

TRAILER LIFE

FOLLOW THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

14

HIGH-FIVERS

FIFTH-WHEELS WITH A
WIDE RANGE OF FEATURES
AND PRICE POINTS

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BRIGHT IDEAS

CURE FOR THE DUALY
TIRE-INFLATION BLUES

QUICK-INSTALL DRILL-
POWERED A-FRAME JACK


SOFT-STARTER FOR ROOF-
TOP AIR CONDITIONERS



TESTED

Home Stretch

TRAVEL LITE'S LONG AND LEAN EVOKE
BLENDS LIGHT DECOR, A SPACIOUS
FLOORPLAN AND JET-INSPIRED DESIGN



QUALITY ADVENTURES DON'T JUST HAPPEN. IT TAKES PEOPLE LIKE MIGUEL ALVAREZ.

Bob and Judy have three kids and seven grandkids, and their Lance Camper has seen a lot of miles. But it still looks like new, thanks in part to craftsman upholsterers like Miguel Alvarez and his 40 years of experience.

It's his skill and love of what he does that's helped make Lance Camper number one in travel trailer sales* and the recipient of the *Trailer Life Reader's Choice Gold Award*. Visit your nearest Lance Camper dealer and notice the difference in Miguel's work yourself.



lancecamper.com

*In the 14'-23' segment.

Lance Campers, Circle 114 on Reader Service Card

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A paradise for outdoor adventures, Nevada's Ruby Mountains stretch 80 miles and soar to heights above 11,000 feet. Page 40



Yo, Adrian!

For RVers traveling on historic Route 66, a small town in the Texas Panhandle marks the midpoint of the Mother Road

The August 2019 issue comes out in mid-July, the midpoint of summer. We hope you're making the most of the season, spinning yarns around the campfire and perhaps scratching a few destinations off your travel bucket list. For many *Trailer Life* readers, myself included, a road trip on historic Route 66 is a top bucket-list item. A 2,448-mile time capsule that takes us back to an era before the Interstate Highway System made cross-country drives homogenous, Route 66 is among America's most well-known and treasured roadways.

At mile-marker 1,139 sits the small town of Adrian, Texas, the official midpoint

Following historic highways is an excellent opportunity to slow down and take in spoonfuls of America at street level.


of the Mother Road, as John Steinbeck called the highway in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Now Adrian isn't exactly a bustling metropolis anymore, with 166 residents as of the 2010 Census and a few Route 66 attractions. If you can't make the drive all at once, try tackling it in two trips, with Adrian the end of the first leg

and the starting point for the second.

Touring any of America's long historic highways can be a travel highlight. Consider the Lincoln Highway, for instance, which winds from New York City to San Francisco. The road, which has various alignments and spurs to large metropolitan areas, runs through Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, Omaha, Denver, Salt Lake City, Reno and Sacramento. Oh, did I mention that it also passes through Elkhart, Indiana, the RV Capital of the World? In fact, three alignments converge in the RV City.

Following historic highways may not be the fastest way to cross the USA, but RV travel provides an excellent opportunity to slow down and take in spoonfuls of America at street level. Strolling America's original interstates can make your travels even more meaningful and enriching.

For your reading pleasure — and I hope you're reading this in your zero-gravity chair under a patio awning — we've packed this issue with some terrific stuff, starting with the cover feature (page 24). Travel Lite has been developing out-of-the-box designs in the past few years, and its first full-size trailer, the Evoke, is packed with features the younger crowd will think are awesomesauce. For those with a fifth-wheel trailer in your future, we take a look at 14 fivers with a wide range of price points (page 32). And to whet your travel appetite, we tag along on RV road trips along the Continental Divide (page 16) and into Nevada's Ruby Mountains (page 40).

Have an excellent second half of the summer, and we'll see you down the road. 

— Chris Dougherty, Technical Editor



TEXAS HOSPITALITY

Midway between Chicago and Los Angeles on Route 66, the sleepy little town of Adrian, Texas, tempts travelers off the historic highway with the MidPoint Cafe, a retro diner known for its homemade pies and well-stocked gift shop, and the Midpoint Campground, an RV park just a block up the Mother Road. For \$25 a night, the pet-friendly campground offers 10 gravel sites with full hookups and free, if not fast, Wi-Fi. www.midpointcampground.com



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TRAILER LIFE

FOLLOW THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

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SNOW
DAY

ALL'S WELL IN WELLS

We are a bit late getting this in, but nevertheless, we want to acknowledge the kind folks at Mountain Shadows RV Park, a Good Sam Park in Wells, Nevada. Last spring we left our home in British Columbia towing our 1980 Bigfoot with a 1999 Nissan Pathfinder that has been in the family for most of its 20 years.

About 15 miles outside of Wells, the SUV started to act up. We limped back to Wells and luckily found a great place to stay at Mountain Shadows. Jerry and Karen gave us a warm welcome. The park is situated within easy walking distance of a grocery store and NAPA Auto Parts, and is well maintained and reasonably priced.

With the help of an OBD-II code reader, factory-service manual and an online forum, I was able to sort out what was causing the SUV to struggle. Turns out, it was the distributor. I ordered the part, and Jerry offered to install it for me. After he did, the Pathfinder ran beautifully. What a relief.

For anyone stopping in Wells, we highly recommend a stay at Mountain Shadows RV Park. We enjoyed our time there, although we were surprised to get a big dump of spring snow.

Shawn Brown and Carole Aoki

Penticton, British Columbia



HAVE A COMMENT?

Write to us at info@trailerlife.com or *Trailer Life*, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Please include your full name, city and state or province.



POLL RESULTS: HOME ON WHEELS

ARE YOU CONSIDERING FULL-TIME RVING?

51% Yes

49% No

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tons dry weight, only a one-ton or larger truck is capable of hefting that beast on its beefy frame. Far too often, folks will overload their three-quarter-ton trucks with such a rig.

Jim Isbell, Anaheim, California



⊕ We just received the June *Trailer Life*, and it's a great read, as always. We were so happy to see the article on the Lance 1172. The 2019 Lance 1172 in the photo (above) is our 12th RV. We started RVing with a Lance truck camper and have owned four of them in addition to a Lance travel trailer, an Airstream trailer, a Grand Design Reflection fifth-wheel, a Roadtrek Class B, a Phoenix Cruiser Class C, an Entegra diesel pusher and two Dutch Star diesel pushers.

We travel all over, especially in the Southwest. The Lance 1172, with the sofa and dinette slide, gives us all the comforts we got in a Class A. We can easily fit into national and state parks, and enjoy boondocking

wherever we are. We installed the new Torklift Cannon hitch extension, made for 2017 and later Super Dutys with the 3-inch receiver hitch, so we have the ability to tow.

I wanted to mention some other neat items on the Lance 1172 that weren't in your article. The 2019 has standard glow-in-the-dark fold-out steps. Since our initial purchase, we have added the roof rack and two solar panels, which Lance offers as options. We went with Zamp over Go Power because it's more expandable.

We sure hope you continue to show truck campers in your issues. Lots of us have downsized, and there is such a rich variety of truck campers available. We are partial to Lance for its quality and fit and finish.

Glenn and Angie LaBar

Hereford, Arizona

Public Eye

I just read "Private Eye," Bob Dawson's June article about installing the Voyager RV camera system on a travel trailer. I've had a TadiBrothers wireless rear-view camera system on my last two fifth-wheels and just installed one on my new Keystone trailer. The

⊕ Keep on Truck Campin'

Thank you so much for Chris Hemer's "Lance a Lot" article in the June issue on the Lance 1172 truck camper. I have been living full time in my 31-foot fifth-wheel for four years. It's good, easy living and allows me to save for my favorite truck camper in which I will hit the road to see this beautiful country. P.S. I just love your magazine!

Robert T. Smith

Apache Junction, Arizona

Regarding the weight of the Lance 1172 camper, at over 2

INJECTION-PUMP PROTECTION

Thanks, *Trailer Life* and Bruce W. Smith, for "Diesel Heart Transplant" in the May issue. Too bad GM isn't offering a CP4.2 fuel-injection pump replacement upgrade to the Denso system, as installed on newer Duramax. My 2015 GMC Sierra has been trouble-free for five years and 58,000 miles, so I rolled the dice and renewed the factory GM Platinum warranty that covers the powertrain, including the fuel-injection system, for less than the S&S Diesel upgrade to the modified CP3.

Bill Dennis, Victorville, California

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monitor is a pop-up that I attached to the dash with hook-and-loop fasteners.

Like Bob, I used the top-center clearance light on the back of the trailer as the power source but drilled no holes for the wiring. I pulled the light out of its mount, used a meter to determine plus and minus wires, then tied into them with vampire clips. I put the light back in with a fresh layer of sealant, ran the wires down about 6 inches,

then drilled the four small screws to secure the mount for the camera, coated with sealant.

I'm a disabled veteran and pull a small trailer behind the travel trailer to carry my electric mobility scooter. I like to be able to watch this trailer on the road, plus the camera system lets me see overtaking traffic. The whole shebang cost \$200.

Bill Dietrick, Pueblo West, Colorado

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Create depth in your image using a shallow depth of field and a large dynamic range between subject and background. People first think about creating depth in their images by using good foreground, mid-ground and background subjects. This is true, but you can also create depth in your images by looking for good dimensional light and controlling how much is in focus or out of focus in your image. First, look at the light hitting your subjects and hitting the background. Then try to find a subject that has good light hitting it but the background has much less falling on it, this will create a larger dynamic range between subject and background. This will give the effect of the image above, a nicely lit subject but a darker background creating depth in the image. If the foreground and background are somewhat the

same density with less dynamic range, your image will look much flatter. Also use a shallow depth of field, this will cause the background to go blurry while the subject remains sharp. Open up your aperture to 5.6 or 6.3 (depending on your focal length) and focus on the subject, this will help minimize the depth of field and give that nice soft effect to the background.

—**Ken Hubbard**, PRO PHOTOGRAPHER & TAMRON FIELD SERVICES MANAGER

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WHAT A WASTE!

Re: "Above and Below," Technical Editor Chris Dougherty's April article about the RV wastewater system (www.trailerlife.com/tech/above-and-below-understanding-the-rv-waste-system):

Nice graphics!

Bob Campbell

Beautiful diagram!

Lauri C.

This is a helpful and informative article. Thanx.

Bill

Good article except not stressing the fact that one should never leave the black-tank valve open while in camp. I see many newbies do this and don't know how to say anything to them. I just hope I never purchase a used rig from someone who does this.

J. Norton

Right on, J. Norton. Something I learned early in my reading about RVs.

D. Umbaugh

Do all RVs have a freshwater "gravity fill," separate from the city-water connection?

Dan

Chris Dougherty replies: *Dan, most but not all of them do. Some high-end fifth-wheels and motorhomes have a tank fill connected to the plumbing system near the city-water connection. When the valve is switched, it fills the tank via a PEX pipe. Some RVs have both a gravity and a city fill.*

Bland or Grand?

I read Larry Krainson's April letter, "The Road Ahead," about how he is unhappy with the "bland" choice of coloring inside the new RVs. When I ordered my 2014 DRV Mobile Suites fifth-wheel, dark wood was the only option. I begged for a light wood color, and Kyle at DRV was kind enough to let one last camper with light oak be produced. We were recently looking to buy a larger fifth-wheel, and when I found out DRV was offering the new off-white wood, I was elated and ordered a 44 Houston. My dealer said that color was such a hit, they were selling the RVs faster than they could get them in.

Cindy Bellis, Baxter, Tennessee

Sluggish Wi-Fi

My wife and I have been RVing for the past 11 years, and the most annoying thing we experience is terrible Wi-Fi at just about every park we visit. The websites on all of them say Wi-Fi is available, but service is bad. We are about to leave for a few weeks and hope that maybe, just maybe, these Good Sam and KOA parks have upgraded their service to accommodate those of us who would like to use the internet, but not if it's slow as a snail.

Charlie Carroll, Mesa, Arizona

Chris Dougherty replies: *Internet access at RV parks is definitely an issue. Unfortunately, location can often be a limiting factor in campground internet service, because even if the campground has invested in good Wi-Fi infrastructure, the system feeding the campground has limitations.*

When it comes to Wi-Fi, there's signal and there's throughput. When you have a campground full of people trying to use the system, you'll likely have a bad connection because the throughput is throttled somewhere in the system. While, in theory, a campground might be able to pay for an upgrade with the internet service provider (ISP), in some circumstances the cost would be extreme and beyond what the campground can logically absorb.

Trailer Life has tested the WiFiRanger SkyPro and Winegard Connect 2.0, and you can find the WiFiRanger article on our website. Both of these Wi-Fi extenders work well to improve signal and throughput to the extent that they can be improved. We will be testing the Furrion Access soon, which promises a similar experience.



The key here is that a better signal increases the chance of having an error-free connection to the node. Also, the rooftop high-power units can hit more distant systems, and more communities are being set up with city-wide internet from Comcast and others. Cellular internet, where available, is often a better choice and is becoming more economical, especially if a reliable connection is needed. **TL**

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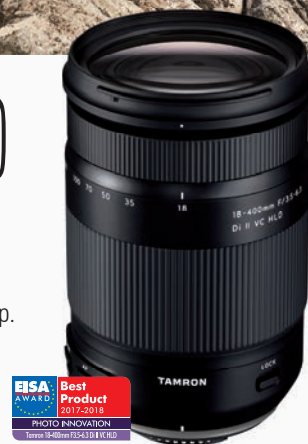
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MOUNT RUSHMORE NATIONAL MEMORIAL

Set in Stone

What to know before visiting South Dakota's legendary presidential shrine

— by Stephanie and Jeremy Puglisi

Mount Rushmore National Memorial, located in the southwest corner of South Dakota, is often portrayed as a mandatory road-trip attraction, and many RVers simply squeeze in a quick stop on their way to destinations like Yellowstone, Grand Teton and Glacier national parks. However, if you slow down and park your rig for a while, you'll discover that Mount Rushmore and the beautiful Black Hills are so much more than an iconic photo opportunity.

If you don't want to feel like Mount Rushmore is overrated, slow down long enough to soak in the natural beauty and historical significance of the region. If possible, avoid the busy summer season, when thousands of tourists descend upon the place every day.

Instead, plan to go during the shoulder seasons of late spring and early fall, and stay in the area for at least three to five days to truly enjoy the special events, exhibits and on-site hiking.

Kick off your visit by attending the Evening Lighting Ceremony, scheduled daily from late May through the end of September. The singing of the national anthem and illumination of the four presidents' granite countenances will give you the patriotic feels.

While at the evening event, make sure to note the posted schedule of Ranger Talks for the following day and map out a plan of attack. Those activities will bring the history and geology of the region alive for adults and children. If traveling with kids, this is the

perfect time to pick up a Junior Ranger booklet at the information center.

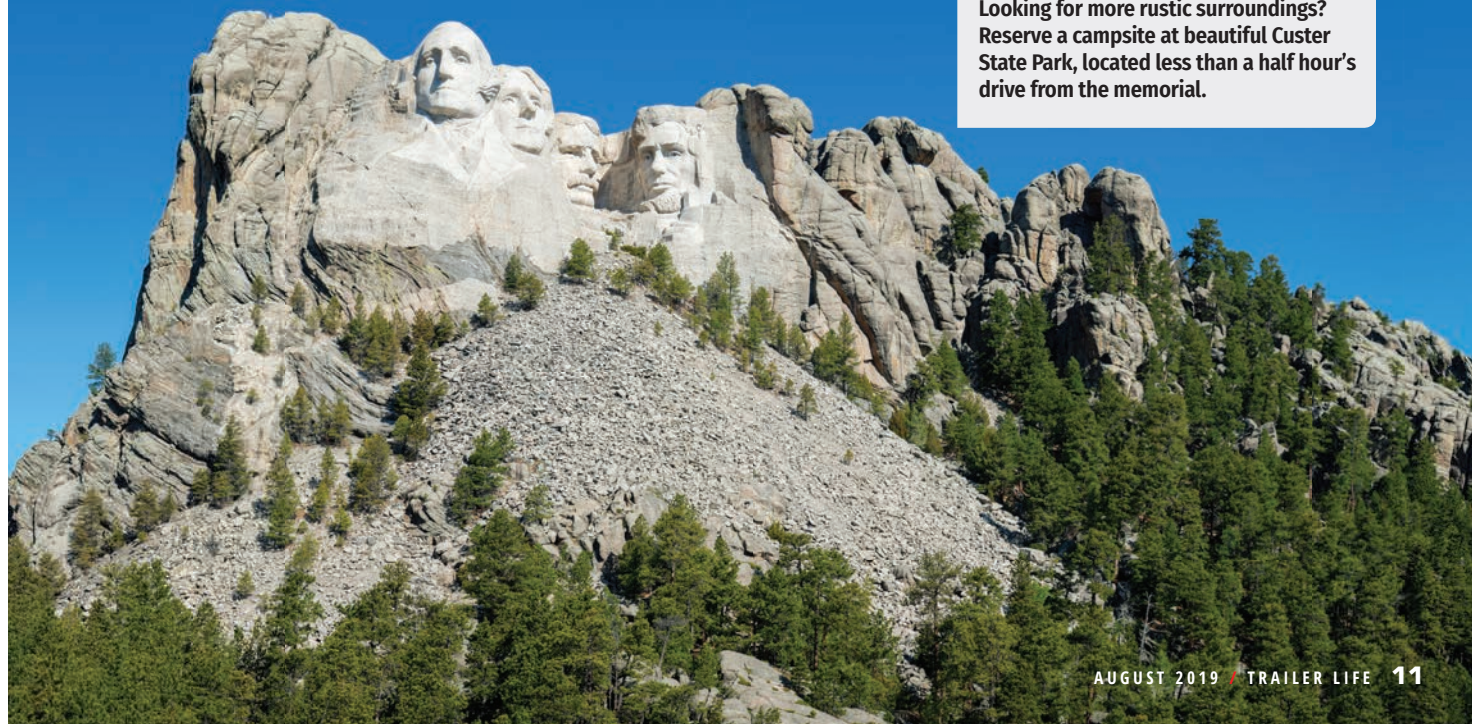
Renovations that are expected to be completed in early 2020 are currently in the works, temporarily closing the Grand View Terrace. Fortunately, the cafeteria remains open, so you'll still be able to splurge on the vanilla ice cream made from Thomas Jefferson's original 1780s recipe. It's pricey but worth every penny.

The memorial has no entrance fee, but there is a \$10 charge for parking, valid for up to 24 hours, so you can attend the evening ceremony and return the next day without paying again.

STAY AND PLAY

While Mount Rushmore National Memorial doesn't have a campground, visitors can enjoy resort-level RV accommodations in Keystone, Hill City and Rapid City, including a number of Good Sam Parks. Looking for more rustic surroundings? Reserve a campsite at beautiful Custer State Park, located less than a half hour's drive from the memorial.

↓ The main attraction in South Dakota's Black Hills, Mount Rushmore gives visitors an up-close look at the rock visages of four exceptional commanders in chief and plenty of patriotic feels.





WISH
GRANTED



Paying It Forward

Mike and Maggie Cook are amazed at the generosity of folks in the RV industry. Their youngest son, Matthew, was diagnosed with Angelman syndrome (AS) at age three. The rare genetic disorder causes seizures and limits his ability to walk and speak. Inspired partly by Matthew's love of the outdoors, the Cooks saw a cross-country RV tour as an opportunity to create awareness about AS and visit other families with children who have the condition. They appealed to the Make-a-Wish Foundation.

Their wish was granted with the help of RV manufacturer Forest River and the Fun Town RV dealership in Purcell, Oklahoma. The Cooks are now the proud owners of a 23-foot, 8-inch No Boundaries travel trailer, but that was just the start.

The folks at Fun Town recommended that the first-time RVers reach out to various companies for help in equipping their new trailer with the extras needed for a successful trip with Matthew — an automatic leveling system that makes it easier for him to keep his balance in the trailer, for example. A number of vendors donated to the project and suggested others for specific equipment, which resulted in 30 companies contributing about \$26,000 worth of accessories.

"I honestly am in total shock," says Mike Cook. From their home in Oklahoma City, the family is traveling to seven states this summer in their well-equipped NoBo. — *Terri Peterson Smith*

Thanks to the Make-a-Wish Foundation and dozens of donors, six-year-old Matthew Cook and his family are hitting the road in a No Boundaries trailer this summer.

PHOTOS: MIKE COOK, FOREST RIVER, KERRI COX



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Retro Rally in the Ozarks

From pink flamingoes on the lawn to candy-striped awnings, there's nothing quite like a retro-trailer rally for nostalgic charm. Each fall, Missouri's Branson KOA welcomes a parade of classic rigs at its Vintage Camper Rally. The eighth-annual event takes place September 5 through 8 this year.

Those interested in staying on-site can receive special camping rates for trailers dating to 1976 or earlier. The general public is welcome to join the fun at Saturday's trailer tour. With at least 50 vintage trailers expected, the tour offers



the chance to check out many unique rigs, each with a personality of its own.

Of course, RVers will find lots more to see and do in Branson. Table Rock Lake and the surrounding Ozark hills offer recreation in the great outdoors, while a multitude of attractions, shows and theme parks spread out along the Branson Strip. — *Kerri Cox*
www.koa.com/campgrounds/branson

What's New in Arizona

Two full-service resorts
open their gates to RVers

1. Verde Valley

Verde Ranch RV Resort, a new 402-site RV park in Camp Verde, is set for a mid-August opening. The Verde River runs through the grounds, inspiring the management to rent kayaks, as well as bikes and ATVs. A pet park, pickleball courts and hiking trails ramp up the outdoor activities under the Arizona sun. Add to that full-hookup RV sites, including some riverfront spots and pull-throughs, a swimming pool, a pair of hot tubs, a fitness center, a clubhouse, and a beer and wine bar.
www.verderanchrvresort.com

2. Sonoran Desert

About 150 miles to the south, the 70-site **Sonora Lake RV Resort** opens this fall in Gila Bend. Centered around a 2-acre recreational lake for swimming, paddling and relaxing on the beach, the resort will offer a restaurant, clubhouse and convenience store. Each RV site comes with full hookups, a picnic table and a patch of grass. A pool, hot tub, and pickleball and tennis courts round out the facilities. Off-road-vehicle trails head into the desert from the property.
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Drop Shot

Winnebago's full-featured Minnie Drop bunkhouse sets a high bar for small towables

The latest offering in Winnebago's line of retro-look trailers, the 2020 Minnie Drop 190BH is a good companion to tow behind many smaller pickups, SUVs and crossovers. With a length of 21 feet and a gross vehicle weight rating of 4,000 pounds, it's aerodynamic, sleeps four, and has a walk-in bathroom, a workable galley in the single slide and the basic amenities one finds in larger

travel trailers.

The 190BH offers wide 48-by-74-inch bunk beds in the rear and a U-shaped dinette up front that converts to a 58-by-74-inch bed. In between is a shower-equipped walk-in bathroom fed by a 6-gallon water heater and a 31-gallon freshwater tank. Flooring is vinyl laminate, and lighting is LED, giving the 190BH a bright, modern ambience.

The street-side galley slideout houses a two-burner cooktop, a microwave above the Dometic fridge and a convenient pantry closet.



Another two-burner cooktop pulls out from an exterior compartment for fixing meals outdoors. Entertainment is provided by the LED TV and Bluetooth stereo system on the wall that faces the dinette.

With a base price of \$25,118, the Winnebago Minnie Drop 190BH manages to fit all the important amenities into an easily towable trailer.

— Bruce W. Smith

www.winnebagoind.com

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CONQUERING THE



BACKCOUNTRY EXPLORATION

Wending their way through the mountain forests of New Mexico, the Intrepid Six started their adventure with relatively clean vehicles. Even as the rigs got caked in mud, the friends' enthusiasm for this once-in-a-lifetime trip never wavered.

GREAT DIVIDE

A group of friends towing a range of small camping trailers tackles a border-to-border trail along America's backbone

— by *Jim Brightly*

It might look like we were emulating the mountain men of the early 1800s, but we were not mule skinnners in Conestoga or Studebaker prairie schooners. We weren't riding horses and guiding pack animals. We were modern-day mountain folks in four-wheelers towing camping trailers and following trails that may have been opened up almost 200 years ago.

Although we enjoyed our evening campfires, we didn't dodge smoke while cooking over them; we used Coleman stoves. We used electric lanterns rather than reading by candlelight, and to keep warm, we slipped into well-insulated sleeping bags rather than wrapping up in buffalo robes. However, the morning bacon smelled just as enticing and

the coffee tasted just as good as they must have all those decades ago.

After almost a year of planning, our group of six conquered the Continental Divide in three separate segments. We chose to start at the southern end of the Great Continental Divide Trail, making our way through five states and ending in Canada. The first stage was the Mexico border to Interstate 40 in New Mexico, the second stage was from I-40 to Interstate 80 in Wyoming, and the third stage was I-80 to the Canadian border, with trailheads at the listed interstates.

Since the official Continental Divide National Scenic Trail is for hikers and horseback riders only, and we were in four-wheelers, we followed a route suitable for motorized travel and towed trailers, some topped with tents, that were cut out for off-road terrain. Our vehicles ran the gamut from a five-year-old Jeep Wrangler to a 45-year-old Toyota Land Cruiser FJ40, with two more Jeeps (a Cherokee and a Wrangler) in between. Two of the four camping trailers were homebuilt, and two were borrowed.

Our trip took a route that closely parallels the Continental Divide

National Scenic Trail, which runs from the U.S. border with Mexico to the Canadian Rockies and covers almost 3,000 miles. As we discovered, the U.S. portion of the route is very close to 2,700 miles.

A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

The spectacular vehicle trail we followed is on a memory card I purchased from GPSKevin Adventure Rides (www.gpskevinadventurerides.com) that is compatible with several Garmin GPS models. Kevin Glassett (aka GPSKevin) has put years of effort into developing this route, along with several alternative routes along the way. As shown on the website, GPSKevin provides one main route (a blue line), some more difficult alternative routes along the way (red lines) and several easier routes (green lines). GPSKevin also offers two-week adventure tours for dual-sport motorcycle riders.

With the card in your GPS

device, you'll see the route plainly delineated as a blue track, with arrows pointing southward. At various spots along the route, you'll see the alternative routes. There are so many of these along the divide that we did not have time to explore them all, but we did sample some. While the blue tracks aren't all that difficult, the green tracks are definitely easier, meaning that they are usually all pavement. Likewise, the red routes we traveled weren't extremely difficult, just more challenging than the blue ones, although we did see one red single-track road that was suitable for a motorcycle only.

All four vehicles were outfitted with Yokohama tires: Geolandar M/T G003 for the 2013 Jeep Wrangler and 1999 Jeep Cherokee, and Geolandar X-MT tires for the 1974 Toyota FJ40 and 2005 Jeep Wrangler. As it turned out, each of us accrued almost 8,000 miles total while on the expedition because of all the highway travel to

and from the trailheads and various detours. Although our vehicles had some mechanical complications and we had a few health issues, we had no problems with the tires.

AND WE'RE OFF!

To avoid summer heat — our vehicles had air conditioning, but our tent trailers didn't — we began our epic journey in March at Antelope Wells, New Mexico, at the Mexico border, and headed north after commemorating the event with several photographs. This also gave us bragging rights to doing the entire route and meeting the nice folks at the Hachita Food Mart.

The drive down state routes 146 and 81 from

Running along the Rocky Mountains from Mexico to Canada, the Continental Divide separates North America's river systems into east and west. The author and five companions took an epic trip paralleling the Great Divide, using a Garmin GPS and a route from GPSKevin Adventure Rides.

Interstate 10 is pretty much just a cruise on a two-lane highway over rolling hills through cattle country. Along the route we'd be meeting hikers, mountain bikers, dual-sport motorcyclists and some fantastic people living in the small mountain towns we'd be visiting.

Our first night on the trail was spent in the mountains

+ WHAT TO TAKE

I would be remiss if I didn't suggest what types of vehicles are needed to safely navigate this route. Low-slung SUVs with all-wheel-drive can do about 80 to 85 percent of the trail in clear weather, which means you could safely drive most of the blue route and all of the green routes. However, if you hit foul weather, sections of deep mud (like we slogged through) or some of the washed-out rocky roads (that we crawled over), you may have to turn around or be pulled out and then backtrack. Therefore, I recommend a high-clearance, four-wheel-drive pickup or SUV with a low-range transfer case and strong off-road tires. The more capable vehicle you take, the more you can relax and enjoy the experience of a lifetime.

The North London Mill near Fairplay, Colorado, was still operational in 1957 when it appeared in the movie *Night Passage*, starring James Stewart and Audie Murphy. Nowadays, it's best to enjoy viewing it from a safe distance.





The Intrepid Six started their adventure at the U.S.-Mexico border. From left to right are author Jim Brightly, Kevin Lake, Mike Barnes, and George and Becky Bernard. Jim's wife, Saraine, is behind the camera.

of New Mexico, a few miles north of Interstate 10. The second night was also very cold, so we stayed in Datil, New Mexico (it's on a GPSKevin green route). Datil does not even have a stoplight — it's just a minor crossroads — but it does have a combination general store, motel, RV park, gas station, restaurant and butcher shop, which also raises its own beef. This cool combo is called the Eagle Guest Ranch, and when we found out they raised and served their own beef, we decided to eat and stay there.

Just down U.S Route 60 from Pie Town (Pie Town's claim to fame is two restaurants said to serve the best homemade pie west of the Mississippi), Datil is a must-stop for anyone who enjoys a good beef steak with all the trimmings, served by some of the nicest people you'll ever have the joy to meet.

WILDFLOWERS AND WEATHER

We were ready for every kind of weather since it is completely unpredictable in the Rockies, even in July. Some passes could be inundated with rain, hail or snow, or even be impassable at times. We packed clothing, sleeping bags and blankets to keep comfortable no matter what weather conditions we encountered. We suggest bringing emergency meals that can be heated or cooked easily, in addition to normal food, in case you're forced to endure snow or rain while cooking.

As mentioned, we began the journey in New Mexico in March because of the potential for too much heat that far south later in the year. Once we climbed into the Mogollon Mountains north of Silver City, we were blessed with springtime fragrances of flowers and the sound of bees buzzing on the warm breezes. That night, however, turned out to be the most uncomfortable — read that as cold — night of the entire expedition. Sharing the nüCamp TAG teardrop with my cousin's chocolate Labrador, I would gladly have traded in the trailer's air conditioning, TV and radio for a wall heater.

Snuggled down into my L.L.Bean sleeping bag (rated for 20 degrees Fahrenheit) and dressed in sweatpants and a sweatshirt with the hood tied and tight, I discovered I couldn't change the page on my Kindle while wearing gloves. I had to remove my glove after each page. I was reading because it was too cold to sleep. In the morning, after the sun warmed the trailer and melted the frozen condensation, Coco's happy tail began swiping the moisture off the walls so it was like being in a rainstorm.

↓ Smittybilt Scout Trailer Kit

Smittybilt thought of everything when designing the Scout trailer kit, a DIY project that starts with a fully boxed galvanized steel frame, which is then powder-coated and covered with heavy-duty undercoating. The galvanized 14-gauge powder-coated tub (boxed body) has a large main compartment and two side cabinets that are perfect for a generator or a camp kitchen, with easy access and locking handles.

Normally, the Scouts are shipped to your home on a pallet (and you assemble them, which takes approximately 16 hours for two people who are experienced in projects like this), but our borrowed unit was assembled by the Smittybilt folks as a demo for our use and then used in traveling trade shows and dealer showrooms.

The steel fenders are removable to accommodate any size tire and strong enough to support a full 5-gallon gas can. At each end of the Scout is a 2-inch receiver, which allows the use of different types of

hitches on the front end and any number of hitch-mounted accessories on the back end, including an attachment point for a winch or strap. Beneath the trailer, three off-road jacks make the Scout easy to unhook and level, and electric axle brakes with a trailer breakaway system provide security in the event of trailer detachment.

Beneath the trailer is an independent trailing-arm suspension, which features coil springs, dual shocks on each side and travel-limiting straps. Double shocks are used to disperse the dampening force evenly across the trailing arm while providing space to allow the center-mounted limiting strap.

The trailer's tongue is designed to accommodate the toolbox, spare tire and parking brake. We found that the Scout offered excellent off-road handling and turning capabilities to match our Jeep while not compromising highway speed stability.

www.smittybilt.com

The Scout was equipped with a rooftop tent, awning and generator, and (right) a 52-quart fridge-freezer.



MEXICO BORDER TO INTERSTATE 40

Silver City, a true old-time Western town, figures highly in the history of New Mexico. Back in the 19th century, it was visited by virtually all the well-known Western folk, from Billy the Kid to Kit Carson, Silver City played host to them all. Today's Silver City is surrounded by manmade mountains of mine tailings, so



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TRAVEL CONQUERING THE GREAT DIVIDE



Top: When settling in for the evening, like at this peaceful campsite in Montana, the group "circled the wagons," much like their pioneer ancestors. **Above:** Slogging through Rocky Mountain mudholes is a dirty experience.

much so that it's mind-boggling seeing the huge peaks that seem to circle the city. Nature's hills in the area must be almost completely hollow from so much being removed from them to make up these mountains of tailings.

Attractions around Silver City include Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument (with five caves that were occupied starting around 1275 A.D.), Whitewater Canyon's Catwalk National Recreation Trail, Fort Bayard National Historic Landmark and Museum (the fort played a role in the search for Geronimo) and several lakes. The Kneeling Nun, a natural rock formation located in the Santa Rita Mountains, has a legend that is dear to the people of Grant County.

INTERSTATE 40 TO INTERSTATE 80

While in Colorado, one of our side trips was to Leadville. From Fairplay (on a green route), we climbed 13,185-foot Mosquito Pass into Leadville, which required all the clearance our vehicles and the transfer cases' low ranges had. But tackling the pass was well worth the effort as the history,

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The author and his companions encountered many small enclaves of hunters and were amazed by the size of the RVs that had been towed along the same trail they were exploring.

Took a different route



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**CAMPING
WORLD**

relics, mine shafts and scenery are beyond description.

At an elevation of nearly 2 miles, Leadville has been called Cloud City. The town enjoyed two gold rushes with a major silver strike in between. People have described Leadville's climate as "10 months of winter with two months of late, late fall." We lucked out, as the day we arrived felt like early fall with sunshine and temperatures in the mid-70s.

I had visited Leadville once



⬆️ TAGing Along

We took turns towing the rugged nüCamp TAG Boondocker teardrop to compare our impressions, and we all felt that it towed easily, braked well and was a luxurious camping venue for off-roading adventurers. A lot can be said for the ease of just opening a door and climbing into bed.

And there's no having to set up a camp kitchen as the TAG's outdoor galley merely requires you to raise the rear hatch to start cooking. This raised hatch also became a protective cover against the elements, and the kitchen has a 12-volt DC slide-out fridge, a two-burner stovetop and holds 8 gallons of freshwater.

The nüCamp literature says the TAG with the Boondock package is designed for the off-road adventurer with its heavy-duty pitched axle, aggressive knobby tires and high ground clearance. You probably don't want to tow it over trails other than moderately technical ones, but it tagged along easily and safely on the dirt roads and trails we threw at it.

Empty, the TAG weighs in at 1,240 pounds, and it has a 2,200-pound gross vehicle weight rating that provides almost 1,000 pounds of cargo capacity. Storage space in the tiny trailer is minimal; there's some shallow storage beneath the mattress and additional storage in the galley cabinet. We hauled most of the cargo in our tow vehicles.

nüCamp RV, www.nucamprv.com

Special thanks to Tom's Camperland in Mesa, Arizona, for use of the nüCamp TAG. www.tomscamperland.com

before in 1978 to tour the famous Tabor Opera House, but it had been closed that day; 41 years later it was also closed on the Monday we were in town. I guess I'll have to plan another trip to Colorado! Built in 1879 by a mining magnate, the beautiful building is one of the costliest and most substantially built structures in Colorado history. The opera house is open certain days between Memorial Day weekend and the beginning of October.

INTERSTATE 80 TO CANADA BORDER

Many historic sites and towns line the Continental Divide Trail, and you can also use the route as a thruway from which to branch off to visit nearby sites that pique your interest. By doing the route in three stages, we had the time to take some of the side trips.

In Wyoming or Montana, depending on the direction you're traveling the Continental Divide Trail, you can take the easier green route through Yellowstone National Park. This route takes you right past Old Faithful Geyser and the Old Faithful Inn. The rustic inn, a national historic landmark built in 1904, is a beautiful sight inside with its four-story wooden log railings and balconies and 85-foot stone fireplace.

Years ago, while on a winter trip via snowmobile, I enjoyed a speech given from the inn's balcony by a Teddy Roosevelt lookalike. Since the 26th president signed Yellowstone into the country's first national park, the speech was very moving.

Because of the altitude, my Jeep's electronic fuel injection started acting up, but this didn't detract from the park's spectacular views of geological stunners such as its 300 geysers, wildlife that include bear, bison and wolves, miles upon miles of trails, roadside picnic areas, waterfalls, petrified forests and a dozen campgrounds. Yellowstone is so uniquely special that it deserves as many visits as you can do in your lifetime. We'll be back.

We discovered some great restaurants in the towns along our route, and one of our favorite diners was Café Jax

in Eureka, Montana, less than 10 miles south of the Canada border. Its name sounds like it should be serving those tiny meals known as nouvelle cuisine; however, its food matches its coffee — robust and delicious. The café serves great coffee, large portions, delicious vittles and has a wide selection on the menu. We thoroughly enjoyed the huge servings of kielbasa, hash and eggs while celebrating our completion of

the Continental Divide Trail. And if the weather cooperates, sitting outside on the patio is delightful.

We parked at the Canada border to capture our completion photos and then motored back into Eureka to celebrate our last evening before wending our way home to Arizona via U.S. Route 93. To say this had been the adventure of a lifetime would be an understatement. **TR**

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Jet-Setter

Travel Lite's sleek Evoke Model C has a spacious light and bright interior inspired by private-jet decor

— by Donya Carlson

Stretched out on zero-gravity camp chairs under the 20-foot awning of a Travel Lite Evoke Model C trailer, we watched the calm and chaos of the campground unfold. It was Easter weekend and it seemed that everyone who owned an RV or tent in Southern California was in

that campground. We were squeezed in on a grass-covered site with neighbors so close you could hold hands with them while reclining in bed.

Enthusiasm and laughter reigned. Kids dyed Easter eggs on a picnic table next to us, while others rode their bicycles through our site, dogs with wagging tails ran around, and the smell of campfires and dinners cooking permeated the air. A guy stood on the rooftop of a toy hauler, pulling a rope to raise and lower a piñata for blindfolded kids joyfully swinging away.

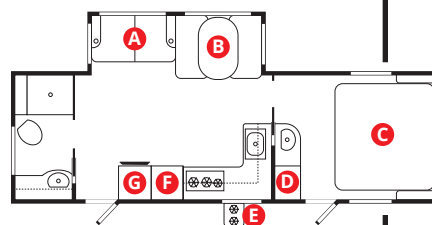
After watching a neighbor direct his buddy, who was driving a Mustang, into a tight campsite and, subsequently, a firepit, I decided it was time to go in and make our own dinner. Extracting myself from the chair, I headed inside the Evoke's tempered-glass, European-style back door via fold-out steps. Yes, a glass door. The 33-foot, 9-inch Model C has a separate glass entry door into the front bedroom, in addition to the main door — kind of like a duplex. Inside, the space is sectioned off from the living area by a wooden sliding door.

✓ In keeping with the light-and-white theme, we enlisted the help of this Ram 1500 Limited Crew Cab 4x4 to make easy work of towing the 33-foot, 9-inch Evoke Model C.



company's 2-in-1 Range Oven with three burners and a flush-mounted safety-glass top, an oven with a sturdy handle on the door and an overhead microwave perpendicular to a large stainless-steel farmhouse-style sink. The sink features a pull-down sprayer faucet with spring-coil spout. We noted that, with the slideout's window curtains open during daylight hours, sunshine reflected off the microwave's controls that are placed about 6 feet high, making them hard to read. Looking out of those 5-foot-long, side-by-side windows with bottom-portion slide-open panes provided hours of entertainment and relaxation while in our campsite. All windows in the Evoke have fabric curtains, which darken the place, but if you like it pitch black when sleeping in, aftermarket day/night roller shades may be in your future.

Adding even more light is a large skylight placed over the



- A) jackknife sofa/bed
- B) dinette
- C) king bed
- D) closet
- E) outdoor kitchen
- F) refrigerator
- G) wardrobe/pantry

middle of the kitchen. A gray-and-white faux-marble backsplash covers the walls between the seamless counter and overhead cabinets and is clear of 120-volt AC outlets and light switches, which are parked out of sight underneath the plentiful cabinets, along with lavender-hued LED light strips. The cabinets open upward on gas struts, and drawers have soft-close hardware.

The cabinet underneath the 23-by-13-inch sink was especially useful since the spacious bottom shelf is free of plumbing and

Windows claim almost the entire side walls over the jackknife sofa and dinette to let in lots of natural light.

LOUNGING AND LIVING

Stepping inside the living area, with the large bathroom at the left and the bedroom out of view at the right, the light-colored contemporary design, accentuated by an off-white Infinity Luxury Woven Vinyl floor, pops with brightness. A two-seater jackknife sofa and booth-style dinette reside in the single slideout. The vinyl cushions are outfitted in a cream color with white stitching (Drummond Stone). Windows claim almost the entire side walls over the furniture to let in lots of natural light. Curved European-style cabinets, finished in Oak Whitewash sans outer hardware, merge with the white Granicoat solid-surface counter and stainless-steel appliances. A Furrion 1,500-watt built-in electric fireplace with remote, high/low heat settings and timer are opposite the seating area. All of this gives the Evoke a sleek look, which the company says is private-jet inspired.

In keeping with the Evoke's Furrion-brand theme, the L-shaped kitchen is outfitted with the



In the right setting, one can see for miles out of the Evoke's full-coverage-windows ensemble. The distinct off-white Infinity woven-vinyl floor was easy to sweep clean and opens up visually an already bright living space.



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CURVED
EURO-STYLE
CABINETS TOP
THE L-SHAPED
KITCHEN

MODERN FLAIR

Above: There's a lot of wall space between the countertop and base of the cabinets, fully covered with a gray-and-white faux-marble backsplash. Stainless-steel appliances add sparkle to light-toned decor in a kitchen that is a joy to work in. Top right: A two-burner cooktop slides out from the outdoor kitchen, which is also equipped with an EverChill fridge and shelving. Bottom right: A 34-inch Furrion electric fireplace and 40-inch HDTV and entertainment system are centrally located to enjoy in the living area.



pipes, so large items could be stored here. A kitchen window set back below the overhead cabinetry brings in more natural light. Standing at the kitchen counter, shorter RVers will have a more sweeping outside view, while I, at 5 feet, 9 inches, found myself crouching down to see more than the ground immediately in front of our campsite.

Another drawer under the oven, which we mistook at first for a warming drawer, is deep enough to hold a collection of pots and pans. The kitchen layout is well thought out with large appliances placed intuitively and plenty of countertop space next to the range. From slicing and dicing on the 40-inch-long, 22-inch-deep counter, to reaching into the fridge and then wandering over to the sink, occupants are free to roam about and not feel space-restricted. There's more than 5 feet of floor space between the kitchen and dinette, and the length of the galley is 12½ feet. Heat registers are kept off the floor for a clean look.

The Evoke's 10-cubic-foot 12-volt DC compressor-model EverChill refrigerator requires a good-size battery bank and recharging system (think solar) for staying put off the grid. A 40-inch HDTV and DV3100 Furrion entertainment system are placed above the fireplace. The DV3100 has two-zone audiovisual technology with Bluetooth connectivity and can be

paired with a smartphone to stream music wirelessly or via DVDs.

Hardwired LED light strips with a lavender hue are located throughout the Evoke and housed under cabinets, around the entertainment center and fireplace, in the dinette, around the slideout's perimeter and in various places in the bedroom. We loved this touch! Not only did it look good but the various mood-setting lights came in handy when trying to find our way around during the night.

The Evoke is not short on interior storage. A large closet by the back entry can serve as a wardrobe, pantry or both. The 37-inch-deep cabinet is sectioned off with the upper half sporting a clothing rod, while the lower portion has two shelves. Under the jackknife sofa is a foot-deep storage area, and there's storage underneath the dinette's bench seats, accessed by removing the cushions and plywood bases. Portable armrests with cupholders are tucked into each end of the sofa. Without attachment points, these armrests can be tippy, so if kids are jumping up onto the sofa, for instance, you'll want to remove drinks because they could get knocked over. And without the 6-inch-wide armrests in place, you can make room for another person on the made-for-two sofa,



+ WHAT WE LIKED

Light and bright living area, large windows, huge bathroom, lavender-hued LED mood lights, outdoor kitchen.

- WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE

A ladder, more exterior storage, footrests on sofa, day/night roller shades on windows, softer lighting over the bed.

which is more like a loveseat.

Since the sofa has no footrests, I preferred sitting lengthwise with my back propped against the wall, providing a view to the outside. The sofa and dinette transform into beds, though both are more appropriate for small people. Lift up the base of the sofa, pull forward and — *voilà!* — the 42-by-57-inch bed is set up. The back cushions are puffier than the seats, so the “mattress” is a

little uneven. The dinette turns into a 40-by-62-inch bed with 4½-inch-thick cushions and takes a little more effort to set up when removing the two-post table. The double-post situation steadies the table for dining or a rambunctious board game, though, and legroom between the bench seating and base of the table is a good 10 inches. In the sleeping position, the sofa does not infringe on walk space or entry into the bathroom.



With generous floor space, the Model C's rear bathroom can accommodate two getting ready at the same time. The shower pan measures 25 by 31 inches, plus it has a seat. The large window slides open.

POWDER ROOM

Ahh, the bathroom — or walk-in closet, as we referred to it. Those who like a grand bathroom to keep clothes at the ready after a shower, lots of storage and abundant elbow and countertop room will be truly happy. The bathroom spans the entire width at the back of the trailer. And since the door slides open parallel to the side wall, there's no door intruding into the space.

The bathroom counter is rather large, but the sink could be bigger; it's almost dwarfed by the spacious counter. The deep-bowl sink is about a foot wide and topped off with a chrome-plated two-handle faucet. There's a mirrored medicine cabinet featuring a cool

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push-button LED, an overhead cabinet, an under-counter double-door cabinet and four self-closing drawers.

A plastic Dometic toilet is planted below the 27-by-33-inch rear window and next to the spacious shower, which features an 18-inch-high molded seat and tri-slide glass doors. Adjusted at the highest setting, the handheld showerhead with shutoff valve is at the 5-foot, 9-inch mark, and with the skylight figured in, total headroom is 6½ feet. When stepping out of the shower with wet feet, the stain-resistant Infinity woven floor offers good grip.

Just remember that when you've finished up in the bathroom and slide open the door, you're stepping out into the heart of the living area with an entry door to the right, so don't parade out of the bathroom without clothing if you don't want to be on full display. With the Evoke set for travel and the slide retracted, the bathroom is accessible,

provided you enter through the rear door. However, access between the living area and bedroom is blocked, unless you want to climb over the kitchen counter and step into the sink while squeezed between the kitchen wall and slideout.

KING-SIZE SLEEPING

Having the loo and bedroom at opposite ends of the RV is a plus for those on

different bathroom schedules. For convenience, there is a vanity with storage and a sink in the bedroom, which worked great for when we didn't want to travel to the other end to brush our teeth. Here, again, counter space is impressive, and there's a big mirror over the small sink. There's 2 feet of walk space between the end of the bed and the vanity.

The bedroom's 80-by-76-inch

MANUFACTURER SPECIFICATIONS

2020 TRAVEL LITE EVOKE MODEL C

Exterior Length	33' 9"
Exterior Width	8' 6" including tires
Exterior Height	11' 6" (with A/C)
Interior Width	7' 9"
Interior Height	6' 9"
Construction	Wood framing, hung gel-coat fiberglass side walls, fiberglass insulation, tongue-and-groove plywood floor decking, TPO Superflex walkable roof
Freshwater Cap.	54 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	40 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	40 gal.
LP-Gas Cap	14 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	10 cu. ft.
Furnace	25,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	15,000 Btu
Converter	55 amp
Battery	Dealer supplied
Tires	M/S 255/55R18
Suspension	Double-eye Lippert Equa-Flex
Dry Weight	7,115 lbs.
Hitch Weight	715 lbs.
Axle Weight (2)	6,400 lbs.
GVWR	8,715 lbs.
GAWR	8,000 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	1,600 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$40,299
MSRP, As Tested	\$40,299
Basic Warranty	One year

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king-size bed with 7-inch-thick mattress was pretty darn comfy, and there's storage underneath the platform, supported by gas struts. Nightstands, 120-volt AC outlets, USB ports and windows are on each side of the mattress, and the curved ceiling over the head of the bed is designed so that most people will have plenty of noggin clearance when sitting up to read or watch TV (a 19-inch HDTV is optional). At the foot of the bed, lavender LED strips softly light up the floor.

Two foot-long LED channel lights are located over the head of the bed, presumably for reading — and good golly, are they bright. Or at least they seemed that way as we settled into bed, expecting less illumination. There's also just one switch to operate them and no dimmer, so they're either both on or both off, which means if one person wants the light on and the other wants to sleep, a battle of wills may ensue. A floor-to-ceiling wardrobe is stationed immediately inside the entry door.

TAKE IT OUTSIDE

Outside the bedroom's entry door is the exterior kitchen with a slide-out, two-burner Flame King range, small shelves and an EverChill mini fridge. The storage door is held up by magnetic latches, and when up, it partially blocks the kitchen window. This trailer is set up for outdoor entertainment with Furion exterior speakers and a bracket so a TV can be mounted outside, plus there's the electric awning with integrated LED lights that runs almost the length of the trailer and shades both entry doors. An outside sprayer is at the back.

The dual-axle, 8-foot-wide Model C body rolls along on Michelin Defender LTX tires on black powder-coated 18-inch wheels, and the tires have a lifetime warranty through Travel Lite. Evoke models have an 8-foot, 6-inch-



Top: Even with a 76-by-80-inch king bed, there's plenty of walk-space between it and the vanity. Lavender-hued LEDs are placed in the bedroom, as well as throughout the Evoke, for lighting during the night. **Above:** The author kicks back on the jackknife sofa, taking notes on the Model C.

wide track, placing the wheels slightly outside the body of the trailer. The aerodynamic molded front cap is covered at its base with a painted-aluminum diamond plate, and three LED light strips on the front cap are operated by a switch in the 31-inch-wide, 18-inch-tall pass-through storage compartment, the trailer's only exterior storage option. The test Model C had easy-to-operate crank-down stabilizing jacks, but power stabilizing jacks are an option. The trailer operates on 50-amp power, is prewired for solar and has a Magnadyne Mobilevision RVTB-B2 Omni-Directional antenna. In keeping with the sleek gel-coat exterior profile, there's no ladder.

Heading home, we realized how soothing the Evoke had been in the chaotic campground. Watching all the energy unfold in the RV-and-tent city was fun, but when we wanted peace in the evening, we stepped inside the roomy Model C, leaving only the calming LED lights and relaxing fireplace on. And we felt quite at home with the generously sized bedroom, kitchen and bathroom. **TL**

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FINDING THE P

The current crop of fifth-wheel trailers comes with a wide range of features and

Every good value shopper chases after the brass ring: maximum bang for the buck. But, as anyone who's taken a deal that's too good to be true will tell you, you get what you pay for. The secret is knowing what you're paying for.

When shopping for a new fifth-wheel trailer, the first step to getting a good buy is arming yourself with knowledge, but before diving too deeply into the research waters, the most important source to consult is yourself. Only you can establish the guide rules that will steer you right.

You don't want to overbuy, so find your "sweet spot." Think about how you'll use the fifth-wheel — and not just your own ideal but the needs of your travel companions. You love baseball and want to visit MLB stadiums, but the roller-coaster nut in your household would rather hit amusement parks, so you might end up doing a little of both, along with visiting fruit festivals for the cook who likes to bake pies (lucky you). So, where will that take you?

Explore the Possibilities

How far will you venture out, and for how long? No need to shell out for larger appliances and more exotic components if you're taking shorter, closer trips. If you're going off-grid, look at power options — solar prep is a nearly omnipresent feature — as well as freshwater- and holding-tank sizes. If you'll be frequenting national parks, be aware that some campsites can't accommodate longer RVs.

Rocky roads will need more rugged tires and a hardy suspension,

but standard gear will do just fine on highways and paved lots. What's the weather forecast? If it'll be hot, make sure the air-conditioning system and power can efficiently support your comfort level. Four-season campers will need heated and enclosed compartments, especially around holding tanks. Either way, make sure there's good insulation to protect from any extreme.

Next is your vehicle. Loaded trailer weight and the truck's ability to handle it are the priorities, and for good reason: lives depend on responsible towing. At the risk of sounding cynical, trust no one's word for a particular truck's tow rating and a fifth-wheel's gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR). Consult the vehicle labeling and manufacturer's specs to ensure that any fifth-wheel you're looking at can indeed be safely pulled by the tow vehicle. Don't forget the added weight of optional equipment, full tanks and cargo, and look for practical data (the weight of water, for instance) to plug into your computations, rather than guesswork.

PHOTOS: MANUFACTURERS. FLOORPLANS: ROB ROY



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in extensive sizes and prices. To find the best fit, consider all of the options

Adapt to the Market

Shopping around for a fifth-wheel can be a good deal of fun, so we've provided some examples of new models with base prices from just shy of \$30,000 to nearly \$100,000. Current trends are placing swankier features across the board, even at lower price points. Theater seats, larger windows and four-season capability are more common than not these days. We're also seeing the emergence of double bathroom sinks, bedroom-dresser "bump-outs" (smaller slideouts) and even secondary bedrooms.

The crux of this search is your willingness to adapt, because the perfect fifth-wheel probably doesn't exist. It's up to you to find the closest model to fulfill your requirements. Take your cue from the Declaration of Independence, which doesn't promise happiness served to all people on a platter but rather offers the opportunity to pursue it on your own. And the pursuit itself is what RVing is all about.



Heartland Milestone 377MB

Come bedtime, an RV can be like a stretch limo — it's been great for entertaining, but you'll have to wait until the party dies down to grab some couch and snooze alongside the other passengers.

Not so with the Milestone 377MB, which has a midship second bedroom containing twin bunks in a slide, plus its own en suite half bath. A window graces the top bunk, and storage cubbies frame the base, with reading lights in both. Heartland leveraged the second bedroom's footprint to the hilt by topping it with a carpeted loft.

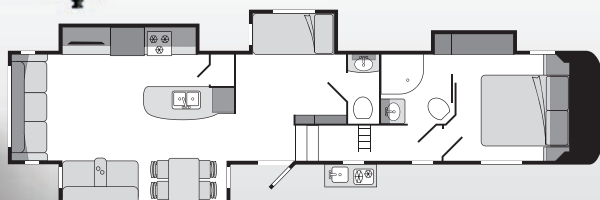
Bedtime is just as nice for occupants of the main bedroom, with its walkaround queen bed, bedside tables, wardrobe in a slide and pocket door to the pass-through bathroom with a radius shower.

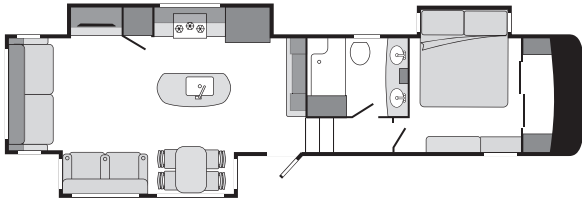
During the day, food storage and prep are handled with the J-shaped kitchen's large pantry, antimicrobial solid-surface countertops and farm sink with pullout faucet, not to mention the camp kitchen outside. Four slideouts augment the Milestone's width, supplementing its 42-foot-plus length. Blue LED accent lighting throughout adds to the overall ambience.

Heartland says this model is "aggressively priced," and we see what the manufacturer means — it's the largest fifth-wheel in the lineup but in the lower half on price.

Exterior Length	42' 2"
Exterior Width	8' ¾"
Interior Height	8' 6"
Exterior Height	13' 6"
Freshwater Cap.	50 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	80 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	80 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
UVW	12,790 lbs.
Hitch Weight	2,430 lbs.
Axle Weight (2)	7,000 lbs.
GVWR	15,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$60,223

www.heartlandrvs.com





KZ Durango 333RLT

The 333RLT meets higher standards for construction, materials and systems expected from a posh fifth-wheel, with a few unexpected things thrown in, like the padded bench seat in the bedroom and the large pass-through basement storage with three-way access from both sides and the front.

The front cap of the 333RLT is designed to increase the short-bed-truck turning radius, and the company claims its Durango line is the lightest high-profile luxury fifth-wheel in the industry. For pulling a boat or small trailer, the towing package includes a 3,000-pound tow rating and 300-pound hitch rating, with a four-pin wire-harness connection and 2-inch hitch receiver.

While those things make life easier on the road, interior touches are meant for easy living. A pillow-top king-size mattress is standard, as are the bathroom's dual stainless-steel sinks and large shower with a seat, and the kitchen's 12-cubic-foot residential refrigerator, convection microwave and large pantry. Living room standards include a 40-inch electric fireplace, 50-inch LED TV and theater seats with heat, massage and lighted cupholders.

A fully vented attic system is designed to eliminate moisture, a 15,000-Btu ducted air-conditioner system keeps things cool, and an all-weather package provides extra insulation. Adding the most frequent options to the \$67,853 base price brings it up to \$75,995, still well below the \$100,000 ceiling for this roundup.



Exterior Length	37' 10"
Exterior Width	8'
Interior Height	9' 4"
Exterior Height	12' 10"
Freshwater Cap.	67 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	53 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	53 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
UVW	10,700 lbs.
Hitch Weight	2,020 lbs.
Axle Weight	8,680 lbs.
GVWR	13,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$67,853

www.kz-rv.com



Grand Design Solitude 390RK

A highlight of this new 41-foot-plus model is the tricked-out rear kitchen, which checks all the boxes for high-end appliances, generous storage and counter space, then adds a double sink along the back wall and a central island with more cabinets and countertop. The whole kitchen is elevated to accommodate sizable exterior storage below, with a heavy-duty sliding door to more easily access larger cargo.

Two chairs at a bar look down toward the entertainment center in the living room, where theater seating for two backs up to the bar and a pair of sleeper sofas face off in opposing slides.

Up the stairs toward the front is a double-sink bathroom with a sunken shower that provides several more inches of headspace, and a walkaround queen bed in a slide with a couple of sneaky spots to stash stuff. Flip up the dresser countertop to expose a shallow recessed area

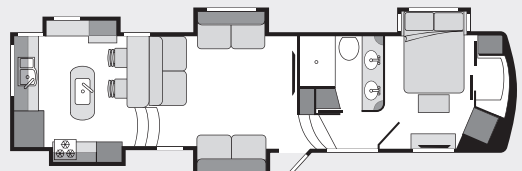


where you can hide (or just store) smaller items like phones and passports. An ottoman is nested under the bed and pulled out by its handle; have a seat on the padded top or lift it to deposit or withdraw items stored there.

Loaded standard features include a living room electric fireplace, bedroom TV, 18-cubic-foot refrigerator (residential optional), two power awnings, an Equa-Flex suspension and a Rota-Flex pin box. A 50-amp cord on a power reel retracts, tape-measure style.

Exterior Length	41' 5"
Exterior Width	8' 5"
Interior Height	8' 6"
Exterior Height	13' 5"
Freshwater Cap.	93 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	53 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	106 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
UVW	14,866 lbs.
Hitch Weight	3,052 lbs.
Axle Weight (2)	7,000 lbs.
GVWR	16,800 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$99,890

www.granddesignrv.com



Forest River Sabre 310BH

One of Forest River's newest floorplans, the 2020 Sabre 310BH is a full-profile, single-slide model that's on the petite side, relatively speaking, with a 33½-foot length and a GVWR of 10,000 pounds. Despite its size, a creative twist means there's room enough to sleep some extra residents.

Designers turned the rear section into a triple-bunk secondary bedroom with two corner single bunks overhead and a wider, 48-by-72-inch lower bunk, each with its own accordion-shaded window and reading light. Drawers, a wardrobe and an under-bed netted cargo area provide storage space.

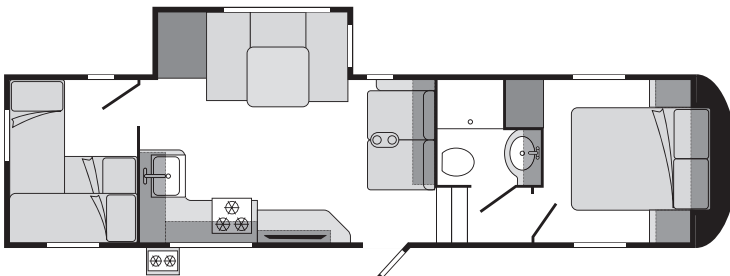
The front bedroom's walkaround queen bed is bookended by nightstands, outlets and overhead cabinets, as well as windows on both walls to provide a cross-breeze. The bathroom offers a large oval sink and a full-shower skylight.

A roomy dinette in the slide holds deep drawers underneath, with ambient lighting overhead and blue LED kick lights on the heat-massage theater seats nearby. RVers can stay charged with double-output USB ports at the end tables, kitchen, bunks and nightstands.

Other features include a camp kitchen, a lighted power awning, a PVC roof membrane, an electric auto-leveling system and a Turning Point pin box.



Exterior Length	33' 6"
Exterior Width	8'
Interior Height	8' 7"
Exterior Height.....	12' 3"
Freshwater Cap.	49 gal.
Black-Water Cap.....	35 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.....	70 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.....	10 gal.
UVW	8,025 lbs.
Hitch Weight	1,670 lbs.
Axle Weight	4,400 lbs.
GVWR	10,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$39,513
www.forestriverinc.com/rvs/fifth-wheels/sabre	



Northwood Arctic Fox Grande Ronde 28-5C

Northwood takes extra pains to create sturdy all-weather RVs that are ready for just about any outside conditions. The 28-5C is a relatively smaller floorplan for this price point, but we all know RV beauty isn't — or at least, shouldn't be — just skin deep. A closer look shows plenty of unseen value.

A cathedral-style ceiling is created by a bonded roof-truss system with batten fiberglass insulation, and

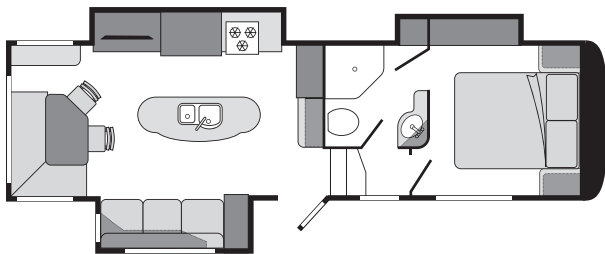
reflective-foil insulation is found in the slideouts and roof, which bears a roof rack and a 20-watt solar panel for battery trickle-charging (upgrades to 100 watts, or 170 watts for more effective charging, are options). A handful of other heavy-duty layers are wrapped in a one-piece fiberglass body.

Inside, the 28-5C has a number of points of interest, like the rear-cap dinette area's corner booth nook



Exterior Length	31' 11"
Exterior Width	8' 6"
Interior Height	8'
Exterior Height	13' 2"
Freshwater Cap.	80 gal.
Black-Water Cap.....	42 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.....	54 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	20 gal.
UVW	11,564 lbs.
Hitch Weight	2,338 lbs.
Axle Weight	9,226 lbs.
GVWR	15,500 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$76,478
www.northwoodmfg.com	





with storage underneath, a freestanding table and two folding chairs. The kitchen slideout contains not only the 12-cubic-foot fridge, three-burner stove and convection microwave but the entertainment center's 40-inch LED smart TV as well. The kitchen has an in-counter knife rack and hinged barrel storage compartments on both ends of the island, along with a skylight above.

The queen bed up front has plenty of walkaround space with nightstands, power outlets and reading lights on both sides, and a skylight with a shade overhead. The bathroom includes a corner shower, porcelain toilet and a wall-mounted pullout lighted mirror with magnification.

Northwood was pretty clever in creating extra storage space. You'll find cubbies under the bedroom stairs and behind the living room TV, which rotates on lift arms. The sofa-slideout cabinet's pullout panel with J-hooks makes for a compact coat closet.

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Coachmen Brookstone 344FL

While this five-slideout floorplan only recently hit dealers' lots, it's already turning heads. The rear is dedicated to an indulgent master bath with a dual-sink corner vanity, a wardrobe with washer-dryer prep and lots of light from the shower skylight, ceiling-vent fan and window over the mirrored cabinets, of which there are many. And, no, the term "master bath" is not superfluous; there's also a half bath off the kitchen. The 344FL is just as lavishly appointed everywhere else, but attention was also paid



to practical matters such as a front cap designed to be shortbed-friendly and side walls with water-impervious Azdel composite material, plus bonus items like an outside refrigerator. At 41 feet, it's in the higher size range of this collection, but not so in price.

Exterior Length41'
GVWR15,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base\$64,113
www.coachmenrv.com

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Dutchmen Astoria 3273MBF

A front queen bed, fold-out sofa, fold-down dinette and double-bed bunks make for a maximum sleeping capacity of 10 (to be comfortable, some sleepers should be kid-size or at least not claustrophobic). The 48-by-60-inch bunk beds are found in a midship second bedroom for a little peace and privacy. Even with accommodations for so many occupants, Dutchmen still made room for plenty of storage, a pass-through bathroom with a porcelain toilet, an entertainment center with a sound bar, a living-area skylight, lighted power awning and automatic leveling system, providing a whole lot of amenities for a relatively modest investment.



Exterior Length 36'
GVWR 12,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base \$56,840
www.dutchmen.com



Escape 5.0TA

Statistically speaking, this is easily the low-number bookend here, with a GVWR that's nearly half that of its next neighbor up on the list, thanks to its diminutive size and molded-fiberglass body. There are small-space sacrifices more often found in Class B motorhomes or small trailers (such as a wet bath), but creativity comes into play with hidden surprises like storage under

the steps leading to the front-loft queen bed, and increased ceiling height helps compensate for the shorter length. The standard \$28,995 model is pretty basic, so options will add up, but at least you'll pay only for what you have use for.

Exterior Length 21' 2"
GVWR 5,500 lbs.
MSRP, Base \$28,995
www.escapetrailer.com

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ST205 / 75R15 - 6PR

ST205 / 75R15 - 8PR

ST225 / 75R15 - 8PR

ST225 / 75R15 - 10PR

ST235 / 80R16 - 10PR *

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Highland Ridge Open Range 284RLS

RVers will enjoy this new floorplan's fireplace with mantel, dresser with lighted countertop and mirror in the bathroom, large frosted-glass full-door pantry inside, and an outside kitchen and lighted power awning, but their furry companions will especially like that it's pet-friendly. There's no carpet in the living area or its two slideouts, and one cabinet has a built-in pet bed. The carpeted bedroom has a third slideout and optional king bed.

Exterior Length 32' 11"
 GVWR 13,702 lbs.
 MSRP, Base \$57,993
www.highlandridgerv.com



Keystone Springdale 253FWRE

This triple-slide model is Keystone's longtime top seller in this line, and it's easy to see why. It's loaded with standard features one wouldn't expect at this price point, including a 50-inch TV, electric fireplace, microwave, dual-entry bathroom, outlets on two nightstands, 82-inch arched ceilings and a freestanding dinette table that can be lowered and pulled into the living room for use as a coffee table. The checklist continues outside with features like exterior speakers, Dexter E-Z Lube axles, rear power stabilizer jacks, triple-seal slideouts and an enclosed, heated underbelly.

Exterior Length 32' 10"
 GVWR 10,300 lbs.
 MSRP, Base \$34,595
www.keystonerv.com



Jayco Pinnacle 36SSWS

Jayco touts this new model as a "home away from home," and it definitely doesn't present itself like a traditional RV. Designers focused on spoiling the owners where they live. The master suite is treated as such with inclusion of a 32-inch fireplace and a curved, cushioned sitting area against the front-cap picture window. The standard king bed is nestled in a telescoping slide — after extending the first length, an inset goes out even further. There's also a "spa-style" walk-in shower and dual LED-lighted sinks in the bathroom. The kitchen and living areas are still quite stylish and well-furnished, and guests can sleep on the fold-out sofa or the optional power-lift Euro-bunk that drops down over it.

Exterior Length 39' 7"
 GVWR 16,750 lbs.
 MSRP, Base \$85,105
www.jayco.com



Vanleigh Pinecrest 335RLP

From Tiffin Motorhomes' towable Vanleigh line, this triple-slideout mid-profile model captures the higher end features Tiffin is known for, such as R-40-insulated flooring and roof, an electric four-point auto-leveling system, and wood fascia and doors that are handcrafted in-house. Little touches like under-counter lighting on the solid-surface kitchen island, a roomy shower and optional memory-foam mattress make the Pinecrest an eye-catching possibility.

Exterior Length 34' 11"
 GVWR 14,000 lbs.
 MSRP, Base \$64,813
www.vanleighrv.com



Keystone Alpine 3711KP

Everything here is upsized, from the extra tall and wide entry door to the 18-cubic-foot residential refrigerator and the aft bath with dual sinks, massaging showerhead and washer-dryer-prepped wardrobe. The front living area sports twin theater seats and two trifold sleeper sofas with a front windshield behind MCD roller shades in the entertainment center. The kitchen contains a full-length coat closet, as well as a true walk-in pantry accessed through sliding barn doors.

Exterior Length 41' 5"
 GVWR 16,500 lbs.
 MSRP, Base \$91,101
www.keystonerv.com



Winnebago Minnie Plus 29MBH

It's the Baby Bear of fifth-wheels, hitting the spot between too big and too small, with a price point to match. Where this floorplan adds a little *oomph* is in the middle bedroom with a fold-out sofa below and a drop-down single bunk above, along with standard features like a freestanding dinette table with four chairs, a microwave and a 15,000-Btu air conditioner. A dual-access bathroom with radius shower and linen closet, three-burner cooktop and stove, solid-surface countertops and power stabilizing jacks are other included niceties.

Exterior Length 33' 8"
 GVWR 9,995 lbs.
 MSRP, Base \$55,535
www.winnebagoind.com **TV**

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RUBY
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ROAD TRIP

NEVADA'S CANYON COUNTRY

With a backdrop of jagged peaks, northeastern Nevada's Lamoille Canyon brims with lush, green meadows, sparkling alpine lakes and a blissfully scenic drive

— by *Mary Taylor*

Our first glimpse of the Ruby Mountains as we approached them from Elko, Nevada, wasn't particularly impressive. For a range that stretches 80 miles, it seemed to rise rather unspectacularly from the parched basin floor. It wasn't until we headed up Lamoille Canyon Road, also known as the Lamoille Canyon Scenic Byway, that we discovered the true beauty of the Ruby Mountains.

We were just above 7,000 feet on the good two-lane road when we were treated to views of stunning polished-rock walls created by glacial action millions of years ago. Steeply carved granite mountains surrounded us, and our perspective included U-shaped canyons and hanging valleys. Multiple creeks rushed downhill or meandered in the flatter green meadows, with their course affected by abandoned beaver dams. Even in summer, several waterfalls appeared in the towering 10,000-foot peaks. It's understandable why the U.S. Forest Service refers to Lamoille Canyon as Nevada's Yosemite, while others have called it the Grand Canyon of Nevada.

The drive up Lamoille Canyon is beautiful enough to satisfy people who think they've

RUBY RIDGE

The Ruby Mountains are an alpine oasis in Nevada's high desert with 10 peaks that rise above 10,000 feet.

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES, SYDNEY MARTINEZ/TRAVEL NEVADA

already seen handsome canyons. The glacier-formed walls are spectacular, and there is much more to see and do. Beyond camping, you can hike, bike, rock climb, fish and hunt in the canyon, and when you get your fill of those, you can explore other sections of the Ruby Mountains and the surrounding area.

COMBING THE CANYONS

To get settled so you have time to explore, one campground in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest accommodates RVs along the 12-mile road. Thomas Canyon Campground is attractively set in pine and aspen groves, with 40 sites and the basic services of water taps, fire rings, trash bins and clean restrooms, thanks to the outstanding camp hosts we experienced. If you require electric

hookups, you'll need to stay down on the flats.

For anglers, the lower creeks are stocked, though catch-and-release fishing is encouraged. Several lakes are accessible along the nearly 40-mile Ruby Crest National Recreation Trail. If you are willing to hike a few miles, you can fish Island Lake and Dollar Lakes at 9,600 feet, Lamoille Lake at 9,700 feet, or Liberty and Castle lakes, which are just over the 10,450-foot Liberty Pass.

For backpackers, the four- or five-day hike along the Ruby Crest Trail begins at the Road's End parking lot at the end of Lamoille Canyon Road. For a shorter trek, you can hike just a section of the trail.

A lovely 5-mile round-trip hike through Thomas Canyon from the campground leads to the bowl-like end of the canyon. Beaver ponds, waterfalls and verdant meadows line the trail. The Talbot, Right Fork and Changing Canyon trailheads can also be accessed off the lower sections of the canyon road.

Equestrians have their own trailhead that leads out from the Road's End parking lot toward Lamoille Lake.



Rock climbers can take their pick of sport climbs, rope routes or bouldering. Winter visitors can go cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, sledding and even helicopter skiing.

ROAMING THE RUBIES

Lamoille Canyon isn't the only appealing spot in the Ruby Mountains, but it is a great place to make your home base while exploring what lies in the surrounding area. On the southeastern side of the mountains is Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge, which can be reached by a combination of paved and dirt roads. Located in the southern end of Ruby Valley, the remote refuge consists of a 16-mile network of spring-fed marshes, grassy areas and brush-covered foothills.

Boating, fishing, wildlife viewing and waterfowl

Above: One of the gems of the Ruby Mountains, the Ruby Crest National Recreation Trail starts at the end of Lamoille Canyon Road. From there, it's a 6-mile-round-trip hike to Liberty Pass, with breathtaking alpine-lake views.



The odds of getting a bite are said to be good when casting at Liberty Lake on the Ruby Crest Trail.

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TRAVEL NEVADA'S CANYON COUNTRY

hunting are all on tap at the refuge. Since it is situated along a corridor that serves the Pacific and Central flyways, the chance of spotting migratory birds is practically certain during the appropriate seasons.

Two nearby areas that are easier to visit are South Fork State Recreation Area and the "barely there" town of Jiggs, named for a fictional character in the long-running comic strip *Bringing Up Father*. Both are along State Route 228 south of Elko, which is off State Route 227, the road that leads to Lamoille Canyon.

About 40 miles south of Elko, South Fork State Recreation Area surrounds a 3-mile-long reservoir. The reservoir was created when the South Fork of the Humboldt River was dammed and filled in 1995. If fishing is your thing, try casting for trophy-size rainbow and brown trout. In winter, there's ice fishing.

JOURNEY TO JIGGS

Jiggs is farther down Route 228, and whether you drive the paved highway or miss the turn from South Fork Recreation Area and end up on a dirt road,



Above, from top: An ideal base for exploring Lamoille Canyon, Thomas Canyon Campground, at an elevation of 7,200 feet, has 40 sites and a creek with brook and rainbow trout. If you go, keep your eyes open for big-horn sheep, mountain goats and pronghorn antelope.

IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE WHY THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE REFERS TO LAMOILLE CANYON AS NEVADA'S YOSEMITE, WHILE OTHERS HAVE CALLED IT THE GRAND CANYON OF NEVADA.





GETTING THERE

To reach Lamoille Canyon, take Interstate 80 to Elko, then follow State Route 227 southeast for about 25 miles. Before reaching the town of Lamoille, turn right on Forest Road 660, aka Lamoille Canyon Road and the Lamoille Canyon Scenic Byway. The route extends 13 miles into Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and ends at a picnic area near the base of Ruby Dome.

Where to Camp

HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST

Located 33 miles from Elko, just off Lamoille Canyon Road, **Thomas Canyon Campground** offers views of the Ruby Mountains and access to the Thomas Canyon Trail. Each dry campsite has a picnic table, campfire ring and grill, and vault toilets and drinking water are on-site. Reservations are available through September 8 this year, after which campsites are first-come, first-served through October 27. www.recreation.gov/camping/campgrounds/232112

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The 13-mile Lamoille Canyon Road concludes with a scenic view of the Ruby range and its highest peak, Ruby Dome.



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TRAVEL NEVADA'S CANYON COUNTRY

you'll wonder what you are getting into. Aside from a few cattle ranches, there's not much to see.

Then suddenly, there it is, and you'll get it all in one glance: the modern red schoolhouse, the old brick Jiggs Hotel, Jiggs Bar and finally, the original white schoolhouse.

Clearly, the bar is the major point of interest, as shown by the yellow road sign posted 20 feet before reaching the saloon. It's the only highway caution sign I've ever seen that shows a cowboy tilting his head back to take a swig of something. The barmaid swears that no one knows where the sign came from.

If you made the 28-mile drive down Route 228, be sure to stop in and see the bar. There's lots of history, as shown by photos on the walls, the barmaid's tales and a historical cookbook offered for sale. Besides that, the beer is cold and the people are friendly.

We spent a week based in Lamoille Canyon and didn't have enough time to see everything in the Ruby Mountains. If you go, chances are, you'll be equally enchanted. **TL**

RUBY MOUNTAIN RIDE

For hard-core cyclists, the 14th annual Lamoille Canyon Hill Climb challenges road riders on a steep 12-mile course through the Ruby Mountains, August 10, 2019. Sponsored by the Elko Velo Cycling Club, the race puts riders' mettle to the pedals with nearly 3,000 feet of vertical gain on the long and winding canyon road. www.elkovelo.com/lamoille-canyon-hill-climb



PHOTO: JEFF MOORE



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2019	HEARTLAND PIONEER BH270	KC5	1585212	TT	\$30,273	\$11,278	\$18,995
2019	COLEMAN LANTERN 263BH	BOC	1568427	TT	\$29,642	\$10,647	\$18,995
2019	HEARTLAND PIONEER QB300	JST	1609023	TT	\$33,678	\$13,683	\$19,995
2019	COLEMAN LIGHT LX 2605RL	MEM	1625310	TT	\$33,930	\$11,935	\$21,995
2019	COLEMAN LIGHT LX 2405BH	MOMN	1578862	TT	\$34,804	\$12,805	\$21,999
2019	COLEMAN LANTERN 285BH	GRV	1578290	TT	\$34,858	\$12,859	\$21,999
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2019	COLEMAN LIGHT LX 2855BH	ROS	1622551	TT	\$28,906	\$4,911	\$23,995
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2019	HEARTLAND FUEL 335	SPO	1621797	FW	\$83,483	\$34,488	\$48,995
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THIS IS COOL!

MICRO-AIR'S EASYSTART REDUCES THE POWER REQUIREMENT TO START AND RUN ROOFTOP AIR CONDITIONERS

A frustration that trailerists have been grappling with for decades is the difficulty of running an air conditioner on a compact, easy-to-handle portable generator when boondocking. While it's possible to lug around a larger and heavier generator that's more difficult to maneuver, many RVers prefer to use a 2,000-watt model for its convenience and versatility. Most rooftop air conditioners can run on

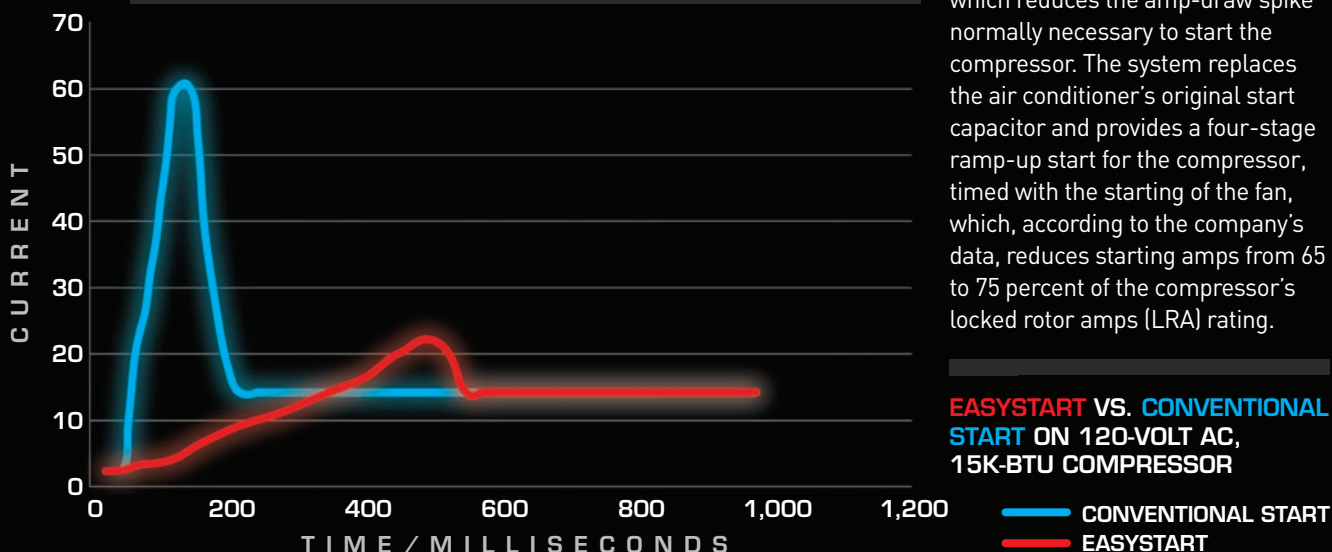
a high-quality 2,000-watt generator once the compressor starts, but that's the rub. The popular 2,000-watt generators do not have the capacity to start a 13,500-Btu air conditioner. Two of these generators must be tethered together in parallel with a connection kit to produce enough amperage to start the air conditioner.

To fix this, Micro-Air created an electronic soft-start system for RV



⚡ **The Micro-Air EasyStart system is simple to set up with the optional installation kit.**

air conditioners called EasyStart, which reduces the amp-draw spike normally necessary to start the compressor. The system replaces the air conditioner's original start capacitor and provides a four-stage ramp-up start for the compressor, timed with the starting of the fan, which, according to the company's data, reduces starting amps from 65 to 75 percent of the compressor's locked rotor amps (LRA) rating.



EASYSTART VS. CONVENTIONAL START ON 120-VOLT AC, 15K-BTU COMPRESSOR



UPGRADE

ELECTRONIC SOFT-STARTER

Difficulty



Time to Install

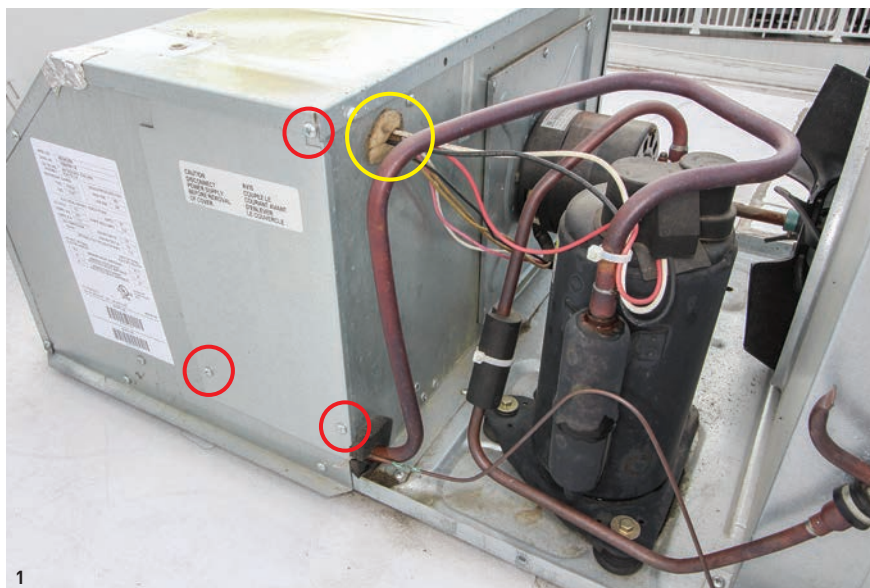
20 minutes

Cost

\$299

www.microair.net

1) With the outside cover removed on the Coleman-Mach air conditioner, the compressor is exposed. Compressor leads pass through the grommet to the air conditioner's capacitor box; EasyStart leads will also be passed through this grommet ●. The capacitor-box cover comes off after removing the two screws on the bottom and then loosening the single top one ●.



1

A few RV manufacturers started installing this technology into their rooftop air conditioners in 2017, and in 2018 Micro-Air introduced EasyStart units to the RV aftermarket, after a run in the marine industry where the company still participates.

The obvious benefit of the EasyStart is the ability to start and run an air conditioner on lower current, and even run two 13,500-Btu units on 30-amp service, with proper energy management. That means it may be necessary to shed other loads, including the battery charger, to run the two air conditioners simultaneously. The same concept applies to running three 15,000-Btu air conditioners on 50-amp service.

Current inverter and lithium-battery technology makes it possible to run one EasyStart-equipped air conditioner for a while on a suitable inverter. This, of course, is predicated on the size and heft of the battery bank and recharging provisions, but that's another story.

The not-so-obvious benefits are reduced noise when the air conditioner starts, and the ramp-up is actually kinder on the compressor than the jolt it gets when the compressor engine "slams on" using the stock capacitor. Additionally, when operating an RV on a generator, there's usually a limit to the number of accessories that can run simultaneously. For example, if the air conditioner was running when the converter/charger kicked in, the generator would likely stall, especially

if the air conditioner shut down and restarted with concurrent loads. The EasyStart makes it easier to calculate and manage loads, running more appliances and accessories while operating the air conditioner.

SETTING UP THE EASYSTART

Installation is pretty simple, but if you're queasy about working with high voltage and wiring, leave the job to a professional. The EasyStart works on all RV air conditioners,



2



3

2) The 15,000-Btu Coleman-Mach's compressor has a locked rotor amperage (LRA) rating of 59.3 at start. Once the compressor is running, it draws 11.5 amps, its rated load amps (RLA). When an air conditioner's start capacitor fails, the compressor tries to draw the required amps directly from the RV's branch circuit, causing the breaker to trip. The spike lasts a fraction of a second, thanks to the boost from the capacitor. The EasyStart instead ramps up the compressor start, substantially reducing the required start current without throwing extra power at the compressor. 3) With the capacitor-box cover removed, the start and run capacitors are exposed.

4) Double-stick tape is used for mounting the housing. The surface is cleaned before mounting, and the grommet or butyl sealant is removed from around the compressor leads. After inserting the bundle from the EasyStart unit, the surface is resealed. Resealing or using plastic bushings is critical to keeping the capacitors dry and reducing the possibility of wires shorting to the metal box. 5) Wiring instructions vary slightly with each A/C model. If the specific air conditioner you're working on has a start capacitor, be sure to verify that the capacitor is discharged using a multimeter.

regardless of the thermostat and circuit-board type, because it connects only to the compressor and power. The unit consists of a tan box containing a circuit board with proprietary software and a wiring harness. The software actually studies the particular compressor, "learns" its unique characteristics and programs it to minimize the power requirement.

The optional installation kit contains all the parts needed for the installation, including cable ties and solderless connectors, along with detailed instructions. The Micro-Air website has videos and additional documents that provide step-by-step procedures, wiring instructions and other information that is useful when installing the system.

FRESH START

After the EasyStart is installed and shorepower is restored to the RV, the start sequence can be initiated. This is done by cycling the air-conditioner compressor five times. The simplest way to perform the programming is to set the thermostat and allow the unit to go to work. The EasyStart uses these start sequences to "learn" the compressor. This will take some time to complete, but once it's done, the unit can be started on a generator or inverter. EasyStart's design includes a five-minute delay between starts to protect the compressor's motor. Alternately, start sequences can be accomplished using two 2,000-watt or larger generators running in parallel with Eco mode off, if hookup power is not available.

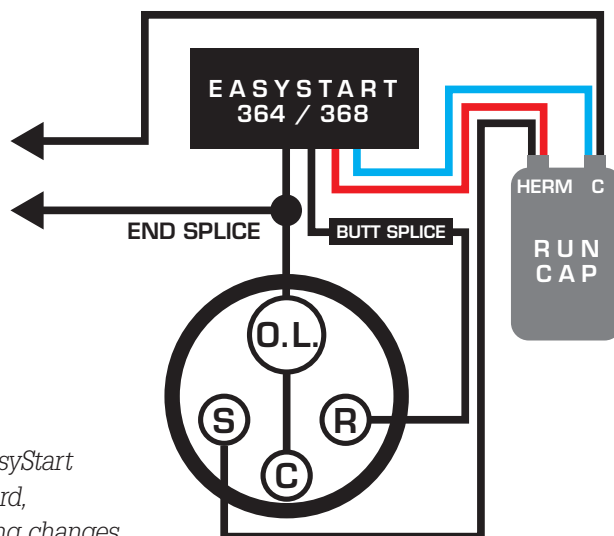
Before tackling this project, three safety warnings must be heeded. First, obviously, you'll be spending time on the roof of the RV, so it should be clean and dry. If you're uncomfortable with heights, don't even consider doing this installation yourself. Second, make sure all sources of AC power to the RV, including automatic-starting invertors, are disconnected. If the RV has a generator with a self-start feature, make sure the generator breakers are off.

❖ *Installing the Micro-Air EasyStart system is pretty straightforward, requiring only moderate wiring changes.*



Lastly, the start capacitor that you may be working with can contain high voltage and give you a good jolt, so be sure to confirm that it is discharged using a multimeter set to AC volts. The correct way to discharge a capacitor is by using a 1,000-ohm resistor across the terminals or using a light bulb and socket. Most of the time, shutting off the power to the air conditioner with the unit running will be enough to discharge the capacitor.

Instructional photos are provided here for installing a Coleman-Mach unit and are generalized for space considerations. The process differs slightly depending on which air-conditioner model is being modified, so follow the instructions that come with the EasyStart. An EasyStart unit will be needed for each air conditioner.





6) Once the wiring is completed, it's double-checked and tucked neatly back into the capacitor box before replacing the cover. Shorepower is restored to the RV before performing the start sequences to program the EasyStart.

MEASURING PEAK OUTPUT

The only way to accurately record the start-up surge is with a sensitive recording ammeter. When the Micro-Air staff demonstrated the system, we saw a significant decrease in the starting amperage (see the "EasyStart vs. Conventional Start" graph on page 48). The 15,000-Btu Coleman-Mach unit's compressor will have a start load of up to about 59 amps with just the stock capacitor, which is reduced to 20 to 23 amps with an EasyStart installed. The 13,500-Btu Coleman-Mach unit will require up to 50 amps to start unmodified, and this requirement is reduced to 16 to 19 amps with the EasyStart installed.

Micro-Air demonstrated that the Honda EU2000 portable generator, for example, will run a 15,000-Btu air conditioner; however, this is dependent on other loads being opened and the elevation at which the generator is being operated. According to the engineering staff, the EU2000 has been able to

TECH TIP ❖ Before tackling this project, make sure the roof is clean and dry, all sources of 120-volt AC power are disconnected, and the start capacitor is properly discharged.

achieve a peak output of 3,300 watts over a short period of time in laboratory testing, but some lesser-quality portable generators were not equally capable.

EasyStart electronic soft-starter units and instructions are available from select RV service centers and directly from Micro-Air for most current-production RV rooftop air conditioners, including Advent, Coleman and Dometic, as well as legacy brands like Armstrong and Carrier.

The EasyStart 364, which we installed, has an MSRP of \$299, and the optional installation kit runs \$9.89. The unit comes with a two-year warranty. For an additional charge, Micro-Air offers an extended warranty, called the Double Down Warranty, that covers compressor failure. **TL**



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PRESSURE CHECK

VALOR TIRE PRESSURE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND BORG SCHRADER VALVE EXTENDERS SIMPLIFY DUAL-REAR-WHEEL TRUCK MAINTENANCE

Inflating tires and keeping tabs on air pressure seem like relatively simple procedures, until you own a dually truck. For some reason, truck manufacturers love to play “hide the Schrader valve” when they configure the wheels for a dual-rear-wheel truck. Valves can be hidden either between the wheel or bent inward, rendering a standard inflation tool virtually useless, especially when cheap, plastic valve extensions are added by the factory.

Dual-foot truck inflators help, but the process of checking

pressure and adding air can lead to complacency, or become maddening enough to put this important maintenance procedure completely out of mind. Unfortunately, failure to maintain proper inflation pressures for safe weight-carrying capacities can lead to breakdowns and accidents, not to mention the inconvenience factor and cost of replacement tires.

After struggling for too long

with a Ram dual-rear-wheel truck with terrible access to the valve stems, Borg Duallyvalve extenders were installed, and since the fifth-wheel trailer tires were already being monitored by a Valor tire-pressure monitoring system (TPMS), the decision was made to add the necessary sensors to also allow monitoring of the rear truck tires on the existing panel. The reasoning to add the sensors for the Valor monitor was

1-2) The flimsy plastic valve extender on the inner dual wheel is recessed in the round hole on aluminum wheels or the oblong opening in the chrome liner. **In both cases, the valve is hard to negotiate, even with a longer truck-style dual-foot chuck. 3-4)** Filling the outer dual is somewhat easier using the factory inverted valve stem, but inconsistent machining made it difficult to seat and release the dual-foot (required) air chuck.



PHOTOS: BOB LIVINGSTON, GETTY IMAGES

threefold: First, when removing factory valve stems, the stock sensors have to be scrapped. Second, to install the Duallyvalve extenders, it is necessary to dismount the tires from the wheels, which is also required to add the Valor pressure sensors. This allowed us to take advantage of labor efficiency. Third, the factory monitor requires a button maneuver on the steering wheel to display tire pressures, which is not that difficult, but when one of the rear tires lost all its air because of a side puncture from debris on the highway, the visual icon failed to illuminate. It wasn't until the truck was parked before the flat tire was discovered. That's not an acceptable scenario, or a confidence builder. Front Valor tire sensors will be added when the tires are



5) Popping off the hub cover before removing the wheel liners (6) requires some finesse to prevent damaging the clips. These caps are expensive and are easy to lose on the road if they come loose, which encourages careful repositioning. 7-8) Ram uses a cheap, plastic valve extender for the inner wheel, which simply unscrews from the Schrader valve in the wheel. 9) The valve core is removed with a special tool to release the air before dismounting the tire. For some reason, it took a long time to vacate the air in the tires, which tacked on labor time.



replaced in the near future.

Borg extenders are made of steel, chromed for visual appeal and machined to perfection. They come in various lengths, depending on application, and ultimately provide no-nonsense access for airing up the tires. In other words, the valves are right in front of your face, making pressure checking and airing up the tires much less of a chore.

In a feeble attempt to add some sanity to the process, Ram provides cheesy plastic extenders for the inner dual wheels. They are accessed through one of the holes in the wheel, and are ridiculously too short and flimsy. Adding air required the use of a dual-foot, truck-type air chuck, and even with the benefit of the added length, it was difficult to depress the plastic plunger adequately to allow air to pass through the valve. The valve flexed and eventually got buggered up enough to be problematic. The use

of an even longer air chuck helped but still wasn't sufficient to keep from hurling colorful language during the process.

The stock inverted valve extensions for the outside duals were better, but still made the procedure difficult. The air chuck frequently got hung up on the end of the Schrader valve because of inconsistent machining tolerances. While Ram gets an F for providing a positive platform for filling tires that would build customer satisfaction, it's not the Lone Ranger in this department. Other dual-rear-wheel trucks and motorhome chassis have similar maladies when it comes to tire inflation.



10) The mechanic took special care to break the tire bead without damaging the factory sensor. Once the Valor sensors and bands are installed, it's important to inform the mechanic to prevent damage when dismounting tires in the future. 11) The factory sensor is bolted to the end of the valve stem and must be removed before continuing the install of the Duallyvalve extenders.

TIRES AND WHEELS

Installing the Borg extenders is not difficult, but it takes quite a bit of time to remove the wheels from the truck and dismount/mount the tires. For this project, Redlands Truck and RV in Redlands, California, was enlisted to do the work, since it has vast experience in this arena. With the tires dismounted from the wheel, it's just a matter of removing the old stems and the attached factory pressure sensors, and reinstalling the Borg extensions. The new extensions have threaded bases with rubber gaskets, and a single nut secures the valve to the wheel. The kit for the four rear wheels retails for \$129.95.

While the tires were dismounted, a Valor sensor was attached to each wheel using a steel band that looks like a giant hose clamp. The process is also fairly straightforward, but the instructions for positioning must be followed carefully.

For grins and giggles, we decided to experiment with remounting the factory sensors to the Valor bands. The thought here was to determine if the stock sensor could be mounted to a band inside each wheel, in defiance of OEM protocol, and retain the use of the factory monitoring system. Since there is no way to reinstall the factory sensors to the Borg valves, strong industrial-grade two-face tape and cable ties were used to secure these sensors to the bands. Generic bands for this purpose can be purchased at

most auto-parts stores, for those not using the aftermarket monitoring system. The result of the sensor experiment was positive, and the factory sensors continued to send signals to the OEM TPMS.

Both sensors for each wheel were mounted in close proximity to the valve stem to prevent damage when dismounting the tires down the road for replacement or repair. It's important to inform the tire dealer of any sensors mounted on bands to help prevent damage; we learned that the hard way.

The tire and wheel portion of the project was wrapped



12) An appropriate tool is used to pry out the factory valve stem from the wheel. **13)** Shorter extension is installed in the outer dual wheel. Extension valve is routed through the existing hole in the wheel and secured with a rubber seal and nut. **14)** Unlike the original valve, the extension in the outer wheel is bent toward the front for easy access. **15)** Longer Borg extension for the inner dual will easily reach through the outer wheel. It's best to leave the extension at full length **16)** and bend it carefully for best access after the wheels are back on the truck. **17)** Stabilizing plug is pushed into a slot in the wheel, centering the long extension in the outer dual. This prevents the extension from vibrating in the wheel and becoming loose, especially on rough roads. **18)** Chips that match the Valor pressure sensors are plugged in to the back of the monitor in a sequence established by the user.



19) Metal band from Valor is used to mount the sensor around the wheel. It looks like a giant hose clamp. Bands like this can also be purchased from auto-parts stores, if the factory sensors are going to be reinstalled without the use of an aftermarket TPMS.



20) Valor pressure sensors have a small antenna and are rated to handle the rigors inside the wheel. Sensors have internal batteries that cannot be replaced. Battery life should be around six years; sensors are available for around \$125. **21)** Although the



sensors slip into the band, industrial-strength two-face tape is used to add stability in a constantly moving environment. **22)** The band and sensor are positioned around the wheel with plenty of material left over for just about any installation.



up in about two and a half hours, including time to rebalance the wheels. Partially worn truck tires can make it more difficult to properly balance the wheels, which was the case for this project.

Redlands Truck and RV mechanics are tire experts and have the heavy-duty equipment to balance large tires, and are persistent. This boosted the labor cost, but in the end everything was working perfectly. Figure on at least \$400 for this job. Redlands is a dealer for Borg Duallyvalves and Valor TPMS, and can handle both products with confidence.

MONITORING SYSTEM

The Valor TPMS has been in service for a number of years in the test truck, making the monitor portion of the install simple. Each sensor is tied to a “chip” that is installed inside the monitor in a user-selected sequence. The sensor and chip are paired and numbered to keep tabs on position; stickers are attached inside each wheel for easy identification. When all the chips were installed, the fifth-wheel and truck tires could be monitored on separate readouts. Sensors and bands (with the chips) are \$143.95 each. The cost of adding a complete kit for a dual-rear-wheel truck and trailer is \$2,195, installed.

The Valor panel is capable of monitoring up to 12 tires. An antenna is mounted under the truck to relay the signals from the fifth-wheel, which also helps with signal strength from the truck tires.

While the Valor monitor is nice looking,

26) It's best to mount the sensor (in this case, the Valor and factory sensors) close to the valve in the wheel. This provides a landmark for dealers when the tire is dismantled from the wheel at the time of replacement. The mechanic must be made aware of the use of internal sensors on a band to prevent damage when using the machine to dismount the tires. **27)** A computer-controlled spin balancer was used to position weights on the wheel properly. It took longer to get the wheels in balance since the tread on the tires was partially worn. Nevertheless, persistence paid off, and the wheels were balanced well within tolerance. **28)** Once the wheels and rims were back on the truck, it was light-years easier to check pressure or add air to the inner dual without the use of an extension or dual-foot chuck. **29)** Direct access to the outer dual extension valve also made it painless to check pressure or inflate the tires in a timely manner.

23) The easiest way to tighten the band is to use a screw gun.

24) Once tight on the wheel, the extra band material can be trimmed with a side cutter. **25)** The sensor fits nicely inside the wheel.

readouts can be hard to distinguish in strong sunlight. Thus, using the provided suction-cup bracket on the top portion of the dash can make it difficult to see the pressure values. As an alternative, a custom mounting plate was fabricated to allow the monitor to be installed in a lower section of the dash, just above the parking-brake release handle.

An audible alert circumvents a portion of the readout issue, while providing a backup for the factory monitor, and control buttons allow the user to scroll to the other tire values and show temperature.

Improvements in valve-stem accessibility, combined with a more robust monitoring capability, make big differences when it comes to safely towing a trailer. Factors like trailer tire quality, miserable road conditions and unexpected hazards all impact tire integrity. The Borg Duallyvalve extensions and Valor TPMS encourage proper tire inflation and allow the driver to keep tabs on pressure. Both are welcome additions to any towing package. **TV**

Special thanks to Redlands Truck and RV in Redlands, California. www.redlandstruckservice.com

Borg Duallyvalve extenders are right in front of your face, making pressure checking and airing up the tires much less of a chore.





FLAP JACK

THE QUICK DROP A-FRAME JACK AND A POWER DRILL SIMPLIFY TRAILER SETUP WITHOUT SPENDING A FORTUNE

— by Chris Dougherty

TWO-WAY TONGUE JACK

Cost \$51.95
 Difficulty 
 Setup 10 minutes

Exercise is great for the body, but not one single health guide suggests that cranking a tongue jack up or down will improve your physique.

The trailer industry has employed electric tongue jacks for a long time, and some are now computer-controlled

components in an automatic RV leveling system. However, not everyone is eager to fork out hundreds of dollars to equip their trailer with an electric jack, especially if their adventures take them well away from civilization where a dead battery can seriously impact the enjoyment of a trip.

Many trailers are equipped with scissor-style stabilizing jacks that use a 3/4-inch socket head crank, so why not build a tongue jack that uses the same type of mechanism, allowing owners to use a cordless drill with a 3/4-inch socket to deploy the post and pad? *Brilliant!* It's actually kind of amazing that no one thought of this before now.

Lippert's Quick Drop one-ton-capacity tongue jack attaches in the same manner as stock counterparts to the A-frame, using the existing bolt pattern, making it super

simple to install. The jack has a hand crank bolted to a clutch sleeve that remains disengaged when the handle is pointed down.

Flip the handle over, and the sleeve slides up and engages the 3/4-inch drive to allow for manual cranking, should the need arise. However, with the handle flipped down, the exposed 3/4-inch drive is ready to accept torque from the drill motor to make the setup much faster.

Installation takes just minutes with a socket set and a jack stand, even on a wicked-cold New England winter day. This jack has a 2,000-pound load limit, so it's important to establish hitch weight before making the install.


We think most people will be willing to spend \$51.95 (retail price) for this seemingly simple jack that makes RVing just that much more enjoyable.

➔ **Lippert Components, Inc.**, www.lci1.com/quick-drop-tongue-jack

Special thanks to Tim's RV in Erving, Massachusetts. www.timsvinc.com



1) The Quick Drop is an easy three-bolt replacement for a standard tongue jack. 2) A stand is placed under the A-frame, and the tongue jack is cranked up, relieving pressure. The three bolts and washers are then removed, as well as the jack foot. 3) The original jack is pulled straight up and removed, and the new Quick Drop is inserted in the frame, bolted down and the foot attached. Be sure to keep a curved-surface metal file handy, as the upper or lower mounting plate openings are a snug fit for the new jack post and may need to be opened up just a bit.

4) The original jack on this trailer had a front rather than a top crank, so there was an issue with the position of the cover for the LP-gas cylinders. 5) After removing the cover, there's plenty of space to crank the jack. Considering that the drill motor will be used most of the time, and it's easy to remove the LP-gas cylinder cover, this was no longer an issue. 6) There is some room to move the cylinder rack farther aft on the A-frame, if needed to accommodate the handle. 7) The cordless drill motor with a 3/4-inch socket operates the jack quite well. To provide the required torque, an 18-volt-model DeWalt was used for this service. Required drill-motor power will partly depend on the weight placed on the jack. 



DID YOU KNOW?

The Lippert Quick Drop tongue jack was one of 10 finalists for the 2019 *RVBusiness* RISE awards. Presented at this year's RVX show in Salt Lake City, the awards honored innovative new RV components.

WHO WILL WIN? YOU DECIDE.



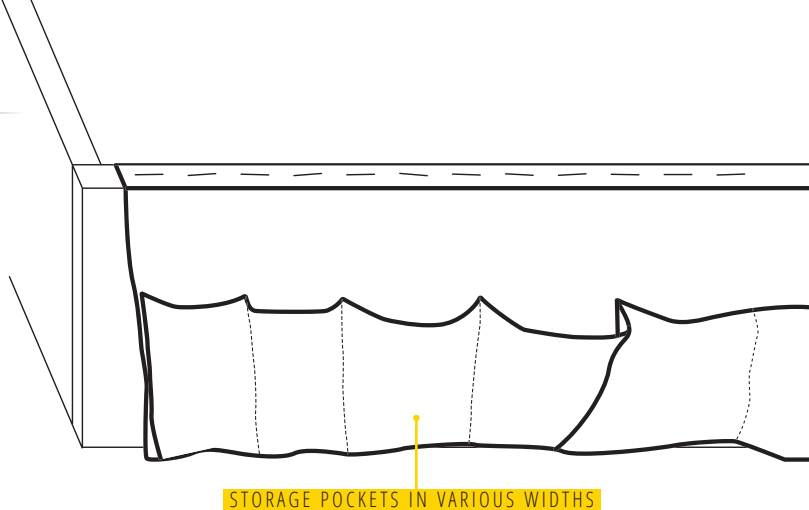
**Vote for your favorite RV products in
Trailer Life's Readers' Choice Awards.**

Go to TrailerLife.com/Readers-Choice today!



IF THE SHOE FITS

Most of the time, I bring along too many shoes. I made a simple, old-fashioned shoe-storage holder using leftover decorator fabric and sewing “pockets” in various widths to stow low-heel shoes, flips-flops and small handbags. (For those who don’t sew, hanging-type shoe organizers are available online, though the pockets are all the same size.) Since I was custom-fitting this one



to use the entire length of the end of the bed, I lifted the mattress and draped extra material over the edge of the under-bed storage area. This way, I could simply staple it to the top edge of the wood frame and it can be removed if I want. It works great and is not in the way.

Sylvie Laviolette, McCormick, South Carolina



Shower Conversion

Downsizing to a small trailer made camping more authentic but put storage at a premium. Our new Rockwood Geo Pro has a tub/shower we will never use since we stay at campgrounds with shower facilities so I converted this space into additional storage by adding shelves.

I built a frame to hold two ½-inch-thick plywood shelves with 1-by-3-inch framing lumber and used gray spray paint to match it to the existing decor. Limited space meant assembling the unit in place using wood screws on the cross bracing. To help keep the unit against the wall, I attached adhesive hook-

and-loop strips to the back of the framing where it joins the shower wall. These strips run the full length of the uprights.

Prior to installing the shelving, I removed the showerhead but left the shower curtain, since when it’s closed it helps keep items from tumbling off the shelves during travel. We now have much-needed storage for our clothing and towels, and the tub basin makes an ideal laundry hamper.

Jamie Schmidt, Calgary, Alberta



Get a Grip

We have a Clearsource water-filter system, and to make it easier to get a grip on it, I added a handle. I purchased a 12-inch heavy-duty barn-door handle by SmartStandard and enlarged the holes on each end of the handle to ¾ inches. Then I removed two outer bolts that hold the filter to the housing and installed the handle using the bolts that were removed. Now the system is much easier to move around.

Dan Leland, St. Paul Park, Minnesota



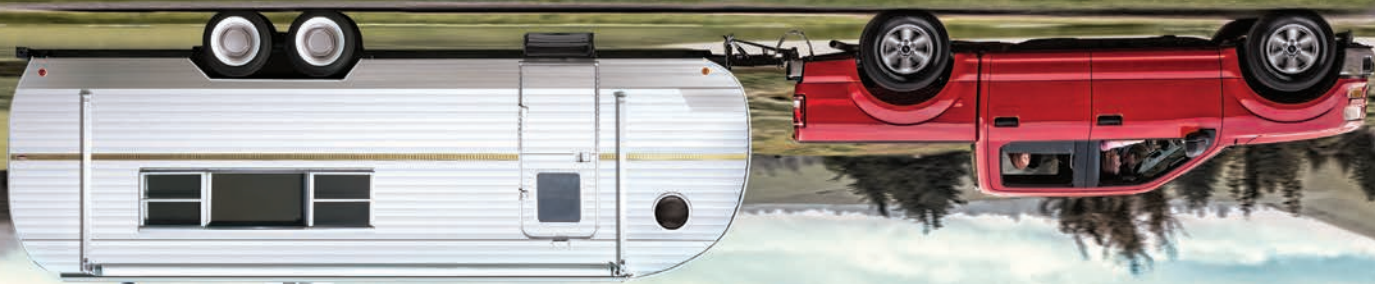
TECH ED TIP

Autumn RV trips are awesome, but falling leaves and pine needles can make a mess of your RV, especially if you have slideouts without slide toppers. It’s important that this detritus is removed regularly, especially from the tops of the slideouts before retracting them. Branches, leaves and pine needles can wreak havoc on the slide seals and hold moisture that can make a mess and damage the rig. Removing the debris is made easier by the use of an electric leaf blower that is small, compact and easy to store.

—Chris Dougherty



To submit a DIY tip, email 10minutetech@trailerlife.com or write to *Trailer Life*, 10-Minute Tech, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Provide a selection of good-quality high-resolution photos. *Trailer Life* will pay \$35 for original 10-Minute Tech ideas. All payments require an SSN or FEIN.



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DIY DOGGIE DOOR

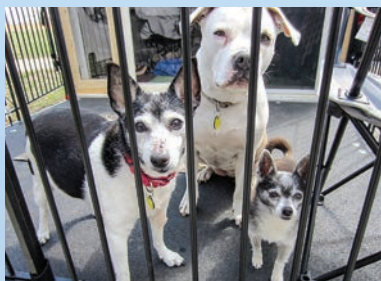
AN IOWA COUPLE BUILT A DREAM RV PATIO AND SLIDING DOOR FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR CANINE COMPANIONS

INVESTMENT ⚙️ **Cost:** \$450 | **Time:** Two days

My husband, Alan, and I started camping three years ago with our dogs. Our latest addition is 73 pounds of love, and between her and two smaller dogs, they take up a lot of floor space in an RV. We started shopping for larger trailers, and a new toy hauler with a sliding-glass door piqued our interest and gave us an idea.

We wound up buying a used 2015 Livin' Lite QuickSilver VRV toy hauler and building a sliding door in the back. After finding a suitable used door for \$125 at a Habitat for Humanity ReStore, we removed the heavy glass from the frame and replaced it with lightweight plexiglass. We enlisted the help of a brother-in-law, Ray Callihan, who is a very creative problem-solving artist and carpenter.

With only 6 inches between the drop-down bed and the ramp door,



a wooden frame was built, and three-prong T-nuts were used to bolt the frame into an existing three-sided metal rail that houses the toy hauler's pull-down screen. The sliding door measures 6 feet across, and the trailer is 8½ feet wide. To fill the gap, we added plexiglass panels, which were bolted into the wood frame. Caulk was used to seal the edges.

To create an outdoor space that we and our dogs can enjoy, we lower the ramp and support it on aluminum jack stands, then place balcony rails on the three sides. The removable railing is made of sections of lightweight steel fence held together by posts and attached to the ramp clamps with hook-and-loop straps.

The toy hauler is now our — and our dogs' — dream remodel, complete with a back porch. The dogs enjoy lounging outside when it's sunny and looking out through the rear windows when it's cold.

— **Lisa Taylor, Paton, Iowa** 📍

IN THE DOGHOUSE

Lisa and Alan Taylor transformed their toy hauler into a canine paradise, fashioning a sliding plexiglass door in the back (far left) and a fenced-in patio on the rear ramp (below). The couple's three dogs (left) love looking out the windows and relaxing on the porch.



RV RENOVATIONS

Have you modified your RV or remodeled it completely? Tell us about it in 500 words or less, including the total cost and time spent, and email your description to info@trailerlife.com. Include an ample selection of photos illustrating the project, along with your full name and mailing address. We'll pay \$50 for every RV Makeover we publish.

dish outdoors

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SKREENZ VEHICLE SCREENS

CONTRIBUTOR PICK 🌟 We love camping but don't love biting bugs. To keep them out of our Class B motorhome, we ordered Skreenz, tough-as-nails mesh insect screens for the side and back doors and cockpit windows. Made and assembled in the United States, Skreenz are vinyl-coated fiberglass and secured with long strips of sticky-backed hook-and-loop material. We installed ours easily. They fit snugly, are fine enough to keep out even tiny no-see-ums, and come with heavy-duty zippers for easy access. The screens are available for most domestic and imported vans and Class B motorhomes, as well as some sport-utility vehicles. Prices vary by application. — *Bobbie Hasselbring*
www.skreenz.com



A *Trailer Life* contributor and frequent RVer in her Pleasure-Way Class B motorhome, Bobbie Hasselbring is editor of *RealFoodTraveler.com*. Catch up with her on our website at www.trailerlife.com/tag/bobbie-hasselbring.

FURRIION EROVE ELECTRIC COOLER \$799

The ultra-quiet 1.3-cubic-foot eRove electric cooler from Furrrion is said to keep food cool without ice for a week, thanks to its rechargeable ePod battery. When on the go, the internal battery is solar rechargeable, or it can be recharged via 12-volt DC or 120-volt AC power. Constructed with pressure-injected polyurethane foam walls, the two-wheel cooler has an LCD display so users can monitor function and power. For added convenience, it offers Qi wireless charging and three USB ports for plug-in charging.

www.furrrion.com/products/furrrion-erove



LOADLIFTER 5000 ULTIMATE PLUS

Air Lift Company's premium-level LoadLifter 5000 Ultimate Plus air-helper-spring kit is designed to level the rear of heavily loaded full-size pickups (without factory air suspension), improving ride and handling. The new double-

bellows air springs, which can support 5,000 pounds, are fitted with an internal jounce bumper to prevent bottoming out. Kits come with military-grade fittings and stainless-steel hardware and air lines, and are available for many Ford, GM and Dodge/Ram trucks dating back to 1968. Prices vary.

www.airliftcompany.com



KENYON FLORIDIAN ELECTRIC GRILL FROM \$679.99

Grilling perfection is easily achieved using the Kenyon Floridian portable electric grill. The powerful tabletop grill works indoors or out and has a touch display that controls temperatures from 150 degrees to a meat-searing 550 degrees. The grill runs on 120-volt AC power and doesn't emit residual heat from the bottom or sides, so it can be used safely on a kitchen counter, outdoor cook station or picnic table, according to the company. One of several portable Kenyon grills, the Floridian weighs 24 pounds and has carrying handles.

www.cookwithkenyon.com



FORD POWER STROKE EXHAUST MANIFOLD \$495

Cracked exhaust manifolds are common among Ford 6.7-liter Power Strokes, so BD Diesel Performance crafted a replacement kit using thick-walled, high-silicon ductile castings. The EGR-compatible manifolds are 75 percent thicker than factory manifolds to combat cracking due to high exhaust temperatures often arising when towing. Thermal durability has been improved with longer exhaust studs and spacers plus thicker, machined bolting flanges. The heavy-duty manifolds have also been ported to maximize exhaust flow.

www.dieselpowerperformance.com **TL**



BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO

After an RV manufacturer and a dealership parted ways, a Wisconsin couple felt like they'd been left at the altar:

“My wife and I purchased our 2017 Heartland Sundance 261RK from Van Bortel RV and Auto in Green Bay, Wisconsin, in the spring of 2017. When we bought it, we were told that Van Bortel was no longer going to be a Heartland dealer but that the end of their partnership would in no way impact our service or warranty.

After using the travel trailer only a few times that first summer, we found an area where the laminate had separated on the front corner. This was brought to the dealer's attention in September 2017. The following month the trailer was at Van Bortel for warranty items as well as the laminate issue, and the dealer simply put silicone over the gap in the front corner. Prior to leaving, I had the service person look at it, and he agreed that it was not right and said they would fix it when I brought the trailer back in the spring.

In May 2018 there were signs of delamination on the front wall by the door and window. The dealer informed me that pictures had been taken and submitted to Heartland for consideration. By the fall of 2018, the trailer had delamination on the front, back and slideout. The service person asked me to take pictures of all affected seals and bubbles so they could be forwarded to Heartland, which I did. Finally, the judgment was made that the cause was water damage due to lack of maintenance of the seals, and Heartland would cover nothing.

When the trailer was back at the dealership, the technicians determined that the front cap had not been assembled properly, which caused the corner to pop. They said they saw no signs of moisture damage and believed a lack of adhesive caused the delamination.

We are at a loss as to what to do. This is the first fiberglass-sided RV we have owned, and it has not

proven to be a pleasurable experience. I would love to trade in the trailer and start over, but any delamination is only going to hurt the trade-in value. If Van Bortel was still a Heartland dealer, would the outcome have been different?

Both the dealer and the manufacturer are acting like this problem didn't start while the trailer was under the factory warranty, and neither wants to take ownership for something it feels the other is responsible for. And since they are no longer teammates, they have little interest in helping each other. Unfortunately, that leaves us in the middle holding the ball, looking for someone to be on our side.

I'm hoping RV Resolutions can provide some leverage to encourage Heartland and Van Bortel to at least work with us to get the delamination fixed before it is beyond repair.

Chris Smith, Appleton, Wisconsin

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

RV Resolutions reached out to the manufacturer and the dealer regarding the Smiths' trailer delamination and received the following reply from Heartland:

Heartland RV has made contact with Mr. Smith, and we are working toward a resolution with him.

Anthony Roberts, Customer Service, Heartland RV, Elkhart, Indiana

Chris Smith followed up with a thank-you letter:

“Heartland received the inquiry from RV Resolutions and offered to make all of the needed repairs at its Elkhart, Indiana, factory. I was happy that Heartland stepped up, although I did request that the company also handle the cost of transporting the trailer to and from Indiana, which was promptly declined. However, Heartland did agree not only to correct the delamination issues but also to investigate possible items promoting trailer sway as well as replacing the kitchen faucet and antenna booster.

Given that the factory was willing to bear the entire expense of the repairs, I contacted Van Bortel to request that the dealership cover the transportation cost. This request was also declined.

The good news is that we now have the Sundance returned to us with all repairs being completed at no cost other than transportation. Heartland replaced the front, back and rear side of the trailer and took care of the faucet and booster replacement. They did not find anything affecting trailer sway.

We want to sincerely thank *Trailer Life* and RV Resolutions for doing what you do and persuading RV manufacturers to do what many would argue was the right thing in the first place.

C.S. ▮

NEED HELP RESOLVING AN RV ISSUE ?

RV Resolutions is *Trailer Life's* 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, mail a typed letter to *Trailer Life* RV Resolutions, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Include copies of appropriate bills and correspondence along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Selected letters will be edited and published unless otherwise requested.

ELECTRIC TOWING



Q When I went for a ride in my grandson's new Tesla, a few questions popped into my mind. First, can a Tesla, or any electric car, be flat-towed behind a motorhome, or must they be towed on a trailer? My grandson's Tesla is all-wheel-drive. Of course, I don't think campgrounds are going to like me using the 50-amp receptacle for a motorhome and the 30-amp to charge my car!

Second, are any RV manufacturers looking into electric-powered motorhomes? I understand Tesla is testing a few electric-powered 18-wheelers on the road. It would be great to tow an electric-powered car behind an electric-powered motorhome.

Third, I understand that Tesla is coming out with an electric-powered pickup in the near future; any ideas on towing capacity or range on these? I'm sure you will want to test one of these trucks.

Franklin Kircher, Pitman, New Jersey

A Not only can a Tesla not be flat-towed, it must be towed on a trailer, not a dolly with two wheels on the ground. According to the manufacturer, towing it any way except on a trailer will void the warranty, to say nothing of damaging the car.

Electric propulsion power is very much on RV engineers' minds these days. So far, only Winnebago has released an electric-powered motorhome model, but it's not quite ready for recreational use. It has a limited range per charge — between 85 and 125 miles — so it's best used for short-range applications such as a bloodmobile or bookmobile that travels to a specific local destination within a city, then returns at night to a home base for recharging. A practical all-electric RV for long-range travel is probably coming, but it's not quite here yet.

If Tesla, Rivian or any other manufacturer produces an electric-powered pickup — or any other vehicle, for that matter — with a useful tow rating and driving range, you can bet we'll test it as soon as we can get our hands on one.

Test the Water

Q I found water in my RV's belly when it was opened to check a valve. I brought it to my dealer and was told it was road water and that this is common. Have you ever heard of this, and how to remedy it?

Jack Fainer, Seymour, Connecticut

A It's certainly possible for roadway water to be kicked up by the tires and make its way into the enclosed underbelly by way of crevices and cracks, Jack. As a first step, you should inspect the underbelly to look for any obvious large holes that are "in the line of fire." Many of those can be sealed with RTV acrylic caulk.

You can also work your way around the rig's underside to be sure the entire underbelly material is securely fastened in place so there aren't any significant gaps for water entry. You can seal some of the joints between the underbelly and frame, but keep in mind that belly material needs to be removable for service work so it will take some consideration concerning which joints should be sealed.

When the trailer is parked and the underbelly area has had time to dry out, inspect for leakage again. Normally the water will stop leaking after a short while. If water is still dripping, the underbelly material needs to be released in the suspected area and inspected for leakage from the plumbing system.

Heavy Toy-Hauler Door

Q My husband and I have a 2013 Forest River Vengeance 399V toy hauler. When we purchased it new, we didn't think to try lifting the ramp door while we were at the dealership before purchasing it. We didn't realize how extremely heavy the door is until we had already signed the paperwork and had the trailer home. Over the years I've contacted the manufacturer, called several service centers and submitted questions on RV forums for a kit or something to help with the door issue, but with no luck.

My husband has Parkinson's disease, so the challenge to lift the cargo door has gotten worse over the years, not to mention that we are getting older. Our last off-roading trip was the final straw when the heavy door knocked both my husband and me to the ground like bowling pins.

We've entertained the idea of trading the trailer in but are having issues finding a fifth-wheel toy hauler with a "true" 22-foot cargo area. We have two side-by-sides that we would like to fit into one triple-axle trailer with a separate bedroom. If you know of a manufacturer that we can check with, please let us know!

Teresa Chandler, Killeen, Texas



READER'S TIP: GARDEN-HOSE FLOWMETER

➔ In your response to Leon Steele's "Water-Tank Capacity" letter in the June issue, you said you knew of no garden-hose flowmeter. I purchased one on Amazon last year that reads gallons and liters, and cost less than \$30. I don't remember the make or model, but Amazon has several different kinds. I use it to fill my RV's 90-gallon water tank to half full for travel. It seems to be accurate. I didn't change the battery in it this year, and it works fine.

Denis Jenkins, Valparaiso, Indiana



Thanks for the tip. I verified it by typing "garden hose flow meter" into Amazon's search box, and a variety of them came up. It seems like an excellent hardware solution for someone who wants to determine water capacities for an RV.



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RV CLINIC

A Your situation is unusual, Teresa, because most toy-hauler doors can be raised or lowered fairly easily by one person. The spring-loaded lift-assist mechanism normally does a good job of balancing out the load. There are five large coil springs that are part of the ramp-door hinge, providing the lifting force to help ease raising and lowering the door.

The most likely scenario is that one or more of those springs has broken, and depending on the location of the break, you might need to look very closely to see it. If this is the case, it should definitely be repaired by a dealer-authorized service center due to the dangerous torque and spring pressure on the parts.

Alternately, a shop that can handle custom work might be able to install a set of lift cables, like those on a castle drawbridge, to help with raising and lowering the door. With a cable on the door edge, pulleys on top of the door frame and large residential garage-door-type springs, you may be able to ease some of the force needed to set up or break down camp.

More Greasable Shackles

I read the "Greasable Shackles" question submitted by Claude Messier and your answer in the June 2019 RV Clinic. I have had the same problem on the last two fifth-wheels I have owned. Based on my experience, I'm proposing another reason for the shackle bushings not taking grease. I discovered that the bushings rotated inside the housing just enough that the holes in the shackle pin and bushing no longer matched. No amount of pressure from the grease gun overcomes this problem.

Luckily for me, the offending holes were not offset enough to prevent jacking up the trailer to let the wheel on one axle hang freely or run one wheel up on blocks to compress the spring. It is a trial-and-error method to determine which procedure works. It depends on which way the bushing rotated. Both methods rotate the bushing on the shackle pin enough to align the holes so they accepted grease easily.

I had this problem on only one or two

zerks, so it wasn't a major job. However, if the holes are misaligned too much, the assembly will probably need to be taken apart and the bushing re-wedged in the proper alignment. Either way, apply all safety precautions jacking up the RV and releasing the tension on the shackles to remove the pin.

Byron Thomas, Anacortes, Washington

Here are some additional points on Claude Messier's issue with his fifth-wheel. Removing the zerk fitting and testing it in the grease gun is a valid test but usually not the reason for the failure to inject grease.

The device on the end of a grease gun that grips the zerk fitting [coupler] is adjustable. The farther you back off the threads and loosen the end collar, the less gripping power the coupler has on the fitting. Yes, this makes it easier to slip onto the zerk fitting, but it also releases or leaks when the grease pressure increases. Tighten the end collar to the point where you can get the coupler to engage the zerk fitting with only substantial hand pressure. This will limit leaking grease out and allow much more pressure to be created.

If grease still will not flow into the joint, the problem is inside the joint. Two scenarios are most common:

1. The joint was not maintained, and the minimal grease inside the joint has dried and become hard enough or dirt/metal fragments have plugged the hole in the pin to resist incoming grease pressure. This can usually be overcome by heating up the joint enough to soften the old grease and allow it to flow.

2. The pin has a hole drilled down the middle and then turns and exits the pin in the middle of the joint. This is how the grease gets to the center and can be distributed in both directions. If the small hole that comes out midway on the pin happens to be pointing down, the weight of the RV will be pressing against it and limit the grease flow.

One way to confirm this is to take the weight off that axle and then note if it will accept grease. If it does, disassemble the joint and rotate the pin. When taking the bolt loose, hold the pin head from turning and rotate only the nut. The pin



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has a knurled shoulder just under the head that grips the shackle. With the nut threaded halfway on the end of the pin, tap on the nut (so the threads are not damaged) and disengage the knurling. Now you can rotate the pin 80 to 90 degrees and reassemble.

Dan Kooienga, Hudsonville, Michigan

In reply to the letter from Claude Messier, it is very important when

installing wet bolts from Dexter or MORryde that the grease holes in the bolts themselves are properly orientated to the 3 or 9 o'clock position during installation. This will allow the grease to flow out of the bolt and into the bushing smoothly.

If they are set at the 6 or 12 o'clock position, the weight of the trailer on the holes will make it difficult to move the grease. I mark the bolt grease hole

locations on the head of the bolts with a small file so I can keep them in the proper location during final torquing of the bolts, and I can check them later.

Patrick Christian, Bisbee, Arizona

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The use of greasable shackle bolts, also known as wet bolts, is a terrific idea for any towable RV. They significantly improve leaf-spring suspension durability and lifespan by reducing the excess wear and tear that are often the result of continued use of the dry, non-lubricated bolts that come on most trailers direct from the factory.

There are several brands and types of greasable bolt kits available, and each is a bit different internally. Some include an interior sleeve with channels that help distribute the grease more freely, and others don't.

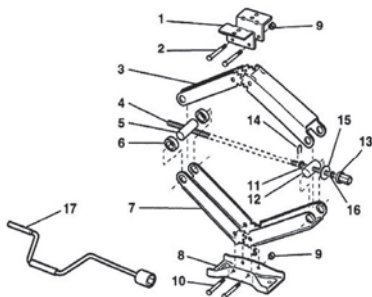
It's good that you guys have discovered a viable bolt-orienting solution to the problem of zerk fittings that can't seem to accept any grease. Thanks for the feedback.

More Stabilizer Jack Looseness

In the June issue, you responded to Michael Stone's "Loosening Stabilizing Jacks" letter regarding his 2017 Prime Time Avenger. I have a 2018 Keystone Springdale 262RK, and I, too, have a problem with the stabilizing jacks loosening up and have to tighten them every couple of days. When I took it to the dealership to have it looked at, they informed me that is the way they work. To me, that just sounds like a factory malfunction, and nobody wants to take responsibility.

I have tried everything possible, just like you said, but they continue to loosen up. As you said, you are truly puzzled, but it does happen, and all I get from my dealership is that this is the way they are supposed to work.

Terry Kauffman, Sidney, Michigan



Regarding Michael Stone's letter, I had a similar situation several years back with jacks made by BAL. The company advised me that washer number 15 in the parts diagram (above), part number P857067, labeled Spacer/Bearing washer, was missing. BAL sent out a set of four washers, which I installed, and the problem was corrected.

Donald Smith, Harlingen, Texas

A From the reader mail we've received, it's apparent that the loosening BAL stabilizer jack problem is more widespread than we realized. First, there are two models of scissors-type jacks, standard and deluxe, the main difference being that the deluxe has a thrust bearing adjacent to the drive screw drive nut. The information here applies to both types.

There's a rubber O-ring (number 16 in the parts diagram) between the drive nut head and the stationary trunnion. This O-ring acts as a brake to deter the threaded drive screw from turning by itself. If the O-ring is damaged or missing, vibration can cause the jack to loosen and lower itself during travel, for example. Two things can damage this O-ring: over-lubrication and excess force applied during jack deployment. Some oil carefully applied to the drive screw at the stationary trunnion is OK, but oil vigorously dumped on the O-ring area is not. The manufacturer, or perhaps your local RV-service center, has these O-rings readily available for replacement as needed, and it's a fairly easy job that an owner can do.

An owner should never use an impact-type cordless drill/driver to deploy the jacks. That can apply far too much force on the mechanism and damage the O-ring. A simple cordless electric drill works fine. And once the

jack extends and contacts the ground or a foot pad, discontinue tightening the screw — just ½ to 1 inch of lift tension is enough to stabilize the trailer. Remember, this is not a leveling jack; it's only for stabilizing the trailer once it's been leveled by other means.

Understanding Weights

Q I have had trouble with the wheel bearings or brakes failing on my

trailer (the mechanic doesn't know which) and almost lost a wheel. I need help understanding weights. I have a two-axle fifth-wheel trailer with the following weights (from the weight sticker): GVWR: 9,995 pounds, GAWR (each axle): 4,400 pounds, UWW: 8,614 pounds.

Now, if 10 to 15 percent of the weight is on the hitch, that would leave 8,495 pounds for the axles to carry (9,995 minus 1,500 pounds). If I have

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RV CLINIC

two 4,400-pound axles, then that should be adequate to carry the loaded trailer weight (2 multiplied by 4,400 equals 8,800 minus 8,495, which equals 305 pounds cargo carrying capacity).

This is what I don't understand: when it had a bearing/brake problem, it destroyed the hub. The hub had these numbers on it: 65535. My understanding of these numbers is 6 equals six bolts, 55 equals 5.5-inch bolt distance, 35 equals 3,500-pound hub and bearings. Now, I have always heard that the real capacity of something was determined by the weakest component, which in this case would be the 3,500-pound hub and bearing.

So, if the weight that the axles had to carry was 8,495 pounds and the bearings could support 7,000 pounds (2 multiplied by 3,500 pounds), wouldn't that make the unit 1,495 pounds overweight (8,495 minus 7,000 equals 1,495)?

My thinking is obviously wrong, as this very reputable manufacturer would (I hope) not design something three-quarters of a ton overweight. Please help me understand this so I can have some peace of mind. Being broken down on Interstate 25 in northern New Mexico was not fun.

Jerry Livingood, Livermore, Colorado

A You're on the right track, Jerry, but have missed a few items. First, you need to take the trailer, loaded and ready for the road, to a public scale and weigh it. Note the overall weight, the hitch weight and the axle weight. That 8,614-pound uvw figure is unloaded vehicle weight, which doesn't include fluids and cargo, and you likely don't tow your trailer unloaded. Those real-world figures will give you something firm on which to base the rest of your calculations.

The axles have 3,500-pound-rated hubs and bearings, but that's two hubs per axle, so the combined axle hubs are rated at 7,000 pounds per axle. Per your suggestion about a piece of chassis hardware being rated according to its weakest component, if you check the maximum load rating for the tires, you'll probably find they're close to 2,200 pounds to produce that 4,400-pound GAWR.

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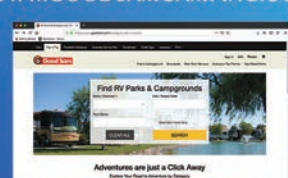
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TO ADVERTISE IN THE CLASSIFIED SECTION EMAIL

KATEY PURGATORIO

katey.purgatorio@goodsam.com

It's entirely possible that once you compare the trailer's loaded, ready-for-travel weights, including the axle weights, you may find that 8,800-pound combined GAWR is overloaded. This can easily happen when an RV manufacturer, even one with a reputable name, uses an axle that's rated to handle a projected load, but for cost reasons, it uses a minimal-rated axle.

However, since there are four axle spindles with 3,500-pound-rated bearings, totaling 14,000 pounds capacity, it's not the bearings that are overloaded. If anything, it would be the wheels and tires, although those being overloaded wouldn't cause a bearing failure. You'll find out the possible overload status by way of determining the true trailer weights per the details above.

If you had a wheel bearing fail badly enough to burn and ruin the spindle, it was probably caused by a lack of bearing maintenance. Axle bearings need to be inspected and repacked

annually, per the axle manufacturer's recommendations. It's also possible the hub retaining nut was improperly torqued following the last maintenance teardown, as that could also cause overheating and failure, but it's more likely a simple bearing and lubrication failure.

If you really like the trailer and don't want to sell it, but you discover that the axles, or specifically, the tires and wheels are overloaded, you might try replacing them with higher rated counterparts. New wheels and tires rated to handle, for example, 2,500 pounds, will give you more weight-capacity wiggle room and a safety margin to avoid overloading. It's going to cost a few dollars, but it's still a lot cheaper than a new trailer. **TV**

HAVE A TECH QUESTION ?

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

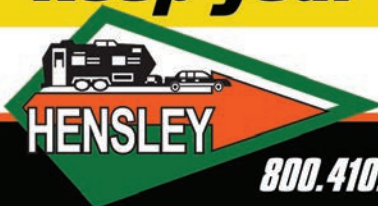
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Thrill Seekers

A memorable ride on a roller coaster at the Great New York State Fair's mega festival

— by Lisa Ballard

“Which roller coaster?” asked my friend, Ilyse, as we joined the throng at the New York State Fair near Syracuse.

“The *biggest*,” I replied, excitedly.

En route to the coaster, we paused by the poultry barn, which also housed the prizewinning covies (guinea pigs). We were tempted to check out the cute covies first, but the desire for an adrenaline

rush proved stronger.

For a brief moment, as we rumbled up the skinny track, we could see across the entire 375-acre fair, then we plummeted down, swung right and left, charged ahead, then dropped again. What a thrill!

Our wild coaster ride was the perfect introduction to the biggest annual family party in the Empire State. We also sampled maple cotton candy, watched

concerts and parades, and poked around the animal pavilions. The goats were even more endearing than the covies.

Luckily, a campground is adjacent to the fairgrounds. There was too much to see in a single day at this king-size carnival!

➔ **If You Go**
This year marks the 174th Great New York State Fair, celebrated August 21 to September 2.
nysfair.ny.gov

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