and we never got used to the backache those cabinets

Happy Campers

I was pleased to see Kristopher Bunker's article on the Rockwood Windjammer in the May issue. My wife and I own a 2012 model that is close to identical to the one tested. We have the dinette, rather than the table and chairs. I would say that the vinyl recliners are well worth the extra cost, but otherwise I agree with most of the article. It is a very comfortable trailer for two and an occasional guest. It has ample storage and tows beautifully behind our Ram pickup.

Al Bruenger, Oakley, Kansas



gave us twice a day while cooking and cleaning. We loved our Aliner, but if it weren't for the airbed we slept on, we would have sold it sooner.

Dallen Bounds, Olympia, Washington

Yukon Integrated Brake Control

In the article on the Hopkins inSight Flex-Mount brake control in the June issue, it's mentioned that you were not aware of any SUVs that come with a factory-installed brake controller. Our 2015 GMC Yukon does have an excellent integrated brake control.

Curtis Colleen, Waterford, Michigan

Trailers for Two

Per R.J. Harper's letter asking about trailers for two in the June issue, take a look at Cruiser RV. I have the 21-foot ViewFinder with a slide, a front bath and a queen bed. The slide holds the couch, and the table is a foldup, which I don't use. If there are two of you, I would use TV trays. There is storage under the couch and, if I remember correctly, under the queen bed. I special ordered quad bunks for my

grandkids. You may order the front kitchen if you want a smaller bath.

I have a Chevy 1500 with a 5.3-liter gas engine and have been out West and East. Last summer there were five of us on a trip to Washington, D.C. for a week. It was a little tight, but we made it, no problem.

The only change I would make is to have the convection/microwave rather than the LP-gas cooktop and oven. The front bath is 60 square feet, and there is a 32-inch walk-in shower and plenty of storage.

Charlotte Day, Little Rock, Arkansas

In R.J. Harper's letter, he asks for more articles on trailers in the 20-foot range. My wife and I found a gently used 18-foot Skyline with a queen bed with access on both sides — so we don't have to crawl over each other for that midnight run. The dinette is small but comfortable for two people. The trailer weighs only 2,700 pounds dry, and we pull it with our midsize SUV. A local dealer told us that when they get a used trailer this size, it lasts only a day on the lot. **(continued on page 11)**



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LETTERS

(continued from page 9) Our biggest gripe was that the cabinets had no dividing shelves, which I've since added. We also added plastic bins to the cabinets so we can utilize every inch of storage back in the hard-to-reach corners.

Dave Carter, Phoenix, Arizona

Good Night's Sleep

Chris Hemer's article on RV mattresses in the June issue was good for a chuckle. We always feel lucky when we hear people complain about the bad beds in their campers. Back in 2003 when we purchased our new Sunline T-280SR, it came with a full-size 60- x 80-inch queen mattress from Page Bedding Company of Johnstown, Pennsylvania (www.pagebedding.com). It's an innerspring mattress and the most comfortable bed we own.

Last year, while camping in Pennsylvania, we drove over to Johnstown and bought a mattress and box spring from the company to use at home. The new bedding has a layer of foam for

extra cushioning and provides a great night's sleep. Page Bedding offers gel and pillow-top mattresses, and there's a separate website for RV products.

We hope everyone can get the same happy snoozing. We love *Trailer Life*!
Mark Woodworth, Westminster, Maryland

Enjoyed the article on RV mattresses.

We've been using a Select Comfort (Sleep Number) mattress since 2000. It's a queen-size with two air chambers, fits the bed platform and is the most comfortable place to sleep either of us have ever had.

The air pump was placed comfortably inside the lift-up bed platform for underbed storage, and we drilled two holes for the tubes connecting the pump and the mattresses. We can each control the firmness of our sides of the bed by using a battery-operated remote that comes with the mattress.

The only drawback is that you must deflate the mattress when climbing in altitude, otherwise you risk a large "pop" and will be looking for a new mattress. We've been everywhere from Alaska to Texas and deflate the bed when climbing mountains.

Jo Ann Soden, Pahump, Nevada

Great Advice

In your May issue, there was a *10-Minute Tech* tip from Jack Bell regarding homemade stabilizers made from 2x4s and ratcheting tie-downs. It looked promising, and I already had everything except for the eyebolts, so I made a set. They really worked! The only things I added were some scraps of plywood between the 2x4 and the ground. Total investment was about \$4, and it took about 90 percent of the movement out of the travel trailer.

Lee Davern, Duluth, Minnesota 🚐

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The Quiet Side of Acadia

Maine's tranquil Schoodic Peninsula delights visitors with cobblestone beaches, tide pools, wildlife and hiking trails

article and photos by Paula Loehr

RVers revere the grand state of Maine for its evergreen forests, crystal-clear lakes, blueberry fields, climbable mountains, iconic moose population and fresh-caught lobster. Among the top travel destinations is Acadia National Park, headquartered "Downeast" in Bar Harbor. Acadia is a 40,000-acre preserve covering a splendid stretch of seacoast and offshore islands.

The Schoodic Peninsula, Acadia's only mainland-based section, is an easy hour's drive north of Bar Harbor. Schoodic delights visitors with the same sorts of cobblestone beaches, pink granite cliffs, churning ocean and pine trees that attract throngs of summer tourists to the bustling Mount Desert Island portion of the park near Bar Harbor. On the Schoodic Peninsula, you can revel in spectacular views of Frenchman Bay, drop a fishing line from the floating pier at Frazer Point's picnic area or hike a marked trail to the top of Schoodic Head, all without fending off crowds.

The one-way loop drive around the peninsula renders sightings of soaring ospreys and peregrine falcons. Land-based critters such as red fox, white-tailed deer and chipmunks also live at Schoodic. We were lucky enough to spot a prickly porcupine lumbering along.

You can count on seeing misty offshore islands, a classic lighthouse or two and plucky seagulls sporting bright white and gray plumage. The 6-mile loop is suitable for cycling as well as driving. Convenient turnouts offer ample opportunities for sightseeing and photo ops.

The road at the southern end of the peninsula accommodates two-way traffic moving to and from Schoodic Point, where thundering ocean waves pound full force against rock walls. On horizontal granite slabs leading to the Atlantic Ocean, you can explore the tide pools.

Plan to visit the picture-perfect village of Winter Harbor where you can sample a bowl of chowder

or buy berries and maple syrup at the seasonal farmer's market. The area's annual Lobster Festival falls on August 9 this year (www.acadia-schoodic.org/lobster-festival).

Local galleries feature oil paintings and watercolor workshops. At the Winter Harbor 5&10, pick up a carved wooden shorebird or lobster lollipop. From mid-June through the last Saturday in September, you can board a passenger ferry for a cruise to Bar Harbor.

On Schoodic's outskirts, freshwater lakes and ponds are ideal for swimming, paddling, fishing and wildlife watching.

At Winter Harbor's MainStay Cottages and RV Park, enjoy the view of Henry Cove from the comfort of a full-hookup campsite (207-963-5561, www.mainstaycottages-rvpark.com).

Schoodic Chamber of Commerce

www.acadia-schoodic.org



In Your Element

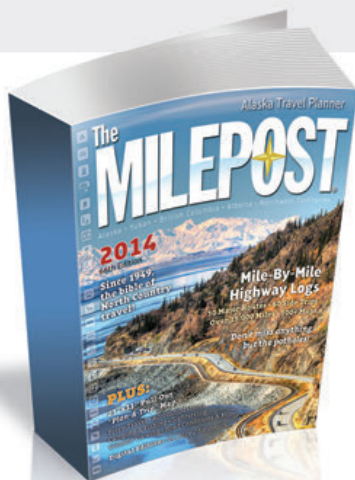
EverGreen RV has introduced two new floorplans for the Element towable line for 2015, with plans for two more on the way. The company calls the travel trailer “a fusion of classic American design and the latest in automotive aerodynamics.” The dual-slide Element has a light-weight DuraLite double-welded aluminum structure and an aerodynamic exterior designed for improved fuel economy. The trailer also features a spread-axle design, Equa-Flex suspension, automotive-grade aluminum wheels and upgraded radial tires.

The 29-foot 9-inch 26RBSS’s dry weight is 5,950 pounds, and it has an 8,795-pound gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR). The larger 31-foot 11-inch 28RLSS’s dry weight is 6,453 pounds and it has an 8,795-pound GVWR. It has a wrap-around sofa at the back. Both models have a 56-gallon freshwater tank, 30-gallon gray- and blackwater tanks, and 14-gallon LP-gas capacities. Inside, the Element has Corian countertops, an island kitchen, residential-style upholstered furniture, ceiling



crown molding, AM/FM/CD/DVD stereo and a lift-up 60- x 80-inch queen bed with gas struts and storage. In the bathroom is a 4-foot fiberglass shower/tub with a seat and a hand sprayer. Two neutral decor choices are available, Selenium and Tungsten. Base MSRP for the 26RBSS is \$36,242 and \$38,500 for the 28RLSS.

EverGreen Recreational Vehicles, 574-825-4298
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Alaska Travel Guide

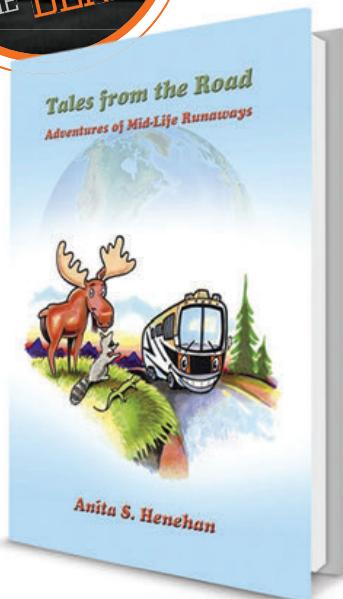
The 2014 edition of *The Milepost*, Alaska’s quintessential travel guide, is packed with 752 pages of information. Included are details on everything from the Alaska Highway system to cruising the Inside Passage. *The Milepost* includes 30 major mile-by-mile routes, Alaska Marine Highway Ferry schedules and a Trip Itineraries section in the back of the book. Researched information on roads and highways, lodging, recreation, services and attractions are included, as well as guidance on Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon and the Northwest Territories. If you’re heading to Alaska, the annually updated *Milepost* offers a wealth of valuable knowledge. Available for \$34.95 at www.themilepost.com.

Recreation Enhancement

The American Recreation Coalition (ARC) testified before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources on reauthorization of legislation that allows federal agencies to collect and retain entrance and recreation fees. Under existing provisions, fees generate more than \$300 million annually to support federal recreation programs.

“We celebrate the marvelous shared legacy of our Great Outdoors — one in three acres of the surface of the nation managed by federal agencies and hosting well in excess of a billion recreation visits annually,” Derrick Crandall, ARC president, told the panel. Crandall noted that tight budgets made recreation fees even more important to federal agencies, but inadequate communications by the agencies and failure to set up convenient and cost-effective fee programs have lessened support by recreationists. ARC’s testimony urged new outreach efforts by federal agencies.

“Americans gain little from great places that are invisible to them. And much of the great outdoors is not on the radar screens of younger, more urban and more diverse Americans. Greatly improved websites, use of social media and a redirected www.recreation.gov can help us deal with federal site visitations that have lagged far behind population growth,” ARC’s spokesperson said.



RV Adventures of Runaways

Ever think about selling everything and hitting the road in your RV? Author Anita Henehan and her husband did just that and have been traveling the United States for more than 10 years. Henehan has documented their full-time adventures that started in a fifth-wheel trailer they named Merrily We Roll Along. She writes about the difficulty in parting with their stuff, including furniture and sentimental knick-knacks, and then the freedom of being able to go just about anywhere without having to be on a time frame. The point of leaving a stationary home was that they wanted the flexibility of living in an RV and being able to spend more time with loved ones — without being in the way as guests who overstay their welcome. She offers advice on becoming a full-time RVer and handling details like setting up a mail-forwarding service. Henehan has written two books that cover the couple's wacky adventures, interesting places to visit, campground recommendations and anecdotes from other RVers. *How to Run Away from Home After 50* and *Tales from the Road: Adventures of Mid-Life Runaways* are available on amazon.com starting at \$9.99 for the Kindle edition and \$15 for the paperback, and at Henehan's website, www.rvtravelswithanita.com.

NEWSWIRE



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RV CAMPING

Campsites to be Built in Xiamen

Experts are expecting a surge in RV-related business in the Chinese city of Xiamen on the Taiwan Strait. The RV lifestyle has been popular in the United States and Europe and is on the rise in China as well. Other cities in the country have been building more campsites, and now with Dayun RV Campsite, the first RV campground in Xiamen, enthusiasm is so high that plans are in the works for five more RV parks to be launched within the next two years. Cai Wensheng, secretary general of Xiamen RV and Camping Association said, "More people are choosing to explore the countryside and hit the roads with recreational vehicles — a home on wheels. The idea of packing bags and heading out for wherever the road leads is the latest trend among many outdoor enthusiasts."



RV FLOORING

Dyna Span's Milestone

Affiliated Resources, a supplier to the RV industry, recently reached a milestone with its Dyna Span subflooring. A spokesperson for the company said that in the past 12 years 500,000 RVs have been built with Dyna Span without a single floor failure. Designed and manufactured specifically for the RV industry, the flooring is produced in one-piece jumbo panels in sizes up to 102 inches wide and 289 inches long. Installed properly, the flooring carries a 25-year limited warranty against delamination, glue bond failure and manufacturing defects to the first owner of record. The flooring is claimed to provide superior racking strength and impact load resistance. Canada-based Tolko produces Dyna Span from sustainably managed forest certified to the ISO 14001 Environmental Management System. 🚚

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EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

Lube-Pump Limbo

When a Florida RVer's lube-pump alarm kept sounding off, even after he made the recommended repairs, he turned to *RV Resolutions* for help:

► In March 2012, I purchased a Remco lube pump and base plate to tow my 2010 Chrysler Town & Country. Everything worked fine on my initial trip to Connecticut, but on the return trip to Florida and every trip since, the alarm has gone off, even though there's no problem with the lubrication system.

I did everything to fix the problem that Remco's technicians told me to do, including changing all the parts and having the wiring checked by an electrician and an RV tech. I asked Remco if they would compensate me for the money I spent trying to fix the problem. I haven't heard back and have since bought a dolly for towing the minivan.

Can *RV Resolutions* help me get some type of reimbursement from Remco?

Ronald Kimball, Nalcrest, Florida



After *RV Resolutions* contacted Remco Industries on Ronald Kimball's behalf, we received a favorable response from a representative in the company's sales and technical support division:

Remco Industries received the information your publication provided in regard to the claim by Mr. Ronald Kimball. After reviewing the claim, our management staff decided to issue a check to Mr. Kimball in the amount of \$1,500. We contacted Mr. Kimball about this sum, and he agreed that it is fair. We appreciate *Trailer Life* bringing this issue to our attention.

Drew Cohoon, Remco Industries
Alexandria, Minnesota

No Prior Approval

After a recommended repair shop couldn't fix a Michigan reader's stranded fifth-wheel, he had the work performed by a mobile service, thinking his extended warranty provider had approved the repair. When that turned out not to be the case, he asked *RV Resolutions* to intervene:

► I had a wheel bearing burn out near Lexington, Kentucky, on October 14, 2013. I contacted AAA road service, and the repairman who arrived stated the damage was more than his shop could handle and that it was unsafe to move my RV. He referred me to Thorough Truck, a mobile service that could perform the repairs onsite.

When the Thorough Truck repairmen brought the parts, I explained that they needed to contact Dimension Service Corporation (DSC), my extended warranty company, prior to any work being done. They stated that they did not deal with any kind of warranty. I then contacted DSC directly and explained my situation, and they instructed me to write up a brief explanation of what happened

and send it along with the receipts.

A month later, I received a letter stating that my claim was denied because it wasn't preauthorized.

Bert Wilkinson, Ann Arbor, Michigan

RV Resolutions sent a petition to Bert Wilkinson's extended warranty company and received the following reply from DSC's legal counsel:

In reviewing the specific details of his claim, it appears DSC correctly relied upon the individual terms of Mr. Wilkinson's contract in grounding their reasons for his claim being denied. However, when DSC once again reviewed his inquiry based particularly upon the totality of the circumstance that he faced, initially being stranded and dealing with a recommended repair facility that would not assist him with having his claim authorized prior

to the commencement of the repairs, those circumstances have caused their decision to be reconsidered and reversed. As a result, DSC will be sending him a check for the repairs in compliance with the terms of his service contract.

Peter Knolla
Dimension Service Corporation
Dublin, Ohio

After receiving a check for \$895.12 from DSC, Wilkinson and his wife, Sandy, sent *RV Resolutions* the following thank-you note:

► We wish to say thank you, thank you, thank you for your help with a dispute that we were unable to resolve. *RV Resolutions* is such a wonderful service that has the ability to intervene on behalf of the consumer.

Bert and Sandy Wilkinson 🚐

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 *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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FOLLOW THE SUN TO BRITISH COLUMBIA

From Saltery Bay to Desolation Sound, far-western Canada's Sunshine Coast welcomes RVers to spectacular scenic beaches, ancient forests and 280 sunny days a year

article by **Larry MacDonald**



Hoofing it up the Sunshine Coast Trail to Tin Hat Hut pays off with a 360-degree view of the Powell River backcountry. (Right) Pack your hiking boots to traverse the entire 112-mile trail or explore a short stretch.



PHOTOS BY JEREMY WILLIAMS

No question about it, RVers love sunshine. It's the primary reason so many Northerners head south during winter, including Canadians like us. Since U.S. regulations limit Canadians' south-of-the-border time to six months, many of us like to return to our home country to spend summer in our favorite locales.

Each region has its own special allure, from the majestic Canadian Rockies to the windswept prairies and the craggy coastlines of the Maritimes. My wife, Sandy, and I, full-time RVers for the past six years, have chosen the Upper Sunshine Coast of British Columbia as our personal favorite — not because the sun shines brightly for 280 days a year, although there's that, to be sure. This hidden treasure offers so much more than just blue skies and a comfortable climate.

British Columbia's 100-mile coastline north of Vancouver, known as the Sunshine Coast, is divided into two geographical regions, the Lower and Upper Coasts. To get to the more northerly Upper Sunshine Coast, board one of the BC Ferries at Horseshoe Bay in West Vancouver for a scenic cruise to Langdale. Then follow Highway 101 along the Lower Sunshine Coast to Earls Cove, where you'll board a ferry for another spectacular cruise to Saltery Bay.

You're now on the Upper Sunshine Coast, total travel time about four hours. From there, a half-hour's drive takes you to the town of Powell River — called the Pearl of the Sunshine Coast, and rightly so. RVers can also reach Powell River by boarding a ferry to Vancouver Island, driving north along the island's idyllic eastern shore and taking a ferry from Comox across the Strait of Georgia.

Part of Powell River's appeal, in addition to its remoteness, is its natural beauty, seaside ambience and the friendly folks who call it home. If you travel with a destination in mind, put this increasingly popular gem on your must-visit list.

POWELL RIVER TOWNSITE

Thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans in 1792, this area of coastal British Columbia was home to the Tla'amin First Nation, whose rich heritage continues today, evidenced by totem poles, native art and an active indigenous community. A generous supply of old-growth forests and a deep-water harbor provided the impetus for establishing a lumber and paper mill here in 1908. In its heyday, the facility was the largest pulp and paper mill in the world.

Standardized housing in this



PHOTO COURTESY SUNSHINE COAST TOURISM

At the northern terminus of Highway 101, on the far end of the Sunshine Coast, the village of Lund serves as a watery gateway to Desolation Sound. (Right) Boardwalks, bridges and crushed limestone make the Inland Lake Trail accessible by cyclists, hikers and wheelchairs.



PHOTO BY JEREMY WILLIAMS

planned community was made available to the initial employees in a grid fashion on the nearby hillside. Stateries homes for managers overlooked the mill and Georgia Strait. Recreational venues were constructed, including a baseball diamond, golf course, tennis courts, a lawn bowling green and the Patricia Theatre, which, according to the Townsite Heritage Society, is the oldest operating movie theater in Canada.

The self-guided walking tour of this recently declared National Historic District is a step back in time. All of the nearly 400 buildings have maintained their early 20th-century character.

Some, such as the Old Courthouse Inn and Rodmay Heritage Hotel, display artifacts and antiques recalling days gone by.

Today, most of Powell River's 15,000 residents live in several adjacent communities, separated from the initial townsite by a magnificent forest. The mill itself is now devoted exclusively to papermaking and currently employs fewer than 400 workers.

Although attempts have been made to diversify the local economy, Powell River has become more of a retirement haven, especially for those who enjoy

outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, boating and fishing. But it is also a haven for artists, musicians and craftsmen, as well as a venue for joyful festivals celebrating such regional themes as blackberries and prawns.

HIKING AND BIKING

Stop by the Powell River Visitor Centre at 4760 Joyce Avenue to pick up information on local activities as well as a map of hiking trails, many of which are suitable for mountain biking. If you enjoy hiking through wooded glens, here are a few we recommend, all well maintained and easily accessible.

From Willingdon Beach Campsite (see "Camping on the Upper Sunshine Coast" on the opposite page), a level trail leads north along the shoreline through a forest of gigantic western red cedar, Douglas fir and broad leaf maple. Interpretative signs and a variety of early logging machines, including a steam-powered winch called a steam



Ferry Tales

From West Vancouver's Horseshoe Bay, a ferry transports RVs and RVers to Langdale on the Lower Sunshine Coast. From Comox on Vancouver Island, another ferry travels to Powell River on the Upper Sunshine Coast. BC Ferries, 888-223-3779 www.bcferries.com

CAMPING ON THE UPPER SUNSHINE COAST

The 35 miles of Highway 101 between Saltery Bay and Lund has at least a half-dozen commercial RV campgrounds and a handful of provincial and regional parks suitable for RVs. Reservations are highly recommended during July, August and holiday weekends.

Garnet Rock Oceanside Resort, Powell River

A favorite campground of ours is Garnet Rock Oceanside Resort, 10 minutes south of downtown Powell River. Beautifully landscaped grounds incorporate full-service sites that back onto Malaspina Strait, a busy waterway for marine traffic and wildlife. Be sure to check out Wispy Trail, a circuitous path that leads from the campground through towering trees and waist-high ferns, marked by neatly arranged rocks and squirrel feeders. Golfers appreciate the 18-hole Myrtle Point Golf Course, just a nine-iron away. 604-487-9535, www.garnetrockrv.com

Inland Lake Provincial Park, Powell River

Part of the BC Parks system, the Inland Lake campground has 22 tree-shaded campsites available on a first-come, first-served basis. www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks

Kent's Beach Cabins and Campsites, Powell River

True to its name, this place is right on the beach. It has both dry campsites and sites with partial hookups, a washroom with hot showers and a laundry room. 604-487-9386, www.kentsbeach.com

Okeover Arm Provincial Park, Powell River

Located 4 miles southeast of Lund, this small rustic campground is within walking distance of one of our favorite restaurants, the Laughing Oyster (604-483-9775, www.laughingoyster.ca), offering fine dining and captivating views of Okeover Inlet. www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks

Western Canada's only National Historic District, Powell River showcases hundreds of buildings from the town's 1910 master plan.

Saltery Bay Provincial Park, Saltery Bay

On Mermaid Cove, this provincial campground offers 42 RV sites under a forested canopy. 800-689-9025, www.discovercamping.ca

Seabreeze Resort, Powell River

An easy stroll from the shore, Seabreeze provides full-hookup RV sites, free Wi-Fi, a laundry room and washrooms. 604-487-9534, www.seabreezeresortbc.com

SunLund by-the-Sea, Lund

The only RV park in the village of Lund, SunLund has 35 slideout-friendly RV sites with full hookups and free Wi-Fi. 604-483-9220, www.sunlund.ca

Willingdon Beach Campsite, Powell River

Another one of our favorite RV parks, Willingdon Beach offers sites with full and partial hookups in a natural setting. Here you can back your rig next to a sandy beach and enjoy magenta sunsets silhouetting the ragged snowcapped mountains of Vancouver Island. Porpoises, seals and whales can be observed in the Georgia Strait, while bald eagles and seabirds soar overhead. In the fall, schools of salmon return from the ocean to spawn in two freshwater streams that flow through the campground. Quaint shops, art galleries, ethnic eateries, miniature golf, a bowling alley and two museums related to forestry and local history are only a short walk from the campground. 604-485-2242, www.willingdonbeach.ca

Y-Knot Camp and Charter, Powell River

On the banks of Okeover Inlet, 4 miles southeast of Lund, Y-Knot offers rustic campsites. 604-483-3243, www.yknot.ca



PHOTO BY LARRY MACDONALD



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SUNSHINE COAST



Tandem paddling on the deep waters of Desolation Sound Marine Provincial Park, renowned for its scenery and sunsets.

donkey, are located alongside the trail.

After a kilometer or so — that's about two-thirds of a mile for you Americans — the trail branches off onto a gravel road leading down to a staging area for the mill. Here a string of five World War II ships linked end to end provides temporary refuge for barges of wood chips used to make pulp for papermaking. Cavorting sea lions can often be seen lounging on a log boom or rock breakwater, bellowing for available mates.

Directly across the highway from Willingdon Beach, several trails meander uphill under a mature forest canopy to the town's recreation complex, which offers various activities to the public, including swimming, exercise classes, pickleball, weightlifting and theatrical productions.

A short drive past the curling rink is the trailhead for a mostly uphill hike to Valentine Mountain with overlooks of the mill and Georgia Strait on the front side and Powell Lake on the backside. If you enjoy geocaching, a well-hidden cache can be found partway up the trail. And if you're really into geocaching, about 50 caches are hidden within a few miles of Powell River.

Inland Lake, a short drive from the city, has a wheelchair-accessible trail that circles the lake, with several picnic areas and swimming beaches along the way. This scenic 8-mile trail is popular with bikers and hikers and well worth the 4-mile drive on a gravel

road to get there.

For serious hikers, the 112-mile Sunshine Coast Trail begins at Salter Bay and traverses a variety of landscapes from sparkling lakes and streams to coastal shorelines and mountain peaks, terminating north of the hamlet of Lund. Shelters and huts in strategic locations, together with some bed-and-breakfast inns, are available so hikers don't have to carry tents. For us less ambitious folks, portions of the trail are easily accessible for day hikes.

BOATING AND FISHING

Powell River has two marinas, and Lund, just 20 miles to the north, has another. Scenic dinner cruises to Desolation Sound Marine Provincial Park can be taken out of Lund, as can guided raft and kayak tours to experience the marine life and remote splendor of coastal British Columbia.

If you prefer to explore on your own, kayaks and canoes can be rented in both Lund and Powell River. If qualified, you can even charter a sailboat or power yacht out of Powell River for extended cruising. Houseboats may be rented near the mill on pristine Powell Lake, which has more than 180 miles of shoreline with scenic coves, verdant mountains, waterfalls and streams — it's a little like RVing but on the water.

If you enjoy fishing, many of the nearby lakes provide anglers with an opportunity to catch rainbow or cutthroat trout. Several outfitters in Powell River rent boats with outboards, or you may wish to cast a fly in one of the many streams downhill from the lakes. If you're thinking salmon, cod, crab or prawns, several companies provide seaworthy boats and knowledgeable guides to ensure your dinner includes fresh seafood.

ARTS AND CULTURE

Be sure to stop by Powell River's Open Air Market, a lively weekend spot selling locally grown produce, baked goods, honey, soap, crafts and a variety of original handcrafted items. If you're looking for that perfect painting,

weaving, carving, piece of pottery or printed T-shirt, duck into one of several galleries in Powell River or Lund.

If you visit in late summer, don't miss the Blackberry Festival (August 15, 2014) with fireworks and all things made from local blackberries, and the Sunshine Music Festival (August 30 through 31, 2014), with entertainment styles from rock to blues to reggae.

And, of course, there are lots of cultural events planned in various

Sunshine Coast communities all year long. For a full list of regional events, visit www.sunshinecoastcanada.com. A fellow who had moved to Powell River a few years ago told me: "I attend more activities here in a month than I did in Vancouver in a year!"

Whether you like to laze about and enjoy the scenery or get out and explore, the choices are plentiful on the Upper Sunshine Coast, our favorite place to spend the summer. 🚐

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MONTANA'S GHOST TOWNS FROM BOOM TO

Leave the modern world behind in a couple of Wild West gold-mining

The California Gold Rush that began in 1848 is famous as a time when a young America was mad for gold and many from the Eastern states suddenly jumped up and headed West in hopes of quick riches and, with some luck, lasting prosperity. Impressive as the California Gold Rush was, however, it was not the only place in the Union where gold was discovered and where legions of people flocked in the mid-1800s. Montana was the scene of another huge gold rush that came 15 years later.

If you are looking for a fun family road trip into America's Old West, where the frenzied thrills of gold prospecting, shootouts, brothels and whiskey once ruled the land, a visit to Montana is a must. Just as in California, Montana's 1860's gold rush eventually became a gold bust, and the towns that once flourished and rang with the voices of thousands of miners today stand vacant, quietly whispering the haunting stories of a time long past.

Gold was discovered in Montana in May 1863 by a group of prospectors who were following the Yellowstone River in their search for gold. While camped by Alder Creek, as they retreated from the Crow Indians, whose hunting

grounds they had crossed, this group unexpectedly struck gold in a big way. Who can keep a secret like that? After they returned to Bannack — but before they had a chance to lay full claim — the news got out. Returning to their site in Alder Gulch a few days later, they were followed by 200 people!

Like the gold-rush towns in California, a makeshift town site was set up near the creek, and rules were made for individual gold claims. Miners arrived in droves within 10 days, and after three months 10,000 people were living in tents and huts along the creek.

But unlike the California Gold Rush, Montana's gold rush started during the Civil War. Although miners poured

into the region from all over the world, including huge numbers from China, most of the miners were rebels from the Southern states. Suddenly having so many Southerners setting up residence in a Northern state made President Lincoln uneasy, so he sent in miners from the North. This resulted in huge tensions in the town, and the new Fourteen Mile City that stretched along Alder Creek quickly became one of the most lawless places in the West.

All this history makes a perfect backdrop for exploring Virginia City and Nevada City in southwestern Montana, two living history ghost towns that stand side by side near Alder Creek today. They are just two hours by car from Yellowstone National Park. We spent several days in the area and were delighted to be able to wander through the original log houses and mercantile buildings that made up these two communities, imagining how life was lived here 150 years ago.

Virginia City is the larger town of



(Far left) At this gold dredge in Nevada City, a conveyor lifted buckets of dirt to be sifted for gold. (Left) Looking across a schoolhouse classroom to the tiny teacher's quarters visible beyond the doorway. (Right) A Nevada City street lined with historic buildings was moved here from other parts of Montana.

BUST AND BACK

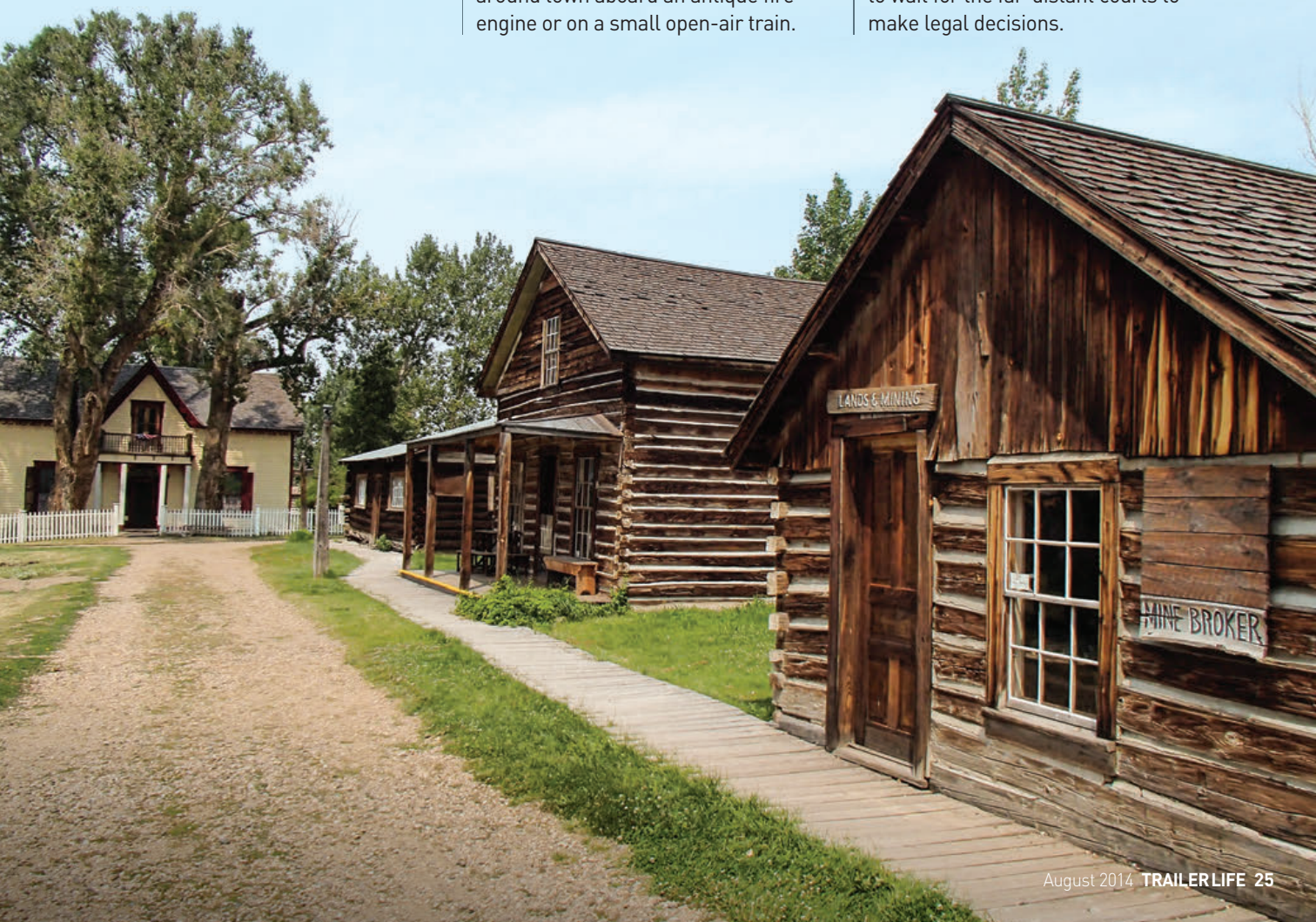
communities where you can almost hear each building whisper its secrets

the two. It was originally named Verina in honor of Varina Davis, the wife of Jefferson Davis and the Confederate States' first (and only) First Lady. The judge who registered the town was a Northern sympathizer, however, and he renamed it Virginia City when he entered the city in the official record books. Of course, that name choice was

a little ironic at the time, as the state of Virginia had seceded from the union two years earlier.

Today, Virginia City has a main street and several blocks of adjacent streets filled with original buildings. It is a wonderful place to enjoy a stroll, take photos, savor a meal at one of several eateries and even take a guided tour around town aboard an antique fire engine or on a small open-air train.

While ambling through town, it is hard to imagine just how quickly the ramshackle tent city in Alder Gulch became established as a true city of homes and businesses. Those first two years, 1863 and '64, were both chaotic and busy. Tempers flared, and scoundrels were on the loose as the population exploded, and no one wanted to wait for the far-distant courts to make legal decisions.



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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Montana Heritage Commission
www.virginiacitymt.com

Montana Post
chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025293/

Nevada City History
www.legendsofamerica.com/mt-nevadacity.html

Virginia City Audio Tour
www.visitmt.com/experiences/audio_tours

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www.virginiacity.com
www.legendsofamerica.com/mt-virginiacity.html

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 866-682-5272, www.ennisrv.com
 Mountain-view RV sites from \$27 to \$35. Pull-throughs and full hookups with 50-amp service, free Wi-Fi, picnic tables, mobile RV repair, laundry and convenience store. Pets welcome. Located 14 miles from Virginia City.

Southside RV Park
 406-683-2244, www.southsidedrvpark.com
 RV sites for \$38 near Blacktail Creek. Pull-throughs and back-ins with full hookups and 30- and 50-amp service, wide easy-access roads, free Wi-Fi, laundry, picnic tables and DVD library. Located 58 miles from Virginia City.

Virginia City RV Park
 406-843-5493, www.virginiacityrvpark.com
 RV sites from \$33 to \$40. Pull-throughs and full hookups with 30- and 50-amp service, free Wi-Fi, cabins, picnic tables. Pets welcome. Just 1/2 mile from Virginia City.

The rural and quiet road through Virginia City is far safer and better than when earlier gold miners made the trek in the 1860s.

One George Ives shot and killed a popular Dutch man, Nicholas Thiebalt, while trying to rob him of his gold and mules. This heinous act resulted in an immediate three-day trial held by the locals. Within an hour of conviction, the murderer was hanging at the end of a rope tied to a 40-foot pole rammed through the window of an unfinished building, in front of 2,000 people. This swift justice launched an era of lynchings carried out by a group calling themselves the Montana Vigilantes.

The region had originally been part of the Dakota Territory and briefly became a part of the Idaho Territory at the start of the gold rush. Just a year later, in August 1864, the lines were drawn for the Montana Territory, and a year later in 1865, Virginia City became Montana Territory's capital.

As we walked around town, we came across the building for the *Montana Post* newspaper. This is hardly an imposing corporate office by today's standards, but the proud sign atop its walls, the big windows and impressive front doors reveal the importance this newspaper had in its day. Peering inside, we could imagine the hustle and

bustle that went on in the pressrooms in the 1860s.

The *Montana Post* was established just four months after the Montana Territory was formed, and it chronicled the events of this part of the Wild West for nine years. It was a vital news outlet in its time, as this area was the most populated place between Minneapolis and San Francisco. However, just as Virginia City's size and influence didn't last when the gold rush moved on to Helena after a few years, the *Montana Post* was replaced by *The Madisonian* when it began publication in 1873.

Closer to RV campers' hearts, Virginia City was made the administrative site for Yellowstone National Park when it was designated the first national park in 1872. For us, wandering through the tiny antique buildings around town, and standing on the creaky, wide plank floors while ducking through the impossibly short doorways, this little historical note made the National Park System's rustic beginnings all the more real.

Today, the national parks are awe-inspiring and stunning, with gracious visitor centers and all the familiar com-

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MONTANA'S GHOST TOWNS



(Above) An antique firetruck takes visitors on tours of Virginia City. (Right) The Virginia City Courthouse lights up at night. (Bottom right) Train tours are a fun way to see the sights of America's Wild West.



mercialism that reflect our modern, technology-driven society. However, none of that existed when the most gorgeous parcels of our raw landscapes were set aside to become our national parks in the late 1800s. What great fortune for us today that the leaders of that bygone era had the forethought to preserve those natural treasures.

Just a mile-and-a-half down the road, historic Nevada City offers another glimpse of life in the early days of the Montana Territory. It's an easy bike ride from Virginia City, or you can drive or take a fun narrow-gauge train ride to get there. Both cities are loaded with photo ops, and everyone around town wields a camera or camera phone. The towns are a bit touristy, but they are so engaging it doesn't matter.

How did these two little neighboring historic towns end up with so many well-preserved buildings? Everything here today is available for the public to enjoy, courtesy of the hard work and philanthropy of Charles and Sue Bovey. Charles was the heir to the General Mills fortune, and he and his wife had a deep interest in Montana's history. They began buying historic buildings in the 1940s, and in 1944 they established the Historic Landmark Society. In 1977 the Bovey family sold the more-than-400

buildings that make up Virginia City and Nevada City to the Montana Legislature which, in turn, established the Montana Heritage Commission that manages the two sites today.

The Boveys began buying the buildings in Virginia City because, as the Great Depression deepened in the 1930s, the town had reached a low point in its history and was deteriorating. Rather than see these classic pieces of American history crumble to dust, the Boveys methodically purchased one building after another until they owned most of Virginia City. At the same time, they began buying other historic buildings all over Montana and moving them to where Nevada City once stood.

Such is the way with ghost towns: they flourish one day and die off the next. The gold in Alder Gulch was in the riverbed, and after the initial gold rush extracted all the gold that was easy to find by panning in the early years, dredges were brought in to float down the river and sift more deeply through the gravelly riverbed. Virginia City had

already lost its luster after only six years when its population fell to just 100 people and the gold rush moved on to Helena.

However, there was still some gold left, and from 1889 to 1922 the dredges that were brought in grew ever larger, digging ever deeper and wider along the riverbed and leaving ever-bigger piles of "tailings" behind. The biggest dredges left scars on the landscape that are still visible today.

Nevada City and many other towns along Alder Creek were essentially plowed under by the dredges. Virginia City was spared because it hadn't been built directly on the riverbank. Over the years, whenever gold prices were high, the region would see a mild resurgence, and then as prices fell, the dredges would fall silent again.

So today, Virginia City is still largely intact, the way it was a century ago, with about 100 historic buildings out of 227 in town. In contrast, Nevada City (which charges a small entrance fee) has only 14 original buildings along with 100 other buildings that the Boveys brought in from elsewhere. Together, the two cities contain the largest public collection of historic buildings in the United States.

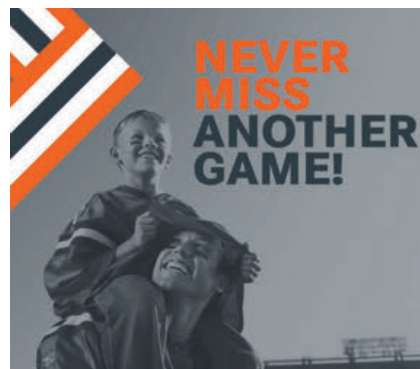
Not all the buildings are authentic antiques, however. Back in the 1950s, once the Boveys had acquired most of Virginia City, they opened the historic buildings to tourists and began operating the town as an open-air museum. Of course, such a venture

is not without its commercial side. Needing workers to serve the tourists, they purchased some Army barracks to use as employee housing, set them up on the back streets of town, and decorated the fronts with western facades so they would fit into the town decor. These buildings are fun to wander through.

Tacky as it might seem to bring in barracks and dress them up for workers, the wonderful thing for visitors is that by transforming Virginia City into a museum, tourists can enjoy the buildings at leisure, and there is no charge. As we stood in each building, smelling the old wood and feeling the cramped spaces, it was as if we touched the heart of a precious era in the American West.

Nevada City is laid out the way a town might have been in the 1860s with walking paths between the buildings. I was particularly taken by a tiny boot shop with a doorway just a little taller than me. Anyone taller than about 5 foot 7 inches has to duck to enter this wee building. Surprised by just how small all the houses were, we paced off the outside walls of many and found they often occupied as little as 200 square feet. The early Montana settlers must have been rugged and hardy people to survive and raise families through the long and cold Montana winters in homes that small.

The one-room schoolhouse is similarly enchanting. Virginia City's first schoolhouse opened in 1865, but



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MONTANA'S GHOST TOWNS

the one on display in Nevada City is from another part of Montana. It is just two rooms and has barely enough space in the schoolroom to cram in about 20 students and a teacher. Peering into this room, I could almost feel the strict discipline from the teacher that would have been necessary to keep a group of kids of all ages occupied with their lessons while the great outdoors beckoned just beyond the windows.

The teacher's quarters in the back is barely 12 x 12 feet, and that was all he or she had for living space. The bed, kitchen area, washtub and everything else were all somehow squeezed in. Coming home to our big 350-square-foot fifth-wheel trailer, with its hot and cold running water, ample shower and modern appliances, made us realize how truly palatial our rolling home is in comparison to the early settlers' homes.

Walking down one of the paths in Nevada City, we heard music coming from the inside of a building. Poking our heads in, we saw a technician at a piano with tools spread all around him. He was working on an old player piano, and we had just hit upon the very special Music Hall that houses the largest public collection of automated music machines in North America! Unfortunately, the Music Hall was closed that day so the repairman could do his work.

Meandering down another path, we came across a large building that is home to a massive collection of antique vehicles, from simple hay wagons to sleighs to carriages worthy of transporting Cinderella to the ball. Every conceivable wheeled contraption that can be towed by horse or oxen is on display. Even more fascinating is that the building was once the dining hall at Yellowstone National Park.

Amusing discoveries like these abound in Virginia City and Nevada City, and the area is well worthy of a summer RV trip, especially for travelers heading to Yellowstone National Park. From special events like lantern tours and reenactments to simply wandering and pondering the history that shaped this corner of America, these charming antique cities — or open-air museums — offer something for everyone. 📱

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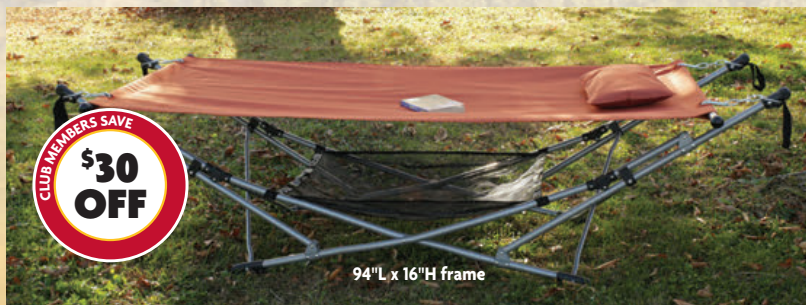
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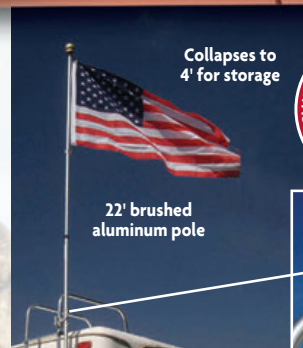
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SPACED OUT IN HUNTSVILLE

article by **Carl Calvert** photos by **Ann Calvert**

Southern hospitality awaits in this north Alabama city that houses many of the state's antebellum homes and America's most extensive rocket collection

Huntsville, Alabama, is well known for its numerous historic sites and down-home attributes. The city's downtown area is rich in Alabama lore, with several historic neighborhood districts, a 150-year-old railroad depot, the oldest hardware store in Alabama, world-class museums and living-history villages. Huntsville is also blessed with colorful botanical gardens, stately houses dating from the 1850s, nature preserves and sanctuaries, recreational lakes and parks, and a full array of visitor sites and services. But the city's shining jewel is something else entirely — and definitely out of this world.

Huntsville's U.S. Space & Rocket Center is a Smithsonian Affiliate and the official visitor center for the Marshall Space Flight Center. Open to the public 361 days of the year, the center

contains more than 1,500 artifacts from America's achievements in space exploration. Visitors can relive the dramatic Space Race by NASA and see a Saturn V rocket — one of only three on display in the world. Guests can also learn about the development and evolution of the space shuttle program and International Space Station (ISS), as well as NASA's latest innovations.

The center houses America's largest rocket collection, along with Apollo spacecraft, a space shuttle replica and a flight simulator. It is also home to Space Camp, where campers age 9 to 18 put their skills to the test as they train to live and work in space. During these weeklong overnight camp programs, young people can take command of their own simulated space missions to the ISS, the moon and

beyond. Lastly, the center also offers IMAX movies, a bus tour to NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center and a number of group programs.

Although the U.S. Space & Rocket Center is definitely the gem of Huntsville's tourist attractions, the city's downtown historic sites are not to be missed. Twickenham Historic District, north and east of Courthouse Square, contains the state's largest collections of antebellum homes, dating from 1841. The Old Town district contains



A space shuttle replica sits proudly in the middle of the U.S. Space & Rocket Center.

federal and Victorian homes, and the Five Points district contains historic bungalows. The railroad runs through the Madison Historic District, and the Huntsville Depot is a restored 1860 passenger depot. Guided tours are offered at the depot, and it also displays Civil War exhibits, period locomotives and other vehicles.

Of special interest is Harrison Brothers Hardware store, the oldest operating hardware store in Alabama. Established in 1879, the store is run by the Historic Huntsville Foundation. Nostalgic items are displayed and sold within the store's antique interior. Other interesting downtown sights include the Huntsville Museum of Art, the Children's History Museum and Maple Hill Cemetery, dating from 1822. Just outside of town, you'll find the Huntsville Botanical Garden, the State Black Archives Museum, the Veterans Memorial Museum, and Burritt on the Mountain, a living history museum on

(Above) Visitors can climb into a Mercury space capsule. (Right) Imagine the power and size of this booster rocket.

the former estate of physician William Burritt that includes a log cabin, a locksmith shop and a church.

For outdoor enthusiasts, the area around Huntsville is rich in recreational opportunities and spectacular scenery. About 35 miles southeast of the city lies Lake Guntersville and its

adjacent state park. The 6,000-acre park offers swimming, boating, tennis, an 18-hole golf course, hiking, a nature center and a campground. Also in the area is DeSoto State Park, with waterfalls and wildflowers; Buck's Pocket State Park, which offers 20 miles of hiking trails; and Cathedral



The U.S. Space & Rocket Center is fun for people of all ages.

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SPACED OUT IN HUNTSVILLE

The Guntersville Museum contains a fascinating collection of memorabilia and offers rotating exhibits.

Caverns, where visitors can take a cave tour or check out a gem mine.

During our visit to this area, we took in the Guntersville Museum and Cultural Center in the town of Guntersville. At the time, the museum was featuring a Wernher von Braun exhibit, a tribute to the scientist often credited as being the father of the modern rocket and a leading pioneer of space flight.

For a totally different experience, be sure to visit the Unclaimed Baggage Center in Scottsboro, a few miles east of Huntsville. Unclaimed Baggage is the only store of its kind. They buy truckloads of lost and unclaimed



airline baggage, then refurbish and sell the contents to the public. At the store, shoppers will find CDs, DVDs, books, designer fashions, fine jewelry, name-brand luggage, digital cameras, sporting goods and more. The store also features a museum of unusual and bizarre items they've unpacked

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256-534-6589, www.alapark.com/montesano/camping

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(Above) Jack Daniel's whiskey is produced at its distillery in Lynchburg, Tennessee, situated in a dry county. (Right) A statue of Daniel stands at the entrance of the spring.



from lost luggage, and it even offers a café for when the shopping experience whets the appetite.

Further afield, a day trip north of Huntsville into Tennessee is well worth the miles to visit a bit of Southern history and tradition — namely, two of Tennessee's most famous whiskey distilleries, Jack Daniel's and George Dickel. The larger and more famous of the two, Jack Daniel's is located in Lynchburg and makes every drop of Jack Daniel's Tennessee Whiskey from spring water on its property. The company has been making whiskey since 1866, and tours of the entire process are offered. Interestingly, Jack Daniel's is located in a dry county, where alcoholic beverages cannot be sold. While the tour is free, for a moderate fee visitors can sample the product under a special agreement by the county.

Nearby, in Tennessee's Coffee County, is the George Dickel Distillery. Located in the small town of Tullahoma, this distillery also offers free tours and a glimpse into its rich history of providing a special brand of Tennessee libation. Unfortunately, no tastings are offered at George Dickel.

Visitors to the Huntsville area can be assured that their time spent in

this part of Alabama will be rich in history, with plenty of sights, sounds and tastes to fill the senses and delight the spirit. And for kids of all ages, the highlight of Huntsville, the U.S. Space & Rocket Center, is definitely a soaring experience. 🚀

RESOURCES

George Dickel Tennessee Whisky Distillery

931-857-3124, extension 230
www.georgedickel.com

Huntsville/Madison County Convention and Visitors Bureau

800-843-0468, 256-551-2230
www.huntsville.org

Jack Daniel's Distillery Visitor Center

931-759-6357, www.jackdaniels.com

Unclaimed Baggage Center

256-259-1525, www.unclaimedbaggage.com

U.S. Space & Rocket Center

800-637-7223, www.rocketcenter.com

article by Chris Hemer photos by Scott Hirko

Going for Gold

KZ RV's new bath-and-a-half Klondike floorplan promises greater flexibility for entertaining

Motorhomes with a guest half bath amidships have been a popular option for many years, as they allow visitors or overnight guests the freedom to use the restroom without traipsing into the master bed/bath area of the coach. The fifth-wheel trailer market has been somewhat sluggish to follow this trend, which seems strange when you consider that fifth-wheels, with their huge living areas, are usually more suitable for entertaining than their motorized counterparts. But KZ RV recently introduced a new floorplan into its GoldRush Durango line that not only has a half bath in the living area but is loaded with features that make it a good value in the competitive midprice fifth-wheel market.

Unlike most companies that use a series of numbers and letters to describe a given floorplan, KZ has given this new floorplan a name: Klondike. At just longer than 40 feet, it's one of the bigger fifth-wheels out there, but with a dry weight of 11,460 pounds and a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 14,500 pounds, it can still be towed by a 2500 series single rear-wheel pickup. It's also competitively base priced at \$58,645, making it an attractive option for those looking to step up on a budget.

Tan is the new white, and KZ follows the trend by finishing the GoldRush in tan gelcoat with graphics, standard aluminum

wheels and frameless tinted windows (which in the test unit were also dual-pane, a desirable and highly recommended \$1,155 option). Not as noticeable but also a nice feature is the standard power patio awning fitted with an LED light strip.

Functionally speaking, the exterior has what you'd expect in a trailer of this size: namely, a huge finished basement storage area and separate, easily accessible compartments for the battery and propane cylinders. The curbside battery door is fitted with controls for the standard four-point leveling system, which is a nice feature, but we wish it were located on the driver's side. Operating the jacks on the passenger's side, then passing between the truck and trailer to get back to the driver's seat (sometimes several times) while hooking up grows tiresome in a hurry. In fairness, KZ isn't the only manufacturer that puts these controls on this side.

The basement storage easily accommodated our trip essentials, but we did notice that the plumbing from the front master bathroom passes directly through this area — so be advised to keep heavy items away from the plumbing to avoid the potential for damage. Fortunately, another compartment at the front of the trailer would be a good place to keep toolboxes and other heavy items within easy reach. The test unit



did have small cutouts in the metal floor for the optional generator prep (\$470). You may need to line it with plywood or other material if you want it to be truly weatherproof.

On the street side of the trailer, the basement storage compartment features a utility center with the front bath black/gray dump handles, as well as clearly marked instructions for plumbing operation depending on the desired function (dry camping with demand water pump, city water supply, black-tank flush, winterizing, etc.). It's a well-executed design, but we wish that the dump valves weren't cable operated. This is probably a concession to the trailer's unusual bath-and-a-half arrangement, but we've found that cables simply aren't as durable or reliable as rods and are harder to fix when they break. In fact, the gray valve in the test unit would not close completely after dumping.

Towing the Durango with our long-term 2014 Ford F-350 Super Duty dually was completely uneventful — the trailer tracked beautifully and never gave us any cause for concern. Some of the credit here goes to the standard Rota-Flex pin box by Trailair, which contributed to the smooth, clunk-free ride.

Setting up at our campsite, we deployed the automatic four-point leveling jacks on decidedly uneven ground. The system did its job in about two minutes and was about ½ inch from perfectly level by our estimation. The front landing jacks on the test unit were equipped with JT's Strong Arm jack stabilizers, which seemed to make a significant improvement to the stability of the

structure as a whole.

If you want to have fun with your RVing friends during setup, ask them to find the control panel with the slideout switches. We looked in all the most sensible locations for several minutes before eventually finding it behind one of the waist-high doors in the galley hutch. The panel is situated between the retracted slides on either side and the kitchen island behind you, so the only way to operate the slide switches is to bend at an awkward sideways angle or wiggle your way between the slides and the island and then squat down. This is far from practical, especially for older users, so we'd definitely like to see the panel relocated to a more user-friendly location.

With the jacks down, the slides out and the patio awning deployed, we were able to take in the trailer's expansive living area. The decor, with its maple-colored cabinetry, contrasting walnut-colored kitchen island and dark brown solid-surface countertops, is pleasing to look at, and we also appreciated the use of wood-look vinyl flooring in the kitchen and dining areas and plush carpet in the living area.

The kitchen is well laid out for the traveling chef, with plenty of prep space on the kitchen island, plus more if you use the sink covers. The stainless-steel sink is generously proportioned, but the faucet with pull-out sprayer, although handsomely designed, is flimsy plastic. The island has doors on either side, though much of the storage space within is occupied by plumbing. There are also electrical outlets at either end,

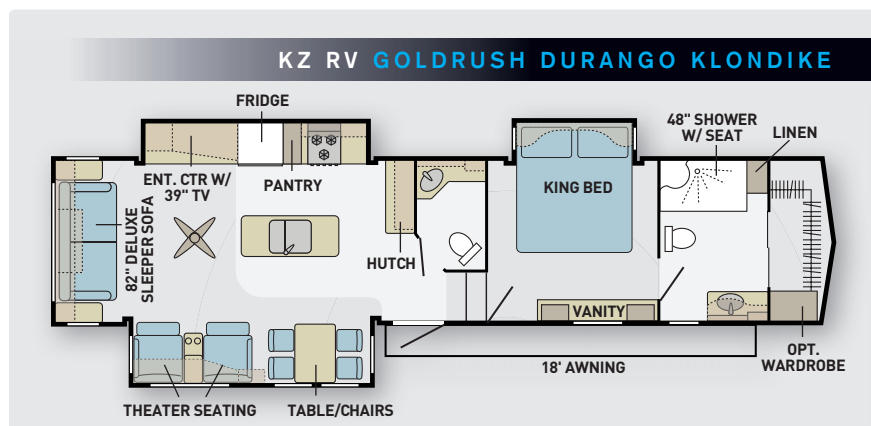


Front master bath features a vanity with a mirror and plenty of room for storage. Space to the right of the vanity is unused — another vanity might make sense here.

and attractive pendant lights above provide plenty of illumination when needed. A towel bar at the forward end is also a nice touch, and there's open storage on the living area end for miscellaneous knickknacks. LED accent lighting beneath the island lends a touch of class.

At the front of the kitchen is the aforementioned hutch with more counter space, plus four drawers and a cabinet. Above this area is a cabinet with decorative frosted glass doors, and beneath it are LED task lights that are controlled by switches mounted in the control panel cabinet. On the street side of the kitchen is a black residential Samsung 18-cubic-foot refrigerator with double doors and a freezer beneath (\$1,840), which cooled quickly and had more than enough room for groceries. Though we obviously had to plug in to keep the fridge running once we arrived at our destination, we found that the trailer's 1,000-watt inverter and a single 12-volt battery (not supplied) kept it cold during travel.

Next to the refrigerator is a cabinet that houses a four-burner Suburban range with a standard oven, utensil drawer and a handy slideout trash receptacle, which we wish more RVs had. Below the oven is another drawer that would be ideal for cookie sheets and frying pans. A black microwave oven of unknown origin was large enough to handle full-size plates of food, and a slideout spice rack made it easy to access the



SPECIFICATIONS

KZ RV GOLDRUSH DURANGO KLONDIKE

Exterior Length	40' 6"
Exterior Width	8' 4"
Exterior Height	12' 11"
Interior Width	8' 1"
Interior Height	8' (living area) 6' 4" (bedroom area)
Construction	Six-sided aluminum framing, 5/8-inch plywood floor decking, 3/8-inch walk-on roof decking, laminated side walls, reflective foil insulation with R-38 value
Freshwater Cap.	67 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	57 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	87 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	12 gal.
Refrigerator	18 cu. ft.
Furnace	35,000 Btu
Air Conditioner (2)	15,000 Btu / 13,500 Btu
Converter	50 amp
Battery	dealer supplied
Tires	ST235/80R16
Suspension	Leaf spring, E-Z Flex equalizer
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full, no supplies or passengers)	12,060 lbs.
Hitch Weight	2,360 lbs.
Axle Weight	9,700 lbs.
GVWR	14,500 lbs.
GAWR (2)	7,000 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	2,440 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$58,645
MSRP, As Tested	\$62,531
Basic Warranty	2-year limited

KZ RV, Inc.

866-472-5460, www.kz-rv.com

Circle 135 on Reader Service Card



Elegant-looking decor in rich brown tones makes for cozy living. The theater seats and couch are very comfy places from which to watch TV in the opposing entertainment center.

spices of our choosing while cooking.

Like most fifth-wheels, the dining area features a freestanding dinette table with an extension and four chairs. With the extension in place, we learned two things: that there was enough room for four average size adults, and that it made the table dangerously lopsided. That's because this table has a single large leg with four feet that simply can't balance the table properly. We suggest that KZ either change the table's design or fit it with a strap or bracket attached to the wall that will keep it balanced when it is extended.

The living area is well executed and comfortable with plenty of storage space. Theater seats on the curbside recline and feature cup holders and a handy compartment that's perfect for snacks, remotes, etc. Both the seats and the rear sofa sleeper are upholstered in very soft, plush material that we found preferable to Ultraleather or even genuine cowhide. The seats were a bit stubborn to deploy completely, but this might be because they were new. Once comfortably reclined, you have an excellent view of the entertainment center, which has some great features. The most noticeable is the 39-inch Hitachi flat-screen LED television, billed as one of the thinnest in the TV biz. Its svelte profile allowed KZ to mount it in

a frame that has a handle on the right side. Pull on it, and the TV swings away to reveal additional storage and satellite connections. It's a pretty slick setup, although the television had an annoying menu along the bottom that displayed the features of the television on rotation, and we couldn't find a way to turn it off, even though KZ supplied the owner's manual. We can't imagine why any television manufacturer would think their customers would want this "feature" built into the product.

Above the television is more storage behind a frosted glass cabinet, and below it is a huge drawer that is perfect for an ambitious DVD collection. To the left of the TV are two more cabinets that would be good for blankets and pillows, and right between them is a Jensen AM/FM/DVD player. We found the entertainment system worked well as a whole; the Jensen unit was easy to use and has controls to switch speaker sound to the living area, bedroom or outside speakers. We didn't have a cable hookup, but popping in a DVD let us experience the surround-sound system, which sounded great to us. We also didn't have occasion to use the optional electric fireplace below the television (\$445) but could imagine how cozy it would be to relax and enjoy this feature during the winter.

The couch at the rear of the trailer

was likewise comfy — for sitting on. It folds out into a bed that, while roomy enough, has a steel support rod underneath that you can feel in the small of your back. It's not a place anyone, except small, lightweight kids, would want to sleep. If you expect guests, invest in a thick memory-foam mattress topper or an air mattress. We'd really like to see KZ, or the furniture manufacturer, make

this sofa bed more comfortable.

On the way to the front bedroom is a door that accesses the guest bathroom. This area has a surprising amount of room, plus generous counter space, a small stainless-steel sink and a porcelain toilet. A large mirror is located above the counter, and to its right is a tall, shallow cabinet with shelves. There's plenty of room for folded towels in the cabinet above the sink, but it might be located too high for shorter users. More storage space is available beneath the sink, but considering this area also contains plumbing, you probably shouldn't put anything here that you wouldn't want to get wet in the event of a leak. The wall has switches for the overhead and countertop lights, but not the fan, which is located way too high for most people to reach. There's also no switch for the water pump, and considering this is the bathroom that you'd use during travel stops, that's a detail that shouldn't have been overlooked.

Up the steps in the bedroom is a king



Kitchen and living areas are well designed and pleasing to the eye. Entertainment center has tons of storage space, and the AM/FM/DVD player is easy to operate. King-size bed comes at the expense of nightstands — a trend we wish would stop.



bed in a streetside slideout. We've said it before and we'll say it again here — we don't understand why manufacturers find it necessary to sacrifice nightstands for a king bed. Either make the room big enough to accommodate a king or leave it a queen with nightstands. The shelf above the bed can work, but try reaching for water or other necessities here in the dark. On the positive side, the

combination inner spring/memory-foam mattress was very comfortable and had underbed storage with gas struts that easily supported the weight of the mattress. Storage for folded clothes is provided by a sort of curio cabinet at the foot of the bed; we wouldn't call it a chest of drawers because it doesn't have any. Instead, there are cabinets on either side of the window, a countertop and



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more cabinets underneath. There are hookups for a television but not enough space for a very big one.

All the way forward is the master bath, which, like the half bath, is surprisingly roomy and equipped with a porcelain toilet. To the right of the entry is a vanity with a stainless-steel sink, good counter space, a large mirror and a cabinet. We noticed that the space directly behind the door is unused, which made us wonder if it would be possible to fit a larger vanity with two sinks.

A trend in the RV industry that we really appreciate is the use of large, rectangular residential shower enclosures in fifth-wheel trailers. The GoldRush was so equipped, and the space features a molded seat and sliding-glass door to further the residential feel. Between the shower and the forward closet is a tall, deep cabinet perfect for storing folded towels, and at the front is a mirrored sliding door providing access to a spacious walk-in closet. This area features cedar inserts, shoe

storage and a large cabinet that could be used to store comforters, blankets and the like. This unit was also proudly equipped with an optional Dyson hand vacuum (\$530) that would neither charge nor operate. We'd recommend you save some money and bring your own vacuum.

Overall, the systems in this fifth-wheel worked well. Fifty-amp service allows the use of a second air-conditioner in the bedroom area (\$975), with the thermostat controls logically placed in both zones. The ducted system proved to be both effective and quiet, and the same goes for the demand water pump that was barely audible within the trailer. The switches, while not labeled, were at least in fairly intuitive locations; the only exceptions to this were the controls for the ceiling fan in the living area, some kitchen lights and the awning control, which were located on the kitchen area control panel. Putting the ceiling fan switch anywhere would have made more sense — such

as at the end of the island in the living area. By contrast, the powered roof vent here was controlled by a remote that was thoughtfully located in a handy holder near the theater seats. KZ also supplies a One Touch remote that can be used to operate the slides, awning, lights and leveling system.

Giving consumers the features they expect at a price they can afford is always a balancing act, and KZ did a good job with the GoldRush for the most part. We'd like to see better fit and finish in some areas, such as the ill-fitting trim over the tires and a drawer in the galley that was crooked. In our view, flaws like this are unacceptable because they're very visible and should be easy to correct at the factory level. However, no trailer, regardless of price, is perfect — and with a few improvements, the KZ GoldRush in the Klondike floorplan could be a great choice for those in the market for a well-equipped, family-friendly fifth-wheel that won't break the bank. 🚐

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Silver Lining

Northwood Manufacturing delivers stout construction and a long list of amenities in its Silver Fox Edition half-ton towable fifth-wheel

Northwood is one of the RV industry's leading manufacturers that truly builds four-season trailers. Combine this feature with a proprietary aluminum super-structure frame, which utilizes thick-wall aluminum tubing ranging from .060 to .125 inches thick, and the company's fifth-wheels end up sporting a solid platform and rigid wall structure that allows Northwood to designate its trailers as suitable for off-road service, an aspect of travel that fits nicely with the factory's rugged Pacific Northwest location.

The stout, independently certified chassis is just the beginning of a solid construction approach that makes the Arctic Fox 27-5L Silver Fox Edition a feature-rich compact fifth-wheel contender in the half-ton towable marketplace. Continuing the theme of building a foundation that's

designed to last a long time are higher-end components like Goodyear tires mounted on 16-inch aluminum wheels managed by a shock absorber at each wheel. Service is a big deal for Northwood, so using name-brand components makes it easier to handle replacement or service issues.

Adhered directly to the frame for maximum strength are the spare-tire carrier, entry step and electric stabilizing and landing jacks that aid in steadying the platform when set up in camp as well as when it comes time to hitch up. Standard is a Reese 5th Airborne pin box, which helps maneuverability in tight places.

Blended nicely beyond the pin box is a handsome gray aerodynamic fiberglass front cap with integrated LED lights and radius corners. Located below is a diamond-plate rock

guard that runs the full width of the trailer, and the front storage area is conveniently prewired and prepped for a generator install. The rest of the body is assembled using a top-tier lamination process for building the high-density one-piece walls and roof.

A single-layer heavy-gauge rubber membrane is laid over a sturdy backer on bow-style roof trusses to promote easier runoff and eliminate standing water. Northwood prides itself on the strength of the roof structure and commonly invites factory workers to pose for publicity pictures as a group standing on the roof.

As part of the exterior hardware, a Carefree Travel'r power awning with 12-volt DC LED lighting is



The 27-5L's white exterior with black and gray graphics and a gray front cap are a nice departure from the norm.

(Top right) The living area slideout houses a four-seat dinette and a comfy sofa bed, while a freestanding rocker/recliner offers additional seating. (Below right) The roomy bath area provides access from either the hallway or bedroom and features an interesting brown garden shower enclosure with a matching sink. A porcelain toilet contributes to the residential feel. (Below left) Corner cabinets in the rear galley offer extensive storage.

mounted to the patio side wall, complemented by deep-tint windows. Stereo speakers are integrated for easy outdoor listening. The exterior convenience center is well conceived, and there's plenty of storage space in large compartments accessed by 1-inch-thick doors. The doors are fitted with slam latches that have the supporting elements to provide decent security.

The whole unit is outlined with large rain gutters and has twin 10-gallon LP-gas cylinders, instead of the 7-gallon units normally found on fifth-wheels this size. There's also an LP-gas quick-coupler for connecting a barbecue, fire pit or camp-style lanterns.

The interior could be mistaken for a small luxury condo. While sitting at the dining room table, occupants will instantly notice how homey the living area feels. It has a wide-open floorplan, considering the fifth-wheel is less than 30 feet long. Ample floor space is highlighted by majestic decorative features with hints of iron decor tossed into the mix of antique glazed cabinetry.

Spaciousness in the Silver Fox Edition is defined largely by the healthy-size living/dining room slideout. This main slideout is packed with an extremely comfy sofa bed wrapped with the Royal Estate package patterns and tones, along with the aforementioned dining table and chairs.

Besides the typical sofa and dining set, the living quarters are also home to a freestanding rocking recliner and a large mirror. There's also a ceiling-mounted sunshade and a fan. Just below is an LCD TV coupled to a Jensen DVD/CD AM/FM entertainment system with an iPod dock and auxiliary ports. Control switches for items like the awning



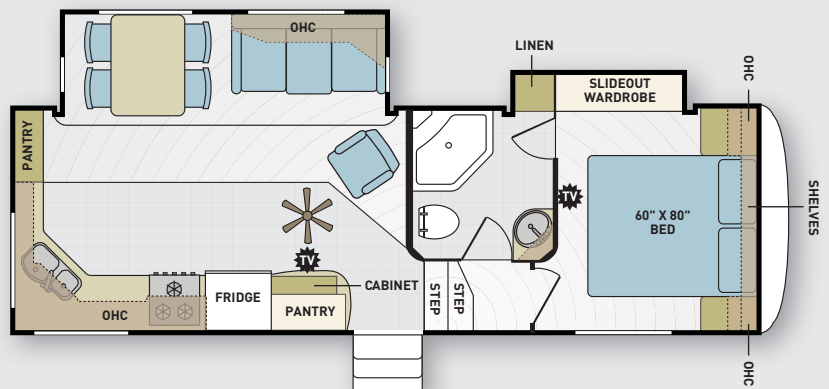
and lights are located within the entertainment cabinetry as well.

This integrated approach is supported by an all-in-one cabinet by the entry door. There's also a small coat closet that's ideal for leaving keys, caps and jackets on a user-friendly sliding rack, all tucked in behind the TV/entertainment/command center.

In keeping with a rear-galley design, the corner cabinets make kitchen storage extensive and accessible. There's a residential-size convection/microwave above the three-burner stove. Between the two appliances (continued on page 69)

QUICK INFO

Exterior Length	29' 5"
Exterior Width	8' 6"
Interior Height	8' 6"
Exterior Height	12' 6"
Freshwater Cap.	82 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	65 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	35 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	20 gal.
Axle Weight	9,650 lbs.
Hitch Weight	1,868 lbs.
GVWR	13,400 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$49,353



Northwood Manufacturing, www.northwoodmfg.com Circle 136 on Reader Service Card.

POWER

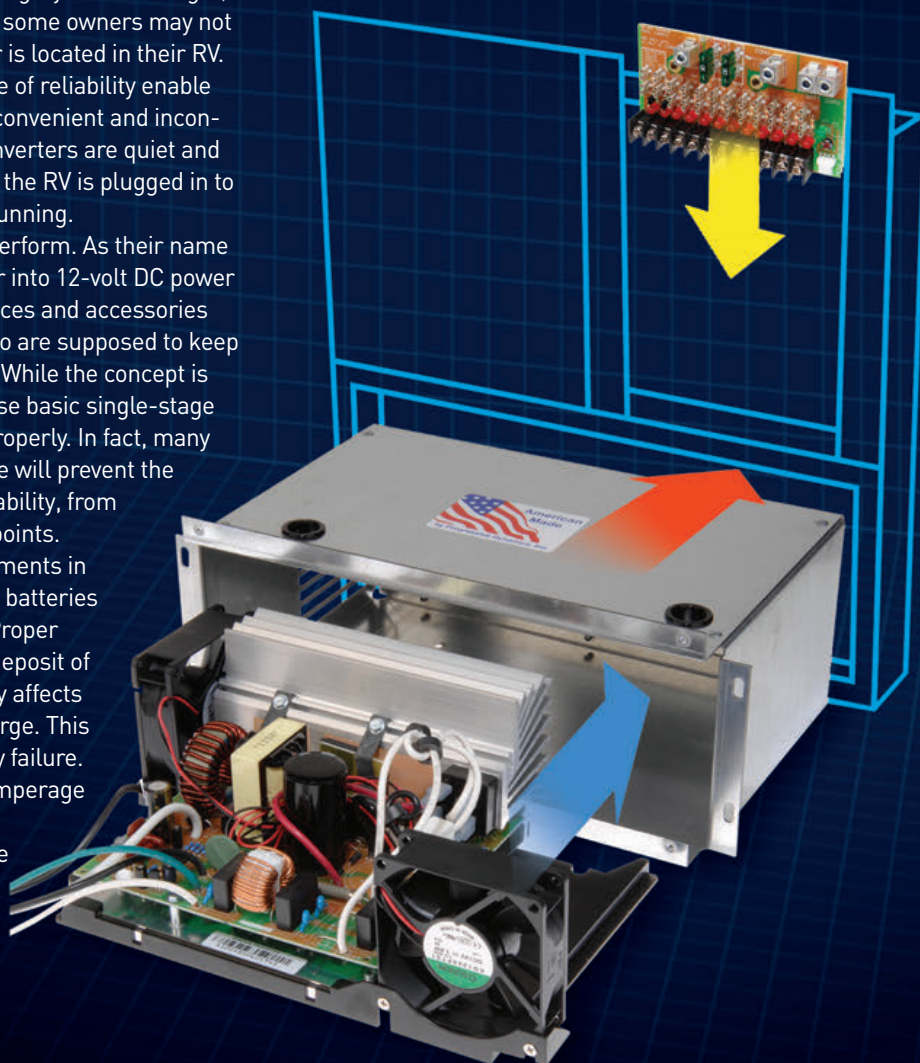
UP CONVERTERS ARE DESIGNED TO PROVIDE 12-VOLT DC CURRENT AND CHARGE BATTERIES — BUT NOT ALL ARE CREATED EQUAL

Power converters fall into the category of “out of sight, out of mind” — literally. In fact, some owners may not even know where the converter is located in their RV. Compact size and a high degree of reliability enable manufacturers to install converters in convenient and inconspicuous places. Modern electronic converters are quiet and efficient, operating automatically when the RV is plugged in to shorepower or when the generator is running.

Converters have two basic jobs to perform. As their name implies, they *convert* 120-volt AC power into 12-volt DC power for running multiple 12-volt DC appliances and accessories without draining the batteries. They also are supposed to keep the batteries at least partially charged. While the concept is good, reality suggests that many of these basic single-stage converters do not condition batteries properly. In fact, many supply only a float charge, which in time will prevent the batteries from reaching maximum capability, from both power supply and longevity standpoints.

The rising cost of lead and advancements in technology have catapulted the price of batteries significantly during the past 20 years. Proper charging will help prevent sulfation, a deposit of lead sulfate on the plates that adversely affects the ability of the battery to accept a charge. This condition is the leading cause of battery failure.

Today's converters have different amperage output ratings, depending on the RV's 12-volt DC system requirement, and the



Progressive Dynamics offers a lower section replacement/upgrade converter with a built-in Charge Wizard that constantly manages the RV's batteries.

ratings usually range from 45 to 90 amps in single and multistage configurations that may include an equalization mode designed to help batteries live a maximum life. Here's an encapsulation of what's out there.

Multistage Converter/Chargers

Multistage converter/chargers with an equalization process are an effective method of charging lead-acid or other types of batteries. For many years, the only available converters had a simple single-stage or fixed voltage design with an output of approximately 13.2 volts DC. There are thousands of these converters in use.

Electrical systems have advanced with the use of printed circuit boards and sensitive electronic equipment, creating the need for a more comprehensive charging system. The benefits are faster charging rates and cleaner DC voltage output. For instance, an 80 percent recharge can occur in two to three hours, instead of the roughly 24-hour charge rate of a single-stage

Parallax Power Supply's converter/charger utilizes a unique temperature-compensation feature designed to maximize output in extreme temperatures.



converter/charger. Replacing an old single-stage converter with a multistage model may seem complicated, but it is well worth the time and expense, especially considering the former never properly conditions batteries.

High-Output Converters

RV electrical systems have more power demands than ever. Several companies offer 80- and 90-amp converter/chargers to meet the highest demands of today's advanced systems. Parallax offers a 90-amp converter/charger (model 5490TC) with temperature compensation and a proprietary Power Factor correction. With this latter feature, the electronic circuit uses

120-volt AC input current much more efficiently, producing up to 90 amps of DC output yet drawing only the current required to run a 65-amp converter.

Living in areas of extreme ambient temperatures presents challenges, even for the best batteries. Ambient temperatures affect the way batteries charge or discharge and, of course, that leads to longevity expectations. Parallax's TC series utilizes unique temperature-compensation technology. Temperature-compensated charging will improve performance, whether the battery is a flooded lead-acid type, AGM or gel cell.

Typically, a battery may be subject to excess fluid loss during high ambient



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temperatures. Parallax's TempAssure converters will compensate and adjust to an ideal charge voltage based on battery temperature. Parallax offers an upgraded power-supply module with temperature compensation (model 4400 TAU) for its series 4400 and 5400 converters. Parallax, formerly Magnetek Converters, also offers electronic upgrades for older Magnetek power centers, including a temperature-compensation model.

Progressive Dynamics, also known as Intelli-Power, builds RV converters and chargers that feature a two-year no-hassle warranty and are made in the United States. Progressive Dynamics developed its first power converter for the RV market in 1968 and in 1993 began manufacturing electronic power converters. The "new" design gave RV manufactures a reliable electronic power converter that was smaller and lighter than what had previously been available. Since then, Progressive Dynamics has been



(Above left) If you suspect that the converter is not functioning, check the AC outlet for 120-volt power. These outlets are controlled by the GFCI. (Above right) Magnetek's (Parallax) lower section upgrade kit has recently been installed. (Right) The Intelli-Power Charge Wizard is a great upgrade for 9100 Series converters.



improving its converter/chargers.

The company's 80-amp converters with the built-in Charge Wizard (models PD9280V and PD 9180V) offer automatic electronic current that reduces output

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voltage when maximum charge capacity is reached. The company's patented Total Charge Management System (TCMS) technology senses when batteries are low or are in need of a fast charge and will automatically increase the voltage to 14.4 volts DC. The TCMS will charge a 125 amp-hour battery to 80 percent capacity in roughly two to three hours while attaining a complete charge in approximately 15 hours.

Standard features on all Intelli-Power models include reverse-polarity protection that guards against damage resulting from improper battery connection, low-voltage protection that automatically shuts the converter down if input voltage is insufficient, and electronic current that automatically reduces output voltage when maximum battery charge has been attained. An automatic thermal shutdown feature will power off the converter when temperatures exceed 150 degrees F, protecting the converter from damage due to excess heat.

Progressive Dynamics also offers a Charge Wizard (model PD9105V) that's designed as a retrofit for its 9100 series converters, effectively changing from a single-stage to a four-stage converter. The Charge Wizard constantly monitors battery voltage and battery usage, then selects one of the following four operation modes: boost, normal, storage or equalization.

The Charge Wizard has been shown to increase battery life by as much as two to three times and is designed to eliminate battery over- and under-charging frequently associated with less-sophisticated battery chargers. The Charge Wizard is easy to install via a simple plug-in system.

Iota Engineering offers its DLS series with exceptionally clean DC power output for sensitive electronic circuits. With current limiting and thermal overload protection, the DLS models can be used without a battery in the system. This can be an advantage, since the DLS models do

not produce a high AC ripple voltage that can adversely affect some electronic appliances.

In the past, living in an RV park 365 days a year required a battery to be onboard at all times to act as a capacitor for DC voltage spikes. Iota's patented IQ4 Smart Charge Controller will transform the standard DLS series converters into a four-stage charger. The four-stage charging system will reduce battery charging time and minimize excess gassing, often caused by high voltage. The IQ4 delivers boost, absorption and float segments as well as an equalization phase. An LED indicator light flashes at different speeds to display the charging activity, and it will even indicate a fault state, should an overvoltage condition be detected. If overvoltage occurs, the converter will be kept in the float mode until it is reset.

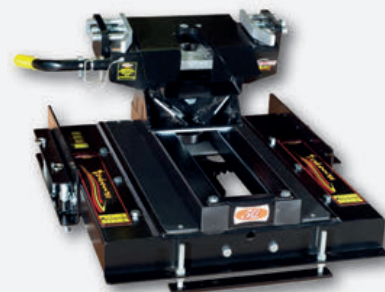
Xantrex TrueCharge2 battery chargers are microprocessor controlled and deliver a two- or three-stage charge to any type of deep-cycle battery. These units are not easily affected by low or high AC power from less-than-perfect shorepower or a generator. Temperature-compensated charging, a battery-equalization feature and the ability to charge a completely dead battery that has been in storage too long makes this charger practical for RVers in need of better performance. Xantrex's reverse-polarity protection will mitigate accidents when replacing batteries in the future.

The TrueCharge2 models have the ability to parallel stack— this allows two of the chargers to work together for up to 120 amps of output. Xantrex went one step further by adding a storage mode that turns on every 21 days for proper charging of batteries that are in storage. Xantrex offers a remote panel (part number 808-8040-1) that

Iota Engineering's IQ4 Smart Charge Controller converts its DLS Series converters to a four-stage charger.



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allows the user to monitor all aspects of battery charging. Add the temperature sensor (part number 808-0 232-01) for operation in extreme temperature climates. With 20-, 40- and 60-amp chargers, Xantrex has the models RVers need for battery care and performance.

Basic Troubleshooting

Modern electronic converter/chargers are very durable and should last without maintenance for many years. But problems can arise. If you suspect that the converter in your RV is no longer charging, here are a few helpful tips for troubleshooting in the field.

Converters need adequate AC voltage for proper operation. Start by checking for voltage at the outlet into which the converter is plugged or wired. Use a handheld voltmeter (multimeter) to confirm voltage to the converter. This electrical circuit is sometimes protected by a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI). If voltage is not present, check the GFCI reset button to see if it has been tripped. Most modern electronic converters have a set of fuses visible in the back section of their housings. If you suspect the converter is not working, check the fuses. Caution: Use fuses that are exact replacements only.

Upgrading to a multistage charger, whether by replacement of the unit itself or by adding new components, will make a big difference in battery performance. With a number of high-tech options to choose from, it's easy to find all the power and versatility your RV needs. 🚐

SOURCES

Iota Engineering

520-294-3292, www.iotaengineering.com

Parallax Power Supply

800-730-2557
www.parallaxpower.com/esm.htm

Progressive Dynamics

269-781-4241, www.progressivedyn.com

Xantrex

800-670-0707, www.xantrex.com



The anticipation that travelers feel when on the verge of embarking on a new trip is one of the simple pleasures of life. The open road awaits, fresh adventures beckon and new possibilities excite the imagination.

But even the most eager traveler can leave with a small shadow of trepidation clouding the departure. It's often hard to go without packing along some nagging worries about leaving your home unattended for extended periods of time.

Although some RVers live their lives on the road, most people still have a home base to return to, one that needs to be protected. When preparing to leave your house for a lengthy period, you'll rest easier if you spend some time planning ahead for security.

In our interconnected age, there are numerous innovative ways to keep your house under surveillance from a distance, and we'll get to those. But some of the most effective methods require no high-tech accessories.

The Basics

You may be on the road, but the rest of the world keeps moving at its own pace. So eliminate the obvious signs that you are away, since nothing says "vacation" like a mailbox bursting at the seams with bills and a driveway stacked with moldering newspapers. Stop your mail and newspaper delivery and ask a neighbor to check to make sure that the flow of paper has actually ceased.

Likewise, the grass doesn't stop growing just because you're having a blast hauling your trailer over the Great Divide. Hire a yard service or one of the neighborhood teenagers to keep your yard tidied up.

Your best line of defense remains vigilant neighbors, so make sure your trusted ones know you are away. You'll want to make sure a couple of neighbors have your cell phone number and you have theirs. It's a good idea to leave a key with a neighbor so they can come in, if necessary. If you're gone for a longer time, you may want to investigate working a deal with a house sitter to give the place a more lived-in look and break the pattern set by lights on timers.

Many neighborhood associations have watch programs that can keep another set of eyes on your property. And don't be too proud to resort to a bit of deception; some hardware stores sell fake home-security signs, in case you don't have the real thing. The selection at www.mysecuritysign.com is particularly impressive, assuming thieves don't have their inventory memorized. You can even find dummy security cameras complete with blinking lights. A surprising number of these can be found on Amazon.com.

Another good idea before you leave is to take photos of your household and key possessions, in case the worst does happen while you're away. Having a record of personal belongings will

ease the process of getting reimbursed by the insurance company. Jot down serial numbers of valuable electronics, bicycles and other easily fenced items.

For decades, vacationers have been using lights set on timers to give a house an occupied look. Those inexpensive plug-in mechanical timers are still widely available and are a cost-effective resource. But a new generation of digital timers has been introduced that can provide even greater flexibility.



(Above left) GE's 15-amp seven-day plug-in dual-outlet digital timer offers a random vacation mode to alter home lighting patterns. Jasco Products, which develops and markets GE home-electronic items, has a video on YouTube showing how to set up the digital timer. (Above right) FakeTV simulates the sort of light a TV makes, so from the outside of the house at night it appears someone is home watching TV.

One place to look for information on the available choices is Home Depot's website, which has a buyer's guide for timers in the Project How-To section.

GE, for example, makes a 15-amp seven-day plug-in dual-outlet digital timer (\$16.48) that includes a random vacation mode to alter the patterns of the lights. Or you can set different times for specific days.

Lights can work for you in other ways. Hydreon Corporation makes a product called FakeTV, a small electronic device that produces the same sort of light a television makes. From the outside at night, it looks like someone is home watching TV. On the outside of the house, motion-activated exterior floodlights might be the difference between thieves breaking in or running away.

From a Distance

The omnipresence of the Internet has changed how we do almost everything, from keeping up with our friends to reading books to paying bills.

The Internet can most definitely be your friend, but it also offers plenty of snares for the careless. Few of us have large followings in our online lives, but if you're active on several outlets, you never truly know how many people are watching. Experienced bloggers with large audiences often won't write about a trip until they return, so it isn't obvious to the online population that they are



Logitech's security systems use software and smart cameras that allow remote viewing without a subscription service. Depending on the system selected, up to six cameras can be employed.

gone at any particular time. As fun as your vacation may be, it's often prudent to avoid shouting to the world that you are hundreds (or thousands) of miles from home.

But that same connectivity gives us great tools for managing our homes while we're away. Cell phones and tablets have been discovered to have monitoring capabilities beyond even what their designers envisioned, and more advanced systems can keep you in constant contact with your home.

If a full-fledged home-security system isn't in the budget, some remarkably simple options have a low cost of entry. AtHome Camera and AtHome Video Streamer by Circlely Networks (iChano) are apps that allow you to use an extra smartphone or spare computer as a home-based security camera. You can set up the phone in your home with the camera pointed wherever you wish, and then check your house remotely over your travel phone's 3G network. You can watch a live video feed or set it up to record a 30-second video and notify you by email when motion is detected. The basic app is free, with an upgraded business app for \$7.99, at the Apple App Store or through Google Play for Android applications.

It's not hard to locate companies that will take you to the next level. Logitech's Alert surveillance systems also relay home-security video to your smartphone or tablet but enhance the security with advanced indoor or



Alarm.com's systems can be employed using Android, Apple, Windows or Blackberry phones and tablets. You can even set up a system so that it will alert you about important things at home with a text message.

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The major app stores are good resources for researching what's out there. If you have the budget, there are monitoring systems available that are, frankly, amazing.

"Smoke and fire detectors, energy management and home automation are particularly relevant for folks who are away from home a lot," said Matthew Zartman of Alarm.com. "You can set



A tablet such as an iPad is a great tool for monitoring your home. "Our dealers make it really easy to get things up and running," said Alarm.com's Matthew Zartman, "and they can help you understand the new system, how to get and use our apps, and demonstrate some key features. The apps are really easy to use."

lights all around your home to turn on and off at different times to give it a lived-in look from the outside. Also, for people who travel a lot, automated locks can make a lot of sense. If there's something that you need a neighbor to check on or take care of in your home,

you can easily give them access, and you won't have to worry about making sure that the door was locked once they leave because you can take care of that right from your phone."

There's more, of course, to protecting a home than warding off

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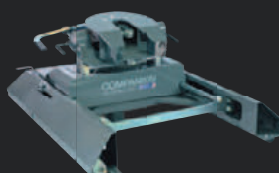


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burglars. "Another great feature is that, if the power goes out at your property, you'll also be immediately alerted. If you're far from home, you can notify a neighbor, and they can save food in your freezer, and if it's winter take action to keep the pipes from freezing," Zartman said. "We had a hard winter this year, and our water and flood sensors notified a lot of people of broken pipes so they could take fast action and prevent as much damage as possible."

It's worth mentioning here that, if you're away for extended periods on a regular basis, it may also be wise to install a water shut-off valve to the house to prevent flooding in the event a pipe inside the house bursts. It is a fairly simple plumbing operation to segregate the house plumbing from the sprinkler system to ensure that your yard still gets watered. Just make sure that your neighbors know to monitor the sprinkler system operation and are provided with instructions on how to shut it off as well in the event of a malfunction.

Alarm.com systems can also be set up to send you severe-weather alerts in case tornadoes or other natural disasters threaten your area. Prices for such a system will vary according to each application and the optional services selected. But it is definitely possible to comprehensively monitor your home while you are away.

"Most people don't understand all the things an interactive security system can do in addition to protecting your home," Zartman added. "When you're away from home, you can know exactly what's happening at home in real-time. It's really easy to control and use. For people who travel a lot, you can set up your system so that it will notify a neighbor, too."

The same technological advances that have aided RVers in communicating from remote areas and navigating using GPS systems have also transformed how we monitor our homes from a distance. In many ways, our homes never really have to be truly alone. 📶

SOURCES

Alarm.com

877-389-4033, www.alarm.com

Amazon.com

www.amazon.com

Apple App store

www.apple.com

Google Play

play.google.com

Home Depot

www.homedepot.com

Hydreon Corporation

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Jasco Products

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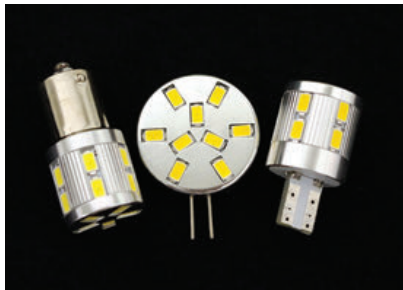
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818-717-8840, www.m4led.com

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Monster Exhaust

Banks Power has released its Monster Exhaust System for 2014 Ford F-150 3.5-liter EcoBoost and 5.0-liter and 6.2-liter gas-powered pickup trucks. This cat-back system reduces exhaust backpressure, increasing flow for more power, improved fuel efficiency and cooler operating temperatures, according to the company. The Monster Exhaust features mandrel-bent heavy-wall stainless-steel 3-inch tubing, and the restrictive factory muffer is replaced with a polished Banks Monster Muffer with a Banks-designed expansion chamber to dissipate annoying midrange exhaust drone. The system is designed for easy installation using the stock hangers and is available with a 6 x 5-inch polished or high-temp black tip.

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888-857-2371, www.bankspower.com

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Axle Ratio Refresher

Gearing has a great affect on performance and fuel economy. Mechanical gearing listed by manufacturers in specification sheets — the actual ring-and-pinion ratios — often appears in tow-rating guides as well.

The ratio represents the number of times the driveshaft and pinion gear turn, for every complete turn of the ring gear, drive axle, wheel and tire. Calculating ratios is quite simple. The number of teeth on the ring gear gets divided by the number of teeth on the pinion gear. For example, if the pinion has 10 teeth, and the ring gear has 41, divide 41 by 10, which equals 4.10. And since this is being expressed as a ratio, it's shown as 4.10:1. This is commonly referred to as a 4-10 ratio.

Tags on the axles or placards in the vehicle often indicate axle ratios. On light trucks popular for towing recreational trailers, these ratios typically range from about 3.5:1 to around 4.5:1. For the sake of this discussion, we'll call lower numerical ratios (such as 3.31:1) "taller" ratios and higher numerical ratios (such as 4.10:1) "shorter" gearing. Towing performance is greatly affected by axle ratios, as can be seen in factory tow ratings. For example, an HD pickup factory-equipped with a 4.3 axle ratio may tow up to 3,500 pounds more than one with a 3.73.

Axle ratios are only part of overall gearing. Transmissions provide gear multiplication before the power gets from the engine to the drive axle(s). Engines have a sweet spot in their power curves between peak horsepower and peak torque RPM. Ideally, the transmission gearing, axle ratio and tire diameter should work together to keep the engine running in its sweet spot while driving at the desired speed.

Traditional transmissions had a 1:1 ratio as their top forward gear. Basically, it was a direct drive, with one turn at the output shaft for every one turn of the input shaft. Manufacturers have been introducing transmissions

— both automatic and manual — with more and more forward gears. This allows the vehicle to have plenty of gear multiplication to get moving from a stop, with smaller steps between gears that allow the engine to stay closer to its power band.

Additionally, this allows for one or two overdrive gears in the top gears. Overdrives typically have ratios around 0.75:1 to 0.70:1. That means they reduce engine speed (and torque at the wheels) by about 25 to 30 percent. This can help offset a short axle ratio at higher speeds.

Automatic transmissions have torque converters (located between the engine and transmission) that have the ability to multiply engine torque as the vehicle starts to pull away from a stop, when it's really needed. Typically, the multiplication is nearly double (2:1). This is one reason why some manufacturers have provided higher tow ratings on models with automatic transmissions rather than manual gearboxes, which don't have torque converters.

On many 4x4 models, the transfer case also provides additional gear reduction in low range. (Usually, they are direct drive in high range.) This comes in handy when slogging through difficult off-road terrain. Some

RVers also use low range on their 4x4s when maneuvering into tight spaces with their trailers. However, making sharp turns on pavement in 4WD can lead to gear bind on some models and put considerable stress on the drivetrain, because the tires are unable to slip to relieve twisting forces between front and rear axles. This occurs because the wheels and tires are negotiating turns of different radiuses.

All-wheel-drive models that don't have a low range typically pass the power through with direct drive (1:1 ratio). All-wheel-drive models also have an inter-axle differential that eliminates the binding that can occur with 4x4 models as detailed above.

You can multiply the transmission ratio for each gear by the axle ratio to calculate the overall gearing. Do this for each gear, and then do the calculations again using the proposed axle ratio to compare the figures to what you would have if you changed the ratio.

Aftermarket add-on overdrive units used to be popular additions to tow vehicles, but as vehicles increasingly came with transmissions having built-in overdrives, these units have faded in popularity. They're still available from Gear Vendors for many models.

Axle ratios play a major role in

Ring-and-pinion gears determine the final drive ratio. You may be able to improve towing performance or fuel mileage by changing ratios. Calculators are available online at www.ringpinion.com/calculators.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BANKS POWER

towing performance for pickups. With an axle ratio that's too tall, a pickup may feel like it lacks power, particularly when climbing grades. This can be changed with a shorter axle ratio. A shorter axle ratio increases torque at the wheels and improves acceleration from lower speeds but often at the expense of unladen highway fuel economy.

Shorter gearing often increases fuel consumption, but the mileage penalty varies depending on your use. If you tow a heavy trailer a lot of the time, there's a point where fuel economy can actually improve with shorter gearing, particularly in cases where it allows you to run one gear higher. In city driving at lower speeds, fuel economy may increase with a shorter axle ratio. For those who tow a lot of weight, a shorter axle ratio can save wear on both the clutch and transmission due to greater mechanical advantage.

Axle ratios can be changed to meet your particular needs. This requires

delicate setup with special tools and should be done by an expert. It can be quite costly on pickups, and particularly on 4x4s, since both axle ratios must be changed. Usually, an existing gear-set ratio available as an option for the vehicle will suffice. Some owners want a special ratio not offered as an option; these are available from aftermarket gear manufacturers.

Changing Tire and Wheel Sizes

Changing tire diameter affects the effective axle ratio, not the actual axle ratio. A larger diameter tire acts like a taller axle ratio. It also may add rotating mass, which requires more torque to accelerate and more braking force to stop.

Here's a formula you can use to calculate tire diameter: cross-section width (in mm) x aspect ratio x 2 ÷ 25.4 + wheel diameter = overall tire diameter. For example: 235/45-17 (235 x 0.45 x 2 ÷ 25.4) + 17 = 25.327. It's not exact, but it's close. Tire manufacturers provide

diameters, and these should be used, if available.

It's also possible to make chalk marks on the edge of the tire where it meets the pavement and on the pavement itself. Then roll the tire one full revolution and mark the ground again. Measure the distance between the marks and divide by 3.14 for diameter.

A 1-inch decrease in tire diameter has about the same effect as one-third of an axle-ratio step. For example, if you have a 3.73 axle ratio with a 31.2-inch-diameter tire, tire diameter is decreased to 30.2 inches, and tire revolutions per mile will increase from 650 to about 670. This works out to about a 3.85:1 effective axle ratio. You can calculate what the change will be as a percentage.

Manufacturers design their vehicles to use specific-size tires. A lot of engineering development and testing goes into the process. Therefore, we don't recommend straying too far from



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original equipment sizes. Changing sizes can significantly affect vehicle handling and performance.

If a manufacturer offers optional tire sizes that fit your needs better than the ones you have, these are often the way to go. Never install tires that have a lower weight rating than the ones you're taking off. Also beware of rubbing and interference, if using tires that are larger than the originals. Check carefully for clearance through the entire suspension travel and steering, lock to lock.

Likewise, work with wheels with weight ratings as high or higher than what you are taking off and go to an experienced tire dealer. You'll find a lot of information about tire dimensions, load ratings and other specifications at the Tire Rack website, www.tirerack.com. Changes in tire diameter or gearing should be accompanied by reprogramming the powertrain control module to allow for the changes in wheel speed relative to driveshaft speed.



Aftermarket tuners such as this Edge unit can also correct the speedometer readings when tire diameters or axle ratios are changed.

Edge Unveils Tuning for 2013-2014 Ram Cummins

Edge Products has introduced 2013-2014 Ram Cummins coverage for the Juice with Attitude CS and CTS diesel tuners. Edge reports its Juice will deliver up to 150 horsepower and 360 lb-ft of torque to the 2013-14 Cummins. There are settings such as tire-size

recalibration, torque management and axle-ratio adjustments.

Edge has also announced coverage for 2015 Chevy/GMC gas and diesel trucks. A dyno chart, list of features, video and part numbers can be found on Edge's website. For more information, call Edge Products at 888-360-3343 or visit www.edgeproducts.com. 📺



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The ThunderShirt provides a gentle hugging sensation to alleviate anxiety in dogs and cats that become panicked by loud noises

Thunder and other loud noises can make a dog fidgety, scared or nervous enough to jump into your lap, looking for comfort. Small dogs are particularly prone to anxiety when subjected to strangers or left alone in an RV or in a pen on the patio.

Calming down a dog that's frightened or anxious can be a tall order that requires constant "babysitting." Few dog owners want to leave their best friend at home, so they put up with less-than-stellar behavior while on RV trips. The ThunderShirt, an innovative product available to fit from the tiniest to 110-pound dogs, is designed to comfort a dog without having to constantly coddle it.

The ThunderShirt is comprised of a blend of cotton, polyester, spandex and carefully located hook-and-loop strips that wrap around the dog and provide a truly unique effect once fitted correctly. This embracing feel is created by supplying gentle hugging and constant pressure on the dog's torso that reportedly causes a calming sensation. Reaching this goal is easily accomplished thanks to just the right amount of elasticity from the combination of materials. This technique is based on the same principles as cattle-squeeze chutes and swaddling an infant, which have proven to be useful techniques.

Although the ThunderShirt may seem very straightforward and simplistic, there are a couple of steps that will greatly increase the success of use, all of which are conveniently printed on a

user-friendly instruction sheet. Before proceeding to the fitting portion, take time to read the instructions and then follow the "Initial Fitting and Conditioning" section precisely. Most dogs will reject having the ThunderShirt on their torso at first, so there are suggestions on how to get the dog to accept something new. For example, to help acclimate your dog, it's suggested to use the ThunderShirt as a "plate" where a food treat can be placed. Dogs associate comfort and trust with food.

From here it's on to the "Fitting Instructions," where part identification is necessary before being able to perform the four steps required to achieve the right fit. Once familiar with everything, it's basically a matter of placing the ThunderShirt on the dog's back and connecting the short flap with the long flap under the torso, making sure to allow for a comfortable yet snug fit. Finish up by securing the chest straps, and it's ready to pacify the dog.

So, does it really work? In one definitive word, yes! The test subject for this project was an anxiety-ridden 6½-pound Chihuahua that had fits when it came time to get in a vehicle. Once little Cy was introduced to the ThunderShirt and placed in the car or RV, he immediately showed signs



Our Chihuahua took to the ThunderShirt and now gets into vehicles without being afraid.

of improvement and was far less shaky than before. After several hours of vehicle rides and wearing the ThunderShirt, Cy gladly gets in the RV without any indication of shaking and has shown a huge improvement in confidence. In fact, quite often now he'll roam freely and looks forward to rides.

As conscientious owners, we were delighted that our dog could be calmed down without the use of drugs. The ThunderShirt is available in sizes to fit most dogs and retails for \$39.95. Optional colors are available for an additional \$5, and the shirt can even be custom-embroidered for \$10. It's backed by a 100 percent satisfaction guarantee, and these shirts are also available for cats.

Traveling without stress — for both dog and owners — had never been possible for us before putting the ThunderShirt on the smallest member of our family. 🐕

ThunderWorks, 866-892-2078
www.thundershirt.com



KEEPING THE PEACE » The ThunderShirt is designed to calm down anxiety-ridden dogs by giving them a gentle hugging sensation.

SCALES OR NOT?

Q There have been a number of articles in recent issues about the use of truck scales to ensure that your rig is within the vehicle towing limits. My question is on a similar topic: truck weigh stations. The signs for the weigh stations usually indicate that all trucks must exit to be weighed. For the purpose of these weigh stations, what defines a truck? Once or twice I have noticed a sign that lists a specific gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) or gross combined weight rating (GCWR) as the criteria, but most of the signs simply refer to a "truck." I previously had not considered a pickup towing a travel trailer or a fifth-wheel as a truck in these situations, until I recently passed one weigh station and noticed a dually pulling a fifth-wheel waiting in line.

Joe Zanghi, Charlottesville, Virginia

A The rule of thumb, Joe, is that commercial vehicles need to stop and private vehicles do not. An RV towed by a private owner for fun is not commercial, so it can sail on by, unless the truck stop signage specifically requires it



to stop. So far, I've never seen such a sign anywhere during my travels from coast to coast. If any readers have follow-up experience along those lines, please drop us a note and let us know. The RV and dually combination you saw at the truck stop was probably a commercial RV delivery driver hauling a new trailer to a dealership, and as a commercial venture it had to stop. — **Jeff Johnston**

2500HD VERSUS 3500HD

Q My wife and I are avid readers of *Trailer Life* magazine. Since we purchased our first trailer in 2008, a Forest River Wildcat, your advice has helped us a lot.

I plan on retiring next year and would like to travel the United States with my wife for a couple of years, but the Wildcat we currently own would not fit our needs. It seems that we have looked at almost every fifth-wheel on the market and decided on a CrossRoads Redwood 38RE or 36RE. The fifth-wheel appears to have everything we need to live in it for the time we will be gone.

That brings me to my dilemma. Our tow vehicle is a 2002 Chevrolet Silverado 2500HD with the Duramax diesel. We

love our truck, and with only 51,000 miles on it, it is almost brand-new. We would like to use this truck to pull the Redwood, but in talking with people at Chevrolet and the Redwood dealership, we keep getting conflicting answers on what truck we should use for towing. I would rather avoid buying a dually, mainly because of the large size of the vehicle. I thought the main difference between a 2500HD and 3500HD is an extra spring. Please help.

Joe, Denver, Colorado

A The tow ratings for the 2500 and 3500 series trucks can be very similar, Joe, but the big difference with the 3500 trucks, and especially dual-lies, is in the rear-axle weight-carrying capacity. A dually will have a signifi-

cantly higher rear gross axle weight rating (GAWR), which allows the truck to handle more hitch weight. A fifth-wheel trailer has a higher percentage of its weight on its hitch than does a conventional travel trailer — about 15 to 20 percent-plus versus 10 to 11 percent. That means a truck slated to haul a big fifth-wheel should have enough GAWR to handle the load.

You didn't pass along a lot of details about your truck, so we can't say how it stacks up, specifically, but you can do some footwork to determine what kind of trailer weight it can haul. First, take the truck, loaded with your usual traveling cargo and passengers, to a public scale and weigh its rear axle. Then find the truck's rear-axle GAWR on the data plate on the driver's side door frame and note that figure. Subtract the truck's rear axle weight from its GAWR, and you'll know how much extra payload capacity you have for the trailer hitch weight. As long as you don't exceed the GAWR or the truck's tow rating with the trailer you have in mind, your current truck should work fine. — **J.J.**

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 18 years and has been an RV enthusiast, mechanic and writer since he could hold a wrench.

FAULTY WIRING TIMES TWO

Q I have a 2010 Ford 6.4-liter diesel F-350 Crew Cab longbed dually towing a 2010 Carriage Cameo F36FWS fifth-wheel trailer. Occasionally, over a couple of years, I have heard a warning tone and seen a message-center display indicating "Wiring Fault on Trailer." It occurs usually while towing on level ground conditions at normal highway speeds. A few times it has happened when I apply the brakes, but all of the trailer lights and brakes work as expected. I have checked all trailer wires, and none show any continuity to ground. I have had the truck to the Ford dealer twice with no problems found, and two trips to a trailer facility show everything is OK. Sometimes several weeks pass without an occurrence.

Dave Sanford, Grafton, Illinois

Q I'd like some help to fix a brake problem that has been plaguing my Ford for a while. I have a 2008 F-250 Super Duty 6.4-liter diesel and a 2011 Avalanche 330RE trailer I bought new. The problem is that I lose brakes on the trailer when towing. A "Wire Fault" indicator from the trailer brake-control readout shows up on the dash of the truck. Then "Trailer Disconnected" might show up. I took the pickup to the truck dealer, and they found nothing wrong. Next, I took the trailer to the RV dealer, and after a while they got the same result with their truck. They replaced all the wire and magnets and the lead from the trailer to the truck. It worked for a very short time, then the problem was back. I took both the truck and trailer back, and now they both point the finger at the other guy, saying there is nothing wrong on their end, but the problem is not gone.

Randy Williams, Radcliff, Kentucky

A Intermittent wiring problems can be a bugger to trace and cure, gents, especially when they're not seemingly related to any repeatable incidents. In both cases it seems like wiring trouble, and I'd lay odds on a bad ground connection. A bad power wire at a magnet or even an entire axle can cause problems, but a single bad

ground can affect the entire trailer and/or incite reactions by the truck's trailer-brake control.

First, and this applies to both examples, you can't rely on the metal-to-metal connection between the truck and trailer as a reliable grounding circuit path. You need to have a solid ground connection via the appropriate pin in the trailer plug and truck receptacle, so that's the place to start looking. Check

every ground connection from the plug/receptacle out, looking for loose, corroded, damaged or worn connections due to wear and tear. If there are junctions with electrical tape covering them, remove the old tape and inspect the joint before rewiring with new tape. You get the drill: check and verify all ground wiring. While you're at it, it wouldn't hurt to go through the other lines as well, just to be sure.

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Randy, since the RV dealer tried towing your trailer with its truck as a test, perhaps you should also try towing a friend's trailer and see if you get the same troubleshooting code with your truck. That would help narrow down the culprit to the truck or trailer and improve your chances of successfully eliminating the problem. — J.J.

SLIDEOUT LUBRICANT

Q I have a 2006 Forest River Surveyor with a rear slide. Is it recommended to occasionally lube the slide with a product such as Protect All Slide-Out Dry Lube? What about treating the seals? Thanks for your help.

Larry Hobdley, Boise, Idaho

A It's always a good idea to follow the manufacturer's recommended service practices on a mechanical component such as a slideout mechanism. The dry lube you mentioned sounds good, but check your owner's manual

or the manufacturer's website for specific product recommendations. Likewise, the rubber seals should be treated with a cleaner and/or lubricant to keep them in good condition and avoid tears or damage due to the seal drying out. Again, check your owner's manual for complete specifics on your product. — J.J.

SHOWER WALL REPAIR

Q We have a Glendale Golden Falcon fifth-wheel that has developed a crack in the shower-wall surround, and I'm hoping you can direct me to replacement wall material. There isn't a current product out there that will retrofit the molded surround, and I'm wondering if I can use sheet material of some type to replace it.

Steve Maslonka, Shakopee, Minnesota

A Pay a visit to your local home-improvement store, Steve, and do some browsing in the bathroom

remodeling area. You'll find bulk sheet material in plastic laminates, plastic composites, wood-backed plastic laminates, fiberglass and so forth. Chances are good you'll find a material that will work for you, and the store will probably also have information on how to work with the materials, including cutting and fastening. Alternatively, a boat yard may be able to repair the crack with fiberglass tape and finishing materials. — J.J.

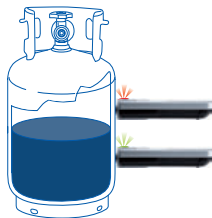
ONE OR TWO GENERATORS REPLY

Q I read your answer to Gene Ponder in June's *RV Clinic* on the question of one or two generators. I went through this same decision a few years ago and went with two 2,000-watt Hondas with the parallel kit. My reasons were, first, one 2,000-watt unit is lighter than the 3,000-watt model. That makes it easier to carry and put into the truck or trailer. Second, when not running the A/C, I use

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only one of the generators. One 2,000-watt unit uses less fuel than one 3,000-watt unit. I can still use the water heater on electricity or the microwave while charging the batteries and running some lights. I have had no problem with this setup while boondocking for weeks at a time. I alternate the generators to give equal wear-and-tear time to each.

Mike Lisle, Dayton, Minnesota

A Thank you, Mike. Those are some pretty good reasons for going with the two-generator setup. Your input may help some readers in the process of making their own decisions along these lines. — J.J.

PUTNAM HITCH

Q I purchased a truck that already had a fifth-wheel hitch installed. It is made by Putnam Industries, and Firestorm is the model. It has the capabilities of a regular fifth-wheel hitch, and after removing two pins and removing the horseshoe plate, it converts to a gooseneck hitch. My understanding through research on the Internet is that Putnam has gone out of business. So my question to you is, where can I find parts for my hitch?

John Coley, Via email

A Yes, unfortunately, Putnam ceased operation several years ago. If you do an Internet search for "Putnam hitch parts," you will find there are a few companies that still have some items. If that doesn't help, welding and fabrication shops can usually make most any part you might need for hitches that are out of production and no longer available. — Ken Freund

FREEWAY HOP CURED

Q Back in the day, my friend in Alaska had just bought a then-new 1990 Dodge and loved it — except for the hard ride, which was killing his bad back and aggravating his kidney problems. Because of a *Trailer Life* article on the Kelderman air-suspension kits, he ordered one and installed it himself. He was ecstatic with the im-

proved ride of his old Dodge.

Just recently, I asked him how he liked the Kelderman, and he said he still had the truck and had no problems with it and would highly recommend it. So I ordered a kit from Auto Spring in Boise and had them install it. I was really amazed how much better the rear of my 2003 GMC 3500 dually rode, both loaded and unloaded; it is better than the torsion bar front end, in fact. My TrailerSaver air-ride hitch hardly moves now; before, it got a real workout. Now when I drive over the California freeways, hop is virtually eliminated, regardless of load. My only regret is I didn't get the Kelderman air suspension 10 years ago and 107,000 miles sooner.

Chuck Wolfkiel, Cascade, Idaho

A That article was by Jeff Johnston, who put many miles on that Dodge Cummins pickup. It's fun to hear that these old articles are still being remembered. Thanks for sharing your experiences with Kelderman. — K.F.

CHANGING A SOFA BED

Q Last June I purchased a 2006 Jayco Eagle and spent most of the summer traveling with my brother. He slept on the sofa bed and was not very pleased with it. Do you know of an alternative couch, daybed or futon that would fit into the 36 x 70-inch space the sofa occupies, perhaps something with storage underneath for bedding?

Sara D'Spain, Mesa, Arizona

A A jackknife-type sofa bed with a good, thick mattress typically won't have much room left underneath. The same goes for futons; some are comfortable, but then they may be heavy and lack storage space underneath. I suggest you visit Camping World, which offers a number of attractive sofa beds in 68-inch lengths that should fit. If you don't find what you want, a local custom furniture and upholstery shop should be able to modify yours or make something to order. You might also consider an air mattress, which is what many new RV manufacturers are going to. — K.F.



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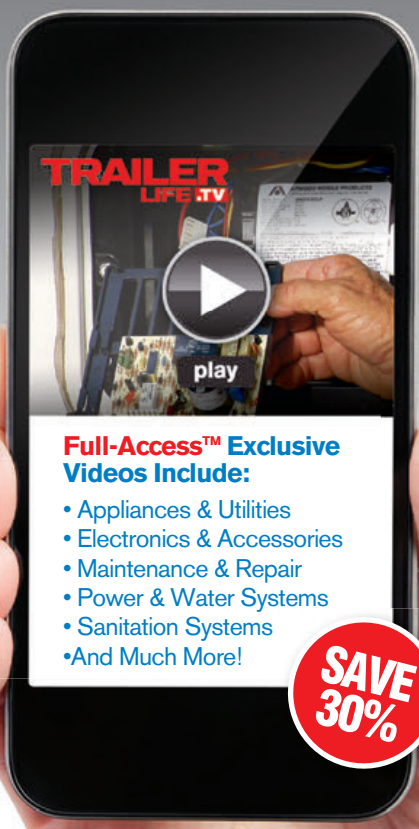
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TIRE CODES

Q The letter “Chinese Tires” in the May 2014 issue about how to tell where tires were manufactured left something to be desired. Perhaps a chart with letters and their matching countries would have been beneficial. My Heartland Sundance 2900MK fifth-wheel has Power King Towmax STR tires in size ST235/80R16. The alphanumeric data on my trailer tires is DOT 83B5 CPB. How do I find where they were made?

Dave Simpson, Moreno Valley, California

A Located on the sidewall of a tire, the DOT tire identification code is a combination of up to 12 numbers and letters with valuable information. The first two are the plant code where the tire was manufactured, and the last four numbers (three prior to 2000) represent the week and year the tire was built.

The list of codes indicating where tires are made is incredibly long — too much to publish in this column. Fortunately, the information is available online for free at www.harriger.com/tires.htm. There is also more information available at www.nhtsa.gov/apps/mfr/index.htm. — **K.F.**

FUEL-ECONOMY CONCERNS

Q I am new at travel-trailer towing and need help in getting better gas mileage on my tow vehicle. I have a 2012 Ford F-150 EcoBoost V-6 dual turbo Crew Cab with the cap over a 6-foot bed. The Ford has all the guts I need to tow, but at a poor MPG rate. The trailer is a 6,400-pound 28-foot Coachmen with about 800 pounds of stuff added when camping. Solo MPG is 17 in the city and 24 to 28 on the highway at 60 MPH. With the trailer in tow, it gets 7 to 9 MPG.

I just traded the trailer for a 4,200-pound 24-foot Fleetwood Pioneer in hopes that that will help. Our plans are to do long-distance trips, and the 28-foot Coachmen is larger than what I want to tow cross-country. Information I have found on the Internet reports that the wind-deflecting units for the roof of the truck will never give me a return on the investment. Others tell me to enclose the underbelly of the trailer. Can

anyone tell me the real story?

Denis Carmody, Rio Grande, New Jersey

A With fuel prices what they are nowadays, it's no fun to fill up, that's for sure. The real story is that your truck is getting mileage similar to what many other folks report getting in similar situations. On predominantly flat roads like you have on the East Coast, most of the engine's power at highway speeds goes to fighting wind resistance. Wind resistance increases with the square of the gain in speed, so small changes in speed can result in substantial changes in fuel economy. Try setting the cruise control at 55 MPH and monitor fuel economy carefully. You may be surprised at how much you will save. Also make sure the tires are properly inflated. — **K.F.**

TPR VALVE

Q We have a 1980's vintage trailer, and the temperature pressure relief (TPR) valve is leaking. I have tried to remove it but cannot. Is there a special tool made for the removal of this valve? If so, where can I get one?

Charles Hyzy, Wheaton, Illinois

A For those unfamiliar with the term, a TPR is a safety device that releases water from the water heater when temperature or pressure becomes dangerously high. Before starting, you should verify that the fault is a bad valve and not high-water pressure or excessive temperature.

Corrosion is probably heavy, and sometimes the threads in the heater will be damaged when you try to remove the valve. If the threads are too far gone, you may not be able to install a new valve — so be prepared to replace the old water heater. Spray the threads with penetrating oil to loosen any rust or other buildup and let it sit overnight. Try a bigger wrench and wear padded work gloves to protect your hands. A long pipe wrench usually works, and since you won't be reusing the valve, it doesn't matter if it damages it. Use a large adjustable wrench to install the new one, using Teflon tape on the threads. — **K.F.**

MATCHING TOW VEHICLE TO TRAILER

Q I need to get to the bottom line with my decision on the right size trailer for my truck. I have a 2013 Chevy Suburban 1500 with the factory tow package. I am not sure what gear ratio it is equipped with. The vehicle is completely stock without any upgrades. The toy hauler I need (not want) is a 27- to 28-footer weighing roughly 7,400 pounds dry and has a 9,900-pound GVWR. I understand the maximum rated tow weight for my Suburban is 8,200 pounds.

Exactly what modifications can I make to my vehicle to maximize its tow capacity? I have a family of six, and my wallet is not big enough to add a diesel truck payment to do the job. Your suggestions would be greatly appreciated.

Jose Garcia, Pasadena, California

A According to *Trailer Life's* tow rating guide, the highest rating your Suburban could have is 8,100 pounds, and if it doesn't have the optimum axle ratio, the rating could be as low as 5,100 pounds. The vehicle manufacturer sets tow ratings, and they are based on extensive engineering and testing regimens. Regardless of what modifications you do, they won't increase the factory ratings. Overloading your vehicle will put yourself, family and other road users at risk. In the case of an accident, there could be serious consequences. We recommend staying within all factory recommended limits.

By the way, you don't necessarily need a diesel truck to tow 10,000 pounds; there are several gas models on the market that can do the job, and since your Suburban is only one year old, your dealer should be able to make a suitable trade with you. That, or you're simply going to have to find a lighter trailer. — K.F. 🚚

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ADVERTISERS' INDEX

RS#	ADVERTISER	PAGE#
102	Air Lift Company	57
101	B&W Trailer Hitches	54
102	Blue Ox	65
104	Bully Dog Technologies	17
	Camping World.....	31-33
105	Chevrolet Motor Division.....	2-3
	Classifieds	72-73
110	Coast Distribution.....	37
107	DISH Network.....	9
106	Dethmers Manufacturing	49
108	Escape Trailer	53
109	Firestone Industrial Products Co.	23
111	Geico	75
	Good Sam Extended Service Plan....	26
	Good Sam RV Loans	15
	Good Sam Roadside Assistance	71
	Good Sam Travel Assist.....	10
114	HWH Corporation	63
	Harbor Freight Tools.....	57
112	Hensley Manufacturing Inc.....	50
113	Hensley Manufacturing Inc.....	67
121	iBall Hitch Cam.....	22
115	Innovations Housing	50
116	Jayco, Inc.	5
117	KZ Inc.	76
118	King Controls	29
119	Lance Campers	47
125	Monochem.....	38
120	Northwood Mfg.	67
	Powerhouse Photo Contest	36
122	Progressive Insurance	7
123	Pull-Rite	28
103	RVawningsmart	30
	RV Marketplace.....	68-69
124	Rear View Safety	55
126	Sea Eagle	30
	The Rally	59
127	Thetford Corporation	42-43
128	Torklift International.....	22
	Trailer Life TV.....	66
129	TrailManor	60
130	Transfer Flow Inc.....	48
131	Truma Corp	64
132	Yamaha Outdoor Power Equipment ..	11

EDITORIAL PRODUCT INDEX

RS#	ADVERTISER	PAGE#
138	Banks Power Monster Exhaust	56
140	KSH Generator Box.....	56
135	KZ Goldrush.....	39
137	M4 Products Elite Series LEDs	56
136	Northwood Arctic Fox	44
139	Winegard Rayzar Air HD Antenna..	56

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(continued from page 45)

WALK-THROUGH: ARCTIC FOX 27-5L

is a custom designer backsplash that adds a decorative accent. The oven is a large 22-inch model with three shelves versus the usual two-shelf version. Next to the oven are three very large, deep drawers ideal for big pots and pans or hefty quantities of utensils. Also in the kitchen is a dual-pane glass rear window to let in some natural rays. Below the window is a deep, double stainless-steel sink with a retractable faucet. There's also a large pantry with extensive shelving (stationary and pull-out) that's good for cans, seasonings and other foodstuffs.

At the top of the stairway to the bedroom is a door decorated with an antique-style black frosted glass inlay. Directly ahead as you enter is the 60- x 80-inch queen bed, positioned lengthwise and complemented by matching nightstands. Highlights in the bedroom include a TruRest mattress, a roomy wardrobe slideout, independent LED lighting on each side of the bed and a Starlite sunshade, plus a fan. At the foot of the bed is a TV stand with the usual connections for ancillary components.

Like many smaller fifth-wheels, the bath area incorporates a Jack and Jill arrangement, with an entry door off the hallway and a second entry from the bedroom. The latter makes late-night visits convenient, and inside the spacious lavatory are two mirrors — one is a telescoping lighted vanity mirror, also known as a beautifying/magnification mirror, and the other is perched above a corner placed sink. For a more home-like feel, a porcelain toilet is provided, and the combo bath/shower is finished in a somewhat unusual but attractive brown color and enclosed by frosted glass — no dealing with a small tub and oversize curtains.

Everything about the Arctic Fox 27-5L Silver Fox Edition suggests quality, from the main structure to the smallest of details such as coiled controlled wire routing to prevent damage and support longevity. It's details like these that demonstrate Northwood's commitment to quality throughout its line. 📷

Stop the Leaking

For those of us whose trailers have a recessed city water connection, it can be difficult to get the hose connected tightly enough to prevent leakage. A standard hose cutoff valve solves the problem. The valve can be purchased for about \$4 at any local hardware store. We leave ours permanently attached to the water inlet.

Mike Halfpenny, Mulberry, Florida

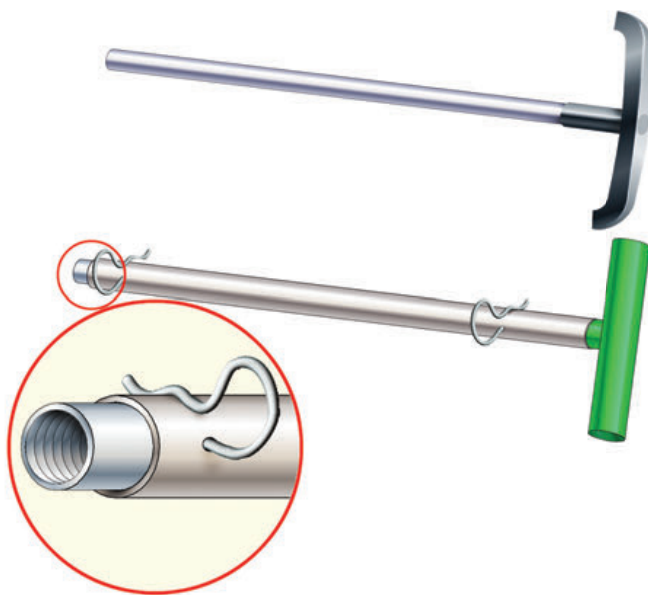


Durable Dump Valve Rods

We are on our second RV and find that the dump valve push/pull rods have failed, either by bending or by the plastic T-handle breaking. My solution was to use a 1/2-inch stainless-steel tube with a 3/8-inch inside diameter and make my own T-handles from steel.

The original threaded bushing that attaches to the valve itself fits perfectly in the 1/2-inch tube. I drilled holes in each end to attach a cotter pin through the original threaded bushing and the custom steel T-handle that I made for the pulling end of the dump valve. When threading the bushing end back to the valve, I used blue Loctite. I painted the T-handles green because in the state of Indiana construction sites use green as the locating color for sanitation, plus it's easier to see when taking a first glance under the RV.

These work so much better and do not bend or break.
Jeff Wineman, Clayton, Indiana



**QUICK
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Babysing the Satellite Dish

We camp a lot where we need a portable satellite dish. Often the dish needs to be positioned far from the RV, and hearing the beeps on the TV (for aligning the dish) can be difficult, not to mention annoying for neighboring campers. My solution is to use a baby monitor. I plug the base unit near the TV and adjust the TV volume to hear it easily on the remote. I then clip the remote to my belt and proceed to adjust the dish. I am now able to hear the beeps and can adjust the volume on the remote so it does not bother the neighbors. It has worked perfectly every time. – **John Wedell, Long Island, New York** 📶

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 you \$35 for original *10-Minute Tech* ideas.

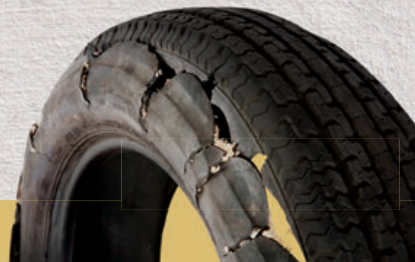
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See Branson by Land and Lake

The amphibious DUKW carried us up a mountain and splashed into Table Rock Lake, while the driver cranked up the *Lone Ranger* theme song



Larry Boggs, nicknamed “Boggy,” was in the sign business in Wichita, Kansas, most of his life. He retired from that, moved to Branson 11 years ago, and is now, at age 73, a Duck driver.

Ducks are amphibious trucks. Born out of necessity during World War II, they were designated DUKWs, a manufacturer’s code used by General Motors, with the D standing for designed in 1942, U meaning utility vehicle or amphibian, K for all-wheel-drive and W for two powered rear axles. The six all-drive wheels are lined up in tandem.

They were used in amphibious landings in the Pacific and the Mediterranean. More than 2,000 of them were in the D-Day invasion at Normandy in 1944. Some were even around to serve in Korea in the 1950s. Advances in how we fight wars, however, left the Duck to the history books decades ago. The folks in Branson had some replicas built, and now Larry spends his days driving tourists around in one.

I joined him for a ride. To get onboard, combat troops used ladders; we used steps. It amounts to getting into a boat when it’s on dry land, which is not the way we usually do it.

Larry clipped on a microphone, and we headed out onto the street. Were it not for the life preservers strapped to the ceiling, we could have been in a tour bus. Passing one of the three Walmarts in Branson, Larry told us that he has a friend who wants to be buried in the Walmart parking lot. “Being there,” Larry said, “he knows that his kids will visit him a couple of times a week.”

Everybody with a microphone in Branson is a comedian. It goes with the territory. Entertainment is what this town is about. Larry said that there are 69,000 theater seats in Branson. “Some theaters have three shows a day, and tickets average about 35 bucks,” Larry said. “People tell me that show tickets go for two and three times that in Vegas.”

Live entertainment is probably the only thing Branson has in common with Las Vegas. There, casino gambling is the focus. The shows are just one of the ways to get gamblers in the door and at the tables. Here, the shows are



Larry Boggs pilots a DUKW, a replica of one of America’s unique military vehicles, on the streets of Branson and on Table Rock Lake. Here, on the water, he approaches the road that allows him to drive up onto dry land.

the focus, and Branson has no casinos.

Larry drove up a mountain where all sorts of World War II vehicles are displayed. We stopped to look down on Table Rock Lake. The marina and RV park were right below us. Larry has a motorhome and said they used to go to that campground, but he now has a house on the lake. “In the winter,” he said, “we become winter Texans and stay at a campground on South Padre Island.”

Back on the flatlands, Larry pulled up to a road that leads into the lake. He gave us a safety briefing required by the Coast Guard. Then he slipped a CD into the player, pumped up the volume, gunned the engine, and with the booming of the “William Tell Overture” — it sounded like the Lone Ranger was behind us, guns blazing — he plunged the duck into the lake. A huge wave of water came over the windshield, and the spray hit a few us. Everybody cheered.

Larry does this all day long. “I’ve got the best job in Branson,” he says.

We chugged around the lake for a while. He offered the driver’s seat to the kids onboard, and each one got to take the helm for a minute or so.

When we were back on dry land, Larry put on more music as we approached the end of the ride — with Dolly Parton singing “America the Beautiful,” undoubtedly the song heard most often in the theaters of Branson. It’s that kind of a place.

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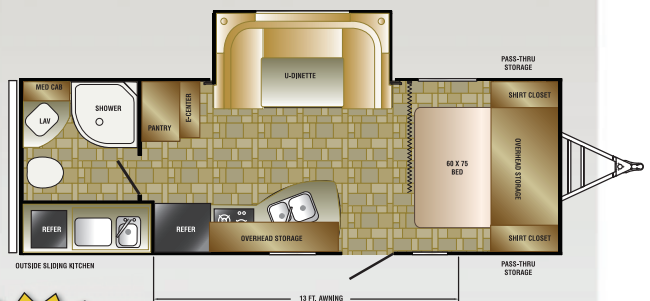
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