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On the cover: Relaxing campside on a crisp day at Ventura Ranch KOA in SoCal, alongside Augusta RV's Luxe LF-38RL. Photo by Scott Hirko



A Happy Milestone

This year marks the 75th anniversary of Trailer Life, and we're celebrating every month!



s we enter a new year, we're proud to announce that Trailer Life will be celebrating a very important milestone: its 75th anniversary. This is no ordinary feat; it puts Trailer Life in a special class of magazines that have been published continuously for a very long time. In 1941 the first issue of Western Trailer Life was circulated, and eight years later the word "Western" was dropped from the logo. Today, Trailer Life continues as the premier RV-lifestyle publication.

My involvement began 44 years ago after being hired by Art Rouse, the man who propelled this publication to success in the 1960s and today is considered a legend to those who embrace the RV lifestyle.

Rouse had an uncanny vision about travel-trailer ownership and the people who made up this mobile community. It was (and still is) a community of people with unparalleled goodwill, and thus, the Good Sam Club was built into the world's largest RV owner's organization. There was something compelling about living in a travel trailer for more than just economic reasons, and Rouse knew that.

Interestingly, my wife, Lynne, and her family traveled cross-country pulling a travel trailer in 1949. We hardly discussed that journey, since she was an infant at the time and could relay only bits and pieces told by her father and mother ... until we became hooked on RVs in 1971. From then on, Lynne figured it was good karma that drove us into the lifestyle.

It's really fun to go through the back issues of Trailer Life and see how enthusiasts traveled and camped in the old days. For the most part, the people haven't changed much. Campground residents set up their trailers with others, pulled out their chairs and proceeded to socialize around potluck dinners and blazing firepits. Back then, the lifestyle was all about travel to fun and beautiful places, friends and caring people; nothing in that arena has changed, except for the clothing, which was more formal. Fellow campers still look out for each other and graciously lend a hand when necessary.

For the next year, in each issue, we'll be featuring flashbacks from the pages of Trailer Life that follow the transformation of this magazine and the RV lifestyle (see page 16). While the products, technical procedures and RV types and styles have changed dramatically, it's apparent that the reasons people hit the road in an RV are still the same: to enjoy the freedom to explore and the camaraderie of fellow RVers.

Thank you for helping us celebrate our 75th anniversary! 🖴

- Bob Livingston, publisher

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BOONDOCKING CAPITAL

Each January, RV snowbirds flock to

Quartzsite, Arizona, seeking warmth, rocks and gems, swap meets and a big annual RV show at the world's largest gathering of RVs and RVers. Less than 20 miles from the Colorado River, the sleepy desert town fills with RVs as far as the eye can see.





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YOUR OPINIONS, STORIES AND FEEDBACK

EcoDiesel or Hemi?

Chris Hemer's November 2015 article about the latest truck offerings, "Sweet '16s," failed to mention that, until Chevy and Nissan can get their small diesel trucks to market, Ram is the only game in town with a half-ton diesel.

I am delighted with my brand-new Ram 1500 Laramie EcoDiesel. It's beefy, comfortable, pulls like a train and gets great fuel mileage — it's averaging 23 MPG. I see a lot of Hemiequipped Rams and can't understand the appeal when there's a more powerful and economical option. Oh, and did I mention that the dealer gave me a discount off the MSRP equal to twice the additional cost of the diesel engine? I'm smiling all the way to the campground — and not needing to stop for fuel on the way!

Doug Swanson, Orange, California

We needed to buy a truck, and I couldn't be happier with the Ram 2500 we picked. I'll tell you the way we figured it, and you can take it for what it's worth.

First question: Diesel or gas? I started looking at Ram because I originally wanted a diesel, and, after talking to many people (including a few mechanics), I concluded that the only diesel worth having is a Cummins, available only on Ram trucks. But I was also counseled that diesels, including the Cummins, have noisy, smelly, mechanical drawbacks. Diesels have plenty of towing power and slightly better gas mileage but



I've been a subscriber for a few years now, and *Trailer Life* was an inspiration for components when building my custom teardrop trailer. I incorporated details from my Ford F-150 in the teardrop with matching taillights, third brake light, wheels, running boards and black metallic paint. The moonroof window

atop the teardrop is even the same shape as the rear window of my F-150. You can find my "build blog" at www.gregoryowen.com/the-teardrop.

Thanks for a magazine that brews ideas — perhaps for a future build!

Greg Owen, Flemington, New Jersey

Grand Teton National Park is not on Jenny Lake but is on Jackson Lake, right next to Signal Mountain Lodge. Jenny Lake's campground is for tents

only, and I do not recommend taking

any but the smallest RV on the Jenny

Lake loop road.

Karen Knowlton, Pocatello, Idaho

"Around the West in 30 Days" was very informative and had great suggestions. We have recently purchased a 30-foot Cruiser RV ViewFinder and are planning a trip to the Southwest. An article covering RVing in the national parks of the Southwest would be most helpful, especially a discussion of the campgrounds, sights to see and helpful tips for touring the area. Keep up the good work!

Cindy Shaw, Palmetto, Florida

More Chock Talk

In Kevin Livingston's November 2015 "Chock It Up" article, he states that you must stabilize your wheels after disconnecting. It should read, you must stabilize your wheels prior to disconnecting.

My personal experience with this was at a campsite with a little slope. As soon as the trailer cleared the ball, it rolled backward about 4 feet before coming to a stop in a bush. Had the bush not been there, who knows what would have happened.

no acceleration, and the weight of the diesel engine takes away from the available payload. So I decided to go for a gas-powered 6.4-liter Hemi, which has more than enough towing power to pull our fifth-wheel.

Second question: 2500 or 3500?
This was a no-brainer. The Ram 2500 has plenty of available payload to handle the pin weight of our RV, and it has rear coil springs. Most heavy-duty and super-duty pickups have leaf springs in the rear, which give a very hard ride. The 2500 rides like a luxury car.

Many people make the mistake of buying more truck than they need. The Ram 2500 with a pretty nice trim level handles the job of pulling our fifthwheel. Just as importantly, 99 out of 100 times when I get into this truck, I'm not pulling the RV, and I'm extremely pleased with the solo acceleration, handling, comfort and smooth ride.

Bill Murphy, Long Beach, New York



Thirty Days, Nine National Parks

I appreciated the tips in Peter Lewis' November article, "Around the West in 30 Days," especially as we are considering visiting some of the national parks mentioned. I do have a brief correction to make, however. Signal Mountain Campground in Had my wife been hooking up the water or electric, she would have been run over. I now chock the wheels first, even on level sites.

Dale Melton, Goodland, Kansas

The opening photo in "Chock It Up" shows the Fastway Onestep. I use this model on my fifth-wheel and am very happy with it. The photo shows the chock being used upside down. The cable should come from the top of the unit, and the lips on the wedges should be against the tires.

Cliff Peschansky, Blairstown, New Jersey

Welcome to America's Outback

I just finished reading Bill Graves' November 2015 column, "Snowy Morning in Indiana." This man really has a way with words. America's Outback is my first read in each issue.

Mike Nelligan, Santa Rosa, California

Thank you, Bill Graves, for the November column's reminder of how beautiful winter in Indiana can be. We've been in Texas for 15 years, and it made us homesick.

Frank and Susan Helmsing Roanoke, Texas

Black Canyon City, Not Bisbee

October 2015's "Great American Haunts" identified Black Canyon Ranch RV Resort as being in Bisbee, Arizona. We are located in Black Canyon City. Imagine my surprise when calls started coming in for reservations in Bisbee!

Christine Dantes, Manager Black Canyon Ranch RV Resort Black Canyon City, Arizona

Pet Protocol at RV Parks

Thank you, Bob Livingston, for your "Respect Can Be Contagious" Driver's Seat column in the October 2015 issue. We agree 100 percent with your comments. We have been full-timing for almost a year and a half, and have stayed at RV parks in 22 states. Most of the RVers we have met do practice proper campground etiquette, but the minority who do not can certainly spoil it for us.

We travel with two miniature

dachshunds and are meticulous about "policing" their waste and controlling their barking. However, we continually encounter fellow RVers who ignore park rules about picking up after their dogs and keeping pets on a leash. There have been several times when I have had to protect my pets from being attacked by unleashed larger dogs.

Perhaps it would be helpful if RVers would be required to sign a document indicating they have read and agree to

follow each RV park's pet policies and accept liability for any damages or harm caused by their pets.

John and Deborah Moore, Topeka, Kansas

Hitching Up Without a Hitch

When we traded in our fifth-wheel for a travel trailer, we started out with a well-known weight-distributing hitch that was also supposed to control sway. The weight part worked out well, but the sway part not so good, especially



when getting passed by big rigs and going down long, steep grades with lots of curves.

After reading Albert Cerf's September 2015 letter, "Taking Control," regarding the Andersen WD hitch, we ordered one and installed it just prior to leaving on an 8,000-mile-plus trip over every kind of road. Everything felt pretty good until we were on a badly rutted two-lane in Canada with rain pouring down, and the pickup felt a bit squirrely.

I stopped, backed the adjustment nuts off half a turn, and for the rest of the trip, things were very stable.

Instead of feeling anxious at the end of each travel day, we now feel relaxed and look forward to the next day. Hooking up and unhooking couldn't be easier, and the hitch is unobtrusive, so there's really no need to remove it from the tow vehicle.

Lee and Charlotte deVries Crawfordsville, Oregon

Discord on the Dashboard

I have one of the RV GPS models that Camping World sells, and it would get confused and show me driving in the ditch beside the highway, among other things. In my discussions with the GPS company, I learned that the device could be affected by interference from my dash cam. I moved the GPS a foot farther from the dash cam, and all the problems with it went away. I wanted to share this in case other *Trailer Life* readers are suffering from the same problem.

Bernie Turner, Killarney, Manitoba

Don't Call Us "Entry-Level"

After receiving a *Trailer Life* subscription for Christmas from great friends five years ago, we have been avid readers, always waiting for the next copy to come. With that said, our only complaint is with your overused term "entry-level."

We own a 2011 Palomino Puma 253FBS that we purchased new and have put thousands of miles on. Your magazine would probably call this an entry-level fifth-wheel, although we have been camping for more than 40 years. We started with sleeping in the car, went on to tenting, then to a couple of pop-ups and a truck camper, and finally to our Puma fifth-wheel.

We love all of the cabinets inside the fifth-wheel as well as all of the storage compartments outside, and, of course, the dinette that is large enough for six adults, or for Gramma and Grampa with the grandkids. The Puma also sleeps six people comfortably.

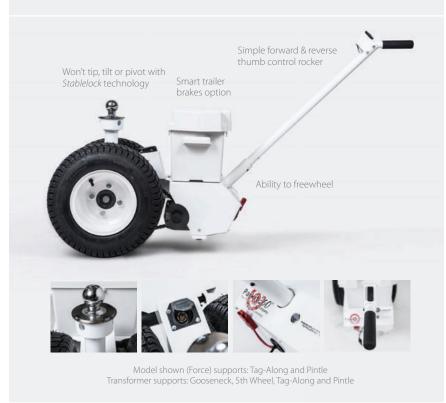
RVs have a very personal fit with their owners. It is not based on how much you spend or how big it is. After all our years of camping and finally purchasing the RV that fits our needs, we hate to think that we are considered entry-level.

Tim and Julaine Botting Manawa, Wisconsin 🗭





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Inside the Memphis Pyramid

Tennessee's former 20,000-seat arena has been transformed into an indoor-outdoor adventure with a mega Bass Pro Shops store

article by Dave G. Houser

Some pundits say the Bass Pro Shops debut at the Memphis Pyramid in Tennessee last April was the biggest thing to hit the Bluff City since Elvis Presley. For those who have not been inside a Bass Pro Shops store, it is an overwhelming experience with its wilderness-themed selection of outdoor, boating, fishing and hunting gear. Many of the stores have large aquariums and streams running through them, and the 86,000-squarefoot Memphis location even lets visitors watch alligators being fed on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

More than 35.000 folks turned out for the reopening of the towering Pyramid — former home of the NBA team, the Memphis Grizzlies — as the world's largest and most dazzling outdoor-accessories and sportinggoods store. The glimmering stainless-steel 32-story icon overlooking the Mississippi River had been mostly dormant since the Grizzlies moved to the FedExForum in 2004, but it

has bounced back big time following a \$191 million makeover masterminded by Bass Pro Shops owner Johnny Morris.

Morris, a media-shy 67-year-old Missouri billionaire, got his start selling fishing lures out of his dad's Springfield, Missouri, liquor store and went on to build a 74-store empire under the Bass Pro Shops banner. He's been called the Walt Disney of Retail, but even Disney might be amazed at the transformation that's taken place inside the 500,000-square-foot Pyramid.

The basketball court has been replaced with a 600,000-gallon swamp containing more than 2,000 fish, live alligators and flocks of ducks. Surrounding it are ultrarealistic 100-foot-tall cypress trees draped with Spanish moss. In the middle of it all, the world's tallest freestanding elevator glows with neon, as it rises to a restaurant, a hotel and an outdoor observation deck atop the structure.

The restaurant features a 13-lane bowling alley, and the hotel that rings the second-floor atrium consists of rustic-style cabins with rocker-lined porches overlooking the swamp.

Amid all the fantasy, there's a mega-size Bass Pro Shops retail store, jam-packed with fishing, hunting and camping gear — plus shooting and archery ranges.

The Pyramid represents a huge boost to the Memphis tourism scene, drawing more than a million visitors during its first three months. But there's plenty more going on in the city that calls itself the Birthplace of Rock 'n' Roll. Graceland, with its Presley mansion and gravesite, has long been a signature attraction. Then there's world-famous Beale Street. a three-block entertainment district lined with music clubs and restaurants, and recently complemented by a pair of new musical attractions, the Memphis Music Hall of Fame and the Blues Hall of Fame.

Bass Pro Shops at Memphis Pyramid 901-291-8200

www.basspro.com/memphis

For a list of Memphis-area RV parks, visit www.goodsamcamping.com.



Creature Comforts in a Wildcat

Based on customer and dealer input requesting lighter and more affordable fifth-wheels, Forest River has given its Wildcat a complete makeover to target the half-ton and three-guarter-ton truck market. The new models have an unloaded vehicle weight ranging from 9,449 to 11,061 pounds, with gross vehicle weight ratings from 11,822 to 13,687 pounds. The popular fifth-wheel brand has been in Forest River's lineup for 15 years and now sports an ivory high-gloss fiberglass exterior and 3M graphics package on a welded aluminum cage.

Currently, five floorplans are available, with four of them having three slides. All models have hardwood fascia and raised-panel cabinet doors and drawers, residential furniture that includes a hide-a-bed sofa sleeper (an L-shaped sofa on 327RE), a fireplace and a 50-inch HDTV on a swingarm. In the kitchen, solid-surface countertops,

a high-rise pull-out

faucet, a microwave oven and a threeburner range with a glass cover facilitate food prep. Four-season R-52 insulation runs



through the linoleum floor and roof, wrapping into the entire front-cap wall.

When it's time to catch some shut-eye, lie back on a 60 x 80-inch walk-around bed from Denver Mattress. Bedrooms on the mid-profile models have a wardrobe slide and nightstands. The high-profile units have a bed slide, a nightstand with drawers and a full wall-to-wall closet. The bathroom includes a 32 x 40-inch shower with a triplesliding door and a built-in mirrored medicine cabinet. Each floorplan has accommodations for a washer and dryer.

Exterior length ranges from 32 feet 9 inches to 37 feet 7 inches, with all models having 60-gallon freshwater tanks. Outside, relax under the Wildcat's 13- to 16-foot awnings with LED lighting. For outdoor lovers, the 29RKP model features a drop-down-ramp-door Park & Play Patio with a full-coverage awning, a refrigerator and an entertainment center prepped for a 50-inch HDTV with surround-sound speakers. Base MSRPs start at around \$35,000.

Forest River, 574-849-8193, www.forestriverinc.com/wildcat





Take Your Best Shot of the Mississippi

Looking for an excuse to explore the Mississippi River? Here's an opportunity to do just that and have some fun at photography, too. Alton, Illinois' National Great Rivers Museum and Jacoby Arts Center have teamed up to create an exhibition of contemporary photos that document and celebrate the Mississippi River and life along it. The exhibition is open to all amateur and professional photographers 18 years and older, with prizes ranging from \$50 gift cards to the \$500 grand prize.

Photos must be original and have been created within the past three years, and they can be taken anywhere along the Mississippi from its Minnesota headwaters to the Gulf of Mexico. They can depict riverscapes, recreation, commerce, wildlife, weather, nature and natural phenomena, as long as the subject matter has a direct relationship with the river.

The entry deadline is February 17, 2016. For contest rules and more information, visit www.mississippiriverphotoshootout.com.

Nevada Cowboy Gathering

The 32nd-annual National Cowboy Poetry Gathering, an international arts-and-cultural festival that celebrates the American West, takes place January 25 to 30, 2016, in Elko, Nevada. Nearly 50 performers are expected at the event, including ranchers, poets, musicians and artists. There will be Western dances, open-mic sessions, films and exhibits that include Northern Plains photography, illustrations and handcrafted work. The event also features hands-on workshops in hat-making, leather carving and traditional food. 888-880-5885

www.westernfolklife.org

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Leash Your Fitness

A cross-country canine inspires people and their pets to work out

article and photo by Dawn Celapino

If you think your dog can't be the perfect workout partner, you don't know Jack — Jack the cairn terrier, that is, my 10-year-old all-around athlete. He and I (Jack's "mom" and a fitness instructor) traveled the country in my RV in the spring of 2015 inspiring dogs and their people to get fit together.

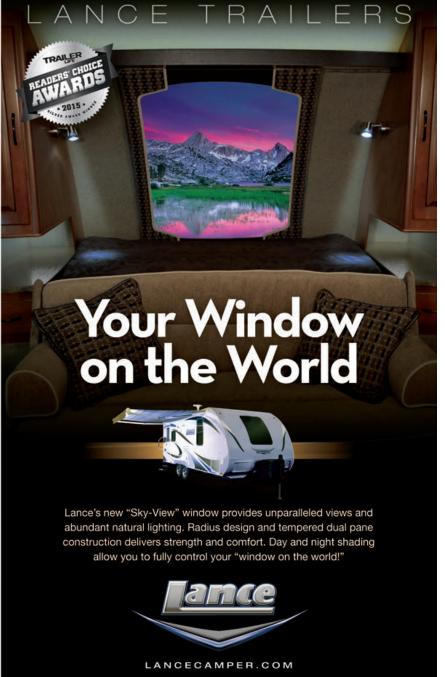
We stopped in 25 states in 10 weeks to spread the word that "Life is short. Work out with your dog." Together, we've now been to 34 states. For Jack, working out means much more than a walk around the block. From hiking to kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding (SUP), dock diving, surfing, even yoga, Jack has done it all.

I wanted a dog that was active, and as soon as I met Jack, I knew he was my new partner in adventure. At just four months old, he hiked in the snow with me at Mammoth Mountain, California, and has been my best friend ever since. When I got the idea to buy an RV and travel the country to inspire other people to get fit with their dogs, I knew that Jack would be a great travel companion and a perfect role model.

We met new friends with whom we went hiking, introduced dogs to kayaking and SUPing and taught people exercises that they can do on their everyday dog walk. Along with me, Jack instructed the largest dog yoga class in San Diego this winter, teaching more than 255 dogs to be still and obedient. He regularly practices what he preaches, knowing that in life, for both pets and their people, there's no such thing as a free treat — you have to work for it!

You can follow Jack and his adventures at www.jacksjourneyusa.com and on our Leash Your Fitness Facebook page. We are constantly doing fun activities, hoping to inspire others to get outside and have fun!





Lance Campers, Circle 112 on Reader Service Card





Pechanga's Chocolate and Wine Decadence

If you think the world is a better place with chocolate and wine in it, you'll want to head to Temecula, California, February 26 and 27, 2016. This delightful pairing comes together at the eighth-annual Chocolate Decadence and Pechanga Wine Festival. Pechanga Resort and Casino, gold winner in Trailer Life's 2015 Readers' Choice Awards, will host hundreds of wine varieties, sweet and savory chocolate

confections, gourmet food samples from acclaimed chefs and live music that includes pianist Sebastian Sidi.

The two-day event features wines from local wineries and others from throughout California and the Pacific Northwest, as well as international favorites. A silent auction on items like cruises, rounds of golf and signed sports memorabilia will benefit Habitat for Humanity Inland Valley.

The all-inclusive price for oneand two-day admission includes unlimited food and wine sampling, a souvenir wine glass and entertainment. Designated-driver tickets are available for \$30, which includes unlimited chocolate, confections, food and nonalcoholic drinks.

General admission tickets are \$55. VIP tickets are \$75 and \$85 (depending on the day), two-day general admission tickets go for \$100, and two-day VIP tickets are \$140.

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Lance 650 for Shortbeds

Lance Campers, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2015, launched an all-new model 650 truck camper aimed squarely at the single largest pickup



segment: half-ton shortbed crew cabs. With a floor length of 6 feet 10 inches, the 650 is designed to fit 5-foot or 6-foot truck beds (specific length varies by truck manufacturer) with payload capacities that can accommodate the new camper. The 650 sleeps three and has a 22-gallon freshwater tank. Wet weight is claimed to be 1,842 pounds on the nonslide floorplan.

Lance Sales Manager Gary Conley noted, "We payload-matched this camper to a 2015 Ford F-150. We believe we now have the ultimate half-ton shortbed, hard-side truck camper."

Marketing Director Bob Rogers added, "I'm fired up to be able to market the 650 to a whole new audience of Lance prospects that already owns a half-ton truck."

Base MSRP for the new 650 is \$19,857. www.lancecamper.com/truck-campers/650

California's Dog-Friendly Parks

DogTrekker.com has launched an alliance with Camp-California.com that could significantly increase public awareness of the as-



sociation's dog-friendly parks. DogTrekker.com is a guide to California's favorite dog-friendly hikes, beaches, hotels and restaurants, and Camp-California.com is an organization of RV park owners and operators. Camp-California.com Executive Director Debbie Sipe announced the partnership with DogTrekker.com's Managing Partner Dave Kendrick.

The mobile-friendly travel-planning website for dog lovers draws more than half a million visitors each year, and Sipe said more than 280 Camp-California.com member parks are now listed on DogTrekker.com. Kendrick told park operators in round-table meetings that dog-friendly travel has increased significantly in California and across the country during the past decade, and that 40 percent of all American leisure travelers bring their pets. Kendrick pointed out that park operators can improve their appeal to dog owners by welcoming their dogs as part of the family.











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RV Time Capsule

A yearlong tribute to Trailer Life's 75 years in print

magine a time before mobile phones, GPS navigation and satellite TV, or TV at all, for that matter. In July 1941, when the first issue of this magazine — originally named Western Trailer Life — appeared on newsstands and in subscribers' mailboxes, the big news in RV technology was vacuum brakes, spun-glass insulation, and butane gas for cooking and heating. Of course, in 1941 the term "recreational vehicle" hadn't been coined yet, much less "RV." The preferred name was "trailer coach."

Filling the need for "a regularly issued publication devoted to trailer life and trailer travel," the modest 20-page debut issue promotes the simple pleasures and cultural significance of what has evolved into the RV lifestyle. "The trailer coach mode of life is no longer a fad," writes one of the initial contributors, "but well on the way to play as important a role in America ... as the automobile."

In classic '40s style, one of the writers sports a fedora in his portrait and another looks a bit like Walt Disney. A couple of young women in vintage bathing suits adorn a layout for a Southern California trailer park, and a column for "the more attractive sex" suggests that "seersucker suits and sports clothes are the answer to the trailer woman's prayer."

The travel trailers featured in

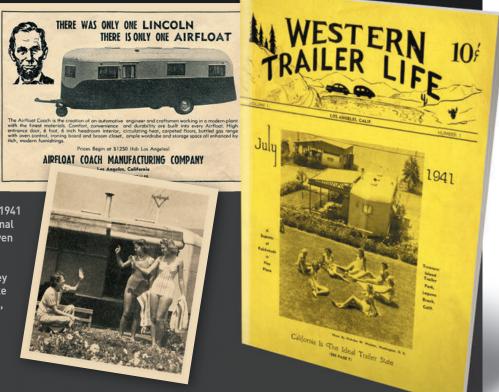


that first issue — Airfloat, Kozy Coach and Silver Dome, to name a few — are now the very definition of "retro." Advertisements are similarly nostalgic with quaint catchphrases (a jack is "Simple, Safe and Satisfactory") and old-school slogans ("Tomorrow's Trailers Today!" proclaims one dealership).

To mark the 75th anniversary of the magazine now known as *Trailer Life*, we're devoting a page in each issue this year to the publication's long history and the parallel evolution of recreational vehicles from tincan campers to contemporary travel trailers, fifth-wheels, truck campers, toy haulers and motorhomes — the retro RVs of tomorrow.



(Clockwise from far right) The July 1941 cover features the magazine's original name, Western Trailer Life, and seven swimsuit models — "A Septette of Pulchritude" — at Treasure Island Trailer Park. Two cover girls, Shirley Valentine and Claire Lombard, strike a friendly pose at the Laguna Beach, California, park. Original columnist and "dyed-in-the-wool trailerite" W.B. Kelly channels Humphrey Bogart. President Lincoln helps promote the '41 Airfloat Coach.





50 YEARS OF FUN

Since 1966, the Good Sam Club and Camping World have taken RVing families on the ride of their lives

For the Good Sam Club and Camping World, 1966 was the start of something big. Both of the now-iconic brands launched during that memorable year when hemlines made headlines and "Good Vibrations" topped the charts. Fast-forward half a century, and the two companies are now recognized as the world's largest organization of RV members and America's largest retailer of RVs and RV accessories. Stay tuned throughout 2016 for golden-anniversary giveaways at Camping World and nostalgic looks at both companies' early days in the pages of Trailer Life, MotorHome and the Good Sam RV Travel & Savings Guide.

Hot Off the Press

North America's only comprehensive printed directory of RV parks and campgrounds, the annual Good Sam RV Travel & Savings Guide is now available at all 115 Camping World locations and on www.campingworld.com. The 2016 edition features detailed listings for 12,500 privately owned RV parks and public campgrounds, including

2,100-plus Good Sam Parks that offer members a 10 percent nightly discount. Good Sam's annually updated RV park ratings help travelers decide where to stay, and state and provincial maps lead them to their destinations. Members can purchase the 2016 edition for \$6.95 (plus shipping and handling charges for online orders), a considerable discount off the \$19.95 retail price. As an added perk, the guide's Camping World coupons ante up \$1,500 in savings.

Half-Price Tickets to RV Shows

Did you know that Good Sam's parent company operates 15 RV shows across North America and members can save 50 percent on two adult tickets at each event? For a list of 2016 shows, visit www.gsevents.com. To receive the discount, show your membership card at the ticket office. To receive the discount online, enter your Good Sam membership number.

Club Events

Good Sam get-togethers at RV-friendly regional gatherings

Havasu Balloon Festival and Fair January 15 through 17 Lake Havasu City, Arizona

Taste of Southern California **April 22 through 24**Golden Village Palms RV Resort Hemet, California

North Carolina Campout April 28 through May 1 Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park at Daddy Joe's Tabor City, North Carolina

Old Fashion Dirt Track Weekend May 27 through 28 Perris Auto Speedway Perris, California

Campout for Charity 2016 June 3 through 5 Iroquois County Fairgrounds Crescent City, Íllinois

Western Weekend — Above and Below June 3 through 5

Grand Canyon Caverns Peach Springs, Arizona

Good Sam Fun Weekend June 10 through 13 The Villages at Turning Stone Verona, Ňew York

Jenny Brook Bluegrass Festival June 23 through 26 Tunbridge World's Fairgrounds Tunbridge, Vermont

State/Provincial Rallies (Samborees) Good Sam State/Provincial Rallies (also known as Samborees) give members a chance to camp together for a few days while sharing RV tips, enjoying activities and spreading the Good Samaritan spirit.

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





In online voting last fall, Good Sam members named Habitat for Humanity volunteers Bill and France Moriarty the club's 2015 RVers of the Year. Get to know these civic-minded members at www.goodsamclub.com/rveroftheyear.

TRAVEL



It's Raining, It's Pouring

An lowa couple reached out to RV Resolutions when water damage caused by a leaky slideout wasn't repaired to their satisfaction on their new travel trailer:

▶ We purchased a new 2014 KZ Spree Connect on May 18, 2015, from J&J Camper Sales in East Moline, Illinois. It rained heavily the first night we used it, and the next morning we stepped in water in front of the refrigerator. Upon further inspection, we found water-damaged wood in the trailer and mold on the carpet under the bench seat.

After consulting with KZ, J&J figured out the problem and agreed to do the warranty work. We were told that everything the water had touched would be replaced and that the needed parts had been ordered. When J&J finished the repair work, we went to pick up the trailer, only to find that not everything that had water damage had been replaced.

During the repairs, J&J's service department had allowed us to inspect the trailer before they put it back together. After seeing how damaged the slideout floor was, it was obvious that this trailer had been defective from the start and the leak had gone undetected while it sat on the dealer's lot. Yes, repairs were made under warranty, but we are very concerned about unseen damage that could potentially be there. We don't want to be saddled with

a lemon that could have problems for years to come. We feel that KZ should have provided a replacement trailer rather than fix the damaged one.



This is a brand-new RV with no previous owners, and it shouldn't have the issues it does. The sad part is that we really fell in love with the trailer and had visions of many years of good times to come.

Wayne and Brenda Johnston, Camanche, Iowa

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

While manufacturers and dealers will typically repair defective RVs under warranty, it's rare for them to replace them outright. RV Resolutions contacted KZRV to see if the manufacturer was willing do anything further for the Johnstons, and we heard back from the corporate vice president:

Pursuant to the receipt of your letter, our aftermarket service manager made contact with the consumer. An agreement was reached for the unit to be repaired at the factory. The consumer will contact KZRV at the end of the camping season to schedule the unit for repair.

Delbert L. Miller KZRV, Shipshewana, Indiana

No Place Like Home

After waiting months for a Texas dealership to fix their new trailer's faulty slideout, a couple of full-time RVers sought RV Resolutions' help:

▶ On February 28, 2015, we traded in our 2008 Forest River Cherokee for a 2015 Grand Design Reflection at Holiday World in Katy, Texas. We had problems right away with one of the slideouts and towed the trailer back to the dealership. The manager said we had to leave it there for a week or two, so we made plans to stay with relatives. Week after week went by, but our calls either weren't returned or we got excuses for the delay.

When we paid a visit to the dealership, they told us they had to order the entire slideout, fixtures and trim, and that it would take six weeks. By that time, the slideout was working well enough that the dealer said we could take the trailer and return

for repairs when the parts came in. Needless to say, no one from the dealership called, so in July we called them, only to find out that the parts ordered in April had never come in.

This trailer is our full-time home, and we should be enjoying our retirement by being able to travel.

Gene and Sandra Adamek Edna. Texas

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

Complaints about RV-repair delays are among the most common topics addressed to RV Resolutions. After hearing from us about the Adameks' lengthy wait for warranty work, Holiday World of Katy's vice president of fixed operations sent the following reply:

Thank you for letting us know of the frustrations Mr. and Mrs. Adamek have felt about their Reflection travel trailer and especially with what appears to be a lack of communication from our dealership. Mr. and Mrs. Adamek are staying at our campground right now, and we have been in contact with Grand Design to make sure we expedite the parts needed. All repairs should be completed by the end of this week.

J. Manuel Carlson Holiday World of Katy, Katy, Texas 🗭

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



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Luxe Life

Augusta RV's entry into the luxury fifth-wheel market offers full-time living at a competitive price

eciding exactly what you want, or more importantly, what you really need in a fifth-wheel designed for full-time use is perhaps the biggest hurdle to overcome when stepping up from a weekend RV or making the jump from your permanent home. Aside from financial considerations, making sure that the trailer you're considering is robust enough and properly equipped for daily use is perhaps most important, but you must also be careful not to buy more trailer than you really need. Budget notwithstanding, a larger, more expensive fifth-wheel may require more tow vehicle than you're comfortable with, and it can also mean a commitment to staying in more high-end resorts with more space and full hookups.

Most of the fifth-wheels that strike that elusive balance are in the 40-foot range and land somewhere in the neighborhood of \$100K to \$125K. It's a competitive market dominated by seasoned, well-respected brands, and a market that Augusta RV has chosen to play in with its beautifully styled (and aptly named) Luxe.

Looking at the specs, equipment and construction materials, it certainly seems like the Bristol, Indiana-based company is off to a running start. A 12-inch I-beam chassis with a stackable 2 x 2-inch box tube underneath forms the foundation, which is fitted with A-list components like an Equalizer six-point hydraulic leveling system and MORryde pin box, independent suspension and disc brakes. Walk around the exterior, and you'll find more icons of long-term durability, like Goodyear H-rated



G114 tires, a Dometic power awning and full-body paint. Of course, as a factory-direct manufacturer, Augusta invites you to be part of the manufacturing process, which helps ensure that the trailer is built to the most important standard of all: yours.

The Augusta Luxe is available in five semi-customizable floorplans ranging from 38 to 43 feet. We recently were given the opportunity to sample the Luxe LF-38RL, a traditional-style floorplan that should find favor with a wide range of fifth-wheel buyers. Finished in a black-and-gray paint scheme with gold trim that the company calls New Moon, the exterior is a welcome departure from the usual lighter tones and gives the trailer an air of elegance and mystery. Black dual-pane frameless windows contribute to the effect.

Once inside, the anticipation grows, as your eyes roam past multiplex lighting panels, a residential LG stainless-steel refrigerator, solidsurface countertops and residential





An LG LED flat-screen television is located directly across from the dual recliners and within easy view of the rear sofa. An LG stainless-steel residential refrigerator and microwave, solidsurface countertops and roomy kitchen island should satisfy the chef in the family.

fixtures — all the stuff full-time trailers are made of. But as we settled in on our test, we started to discover some of the areas where Augusta chose to save money to keep the Luxe competitive.

The slideout mechanisms seemed adequate at best, looking and sounding as though they were laboring to deploy the large opposing rooms in the living area — something the company has addressed as we go to press. And as we packed the interior with our belongings, we felt that the cabinet doors, while nicely finished and well fitting, felt a little light for a trailer in this class. We also noticed the furniture and overall design could use a little help. The rear couch and curbside recliners looked low-end to us, the freestanding dinette was painted, not stained, and the wonky-looking wood trim on the ceiling seemed out of place in a trailer that was otherwise sleek and modern.

No one could argue that comfort is the most important feature of any luxury fifth-wheel, and the Luxe we tested fell short there in only a few areas. The rear couch in the test unit, while large, wasn't very soft or supportive, and there is no storage space on either side on which to put your drink or phone. That seemed odd, especially considering the thoughtful placement of a USB charge port on the street side, as well as a 120volt AC outlet.

The couch converts to a sleeping

space with a genuine folding bed inside, not a trifold arrangement. We found it reasonably comfortable for the intended purpose of unexpected guests but not something anyone is going to relish sleeping on for more than a night or two. The dual recliners in the curbside slideout were also firm and generally uncomfortable, with manual, cable-operated footrests that could barely support the weight of our legs. These would be expected in a \$50,000 fifth-wheel, but not in one costing more than twice as much.

The recliners are tied together by a center armrest that contains two conveniently placed cup holders and an elbow pad that opens to store remotes or snacks. The placement of the recliners is perfect for viewing the LG LED TV, which features a sound bar for a heightened audio experience. A cabinet on either side of the Greystone fireplace contains a shelf and pull-out drawers for movie storage, as well as a DVD player (right side) and outlets for additional equipment (left side). Overhead cabinetry here, as well as above the couch, is available for storing blankets, pillows and other items suited for general lounging purposes.

Another thing a full-timing fifthwheel should have is a good kitchen, and on that front, the Luxe delivers. The residential LG refrigerator is cavernous and had more than enough room for our stuff. It also has a freezer underneath in

a separate drawer for an unexpectedly large amount of usable space. Moving forward on the street side, there's a pantry with frosted-plastic doors, the lower one of which contains four large drawers. The upper cabinet is best for large, soft items (like paper towels and napkins), as it does not have any divider to stop items from moving during travel. One thing it does have, which owners will appreciate, is a complete list of all the equipment on the trailer, who makes it, model number and serial number, which can come in very handy if something goes wrong on the road.

In the nerve center of the kitchen is a True Induction cooktop, with a genuine glass-tile backsplash and an LG residential stainless microwave above. In lieu of a standard oven, drawers and cabinets are located directly underneath, and we liked that they are all soft-close — just give them a push, and they shut by themselves. The bottommost cabinet contains two drawers (center and left), while the right contains

1-800-887-5030

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a small trash can — something many manufacturers forget about.

The center island features a large stainless-steel sink that is offset toward the front of the kitchen, leaving lots of prep space to the right. A 120-volt AC outlet below on the side is well placed to plug in a blender, stand mixer or other small appliance. There's also an integrated drawer dishwasher below and to the right, as well as a silverware drawer. The only thing we wished for in the kitchen was a little more storage for larger pots and pans, although it would be possible to store some of these in the large cabinet below the sink.

At the front of the kitchen to the left of the bedroom hallway is a small buffet with more storage, some shelf space for spices and a small LG television, which we thought was a cool detail considering the chef usually can't watch the living room TV while cooking. On the other side of the hallway, near the entry door, is a wide, shallow cabinet that contains the slideout mechanisms, generator con-



The bathroom is compact but elegant, with a vessel sink, glass back splash and plenty of storage for essentials.

trol (the test unit was generator-ready), water-heater switches, tank-level monitors, etc., and below it, a cleverly placed fuse panel for easy access. Elsewhere in the cabinet, there is room for small items, but it's not deep enough to hang clothes, for example. The multiplex panel next to the door is a nice touch, and the



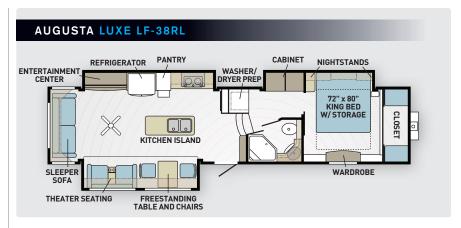
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panels for the LED lighting throughout the trailer seem logically placed.

Up the stairs and to your right is the bathroom, which features some elegant touches that make a difference in the space. Perched atop the counter is a vessel sink that looks great (although it takes up most of the counter space) and is complemented by a stainless-steel residential fixture and a one-piece glass backsplash for an added touch of class. Above the sink is a medicine cabinet with mirrors, and mirrored cabinets on either side. The spa-like shower also looks inviting with its clear glass door, granite-look shower enclosure and stainless-steel fixtures. It's not markedly roomier than other showers we've sampled in this class, but it had plenty of room for our needs, and the overhead Fan-Tastic vent removed steam guickly.

Across from the bathroom is a cabinet for a washer and dryer (again, our test unit was prepped for this option), and a large cabinet with adjustable shelves for clothes or folded towels. The



only misstep in this area is that the door to the bedroom does not move with the opposing slide, so forgetting to close it before retracting the room could result in a broken door.

Inside the bedroom is a queen bed in a large slideout, which means there is room for nightstands on either side, although the one nearest the front closet is narrow. The one near the bathroom is large, has a power outlet above and plenty of storage inside. The bed is com-

fortable and has a multiplex switch above the rearmost nightstand, but it's not really within easy reach. It would make more sense to put this panel underneath the overhead cabinetry so you can reach it without having to lean out of bed.

Front and center is a flat-panel TV at a perfect angle for watching your favorite show or movie from bed. There's a shelf underneath on which to place a DVD or Blu-ray player, and beneath this is a large window that keeps the area

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The rear couch is large and converts into a bed, but wasn't very comfortable in the test unit. End tables on which to put drinks or phones would be a welcome addition. Greystone fireplace adds a homey feel to the area.

light and bright during the day. At night, we appreciated the MCD solar/blackout shades used throughout the trailer. At the front of the bedroom is a good size closet with shoe storage and a small chest of drawers on either side. Overall, the room is comfortable and roomy, but the exterior bathroom wall facing into the bedroom is stark white and looks unfinished. It would be good to panel this or upholster it so it looks nicer.

One area where a lot of manufacturers tend to cut corners is the exterior storage compartments and utility center—but full-timers know these are areas that can really make a difference when they're done properly. So does Augusta. The large front storage compartment is nicely finished and well lit, and the test

unit was equipped with optional MOR/ stor sliding trays that made it very easy to access our larger, heavier items. On the curb side, the 50-amp power cord is stored on a reel for easy access, and the utility center is well finished and nicely arranged with winterizing valves, blacktank flush, freshwater connection and cable-operated dump valves.

We don't envy any fifth-wheel manufacturer when it comes to deciding what to include — and not include — to stay price-competitive. But the Augusta Luxe gets it right in the most critical areas, and with a few minor improvements, which could be driven by customer input (for example upgraded furniture for the living room), it could become a leader in the luxury full-time fifth-wheel segment.

The forward closet is large and offers shoe storage and a chest of drawers on either side. It is good-sized and well-lit, but is not cedar-lined. Dual recliners and a table were two of the items we would elect to upgrade if it were our own trailer.

SPECIFICATIONS

AUGUSTA LUXE LF-38RL

Exterior Length	39' 7"
Exterior Width	8' 5"
Exterior Height (with A/C)	13' 6"
Interior Width	7' 8"
Interior Height	8' 3"

Construction 12-inch I-beam frame, welded six-sided aluminum super-structure, 16-inch on-center welded roof trusses, 3/8-inch plywood roofing, 5/8-inch tongue-and-groove flooring, 3/4-inch-thick high-gloss gelcoat hung walls, seamless one-piece rubber roof, heated and enclosed holding tanks

p.	79 gal.
p.	80 gal.
ар.	40 gal.
	20 gal
Сар.	16 gal.
	21 cu-ft
	40,000 Btu
	(2) 15,000 Btu
	75 amp
	1,800 watt
(2) 12-volt group 24
215/75R1	7.5 Load Range H
MOR	ryde independent
and propa sl	i ne 18,360 lbs.
-,	3,760 lbs.
	14,600 lbs.
	19,580 lbs.
	8,000 lbs.
Сар.	1,220 lbs.
	\$115,500
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AMERICA'S LAST FRONTIER

Hitch up for the ultimate RV road trip along the scenic and historic highway that stretches 1,387 miles through British Columbia, Yukon and Alaska

ess about the destination than the getting there, the Alaska Highway is the quintessential road trip. Travelers pass through towns and cities, but the real attraction is what there is between them. Years ago, I took a three-week vacation and drove my brand-new Class B motorhome as far as Haines Junction, Yukon, before running out of time. I vowed to return one day and do it right. In July 2015, my wife, Mara, and I set aside two months to do just that. We didn't reserve anything in advance and didn't plan our itinerary in detail, preferring to let events dictate what we did and when we did it.

STEWART-CASSIAR HIGHWAY

Arriving in Prince George, British Columbia, we find our path to the southern terminus of the 1,387-mile Alaska Highway impeded by forest fires. Luckily, there's an alternative. By combining the east-west Yellowhead and north-south Stewart-Cassiar highways (Trans-Canada 16 and BC 37, respectively), we take a scenic detour around the problem.

Prince George is British Columbia's

fourth largest city and a good place to get provisions and fuel. Heading out of town, civilization falls away quickly, and small villages alternate with mountains and pristine lakes. Provincial and city parks dot the route and are the way to go when backwoods campground ambience trumps amenities. In the village of Smithers, we bed down for the night at Riverside Municipal Campground and feed our electronics some 30-

amp juice for the road ahead.

Continuing north, we watch for the turnoff to BC 37A and the town of Stewart. Stewart is nothing special, but the 40-mile drive to it is. Our heads are on a swivel, with glaciers to the left and waterfalls to the right. Persistent rain prevents a detour to nearby Hyder, Alaska, where we had hoped to spot bears fishing for migrating salmon.

Back on the Stewart-Cassiar Highway, at pristine Mehan Lake, we share lunch with a retired couple from Australia and a cyclist from New Zealand, as loons serenade in the background.

Our next stop is Jade City's Cassiar Mountain Jade Store, a family business selling its namesake product. The owners claim that more than 90 percent of the world's jade is mined here.



ALASKA HIGHWAY

Prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, there was no overland link between the Lower 48 and Alaska, then a U.S. territory. That event changed everything, as a road was deemed a military necessity. With more than 10,000 U.S. soldiers and civilian workers tending to the task, the highway was completed in eight months and 12 days, and was opened to the public in 1948.

Dawson Creek, British Columbia (not to be confused with Dawson City, Yukon), is famous for hosting the start of the Alaska Highway. We take a photograph of the Mile 0 monument and stop at the town's visitor center, housed in the Railway Station Museum, and the Alaska Highway House, which documents the highway's construction. Walter Wright Pioneer Village, with buildings and artifacts mostly from the early 1900s, has a special virtue for RVers: the adjacent Mile 0 Campground is the best RV park in the area.

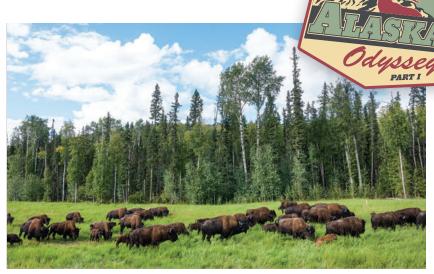
The first 400 miles of the Alaska Highway are relatively ho-hum, with heavy truck traffic, power poles and average scenery. The cities of Fort St. John and Fort Nelson, although historic, are also ordinary.

Muncho Lake (mile 437), known for its deep blue color, is home to Muncho Lake Provincial Park and two of the nicest campgrounds anywhere, MacDonald and Strawberry Flats, with 30 dry sites, pit toilets and a water pump. The closest alternative is Northern Rockies Lodge.

Next up is Liard River Hot Springs (mile 477). I'm not a hot-soak fanatic, but this one is fun. It's a natural thermal springs with changing rooms, restrooms, in-pool benches and a gravel floor that's easy on the feet. My wife claims I'm a better person now.

As we travel north, a herd of bison, probably a hundred strong, trots alongside the road, a couple of young black bears munch on flowers, and two young grizzlies feast on a moose.

Crossing the Yukon border, Watson Lake (mile 612) is one of the most-photo-





south near Liard River Hot Springs in British Columbia. (Above) The closer you get to the Liard River's thermal springs, the hotter the water. (Right) Tlingit Cultural Centre in Teslin, Yukon. (Left) Denali on a clear day.

graphed towns along the Alaska Highway, but not for its dramatic scenery. It was made famous by a homesick American G.I. working on the highway who made a sign noting the mileage to his Illinois hometown. Others followed suit, and we now have the Signpost Forest, with more than 77,000 mementos nailed to any available spot. We spend the night at nearby Baby Nugget RV Park.

In Teslin (mile 776, population 450), we stop at the Northern Wildlife Museum,

► MORE THAN HALF OF ALL U.S. PARKLAND IS FOUND IN ALASKA, YET THE STATE'S POPULATION HOVERS AROUND 740,000, THE SIZE OF A LARGE CITY IN THE LOWER 48.

ERLIFE 27



the Tlingit Heritage Centre and the George Johnston Museum. The first has outstanding local wildlife dioramas, and the last honors a Tlingit trapper, fur trader and photographer who brought a 1928 Chevrolet to the then-roadless town by paddle-wheeler and built a 3-mile road to drive it on.

With camping options limited, we drive to Whitehorse (mile 918) and stay at Caribou RV Park, a Good Sam Park with an ambience and amenities among the best on the trip. Whitehorse, the Yukon capital, is home to two-thirds of the territory's population. While distinctly modern, the city has a number of attractions that visitors interested in history can appreciate, including the S.S. Klondike National Historic Site and the MacBride Museum of Yukon History.

DAWSON CITY

Just north of Whitehorse, we take our first detour. The 335-mile drive to Dawson City via the Klondike Highway (Yukon 2) justifies a stop in the village of Carmacks. In 1896 George Carmack looked in his gold pan and saw \$5 worth of gold when 10 cents was considered a find, and the Klondike Gold Rush was on.

Dawson City was at the center of it all and is now a national historic site. With a population of 30,000 at its peak, the town was a wild and lawless place. Now a popular visitor destination, it has a high concentration of restaurants, bars and

ALASKA NORTHWEST **FAIRBANKS** TERRITORIES CHICKEN DELTA DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND YUKON **PRESERVE ANCHORAGE** NATIONAL WATSON LAKE WHITEHORSE PARK VALDEZ FORT HOMER • SEWARD SKAGWAY OLUMBIA DAWSON theaters. We check out the Dawson PRINCE City Museum and walk the streets in search of ice cream. A young Jack London lived here and

A young Jack London lived here and built a cabin where he stayed in 1897, now a museum. No dilettante, London roamed the trails from town to the gold fields and made observations that helped shape his later life as a writer and adventurer.

Driving to Dawson City comes at a price. The "paved" Klondike Highway has significant stretches of rough gravel, and we get our first exposure to real Alaska driving — rocks, potholes and stretches of washboard.

Rather than returning the way we came, we leave via the Top of the World Highway (Yukon 5), knowing we'll drive the missed section of the Alaska Highway on the way home. A free ferry ride takes us across the Yukon River, a charming alternative to a bridge, but the charm is short-lived, as we count the hours (five) needed to drive the 90 miles of (mostly) gravel to the end.

The road is pretty but lonely until we reach Chicken, Alaska. The story behind the name is reason enough to visit, however briefly. It seems the original settlers back in the late 1800s wanted to name the new town after their favorite game bird, the ptarmigan. Unable to agree on the spelling, they decided to name the town for the bird it most tasted like. I buy a T-shirt, a good conversation starter.

Chicken leads to Tok, where we use up our quarter collection at the car wash. If you don't get the mud off now, you'll need a chisel later. It's also a good place to buy high-quality First Nations souvenirs. While I look at knives, the saleslady confesses to me that her husband married her for her knives, guns and chainsaw. Welcome to Alaska.

We camp overnight in one of the best campgrounds of the trip, Tok RV Village, a top-rated Good Sam Park.

DELTA JUNCTION

With 9 miles to go to Delta Junction,

(Below, from left) In Denali National Park, private vehicles are banned from all but 14 miles of the road, and tour buses like this one transport visitors farther into the park. Some places have their mansions, but Alaska has the log cabin; this one is near the village of Talkeetna, not far from Denali National Park. Tok RV Village provides more than 100 pull-through campsites.





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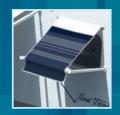






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(Above, from left) During the Klondike Gold Rush, Dawson City, Yukon, attracted people from all over the world, many unprepared for life in the far north; these structures, built on permafrost, are a testament to their inexperience. Watson Lake, Yukon's Signpost Forest.

we stock up on smoked elk sausage for nibbling and bison and yak for later at the Delta Meat and Sausage Company.

Delta Junction (actual mile 1,387, historical mile 1,422) marks the official end of the Alaska Highway. We get our picture taken at the end-of-the-road monument and cross the street to the Sullivan Roadhouse, a relocated roadhouse that is now a wonderful museum.

Visiting cities wasn't high on our to-do list, but there's a good reason to spend a few hours in Fairbanks, 96 miles from Delta Junction. The highly recommended University of Alaska Museum of the North documents the state's history from prehistoric times to the present.

En route to Denali National Park, the village of Nenana is home to the 1917 St. Mark's Episcopal Church, with hand-hewn pews and an altar of moose hide decorated with beadwork, and the Alaska State Railroad Museum and Nenana Cultural Center, with artifacts and high-quality souvenirs.

DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE

Mount McKinley National Park was established in 1917 and renamed Denali National Park and Preserve in 1980. The 6-million-acre park is 121 miles south of Fairbanks via the George Parks Highway (Alaska 3). At 20,320 feet, Mount Denali (formerly McKinley) eludes 70 percent of the people who come here, as it is often shrouded in clouds.

A single 92-mile road serves the park, but only 14 miles of it are open to private vehicles. To get beyond that, you need to take a bus or a bicycle. We peruse the options and choose the eight-hour-round-trip shuttle to

Only a few minutes' drive from the Alaska Highway, northern British Columbia's remarkably blue Muncho Lake has an eponymous provincial park with 30 dry campsites.



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the Eielson Visitor Center. Winding 66 miles into the park, the bus stops well short of Denali's base but within photographic range. Riders are free to get off at any of several stops and catch a later bus. We see bears, moose, caribou and a lone wolf, and Denali honors us with her presence.

Among the other tour options, an 11-hour shuttle to and from Wonder Lake takes visitors 84 miles into the park and much closer to Denali, and another tour replaces the bus driver with a trained naturalist. Local companies offer additional sightseeing excursions.

Three campgrounds within the park are open to RVs, with some campsites accommodating rigs up to 40 feet.
Those with reserved sites at Teklanika River Campground, 29 miles inside the park, are allowed to drive beyond the 14-mile mark. Teklanika requires a minimum three-day stay, but its location provides a better opportunity to view wildlife up close, according to people who camped there.

Private camping options near the entrance are marginal. After seeing all that pristine wilderness, the thought of being jammed together next to a gas station and convenience store doesn't appeal, so we head 6 miles south to camp at family-owned Denali Grizzly Bear Resort on the Nenana River.

► Part II: In February, Peter Lewis travels to Alaska's Kenai Peninsula, Valdez, Wrangell– St. Elias National Park and Skagway.

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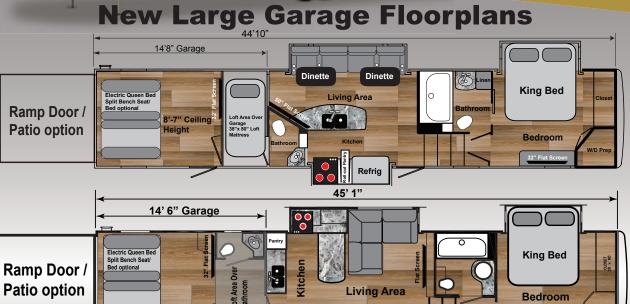
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s RVers, much of our time is spent on the road en route to the next campground. That's why riding comfort should be at the top of our lists. Nobody likes to feel every highway irregularity, and these sensations are often heightened when towing a fifth-wheel trailer. After a long day spent with chattering teeth and a jerky ride, it's difficult to enjoy the sights. And we haven't even mentioned the additional stress a poorly damped combo can have on the truck and trailer, as the bouncing and jarring can take a serious toll on components and even cause serious damage over time.

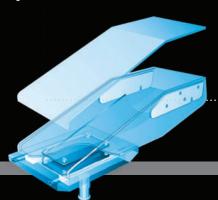
To avoid potentially costly and unpleasant towing experiences, not only do you need a properly rated and equipped tow vehicle, but attention should also be paid to the connection between the truck and trailer: the kingpin and hitch.

The first inclination may be to replace the fifth-wheel hitch with one that is designed to improve the ride, but attending to the pin box can be a good alternative solution. The main

function of a pin box is to hold and fix the kingpin at a specific location and angle in relation to the front of the fifth-wheel. But the undamped ride of the connected combo can be quite harsh due to road conditions. In fact, the majority of ride-quality issues associated with fifth-wheels are caused by uneven road surfaces, which put unnecessary stress on the connection and transfer unwanted movement (bouncing, chucking, etc.) to the trailer. This bounciness produces a jerky ride that can cause undue wear to the chassis of the vehicle. A good pin box helps absorb the seesaw action between truck and trailer (think shocks and springs on a suspension), and can ultimately reduce wear and tear and improve occupant comfort.

The box configuration is designed to squeeze the most strength from the flattened steel by increasing the surface area, and it is also conducive to hosting a variety of add-ons and mounting options. The box design allows manufacturers to change the mounting location via an extension, for example, that prevents the front of the fifth-wheel from crashing into the cab when towing with a shortbed truck and making sharp turns. It also allows for some additional damping measures — including air bags, shock absorbers and cushions — all of which can help smooth out the bumps and make for a much more civilized ride.

Whatever the method used by the manufacturer, the following aftermarket pin boxes can each be installed in an afternoon, even by average shade-tree mechanics.



The pin box attaches to the front of the fifth-wheel. Beyond providing a place for the kingpin, it allows for some interesting options in terms of reach, pin placement, cushions, tilt plates, shock absorbers and air bags.



SMOOTH OPERATORS



Air Hitch Technology

The AirSafe King Air is a rugged, lightweight pin box that smooths out the ride using air. By placing four commercial-grade Firestone air springs between the hitch and the pin box, the result is a much-improved ride with less surging, bucking and chucking. And, because the air bags are placed directly over the fifth-wheel hitch, the AirSafe does not cause the forward-and-back motion sometimes associated with a hinged pin-box design, according to the manufacturer. Pin weight capacity is 4,000 pounds, and the AirSafe can be used on fifth-wheels with up to a 21,000-pound gross vehicle weight rating (gvwR). The four air bags can be filled at one central location and can be adjusted based on the level of damping needed.

MSRP: \$1,159

▶ 866-414-4824, www.airsafehitch.com/5th-wheel/pinbox



Demco

Demco's **Glide Ride** pin boxes absorb the uncomfortable bumps and jolts of towing through a gravity-based, self-centering linkage system. The linkage allows parallel movement but then utilizes gravity to bring the kingpin back to its original, centered position. The company says the Glide Ride is maintenance-free, doesn't affect braking or steering and is available in multiple fits for an easy bolt-on application. Rated at 21,000 pounds.

MSRP: \$939

▶ 800-543-3626, www.demco-products.com/rv-towing-products/glide-ride



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SMOOTH OPERATORS

Lippert Components

The **Trailair Air Ride** acts as a buffer between the tow vehicle and the trailer by employing two damping measures: an air bag and an oil shock. It features a unique scissor action that allows the air bag to absorb road shock and vibration, while the gas shock damps any pushback or bounce. The Air Ride can be retrofitted to most pin boxes on the market; it is offered in a multifit design that can be matched based on style and size.

MSRP: starts at \$1,099

The heavy-duty pivoting head on the **Trailair Rota-Flex** controls the vertical tug-of-war between the tow vehicle and trailer, known as chucking. The durable rubberized torsion compound absorbs motion and vibration caused by road shock. Lippert says the Rota-Flex reduces vibration more than twice as much as the competition.

MSRP: starts at \$625.55

The new **Flex Air** features a Rota-Flex pivoting head to significantly reduce fore-to-aft movement and minimize chucking. The pin box utilizes an air bag as a buffer between the tow vehicle and fifth-wheel to absorb road shock and vibrations. Its integrated oil shock absorber is designed to damp kickback and control chucking. The Flex Air also features a pivoting head in its lower jaw that uses a rubberized compound to provide an additional buffer to help protect the fifth-wheel from jarring motion.

MSRP: \$1,299

> 574-537-8900, www.lci1.com/air-ride-pin-boxes, www.lci1.com/rota-flex, www.lci1.com/flex-air-pin-box









MORryde

The MORryde **Rubber Pin Box** utilizes a unique rubber shear spring to minimize road shock. The rubber spring acts as a cushion and works in a horizontal planar motion (longitudinal and lateral) to effectively diminish the transfer of forces from the fifthwheel to the truck. The MORryde pin-box system can be installed on most fifth-wheels. Installation is bolt-on and typically takes about an hour, according to MORryde. The company also says that, with no air-filled springs to leak or shock absorbers to replace, the unit will have a long life.

MSRP: \$849.99

> 574-293-1581 www.morryde.com/products/101-rubber-pin-box



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For RVers looking for additional clearance to avoid cab-to-trailer collisions (such as when towing with a shortbed), Pop Up offers the **RV5 Extended Kingpin**. The RV5 bolts on to the fifth-wheel's existing kingpin to add 10



inches of clearance. The RV5 is precision laser-cut from half-inch steel plate. The extension is rated for 6,000 pounds hitch weight and 24,000 pounds trailer GVWR. **MSRP: \$350**

▶ 800-837-8578, www.popuphitch.com/products/rv/kingpins/rv5-extended-kingpin

Reese

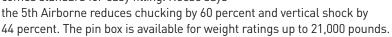
The Reese **Sidewinder** is designed specifically for shortbed pickups, but when used with full-size beds can improve turning radius. The kingpin locking mechanism moves the pivot position 22 inches behind the pin box's attachment point, allowing the Sidewinder to handle



up to a 90-degree turn in many cases. By moving the pivot rearward while keeping the load centered over the axles, the trailer tracks more closely to the truck. The pivoting pin box makes hookup possible at most angles. And since the towing position of the pin-box arm is locked in line with the truck, truck owners can make full use of the bed, allowing extra storage space for fuel tanks, toolboxes and cargo. Weight ratings go up to 19,000 pounds.

MSRP: \$1,329.39

The **5th Airborne** features a lightweight one-piece body to help improve ride comfort and reduce driver fatigue. The air bag is located at the top of the pin box, making on-the-fly adjustments easier. An air line comes standard for easy filling. Reese says



MSRP: \$985.31

The **5th Airborne Sidewinder** provides all the benefits of the Sidewinder and 5th Airborne, combining the maneuverability of the former and the damping of the latter. Its durable, long-lasting design affords RVers up to 90-degree turns on most applications. Like all Reese pin boxes, the 5th Airborne Sidewinder is backed by a limited lifetime warranty. Weight rating is set at 16,000 pounds.

MSRP: \$2,249.49

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Replacing a worn kingpin assembly strengthens the truck-and-fifth-wheel connection and improves towing stability

e keep our one-ton diesel truck and 36-foot fifth-wheel trailer in top shape by inspecting key components on a regular basis. We check the kingpin assembly a few times a year, ensuring that the bolts are tight and the welds are good. We also verify that there is no play in the kingpin base by grabbing it with both hands and twisting sideways.

On a recent check, we found the kingpin base felt a little sloppy and the assembly plates were warped away from the Demco Glide Ride pin box. Both the pin assemblies and the links inside the pin box needed to be replaced to make sure the connection between the truck and trailer was as rigid as possible. We had towed our trailer more than 40,000 miles in the course of seven years of ownership, so this kind of wear came as no surprise.

The replacement of the pin assemblies and links is an easy half-hour job that requires an extra set of hands for a few minutes to remove the kingpin base from the pin box.

[1] First, loosen the serrated flange bolts that hold the kingpin base onto the pin box. There is one bolt on each side of the pin box. We couldn't break the bolts loose with a regular ratchet and were concerned that using an extension handle would risk breaking the ratchet and/or the socket. Instead, we used a long-levered breaker bar with a hardened-steel six-sided ¾-inch impact socket. A long-handled torque wrench would also work. Don't use a 12-point socket, as this might strip or break the socket.

(2 and 3) Once the two bolts are removed, the kingpin base is still held in place by the pin plate assemblies on the sides of the pin box. To remove the kingpin base from the pin box, one person must hang onto the kingpin with two hands to get a solid grip on it, while the other unscrews both pin assemblies and slides them out.









(4) It may be necessary to use a screwdriver to pry the pin-assembly plates from the pin box before they can be removed.

(5) After removing the kingpin base from the pin box, place it on the ground or the tailgate of the truck and slide the links off the posts. There are two links on each side of the kingpin base, and they pull straight out. Then slide the new links in place.





(6) The original bushings in the links were worn, which caused play in the pin assembly plate. (7) Inspect the interior of the kingpin box for signs of wear. Verify that the rubber bumpers look OK, and that the welds are solid and there are no cracks. Then reattach the kingpin base to the pin box by having one person hold the kingpin base while the other aligns the pin assemblies with the pin-box holes and slides them in.





(8) In our case, the new pin assemblies were much more rugged than the original ones. Each new pin assembly plate was about \(^1/8\)-inch thicker than the old one, requiring a longer serrated flange bolt to be used to bolt it to the pin box. These longer bolts did not come with the replacement pin-assembly kit. We purchased grade 8 bolts of the correct length and matching pitch. Once both pin assemblies are in place, snug up the serrated flange bolts using a ratchet. Use a torque wrench to tighten them to 85 ft-lbs.

(9) After we replaced the pin assemblies and links, there was no slop or play when we twisted the kingpin base. We also found the difference while towing was very noticeable. Now the connection between the truck and trailer is rock solid.



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SPLENDOR INTHE SANDS

Off the beaten path in southern New Mexico, the alabaster slopes of the world's largest gypsum dune field crown a beautiful and surreal landscape



ve always had a yen to go to White Sands National Monument, but during our travels, it has invariably been too many miles off our driving route. Finally, we were $oldsymbol{\perp}$ traveling east from Arizona and had a few days before we had to be at our destination in southern New Mexico. It was a perfect time for a stop at White Sands.

We stayed in the charming city of Las Cruces, and during our visit artists literally took to the closed-off streets to compete in a chalk-drawing competition. The resulting images were artistically done and extremely beautiful. Many local artists and merchants took part in the ongoing street fair, and shops displayed locally produced merchandise.

A side trip took us to nearby El Paso, Texas, where we drove the back roads and passed through acres and acres of pecan trees. The region is also known for wine production, and we stopped in at one winery for a taste test.

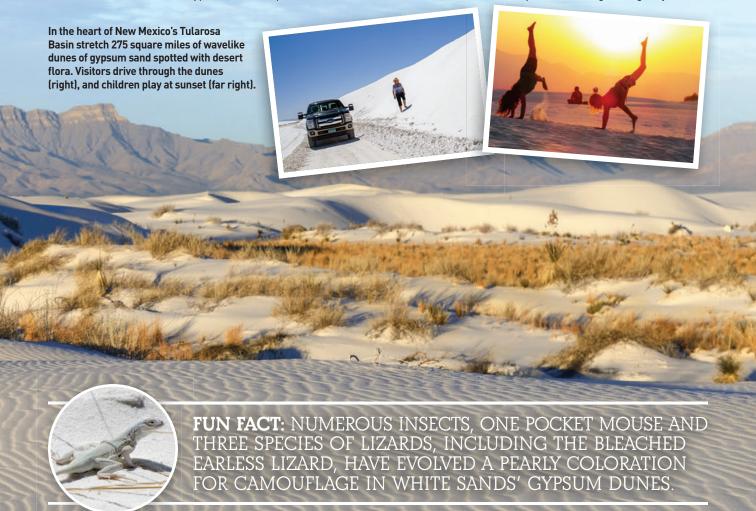
But the main reason we came was to visit White Sands. To understand why this national monument is so remarkable. we need to review a bit of geology. To begin with, the White Sands in its name is not sand at all but powdered gypsum that over the centuries has drifted from the surrounding mountains into tall dunes. Gypsum is an evaporate mineral,

meaning that it forms almost exclusively when dissolved ions become concentrated due to the evaporation of water.

In fact, White Sands is the largest gypsum dune field in the world. I have traveled throughout the Southwest and seen desert sand in many forms, but the pure-white coloration we saw at White Sands is simply breathtaking. Because it is gypsum, it feels more like talcum powder than sand and retains its coolness, even in the heat of desert summers.

While several early attempts were made to bring this area into the national park system, it wasn't until 1934 that White Sands actually opened, following a declaration by President Hoover. Facilities at the 143,000-acre monument were completed by the Works Projects Administration in 1938, and some are still in use today.

The monument resides at the northern end of the Chihuahuan Desert at the edge of the White Sands Missile Range, which earned its reputation before, during and after World War II as a testing location for the first nuclear weapons. The Trinity Site where the first atomic blast was done is in the north end of the missile range. Missileborne armaments are still tested here, and portions of the monument are occasionally closed during testing. Adjacent



to the monument is Holloman Air Force Base, and a few miles farther down the road is the city of Alamogordo.

It takes about 45 minutes to drive from Las Cruces to the visitor center at White Sands. We left Las Cruces and crossed over the San Andres Mountains into the peaceful and serene valley that contains the monument. It is estimated that the dunes have been there for between 7,000 and 10,000 years. As we drove across the desert, it was difficult to imagine how early

civilizations survived throughout history. Mescalero Apaches occupied this region and continue to do so today. Hispanic pioneers began farming and ranching in the area in the 1860s, but the severe drought and Great Depression of the 1930s pretty much put an end to expanded settlement. In the 1940s, a large portion of this area was set aside for defense purposes.

As we turned into the visitor center, the stark, bright whiteness of the "sand" was striking. Unlike the tan





(Top) Miles of wide-open sand invite visitors to enjoy the views at White Sands National Monument. (Above middle) A group of curious onlookers enjoys a ranger-led tour. (Above) Nearby Las Cruces offers plenty of things to do, including Avenue Art New Mexico, a daylong festival where the downtown streets become artists' canyases.



and brownish sand in other parts of the Southwest, these gypsum grains maintain their color throughout the seasons. The visitor center, housed in a Spanish pueblo-adobe building constructed in the 1930s, offers not only a good orientation about the region's geologic history but also an outline of how the park is laid out and the areas that are accessible to the public.

Park roads are limited, but they do take you to the various topographies of the dunes. At first, you will encounter small dunes and parabolic dunes (where strong winds have eroded a section of vegetated sand), while at the end of the drive you will see larger dunes with more prominent faces and sides. The drifting sand acts like drifting snow, and snow-removal equipment is used to keep the roads open.

The 8-mile Dunes Drive, which

starts at the visitor center, has its first stop at Playa Trail. This short hike takes you into some of the frontal areas of the dunes. On this and other trails, various forms of cacti and yucca plants can be viewed. The elevated Interdune Boardwalk, 41/2 miles from the visitor center, crosses over the sand and reveals plants and sand structures.

At almost every turn, a different set of sand structures begs to be explored, and several pull-offs lead to dunes to climb. It was quite an experience to hike to the top and look out upon a sea of gypsum sand that appears to be never-ending. We were fortunate that we chose a day where the wind was not high, but I can imagine what it would be like on gusty days.

At the end of the drive is a loop

BLUE SKIES, WHITE SANDS

Average daytime temperatures in White Sands National Park run from 60 degrees Fahrenheit in winter to 75 degrees in spring to 80 degrees in fall. Summer temperatures average a toasty 95 degrees, with some days soaring to 110 degrees.

called Heart of the Sands with an amphitheater and an unusual picnic area. Each table has a curved roof that is positioned close to the ground to ward off airborne sand in high winds.

Photographers will appreciate the wonderful shapes and forms that the gypsum takes, but dealing with the stark-white background does provide a challenge. Like taking photographs in snow, the effects of the brightwhite backgrounds, with the shadows and ripples in the sand, create some appealing results. Contrasting colors presented by the rocks and vegetation provide more photographic material. But in the end, the most awe-inspiring feature of this rare landscape is the vastness and changing nature of the white desert.

MEXICO

White

Sands

Monument

Las Cruces

Alamogordo

82 miles to

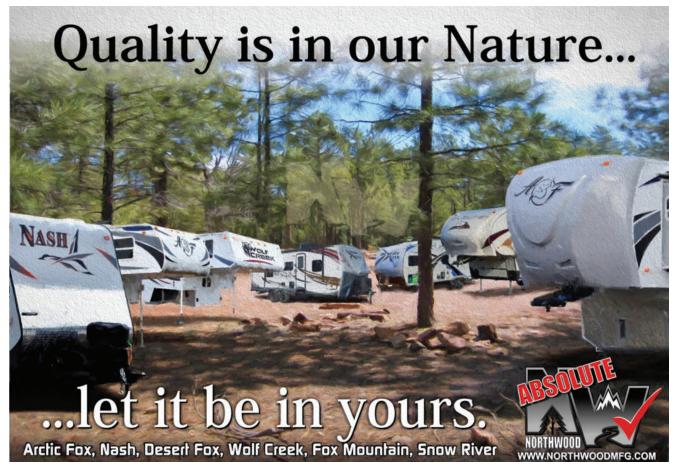
El Paso



White Sands National Monument, 575-479-6124, www.nps.gov/whsa

Missile tests are still conducted at the adjacent White Sands Missile Range, occasionally closing areas of the monument; check the the White Sands National Park website or call before you go.

The National Park Service offers moonlight bicycle rides across the dunes several times a year in spring and fall, with advance registration (www.nps.gov/whsa/planyourvisit/bicycling.htm).



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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Alamogordo Chamber of Commerce 800-826-0294 www.alamogordo.com

New Mexico Museum of Space History 575-437-2840

www.nmspacemuseum.org

Visit Las Cruces 575-541-2444 www.lascrucescvb.org of the components helped in understanding how the missiles operate.

White Sands is a place of mystery and beauty. It is a living desert where more permanent features such as flora and rocks mix with the shifting white sands to create different moods at every turn. While we had seen images of White Sands in the past, nothing prepared us for the stark beauty of the bright gypsum and rolling dunes. It is one of the wonders of the world.

WHERE TO HANG YOUR HAT

RV accommodations in southern New Mexico are many, depending on where you want to stay and which attractions you want to see. We stayed in Las Cruces because we had never seen that city and wanted



to explore its culture and historic sites. From among the three Good Sam Parks in Las Cruces, we elected to stay at Hacienda RV and Rally Resort, which had all the amenities we needed. Hacienda is near the center of town and allowed easy access to major highways. We wanted to explore southern New Mexico down to El Paso, Texas, as well as take a trip to White Sands, and this location seemed to serve those needs best.

Traveling farther east, there are also a couple of Good Sam Parks in Alamogordo, which is much closer to White Sands National Monument.

ALAMOGORDO

Boot Hill RV Resort, 575-439-6224, www.boothillrv.com White Sands Community, 575-437-8388, www.westernm.com

LAS CRUCES

Hacienda RV and Rally Resort, 888-686-9090, www.haciendarv.com Siesta RV Park, 800-414-6816, www.siestarvpark.com Sunny Acres RV Park, 877-800-1716, www.sunnyacresrv.com



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888-908-0322 torklift.com/trailerlife



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*Government fees, state taxes, dealer fees and emissions testing charges as applicable will be added to comply with state vehicle codes. Freight and prep costs vary by state (Not applicable in CA, OH, TX, TN, GA or UT). Inventory and floorplans vary by location, not all advertised manufacturers available at participating dealers. New units will be delivered from the nearest authorized dealer. Contact your area dealer for availability. VIN numbers posted at dealership. Payments to qualified buyers with approved credit. Subject to lender terms. Example bunkhouse travel trailer Stk# LAP555405. Payment based on 10% down at 5.50% APR for 144 months. Example rear living fifth wheel Stk# MAD534468. Payment based on 10% down at 5.50% APR for 144 months. Example front living fifth wheel Stk# TUC543217. Payment based on 10% down at 4.99% APR for 180 months. Example rear living fifth wheel Stk# OKC556205. Payment based on 10% down at 4.99% APR for 240 months. Advertised inventory available at time of production. New unit photography for illustration purposes only. May not be combined with any other offer and not applicable to prior sales. Offers valid at any Camping World RV Sales or FreedomRoads dealer only. See dealer for details. Offers expire 1/3/16. FR044383-1015



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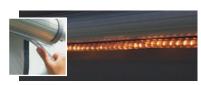


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s are constructed in a number of different ways, but many follow the same basic blueprint: Start with a steel or aluminum frame, build up the walls with wood and/or aluminum, more framing and composite materials, cover the structure with a roof and wrap the entire unit with either aluminum panels or gelcoat fiberglass. While conventional construction methods work well, another successful strategy has been in place for years and continues to flourish: molded fiberglass.

RVs built from molded fiberglass are sleek and shiny, and share their origins with the marine industry (think boat hull). In a molded-fiberglass trailer, fifth-wheel or truck camper, the rigid fiberglass body actually serves as the main framing element, as well as the interior and exterior skin. The body of the RV is essentially two pieces that clamshell together, resulting in a durable, corrosion-resistant body that is quite strong and can have several advantages over traditionally built RVs.

"The two-piece fiberglass shell has one main seam around the center belt line," explains Grant Bilodeau, president of Bigfoot RV. "Traditional trailers are made of many separate side, floor and roof panels, and are then screwed together with many moldings and seals. As RVs are meant to travel down the road, a traditional trailer will flex over time, and all the extra seams and joints become higher maintenance and risk points for leaking. With a fiberglass trailer, there is only one seam to worry about."

"Fiberglass molded trailers are sprayed into a mold with gelcoat and fiberglass," Bilodeau adds. "The glass content is like the rebar in concrete — it gives you all your strength, as the resin

binds it all together."

Fiberglass construction can also lead to some positive results when it comes to fuel mileage, handling and durability. "Our fiberglass campers are 25 percent lighter than conventionally built truck campers," says Keith Donkin, general manager at Northern Lite Manufacturing. "They are very aerodynamically designed for improved fuel efficiency, and they feature a very low center of gravity, which eliminates the sway of a conventionally built camper."

Improved towing characteristics and longevity do come with a trade-off. Molded-fiberglass RVs can be a bit more costly than their conventionally built counterparts. But manufacturers of fiberglass RVs claim the difference in price can easily be amortized over the lifetime of the RV.

"Generally, people like our trailers because they are easy to tow, easy to



set up, and they last forever," reports Kent Eveland, president of Scamp Trailers. "Most of the trailers we built in the 1970s are still in use."

Robert P. Partee, general sales manager of Oliver Travel Trailers, agrees. "Most fiberglass trailers hold their value over the years much better than the standard-build types," he says. "Constructing travel trailers with fiberglass has been flying under the radar for years."

Often eclectic, sometimes retro-chic and always eye-catching, molded-fiberglass RVs are frequently the focus of online communities and club rallies. "We find our trailers appeal to all ages in part because of the nostalgia factor, as well as the simplicity and weight," says Heather Gardella, president of Dub Box USA.

Check out the following collection of some of the more interesting fiberglass RVs on the market today.

Biafoot

Bigfoot Industries manufactures a variety of travel trailers and truck campers, all featuring clamshell molded-fiberglass construction. Bigfoot actually overlaps the top shell onto the bottom and uses a special sealant to further guard against water penetration. The 2500 series travel trailers include R-8 insulation, which, when combined with the fiberglass base (less conductive than aluminum or steel), creates a more livable fourseason RV, according to Bilodeau. Seven floorplans ranging from 17 to 25 feet are available. The 25B25FB boasts a full rear bath, sleeping space for up to six and standards that include a porcelain toilet, aluminum wheels, heated and enclosed tanks, and a living-area skylight. The option to enclose the A-frame and add cargo space is not only practical but looks great as well. Other options include



a solar-power system, 11,000-Btu roof air conditioner, exterior speakers and an electric A-frame jack.

Exterior Length	25' 6"
Exterior Width	8' 4"
Interior Height	6' 4"
Exterior Height	9' 2"
Freshwater Cap.	45 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	45 gal./45 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
UVW	5,450 lbs.
Hitch Weight	612 lbs.
GVWR	7,500 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$52,017
250-546-2155, www.bigfootrv	.com





Casita

For 33 years, Casita has been building lightweight fiberglass trailers. The 17-foot Casita Spirit Deluxe offers comfortable sleeping arrangements for three, with a bit more space for quests, provided they are of the smaller variety. Both sleeping areas convert to dinettes by day, meaning the trailer can easily accommodate more than it can sleep before the sun goes down. A couch/ bunk-bed option ups the ante even more. The surprisingly wide-open floorplan means occupants won't trip over each other while moving about. In Deluxe models, a large, full-featured bathroom is located at the front of the trailer, as is a roomy storage wardrobe. Standard features include custom marine-grade

fiberglass furniture, carpet-lined storage compartments and a powered roof vent. Owners can also opt for LED lighting, a microwave, an electric A-frame jack and a larger gray-water holding tank.

Exterior Length	17'	
Exterior Width	6' 8"	
Interior Height	6' 1½"	
Exterior Height	8' 11"	
Freshwater Cap.	16 gal. (25 opt.)	
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	15 gal./32 gal.	
LP-Gas Cap.	10 gal.	
UVW	2,480 lbs.	
Hitch Weight	365 lbs.	
GVWR	3,500 lbs.	
MSRP, base	\$20,661	
800-442-9986, www.casitatraveltrailers.com		

Fun with Fiberglass



Dub Box

Dub Box USA manufactures lightweight fiberglass trailers reminiscent of the Volkswagen Microbus popular in the 1960s and '70s. Dub Box trailers are not true Volkswagen conversions but are in fact manufactured from a fiberglass mold made from the vintage VW Bus. Each Dub Box trailer comes equipped with classic moon-style hubcaps, a hot/ cold outdoor shower, a two-burner stove, a sink, a 3-cubic-foot refrigerator, an LP-gas water heater, an L-shaped convertible couch with 4-inch cushions, a folding dinette table and Sunbrella weather curtains for the pop-top. Options include air conditioning, solar panels, a luggage roof rack and a storage box on the A-frame. Buyers get to select the paint color for the exterior to match their tow vehicle.

Exterior Length	16'
Exterior Width	5' 8"
Interior Height	6' 6" (with top raised)
Exterior Height	6' 4" (travel)
Freshwater Cap.	20 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water C	ap. NA/25 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	10 gal.
UVW	2,300 lbs.
Hitch Weight	110 lbs.
GVWR	3,500 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$22,000
503-744-0032 www	dub-box-usa com



Eggcamper

Eggcamper trailers are ultralightweight and offer a fun way to enjoy RVing. Available only from the factory in Grandville, Michigan, and weighing less than 2,000 pounds (dry, without options), the Eggcamper can be towed by almost any properly equipped truck, van or SUV. The all-white trailers may look spartan inside, but they contain all the amenities needed for weekend fun, including sleeping space for two to four, a galley with a stainless sink, a 2.4-cubic-foot refrigerator, available air-conditioner. appliances and a lavatory with a toilet (or a large storage area instead). Plus, the smooth interior makes cleanup a breeze. The Dexter Torflex suspension is a welcome inclusion, as are the power roof vent and radius safety-glass windows with screens and miniblinds. LP-gas options are available, in addition to the electric-only model powered by an appropriately sized AC generator,



along with the standard 30-amp converter with charger.

Exterior Length	17'
Exterior Width	7' 4"
Interior Height	6' 7"
Exterior Height	8' 2"
Freshwater Cap.	14 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	8 gal./24 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	Opt.
UVW	1,880 lbs.
Hitch Weight	240 lbs.
GVWR	2,500 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$24,990
616-437-9255, www.eggcamper.	.com



Escape

Another big name in the molded-fiberglass market is Escape Trailers. Based in Chilliwack, British Columbia, Escape offers several fiberglass travel trailers and more recently introduced a fifthwheel. All Escape trailers are compact and lightweight for easy towing, and the Escape 21 is designed specifically for tow vehicles with weight ratings down to 5,000 pounds. But don't be fooled by the diminutive size. Escape trailers are equipped with full galleys, bathrooms and living areas, in addition to oak cabinetry, high-grade linoleum flooring and an insulated headliner. Other impressive standards include two roof vents, LED ceiling lighting, full-surround

overhead storage and a holding-tank monitor. Popular options range from appliance upgrades to a stereo, a water filter and a solar charging system.

Exterior Length	21'
Exterior Width	7' 4"
Interior Height	6' 5"
Exterior Height	8' 7"
Freshwater Cap.	30 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	30 gal./22 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	10 gal.
UVW	3,140 lbs.
Hitch Weight	360 lbs.
GVWR	4,500 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$27,000
855-703-1650, www.escapetrailer.com	



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Today, approximately 40% of all RVs are sold through private parties. With easy access to neighborhood, local and online listings, shopping around for used RVs is easier than ever – but obtaining financing for a private party loan can often seem anything but simple.

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^{**}Rates and terms may vary with market conditions and are subject to change without notice. APR applied to the loan is the APR in effect on the date the application is received and is valid until 30 days after the loan is approved. APRs may vary with loan term. For a refinance request, RV must be 2006 model year or newer. For a purchase request, RV must be 2008 model year or newer. Maximum loan to value is determined by the following: credit score and model year, with collateral value being established per NADA Used Wholesale Trade-in value. Maximum loan term may vary based on model year, loan amount, loan type and lender guidelines. Example of a recreational use RV loan: A 10 year fixed-rate \$55,000 loan. Based on an APR of 3.97%, this loan has 120 monthly payments of \$556.06 each. Information is accurate as of October 22, 2015.

Fun with Fiberglass

Happier Camper

In addition to offering vintage restored fiberglass rentals, Happier Camper now builds the unique HC1 trailer. The base-price HC1 begins as an empty shell built using bonded double-hull fiberglass with 1.5-inch honeycomb fiberglass flooring. Grooves are embedded in the flooring to accommodate the modular components (think Legos) that will make up the custom floorplan, including a kitchenette, benches, cushions, an AC/ DC refrigerator cube, tables, floor panels — there's even a portablepotty cube. Buyers can configure the layout exactly as they'd like it, and the price is determined by the selected modules. LED lighting comes standard, as do built-in rear stabilizing jacks and an undercarriage-mounted full-size spare tire. Add-ons include compatible comfort heating, stereos, electric fans and moon-style hubcaps.

Exterior Length	13'
Exterior Width	6' 11"
Interior Height	6' 1"
Exterior Height	7' 4"
Freshwater Cap.	5 gal. (opt.)
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	NA/5 gal. (opt.)
LP-Gas Cap.	NA
UVW	1,100 lbs.
Hitch Weight	110 lbs.
GVWR	3,500 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$15,950
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Nest Caravans

A newcomer to the fiberglass-trailer market. Nest Caravans from Bend. Oregon, combines the easy-towing capabilities of a lighter-weight fiberglass trailer with elegant sophistication and an eve for detail. Nest trailers are available in five color combinations with an array of useful exterior standards, including a nosecone storage box, all-LED exterior lighting, BAL stabilizing jacks and frameless windows. Inside, dimmable switches help control the mood with all-LED lighting, and the galley shimmers with a stainless-steel sink. two-burner cooktop and 3.2-cubic-foot refrigerator. The full-time queen bed

can comfortably sleep two. Options include a convertible dinette, natural cork tiles, a microwave and an entertainment system.

Exterior Length	16' 6"
Exterior Width	6' 8"
Interior Height	6' 3" - 6' 8"
Exterior Height	8' 2"
Freshwater Cap.	20 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	Portable toilet/20 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	10 gal.
UVW	2,400 lbs.
Hitch Weight	275 lbs.
GVWR	3,500 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$29,995
541-610-2292, www.nes	tcaravans.com

Northern Lite

Another Canadian manufacturer. Northern Lite Manufacturing in Kelowna, British Columbia, builds fiberglass truck campers designed to withstand extreme weather. The company's top-selling Ten 2000 EX CD SE boasts some impressive features like 95-watt solar panels, a 10-foot side awning, an LCD TV and DVD player, thermal-pane windows and skylight, solid hardwood and more. There's even a full 14-inch basement with heated and enclosed storage tanks. Sleep like a baby on the 60 x 80-inch queen bed, or take a warm shower in the large bathroom area. Options include an air conditioner, electric jacks, LED lighting in the electric awning, batterydisconnect, an extended patio bumper, and a boat rack and ladder. With a floor length of more than 11 feet, this camper weighs in at 1,400 to 2,000



pounds lighter than comparable conventionally built campers with the same features, offering buyers the best of both worlds.

Box Length	8'
Exterior Width	8' 2"
Interior Height	6' 8"
Overall Height	8' 10"
Floor Length	11' 2"
Freshwater Cap.	36 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	18 gal./40 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	10 gal.
UVW	3,265 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$43,210
250-765-3702, www.northern-lite.com	





Oliver

Oliver Travel Trailers offers two fiberglass trailers, the Legacy and Legacy Elite II. "Ollies," as they're called, begin at the Tennessee factory with dual fiberglass shells. The shells are then wrapped around a hefty 2 x 5-inch aircraft-gradealuminum box-tube frame, offering additional rigidity and durability. All holding tanks and components are enclosed between the inner and outer shells for superior insulation benefits and protection from the elements. The 2016 Legacy Elite II has a number of impressive features, from the custom-molded-fiberglass spare-tire and LP-gas cylinder covers to LED lighting, marine-grade stainless-steel cabinet latches and eye-catching interior gelcoat walls and cabinets. Options range from fiber-granite countertops to a solar package, plus a tech-savvy selection that includes Wi-Fi and cell-phone boosters, a rearview camera, and satellite antennas and wiring.

Exterior Length	23' 6"
Exterior Width	7'
Interior Height	6' 6"
Exterior Height	8' 6"
Freshwater Cap.	32.5 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	18.5 gal./35.5 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	10 gal.
UVW	4,600 lbs.
Hitch Weight	420 lbs.
GVWR	7,000 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$48,500
931-796-1178, www.oliv	ertraveltrailers.com

Scamp

Scamp fiberglass trailers are sold factory-direct in Backus, Minnesota. Available in 13- and 16-foot trailers and a 19-foot fifth-wheel, the nimble RVs are ideal for couples and smaller families on weekend getaways. Scamp has always focused on ease of use and maneuverability. Its trailers are durable, lightweight and aerodynamic, and are designed to be towed by properly equipped small cars, SUVs, minivans and trucks. The 13-footer is available in Standard or Deluxe (upgraded interior), with a convertible sofa or a shower and toilet up front. The options package that includes the lavatory features a 1.9-cubic-foot refrigerator, a screen door, a water pump, a water heater,

a gravel shield and a window above the range. Additional add-ons include cabinet configurations, a 2-inch hitch receiver for bike racks, TV hookups and antenna, and an 8-foot awning.

Exterior Length	13'
Exterior Width	6' 8"
Interior Height	6' 3"
Exterior Height	7' 6"
Freshwater Cap.	12 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	26 gal. (opt.)
SaniPotti 9 ga	l (opt); 26 gal. (opt)
LP-Gas Cap.	5 gal.
UVW	1,300-1,600 lbs.
Hitch Weight	120-160 lbs.
GVWR	2,200 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$10,595-\$11,895
800-346-4962, www.scamptrailers.com	



Weis Craft

The Little Joe is a lightweight fiberglass trailer that offers two people a comfortable place to stay while on the road. Inside, dual sofas fold down to create the ultimate 78 x 63-inch sleeping area. Although the Little Joe doesn't have bathroom facilities (those come in Weis Craft's Ponderosa model for an additional \$6.000), a two-burner cooktop and a standard icebox allow for gourmet campsite fare (a refrigerator option is available), and a small freshwater tank lets owners clean up after a long day's adventure. Options abound in the Little Joe, including a furnace, air conditioning, folding shelves, a three-speed reversible fan and an 8-foot awning. And, chances are, you already own a vehicle that can haul the Little Joe. 폊



Exterior Length	12' 6"
Exterior Width	5' 8"
Interior Height	6'
Exterior Height	7' 4"
Freshwater Cap.	6 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	NA
LP-Gas Cap.	5 gal.
UVW	1,100 lbs.
Hitch Weight	180 lbs.
GVWR	2,999 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$13,800
303-947-2351, www.weiscrafttrailers.	.com/littlejoe



GOOD AS GOLD... AND SILVER AND BRONZE

PRESENTING YOUR FAVORITES IN TRAILER LIFE'S FOURTH-ANNUAL READERS' POLL

panning recreational vehicles, tow vehicles and everything that goes with them, *Trailer Life's* annual Readers' Choice Awards honor the places and products that work best for RVers. The 2015 poll results can help you decide where to go and what to get, or at least narrow the field. Consider the awards the ultimate tips from the ultimate insiders — dedicated RV enthusiasts.

Wondering what brand of RV to buy and how to equip it? *Trailer Life* readers share their favorite manufacturers of travel trailers, fifth-wheels, folding campers and truck campers, plus must-have awnings, portable generators,

satellite-TV hardware and tire-pressure monitoring systems. Shopping for a new tow vehicle? Readers name their top three preferences, along with tried-and-true engine oils, fuel additives and performance enhancements to keep the vehicle running strong. Not sure where to go next? Recommendations range from campgrounds to casinos, and restaurants to RV retailers, as well as readers' three best-loved states for RV travel.

And so, without further ado, we present the top votegetters in 29 categories, *Trailer Life* readers' gold, silver and bronze winners for 2015.

ENGINE OIL



GOLD: SHELL ROTELLA

Produced by Shell for more than 40 years, Rotella heavy-duty engine oils and synthetic lubricants are designed to control wear, buildup and emissions. 800-237-8645, www.shell.com/rotella

SILVER: AMSOIL

800-956-5695, www.amsoil.com

BRONZE: MOBIL 1

800-662-4525, www.mobiloil.com

FIFTH-WHEEL HITCH



GOLD: B&W TRAILER HITCHES

Nearly 30 years ago, B&W introduced the first Turnoverball hitch. Today, the company continues to bring innovative hitch solutions to the RV market. 800-810-4918. www.turnoverball.com

SILVER: PULLRITE

800-443-2307, www.pullrite.com

BRONZE: REESE

800-632-3290, www.reeseprod.com

FIFTH-WHEEL TRAILER



GOLD: GRAND DESIGN

One of the fastest-growing RV manufacturers, Grand Design builds Imagine

travel trailers, Solitude fifth-wheels, Reflection travel trailers and fifth-wheels, and Momentum fifth-wheel toy haulers. 574-825-9679, www.granddesignrv.com

SILVER: KEYSTONE

866-425-4369, www.keystonerv.com

BRONZE: FOREST RIVER

574-389-4600, www.forestriverinc.com

FOLDING CAMPER



GOLD: JAYCO

America's largest family-owned and -operated RV manufacturer, Jayco builds a range of motorized and towable RVs, including the Jay Series line of folding trailers. 574-825-5861, www.jayco.com/products/camping-trailers

SILVER: FOREST RIVER

574-389-4600, www.forestriverinc.com

SILVER: STARCRAFT

800-945-4787. www.starcraftrv.com

BRONZE: TRAILMANOR

402-316-7288, www.trailmanor.com

FUEL ADDITIVE



GOLD: LUCAS OIL

Lucas Oil's extensive lineup of additives and lubricants is designed to improve engine performance, longevity, fuel stability and mileage.

800-342-2512, www.lucasoil.com

SILVER: AMSOIL

800-956-5695, www.amsoil.com

BRONZE: SEA FOAM

952-938-4811, www.seafoamsales.com

FUEL STATION



GOLD: PILOT FLYING J

With more than 650 RV-friendly locations, Pilot Flying J offers gas and diesel fuel, restaurants, snacks, shower facilities and certified truck scales. 877-866-7378, www.pilotflyingj.com

SILVER: LOVE'S TRAVEL STOPS

800-655-6837. www.loves.com

BRONZE: COSTCO

800-774-2678. www.costco.com

HOLDING-TANK CHEMICALS



GOLD: THETFORD

Thetford is the world's leading supplier of mobile sanitation products for the recreational vehicle market. 800-543-1219, www.thetford.com

SILVER: CAMCO

800-334-2004, www.camco.net

BRONZE: ODORLOS

800-869-8764, www.yara.us

PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING PRODUCT



GOLD: BANKS POWER

The company founded by performance pioneer Gale Banks offers a range of emissions-legal products to boost

power and fuel economy, from coldair-intake kits to PowerPack systems. 800-601-8072, www.bankspower.com

SILVER: BULLY DOG

877-285-5936, www.bullydog.com

BRONZE: BD DIESEL 800-887-5030

www.dieselperformance.com

RV AWNING



GOLD: DOMETIC

Dometic makes RV patio, door and window awnings, in addition to slide toppers and add-on screen rooms in a range of sizes, fabrics and colors. 800-544-4881, www.dometic.com

SILVER: CAREFREE OF COLORADO

303-469-3324

www.carefreeofcolorado.com

BRONZE: LIPPERT COMPONENTS

574-537-8900

www.lci1.com/solera-power-awning

RV BATTERY



GOLD: INTERSTATE BATTERIES

The top-selling RV-and-marine battery, Interstate supplies deep-cycle, starting, dual-purpose and sealed AGM batteries. 866-842-5368

www.interstatebatteries.com

SILVER: EXIDE TECHNOLOGIES

678-566-9000, www.exide.com

SILVER: TROJAN BATTERY COMPANY

800-423-6569, www.trojanbattery.com

BRONZE: OPTIMA BATTERIES

888-867-8462, www.optimabatteries.com

RV CAMPGROUND/RESORT



GOLD: PECHANGA RV RESORT, TEMECULA, CALIFORNIA

A perennially top-rated Good Sam Park, Pechanga RV Resort has 168 fullhookup RV campsites that are a short walk or shuttle ride from California's largest casino.

877-997-8386, www.pechanga.com

SILVER: ANCHOR DOWN RV RESORT, DANDRIDGE, TENNESSEE

877-784-4446

www.anchordownrvresort.com

SILVER: THE CAMPSITES AT DISNEY'S FORT WILDERNESS RESORT, ORLANDO, FLORIDA

407-934-7639

www.disneyworldcamping.com

BRONZE: OCEAN LAKES FAMILY CAMP-GROUND, MYRTLE BEACH, SOUTH CAROLINA

843-238-5532, www.oceanlakes.com

RV CASINO RESORT



GOLD: PECHANGA RESORT AND CASINO, TEMECULA, CALIFORNIA

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951-693-1819, www.pechanga.com

SILVER: SEVEN FEATHERS CASINO RESORT, CANYONVILLE, OREGON

800-548-8461, www.sevenfeathers.com

BRONZE: COUSHATTA CASINO RESORT,

KINDER, LOUISIANA 800-584-7263

www.coushattacasinoresort.com

RV CLEANING PRODUCT



GOLD: PROTECT ALL

Protect All's popular line of specialty cleaners and polishes is geared to RVers. 800-322-4491, www.protectall.com

SILVER: MEGUIAR'S

800-347-5700, www.meguiars.com

BRONZE: CAMCO

800-334-2004, www.camco.net

RV COVER



GOLD: ADCO

ADCO specializes in covers for RVs and RV tires, windshields, LP-gas cylinders and air-conditioning units. 800-541-2326, www.adcoprod.com

SILVER: CLASSIC ACCESSORIES

800-854-2315, www.classicaccessories.com

BRONZE: CALMARK

800-838-7236, www.calmarkcovers.com

BRONZE: COVERCRAFT

800-426-8377, www.covercraft.com

BRONZE: ELEMENTS

888-626-7576

www.campingworld.com/elements

RV GENERATOR



GOLD: HONDA

Since 1953, Honda has manufactured

more than 100 million power products, including a range of long-lasting and quiet portable power stations for RV use. 770-497-6400

www.powerequipment.honda.com

SILVER: YAMAHA

800-962-7926

www.yamaha-motor.com

BRONZE: CUMMINS POWER GENERATION

800-888-6626

power.cummins.com/rv/generators

RV REFRIGERATOR



GOLD: DOMETIC

Dometic provides built-in and freestanding refrigerators for all sizes and types of RVs, along with portable coolers, icemakers and wine chillers. 800-544-4881, www.dometic.com

SILVER: NORCOLD

800-543-1219, www.norcold.com

BRONZE: SAMSUNG

800-726-7864, www.samsung.com

RV RETAILER



GOLD: CAMPING WORLD

Celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2016, Camping World is America's largest retailer of RV supplies, accessories and new and used RVs, with 115 locations and a consumer website. 888-626-7576, www.campingworld.com

SILVER: LOCAL DEALERS BRONZE: WALMART

800-925-6278. www.walmart.com

RV TIRES



GOLD: MICHELIN

Michelin manufactures a variety of tires suitable for tow vehicles and trailers, and offers a website dedicated to RVers. 866-866-6605, www.michelinrytires.com

SILVER: GOODYEAR

800-321-2136, www.goodyearrytires.com

BRONZE: MAXXIS

800-462-9947, www.maxxis.com

RV TOILET



GOLD: THETFORD

Thetford markets three brands of RV toilets: Aria, Aqua-Magic and Tecma. 800-543-1219, www.thetford.com

SILVER: DOMETIC

800-544-4881. www.dometic.com

SATELLITE HARDWARE



GOLD: WINEGARD

Winegard is a leader in mobile-TV reception and supplies all types of antennas for RV use.

800-288-8094, www.winegard.com

SILVER: KING

952-922-6889, www.kingconnect.com

BRONZE: TV4RV

541-244-0250, www.tv4rv.com

SATELLITE-TV PROVIDER



GOLD: DIRECTV

With the DirecTV Choice Mobile package and the proper equipment, traveling RVers can access up to 185 channels. 888-777-2454, www.directv.com

SILVER: DISH

800-823-4929. www.dish.com

BRONZE: SHAW

888-472-2222, www.shaw.ca

SIT-DOWN RESTAURANT



GOLD: CRACKER BARREL

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TIRE-PRESSURE MONITORING SYSTEM



GOLD: TIREMINDER

Minder Research's wireless TireMinder systems keep tabs on air pressure and temperature in trailer and tow-vehicle tires, alerting drivers with visual and audible alarms. TireMinder systems can monitor up to 22 tire sensors. 772-463-6522

www.minderresearch.com/tireminder

SILVER: TST

770-889-9102, www.tsttruck.com

BRONZE: ADVANTAGE PRESSUREPRO

800-959-3505

www.advantagepressurepro.com

BRONZE: DORAN

866-816-7233, www.doranmfg.com

BRONZE: EEZ RV

510-910-5397, www.eezrvproducts.com

BRONZE: HAWKSHEAD 888-321-8767, www.tpms.ca

BRONZE: INNOTECHRY

770-844-6218, www.innotechrv.com

BRONZE: TIRE-SAFEGUARD

818-400-9976, www.tiresafeguard.com

BRONZE: TIRETRAKER

866-200-9773, www.tiretraker.com

TRAILER HITCH



GOLD: EQUAL-I-ZER

Built by Progress Manufacturing, the Equal-i-zer hitch combines weight distribution with sway control to minimize

problems caused by passing vehicles, crosswinds and other towing hazards.

800-478-5578

www.equalizerhitch.com

SILVER: REESE

800-632-3290, www.reeseprod.com

BRONZE: BLUE OX SWAYPRO

800-228-9289, www.blueox.com

TRAVEL TRAILER



GOLD: KEYSTONE

One of the world's largest manufacturers of travel trailers, fifth-wheels and toy haulers, Keystone RV Company sells all types and sizes of towables in many well-known brands.

866-425-4369, www.keystonerv.com

SILVER: LANCE

661-949-3322

www.lancecamper.com/travel-trailers

BRONZE: JAYCO 574-825-5861

www.jayco.com/products/travel-trailers

TRUCK-BED LINER



GOLD: LINE-X

One of the leading providers of spray-on coatings, Line-X offers fast-curing truck-bed liners that bond permanently and provide tough protection with long-lasting polymers.
877-330-1331, www.linex.com

SILVER: RHINO LININGS

800-422-2603, www.rhinolinings.com

BRONZE: BEDRUG

800-462-8435, www.bedrug.com

TRUCK CAMPER



GOLD: LANCE

Twelve-time winner of the RV Dealers Association's DSI Quality Circle Award, Lance has been a leading truck-camper manufacturer for 50 years and also builds travel trailers and toy haulers. 661-949-3322

www.lancecamper.com/truck-campers

SILVER: NORTHWOOD

800-766-6274

www.northwoodmfg.com

BRONZE: CHALET

541-791-4610, www.chaletrv.com

TRUCK FOR TOWING



GOLD: FORD

Ford's popular F-Series includes America's best-selling truck for 38 years, the F-150, with greater towing and payload capacities for 2016 and the innovative Pro Trailer Backup Assist system.

800-392-3673, www.ford.com/trucks

SILVER: RAM

800-423-6343, www.ramtrucks.com

BRONZE: CHEVY 800-222-1020

www.chevrolet.com/trucks 🗣

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Brute Force

Husky's Super Brute electric A-frame jack has a mammoth 5,000-pound rating and a remote-control key fob



a travel trailer quickly discover aspects of the process that end up becoming routine and less than desirable. Probably one of the most common is cranking a manual A-frame jack to lift and lower the A-frame while hitching up and disconnecting the trailer. The job becomes monotonous and downright annoying in short order. You know the routine: tons of sweat-inducing hand cranking, which seems pretty archaic in our motorized world.

There's no doubt that the best way to deal with a standard manual-cranking A-frame jack is to upgrade to a power model. For those in the market for such a jack, there are many choices. If you're





(Above, from left) The Husky Super Brute (on right) is bigger than its predecessor and has a modern design. LEDs are strategically placed in three locations to provide good illumination.

looking for a model that will go the distance with little complaint and pack in a number of ancillary features, the Super Brute HSB5000R premium electric Aframe jack from Husky Towing Products should be at the top of your list.

Not only is this mammoth 5,000-pound-rated jack built to last, its low-friction, full-length 20mm ball screw, high-capacity ball nut and hardened steel gears are designed to lift much more than the hitch weight of most trailers. And it all works with a remote-control key fob to further the convenience. Beyond a stout build that may be considered overkill by some, the jack has flush-mounted high-output LEDs in three locations and an adjustable, weather-defying universal plug holder. The plug holder also makes for a good flat spot to place the included bubble level.

Installation of the Super Brute couldn't have been any simpler, especially for such a highly capable jack. Even the wiring is simple for a component that includes the electronics that

operate the remote function. In fact, the HSB5000R is a true one-wire install with only a 30-amp resettable circuit breaker spliced in between.

To begin the removal and replacement procedure of the old and new jacks, securely chock the trailer tires then carefully lift and support the A-frame using jack stands. Now the original jack is ready to come out. If you're removing an existing electric jack, make sure to disconnect the power wire(s) and secure it out of the way, leaving a clean canvas for the new Super Brute. As long as the original bolts are in good shape and of decent quality, they can be reused, but only after installing the three supplied locking star washers, which help to ensure a proper ground for the circuitry.

The last step is to run the 10-gauge power-supply wire to the battery's positive terminal, after connecting the circuit breaker. Just tuck in and secure the wiring, and allow access to the button on the

(Far left) Manual-control switches are mounted in the top portion of the head. The Super Brute looks good on any A-frame. (Left) The 30-amp circuit breaker must be placed in the power wire that's connected to the battery.





LOW EFFORT Husky Towing Product's electric Super Brute HSB5000R, with a 5,000-pound lift capacity, total jack reach of 24 inches, three high-output LEDs and a remote-control key fob, does the work for you.





(Above, from left) The holder for storing the umbilical cord attaches to the jackleg and protects the cord from weather. This accessory doubles as a platform for the included bubble level. A key fob allows remote control of the jack from nearby locations.

breaker, if resetting becomes necessary. I found it easiest to drill a hole into the battery box for the breaker. Within 30 minutes, you should be ready to test the jack.

I've run Husky's predecessor for more than a year, and I can report that the wireless system works flawlessly, so it's likely the upgraded jack will have the same reliability. The Super Brute lifts the front of the trailer with almost no effort and is very fast and smooth. The jackleg can travel 18 inches, and

with a 6-inch extension capability by releasing a pin and lowering the inner leg, the total jack reach is 24 inches. The LED lights are perfect for night hitching, and the umbilical cord holder is a welcome touch.

Retail pricing for the HSB5000R is around \$350, but the jack can often be found at Camping World and other RV suppliers for less money. 🗬

Husky Towing Products

877-544-4449, www.huskytow.com



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No-Trip Satellite Cables

We discovered that the coaxial and power cables that run on the ground between the trailer and portable satellite dish on a tripod can be hazardous, especially in the dark. To minimize the chance of tripping, we use a bright-colored swim noodle. I carefully sliced halfway into the noodle lengthwise, then cut the noodle into two equal sections. At each campsite, we place the cables inside the noodle sections and lay them on the ground.

Tom Peterson, Hatboro, Pennsylvania

QUICK FIX

Easy-Connect Breakaway Cable

When we picked up our new travel trailer, the dealer advised us not to attach the breakaway cable to the ball mount or the receiver. Instead, he suggested that I drill a hole in my truck's bumper and attach it there. I was reluctant to drill into the bumper, and instead took out one of the license-plate bolts and replaced it with a stainless-steel eyebolt anchored behind the bumper with a fender washer and locknut. Now all I do is attach the cable to the eyebolt with a carabiner clip, and we are good to go.

Dann Yeager, Vestal, New York 🗭



Cutting Board at-the-Ready

I was looking for an easy way to secure the cutting board in my RV while still allowing it to be readily accessible. I took a 3M plastic hook that was deep enough to fit the width of the cutting board and mounted it upside down on the wall behind the stove at the same height as the cutting board. Now all I do is slip the cutting board into the hook opening and push the bottom of the board against the wall with a nonslip pad underneath. This secures the cutting board when traveling, keeps it out of the way when not in use and is easily accessible when needed.

Len Posner, Granada Hills, California

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

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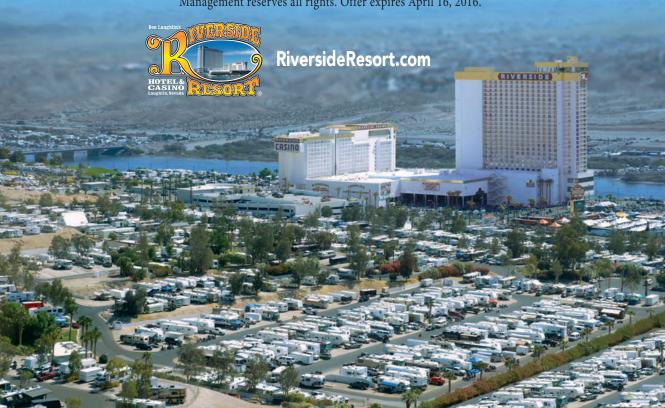
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Riverside Resort & Casino, Circle 132 on Reader Service Carc





Let There Be Light

Many older RVs have fluorescent tube lighting in one or more areas. While these fixtures are energy-efficient, they often produce unflattering light and can start to flicker as they age. If you've been looking for a suitable alternative, M4 Products may have the answer with its new 12-volt DC LED Tube Lights. Offered in standard and hard-to-find sizes, including 12- to 36-inch and circular 8-inch tubes, these retrofit lights use the natural sockets in existing fixtures — simply rewire the fixtures with the included installation materials that eliminate the ballast. More efficient than fluorescents, M4 LED Tube Lights are available in three colors: Cool White (6,000k), Natural White (4,500k) and Warm White (3,200k).

MSRP: Starting at \$16.99

818-717-8840

www.m4products.com/tube-lights
Circle 136 on Reader Service Card



To the Rescue

When it comes to RV ownership. making minor repairs is part of the real world. Rescue Tape is one of those products that can help mend leaking hoses or plumbing, insulate frayed wire or even serve as a temporary fan belt. Rescue Tape is a multipurpose silicone repair tape that has a 950-PSI tensile strength, and can handle temperatures up to 500 degrees Fahrenheit and insulate up to 8,000 volts. Rescue Tape bonds to itself; wrap it around a pipe, and the leak is sure to stop. It can easily be used to shrink-wrap wire and is said to even seal hydraulic fittings. Available in a slew of sizes and colors, this military-inspired tape is fireresistant, waterproof, extra resilient to chemicals and a must-have for any RVer.

MSRP: \$21.95, two-pack

702-953-0968, www.rescuetape.com Circle 137 on Reader Service Card



Thinking Smart

Filling up the holding tank unexpectedly while parking in a site without full hookups can make dumping more difficult, if you don't want to vacate the spot. Portable tanks that can be filled and taken to the nearest dump station have been around for some time, and Thetford, one of the major manufacturers of such tanks, has refined its classic rolling model with the SmartTote². The SmartTote² portable waste tank is available in two- and four-wheel options and can carry from 12 to 35 gallons of waste without making a mess. It's ready to use with many built-in provisions like an AutoStop Level Gauge and a retractable hose with a cap to prevent overfilling (not available on the 12-gallon model), rubber wheels and a tow strap or handle.

MSRP: \$97 to \$319

800-543-1219, www.thetford.com Circle 138 on Reader Service Card



Satellite TV Fit for a King

Portable satellite antennas have become a big part of the RV lifestyle — but the challenge is often where to mount them while in camp. King has introduced a new bracket that is designed for ultimate compatibility with all vehicles, according to the company, and is customized to fit King Tailgater and King Quest portable satellite TV antennas. Installation is easy — simply attach the Portable Antenna Mount to the antenna and hang the mount on the window, ladder or other suitable place on the RV. No drilling is required, and heavy-duty mounting tape provides for installation on the side of an RV, if desired. The mounting bracket is constructed from high-performance, automotive-grade polymer designed for outdoor use.

MSRP: \$34.99, 952-922-6889, www.kingconnect.com /product/portable-antenna-mount Circle 139 on Reader Service Card ♣



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Vehicle Tracking Systems

Many of us spend a small fortune — OK, make that a *large* fortune — on fully equipped tow vehicles, recreational trailers, motorhomes and more. These big-ticket items require years of hard work and saving, yet can be gone in an instant if they cross paths with a thief.

Fortunately, technology can help keep what's yours, yours — or aid in recovering it, if need be. About 25 years ago, LoJack pioneered a vehicle-tracking-and-recovery system that was so effective, it is still available today. Over the years, tracking systems have evolved, and many can do all sorts of useful things, from calling for help if you crash to unlocking doors if you're locked out.

Vehicle tracking has become a large industry in a relatively short time, as it is helpful to many types of users. Police agencies, ambulance operators and trucking fleets, as well as bus and taxi companies, all use them to see where their vehicles are, and more uses are found almost daily.

Tracking systems can provide a host of services, from confirming that your tow vehicle, trailer or motorhome is still where you parked it, to helping law-enforcement authorities find your vehicle after it has been stolen. Some will even tattle on your teenagers if they drive your vehicles with, let's just say, a bit too much spirit.

These systems typically use a GPS network to accurately pinpoint vehicle location and communicate using radio waves via cellular-phone networks, satellites or both. Some alert systems

also broadcast other radio frequencies that allow tracking.

Original Equipment Systems

Telematics systems employ various wireless technologies to connect motor-vehicle occupants to outside sources of communication, information, navigation, entertainment and other services. External connectivity is accomplished over cellular-phone networks, while Wi-Fi and Bluetooth systems are used for internal vehicle communication and connections to some hot spots.

There are two major types of vehicle telematics systems: embedded and non-embedded. Embedded systems use a built-in cell-phone system and typically require monitoring-service fees. Non-embedded systems utilize a cell phone connected to the vehicle systems either by wire or Bluetooth, and typically don't have additional service fees.

Embedded systems have been available for quite a few years, and their features have increased and been refined. General Motors' OnStar, introduced 20 years ago, offers many services, including stolen-vehicle assistance. If your vehicle's alarm sounds, OnStar will contact you



GM's OnStar, the auto industry's first embedded telematics system, can connect to representatives who provide vehicle tracking, emergency services and remote diagnostics.

immediately by your choice of text, email or phone. After authorities are notified that the vehicle has been stolen, OnStar can pinpoint its location using GPS tracking. On many models, once a vehicle has been reported stolen, an OnStar adviser can send signals to block the engine from restarting or that slow the vehicle to prevent high-speed pursuits. OnStar also provides vehicle diagnostics, lockout help, navigation, roadside assistance, travel services and more.

Fiat Chrysler brands offer a system made by Hughes Telematics called Uconnect Guardian, which provides Bluetooth and can summon emergency assistance when needed, among other convenience features such as navigation. The Vehicle Finder smartphone app can be used to locate Uconnect-enabled vehicles on a map and provide directions to it.

Ford's Sync system, which came out in 2007 and is now in its third generation, offers some telematics services via a Bluetooth or USB cable link from a cell phone to the vehicle. If a crash occurs, for instance, the Sync system uses the driver's cell phone to call 911.

BMW's ConnectedDrive system



OnStar FMV, a replacement rearview mirror, offers some of GM's OnStar benefits that include stolen-vehicle tracking, automatic crash response and roadside assistance, and is compatible with most non-GM vehicles.

includes stolen-vehicle tracking and automatic collision detection and reporting, along with remote door unlocking and emergency light and horn activation. Mercedes-Benz offers Mbrace, which includes services similar to the BMW and GM systems. Several other manufacturers now offer factory-installed telematics systems, with more being added all the time.

Aftermarket Systems

Aftermarket tracking devices come with a variety of features and options. The LoJack system is one of the best-known aftermarket units. LoJack's Stolen Vehicle Recovery System with the Early Warning option functions through a keychain fob that communicates directly with the LoJack unit installed in a vehicle. If the vehicle is driven and the keychain fob is not detected within that vehicle, LoJack sends an alert via a text, email and/or phone call, typically within 15 to 30 minutes.

Once a vehicle is reported as stolen and processed by law-enforcement personnel, the LoJack system can be activated to emit a uniquely coded RF signal. Law-enforcement agencies can use the signal to track the vehicle, even in places with difficult radio-wave propagation, such as parking garages, shipping containers and heavily wooded areas. Activation is contingent upon the vehicle being within LoJack's coverage area, which can be viewed at www.lojack.com/coverage.

Another type of tracking system has been spawned by on-board diagnostic (OBD) systems. Two examples are Linxup's plug-in GPS



LandAirSea's SilverCloud Sync plugs into the OBD-II port under the steering column and conveys diagnostic information in addition to tracking the vehicle.





OnStar FMV, an aftermarket rearview mirror with a built-in OnStar module, is available for retrofitting on compatible non-GM vehicles. It replaces the vehicle's original rearview mirror and offers some of the features of GM's OnStar system, including stolen-vehicle tracking, automatic crash response, navigation and roadside assistance.

Battery-powered trackers such as the LandAirSea Silver-Cloud Tag (right) and the Spot Trace (far right) can monitor the location of travel trailers, fifth-wheels, ATVs, motorcycles and watercraft, and send email and cell-phone alerts.



Asset Tracking Systems

Travel trailers and fifth-wheels don't have starting or ignition systems that can be monitored for tampering or unauthorized use. Therefore, they generally require different tracking systems. Many RVers also own various on- and off-road "assets," such as ATVs, UTVs, motorcycles, boats, personal watercraft and other

expensive motorized toys that are subject to theft. These can all be protected with aftermarket units known as asset trackers that run on built-in batteries, so there's no power draw on the protected vehicle.

Spot's Trace theft-alert tracking device acquires its coordinates from a GPS network. Because the Trace uses satellite technology instead



of cell towers, it can track vehicles outside the range of cellular networks. When movement is detected, an alert is routed to the owner's phone or computer, and the asset can be monitored in near-real time on Google Maps.

LandAirSea offers the SilverCloud Tag, a pocket-size tracker that relies on GPS satellites and cellular-data service. The Tag can be placed in a vehicle's glove box or other small compartment and monitored from any Internet-enabled device.

Linxup sells inexpensive, easy-to-install trackers that use the AT&T 3G network and require monthly service fees. The Linxup AT3 and AT6 report once a day while stationary using a three-month rechargeable battery or every 10 minutes when powered and moving. Linxup's ATSolar tracker runs for longer periods without recharging the battery. It reports once every three hours when stationary and every 10 minutes when in motion.

Privacy and Security

Surreptitious tracking devices using these technologies are widely available, making it easy for users to secretly track the movements and whereabouts of vehicles. Suffice it to say, you never know who's watching.

Security is another consideration, particularly after researchers hacked Fiat Chrysler's Uconnect system on a reporter's Jeep Cherokee last summer, disabling the engine and brakes, and causing the car to crash without harming the driver. Uconnect's onboard software has since been updated to close the security gap. Owners need to visit a Fiat Chrysler dealer to have the patch installed or download it from the Internet to a USB storage device and install it via the vehicle's USB socket.

Final Thoughts

Vehicle and asset tracking devices provide a host of benefits for a relatively low cost. There are many brands and models on the market beyond the ones listed here. An Internet search can find them by typing in key words such as "vehicle tracking device." Most are easy to install and use, and can provide peace of mind for owners of expensive vehicles that are regularly left unattended. As technology advances, we can expect these types of devices to offer even more features and for prices to decline.

Sources

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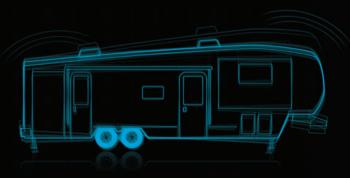


STABILIZER STABILITY

We recently bought a used 2011 Keystone Montana 35-foot fifth-wheel. Our question is about stabilizing the trailer. After we lower the front feet and rear stabilizers, put the ratchet-style scissor chocks between the tires and place the kingpin on the hitch, the trailer still has a wobble effect, moving back and forth when we walk inside. How can we prevent this from happening? We even tried putting a little too much tension on the back stabilizers.

Jim and Janis McCullough, Buffalo, New York

A Even with those landing legs and stabilizer jacks deployed, most of the trailer weight is still riding on



its suspension and tires, so it's going to shift around a bit. You can buy various braces that help provide extra foreand-aft or lateral stiffness for jacks and stabilizers, and these can help a great deal with steadying your trailer when parked. Check out JT's Strong Arm as one type of trailer-stabilizing product. — Jeff Johnston

LEAKING WATER HEATER

Jim Snider's "Winterizing Woes" letter in October's RV Clinic about problems with his trailer's leaking water heater sparked me to write. Each fall when I winterize my RV, I always bypass the water heater and drain it thoroughly. I have found that water still resides in the bottom of the tank and cannot be drained. I bought a plastic cooking baster and attached a foot-long piece of clear plastic tube. I suck out the remainder of the water and leave the drain plug out for the winter. I then use a paper towel to plug the drain hole, gas-igniter area and other places where spiders may decide to take up winter residence.

Jim Popovich, Mora, New Mexico

A It never hurts to be thorough, but that last little bit of water in the bottom of the water-heater tank is far less critical than leaving any water in the lines or fittings. Inside enclosed plumbing, when the water freezes

and expands, it has nowhere to go and can burst a line, for example. The bottom of the water-heater tank is bowl shaped, or more accurately, cylindrical, with the wider convex side "up." If any residual water freezes, it simply expands up into the open air space in the tank because there's nothing to bind or trap it in place. Your suggestion about removing the last of the water is a sound idea, though, and may help some readers who wish to do just that. — J.J.

WD HITCH APPLICATION

I'm considering buying another trailer and need clarification on how a weight-distributing (WD) hitch may affect the allowable hitch weight in relation to the tow vehicle's hitch capacity. My Tahoe has a 1,000-pound-capacity receiver and a 3:42 rear end. It has an 8,500-pound towing capacity. The 30-foot trailer has 6,400 pounds dry weight and an 8,835-pound gross

vehicle weight rating (GWR), and has a stated 835-pound hitch dry weight. With front storage and LP-gas cylinders, it wouldn't take much to reach and exceed the 1,000-pound hitch rating. Two dealers told me that the WD hitch will compensate and spread the load, and that it would be OK. But I have read in *Trailer Life* that "hitch weight is hitch weight" and should not be exceeded. Can I safely exceed the hitch weight if using a WD hitch, and if so, what would a safe guideline be?

Niles Toole North Augusta, South Carolina

You are correct, Niles. A WD hitch doesn't allow you to exceed any manufacturers' towing-related specifications, including hitch weight, tow rating, GVWR or gross combined weight rating (GCWR). The WD hitch helps distribute the weight between the tow vehicle's front and rear axles, but the weight is still there. That 835-pound "dry" or fantasy hitch weight will rack up in a hurry, as you fill the LP-gas cylinders, add cargo and, depending on the location of the tank, fresh water to the trailer. I'd also keep an eye on your trailer's weight, as that, too, adds up. Take the trailer to a certified public scale to learn its real-world weights and go from there. - J.J.

THE TECH TEAM



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

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

END CAPS REVISITED

November's RV Clinic letters about prematurely faded and discolored Keystone end caps brought in a lot of reader comments about similar problems and other end-cap issues. Here are four of them. - J.J.

I don't think the problem is oxidation. My son is going through the same thing with his Jayco. The end-cap has dull blotches in several places, and the dealer can't seem to resolve the issue. My guess is that the RV manufacturers are all in the same general geographical area, and they all use the same vendor to manufacturer the end caps. I am familiar with the fiberglass and gelcoat process, and would bet that the problem is with the equipment used to apply the gelcoat to the mold. When the gelcoat is sprayed, there is a catalyst (MEKP) mixed with it at the spray gun. If the mix is not right at the gun, the end result will be small craters or dull areas in the finish. I suggest that the vendor consult with his spray equipment supplier to resolve the problem.

I bought a new Sydney Outback by Keystone in 2013. The front cap began to fade within several months of ownership. Not only do I always wax my RVs, I also store them indoors. I contacted a local body shop and was told the fading is a result of improper primer on the fiberglass. This information comes from the manager of a body shop that has been in business well over 25 years. I took my RV to the dealer, and the company repainted the front. Since the three letters were written by owners of 2013 and 2014 Keystone products, I contend that this is not an oxidation problem caused by weathering or improper care.

Bill Land, Garland, Texas

Ken Baker, Greencastle, Pennsylvania

I had the same problem with my 2012 Keystone Outback and tried everything to correct it. Finally, on my second trip to the dealer, I was told that it was a paint problem. The dealer advised me to take three pictures, and they would contact Keystone and let me know the

outcome. Within two weeks, Keystone acknowledged the problem and offered to have my front cap repainted at no cost. That was done, along with placing new decals. Thank you, Keystone, for taking care of your customers.

W.H. Krizmanich, Columbia, Maryland

Thank you for the information about the gelcoat chemicals, guys. Some manufacturers use outside vendors, and others have in-house fiberglass facilities, and chemical problems can happen in either example. — J.J.

END-CAP CRACKING

Our 1995 Skyline Nomad fifthwheel end cap has been cracking along the sides for a number of years. A little caulk kept them under control, but now we have a large crack down the middle, starting at the roof and proceeding down the center. We lived in Minnesota at the time, and the local RV dealer said it was due to contraction during the cold winters. We have moved to Sioux Falls. South Dakota (a little warmer), but still have concerns. My research indicates the material is ABS, so I have applied Rhino glue to the 30-inch crack, which held this summer with limited use. Next summer we are heading back to Alaska for the seventh trip with this trailer. Any suggestions? After having a wet bed, which caused us to discover the crack. I covered the crack with white duct tape, which got us home from Alaska with no problems.

Don Patrick, Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Don, the cracks occurring on your A 20-year-old trailer seem like what can happen with almost any fiberglass component on an RV. Fiberglass is a wonderfully useful material for RVs, but it's somewhat brittle. As an RV frame flexes, it places stress on the fastening points on a fiberglass component, and sooner or later, stress cracks start to appear near those fasteners. The fact that your 20-year-old trailer is starting to show these cracks seems like a pretty reasonable lifespan for the product. A shop qualified to work on

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RV CLINIC

fiberglass would be the best place to have this repaired, as it involves filling and refinishing the cracked areas. This type of repair won't make the source of those cracks go away, but it will get your end cap looking good again for the duration. - J.J.

STEP-DOWN **ELECTRICAL ADAPTERS**

While browsing through my favorite RV-accessory store, I was surprised to note that on the shelf was an electrical adapter to step down from a 50-amp outlet to a 30-amp outlet, and then another electrical adapter was available to step down from a 30-amp outlet to a 20-amp or 15-amp outlet. If we choose to operate one or two 1.500-watt electrical heaters from a hardware store on an extension cord to take the chill off, as my wife and I occasionally do while camping, we are only actually protected by a 50-amp circuit breaker. Not a good electrical practice? Oscar Wiltse

Flowery Branch, Georgia

This type of step-down-adapter A string works two ways. If you start with a campground power pole with a 50-amp receptacle and use step-down adapters to eventually run a 15-amp extension cord to your RV, then yes, you're powered through a 50-amp circuit breaker. However, you can run only as many appliances as you can normally power from a 15-amp connection because that's what you are ultimately using to connect to the shore-power supply.

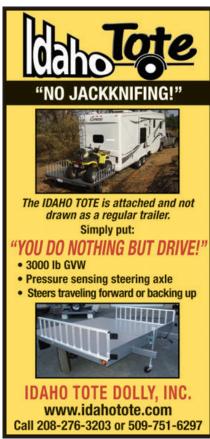
If, on the other hand, your RV has a 50-amp power cord and you're using the step-down adapters to connect your RV to a 15-amp outlet, then you're routing power through the 15-amp circuit breaker. As with the previous scenario, you can run appliances only up to that 15-amp supply line and circuit-breaker capacity. That pair of 1,500-watt heaters, if operated on High, would seriously overload a 15-amp circuit. Stay plugged in to 30-amp or higher service, without the 30- to 15-adapter, and you'll be fine. — J.J. (continued on page 79)

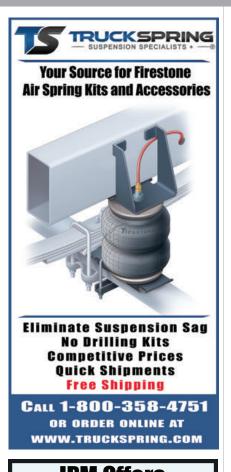
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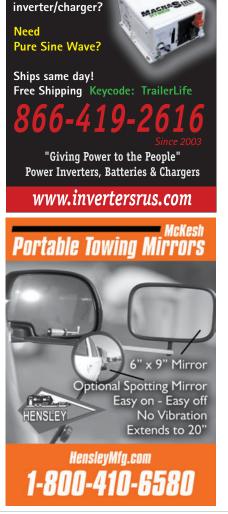




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(continued from page 76)

SELECTING AN RV

My wife and I have retired and intend to sell our home and buy an RV for travel. For several years, we have subscribed to both *MotorHome* and *Trailer Life*. We would really prefer a fifth-wheel trailer, but due to our age, we are concerned about the three steps up to the bedroom area. We have been researching higher-end trailers but are unable to find any that are generator-ready and equipped with instant hot water. Are you aware of any manufacturers that provide these options? We would appreciate any assistance you can offer.

Rick and Mary Day, Washoe Valley, Nevada

If you are concerned about the A steps up, you are probably better off with a flat-floor travel trailer or perhaps a motorhome. If you go with a fifth-wheel trailer, since you have to tow it with a pickup truck or flatbed, consider mounting a generator just behind the cab. Many owners do this. It isolates the noise and vibration from the trailer, and you don't lose storage space. If you insist on having a built-in genset, any good RV shop should be able to set one up, if you can't get the manufacturer to build one in. Many fifth-wheels are available with a generator-prep option, but it's not commonly ordered, so you may need to look pretty deep to find it on a specification chart.

Several brands of instant water heaters are designed just for RVs. The Truma AquaGo is receiving some very good reviews. These water heaters fit in the same space as traditional tanks, so a dealer should not have a problem installing one for you.

Don't let a lack of these features be a deal breaker. If the trailer you want is not offered with these options, many manufacturers and dealers are flexible about components when they want to make a sale. — **Ken Freund**

BATTERY DRAWS DOWN

We have a 2011 Forest River Surveyor Sport 186 trailer. It comes with one 12-volt battery. By the third

day dry camping, I have only one light showing on the battery monitor with not a whole lot of juice left. It's a new RV/marine battery. I have one small light on the refrigerator, one on the gas detector and one on the stereo, even when it's off. I don't even use the lights in the trailer for fear of wearing the battery down. There seems to be a fan that keeps going on and off all the time not sure if it's from the refrigerator or the converter. My power converter is a Cheng model WF-8955EC. Does the trailer need two batteries, or is there a possible problem? When running the small generator I have with 9-amp output, can I hook up directly from the 120-volt AC power-cord plug to the generator or use the battery clips and put them on my battery, or do I need to bring a battery charger with me?

Tom Grimm, Warrenton, Oregon

A Your trailer has a lot more power draws than you realize, and to get three days of dry camping from one charge on one battery is actually quite good. Keep in mind that it is not good for conventional lead-acid batteries to be drawn down to less than 50 percent charge. If you are presently drawing your battery down deeper than that, you may need to add a second battery, or you may consider charging it more often or adding solar panels.

If you decide to add a second battery, the existing battery should be replaced at the same time. If they aren't replaced in pairs, you may find that, as the older one weakens with age, it may start to "cannibalize" the stronger, newer one, drawing power from it when the two are connected in parallel. Some owners install a battery-selector switch (such as the ones from Perko) so they can use one battery at a time and isolate them.

You can plug your trailer into the generator, provided you don't have a total power draw higher than 9 amps. However, the power converter will likely take longer to fully charge the battery than a separate battery charger. Connecting the battery-charging clips generally provides an unregulated charging rate and is not an efficient way to charge your battery. — K.F.



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TOW-RATING OUESTION

My wife and I have a Coachmen Freedom Express 246RKS that weighs 4,806 pounds dry. We started out pulling it with a 2008 Dodge Dakota with the 4.7-liter V-8 fivespeed automatic transmission with 3:92 gears, with a tow rating of 7,050 pounds. Everything was fine until we decided to go to Branson, Missouri. Going up some of the steep grades, the transmission overheated. So, on returning home, we bought a new 2015 Ram 1500 with the Hemi engine, six-speed transmission and 3:92 gears, with a tow rating of 10,360 pounds. Can we safely go to a larger trailer in the 5,500- to 6,000-pound dry-weight range? We usually carry around 500 pounds of equipment or less with us. I also use a weightdistributing hitch.

Robert Templeton, via email

Your present truck should handle your trailer fine. However, I highly recommend that you refrain from using dry weights when figuring tow ratings and capacities. These weights don't exist in the real world and only get people in trouble by encouraging overloading. Instead, use the trailer's gross vehicle weight rating (gvwr) as the actual weight, until you have weighed your fully loaded trailer on a truck scale (which everyone should do). I also recommend installing a transmission fluid temperature gauge, which could have saved you a transmission, and therefore a tow vehicle.

As a final suggestion, be sure you manually shift from Overdrive (OD) to Drive (D) when you're towing on grades. If you leave the transmission in OD, it's going to be "hunting" back and forth to the lower gears when climbing. That hunting can lead to transmission overheating, and shifting to D helps eliminate that problem. — K.F. 🗣

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Alabama's Sweet Spot

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labama isn't as well known for its beaches and oceanfront hangouts as its next-door neighbor, Florida. But what Alabama has at Gulf Shores and Orange Beach is spectacular — miles of wide beaches with sugar-white sand and warm breezes off the Gulf of Mexico.

Between the two coastal cities. 6,150-acre Gulf State Park has one of

the longest stretches of RV campsites in the country. Nearly 500 sites spread out for almost 3 miles on both sides of the state park's main road. The park has another 11 miles of paved trails that are popular with bicyclists. In just a couple of hours, I was able to see the whole park while riding the trails on a Segway with a group and a guide.

For the uninitiated, a Segway is a battery-powered two-wheeled vehicle that you ride while standing up. It was tricky stepping on it at first, as I was not sure who was in control — the gyroscopic sensors or me. Once I got the hang of it, it was great fun, and I was rolling along at 10 to 12 MPH. We stopped at a couple of lakes and took pictures of an alligator.

The park is centered on this long island that can be accessed via State Route 59 or the Beach Express toll route. The Mobile Bay Ferry makes a 30-minute run from Dauphin Island to Fort Morgan on the island's western tip.

The 42-mile-long island is separated from the mainland by the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway that runs from Brownsville, Texas, to Carrabelle, Florida, a distance of 1,050 miles. The sheltered waterway provides a channel with a depth of 12 feet, designed primary for barge traffic. It was completed in 1949.

With some friends, I spent an afternoon boating on the waterway with Skip Beebe, who runs Sailaway Charters and knows these waters well. He could see that I was fascinated by the snub-nosed pusher boats maneuvering a chain of barges up the narrow canal. He said that the boats usually push four barges, sometimes fewer. On their trek east, they are loaded with coal, and sometimes liquid fuel.

Skip said that he had a pusher captain on his boat one time. The captain told him that barges carrying gasoline on the waterway replace hundreds of tanker trucks that would



otherwise be required to move it, thus relieving traffic and making travel safer and more pleasant for the rest of us.

Skip took the boat into Wolf Bay, where we watched a dolphin splashing around in shallow water catching fish. Skip would watch for a slight ripple on the water and then tell us where the dolphin would come up next for air. He was always right.

He eased the boat up next to a float that marked a crab pot and pulled the pot up to show us a popular item on the menu of most restaurants here — fresh crab. Then he lowered an oyster claw into the water to scrape the bottom. It looked like two long-handled rakes attached together. What he grabbed on the bottom, which included several oysters, he dumped onto the deck of the boat.

Skip said that oysters are filter feeders, drawing in water from which they extract plankton and other stuff off the bottom. An oyster can filter more than a gallon of water an hour. "That's why I don't eat them raw," he said. "But my wife does."

Most of the beaches here are public, and there's no sign of oil from the Deepwater Horizon spill more than five years ago. During my stay, beach umbrellas and portable beach chairs were lined up a few feet back from the water's edge, but everybody had a front-row seat. A sandcastle here is at risk of a high tide but never a crowd.

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