

FIFTH-ANNUAL READERS' CHOICE AWARDS: FIELD-TESTED FAVORITES

# TRAILER LIFE

FOLLOW THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

## Minnie to the Max

Light and Loaded Winnebago

**SmartPlug**

Safer Power  
in an Hour

**Take the Fifth**

Latest Hitches for  
Smooth Towing



### Southern Accents

- ▶ Work Camping in Georgia
- ▶ Louisiana's Cajun Country

**21** TRENDSETTING  
TRAILERS FOR 2017





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## This Year:

- ☒ Spend more time with family
- ☒ See more of North America
- ☒ Spend time outdoors
- ☒ Go on an adventure
- ☒ Go fishing
- ☒ Take the road less traveled



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Horseshoe Bend, Arizona



➤ The Mammoth for one-ton duallies boasts three slideouts and an optional king bed. Page 10

**On the cover:** Taking in the beauty at East Brimfield Lake in Sturbridge, Massachusetts, with the Winnebago 2500FL. Photo by Karen Dougherty



# New Year's Resolutions

Many of my annual goals go by the wayside quickly, but cleaning out superfluous items stays on point



**I**t's amazing how many people make New Year's resolutions. Ushering in a new year brings out the emotion — and realization — that we need to make changes and do the things we have neglected during the course of the previous year. Popular on the list are going on a diet and exercising. Great expectations are very noble, but almost all resolutions are universally underdelivered — or ignored — by the end of January.

For those who can stay the course, congratulations are in order. I have to admit, I'm pretty bad at the resolutions game, too, but I stay really focused when it comes to the stuff that I store in my fifth-wheel and truck. It doesn't take long to fill up just about every storage compartment and cubbyhole, inside and out, and dealing with all this stuff makes it hard to find anything without wading through mounds of clutter.

To keep cargo under control, and preserve my sanity, I go through all the compartments and cabinets every year and take inventory. It's amazing how much stuff accumulates. I use the one-year rule when making decisions on what to keep and what to eliminate. If an item has not been used or needed — and in many cases, is forgotten about — it's removed and put into the garage or my off-site storage facility. My latest cleanup round netted a couple hundred pounds of unnecessary cargo.

Of course, there are exceptions to the one-year rule. Tools, critical replacement parts and hardware needed to make common repairs are exempted from the purging. And if you're a packrat or someone who lives by contingency plans for fixing anything while on the road, then parting with little-used items will be difficult. Nevertheless, all RVs have weight limits, and overloading can compromise safety, lead to damaged components and reduce the longevity of the RV.

Manufacturers, responding to consumer demand, continue to emphasize storage capabilities of new models. Cruising the displays at last fall's Elkhart RV Open House (see page 23), it was clearly evident that cavernous storage areas are a high priority. Gigantic storage compartments encourage loading, and I've seen just about everything over the years, like a friend who carried three large barbecues and the guy who found a deal on soda at a discount store and stuffed the front compartments of his fifth-wheel with so many cases that the landing jacks failed.

Fortunately, most owners are more judicious when it comes to loading. One friend actually weighed every item and removed something of equal weight before bringing anything new onboard. While my yearly ritual to reduce inventory is not that severe, it's still much better than my annual resolution to stay on a diet. 🐺

— **Bob Livingston, publisher**

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## DID YOU KNOW?

Anglo-Saxons called the wintry first month of the year Wulf-monath (wolf month) because the lack of food drove wolves to prowl ancient Britain.

# TRAILER LIFE

FOLLOW THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

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## Positive Connections

I enjoyed reading the November 2016 issue's "Easy Hitching" by Bob Livingston about PullRite's SuperLite ball-and-coupler hitch. Last year I purchased the similar Andersen Ultimate 5th Wheel Connection for pretty much the same reasons mentioned in the article. I like the ease of hitching and the light weight of the base. I used the hitch this summer when towing my fifth-wheel 7,800 miles to Fairbanks, Alaska, with no problems. At 40 pounds, the Andersen base is easy to move by myself, and it fits in the front storage compartment of my trailer.

Although safety chains are not mentioned in the article and aren't required for fifth-wheel hitches, I don't know that either the SuperLite or Andersen hitches quite fall into that category. Andersen offers safety chains as an accessory, but I fabricated my own set using heavy-duty hardware and chain. It never hurts to be safe.

**Ray Fallen, Cannon City, Colorado**

## Cool Customers

We have been RV camping since 1982 and have winterized and stored our RV using the techniques discussed by Chris Dougherty in November's "Take the Chill Off." He covered pretty much everything, except that we also remove small batteries from any electronic gear that stays in the RV, such as remote controls, smoke detectors and flashlights.

**Ann A. Martin, Fort Smith, Arkansas**

"Take the Chill Off" was very good. I go a step further and place mothballs in a nylon ankle stocking at each point that lines or wires come into the trailer, and under the trailer, especially around the wheels where mice could easily climb up.

**Chris Shields, Greenville, Maine**

## Smooth Rider

I purchased the original Joy Rider shock system, and, yes, the brackets

# All Trailers, Great and Small

My wife, Faye, and I both read "Light Makes Right," Donya Carlson's November 2016 review of the Travel Lite Idea i18, as it looked very similar to our own Rockwood Mini Lite 2109S that we purchased a year ago. Both my wife and I love our little camper, and our 2017 Honda Ridgeline tows it with ease, as did our 2007 Honda Ridgeline. I'm glad the magazine is reviewing smaller travel trailers, as not all of us can afford the much larger units. Sure, I read about them with interest, but I would suggest that, when reviewing the largest RVs, you also review midsize and smaller ones to cover all the bases.

**Larry Krainson, Longmeadow, Massachusetts**



did crack and break, as Curtis Paulson said he experienced in "Still Smoothing Out the Bumps" in November's RV Clinic. But they were replaced by RVIS, and, like Curtis, I've had no problems since. After reading about the RVIS Liberty Rider and Joy Rider II suspension upgrades in the March 2016 issue, I ordered the kit for my 2014 XLR Thunderbolt toy hauler and installed it in about three and a half hours. What a smooth ride, and braking is great. I highly recommend it.

**Curt Schenk, Sanborn, Minnesota**

## Super Duty Tow Ratings

In October's "Light-Heavyweight Champ," Chris Hemer states that the maximum tow ratings for the new Ford F-350 Super Duty are 32,000 pounds for a gooseneck and 27,500 pounds for a fifth-wheel. Why the 4,500-pound difference?

**Ron Fillmore, Saxton, Pennsylvania**

Chris Hemer replies: According to Aaron Bresky, vehicle engineering manager for Ford Super Duty, and Andre Kunynetz, trailer tow development engineer, the reason for the

discrepancy amounts to average fifth-wheel trailer weights. In the Super Duty's development, the engineering team found that there were very few fifth-wheels on the market that weighed more than 26,000 pounds, so they assigned a 27,500-pound maximum rating to provide an extra margin. Also, while a fifth-wheel hitch may look more robust, it is attached to the vehicle's frame through a substructure, whereas a gooseneck is a direct attachment. Combine this with the fact that gooseneck trailers are often used in commercial and farming applications, and are often heavily loaded, and the higher gooseneck rating makes sense. That being said, Ford is aware that there are a few custom fifth-wheel manufacturers that could potentially build a trailer that weighs more than 27,500 pounds and may choose to assign a higher fifth-wheel rating in the future. 📧

**TALK TO US!**

**Write to:** Trailer Life, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036 or email [info@trailerlife.com](mailto:info@trailerlife.com). Please include your full name and location.





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(Far left) Spanish-moss-covered trees in Bon Secour's parking area greet visitors. (Left) Easy to walk tree- and fern-lined pathways wind through the wildlife refuge where visitors can enjoy the peacefulness of the sanctuary.

## Alabama's Safe Harbor

Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge protects thousands of acres of coastal habitat and is a sanctuary to threatened birds and animals

article and photos by James Richardson

Alabama has lots of activities to enjoy along its shoreline. Beaches. Resorts. Camping. And wildlife. One of the best places to observe coastal wildlife is Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1980 to preserve its dune ecosystem and protect its threatened and endangered species. The undeveloped refuge, located on the Fort Morgan peninsula west of Gulf Shores, has been called one of the natural wonders of Alabama.

Bon Secour means "safe harbor," and the 7,000-acre refuge comprises some of Alabama's last remaining undisturbed coastal habitat. Its maritime forests, marshes and dunes provide habitat for migratory birds

and other wildlife. Its beaches serve as nesting sites for loggerhead (the most common), green and Kemp's ridley sea

turtles. The endangered Alabama beach mouse also makes its home at the refuge. The mouse burrows small tunnels in the sand to raise its young, but visitors are unlikely to see these little fellows on the trail, as they are strictly nocturnal.

The refuge is an important and popular birding spot. Some 400 species of birds — from ospreys and herons to hummingbirds — have been identified along the Fort Morgan Loop of the Alabama Coastal Birding Trail, which begins at the refuge. In nearby Fort Morgan State Historic Park, ornithologists set up banding stations for hummingbirds for two weeks each spring and fall.

Four more trails lead visitors through the refuge, ranging in length from 1 to 4 miles. The mile-long Jeff Friend Trail is a wheelchair-accessible loop with a boardwalk near

the shoreline. Light-colored reindeer moss, or, more accurately, reindeer lichen, grows abundantly along the trails in the scrub brush. Another misnomer, the common Spanish moss, which is neither Spanish nor moss, hangs from live oak trees throughout the refuge.

Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge is divided into five units in Baldwin and Mobile counties, and can be reached by driving west from Gulf Shores on State Route 180 or via the Fort Morgan Ferry, which crosses Mobile Bay, leaving from Dauphin Island just south of Mobile. The refuge is open year-round during daylight hours, and the visitor center is open from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. on weekdays (closed on federal holidays). Admission is free. There are no campgrounds in the refuge, but several are located along SR 180 and in Gulf Shores.

### Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge

251-540-7720

[www.fws.gov/refuge/bon\\_secour](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/bon_secour)

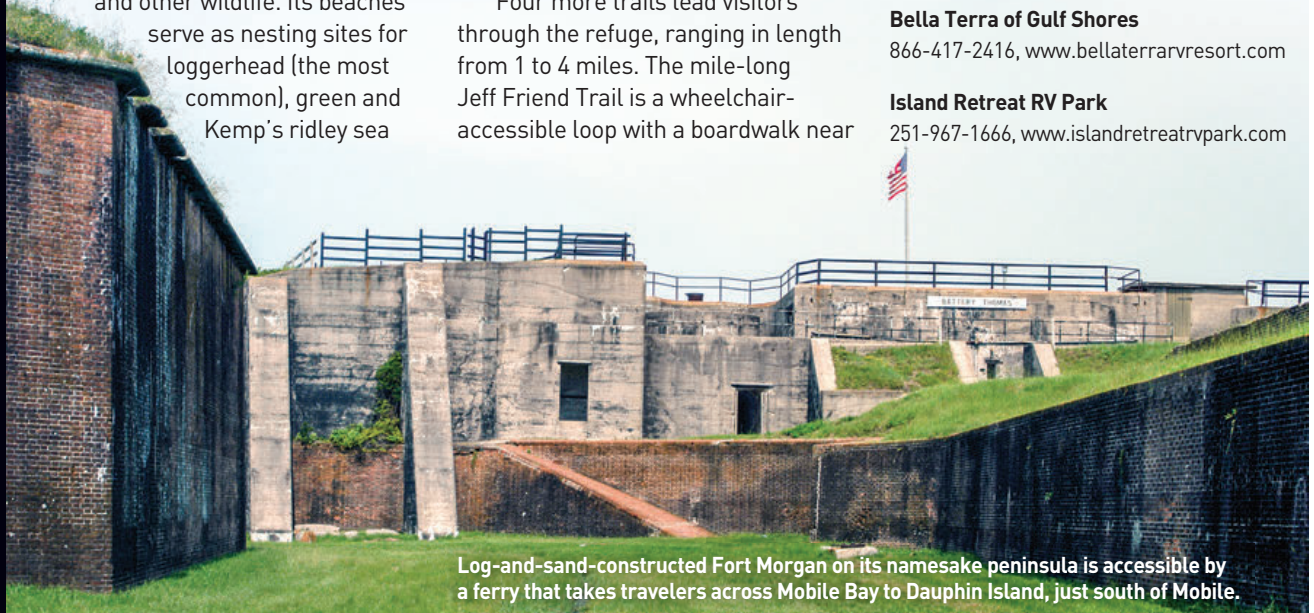
### Gulf Shores Good Sam Parks

#### Bella Terra of Gulf Shores

866-417-2416, [www.bellaterrarvresort.com](http://www.bellaterrarvresort.com)

### Island Retreat RV Park

251-967-1666, [www.islandretreatrvpark.com](http://www.islandretreatrvpark.com)



Log-and-sand-constructed Fort Morgan on its namesake peninsula is accessible by a ferry that takes travelers across Mobile Bay to Dauphin Island, just south of Mobile.



# One Mammoth Camper

If you're someone who appreciates the freedom to roam without sacrificing the finer things in life, the four-season Mammoth truck camper for long-box, one-ton dually pickups may be just the ticket — and it has options galore. One of five camper models built by Host Campers, the 8-foot-wide, 11½-foot-floor-length Mammoth features three slideouts, three wardrobes, bedroom access from two sides and a large bathroom. The company, based in Bend, Oregon, specializes in unique built-to-order campers and four-wheel-drive expedition vehicles.

Step into the Mammoth through the side door to cozy seating for two on the left. An option is to swap the sofa out for a laundry center or a wardrobe. Opposite the entry door is a U-shaped dinette, which can be traded for a 6-foot couch (both can be made into beds) and a movable high/low table. The galley offers good walk-about space, an 8-cubic-foot refrigerator, a three-burner range and a floor-to-ceiling pantry.

Midpoint is where you'll find an entertainment center with an AM/FM/CD/DVD stereo and a 24- or 32-inch TV mounted above a 120-volt AC simulated fireplace with a 5,120-Btu heater (all options) within a freestanding unit. A large bathroom with a rolling door closes it off from the living area. Of the four bedroom choices, a 60-by-80-inch queen bed with a wardrobe on each side is standard. Optional are three bedroom layout choices, each with a king bed.

Outside, the Mammoth has almost 45 cubic feet of basement storage with a convenient 80-inch-long slide-out tray, and freshwater capacity is 65 gallons. Base weight is 3,360 pounds, and base MSRP is \$49,236, with average prices for well-equipped models ranging from \$58,000 to \$68,000. Host Campers, 541-330-2328, [www.hostcampers.com](http://www.hostcampers.com)



## NEWSWIRE

### FOREST SERVICE



### Take Me Fishing Campaign

To promote recreational fishing on U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands, the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF) and USFS have entered into a cooperative agreement. The USFS will help provide funding for the Take Me Fishing and Vamos A Pescar campaigns and websites, while RBFF will promote fishing opportunities on or near USFS lands. Reportedly, younger and more diverse audiences are underrepresented on USFS lands, and the RBFF will help address this by reaching out to diverse communities and assist with providing fishing gear for youth in need. [www.takemefishing.org](http://www.takemefishing.org)

### OFF-GRID TRAILER



### Torklift and Outdoors RV Partnership

Torklift International, producer of aftermarket and factory parts for the RV and automotive industries, and Outdoors RV Manufacturing have partnered to build the 2017 Black Rock, "the ultimate off-the-grid travel trailer," according to the two companies. The Black Rock has 2-inch-thick aluminum-framed walls, four-season off-road features and Outdoors RV's own custom-built chassis. The trailer also comes with a Torklift-manufactured Off-Grid Receiver Hitch, rated at 3,500 pounds (300 pounds hitch weight), and Off-Grid Battery Tray. [www.outdoorsrvvmfg.com/black-rock](http://www.outdoorsrvvmfg.com/black-rock)

### NATIONAL PARKS



### Every Kid in a Park

The U.S. National Park Service's (NPS) Every Kid in a Park program, which allows every fourth-grader in the country to get a one-year pass for free entry to NPS lands, received a \$165,000 donation from Google. The donation will help bring kids who don't have transportation to the parks, as well as help fund multiday environmental-education programs. Darcy Nothnagle, Google's head of external affairs in the Northeast, said, "Google has always made it a priority to help students discover the world. This grant is the next step, helping students visit parks in person to experience the outdoors." [www.everykidinapark.gov](http://www.everykidinapark.gov)

### INDUSTRY NEWS



### Dometic's Brand Repositioning

Dometic, manufacturer of mobile-living products for recreational vehicles, announced a new brand positioning for the company. With the tagline Mobile Living Made Easy, the rebranded Dometic will unify numerous divisions including Atwood, Fan-Tastic Vent, Marine Air and Cruisair. Said Kelly McGann, senior vice president of marketing, "Dometic ... provides great solutions to satisfy people's essential needs when living mobile. At the heart of this new brand platform is a sharp focus on our end consumers — RV owners, boat owners, truck drivers and outdoor enthusiasts." [www.dometic.com](http://www.dometic.com)





## Arizona Activities

In addition to the popular Quartzsite Sports, Vacation and RV Show, January 21 to 29, the Grand Canyon State hosts a couple of upcoming events to put on your radar:

January 12 to 15 — **Wings Over Willcox Birding and Nature Festival** honors more than 500 species of birds that make their temporary or permanent home in the Willcox area, including sandhill cranes, hawks, owls and eagles. Activities include birding and photography tours.

[www.wingsoverwillcox.com](http://www.wingsoverwillcox.com)

January 28 to February 12 — The world's largest gathering of gem, mineral, and fossil buyers and sellers, the **Tucson Gem, Mineral and Fossil Showcase** brings hundreds of dealers to set up shop at the Tucson Convention Center and around town.

[www.visittucson.org](http://www.visittucson.org)

## Women's RVing Groups

More than 30 vintage travel trailers will roll into Pala RV Resort, next to Pala Casino and Spa in Temecula, California, January 6 through 8, towed by three groups of RVing women known as Sisters on the Fly, Tow Girlz and Lemon Drop Divas. Visitors are welcome to stop by to check out the trailers on Friday and Saturday at the eight-month-old 10/10\*/10-rated Good Sam RV resort.

Many of the owners have restored these retro RVs and given them names and themes. There's a 1962 Oasis with an I Love Lucy motif; Sweet Magnolia, a 1962 Streamline Duke with a French farmhouse theme; Vagabond Gypsy, a 1959 Streamline; and the Temple of Spirits, a 1961 Aristocrat Lo-Liner. Other classics include a 1957 Deville, a 1964 Aristocrat Lil Loafer and a 1970 Scotsman.

Pala RV Resort

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**A 1962 Oasis trailer pays tribute to Lucille Ball.**

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Grab your fork for the Good Sam BBQ Showdown in Phoenix.



## ON THE FAST TRACK

Good Sam puts the pedal to the metal in February

As the Good Sam RV Super Show gets ready to roll into Arizona's Phoenix International Raceway, February 23 through 26, the lineup of activities and entertainment is picking up the pace. Beyond shopping for RVs and RV gear, show-goers can saddle up on a mechanical bull, sample grilled chicken, pork and beef at the barbecue cook-off and ride shotgun in a real stock car.

The Rusty Wallace Ride Along Experience lets would-be race-car drivers buckle up in the passenger's seat of a NASCAR Sprint Cup car, as a professional instructor takes three high-speed laps around the 1.022-mile oval. To top it off, members get 50 percent off all Rusty Wallace Experience packages. Over at the Good Sam BBQ Showdown, \$5,000 is up for grabs at the Barbecue Championship Series-sanctioned cook-off, staged by AZBarbeque.

Trailer Life and MotorHome Publisher Bob Livingston tops the seminar schedule, games and giveaways are on tap at the Good Sam hospitality tent, and carnival rides, a climbing wall and a four-person bungee trampoline ratchet up the fun. After the sun sets, live music, Friday's movie under the stars and Saturday's fireworks show keep the good times going.

► For full details and to reserve a spot, call 866-838-5299 or visit [www.goodsamrvshow.com](http://www.goodsamrvshow.com).

## MORE RV SHOWS

In addition to February's big event in Phoenix, Good Sam stages RV shows across the country all year long. The following five shows are recent additions to the 2017 lineup:

### Knoxville RV Super Show

**January 6 through 8**

Sevierville Convention Center  
865-453-0001

### Wisconsin RV Super Show

**January 6 through 8**

Wisconsin Center, Milwaukee  
414-908-6001

### Chattanooga RV Super Show

**January 20 through 22**

Chattanooga Convention Center  
423-756-0001

### Cincinnati-Dayton RV Super Show

**February 2 through 5**

Dayton Airport Expo Center  
937-333-4700

### Columbus RV Super Show

**February 10 through 12**

Greater Columbus Convention Center  
614-827-2500

► For a complete list of 2017 shows and to purchase tickets online, visit [www.gsevents.com](http://www.gsevents.com). Good Sam members can save 50 percent on two adult tickets by showing their membership card at the ticket office or entering their membership number when buying tickets on the website.

## GOING PLACES WITH GOOD SAM

### RV TOURS

Experience world-class events and must-see destinations on guided RV tours for members:

#### New Orleans Mardi Gras

**February 21 through March 1**  
New Orleans, Louisiana

#### An American Civil War

**March 26 through April 9**  
Start: Charleston, South Carolina  
End: Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

#### Alaska Your Way

**June 26 through August 26**

Start: Anacortes, Washington  
End: Prince George, British Columbia

► For more details about Good Sam RV tours, visit [www.fantasyrvtours.com/goodsam](http://www.fantasyrvtours.com/goodsam).

### REGIONAL EVENTS

Don't miss the chance to connect with fellow members at the following club get-togethers:

#### Havasu Balloon Festival and Fair

**January 13 through 15**  
Lake Havasu City, Arizona

#### FunFest

**May 8 through 11**  
Washington Land Yacht Harbor RV Park, Lacey, Washington

#### Good Sam Fun Weekend

**June 2 through 4**  
The Villages at Turning Stone  
Verona, New York

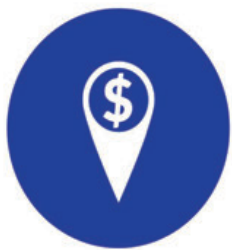


**Off to a flying start at January's Havasu Balloon Festival and Fair.**

► Find the full schedule of Good Sam regional events, including State/Provincial Rallies, at [www.goodsamclub.com/events](http://www.goodsamclub.com/events).

**🏆 GOLDEN GIVEAWAY** Eddie and Margie Richardson of Nashville, Georgia, are the latest winners of a new Coleman 262BH travel trailer in the Golden Giveaway, part of the 50th anniversary celebration for Camping World and Good Sam in 2016. The Richardsons hitched up their new trailer in October at Camping World of Valdosta.





# GREAT COVERAGE

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## Climbing the Ladder

When a Texas reader picked up his new trailer, he was disappointed to learn that the ladder had not been installed:

► I purchased a Jayco Jay Flight 33RLDS from Orlando RV in Winter Park, Florida. At the time of purchase, I ordered a rear roof ladder for an additional \$300 and was told it would be installed by the delivery date. When I arrived for the walk-through, the ladder had not been installed. In fact, it had not even arrived from the manufacturer. Because I was from out of state, Orlando RV assured me they would ship the ladder to me, and I could have it installed at my local Jayco dealer.

When the ladder arrived, I called the manufacturer to ask if I could have the service performed at a non-Jayco dealership. The representative said yes, but that I would have to pay for the service and request reimbursement. My local dealer charged \$280 for the installation, and several warranty repairs were also addressed at that time.

Jayco had approved all of the repairs and mailed me a check to cover the cost. However, the \$280 for the ladder install was not paid. I called Jayco and was told that I needed to take that up with the selling dealership. I called

Orlando RV and was told I would receive a check for the cost of their ladder installation fee, which was \$125.

After going back and forth between the dealer and manufacturer, I have had no success getting back the remaining \$155.

**Lee Nadeau, Keller, Texas**

### THE COMPANY RESPONDS

RV Resolutions presented Lee Nadeau's case to Orlando RV and received the following positive reply:

Although we are never happy to hear that any of our customers have an unresolved issue, we do feel a sense of obligation to take the necessary steps to satisfy the customer, if at all possible. Our company strives for 100 percent customer satisfaction, always. I personally will see that a check is issued and expedited to Mr. Nadeau for the additional \$155.

**Cindy Delaney, Manager, Orlando RV, Winter Park, Florida**

## In Hot Water Without a Warranty

After fixing the faulty plumbing and collateral damage in his fifth-wheel, a Pennsylvania reader asked for help getting reimbursement:

► I purchased my Open Range 3X fifth-wheel from Tiara RV Sales and Service in Elkhart, Indiana, in 2013. Within the first five months, we experienced a broken slideout, a faulty DVD player and awning lights that burned out, among other problems. At that time Open Range's customer service was terrible. After Highland Ridge, a division of Jayco, bought the manufacturer, customer service improved 100 percent. I dealt with Stephan Morris, who handles East Coast customer service, and he had the slideout serviced and a new DVD player and awning lights shipped.

My complaint is about what occurred after the two-year limited warranty expired. On our annual trip to Florida this past year, we noticed that the floor in the kitchen was

extremely soft. Then a water-line connection blew, and water poured into the underbelly. I applied a hose clamp as a temporary fix.

We cut our vacation short and took the fifth-wheel to Butler RV Center, an Open Range dealer north of Pittsburgh. After removing the underbelly and deciding the job was too big for them, Butler recommended taking the fifth-wheel to New Castle Truck and Trailer. The New Castle shop informed me that the damage was the result of an improperly installed fitting at the factory.

Stephan offered to make the repairs at a reduced rate for parts and labor if we towed the fifth-wheel to Highland Ridge's Indiana facility. Rather than driving hundreds of miles,

I had New Castle Truck do the repair at a cost of \$3,750.

The plumbing for the hot-water tank is not very visible. If it were, I would have discovered the defect while the RV was under warranty. I don't think I should be responsible for damages caused by faulty manufacturing.

**Ken Kich, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**

RV Resolutions received a thank-you note from Ken Kich after reaching out to Highland Ridge RV on his behalf:

► Highland Ridge offered to reimburse me \$1,785 of the \$3,750 repair cost, and I accepted. Many thanks to *Trailer Life* and RV Resolutions for helping in this matter.

**K.K.** 🚐

**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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# Winnebago Wow

The latest addition to the Minnie lineup, the rear-bedroom 2500FL model gets attention everywhere it goes, from a Massachusetts RV park to the middle of Manhattan

**T**he minute we saw this trailer, we knew it was going to be a fun test.

Winnebago's series of Minnie travel trailers is designed for just that — family fun. The trailers are nicely designed and built with modern amenities. The newest member of the clan, the single-slide, rear-queen-bed 2500FL, doesn't disappoint.

This test came on the heels of a remarkable acknowledgement by the New York Stock Exchange [NYSE] and CNBC network that Winnebago Industries and its president, Mike Happe, were

riding atop the RV industry's recent wave of success. And so it was that we started this test by towing the 2500FL into Manhattan from Massachusetts one Friday, as Winnebago and CNBC wanted to showcase the manufacturer's latest advancements.

Everywhere we stopped on the way to New York, whether at a Pilot Flying J travel plaza or parked within the security zone at the NYSE, this Winnebago received lots of attention. With its royal-blue-and-black two-tone exterior, sporty deluxe aluminum wheels and metallic-silver "W" graphics





that glimmer in the sunlight, this is an RV that has “Check me out” built into its DNA. People would stop and give a thumbs-up for it, and everyone from network executives to NYPD officers had to come and take a look.

There are plenty of travel trailers we wouldn’t want to haul around the southern tip of Manhattan, but the Minnie towed beautifully. At just a little longer than 28 feet, the 2500FL is small enough to handle without too much tail swing, yet, within, it still has a roomy, comfortable living space.

Following our little adventure in New York, we proceeded to Oak Haven Family Campground in Wales, Massachusetts, just outside the historic town of Sturbridge. A nice Good Sam Park equipped with 140 campsites, an outdoor swimming pool and a store, Oak Haven is a great place to stay while

visiting Old Sturbridge Village or the weeklong Brimfield Antique Shows held in May, July and September.

While the Minnie’s eye-catching appearance does attract attention, it’s still quite at home in the campground. On the outside, you’ll find all the usual trappings expected of a midpriced travel trailer. Under the plentiful shade provided by the optional 18-foot Dometic power awning are the two entrances, the front one serving the living area and the rear one the bedroom, both with dual manual pullout steps.

Besides the optional large grab handle for the front door, under the awning you’ll find an optional backer plate area to mount an outside TV, along with an electrical outlet and coax cable connection into the trailer’s central TV system, the freshwater-tank fill, refrigerator vent, furnace and water

heater. While the water heater is probably OK, I’m not a big fan of furnaces under awnings, especially right where you’d be likely to put a picnic table and have to listen to the noise. Caution should be taken by any RVer when combustion appliances are under the awning. If the furnace kicks on, for instance, it can heat items on the table, especially plastic tablecloths, which can ignite. Also, if you use an enclosed screen room, make sure it is ventilated when using the appliances to reduce effects of carbon monoxide.

A cavernous storage area runs across the back of the Minnie with compartment doors of ample size to admit most chairs and large items. The doors themselves are standard radius-corner style with thumb lock and key lock, and are held open by the customary plastic catches. We would love to see



**The kitchen (far left) is nicely appointed, with ample counter space, a full range and lots of storage. Across from the kitchen (left) is the dinette slide, which, when deployed, opens up more floor space for the kitchen and living area.**



**The Minnie is a striking travel trailer with its dark blue fiberglass and metallic silver appliques. It is an easy-to-tow, easy-to-own package that offers great value.**



magnetic catches here, but the plastic ones are serviceable.

The aluminum-frame trailer (walls and floor) has  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch plywood flooring and an optional enclosed underbelly, and is set on the NXG Frame chassis system. This chassis from BAL RV Products Group is said to be stronger and lighter than comparable fully welded steel frames. Made with high-strength low-alloy steel, the chassis is powder-coated to resist corrosion. While some common components like the trailer A-frame and bumper are robotically welded, the rest of the frame is built using individual pieces Huck-bolted together, providing a consistent clamp load, according to the manufacturer. Crawling under the trailer, I found a nicely engineered frame that looked tight and was free of rust, which many new trailers will have right from the factory.

Aluminum-frame tinted windows with radius corners are standard, with a mix of jalousie, slider and hung glass. The windows are set into high-gloss



(Above, from left) The rear master bedroom features a 60x80-inch queen bed with under-platform storage and ample shirt wardrobes on each side. The bathroom is compact but gets the job done with a walk-in shower, a ceramic toilet and a stainless-steel sink.

gel-coat exterior walls available in five attention-grabbing colors. In addition to LED lighting under the awning, LEDs take the place of the standard porch light, although some people may not think this is an improvement. In consideration of the neighbors, the use of a small amber light rather than super-bright LEDs will be less obtrusive.

The Minnie towed easily on this platform, even on the highways around New

York City, and was well balanced and compliant. The standard spring suspension attached to dual 3,000-pound axles with 14-inch aluminum wheels provided a predictable amount of support without the trailer being too bouncy.

The street side of the 2500FL has the single slideout, as well as all the standard utility connections. Standouts include an optional exterior shower and black-tank flush, cable- and satellite-



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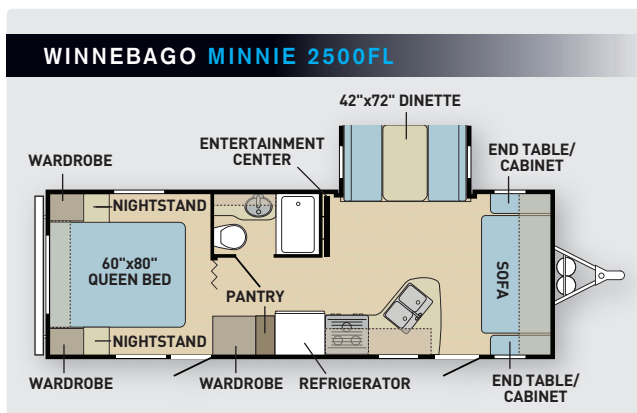


TV connections, and a 30-amp Furrion twist-lock power-cord set. The rear has a spare tire with a "Winnebago"-emblazoned tire cover, a 4-inch square-tube bumper for hose storage and an optional roof ladder. The Minnie comes standard with walkable roof decking.

The trailer can be stabilized on all four corners with optional manual-crank lateral-arm jacks that function well, in addition to the optional 12-volt DC power A-frame jack. Twin 5-gallon LP-gas cylinders and the standard battery tray complete the attachments to the trailer A-frame.

Upon entering the 2500FL, the first thing you notice is how bright and open it is. Winnebago uses light-tan wall paneling and whitewashed oak-colored cabinets with darker accents in this package. Of the six interior combinations, Onyx was the one featured in the test unit. The counter is a dark-marble laminate with a faux-glass-tile wallpaper backsplash. Upholstery is soft vinyl in dark chocolate, and the dinette seat backs and window valances are clad in an attractive tan-and-black swirl fabric. All of this is atop a vinyl floor that has the appearance of recycled oak, which looks modern and stylish.

Of the three "optional" packages — Value, Comfort and Convenience — two are mandatory. Dealers are required to order them, and no trailer will be sold without them. Although "optional" and "mandatory" have opposite meanings in the real world, here these packages aren't options at all but standard features. A long list of à-la-carte options



means the Minnie can be outfitted in just about any way the purchaser desires.

To the right of the main entrance is a jackknife sofa that is set out just enough from the sloping front wall to allow comfortable seating for a 6-footer. A small shelf sits low behind the sofa to act as soft-goods storage, or whatever you like, and the open space in front of the shelf leads to a cavernous storage area under the sofa, which is accessed by a large hinged door on the front of the couch. Accessible from the front entry door, the compartment is really handy, as we could open the door and put camera bags, purses and such inside without having to go inside the trailer.





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The Minnie's front wall features a comfortable vinyl-clad jackknife sofa with side-table cabinets at each end, an overhead shelf with cabinets and voluminous storage underneath the sofa that is accessed by a full-width vinyl-clad door.

The sofa has end-table cabinets on both sides and a pair of bookend ceiling cabinets with a long overhead shelf between them. Windows that open on each side of the sofa provide nice ventilation for when you're watching the 32-inch LCD TV, for instance, which is mounted on the opposite wall. Next to the screen is a Dometic thermostat for the furnace and the optional 15,000-Btu air conditioner (13,000 Btu is standard). Wall outlets on each side are convenient for plugging in chargers for all those necessary electronics. Well-positioned LED lighting is standard throughout.

The slideout contains a booth-style dinette that converts into a small bed. Folded down, it's great for kids or a small adult. Set back up, we found it adequate for meals, although we missed having a power outlet close by. We wound up running an extension cord

across the window valance to the outlet behind the TV.

Across from the slide is the nicely appointed galley. The neo-angle base cabinet features a large under-sink space and three full-length drawers facing the dinette. A large two-level storage cabinet is around the corner. A stainless-steel double-bowl sink sits in the countertop, and an optional three-burner range is to the right, next to the 6-cubic-foot double-door Dometic LP-gas-and-electric refrigerator.

We found the counter space sufficient for moderate cooking duties, especially with the sink covers in place. Above the counter is a single-door wall cabinet, flanked by the stereo and command center on the left and the microwave on the right. The command center is concealed neatly behind a cabinet door and includes the light switches,

## SPECIFICATIONS

### 2017 WINNEBAGO MINNIE 2500FL

Exterior Length	27' 11"
Exterior Width	8' 1"
Exterior Height	10' 6"
Interior Width	7' 10"
Interior Height	6' 5"

#### Construction

1½" aluminum-tube laminated side wall construction, with exterior colored fiberglass and bead-foam insulation. Walk-on aluminum-truss one-piece TPO roof with fiberglass-batt insulation and ¾" tongue-and-groove plywood decking. BAL NXG Frame chassis.

Freshwater Cap.	43 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	25 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	43 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	10 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.

Refrigerator	6 cu. ft.
Furnace	25,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	15,000 Btu
Converter	55 amp
Battery	12 volt
Tires	ST205/75R14C
Suspension	Leaf spring

Weight (freshwater, water heater and LP-gas full, no cargo)	5,678 lbs.
Hitch Weight	760 lbs.
Axle Weight	4,918 lbs.
GVWR	7,000 lbs.
GAWR	(2) 3,500 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	1,322 lbs.
Base MSRP	\$23,193
As-Tested MSRP	\$30,732
Base Warranty	1-year limited

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tank-level gauges, awning controls, and water heater and water-pump switches.

The hallway contains abundant cabinetry along the curb side of the trailer, and includes a combination closet-and-pantry cabinet. The cabinet is conveniently arranged, albeit a bit hard to access because of the narrowness of the hallway, but it works. Below it are two smaller cabinets and the electrical load center.

On the street side of the hallway is the full dry bath, which includes a ceramic toilet, a stainless-steel sink, a mirrored double-door vanity and a walk-in shower. While compact, the bathroom is adequately sized for the task with ample counter space for all the necessities. The rectangular shower with ABS surround has plenty of room and features a skylight and an arched accordion-topped, magnetic-latched shower screen that offers extra shoulder room. The only addition we would like to see is lighting both above the sink and in the shower area. With the single LED fixture above the door, the room is somewhat dark at night, especially in the shower.

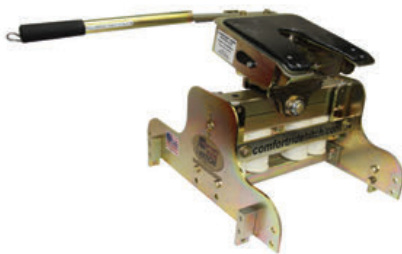
The roomy and well-appointed master bedroom fills out the rear of the 2500FL. A queen-size memory-foam mattress sits atop a nicely designed storage cabinet, which is accessed by lifting the bed with the assistance of gas props. On either side of the bed are shirt wardrobes with two-door cabinets above. Access, or for that matter, egress, is easily facilitated in the bedroom, as it not only has an outside entry door but two emergency-exit windows, one on each side. The curbside emergency exit window is a bit odd because it's right next to an exit door. A jalousie window opens at the head of the bed, and a standard 14-by-14-inch crank-up roof vent is directly above the bed. The mattress wasn't the best, but what factory RV mattress is?

The Winnebago Minnie is a well-designed and well-equipped trailer. While the price point on the 2500FL is on the higher end for this class, the build quality, feature set and the support of the Winnebago brand are more than worth the difference. 🚐

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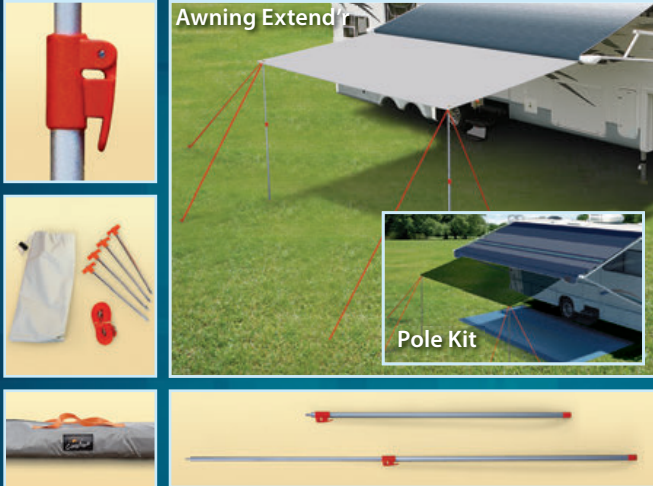


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# What's New?

As the 2017 RVs roll onto dealers' lots, look for crowd-pleasing concepts — from vintage-style trailers and tiny toy haulers to luxury fifth-wheels with picture windows and motorhome pedigrees



**W**hen designers for Keystone RV's Montana fifth-wheel brand came up with the concept of installing a windshield in the front cap of the venerable RV line, they weren't exactly reinventing the wheel. Unlike travel trailers, which can be crafted in a myriad of shapes from tiny teardrops to 34-foot-long towables with five slideouts, the fifth-wheel profile hasn't changed tremendously since the essential design was established by the Aerocar Company of America in 1929.

In general, a window in the front of an RV is nothing new, and it has been a standard feature of many trailers since trailers were invented. Floorplan and body features can come and go with buying trends, so it's natural that some manufacturers bring back certain features now and then when the time is right.

What they accomplished, though, was to create a totally different environment inside the trailer. Spanning nearly the entire width of the front cap, the windshield created a spacious "picture window" effect for the front cabin.

Recognizing a hot commodity, the

Goshen, Indiana, manufacturer wisely created a number of different floorplans for the windshield-equipped Montana, including two configurations introduced last year — one with a front lounge and the other with the entire galley moved to the upper level, a layout that garnered accolades as the 2016 *RVBusiness* RV of the Year and graced the August 2016 cover of *Trailer Life*.

For 2017 it's been changed again. It's now a front-bathroom unit. That's right: You can cover yourself in soap bubbles while soaking in a tub and enjoying the scenery behind the expansive glass — which, due both

to the elevation of the front deck and the darkly tinted glass, doesn't reveal anything from the outside. Of course, there's also an automatic privacy shade.

"When we first went to big fiberglass showers, we had a tub in the base, and we found there were a lot of people who liked that," said Montana Product Manager Mark Krol. "Montana introduced the whole front-bath-and-a-half concept about four years ago, and it seemed to us a natural evolution ... to set it up more like a master bathroom in a luxury home. Every high-end home has a separate shower and tub, and we wanted to bring that into RVs."

According to Krol, the 41-foot 4-inch **Montana 3921** uses a full-size residential soaker tub. "The challenge with putting a tub of that size in a coach is, obviously, filling it with hot water," he said. "That's why we're using a Suburban on-demand water heater.



**New for 2017, the Montana 3921 (above and left) features Keystone's patented Max Turn front cap with a tinted, laminated windshield. (Below) Forest River's Flagstaff and Rockwood travel trailers debuted similar windshields this year.**





# What's New?

We were able to fill it up with 115-degree water. It took less than 20 minutes and burned less than a pound of propane.”

The front-bath layout hasn't adversely affected the weight distribution of the \$85,000 (MSRP) fifth-wheel. “The hitch-weight difference between our 3911, which is a front bath with front closet and washer/dryer, and the 3921 is 148 pounds,” said Krol. With a 16,930-pound gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR), the 3921 also features a rear living room with theater seating, opposing slideouts in the mid-galley area and a kitchen island.

Of course, the front-bath Montana isn't the only notable towable making its introduction in the 2017 model year. For that matter, it isn't even the only one with a windshield. As RV dealers found out while attending September's trade-only Elkhart RV Open House in Elkhart, Indiana, where most RV

manufacturers debut their 2017 lineups, Keystone shared the technology with its Outback travel trailer division.

Meanwhile, several of Forest River's travel trailer brands also sport front glass for 2017. “Basically, we're putting in a windshield everywhere that we can,” said John Stringer, who oversees the Elkhart-based company's Rockwood and Flagstaff lines. In fact, 21 of the 22 Flagstaff and Rockwood models on display at the event had a laminated windshield by Guardian Automotive Products, the same company that supplies windshields for the new Keystone Montana 3921.

“The benefit of the windshield is two-sided,” Stringer added. “One is the outside appearance and the fact that it's an automotive windshield, just like what you have on a truck or a car. You don't need to protect it. And the other side of it is, when you're on the inside, it offers such a splendid panoramic view.”



The folks at Little Guy Worldwide have hooked up with the Scotty family to bring back one of the most recognizable names from the 1940s and '50s, the **Serro Scotty** travel trailer. “We're going to have a couple evolutions of Scottys,” said Chris Baum, the company's chief marketing officer. “There is a stick-and-tin model that's going to be affordable for any family. The next evolution, which we hope to have probably by January, is going to be a more upscale bunkhouse.” Baum added that future iterations will carry venerable Serro Scotty model names such as HiLander and Sportsman.

The vintage-style Serro Scotty is initially available in five floorplans, from 17 feet 2 inches to 22 feet 7 inches, with retail prices beginning at around \$14,500. While maintaining its retro feel, the contemporary Serro Scotty features all-LED lighting, hardwood cabinetry, a full-size awning and a dry bath. With dry weights ranging from 2,230 to 3,927 pounds and hitch weights maxing out at 350 pounds, the trailer can be towed by just about anything.



Boost is the newest addition to Forest River's XLR toy-hauler division. While the name was introduced last year at the Louisville trade show, the line has grown to include four travel trailers and two fifth-wheels. The **Boost 36DSX13** fifth-wheel was the newest introduction on display at the Elkhart RV Open House. The Boost lineup has a broad-market price point yet still offers all the key features of a toy hauler, said Jan Frank, XLR's regional sales manager.

The 36DSX13 offers a bath-and-a-half floorplan with a king bed and a 13-foot garage. The 38-foot toy hauler has a GVWR of 14,300 pounds and an MSRP of \$43,000. “It's a whole lot of trailer for the money,” Frank said.



Among the fifth-wheels on display from Forest River's Palomino division was the new 40-foot couple's fifth-wheel,

the **Columbus 366RLC**. “We see a large demographic of couples whose kids have left home, and that's who we're targeting,” said Colin Dechant, division general manager.

“This really has a lot of features that appeal to the HGTV crowd,” Dechant said. In addition to the outside kitchen, right inside the door is a prep sink. An 84-inch island with another sink is in the middle of the kitchen, providing an amount of counter space that's hard to find in other fifth-wheels.

The door side features a 143-inch slide, and the opposite side has a 160-inch super-slide plus a front-bedroom slide. There's a wine chiller in the kitchen, along with a large refrigerator. The fifth-wheel also has dual awnings to provide protection across nearly its full length. Fully loaded, the Columbus 366RLC has a GVWR of 15,100 pounds and an MSRP of \$67,700.



According to Gary Conley, national sales manager for Lancaster, California-based Lance Camper, initial response to the new **Lance 2375**, a rear-lounge travel trailer, “has been good for a light-



weight, shorter, composite-built trailer.”

Although only 27 feet from rear bumper to coupler, the 2375 includes plenty of amenities, from the dual rocking chairs in the lounge to a 36-inch shower and porcelain toilet. “We put a lot of linen and towel storage in the bathroom, which a lot of units are lacking,” Conley said, adding that the 2375 has a 6,200-pound GVWR. “For a rear-living-style trailer, you don’t have to have a big SUV for towing.”

Outside, a Carefree of Colorado awning runs nearly the full length of the trailer and features LED lighting and a wind sensor. In addition, the 2375 utilizes three 5-gallon LP-gas cylinders, making it easy for owners to switch out cylinders when refills aren’t an option, and all batteries are in locking compartments, a feature across the Lance line.



When Grand Design RV in Middlebury, Indiana, was founded in 2012, one of its original brands was the **Solitude** line of extended-stay fifth-wheels. For 2017, the Solitude got a complete makeover, both inside and out.

“We’ve pretty much done a total bumper-to-bumper overhaul,” said Product Manager Rob Groover. “We have all-new exteriors, all-new graphics packages and a really innovative brand-new front cap with a windshield that’s going into two of our new floorplans.”

Among the interior changes are higher-end hardwood window treatments and upgraded furniture that includes power retracting/extending theater seats with built-in massage. There’s a significant increase of LED interior accent lighting, plus a unique wall-mounted dinette table that forgoes the knee-knocking pedestal base.

The Solitude has eight floorplans, six of which are either modified or

brand new, including the 375RES, a 41-foot 4-inch fifth-wheel with a 16,000-pound GVWR and \$90,713 MSRP. What’s unique about the 375RES is underneath the rear living area. It’s a massive storage compartment accessible on three sides, with the rear access including a sliding cargo tray. How big is it? There’s room for two 14-foot kayaks, cleverly suspended from the rear of the cargo space, with space left over for all the outdoor gear that goes with them.



One of the innovations seen at the Elkhart RV Open House was the new StepAbove entry step developed by MORryde, an Elkhart-based supplier that provides a variety of engineered products for the RV industry.

The StepAbove features stability, as the 500-pound-capacity steps are mounted inside the trailer. When deployed, they go all the way to the ground. Adjustable ends compensate for uneven terrain to create a solid foundation. When the RV is in transit, the lightweight aluminum steps rotate up and into the RV and are stored securely inside the door.

K-Z RV in Shipshewana, Indiana, found a unique use for the StepAbove in the all-new **Durango Gold 384RLT**. Typically, designers have located the door before or after a slideout and wheels, but the StepAbove allowed the 384RLT’s main entry to be positioned in a 16-foot curbside slideout.

“We now have the largest living room of any fifth-wheel in the marketplace,” said Charles Wade, K-Z’s

district sales manager and fifth-wheel specialist, taking into account the 384RLT’s 102-inch width and the 16-foot slideout on the street side. Both slides are 7½ feet tall and 34 inches deep.

“Having the door in the slideout allows the slideout to be longer, and it allows us to fit a stackable washer and dryer on the downstairs level instead of stuffing it into the bedroom,” Wade added. “For that same reason, we have a really big pantry and a kitchen area with huge counter space because we don’t have to stick a pantry into the slideout.”

The 384RLT comes in at 39 feet long, weighs 12,500 pounds (dry), and has an MSRP around \$75,000. Features include an 18-cubic-foot refrigerator, six-point hydraulic leveling system, two 15,000-Btu air conditioners with Quiet Cool, a 50-inch TV and a 7-foot-wide exterior front storage compartment.



**Sidewinder** is a new, moderately priced fifth-wheel toy hauler in the K-Z lineup. It retails in the \$60,000s yet has all the content and components toy-hauler customers want, according to Wade.

“There’s a lot of expensive \$80,000 to \$90,000 toy haulers out in the market, and a lot of people are asking for less-expensive ones, but they still want all the content features including auto-leveling, 160-watt solar panel, 1,000-watt power inverter, full-size ramp door and patio system, and a fuel station, which we’ve done with the Sidewinder,” he added.

The Sidewinder debuted with three floorplans ranging from 34 to 39 feet and between 10,500 and 12,000 pounds (dry weight). Wade singled out the 11,000-pound (dry weight) 3610DK in particular. The two-slide model registers just shy of 39 feet yet offers an outdoor kitchen, 10-foot garage with



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## What's New?

two electric beds, and myRV control system, among other items.

“It's a little bit of an anomaly,” Wade added. “Typically a toy hauler is not this big in the living room. We have a booth dinette, a sofa and a full-size kitchen, where most of the time a toy hauler will be limited to just a sofa and a table in front of it.”



Not only did Somerset, Pennsylvania-based Aliner and Somerset Camping Trailers refresh its Aliner brand with all new interiors, but the company keeps pushing what can be offered in an entry-level popup trailer. For 2017, the company offers a brand-new **Explorer** A-frame towable with hard dormers. It's also the first to abandon the cassette toilet in favor of a porcelain commode. There's also a bathroom curtain for privacy, and up front the Explorer features new cabinets with real wood doors in the 15-foot living space. Just 18 feet from tail to coupler, the Explorer has a GVWR of 2,500 pounds and an MSRP, fully loaded, of \$20,000.



Vanleigh RV, owned by the Tiffin family — and soon to be branded more closely with the Tiffin name, according to Regional Sales Manager Don Krzyzanowski — is injecting its fifth-wheel lines with more than the family's reputation for high-quality

motorhome manufacturing. Among its new front-slideout floorplans, the **Vilano 375FL** stands out because its back third is identical to the Tiffin Allegro Bus 371. To drive the point home, an interior placard proclaims “Motorhome DNA” for the model.

“It's as close as you can get to a motorhome without the motor,” Krzyzanowski said of the full-profile unit. It features the soft-touch ceiling of the Tiffin motorhome line, 103-inch interior height from the kitchen rearward, three air conditioners, a front living room with a fireplace, solid wood cabinets and the company's Spider multiplex control system — a simplified system that allows for easy diagnosis and repair in the event of a problem, according to Krzyzanowski. The 40½-foot fiver carries a 14,500-pound GVWR and an MSRP of \$99,000.



While Travel Lite continues to see growth in its truck camper line, according to Sales Manager Jay Handy, the New Paris, Indiana, company hasn't forgotten its travel trailer production. The 2017 lineup includes a new aerodynamic **Falcon**.

The 2,480-pound, 20-foot Falcon features an all-aluminum exterior and black diamond-plate lower front, complemented by the Falcon graphic. The trailer also offers pass-through storage, and inside there's a one-piece Granicote kitchen counter, an oversized faucet, aluminum-framed cabinet doors with smoked glass and a 5-cubic-foot Dometic refrigerator, compared to standard 3-cubic-foot fridges found on similarly sized RVs. The Falcon rides on 18-inch Michelin automotive tires and has a \$14,860 MSRP.



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# What's New?



As mentioned previously, dealerships will soon be displaying many more towable RVs with an automotive-style front windshield. As a prime example, Forest Rivers' John Stringer pointed to the **Rockwood Signature Ultra Lite 8324BS**, a 35-foot 5-inch unit with an 8,827-pound unloaded vehicle weight (uvw). The four-slide, rear-bedroom 8324BS, which retails for \$42,950, features a living room up front that makes use of the windshield in a clever manner. Opposing slideouts house sofas, and a third seating arrangement faces the front of the RV where a fireplace and cabinetry surround the windshield. But hidden behind

the fireplace is a big-screen TV on a "televator" lift, which raises the television in front of the windshield when it's time to watch TV.



While you may know its products, you probably aren't familiar with the name nuCamp RV. It's the monicker for Pleasant Valley Teardrop Trailers, based in Sugarcreek, Ohio, which has been the manufacturing partner for Little Guy Worldwide. In April, the two companies will separate, and Pleasant Valley will begin marketing the Cirrus truck camper, as well as its T@B and T@G teardrop trailers under nuCamp.

The **T@B 400** is basically a larger version of the T@B in both capacities

and interior dimensions — 3½ feet longer, 1 foot wider and about 1 foot taller. The 400, which nuCamp President Scott Hubble predicts will retail in the mid to high \$20,000s, also features a European entry door with an integrated wastebasket and storage compartments, as well as a trim package that's not quite as pronounced as its T@B little brother.



Riverside RV keeps expanding its Retro travel trailers and toy haulers, adding a new fifth-wheel to the line of vintage-inspired lightweight towables in the LaGrange, Indiana, company's stable.

"Customers have been looking

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for something lightweight that's half-ton towable," explained Riverside's sales manager, Bob Taulbee. That's one reason the company introduced the **526RL Retro**, a 27-foot fiver with a rear living room.

Riverside started offering the 6,480-pound (dry), \$35,000 (MSRP) 526RL to dealers for orders last May, but the first unit came off the line in September. The company plans to introduce two more Retro floorplans, one with a rear kitchen and a bunkhouse.



Sunset Park brought a wide selection of RVs from its Shipshewana, Indiana, factory to its Open House display, but the largest was still relatively small: the 30-foot 2-inch **Rush 30QB** toy hauler. The trailer has a 9,995-pound GVWR and a relatively small \$23,900 MSRP.

The WQB designation is for walk-around queen bed, the key living feature, according to Roger West, part owner and head of sales and design. The trailer has a 90-inch ceiling in the cargo area and a 78-inch ceiling in the front. Options include an outside shower and an extra 40-gallon freshwater tank.



According to Tim Domiano, product manager for Keystone RV's Outback division, the company has produced more than 72,000 Outbacks since inception, and as the line celebrates its 15th anniversary in 2017, he wanted to do "something different." He didn't have to look further than Keystone's Montana for inspiration.

"When I saw the front windshield


used on the Montana, it was my goal to have something with that windshield in it. We were due for a redesign of our front cap anyway," Domiano added.

For 2017, the Outback is offered in two lines: Ultra Lite, a smaller line that runs from 21 feet to 31 feet and weighs in at 4,500 to 5,500 pounds fully equipped, and the Super Lite. "Those products are typically in the 7,500- to 8,500-pound range and run from 33 to 36 feet with triple slides, king beds and washer-dryer


cabinets," Domiano said.

The 33-foot **Super Lite 333FE**, with an MSRP of about \$42,000, is a front-entertainment floorplan with dual opposing slideouts and a 50-inch TV behind the fireplace, which is tucked below the front windshield. "It also has a great kitchen, walk-through bath, dual pantry in the kitchen area, and in the back it has a full king-bed slide," Domiano said.


Outback has also partnered with Norco Industries this year, Domiano




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# What's New?

noted, and the line now offers the BAL NXG Frame with a seven-point automatic leveling system. The chassis incorporates a fold-down rack in the back for a portable generator or toys. The Super Lite series also gets the second-generation version of the iN-Command system that Keystone developed last year with ASA Electronics.



The **Basecamp** trailer from Airstream, the Jackson Center, Ohio-based subsidiary of Thor Industries, is actually a new and improved version of the Basecamp that had a short 2006 to 2007 lifespan. After extensive feedback

from dealers, as well as previous and potential Basecamp owners, this reincarnation is designed to be a "small, lightweight, fully functional travel trailer," said Airstream CEO and President Bob Wheeler.

At just 16 feet long, a base weight of 2,585 pounds (unloaded) and maximum trailer capacity (GVWR) of 3,500 pounds, the \$34,900 (starting MSRP) Basecamp is towable by a variety of small and midsize SUVs and crossover vehicles.

With its large rear cargo hatch and flexible interior use of space, in which the convertible rear space is designed to easily adapt for eating, sleeping, lounging or storage, the Basecamp has room for outdoor gear such as bicycles and kayaks. Features include a kitchen with a cooktop, a stainless-steel sink and refrigerator, and a wireless Bose Bluetooth SoundLink Color speaker. Options include an enclosed patio and rear tent that seamlessly attach to the Basecamp roof track, allowing for extra outside storage.

"The Basecamp is a fully loaded adventure waiting to happen," said Wheeler, adding that the Basecamp is poised to capture younger outdoor enthusiasts.



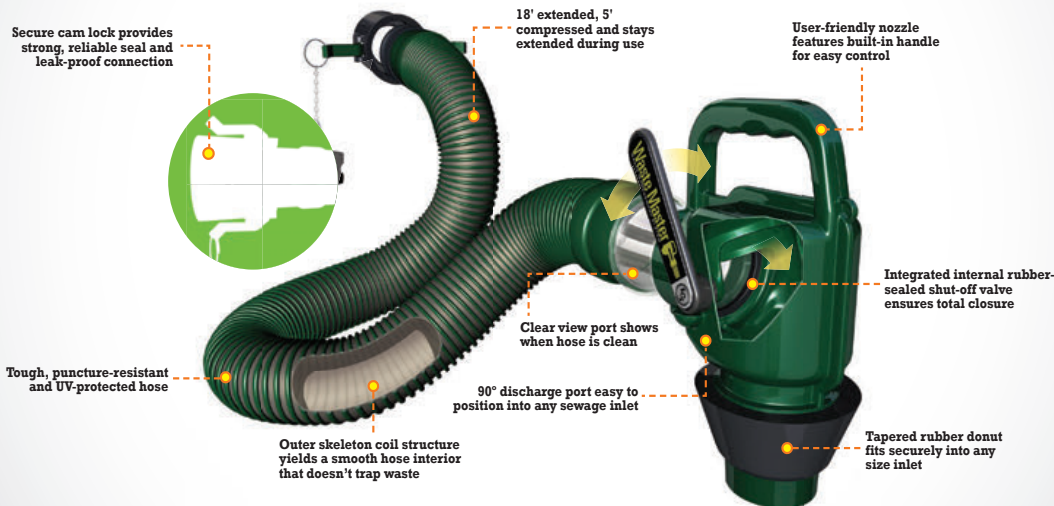
Cruiser RV, a division of Heartland, has always been a solid player in the travel trailer market, but for 2017 the company decided to test the waters in the fifth-wheel segment in a big way. "We wanted to be a little more competitive with some of the bigger players out there," said Shawn James, East Coast sales manager.

What the company came up with was a series of larger fifth-wheels, from

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34 to 38 feet, the first of which is the 34-foot **South Fork Cameron**.

"We wanted to be a little different on the inside from what's in the market," said James. "There's only so much you can do with a fifth-wheel outside, so we wanted a different look inside. We went with a Western look, a distressed-wood look with barn-type doors and hardware."

The 18,000-pound (dry) Cameron retails "right around \$75,000," James said. "Even with the bigger unit, you'll only be pushing \$80,000, so we're giving the customers great value."



Gulf Stream Coach of Nappanee,

Indiana, introduced the **Geo**, a laminated travel trailer that's initially available in two floorplans, the 23-foot, 5,220-pound 235RB (\$23,093 base MSRP) and the 28-foot, 7,200-pound 280TB (\$25,193 base MSRP), with additional configurations in the works.

With vacuum-bonded laminated walls featuring a fiberglass exterior skin and composite interior skin sandwiching rigid foam insulation, the Geo has a welded-aluminum frame, fiberglass front cap and interior styling reminiscent of a "country club or upscale resort," according to the company.

"What we're seeing is more first-time buyers entering the marketplace, especially young families, millennials and middle-age couples who are empty-nesters," said Paul Campbell, director of marketing at Gulf Stream. "They're buying their first RV, but they have high expectations as far as fit and finish, amenities, creature comforts

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# Firestone

## What's New?

and styling. They're demanding something that looks great with advance construction, but with the amenities they're used to at nicer hotels and resorts," Campbell added. "The Geo delivers on all that."



Building all-aluminum trailers isn't a new exercise for inTech RV. The company has been crafting aluminum car haulers under its inTech Trailers name for six years. The company expanded into the RV market last year with a pair of modified teardrop trailers, the XLT Flyer and **Max Flyer**, and in September introduced microlight toy hauler versions of each, capable of handling a couple of motorcycles or a full-size ATV.

All offer a fully welded cage, one-piece aluminum roof and one-piece aluminum skin. "That helps us maintain a lightweight product," said Rich Schippel, director of sales and marketing. "They also are seamless. There are no screws or fasteners."

The difference between the two models (four, counting the toy haulers) comes down to equipment. The slightly longer and wider Max Flyer, at 13 feet 5 inches, as opposed to the XLT's 12-foot 4-inch dimensions, is essentially dedicated to a curbside slideout kitchenette that includes a two-burner propane stove, 12-volt DC Dometic refrigerator and an exterior countertop. It also includes a 12-volt deep-cycle battery and AM/FM/Bluetooth stereo system. Fully optioned out with an upgraded 12-volt DC/120-volt AC refrigerator, LP-gas cylinder, off-road tires, 9,200-Btu roof air conditioner and two mattresses, the Max Flyer





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## What's New?

weighs just 1,500 pounds.

The inTech Max Flyer has a starting price of \$9,443, and the XLT Flyer starts at \$6,750.



One of the biggest draws at the Elkhart RV Open House last fall wasn't a production-based RV but rather a prototype that **Heartland** showcased to get dealer feedback, and based on what company executives heard, the as-yet-unnamed retro-style towable will soon become Heartland's newest travel trailer.

"We priced it, showcased it and wrote a bunch of orders as well," said Coley Brady, vice president of sales for the Elkhart manufacturer. "Now we're in the process of developing it and getting ready to run some pilot units with the goal of being in production right after the first of the year."

According to Coley, the trailer was built by Darryl Byers, who works at Elkhart RV supplier MORryde, and a friend of his. "Obviously, we liked what we saw, so we'll be in production on something that looks very close to what was on display at Open House, to make it our own without losing the essential features of the product."

Highlighted by its polished aluminum exterior paneling, the trailer will feature an array of modern conveniences inside. Initially, it will be built in one 21-foot floorplan, according to Coley, with a long-term goal to add two others. The GWRV has yet to be determined for the single-axle trailer, but Coley believes it will retail for right around \$20,000. 🚐



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# SPICE OF THE SOUTHEAST

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Louisiana's Cajun country is a complex blend of traditions, cultures and food all wrapped up in a region with one-of-a-kind wetlands and a laid-back lifestyle

My wife, Monika, placed our purchases on the counter at a Podunk grocery store where we'd stopped for supplies. The older woman who worked there had a sparkle in her eyes and wrinkles that showed the hard life of surviving several hurricanes. She said to Monika with some sincerity, "Honey, what's y'all gonna cook for anyone with *one onion?!*" There's a saying in southwest Louisiana that if it walks, crawls, swims, flies or slithers, you'll find it at the bottom of a well-seasoned cast-iron pan.

Southwest Louisiana is Cajun country, and Cajun country is about food, music and dance, but there was also more to learn. We started at Adventure Point, the fabulous satellite office of the Lake Charles Convention and Visitors Bureau, in the town of Sulphur, taking exit 20 off Interstate 10. Other visitor centers in Lake Charles proper and at the Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge are equally informative. All of them have great hands-on displays for children and adults with inquisitive minds — plus Wi-Fi.



An airboat swamp tour at Atchafalaya Basin Landing gives visitors an up-close look at the ancient mossy cypress trees and alligators that inhabit the area.



## CREOLE NATURE TRAIL

Looking at a map of this corner of the country, you'll see that a lot of it is under water, bisected by the Intra-coastal Waterway and numerous rivers, lakes and bayous. For those not from these parts, a bayou is a slow-moving creek or a swampy section of a river or a lake. As a slice of the Pleistocene Prairie Terrace, southwest Louisiana is some of the youngest land on the North American continent.

The best way to get a feeling for this unique region is to follow the 180-mile Creole Nature Trail All-American Road. The drive passes through several nature preserves and wildlife refuges, with stops at wildlife viewing sites. It runs all the way to the beaches of the Gulf of Mexico where you may find dozens of shell varieties on the sand at low tide, especially after a storm.

Birds can be seen year-round, but March and April may be the best months to spot the more than 400 species that migrate through the nature preserves. While birds are beautiful, alligators can be more exciting. We did use caution as we walked the nature trails, knowing that alligators can have a running speed of 20 to 25 MPH — if they spot something that looks like part of the food chain. Keep your dog on a short leash.

For a safer, more personal

encounter with these toothy beasts, we stopped at Atchafalaya Basin Landing and Marina for an up-close look at the ancient cypress trees, impressive bodies of water and, of course, the alligators. As it turned out, our swamp-tour guide at the helm of the airboat had a personal relationship with a few of the gators.

Shrimp, on the other hand, required no net or boat. We were able to find them fresh by the pound at several roadside shops. One shrimper and his wife were happy to show us the quick way to shell them.

## TOE-TAPPING ZYDECO

An equally important aspect of Cajun country is the music, especially the unique, fast-tempo zydeco. The music arose as a synthesis of traditional Creole music, Cajun influences and African-American traditions, including R&B, blues, jazz and gospel.

A typical band is composed of a sax player, an electric guitarist or bassist, and most importantly, an accordion player and someone stroking an old metal washboard or maybe clacking some spoons. It's music you can listen to, but, as we discovered, its primary purpose is for dancing. When the band strikes up a favorite tune, you can't keep your foot from tapping. The music integrates waltz, shuffle, two-step, blues and rock 'n' roll — so the excuse "I can't dance" doesn't really fly.



**Airboat tour guide Captain Tucker Friedman has a friendly relationship with a few of the local alligators.**

By chance, just up the road from Atchafalaya Basin Landing, we discovered the Whiskey River, a dancehall well known by the locals for its Cajun and zydeco bands. Horace Trahan and the Ossun Express were playing. I was taking pictures, and when I turned around, Monika was already out on the floor with a partner. Hey, that got me off the hook!

## AVERY ISLAND

Almost everyone has heard of and maybe tasted the spicy pepper sauce called Tabasco. We were surprised to learn that it is still produced on Avery Island in southwest Louisiana and has been since 1868 when Edmund McIlhenny invented it. One of five wooded "islands," Avery sits atop a deposit of solid rock salt that geologists believe is a remnant of buried ancient seabed. Indigenous plants and wildlife

**Located in Rip Van Winkle Gardens on Jefferson Island, the 22-room Joseph Jefferson Mansion was built in 1870 and is decorated in period furnishings, paintings and heirlooms.**



## SPICE OF THE SOUTHEAST

(Clockwise from top left) The boudin and smoked spicy sausages at Homs's in Lake Charles were the best the author found. In Cameron, a shrimper was happy to demonstrate the quick way to shell the small crustaceans. Fresh out of the oven, the French bread at LeJeune's Bakery in Jeanerette was a tasty treat.

occupy the roughly 2,200-acre island, which is surrounded by low-lying swamps and marshes.

A tour of the Tabasco factory gave us some fascinating history about the hot stuff we've been adding to our Bloody Marys for years. The original seeds of the peppers (*Capsicum frutescens*) came from Mexico or Central America. Today, Tabasco is labeled in 22 languages and dialects, and sold in more than 180 countries and territories.

The special peppers are handpicked using *le petit bâton rouge*, or "the little red stick," as a guide. Painted the color of a ripe Tabasco pepper, the stick ensures only the ripest red peppers are picked. After the peppers are mashed,



they are aged in white-oak barrels for up to three years. A member of the McIlhenny family personally inspects each barrel of pepper mash and deems the aging process complete.

Just across the road from the Tabasco factory is the real treasure of the island, Jungle Gardens and its Bird City. Covered with a layer of fertile soil,

Jungle Gardens is one of the world's most beautiful nature sanctuaries and is open every day of the year.

White snowy egrets swooped across the calm water of Bayou Petite Anse. Alligators and turtles basked in the sun, watching us with their curious squints. We wandered and drove through the 200 acres of flowers and evergreens.



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Massive live oaks were draped dramatically with Spanish moss, filtering morning light across our path.

Again, thanks to McIlhenny, or "Mr. Ned," as he was affectionately known, his Bird City is home to thousands of migrating egrets and herons. They were once near extinction when plume hunters slaughtered them by the thousands for feathers to make fashionable ladies' hats. In the Chinese Gardens, a temple and Buddha statue date back hundreds of years.

### JEFFERSON ISLAND

Island hopping, so to speak, was a short drive over to Jefferson Island and the semitropical Rip Van Winkle Gardens. We found safe overnight parking and were ready to explore the area at first morning light. Sitting atop another prehistoric salt dome next to Lake Peigneur, the 20-acre Rip Van Winkle Gardens was named after Joseph Jefferson, the acclaimed American actor who played the role of Rip Van

Winkle from the Washington Irving tale for many years in the theater. His magnificent Southern mansion was built in 1870 in the Moorish style and is richly appointed in period furnishings and paintings. Tours started at 9 a.m., and we were in line.

The 20 acres surrounding the Joseph Jefferson estate are seasonally home to 12 species of exotic birds that draw photographers from around the world. Roseate spoonbills are a favorite, and peacocks wander the grounds and roost in the live oaks at night. All told, more than 400 species can be spotted as they come in from two major flyways. The Café Jefferson was open for lunch, and we enjoyed ours with a lovely view of the gardens and lake.

### SUGAR, RICE AND CAJUN SPICE

Driving some of the side roads that crisscross this part of the state, we couldn't help but notice the thousands of acres of sugarcane being harvested. Our curiosity prompted us to stop at the

St. Mary Sugar Co-op processing plant. They don't offer official tours, but Micah Guidry, safety and personnel director, was kind enough to show us around.

Louisiana is the second largest producer of cane sugar in the United States with 13 million tons of cane harvested yearly. The St. Mary Sugar Co-op alone refines 1.2 million tons of cane into 134,000 tons of raw sugar. The yearlong choreographed process that gets that little spoon of sugar to your coffee cup is amazing. If you need to feel better about it, the truth is that sugar is pure, contains no man-made chemicals or warning labels, is 100 percent natural and contains less than 16 calories per teaspoon.

The history of southwest Louisiana is part of its allure. In the footsteps of the native Coshatta people, a melting pot of arrivals made their mark on this unique culture, starting in the 16th century when Spanish Conquistadors landed on the Mexican coast. They were followed by Spanish and French



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Creole immigrants, Anglo-Celtic settlers, slaves that worked the sugar and cotton plantations, Tennessee and Kentucky soldiers who served in the 1815 Battle of New Orleans and French-speaking Acadians (Cajuns) exiled from Canada — and that's just for starters. Museums in towns throughout the region add depth to the story.

We weren't in time for the annual Fat Tuesday celebration, but the Mardi Gras Museum of Imperial Calcasieu in Lake Charles has the largest display of Mardi Gras costumes in the South. In New Iberia we found the oldest rice mill in the United States. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the mill is still using machinery from 1912. The W.H. Tupper General Merchandise Store in Jennings opened in 1910 and now is a museum with more than 10,000 items on display, many in the original packaging and still bearing the original price tags.

While we were in Jeanerette, we had to stop at LeJeune's Bakery, opened in 1884, for one of its famous loaves of French bread and a few ginger cakes, hot out of the oven. The Jeanerette Bicentennial Park and Museum is a jewel full of antiques where we watched a fabulous video on planting, harvesting and processing sugarcane. It was also a good place for a picnic.

Circling back toward Lake Charles, we pulled into the huge parking lot next to Bord du Lac Park, right on the lake, for a quick overnight stay. A stroll along the boardwalk took us to watch fishermen in the evening, and a fantastic children's playground next to the parking area made us wish we were a few decades younger. In Sulphur, we found the



## SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA ESSENTIALS

### BELL CITY

#### **Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge**

Twenty-five miles southeast of Lake Charles, the visitor center for the entire Southwest Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex offers an orientation video, wildlife exhibits and an outdoor bird-viewing platform.  
337-598-2216, [www.fws.gov/refuge/cameron\\_prairie](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/cameron_prairie)

### BREAUX BRIDGE

#### **Atchafalaya Basin Landing and Marina**

The area's largest fleet of airboats transports guests on guided swamp tours into the heart of the Atchafalaya Basin. Located at 1377 Henderson Levee Road, the marina runs daily tours, weather permitting.  
337-228-7880, [www.basinlanding.com](http://www.basinlanding.com)

### LAKE CHARLES

#### **Lake Charles Convention and Visitors Bureau**

On the south side of I-10 at 1205 N. Lakeshore Drive, the regional visitor center is staffed with helpful assistants and stocked with tourism brochures and maps. The center welcomes travelers with free coffee, Wi-Fi and restrooms — and its own alligator pond.  
337-436-9588, [www.visitlakecharles.org](http://www.visitlakecharles.org)

### SULPHUR

#### **Creole Nature Trail Adventure Point**

Hands-on displays introduce visitors to the natural wonders and unique culture of southwest Louisiana. Just south of I-10 from Exit 20, Adventure Point is open daily at 2740 Ruth Street.  
337-502-4358, [www.visitlakecharles.org/creole-nature-trail](http://www.visitlakecharles.org/creole-nature-trail)

## WHERE TO STAY IN CAJUN COUNTRY

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#### **A+ Motel and RV Park**

337-583-2631, [www.a-plusmotel.com](http://www.a-plusmotel.com)

#### **Hidden Ponds RV Park**

800-440-4709, [www.hiddenpondsrvpark.com](http://www.hiddenpondsrvpark.com)



The long beaches of the gulf coast offer many miles of shoreline and numerous varieties of shells after a high tide.



A+ Motel and RV Park to be one of the best-managed and cleanest parks we've seen anywhere in the country.

Back on the food trail again, we had been hearing about boudin since crossing the border into Louisiana. Napa Valley has wine. Chicago has pizza. Wisconsin has cheese. And southwest Louisiana has boudin. It's a staple of this region and is the one delicacy most widely consumed. Of course, we had to try it, and everyone had their opinion of where to get the best. That choice was made more difficult by the fact that there are at least eight main versions including black, white, pork, crawfish, alligator and shrimp. Basically, boudin is a mixture of cooked meat, rice and spices carefully blended and stuffed into natural pork casing.

Following our diligent research, we found what was clearly the best boudin and its accompaniment, smoked spicy sausages, at a little hole-in-the-wall store and butcher shop called Homs's on Broad Street in Lake Charles (another location is on Kirkman Street). Sam Homs gave us a tour of his kitchen and smokehouse, and we walked out with a hot sausage in our hands. After trying his boudin that has won awards year after year, we liked it enough to bring home several pounds. Boudin and smoked sausage are already cooked, so they travel well and require only reheating.

Our minds kept coming back to food — sort of. You may recall that a good part of southwest Louisiana is covered with lakes, rivers and bayous, not to mention its proximity to the Gulf of Mexico, and that means some of the finest fishing anywhere. We had not brought our gear, but there are numerous fishing outfitters in the area, and we saw plenty of evidence of their daily success during our stay at the A+ Motel and RV Park. Redfish are a popular catch, but flounder, amberjack, spotted bass, speckled trout and even one of the best fighting and eating fish, the mahi-mahi or dorado, can be landed.

Next time we are here, we will be sure to bring our tackle and a well-seasoned cast-iron frying pan. Oh, and a few more onions, in case y'all stop by our camp. 🚐

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# WORK CAMPING IN NORTHERN GEORGIA

Part-time employment on a Peach State llama farm allowed one couple a memorable opportunity to explore small-town life and local culture while learning the intimate workings of a ranch



Author Jessica Dionne with Dolly, one of the llamas at Windy Valley Llama Farm in Blue Ridge, Georgia, where she and her husband spent a summer as work campers.

When my husband, Pete, first mentioned the job posting regarding working on a llama farm in northern Georgia for the summer, I laughed. That wasn't part of the plan. New to the work-camping scene (also known as "Workamping," a trademarked term coined by *Workamper News*), I had envisioned getting a job in a campground cleaning bathrooms or working in the office in exchange for a free campsite and, in some cases, a small wage. That's what work campers did, right? We have been full-time RVing since June 2014, but spent some time in Michigan in the backyards of family members before heading south in January 2015.

In a strange limbo that I'm sure many work-camping couples experience, we were trying to decide where we should go, what jobs to do and how long we wanted to stay at each job. We are not retired. We are in our 30s, and sold our house and our coffee shop in Colorado to pursue

this lifestyle. It was supposed to be simple and easygoing. However, with hundreds of job opportunities in every state, at all times of the year, and determining how close to towns they are in case we wanted to get additional jobs made the decision overwhelming.

My husband and I are huge animal lovers, and our dog, Lilly, is very much the center of our world. Over the years we have spent countless hours walking through livestock barns at 4-H fairs and rodeos, and have spent quite a bit of time volunteering at the local Humane Society.

When I hadn't stopped thinking about the llama farm after several days, I decided it was worth inquiring about. In speaking to Jerry, who owns the farm with his wife, Pam, he told me they had never had a work-camping couple who did not cry when leaving the llamas at the end of their stay. That spoke to my heart. It was decided — spending the summer in the North Georgia Mountains taking care of 11



Lake Blue Ridge, as viewed from a public boat-launch site.





**(Above, from left) Smudge, one of the male llamas with an attitude, nibbles on grass in front of the farmhouse. Amicalola Falls State Park in Dawsonville has a 729-foot waterfall nestled among breathtaking scenery and well-maintained hiking trails.**

llamas, two herd dogs and a barn cat would be right up our alley.

We backed our 24½-foot fifth-wheel onto a level gravel pad in a site with full hookups that was large enough to accommodate an RV nearly double its size. The site was next to one of three barns on the farm and had a beautiful view of the fields. From our patio area, we could watch the llamas graze and sometimes run around acting like fools. Watching a llama run has a way of putting a smile on your face, no matter what your mood.

It did not take us long to settle into a routine and learn our duties on the farm. What started out as a three-llama pet farm to entertain Pam in her retirement years grew to as many as 37 llamas, many of them rescues. With so many animals, it became necessary to have some help on the farm, and work campers seemed like the best solution. Llamas can be wary around new people, and having long-term work campers who stayed for six months at a stretch worked well. Pam also began breeding llamas, and each spring several *cria* (baby llamas) were added to the family and had to be trained. When we arrived on the farm, there were no *cria*, and the herd had shrunk to 11, but we still had plenty to do.

Five days a week, we haltered and fed the llamas (nine females and two males), fed the dogs, cleaned the barns and fields, put out fresh hay and water, and worked to better socialize the younger animals. Star, the youngest llama at two years old,

needed to have her face and feet touched daily to accustom her to that interaction. Llamas, in general, do not like to be touched, but for regular care reasons, including trimming nails and checking the health of the animals, it is something that needs to be done on a routine basis. After some struggle and a bit of spit, Star usually complied.

There is a very special place in my heart for Sassy. She definitely lived up to her name, as she was typically the most difficult to halter for the morning feeding. However, once that lead was on, she turned into a big ham. I loved the feel of her warm breath on my cheek and in my ear as she sniffed around my face. This was her version of an affectionate nuzzle, and she was the

first to warm up to me and make me feel welcome. At one point I thought I had developed the same relationship with Smudge, one of the males. I was gravely mistaken. Fortunately, the majority of his spit went in my hair and not on my face. That's always the thing people want to know when I tell them about the farm. Their first question is, "Don't llamas spit?" or "Have you been spit on?" Yes, they do, and yes, I have.

We loved the simplicity of the farm. Taking care of animals was a beautiful existence that we thought

**The author's fifth-wheel parked next to several barns provided easy access to the farm animals they were caring for, as well as a wonderful view of the property.**





could get no better. Then came Tucker, a clumsy white fur ball with boundless energy and a brave sense of adventure. Watching a nine-week-old Great Pyrenees run alongside and bark playfully at llamas 10 times his size was the joy of most of our days. He was six months old by the time we left the farm, and it was fascinating to witness the actual training of a farm dog. We were excited to have been a big part of it.

Each evening of our five-day work week, we spent about half an hour in the barns. We fed one llama, which was underweight and needed to pack on a few more pounds. We fed the dogs again, making sure they had fresh water, and cleaned up the barns. During the heat of the summer, the llamas spent a great deal of time lying on the cool cement in the barns in front of industrial fans. As you can imagine, farm animals are quite capable of trashing a barn within a few hours, so most of the night work was cleaning. Our “jobs,” which totaled around 20 hours a week each, were in exchange for a full-hookup campsite that included Wi-Fi and laundry. To pay our bills, I worked at a restaurant in town, and Pete picked up the occasional odd job.

The relatively small commitment to the farm and flexible work hours



### WORK-CAMPING RESOURCES

Seasonal employment draws RVing nomads looking for paychecks and less tangible rewards such as satisfying work, scenic destinations and meaningful relationships. Work campers can find jobs in free online listings and the subscription-based *Workamper News*.

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[www.workampernews.com](http://www.workampernews.com)

**Workers On Wheels**  
[www.work-for-rvers-and-campers.com](http://www.work-for-rvers-and-campers.com)

allowed us plenty of time to relax under our awning and dive into the local culture. We spent many hours sitting on our patio overlooking the fields and enjoying the llamas. Most nights we lit a fire in our barbecue pit and watched hundreds of fireflies twinkle over the pastures. Some nights we watched the sunset over Lake Blue Ridge.

Lake Blue Ridge is one of many lakes in the area that offer water-based activities. We heard that the fishing was great, but we spent our time boating and swimming. Morganton Point Recreation Area has a beautiful sandy

beach that kept us entertained. We rented several of the colorful sit-on-top kayaks for cruises along the shoreline. Spending hours enjoying the warm water, the hum of outboard motors and the gray-blue mountaintops across the calm reservoir was the perfect way to spend a hot summer day.

The inviting mountain town of Blue Ridge was only a 10-minute drive from the farm. The charm of a train parked adjacent to Main Street with a line of historic buildings in the background gave it a postcard-perfect appeal. The train, not merely ornamental, is a fully



In the old mining town of McCaysville, riverside cafés are a relaxing place to dine and enjoy a view of the Toccoa River. The Georgia-Tennessee border runs through the center of town.



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**The pampered pets of Windy Valley Llama Farm, along with the owners and work campers, enjoy freely roaming the property's 7 acres in northern Georgia.**

functioning electric railway that leaves downtown for daily trips to nearby McCaysville. "All aboard!" for the 11 a.m. Blue Ridge Scenic Railway departure, and we were off in an open-air car to see the sights.

There were climate-controlled cars, but we preferred the feel of the wind in our hair and the cool breeze from the river. The scenic tour of the rolling hills and serene Toccoa River was accompanied by a narration of local history and Native American cultural influences. We were also treated to a front-row seat for the numerous watersports that take place on the river. Tubers and kayakers weaving among the fly-fisherman provided the perfect summer backdrop to the history lesson taking place.

Exploring the old mining town of McCaysville, we enjoyed straddling the



Georgia-Tennessee state line, which runs on a diagonal through the center of town. The iron bridge behind Main Street is a sight to be seen. Built in 1911, it ended the need for a ferry. The dividing line where the Toccoa River becomes the Ocoee River, the bridge

creates a nostalgic backdrop to the historic downtown. We had lunch at a peaceful riverside café and enjoyed the view of the flowing river. Technically on the Toccoa side of the bridge, this little café was a favorite of the train patrons and locals alike — as well as dozens of

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**Hop aboard the scenic railway for a four-hour, 26-mile ride alongside the Toccoa River in the charming town of Blue Ridge, tucked into the Chattahoochee National Forest.**

ducks that were lined up on the shore waiting for handouts.

On another day, we headed to Amicalola Falls State Park. The falls, at 729 feet, are the tallest in Georgia, and the park, with its beautiful scenery and well-maintained hiking trails, made for a marvelous day trip. We tested our stamina by hiking up the trail that runs adjacent the falls. The trail covers a little more than a mile, but that includes 600 stairs. Feeling the cool spray from the waterfall and witnessing the power of nature as the water shot over the falls made up for the reminder that the next day we'd be paying for abusing the muscles we tend not to use too often. There is also the option to drive to the top, which allows a few photo opportunities along the way.

The park boasts many hiking trails,



including an 8-mile hike to Springer Mountain, the start of the famed Appalachian Trail. The trail covers about 2,200 miles and extends all the way to Maine. Since that was a bit beyond our ability level, we called it a day and headed back to Blue Ridge and our home on wheels.

Northern Georgia had not been on our radar as a place to visit. However, we discovered a beautiful, untapped

area full of things to do and see. Since we aren't the settling-down types, we have since moved on to several other jobs that have included working at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, the Final Four basketball championships and a campground in northern Michigan. As rewarding as all of these experiences have been, we still miss the llamas and even shed some tears when we had to say goodbye to them. 🐫

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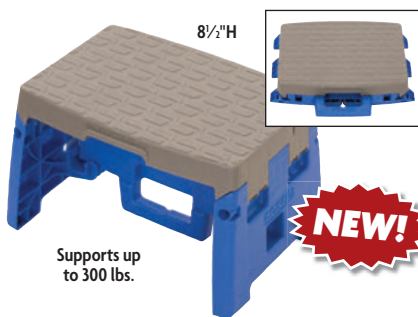
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**EXCLUSIVE!** Reversible  
**Fleur de Lis Patio Mats**, 9' x 12'  
UV-coated polypropylene is mold-, mildew- and fade-resistant. | Reg. \$79.99



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Chrome

Brushed Nickel

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**\$31.97** **Body Spa RV Shower Kit**, White #68324 | Reg. \$42.99  
Chrome #68322 **Club SALE \$38.97** Reg. \$51.99  
Brushed Nickel #68323 **Club SALE \$44.97** Reg. \$59.99



Grey

21"W

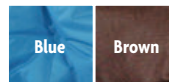
Includes carry bag

250 lb. capacity

**CLUB SALE**  
**\$49.97**

Club Chair

Grey #90248 Blue #74235 Brown #42645  
Cushy padded chair is covered in 600-denier polyester. Heavy-duty tubular steel frame. Reg. \$58.99 | 🚚 | 🛑





# FT GUIDE

Prices Expire January 1, 2017



26"dia. x 19 1/2"H

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Save  
**25%**

CLUB SALE  
**\$69<sup>97</sup>**

Legs fold for  
easy storage  
in carry bag



**NEW!** Portable Outdoor Fire Pit #90915  
Safe, lightweight and portable for use at home or in  
camp. Folds to only 6"H. | Reg. \$94.99 | |



CLUB MEMBERS  
Save  
**30%**

Open: 35 1/2"L x  
20 1/4"W x 22 1/2"H

150 lb.  
capacity

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Folds to 8"H into  
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This wagon has infinite uses! Use it to avoid high  
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**EXCLUSIVE!**

250 lb.  
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16,000 BTUs

367 sq. in. cooking surface

45 1/4"W x 19 1/2"D x 16"H



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Vector Gas Tabletop Grill with Smoke Tray #86915

Features two independently controlled 6500 BTU burners plus a 3500 BTU smoke  
tray burner. Porcelain coated wire cooking grid. Includes hose for a 20 lb. propane  
tank (sold separately). | Reg. \$214.99 | |



# THE FIFTH [WHEEL] DIMENSION

## THE LATEST HITCHES FOR EVERY TYPE OF TRUCK AND MOUNTING SYSTEM

**F**ifth-wheel trailers have long been renowned for their towing stability. The advantage lies in the position of the fifth-wheel hitch above or slightly in front of the truck's rear axle. Travel trailers are more prone to sway because the hitch point is behind the rear bumper and allows movement of the trailer to push the rear of the tow vehicle laterally. That leverage out back, behind the axles, translates into pushing the front of the truck the opposite direction using the rear axle as a fulcrum.

The hitch attachment point on a fifth-wheel trailer is the kingpin, which connects to the front of the trailer with a pin box and slides into the saddle of a fifth-wheel hitch, mounted in the bed of the truck. The hitch has a latching mechanism, usually a single or double jaw or a sliding bar, that secures the kingpin. A tight fit between the jaw or bar and the kingpin is essential to limit rattling, bouncing and front-to-rear

movement known as chucking.

Several fifth-wheel mounting systems are available. One popular setup uses two rails affixed to the floor of the truck bed and attached to the truck frame by under-bed brackets. These above-bed systems allow different brands of fifth-wheel hitches to be installed on industry-standard rails.

Under-bed mounting systems, called puck systems, attach the hitch

directly to brackets under the truck bed, keeping the bed free of rails and leaving it unobstructed when the hitch is removed. Under-bed mounts are part of fifth-wheel towing packages on some late-model trucks, and a growing number of hitches are designed to fit these systems. Adapters allow rail-type compatibility.

Shortbed pickups present a problem when towing certain fifth-wheels because of the decreased distance between the truck cab and the fifth-wheel hitch. Turn too far, and the front of the trailer will collide with the back edge of the truck cab. To remedy this situation, sliding fifth-wheel mechanisms allow the hitch to move rearward, temporarily creating more cab clearance. Once the tight maneuver is completed, the hitch can be slid forward into the towing position. Manual sliding hitches require the driver to get out of the truck and pull a lever on the hitch before making a sharp turn, while automatic sliders move as needed to provide adequate clearance.

With all of the fifth-wheel trailers, truck-bed types, mounting systems and hitch styles available today, choosing a hitch can seem overwhelming. To simplify the task, we've rounded up some of the most popular fifth-wheel hitches from the best-known brands and listed them in alphabetical order with starting prices.



PHOTO BY SCOTT HIRKO





## AirSafe/Air Hitch Technology

AirSafe's **Airbox Revolution Next Generation** (\$1,395) features four commercial airbags located directly under the hitch saddle to absorb shock and control front-to-back and side-to-side motion. Air pressure through connecting lines regulates the air bags to control bouncing. Available in three sizes with tow ratings of 12,000, 16,000 or 18,000 pounds, the Airbox has four height adjustments to accommodate various truck bed and trailer height combinations. All sizes come assembled with standard bed rails included.

The AirSafe Omni-Directional series (\$2,595) includes two fifth-wheel hitches with towing capacities of 20,000 and 25,000 pounds. The multidirectional — front-to-back, back-to-front, side-to-side and corner-to-corner — motion is made possible by four air-joined air bags. Height is adjustable from 14 to 18 inches by increasing or decreasing air pressure. Both Omni-Directional hitches can be mounted in standard rails (not included) and disassembled into four sections to ease installation and removal.

**701-277-0510, [www.airsafefhitch.com](http://www.airsafefhitch.com)**



## Andersen Hitches

Andersen's **Ultimate 5th Wheel Connection** offers a unique solution for fifth-wheel towing. Conventional fifth-wheel hitches have couplers that are part of the hitch head at the top of the base. The Ultimate Connection

attaches the coupler to the kingpin of the trailer. An all-aluminum 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch ball sits on top of the hitch and rides in the greaseless coupler. The result is a lightweight hitch that can swivel in any direction. The patented ball funnel allows a successful hookup with up to 3 inches of ball-to-coupler misalignment.

Designed to work in nearly all shortbed, standard and longbed trucks, the Andersen hitch is height-adjustable in three increments. The rail version (\$529.99) installs in industry-standard rails (sold separately), can tow 20,000 pounds and weighs 40 pounds. The gooseneck version (\$639.99) can be attached to an under-bed-mounted gooseneck hitch, tows up to 24,000 pounds and weighs 70 pounds.

Andersen also offers the lightweight **Ultimate 5th Wheel Connection 2** (\$769.99) for gooseneck hitches. It's rated to tow 24,000 pounds, and the all-aluminum base weighs just 35 pounds. Andersen hitches are fitted with a remote-release cable assembly, eliminating the need to climb into the truck bed to lock or unlock the coupler.

**800-635-6106**

**[www.andersenhitches.com](http://www.andersenhitches.com)**



## B&W Trailer Hitches

B&W's **Companion** (\$934) utilizes the company's under-bed Turnoverball mounting system. Sold separately, the Turnoverball bolts in place using existing holes in the vehicle frame providing single-point attachment. The Turnoverball can also work as a gooseneck hitch. When the hitch is removed, the truck bed is free of obstructions. Available as a fixed or sliding hitch with a capacity of 20,000 pounds, the Companion has three height settings from 17 to 19 inches. A fully articulating head allows movement

in all directions, and 1-inch wraparound jaws grasp the kingpin tightly, eliminating unwanted movement during starts and stops. Polyurethane bushings help keep the hitch rattle-free. Models are available to fit factory puck systems.

The Patriot hitch mounts in industry-standard rails. A fully articulating head allows front-to-back and side-to-side pivoting, the  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch jaws wrap securely around the kingpin, and a cam-action handle makes release easy. The Patriot 16K (\$599) and 18K (\$699) stationary hitches have height adjustments of 16 to 19 inches and 4 inches of front-to-back adjustment. The sliding version of the 18K (\$799) has up to 12 inches of slide travel and 17 to 19 inches of vertical adjustment, and automatically latches in the travel and maneuvering positions.

**800-810-4918, [www.turnoverball.com](http://www.turnoverball.com)**



## Camco Manufacturing

**Eaz-Lift** stationary hitches (\$576) have a universal design that allows them to be mounted to existing bed rails or heavy-duty rails (sold separately). The 16K, 18K and 22K have height adjustments from 14 $\frac{1}{2}$  to 18 inches.

For shortbed trucks, Eaz-Lift sliding hitches (\$945.99) allow 9 inches of additional clearance for tight turning. Height is adjustable from 17 $\frac{1}{2}$  to 21 inches. The 16KS and 18KS can be mounted on industry-standard rails, but the 22KS must be mounted on Eaz-Lift's 22,000-pound-rated rails. A visible flag on each slider rail shows when the hitch has been locked in either the towing or maneuvering position. The latching mechanism and rollers are fully enclosed to minimize debris buildup.

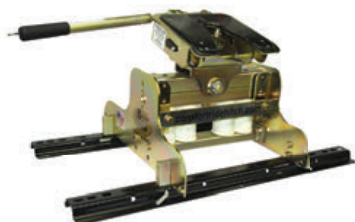
All Eaz-Lift hitches feature 32 degrees of front-to-back pivot and



## THE FIFTH [WHEEL] DIMENSION

11 degrees of side-to-side pivot with urethane cushions. An automatic locking mechanism and a secondary handle lock ensure that the jaws close securely around the kingpin.

800-334-2004, [www.camco.net](http://www.camco.net)



### Comfort Ride Hitch

Comfort Ride hitches have 5-inch-tall air cells to minimize chucking and bouncing. The air cells are made from solid polymer containing millions of microscopic air holes that absorb energy and cushion the ride. They require no air compressor, are maintenance-free and can't blow out.

Comfort Ride's best-selling hitch is the **Model 184** (\$1,699), with height adjustment from 12 to 19 inches and a towing capacity of up to 18,000 pounds. A four-way articulating coupler eliminates stress on the kingpin and allows hookups on uneven surfaces. The 1x2-inch locking jaw, with close tolerances, ensures a secure connection. The hitch is zinc-plated with a secondary coat of yellow chromite and sealed with a clear coat for a long-lasting finish. An antifriction pad comes installed on the hitch saddle.

For heavier trailer towing, Comfort Ride offers Model 245 (\$1,999), with a towing capacity of 24,000 pounds, and Model 308 HD (\$2,999), rated to tow up to 30,000 pounds.

844-873-5010, [www.comfortridehitch.com](http://www.comfortridehitch.com)



### Curt Manufacturing

Curt's **A Series** hitches (\$1,037) mount to industry-standard rails and are

rated to tow 16,000 pounds for the A16 and 20,000 pounds for the A20. Three positions adapt to variations in bed height, and a lockable handle self-resets to the ready-to-couple position after disconnecting. The fully articulating torsion head has an extra-wide opening for easier coupling and is installed and removed with a single pin. A cast yoke with poly-torsion inserts is said to suppress shock and reduce noise, and high-strength interlocking jaws wrap the kingpin to further minimize noise. The three-position coupling indicator is visible from the truck cab. A polyethylene lube plate eliminates grease deposits.

Curt's OEM Puck System 5th Wheel Legs (\$684) adapt any Curt fifth-wheel hitch head to fit under-bed mounting systems from Ford, GM, Ram and Nissan. A quarter-turn anchoring system locks the hitch to the factory pucks. Adjustable anchors ensure a tight connection between the legs and under-bed rails.

877-287-8634, [www.curtmfg.com](http://www.curtmfg.com)



### Demco Manufacturing

Demco's new **Recon** (\$595) features a lightweight two-piece design, making installation and removal easy. The hitch utilizes an aerodynamic fifth-wheel head that requires no adapter plates or modifications to the kingpin. With a maximum towing capacity of 21,000 pounds, the Recon mounts in industry-standard rails (sold separately). Wrap-around jaws with a lock-bar make a tight connection. Hitch height is adjustable in three increments from 15½ to 18 inches.

The Hijacker Autoslide (\$1,386) creates clearance between the truck

cab and trailer automatically while turning without the need to get out of the truck and pull a lever. No locking plate is required to activate the slide mechanism. Ideal for 5½- and 6-foot truck beds, the 13K offers 22½ inches of travel with a tow rating of 13,000 pounds. To prevent the pin box from hitting the bed rails or the tonneau-cover rails, the 13K incorporates 3¼ inches of side-to-side travel. For larger fifth-wheels, 18,000- and 21,000-pound-capacity versions are available with 14 inches of front-to-back travel. All Hijacker Autoslide hitches can be installed on industry-standard rails or using Demco's under-bed mounting brackets. The 18K and 21K can also be installed on Ford's under-bed puck system.

800-543-3626

[www.demco-products.com](http://www.demco-products.com)



### Husky Towing Products

Husky S Series hitches are available in stationary and slider formats with a tow rating of 16,000 pounds. Features include a side-to-side tilting plate, front-to-rear pivoting head and four height adjustments from 14 to 17 inches. Additionally, a 2-inch fore-and-aft head adjustment can be made. A pop-out hookup indicator makes it easy to see that the kingpin is locked in place. The slider version provides up to 9 inches of additional travel to accommodate tight maneuvering.

The company's **W Series** hitches have ratings of 16,000 and 26,000 pounds and feature fully articulating heads to accommodate the kingpin in a broad range of truck and trailer hookup conditions. Three fore-and-aft adjustments and four height adjustments ensure proper hitch positioning.

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FALCON

MODERN ULTRALITES



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[www.TravelLiteCampers.com](http://www.TravelLiteCampers.com)



## THE FIFTH [WHEEL] DIMENSION

A wraparound jaw fully encloses the kingpin, and a self-locking handle eliminates the need to manually open the jaw to hitch up. To accommodate tight maneuvers in shortbed trucks, slider versions are available with 10 inches of movement.

877-544-4449, [www.huskytow.com](http://www.huskytow.com)



### PullRite/Pulliam Enterprises

PullRite's **ISR Series SuperLite 20K** (\$669) represents a unique application for fifth-wheel owners. Combining the function of the hitch plate, rocker arm and crossmember found on conventional fifth-wheel hitches, the SuperLite 20K clamps to the trailer's

kingpin, mounting an upside-down ball in place. An inverted gooseneck coupler is attached to the hitch base in place of a conventional hitch head. The SuperLite 20K fits in industry-standard rails or PullRite's removable SuperRails (sold separately). A funnel attached to the coupler guides the ball into the locking tube. To make hitching easier, the funnel coupler can be seen from the truck bed, and its design allows for hitching and unhitching at any angle. This innovative hitch weighs 52 pounds and has a capacity of 20,000 pounds.

Designed to increase cab-to-trailer clearance up to 18 inches on the fly, the ISR Series SuperGlide automatic sliding hitch allows 90-degree turning with shortbed trucks. The SuperGlide mounts directly to industry-standard rails and comes in models rated to tow 16,000 pounds (\$1,264), 18,000 pounds (\$1,671) or 24,000 pounds (\$2,080). Adapters (sold separately) allow SuperGlide hitches to be installed in Ford, GM and Ram pickups with fifth-

wheel towing packages.

574-259-1520, [www.pullrite.com](http://www.pullrite.com)



### Reese/Cequent Performance Products

Reese offers an extensive selection of fifth-wheel hitches, including the 20,000-pound-capacity Reese 20K (\$1,606), designed to fit the puck system in Ram 2500 and 3500 HD pickups. The drop-in hitch has three height adjustments and a wide footprint to increase stability. The fully articulating four-way head has 4 inches of side-to-side movement.

With a 16,000-pound towing capacity, the **Titan 16K** (\$1,056) has



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to travel  
like it's 1969



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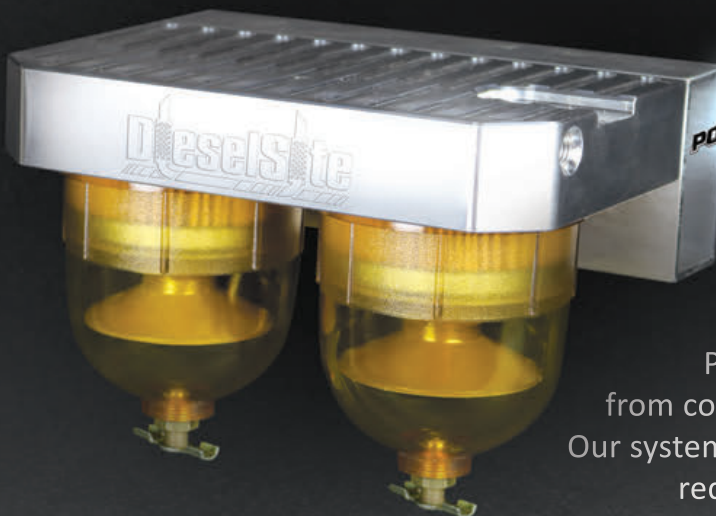
Little Guy Worldwide is bringing back the iconic Scotty camper that fueled a small-trailer craze in the '60s and '70s. Its retro look and modern conveniences will delight travelers.

Already the premier distributor of teardrop campers, Little Guy will manufacture and distribute Scottys at dealerships all across the USA, coming in 2017.



Sign up to be notified of Scotty rollout and availability at [serroscottytrailers.com](http://serroscottytrailers.com)





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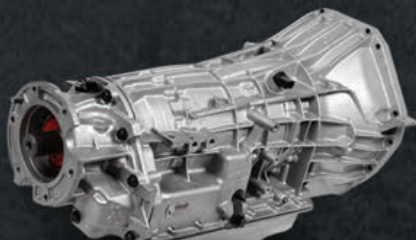
Protect your 6.7L FORD diesel fuel system from costly repairs NOT covered by OE warranty. Our system includes 2 micron filtration and doesn't require any cutting of the factory fuel lines!

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## THE FIFTH [WHEEL] DIMENSION

a cast head and double-jaw coupling mechanism with geared teeth for 360 degrees of contact around the kingpin. The head's 9-inch-wide funnel design and four-way pivoting action ease hooking to the kingpin, and an indicator shows when the kingpin is fully engaged in the jaws. The Titan 20K (\$1,350) can tow 20,000 pounds and has the same features as the Titan 16K plus a system for vertical and longitudinal vibration damping and improved ride. For use on shortbed trucks, both hitches are available with round-tube sliders that provide 11 inches of additional turning clearance.

Designed to mount in Reese Elite series under-bed rail kits (sold separately) or the Ford F-250 and F-350 puck system, the Elite 18K slider (\$2,356) features a self-latching one-piece forged jaw that wraps around the kingpin. Rated for up to 18,000 pounds, it fits most shortbed pickups. The Elite 26.5K slider (\$1,856) has 4 inches of side-to-side pivot for

better control and a wider footprint for increased stability.

With a tow rating of 30,000 pounds, the 30K Low Profile (\$2,249) offers 3 inches of vertical adjustment. The hitch's front-to-rear tilt facilitates hooking to the kingpin, and its side tilt is designed to reduce stress on the vehicle frame.

800-234-6992

[www.cequentconsumerproducts.com](http://www.cequentconsumerproducts.com)



### TrailerSaver/ Hensley Manufacturing

TrailerSaver **Air-Ride** solid-steel suspension hitches have heavy-duty airbags to absorb the up-and-down and

fore-and-aft motion of the trailer and truck. The BD1 (\$2,195) has a capacity of 14,000 pounds, and the BD3 (\$2,495) can tow up to 18,000 pounds. Both models have four-way pivoting heads, jaws that encircle the kingpin and adjustable height from 15½ to 20 inches. The 25,000-pound-rated TS3 (\$2,895) and 32,000-pound-rated TSLB2H (\$3,149) have level-head pivoting systems and three air-compressor options: auto-inflate, cab remote or manual fill. The TS3, BD1 and BD3 fit industry-standard rails or can be outfitted with under-bed adapters, and the TSLB2H comes with a standard bolt-down mounting plate.

The TrailerSaver line includes three stationary fifth-wheel hitches with capacities from 26,000 to 32,000 pounds. For towing with shortbed trucks, the Simple Slide accessory turns any TrailerSaver hitch into a manual slider for additional cab clearance. It installs on industry-standard rails.

800-410-6580, [www.trailersaver.com](http://www.trailersaver.com)

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**BUNKHOUSE 29'**

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**Jayco**

**REDHAWK 29XK**

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**Jayco**

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# STRIKING GOLD

## TRAILER LIFE'S FIFTH-ANNUAL RV SURVEY REVEALS READERS' FIELD-TESTED FAVORITES

When it comes to RVing, *Trailer Life* readers are the experts. You came up with your favorite products and places after years of trial and error. That's why we turned to you when we wanted to know who offers the best of the best. Capitalizing on your collective expertise, we launched the annual *Trailer Life* Readers' Choice Awards in 2012 with categories for RVs, tow vehicles and nearly everything that goes with them. From the top trucks and travel trailers to the most reliable awnings and batteries, these are the brands and businesses that have earned your trust. After three months of voting, the results of the fifth-annual online poll are in and ready for the big reveal. Without further ado, here are the gold, silver and bronze awards for 2016, readers' tried-and-true favorites.

### RVS AND TOW VEHICLES

#### TRAVEL TRAILER



##### ● GOLD: FOREST RIVER

One the largest RV manufacturers, Forest River has a broad corporate umbrella that covers the Cherokee, Evo, Flagstaff, Salem, Sonoma, Survey, Rockwood, r-Pod, Wildcat, Wildwood and Vibe travel trailer brands. The official Forest River Owners' Group, also known as FROG, enhances the RV-ownership experience with seminars, service and six nights of camping each summer at Indiana's Elkhart County fairgrounds.

574-389-4600

[www.forestriverinc.com/traveltrailers](http://www.forestriverinc.com/traveltrailers)

##### SILVER: LANCE

661-949-3322

[www.lancecamper.com/travel-trailers](http://www.lancecamper.com/travel-trailers)

##### BRONZE: JAYCO

574-825-5861

[www.jayco.com/products/travel-trailers](http://www.jayco.com/products/travel-trailers)

#### FIFTH-WHEEL TRAILER



##### ● GOLD: GRAND DESIGN

With a reputation for customer satisfaction, Grand Design builds Reflection and Solitude fifth-wheel trailers, and Momentum fifth-wheel toy haulers, in addition to two lines of travel trailers. In the four years since Grand Design launched, it has become one of the fastest-growing RV manufacturers, a fact that didn't go unnoticed by Winnebago Industries. In late 2016 the iconic motorhome company announced a deal to purchase Grand Design and expand its towable offerings.

574-825-9679, [www.granddesignrv.com](http://www.granddesignrv.com)

##### SILVER: KEYSTONE

866-425-4369

[www.keystonerv.com/fifth-wheels](http://www.keystonerv.com/fifth-wheels)

##### BRONZE: FOREST RIVER

574-389-4600

[www.forestriverinc.com/fifthwheels](http://www.forestriverinc.com/fifthwheels)

#### FOLDING CAMPING TRAILER



##### ● GOLD: JAYCO

Founded nearly 50 years ago by Lloyd Bontrager on his Indiana farm, Jayco hit the big time in 2016 when the company produced its millionth RV and partnered with giant Thor Industries. Despite Jayco's impressive success, the brand continues to produce a line of modest folding trailers, just as it did back in 1968. Four floor plans in the Jayco Jay Sport series are available for 2017, weighing as little as 1,500 pounds and backed by a two-year limited warranty.

574-825-5861

[www.jayco.com/products/camping-trailers](http://www.jayco.com/products/camping-trailers)

##### SILVER: TRAILMANOR

402-316-7288

[www.trailmanor.com](http://www.trailmanor.com)

##### BRONZE: STARCRAFT

800-945-4787

[www.starcraftrv.com](http://www.starcraftrv.com)

## TRUCK CAMPER



### ● GOLD: LANCE

Lance has been in the business of building truck campers since 1965 with an emphasis on innovation and durability. In recent years, Lance has added lightweight travel trailers and toy haulers to its lineup. The company rolls out the red carpet for its dedicated owners club, Lance Owners of America, at its factory in Lancaster, California.

661-949-3322

[www.lancecamper.com/truck-campers](http://www.lancecamper.com/truck-campers)

### SILVER: NORTHWOOD

800-766-6274

[www.northwoodmfg.com/truck-campers](http://www.northwoodmfg.com/truck-campers)

### BRONZE: BIGFOOT

250-546-2155, [www.bigfootrv.com](http://www.bigfootrv.com)

### BRONZE: NORTHERN LITE

250-765-3702, [www.northern-lite.com](http://www.northern-lite.com)

## TRUCK FOR TOWING



### ● GOLD: FORD

It was good news for RV-trailer enthusiasts when Ford switched to an aluminum-alloy body on the F-150 two years ago. The lighter, more capable F-150 was so well received that Ford went all out on the 2017 Super Duty, introducing an aluminum body with beefed up components and best-in-class towing performance.

800-392-3673, [www.ford.com/trucks](http://www.ford.com/trucks)

### SILVER: CHEVROLET/GMC

800-222-1020, [www.chevrolet.com/trucks](http://www.chevrolet.com/trucks)

888-988-7267, [www.gmc.com/trucks](http://www.gmc.com/trucks)

### BRONZE: RAM

800-423-6343, [www.ramtrucks.com](http://www.ramtrucks.com)

## RV PRODUCTS AND ACCESSORIES

### RV AWNING



### ● GOLD: DOMETIC

A worldwide manufacturer of products for recreational vehicles, Dometic supplies awnings, slide toppers and add-on screen rooms among its broad range of RV offerings. Recent innovations range from LED lighting and power connections on awning roller tubes to sensors that retract shades automatically in high winds.

800-544-4881, [www.dometic.com/usa](http://www.dometic.com/usa)

### SILVER: CAREFREE OF COLORADO

303-469-3324

[www.carefreeofcolorado.com](http://www.carefreeofcolorado.com)

### BRONZE: AWNINGS BY ZIP DEE

800-338-2378

[www.awningsbyzipdee.com](http://www.awningsbyzipdee.com)

### BRONZE: LIPPERT COMPONENTS

574-537-8900

[www.lci1.com/solera-power-awning](http://www.lci1.com/solera-power-awning)

### RV BATTERY



### ● GOLD: INTERSTATE

Founded in Dallas in 1952, Interstate makes an array of automotive batteries and electric-power suppliers, including 6-volt deep-cycle house batteries, 12-volt starting/house batteries and sealed AGM dual-purpose batteries for use in recreational vehicles.

866-842-5368

[www.interstatebatteries.com](http://www.interstatebatteries.com)

### SILVER: TROJAN

800-423-6569, [www.trojanbattery.com](http://www.trojanbattery.com)

### BRONZE: OPTIMA

888-867-8462, [www.optimabatteries.com](http://www.optimabatteries.com)

## RV CLEANING PRODUCT



### ● GOLD: PROTECTALL

ProtectAll's namesake all-surface cleaner tops the company's extensive lineup of RV-care products.

800-322-4491, [www.protectall.com](http://www.protectall.com)

### SILVER: MEGUIAR'S

800-347-5700, [www.meguiars.com](http://www.meguiars.com)

### BRONZE: THETFORD

800-543-1219, [www.thetford.com](http://www.thetford.com)

## RV COVER



### ● GOLD: ADCO

ADCO specializes in covers for RVs and RV tires, windshields, side-view mirrors, LP-gas cylinders and rear bike racks.

800-541-2326, [www.adcoprod.com](http://www.adcoprod.com)

### SILVER: CALMARK

800-838-7236, [www.calmarkcovers.com](http://www.calmarkcovers.com)

### BRONZE: ELEMENTS

888-626-7576

[www.campingworld.com/elements](http://www.campingworld.com/elements)

## RV ENGINE OIL



### ● GOLD: SHELL ROTELLA

Developed by Shell, Rotella heavy-duty engine lubricants include straight



grade, full synthetic and synthetic blends. Rotella T4 and T5 meet the new API CK-4 diesel engine oil standards. 888-467-4355, [www.rotella.com](http://www.rotella.com)

**SILVER: AMSOIL**

800-956-5695, [www.amsoil.com](http://www.amsoil.com)

**BRONZE: MOBIL 1**

800-662-4525, [www.mobiloil.com](http://www.mobiloil.com)

## RV FUEL ADDITIVE



● **GOLD: LUCAS OIL PRODUCTS**

Easy to find on the shelves of auto-part stores and discount retail chains, Lucas Oil additives, lubricants and utility treatments include products designed to boost performance and fuel economy. 800-342-2512, [www.lucasoil.com](http://www.lucasoil.com)

**SILVER: AMSOIL**

800-956-5695, [www.amsoil.com](http://www.amsoil.com)

**BRONZE: SEA FOAM**

952-938-4811, [www.seafoamsales.com](http://www.seafoamsales.com)

## RV GENERATOR



● **GOLD: HONDA**

Honda is a leading supplier of light-weight and quiet portable generators. Its popular 2,000-watt generators run for hours without refueling and provide consistent electrical current. 770-497-6400, [www.powerequipment.honda.com/generators](http://www.powerequipment.honda.com/generators)

**SILVER: YAMAHA**

800-962-7926, [www.yamaha-motor.com](http://www.yamaha-motor.com)

**BRONZE: CUMMINS**

800-888-6626  
[www.power.cummins.com](http://www.power.cummins.com)

## RV HOLDING-TANK CHEMICALS



● **GOLD: THETFORD**

Thetford is the number-one supplier of sanitation products for the RV market. Aqua-Kem, the top-selling holding-tank deodorant, comes in liquid, granular and toss-in forms. 800-543-1219, [www.thetford.com](http://www.thetford.com)

**SILVER: CAMCO**

800-334-2004, [www.camco.net](http://www.camco.net)

**BRONZE: WALEX**

800-338-3155, [www.walex.com/rv\\_marine](http://www.walex.com/rv_marine)

## RV PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING PRODUCT



● **GOLD: BANKS POWER**

Banks Power has been in the business of maximizing engine performance for five decades. For trailer towing, the company offers emissions-legal tuning devices and intake-and-exhaust airflow systems intended to improve horsepower, torque and fuel mileage. 800-601-8072, [www.bankspower.com](http://www.bankspower.com)

**SILVER: BULLY DOG**

877-285-5936, [www.bullydog.com](http://www.bullydog.com)

**BRONZE: EDGE PRODUCTS**

888-360-3343, [www.edgeproducts.com](http://www.edgeproducts.com)

## RV REFRIGERATOR



● **GOLD: DOMETIC**

Designed for RV use, Dometic refrig-

erators are built to withstand the rigors of road travel. The company's essential kitchen appliances come in a variety of shapes and sizes, from double-door built-ins to freestanding fridges and even six-bottle wine chillers.

800-544-4881, [www.dometic.com/usa](http://www.dometic.com/usa)

**SILVER: NORCOLD**

800-543-1219, [www.norcold.com](http://www.norcold.com)

**BRONZE: ATWOOD**

800-546-8759  
[www.atwoodmobile.com/refrigerators](http://www.atwoodmobile.com/refrigerators)

## RV SATELLITE HARDWARE



● **GOLD: WINEGARD**

Winegard's RV antennas and portable satellite systems take the TV-viewing experience far from home. A good choice for RVers with multiple TVs, Winegard's Trav'ler automatic roof-top antenna works with satellite-TV providers Dish, DirecTV and Shaw Direct. 800-472-1039, [www.winegard.com](http://www.winegard.com)

**SILVER: KING**

952-922-6889, [www.kingconnect.com](http://www.kingconnect.com)

**BRONZE: KVH**

401-847-3327, [www.kvh.com](http://www.kvh.com)

## RV SATELLITE-TV PROVIDER



● **GOLD: DISH**

Dish offers equipment and programming so RVers can watch HDTV almost anywhere they roam. The Pay-As-You-Go option lets RVers pay for only the months of satellite-TV service they

need with no long-term contract.  
855-398-8011, [www.dishformyrv.com](http://www.dishformyrv.com)

**SILVER: DIRECTV**

888-777-2454, [www.directv.com](http://www.directv.com)

**BRONZE: BELL CANADA**

888-759-3474, [www.bell.ca](http://www.bell.ca)

## RV TIRES



● **GOLD: MICHELIN**

Although Michelin doesn't manufacture ST tires for trailers, it does make a variety of tires that are suitable for RVs and tow vehicles, including XPS Rib LT tires, a popular ST replacement.  
866-866-6605, [www.michelinrvtires.com](http://www.michelinrvtires.com)

**SILVER: GOODYEAR**

800-321-2136, [www.goodyearrvtires.com](http://www.goodyearrvtires.com)

**BRONZE: MAXXIS**

800-462-9947, [www.maxxis.com](http://www.maxxis.com)

## TIRE-PRESSURE MONITORING SYSTEM



● **GOLD: TIREMINDER**

Minder Research's TireMinder monitors up to 22 sensors, keeping tabs on air pressure and temperature in trailer and tow-vehicle tires, and alerting drivers with visual and audible alarms. The new TireMinder Smart TPMS lets users check tires from smartphones.  
772-463-6522  
[www.minderresearch.com/tireminder](http://www.minderresearch.com/tireminder)

**SILVER: HAWKSHEAD**

888-321-8767, [www.tpms.ca](http://www.tpms.ca)

**BRONZE: TIRETRAKER**

866-200-9773, [www.tiretraker.com](http://www.tiretraker.com)

## RV TOILET



● **GOLD: THETFORD**

Thetford markets RV toilets with the brand names Aria and Aqua-Magic. Constructed of sturdy plastic or homelike china, with high or low profiles and hand or foot flushing mechanisms, the toilets provide a reliable flush without wasting water. In addition to having a reputation for trouble-free service, Thetford's indispensable bathroom fixtures are known for their comfort and style.  
800-543-1219  
[www.thetford.com/products/toilets/rv-toilets](http://www.thetford.com/products/toilets/rv-toilets)

**SILVER: DOMETIC**

800-544-4881, [www.dometic.com/usa](http://www.dometic.com/usa)

**BRONZE: NATURE'S HEAD**

251-295-3043, [www.natureshead.net](http://www.natureshead.net)

## TRAVEL 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. The hitch relies on spring-bar tension and is particularly effective on trailers with relatively high hitch weights.  
800-478-5578  
[www.equalizerhitch.com](http://www.equalizerhitch.com)

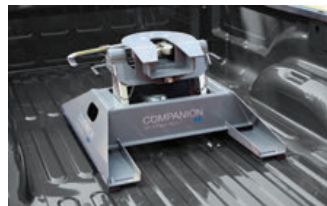
**SILVER: REESE**

800-632-3290, [www.reeseprod.com](http://www.reeseprod.com)

**BRONZE: FASTWAY**

877-523-9103  
[www.fastwaytrailer.com/e2-hitch](http://www.fastwaytrailer.com/e2-hitch)

## FIFTH-WHEEL HITCH



● **GOLD: B&W**

B&W Trailer Hitches introduced its first Turnoverball hitch nearly 30 years ago and has been bringing innovative towing solutions to the market ever since. A family-owned business based in Kansas, B&W makes the popular rail-mounted Patriot and under-bed Companion fifth-wheel hitches in stationary and sliding models. The Companion hitch also fits Ford, GM and Ram puck systems.  
800-810-4918  
[www.turnoverball.com/products/fifth-wheel-towing](http://www.turnoverball.com/products/fifth-wheel-towing)

**SILVER: DEMCO**

800-543-3626, [www.demco-products.com/rv-towing/hijacker](http://www.demco-products.com/rv-towing/hijacker)

**BRONZE: PULLRITE**

800-443-2307, [www.pullrite.com](http://www.pullrite.com)

## TRUCK-BED LINER



● **GOLD: LINE-X**

One of the leading providers of spray-on coatings, Line-X applies fast-curing truck-bed liners that bond permanently and offer tough protection. Installed by professional technicians at more than 400 franchises, the long-lasting bed liners come in a variety of colors and carry a lifetime warranty.  
877-330-1331, [www.linex.com](http://www.linex.com)

**SILVER: RHINO LININGS**

800-422-2603, [www.rhino linings.com](http://www.rhino linings.com)

**BRONZE: BEDRUG**

615-847-0020, [www.bedrug.com](http://www.bedrug.com)



## RV RETAIL, SERVICE AND TRAVEL

## RV CAMPGROUND/RESORT


**GOLD: PALA CASINO RV RESORT  
PALA, CALIFORNIA**

Southern California's Pala RV Resort opened its gates last May with 100 full-hookup RV campsites up to 70 feet long. The new 100-acre RV resort scored a perfect 10/10\*/10 Good Sam rating and is a shuttle ride away from the 2016 RV Casino Resort gold-award winner. 844-472-5278

[www.palacasino.com/resort/rv-resort](http://www.palacasino.com/resort/rv-resort)

**SILVER: PECHANGA RV RESORT  
TEMECULA, CALIFORNIA**

877-997-8386, [www.pechanga.com/rvresort](http://www.pechanga.com/rvresort)

**BRONZE: DISNEY'S FORT WILDERNESS RESORT  
ORLANDO, FLORIDA**

407-824-2900

[www.disneyworldcamping.com](http://www.disneyworldcamping.com)

## RV CASINO RESORT


**GOLD: PALA CASINO SPA AND  
RESORT, PALA, CALIFORNIA**

With 2,000 slot machines and 97 table games, Pala is not only a state-of-the-art casino with an adjacent RV resort, it's also one of the top-10 spas in the casino industry, according to Spas of America. Pala's year-round entertainment lineup and many restaurant choices rival the Las Vegas competition. 877-946-7252, [www.palacasino.com](http://www.palacasino.com)

**SILVER: PECHANGA RESORT AND CASINO  
TEMECULA, CALIFORNIA**

888-732-4264, [www.pechanga.com](http://www.pechanga.com)

**BRONZE: SEVEN FEATHERS CASINO RESORT  
CANYONVILLE, OREGON**

800-548-8461, [www.sevenfeathers.com](http://www.sevenfeathers.com)

## RV FUEL STATION


**GOLD: PILOT FLYING J**

Pilot Flying J sets out the welcome mat for RV travelers at more than 650 travel plazas across North America with overnight parking, dump stations and LP-gas refills, along with designated RV-fueling lanes at some locations and certified truck scales. Clean restrooms, hot showers and popular fast-food options are a bonus.

877-866-7378

[www.pilotflyingj.com/rv-services](http://www.pilotflyingj.com/rv-services)

**SILVER: SHELL**

888-467-4355

[www.shell.us/motorist](http://www.shell.us/motorist)

**BRONZE: LOVE'S**

800-655-6837, [www.loves.com](http://www.loves.com)

## RV RETAILER


**GOLD: CAMPING WORLD**

After celebrating its golden anniversary in 2016, America's largest retailer of RV supplies, accessories and new and used RVs is busy stocking its shelves for the next 50 years. Founded and based in Bowling Green, Kentucky, the company invites RVers and other outdoor enthusiasts to visit 120 conveniently located Camping World SuperCenters and browse thousands of items for sale on its website.

888-626-7576

[www.campingworld.com](http://www.campingworld.com)

**SILVER: LOCAL DEALER**
**BRONZE: WALMART**

800-925-6278, [www.walmart.com](http://www.walmart.com)

## SIT-DOWN RESTAURANT


**GOLD: CRACKER BARREL**

Offering a warm welcome to RVers since 1969, the chain of 641 Cracker Barrel Old Country Store restaurants and gift shops dishes up soothing comfort food and down-home Southern hospitality in 43 states.

800-333-9566

[www.crackerbarrel.com](http://www.crackerbarrel.com)

**SILVER: DENNY'S**

800-733-6697, [www.dennys.com](http://www.dennys.com)

**BRONZE: APPLEBEE'S**

888-592-7753, [www.applebees.com](http://www.applebees.com)

**BRONZE: CHILI'S**

800-983-4637 [www.chilis.com](http://www.chilis.com)

## STATE TO RV IN


**GOLD: OREGON**

From the Columbia Gorge to the Pacific Ocean, and Multnomah Falls to Mount Hood, Oregon is a scenic and recreational paradise. Friendly locals make RVers feel right at home, and the state's abundance of RV parks ensures happy camping. The Travel Oregon website provides an RV-park search tool, along with trip ideas and information about attractions, events and the outdoors.

800-547-7842

[www.traveloregon.com](http://www.traveloregon.com)

**SILVER: MICHIGAN**

888-784-7328, [www.michigan.org](http://www.michigan.org)

**BRONZE: COLORADO**

800-265-6723, [www.colorado.com](http://www.colorado.com)

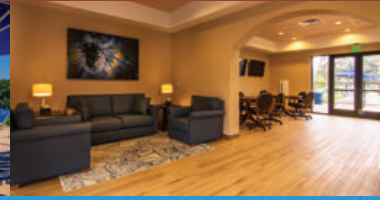
**BRONZE: UTAH**

800-200-1160, [www.visitutah.com](http://www.visitutah.com) 🚐



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- Games, Billiard Table, Card Tables
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- 5 Barbecue Grill Areas
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For reservations: 1-844-4PALARV (1-844-472-5278)

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[PalaCasino.com](http://PalaCasino.com)

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# Solid Connection

Fitting a power cable with SmartPlug's conversion kit ensures better electrical conductivity and a hassle-free process

Since every RV has a provision for hooking up to campground electrical power, owners have to work with a cable for making the connection. The trend lately is to use a removable cable that plugs into a receptacle in the exterior wall or inside a storage compartment.

The rub is that the plug can be difficult to seat in the receptacle, especially when using a 50-amp cable, which is heavy and unwieldy. Compounding the difficulty is a locking ring that can be less than cooperative. The fresh air in this arena is the SmartPlug shorepower system, which was first marketed to the boating industry but has also been designed to be easily retrofitted to any RV with an independent 30- or 50-amp cable.

On a good day, the connection point for the OEM cables can be less than stellar; the SmartPlug fixes the problems commonly associated with systems used in the RV industry with a four-stage solution. First off, the sleeve design and multipoint locking system

**1)** The original plastic receptacle is removed from the exterior wall to gain access to the wiring. **2)** The wires are removed from the receptacle, which is an easy process. **3)** Once the cover plate is slid over the receptacle, the wires are attached following color-coding on each terminal. A provided Allen wrench is used to tighten the wires. There is usually plenty of wire to work with. **4)** The SmartPlug receptacle is screwed onto the wall using existing holes. **5)** The plug that goes into the RV is cut off the cable using a professional tool. Large wire cutters can be used by attacking the wires individually. Make sure the cable is unplugged from any electrical source. **6)** The robust seal is pulled away to gain access to the screws.

## DIFFICULTY

1 2 3 4 5

## TIME TO COMPLETE

1 HOUR

## TOOLS NEEDED

SCREW GUN WITH PHILLIPS AND SQUARE DRIVE BITS, WIRE STRIPPER, WIRE CUTTER, MEASURING TAPE



**PLUG-IN POWER »** The SmartPlug 50-amp kit comes with everything needed to make the conversion.



**7)** The screws are removed from the new plug to expose the terminals. **8)** Two inches of insulation are carefully cut away from the wires. It's important not to cut into any wires during this process. **9)** A special sleeve is provided for controlling the wires when pushing through the boot. Water is used to reduce friction when threading the cable. **10)** After stripping each wire, the ends are connected to the terminals and tightened with the Allen wrench. Color-coding prevents mistakes. **11)** A strong retaining collar prevents the wires from being pulled out of the plug when the cable is handled improperly. **12)** A multi-point latching system allows the plug to be seated in the receptacle with alacrity. An early version of the SmartPlug was installed here; the company has made improvements to the boot to prevent moisture intrusion.

make the connection incredibly secure when compared to twist-lock counterparts. The pin contact area is much larger and, according to the company, provides 20 times the electrical conductivity — and less arcing, which can lead to shorting and overheating. Three weatherproof seals prevent moisture intrusion and resultant corrosion so electrical conductivity is not compromised. The plug is seated in the receptacle with conviction, and the locking mechanism is pretty impressive — and will restore happy faces to those frustrated with wrestling with standard plastic systems.

External components are made of marine-grade 316 stainless steel, and the pins are nickel-plated brass. The plastics are ultraviolet (UV) protected and heat-resistant. SmartPlug stands behind its product with a seven-year warranty.

Installation requires only a few electrical tools and some wiring experience. Clear step-by-step instructions and supportive videos on the company's website make the process almost fool-proof. The connection points for wires are even color-coded, so installers need no previous knowledge of 120-volt AC systems. We completed the installation in less than one hour.

The photos on these pages illustrate the process on a fifth-wheel with a 50-amp system. The kit retails for \$285 and includes everything needed to make the swap. A 30-amp kit sells for \$227. 🚐

#### SmartPlug Systems

206-285-2990, [www.smartplug.com](http://www.smartplug.com)



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## Hung Out to Dry

As an active outdoorsman and RVer, I often need a place to hang clothes or rain gear to dry. Since our RV does not have a clothesline in the shower stall, I made a simple one myself. I installed two self-adhesive plastic hooks on opposite corners of the shower. I then drilled a hole in each end of an old broom handle, threaded a shoelace through each hole and knotted both shoelaces to hold them in place. At the other end of each shoelace, I made a loop for hanging them on the hooks.

Now I have a clothesline that's easy to set up. When I don't need to hang wet clothes, it gets stored away, and the hooks can be used for washcloths or a bath loofah with rope.

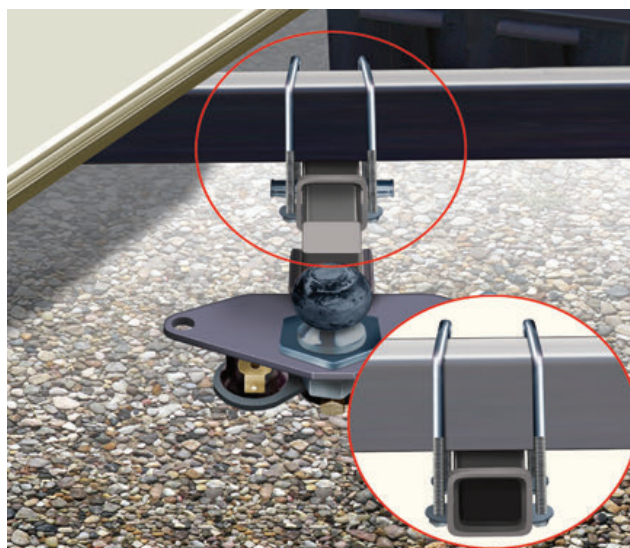
**Dennis Michael, Lewiston, Idaho**



## Cure for Kamikaze Spice Bottles

After going through many spice racks and bottles, and cleaning up scattered spices after the bottles fell off the sliding pantry shelves, my wife decided to recycle some of our prescription bottles. She sanitized the containers, dried them thoroughly and then filled them with spices. The lids are labeled for easy viewing, they fit perfectly on the pantry shelves, and they stay put.

**Bud Linardy, Sierra Vista, Arizona**



## Shin-Saving Hitch Holder

When we got our new travel trailer, it required a weight-distributing hitch. It's a much heavier hitch than our previous one and presented the problem of what to do with the ball mount once we got to the campground. If I left it on the truck, it was a guaranteed "shin-buster" while walking around the truck. My solution was to attach a hitch receiver to the trailer A-frame with large U-bolts. Now I take the ball mount off the truck and lock it in the hitch receiver for the duration of the camping trip. Total cost was around \$30.

**Dann Yeager, Vestal, New York** 📧

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

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1125 PSI VERTICAL  
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**DOUBLE-BEVEL WATER SAW WITH LASER GUIDE**  
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**3-IN-1 PORTABLE POWER PAK WITH JUMP STARTER**  
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## Kingpin Collar

The kingpin makes hooking up a fifth-wheel trailer quick and easy — for both owners and thieves. To prevent theft, Bolt's new Fifth Wheel King Pin Locking System utilizes a U-shaped locking collar that wraps around the kingpin, keeping it from being slid into a fifth-wheel hitch. The collar is locked in place with Bolt's 5/8-inch Receiver Lock (sold separately), which can be keyed to the owner's tow-vehicle ignition key. The hardened-steel collar and stainless-steel locking pin act as a visible theft deterrent; both components come with a limited lifetime warranty.

**MSRP: \$14.99**

**844-972-7547**

**www.boltlock.com**

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## Keep the Lights On

Quiet, fuel-efficient portable generators are essential for RVing in remote settings. Briggs & Stratton's PowerSmart Series P3000 inverter generator fits right in, supplying clean, stable electricity to run everything from laptops to TVs, while keeping the lights on and charging smartphones. The 3,000-watt generator is quieter than a normal conversation, according to the manufacturer, and its LCD display shows how many watts are being used. The P3000 is easily transported and can be connected to another unit to double up the power supply — ideal for RVs with air conditioners (connector kit sold separately).

**MSRP: \$1,299**

**800-743-4115**

**www.briggsandstratton.com**

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## A Fifth for Air

Owners of Ram 1500s with the factory air-ride suspension have it easy on the road, especially towing conventional trailers. But fifth-wheel owners have found it difficult to mount a hitch in the truck bed. Now that task can be just as smooth as the ride with Reese's Custom Quick Install Fifth Wheel Mounting Brackets (part number 50142) or the complete Custom Quick Install Kit with mounting brackets and 10-bolt rails (50142-58). The brackets match up with existing holes in the truck frame and fit all models of 2009 to 2016 air-ride Ram 1500 trucks. Reese, a division of Cequent Performance Products, covers the new kit with a 10-year warranty.

**MSRP: \$279/brackets, \$447/kit**

**800-632-3290, www.reeseprod.com**

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## Rest Assured

One of the most effective ways to improve the overall comfort of the RVing experience is to upgrade the standard bed with an adjustable sleeper. With more than 15 years supplying German bed systems, Axel Bloom offers adjustable beds with a frame that's only 5 inches thick. Because the motors and mechanisms that raise the mattress (at the head, shoulders, back, knees and

legs) are integrated into the frame, the system can be placed on top of an RV bed platform, and no holes or other modifications are needed to make room for a motor. Axel Bloom offers a variety of frame sizes (from twin to king), and can also custom-fit a bed system to an RV's specifications. Axel Bloom's low-profile, hypoallergenic mattresses have a "cold-foam" core and come with natural fabric covers that are machine-washable and dryable. Frames come with a three-year warranty, and mattresses are backed by a 10-year warranty.

**MSRP: Starting at \$1,750, 866-696-8387, luxuryrv.axelbloom.com**

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1	Colorado RV Adventure Travel Show	January 5-7	Colorado Convention Center
2	South Carolina RV & Camping Show - Greenville	January 6-8	TD Convention Center
3	Wisconsin RV Super Show	January 6-8	Wisconsin Center
4	Knoxville RV Super Show	January 6-8	Sevierville Convention Center
5	Mid-America RV Show	January 12-15	Bartle Hall at Kansas City Convention Center
6	Washington Camping RV Expo	January 13-15	Dulles Expo Center
7	New Jersey RV & Camping Show - Edison	January 20-22	New Jersey Convention & Expo Center
8	Chattanooga RV Super Show	January 20-22	Chattanooga Convention Center
9	Cincinnati-Dayton RV Super Show	February 2-5	Airport Expo Center
10	Minneapolis/St. Paul RV, Vacation & Camping Show	February 9-12	Minneapolis Convention Center
11	Richmond Camping RV Expo	February 10-12	Richmond International Raceway Complex
12	Columbus RV Super Show	February 10-12	Greater Columbus Convention Center
13	Atlantic City RV & Camping Show	February 17-19	Atlantic City Convention Center
14	Harrisburg RV & Camping Show	February 23-26	PA Farm Show Complex & Expo Center
15	Good Sam RV Super Show	February 23-26	Phoenix International Raceway
16	Colorado RV, Sports & Travel Show	March 2-5	National Western Complex
17	Rhode Island RV & Camping Show & Sale	March 3-5	Rhode Island Convention Center
18	Virginia RV Show	March 10-12	Hampton Roads Convention Center

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GRAS1428 - 0916

## INTERIOR LIGHTS DIMMING

**Q** Our 2012 Keystone Cougar High Country 321RES had the problem of lights going bright, then dim. We tried installing a new battery in the trailer, but that didn't help. When we asked the service technician at our local RV dealership which power supply would be better than the WFCO WF-9875 converter/charger that was installed at the factory, he said, "Almost any." That suggests to me that consulting with WFCO tech support might be fruitless.

The trailer's converter was in an accessible location, so I ordered a replacement with equal capacity from another manufacturer and supervised its installation by my wife, who fit in that "accessible" location better than I did. Problem solved. Our lights have been strong ever since, and the new system came with a remote that gives an idea of the state of charge of the battery. We are in the process of replacing the trailer's incandescent lights with LEDs to reduce the battery load in case we are dry camping.

**Ed Austin, Newport News, Virginia**



**A** I think that mechanic's assessment of the 9875 converter may have been a bit hasty, Ed, as it's not a bottom-end converter. Among other features, it has three-stage charging (float, absorption and bulk), so it's what we call a "smart" converter that doesn't harm the battery. It's possible your original converter was defective, which would have been a shame, given its relatively young age, but replacing it with a new upgrade model was a good idea, and we're glad to hear it solved the fluctuating-light problem. — **Jeff Johnston**

## FEAR OF WIND

**Q** We have a 2016 Ford F-150 Crew Cab with the EcoBoost engine and pull a 2014 Keystone Passport 31RE travel trailer (it's actually 34 feet long). We seldom haul the trailer with water in any of the tanks and don't carry much in the truck bed, so I don't think we are exceeding the 690-pound hitch weight. Connecting the two is an Equal-i-zer 10K weight-distributing (WD) hitch that was installed when we purchased the trailer new two years ago.

On our trip to California last spring, we were almost blown off the road by a freak gust of wind near Las Vegas that really scared us, making us fearful and anxious for the rest of the two-week trip. Only luck, my husband Rick's skill and the grace of God enabled us to pull

to the side of the highway. Since then, we no longer feel safe with our trailer, fearing windy days, even to the point of canceling travel. We still experience sway in higher wind conditions.

We are questioning whether our tow vehicle is too light, the trailer is too long, the wheelbase of the trailer is too short, it sits too high off the road, etc. We had hoped that this trailer (which we dearly love) would be our retirement RV, enabling us to travel all over the West in comfort and safety. But now we are actually considering selling it. Wyoming, Montana and the West's open spaces all come with big wind.

**Kay Poston, Centennial, Colorado**

**A** That trailer is a long one, for sure, but your truck should be up to the

task of towing it. First, you didn't tell us your truck's tow rating or the trailer's true weight loaded and ready for the road. Those figures can have a bearing on stability. Given your hardware's relatively young age, we can presume all of the gear is in good mechanical condition with effective shock absorbers, good tires and the like.

For the moment, we can suggest a few things. First, be sure that your trailer's hitch weight is at least 10 percent of the overall trailer weight. Insufficient hitch weight is one of the most common problems leading to trailer sway. Be sure your vehicle's WD-hitch spring bars are adjusted tightly enough. If they are not, the hitch can remove enough weight from the truck's front end that it affects steering precision, which can induce sway and overall handling.

If you can't move enough heavy cargo forward to adjust trailer weight distribution, do a bit of spelunking to find out where the freshwater tank is located. With the bath and kitchen located ahead of the axles, the tank may be for-

### THE TECH TEAM



**CHRIS DOUGHERTY:** Technical editor for *Trailer Life* and *MotorHome*, Chris is an RVDA/RVIA certified technician, former service manager and lifelong RVer.



**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.



ward of the axles. If that's the case, you might want to consider carrying a few gallons of water for the sake of the extra weight that would add up front.

Finally, check to see how the trailer rides when hitched up. The frame should be parallel to the ground. If the hitch ball is adjusted too high, with the trailer's aft end down somewhat, that's a less-stable towing position than with the chassis level or slightly down at the

hitch. Try moving the hitch head down a notch or two, as needed, and readjust the spring-bar tension to keep them suitably snug. These steps should help the sway condition and get you back on the road. — J.J.

### HITCH PIN BENDING

**Q** I have a 2013 Chevrolet 3500 with a factory 2½-inch receiver. I am using

the supplied sleeve that allows me to use a 2-inch-mount Equal-i-zer hitch. For the past couple of years, I have noticed that the hitch pin retaining clips are being bent; one was even broken. Recently, I noticed when I got home that the retaining pin was gone! That could have been a disaster had the hitch pin fallen out.

Last week, when I installed the hitch, I noted the position of the retaining pin. When I arrived at my destination, 80 miles away, the hitch pin had rotated, and the retaining clip was again bent.

Is there a problem with using a sleeve in a 2½-inch receiver so that one can use a 2-inch ball mount?

**Paul Roubinet, Bountiful, Utah**

**A** This is an interesting question and problem, Paul, and we can safely say it's never come up before. When you refer to retaining pin clips, we're guessing you mean the spring clip with one straight side and one contoured side that fits the hole in the receiver pin to secure it. We're also guessing this has something to do with the total package of the hitch, receiver and receiver adapter.

How tightly do all the parts fit? If the 2½-inch adapter is somewhat loose in the receiver, and the 2-inch hitch-head shank is loose in the adapter, there could be enough movement between the parts to cause the pin to shift toward one side and damage the retaining clip. You could try swapping the retaining pin from one side to the other — insert it from the left instead of the right, for example — and that would cause the pin movement during travel to place pressure on the bent end of the pin instead of the much smaller retaining clip. You could also replace the pin with a locking-type pin that has a padlock mechanism instead of the smaller spring pin.

Odd as it sounds, shifting some cargo in the trailer so there's more weight on the hitch may help. If there's insufficient weight, every time you drive over a bump or small undulation in the road, the lightly weighted hitch moves up and down, and that movement can be affecting the hitch retaining pin and



3 months into ownership of our rig we had a height related accident. At a fuel stop, we cleared the stations overhead going into the fuel island, but there was a road grade change that altered the clearance height. We hit the overhead as we pulled out . . . we brought the damaged rig to our dealership.

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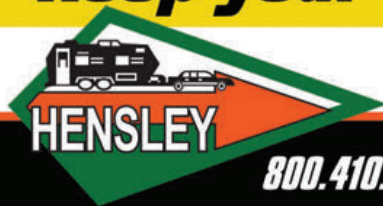
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## RV CLINIC

clip. More hitch weight means less movement. It's worth a try.

Another thing to try would be to find a friend with an action video camera like the GoPro Hero, if you don't already have one. Mount the camera so it's viewing the pin area, and drive for a while. Review the footage to see if you can tell at which point the pin is being affected strongly enough to bend it. This won't solve the problem, but it may give you some insight into what's causing it. — J.J.

## RAM BED SAG ... AGAIN

I read Shawn Kirchner's "Ram Truck-Bed Sag" letter in the September 2016 RV Clinic. I also have a 2016 Ram 3500 and tow a 40-foot fifth-wheel — a Keystone Montana — and have experienced the same type of sag.

I did just what you advised and installed an air-bag system — the Air Lift LoadLifter 5000 Ultimate with the WirelessOne compressor. The install was easy and took about two hours, and the compressor is controlled by a wireless remote. It does a great job leveling the truck while the fifth-wheel is hooked up, and the improved handling of my Ram was very noticeable.

**Ed Kosakowski, Brewerton, New York**

Thanks, Ed. We frequently recommend adding air bags as a solution for a sagging aft end on a pickup towing a fifth-wheel, and it's good to hear a successful firsthand report. It's also interesting to hear your report on the wireless remote. We're sure our readers will likewise find the information useful. — J.J.

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## ALL JACKED UP

**Q** I jack my lightweight trailer up for winter storage to avoid flat spots and tire bulge, but the owner's manual says not to do this using the axles as the supports on the tandems. I called Dexter Axle and spoke to two engineers who said I could bend the axles that way, and that they do not recommend jacking the trailer up using the axles. I asked more specifically, stating that my aluminum trailer weighs only 3,200 pounds, and dividing that weight and subtracting the

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

tongue weight would mean that only 700 pounds would be pressed on each end of each axle. I further asked if they could give me the PSI strength of each axle exerted on each jack stand, and they said they didn't know.

I have used this method to check for tire bulge and adjust brake drums, noting that the axles on my Livin' Lite trailer are massive and cannot be bent using two floor jacks to lift one side at a time. What is your opinion?

**Barry Vanslager, Granger, Indiana**

**A** Barry, we agree with the folks at Dexter, and the other axle manufacturers will concur. Trailer axles are hollow tubes that are often built to share the weight of the trailer. Jacking the trailer up by a small point on an axle would likely cause irreparable damage by kinking or bending the tube, which can lead to misalignment and tire wear or failure, or in a worst-case scenario, complete axle failure and wheel separation. Trailer jacking should always be done on the frame of the trailer or at specific jacking points outlined in the owner's manual for some of the lighter-weight chassis. — **Chris Dougherty**

## HEAVYWEIGHT BATTLE

**Q** I finally got a chance to weigh my truck and trailer loaded up as we typically travel and was surprised at the results. The truck is a 2011 Ford F-150 Crew Cab shortbed with no modifications and a weight-distributing hitch. The trailer is a 30-foot Dutchmen Komfort 2410RK. The weights are as follows: truck front axle: 2,920 pounds (21 percent); truck rear axle: 4,120 pounds (30 percent); trailer axles: 6,900 pounds (49 percent); total truck and trailer: 13,940 pounds.

I have two questions. First, should there be more weight on the front truck axle and less on the rear axle — closer to 25 percent front and 25 percent rear? And, if so, does that mean the WD hitch is not correctly adjusted? Second, since the gross axle weight rating for the truck rear axle is listed as 3,850 pounds on the chassis sticker, am I overloading the rear axle by 270 pounds?

I have naively driven this combo for more than two years and more than 14,000 miles without noticing a handling or stopping issue, even over rough or whoop-dee-doo roads. Any guidance you can give me would be appreciated.

**Bill Wessale, Spring Branch, Texas**

**A** First of all, Bill, we're glad you weighed your trailer and truck. Many RVers don't do this and then wonder why they have handling and tire issues. However, you didn't say exactly which truck and power train you have, so we can't tell if the truck's tow rating is exceeded.

When setting up a WD hitch, weigh the A-frame of the trailer using a portable or public scale. If one is not available, make an assumption that the hitch weight is 10 to 15 percent of the gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of the trailer and use this number to size an appropriate hitch. When setting up the hitch, take measurements at the bumpers or wheel wells of the truck, front and back, before and after adjusting the spring bars to confirm that any drop in suspension height is equal, front and rear.

If the numbers you quote are correct, then, yes, the rear axle is overloaded, and this condition should be corrected. This can be done by reducing the amount of weight in the truck and redistributing the weight in the trailer rearward. Take care with this last step, though — you want to maintain adequate hitch weight to prevent handling problems. — **C.D.**

## SLIDEOUT POWER

**Q** The answer to Ron Stevens' "Slideout Won't Retract" letter in the September 2016 RV Clinic said slides work off 12-volt batteries. I've been operating mine on 120 volts AC. Is this a concern, or will it cause problems?

**Bobby Rutherford, Fruitland Park, Florida**

**A** RVs have two electrical systems and operate appliances and accessories on 12-volt DC or 120-volt AC power. The 12-volt DC system uses a battery to power things like lights, certain appliance circuit boards, the water



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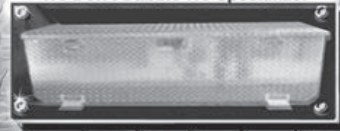


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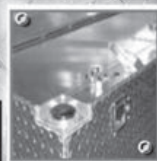
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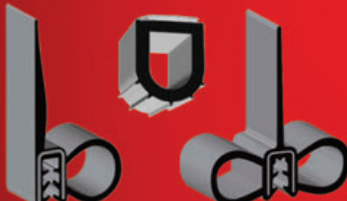


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pump, furnace and so on. The power converter is used to provide 12-volt DC electricity at a given amperage to the RV and to partially charge the battery. The battery, besides being a power source when the trailer is off the grid, also acts as a buffer for the converter when higher loads, like slideout motors, are operated.

Because RVs are designed to operate as standalone vehicles, without any connection to shorepower, the slideouts are designed to work on 12-volt DC power. When plugged in to shorepower, they're still working on 12-volt DC, but the power can be supplied by the converter.

As a rule, it is always better to have a battery connected to the 12-volt DC system when operating the slideouts. The stress of the added amp draw can shorten the life of the converter, which can be a costly repair. Having a battery on the trailer also ensures that appliances like an RV refrigerator continue to operate, provided they have LP-gas, if the shorepower is lost or not available. — C.D.

### KINGPIN WEIGHT

**Q** The pin weight for my fifth-wheel is listed at 2,095 pounds. Can I assume this is with the unit unloaded? If so, this figure would seem to be a minimum, and dependent on the cargo load and distribution. Choosing a tow vehicle with sufficient payload capacity should take this into consideration, correct?

Jim Georger, Lyndonville, New York

**A** You're absolutely correct, Jim. The pin weight listed in a brochure, for example, also may not include some factory-and-dealer-installed options or the weight of LP-gas. As a rule, the pin weight of a fifth-wheel is about 15 to 24 percent of the GVWR of the trailer. To know for sure, weigh the trailer after it is loaded for a typical trip. — C.D.

### BLACK-WATER FLUSH

**Q** I have a 2011 Montana Mountaineer 33-foot fifth-wheel that has an exterior connection to flush the black-water tank. The last time I used this, the water began gushing from the wall behind



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the toilet (near the ceiling!), rather than going to the black-water tank.

When I got home, I removed the panel in the pass-through storage area to expose the plumbing. The line for the flush leads from its outside panel to, and up into, the wall cavity behind the toilet, then comes down the wall cavity and goes into the black-water tank.

First, why does this line not go directly to the black-water tank? Second, how does one begin to find a leak and repair it without tearing the interior wall apart? I have spoken with four different repair shops, and no one seems to have any suggestions other than tearing out the wall.

**Larry Aalbu, Snohomish, Washington**

**A** The reason manufacturers do this is to provide a high point in the plumbing to help eliminate siphoning from the black tank through to the outside connection. In many cases, in addition to just a loop, an anti-siphoning device is attached at the top of the loop, and this is frequently where the leaks come from.

I would recommend pressurizing the black-water flush with low-pressure compressed air to help find the leak. Now the tank end will be open, so you won't have the full pressure you put into it, but you should have a good indication of where the leak is. Around 40 psi should be adequate.

If the manufacturer hid that connection in the wall, then opening up the wall is the only way to correct the problem, other than replumbing the system and bypassing that section of pipe altogether. If you do that, though, make sure that you have an anti-siphoning device in-line on a high point in the system and that there are no low points that can hold water, because they can freeze and break during the winter. — **C.D.**

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Leaving our truck in the parking lot off Route 89 and walking the  $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile trail to the Horseshoe Bend overlook, we crested a hill and suddenly glimpsed an immense ditch in the distance and people scurrying across the flat, barren landscape to peer over the edge. Filled with excitement, we ran the rest of the way. At the rim, the land under our hiking boots suddenly fell away

and plunged 1,000 feet to the river below, and we both held our breath in awe.

The scene before us didn't seem real. Massive flat boulders created a platform surrounding the canyon's edge, and tiny mountains in the distance formed an undulating horizon. Far beneath us, kayaks and rafts floated around the 180-degree bend, mere specks on the vivid blue-satin ribbon of water.

We stood cheek-by-jowl with a boisterous throng of people that evening, as the sun cast its golden glow on the sheer rock walls before making its colorful descent. But serenity reigned when we returned the next morning at dawn, and a magical sunrise chased the night's shadows down the silent canyon walls. 📸



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