

GOOD AS GOLD: SIXTH-ANNUAL READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

TRAILER LIFE

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Minnie Drop Rear-Kitchen Retro



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- » RECURVE R6 WEIGHT-DISTRIBUTING HITCH
- » SUPERGLIDE AUTOMATIC FIFTH-WHEEL SLIDER

RV SHOWGOING

- » 10 TIPS FOR SUCCESS

NEW FOR 2018
19 TRENDSETTING
TOWABLES

Rock Bottom
Arizona's Petrified Forest



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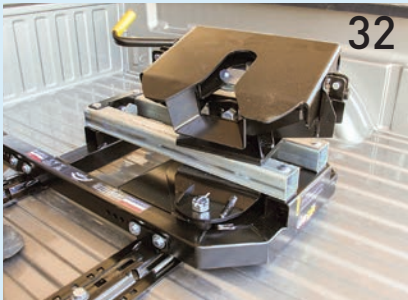
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We have much more to say about this amazing hitch!
Visit our website at www.pullrite.com/TL4 to learn more!



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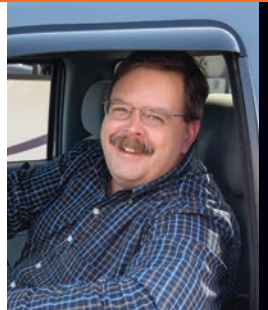
Petrified Forest National Park, Arizona

.....
 🚛 **Trailer Life's annual RV survey reveals readers' favorite trucks, trailers and more. Page 48**

On the cover: Enjoying sunset at Elkhart Campground in Indiana under the awning of Winnebago's Minnie Drop. Photo by Shawn Spence

It's Show Season

If you're into RVing, RV shows are must-go events



January can be tough for those of us living in the northern parts of the country. Having spent most of my life in the Hudson Valley of New York, I can predict that weather in the Northeast over the next few months will be dreary at best. But there is a bright spot: RV show season. Attending RV shows is a great way to see all types of new RVs and get a well-rounded RV education.

Years ago when I was in the market for an RV, I'd visit a number of shows to get an idea of the makes and models I liked, and find the floorplan I wanted later on a dealer's lot or at an RV rally. That was then. Now, with this magazine and our annual *RV Buyer's Guide*, and their respective websites, www.trailerlife.com and www.rvbg.com, as well as the manufacturers' websites, buyers have the opportunity to study up beforehand with the goal of purchasing an RV at a show and taking advantage of special pricing.

A good place to start learning about the latest models is the roundup of towable RVs that debuted at September 2017's RV show in Hershey, Pennsylvania, and October's RV Open House in Elkhart, Indiana (page 20). From tiny trailers to luxury toy haulers, these new models are already rolling into RV shows and dealerships.

Beyond displaying new RVs and offering deals, many shows stage educational seminars, and the larger shows have manufacturers' reps on hand to answer technical questions. On page 38, veteran showgoers and authors Stephanie and Jeremy Puglisi suggest more ways to make the most of RV shows.

Whether you're shopping for a new trailer or fifth-wheel, you'll want to make sure it's paired with a suitable tow vehicle. Our annual *Guide to Towing* can help. With nearly 1,000 manufacturer-supplied maximum tow ratings, the enclosed guide lists how much the 2018 vehicles can tow so you can make informed decisions. Tow limits for vehicles going back to 1999 are available on our website at www.trailerlife.com/trailer-towing-guides.

The tally is in, and we've published the results from the recent Readers' Choice Awards poll on page 48. The sixth annual survey of your favorite RV products and places not only shares what's hot with fellow enthusiasts, it also lets the industry know what's working and is a barometer of RV-lifestyle trends.

Speaking of trends, small trailers are big business these days. Many manufacturers are building lightweight and compact RVs to answer the demand. On page 14, Elkhart contributor Barb Riley tests the 2018 Winnebago Minnie Drop. The rear-kitchen 1790 is a nice little trailer with all the comforts of home on the road.

I hope you have a happy new year full of great RV travels. See you on the road — or at an RV show! 📞

— Chris Dougherty, Technical Editor

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your neighbors, your friends.
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All About Etiquette

Wow! It's like *Trailer Life's* editors were reading my mind! I opened my November 2017 issue upon returning from our vacation and immediately saw a great article on the very subject I was intending to write you about. "RVers' Guide to Good Manners" by Stephanie and Jeremy Puglisi pretty much hit on everything I had thought about, and then some.

Our two biggest peeves are yapping dogs and lights shining in our RV's windows at night. I certainly have no complaints about latecomers using outside lighting to assist in positioning their RVs and setting them up for the night. But — *please!* — when that stuff is done, turn off the ball-stadium lights and don't replace them with a string of 100 cute little LEDs dangling from the awning!

And please don't leave your doggie in your RV to yap all day while you're off seeing the sights. Most people who do this probably don't even realize their dog is barking. After they say goodbye and their car disappears from Snuggles' sight at the RV window, the dog begins barking and doesn't stop until they return. Snuggles, of course, wags her tail and promptly falls asleep (she's exhausted after barking all day), while her owners smile with pride at what a good little traveler she is.

J. Charles Hill

Catron County, New Mexico

The Puglisis' article came in a very timely manner, as my wife and I were still talking about the issues we ran across at a campground in eastern Virginia. I won't name the campground, but I will say that my wife and I were appalled at the camping manners we encountered.

Every day during our eight-day stay we had people cutting through our campsite. This was multiple times per day, and we always asked them nicely not to. Some did go around, but others said nasty things to us. We tried taking walks, but 12-year-olds driving golf carts at full speed nearly ran us over,

Truth or Scare?

In the November 2017 issue, I read with interest "San Jose's Curious Creation" about the Winchester Mystery House, as I visited the "house" in the late 1960s or early '70s. As Pauline Milner wrote in the article, we were told that the stairs that went nowhere, the doors that opened onto blank walls and the hidden passages were intended to confuse the spirits of those that perished from the famous Winchester rifle. We were also told that the ongoing construction during Sarah Winchester's life was because a fortune-teller told her that as long as the house was in an unfinished, constant state of construction, she would not die.

George Nachtsheim, Littleton, Colorado



While some sources attribute the mansion's continuous construction to a psychic's advice, others claim that is a myth circulated by guides to spice up the tours. An upcoming movie, Winchester: The House that Ghosts Built, starring Helen Mirren [left] as the heiress to the Winchester fortune, takes the former stance. The film is scheduled to open in theaters on February 2. — Editors

often yelling as they approached us to get out of the way.

I had one person ask if my grill and propane tank were locked down. When I told him no, he said, "Don't be surprised if they vanish during the night." I locked the grill and tank to the picnic table with a cable I had in my truck. I've never had to do this!

You can see why your article was so timely. We'll probably laminate it and put it in our RV for guests to read.

Larry and Faye Krainson

Longmeadow, Massachusetts

Shortly after reading November's etiquette article, we went to the hot tub at the RV park where we were staying for the weekend. Three young children were playing there: a toddler in water diapers and two kids who were maybe ages five and seven. Now, a hot tub is not really intended for children; the heat isn't good for their bodies. And it isn't the place for food and floaty pool toys. Sharing a hot tub with kids is OK, as long as it isn't viewed as a special kiddie pool.

Phil Burtis, Newport Beach, California

Although observing quiet hours was referred to in your RV manners article, the lack of mentioning generators astonished me. Many beautiful days, nights and mornings have been ruined by the noise of generators.

RVers staying in campgrounds where there are no electric hookups should act like they're camping. Use a drip coffeemaker or a pot or pan instead of a microwave. And we don't want to watch your outside TV. If you need those things, go to an RV park with hookups, but please stay away from our national parks and forests.

The article did mention my second biggest campground problem, and that is outdoor lights. We have a pop-up pickup camper, and if we close our windows to block the lights, we do not get any ventilation. I enjoy stargazing, but it is often impossible.

Jo Ann Herr, Oakland, California 📧

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Waterfalls of Dogwood Canyon

Near Branson, Missouri, a nature park overflows with bottomless green pools, hiking and biking trails, and dramatic landscape

article and photo by **Starla Hester**

While on a visit to Branson, Missouri, we never thought we would find such a beautiful nature park outside the busy entertainment city, about 45 minutes away in Lampe, Missouri. The founder of Bass Pro Shops, Johnny Morris, acquired the 10,000 acres of the Ozark Mountains, best known as Dogwood Canyon, in 1990, and since then it has been preserved for the public's enjoyment.

Dogwood Canyon Nature Park is located right on the Arkansas-Missouri state line. On our nature hike, while strolling the paved trail, we were amazed to walk out of Missouri and into Arkansas in a couple steps. Even more amazing were the waterfalls we encountered along the trail — more than a dozen of them on our 6.5-mile hike through the Ozarks. Each was unique with different size falls and distinctive sounds of the water hitting the rocks.

A small 1800s-replica church, Hope Wilderness Chapel, sits between the hiking trail and a creek with a view of a large waterfall cascading down rocks. Because of its lovely setting, the church is often used for weddings and vow renewals. As you walk farther down the trail, you come to several bridges that are handmade of stone. The arches and structure of the bridges give



The view of a large waterfall at the entrance to Dogwood Canyon can be enjoyed from inside the onsite café or from its patio. The 10,000-acre park recently reopened and is managed by the canyon's nonprofit organization, dedicated to protecting the plants and wildlife.

them a timeless and indestructible appearance.

The last waterfall on the trail, Wish Bowl Falls, is a large cascade that flows down one slick wall of a rock formation. The wall made the water look like it was threaded with silver glitter as it trickled down. I waded into the cool, clear water and listened to the calming sounds of the falls, as bright-yellow fish swam around me. Wish Bowl Falls was unquestionably worth the long walk to the end.

The trail is also open to hiking, biking, fly-fishing, Segways and Jeep tours. The park has a restaurant onsite and a beautiful treehouse that was magical for our four-year-old godson, one that every little boy and even adults dream to own.

Bridges, caves and wildlife can also be seen throughout the preserve,

plus there's a bison habitat. The park is very accommodating to anyone with special needs and has strollers for rent for just a few dollars. There was so much to explore that it took my family the whole day to see it all. Each waterfall is a must-see and a must-hear. The park has a way of captivating you and lifting your spirits.

Dogwood Canyon Nature Park
www.dogwoodcanyon.org

Branson, Missouri, RV Parks
(about 30 miles from Lampe)
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Open year-round, but the office closes for winter from December 5 through mid-March. Winter rates start at \$25. 800-671-4399, www.abc-branson.com

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www.bransonlakesidervpark.com

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Dustin Johns

DUSTIN JOHNS
PRESIDENT & CEO

TRAVEL LITE RV

On a Crusade

If you like a lot of choices, Prime Time Manufacturing's Crusader fifth-wheel line will give you just that. There are two distinct products in the line: the full-size Crusader, and the Crusader Lite, which is the company's smallest and lightest fifth-wheel. The Crusaders feature contemporary interiors with residential touches such as stainless-steel appliances, Shaker-style interior doors, Furrion stereos and speakers, and modern bedspreads and window treatments.

Seven floorplans are available in the Lite line. Exterior lengths start at 29 feet for the 26RE, with an unloaded vehicle weight of 7,282 pounds, and go up to 38 feet. All have solid-wood-core cabinets, a residential-size shower with glass doors, a double-bowl kitchen sink with a high-rise metal faucet, a queen walk-around bed with nightstands on each side and a 60-gallon freshwater tank.

At just under 34 feet, the three-slide Crusader 319RKT features a large rear kitchen with an L-shaped counter, theater seating and an entertainment center with a 50-inch HDTV.



The Crusader, the company's flagship RV, is offered in 10 floorplans, two that are new for 2018. The 42-foot 381MBH and 382MBH both have a bunk room with a loft and four slides, one housing the queen bed (king optional), kitchen island and outdoor kitchen. The 381MBH is standard-equipped with a 20-cubic-foot residential refrigerator.

Said Product Manager Paul Morrison, "We've added some really impressive features to complement our redesigned contemporary interiors. MORyde's StepAbove Zero Gravity entry steps and Furrion's residential cooktop and oven highlight the numerous improvements we've made."

Base MSRP for the Crusader is \$40,000 to \$54,000, and \$34,000 to 45,000 for the Crusader Lite.

Prime Time Manufacturing
574-862-3001, www.primetimerv.com



NEWSWIRE

SAFETY SEMINAR



RVSEF Online Course

One of the RV Safety & Education Foundation's (RVSEF) most popular RV consumer-safety programs will be available online only starting in April. The website's RV Driving Safety program is self-directed so RVers can study on their own time. The course will take approximately four to six cumulative hours to complete. The RV Driving Safety Program is recognized and supported by the National Safety Council, National RV Dealers Association and Recreation Vehicle Industry Association. Enrollment is \$49.95, and a detailed course-companion manual can be purchased for an additional \$20. www.rvsafety.com

HYDRONIC HEATING



Aqua-Hot's Hot Stuff

Aqua-Hot, manufacturer of hydronic heating systems, has introduced the 200 Series heat and hot-water system for fifth-wheels and travel trailers. Previously, Aqua-Hot's systems were available only in Class A motorhomes because of their large size. The new 200 is available in propane and diesel with an optional 120-volt AC electric element. The system delivers residential-style interior comfort heating through heat exchangers and provides continuous hot water. The company says the all-in-one Aqua-Hot system is available for any towable and can be purchased through RV dealers. www.aqua-hot.com

California Cook-Off

Pala RV Resort and Casino in Southern California is hosting a Tailgaters Chili Cook-Off Weekend, January 19 and 20. Pala is located near Temecula, known for its mild temperatures, wineries and hot-air balloon rides. The RV resort has 100 full-hookup campsites and free shuttle service to the casino.

The cook-off starts at high noon, with prizes for the best chili. Guests are encouraged to decorate RV sites with their favorite football team's colors and join in on Beer Bingo (21 and older).

844-472-5278

www.palacasino.com/resort/rv-resort



Arizona Gems

Snowbirds flocking to the Grand Canyon State enjoy mild temperatures and sunshine in Tucson and much of the surrounding area. There's something for every family member to enjoy, from the Pima Air and Space Museum, with more than 300 historical aircraft, to docent-led tours of Mission San Xavier del Bac, a National Historic Landmark and the oldest intact European structure in Arizona. Nearby in Oracle is Biosphere 2, the world's largest earth-science laboratory.

Here are some other activities RVers can enjoy during the winter months:

Wings Over Willcox Birding and Nature Festival, January 11 to 14: Tens of thousands of sandhill cranes gather near Willcox every winter, as do roughly 500 other species of birds that make their temporary or permanent home in the area, including hawks, owls and eagles. Events include birding and photography tours and activities for children. www.wingsoverwillcox.com

Tucson Gem, Mineral and Fossil Showcase, January 25 to February 11: The world's largest gathering of gem, mineral and fossil buyers and sellers features hundreds of dealers setting up shop in various venues around town and

at the Tucson Convention Center. www.visittucson.org

Cochise Cowboy Poetry and Music Gathering, February 2 to 4: This event in Sierra Vista is an annual gathering of poets, musicians, singers and storytellers, with a barn dance and Western-swing theme. www.cowboypoets.com

Tubac Festival of the Arts, February 7 to 11: The oldest art festival in southern Arizona features 170 visiting artists. www.tubacaz.com

Tucson Rodeo Parade, February 22: Rodeo competitions sanctioned by the



Pima Air and Space Museum

Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association plus a large nonmotorized parade at the Tucson Rodeo Grounds. www.tucsonrodeoparade.org

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Sierra Vista RV Park
520-459-1690, www.sierravistarvpark.com

Tucson

Mission View RV Resort
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Current Event

A Georgia reader asked RV Resolutions for help when his portable power protector failed:

► I purchased a Progressive Industries EMS-PT50C surge-protection unit on March 31, 2017. I used it three times, and it worked perfectly, but then it started showing an error code of E5. I filed a warranty claim with Progressive Industries that was denied. Progressive said an E5 error code indicates possible water damage. The unit was never subjected to rain or water.

The decision to purchase from Progressive was made because of the company's customer service and warranty. I feel they should honor my claim.

Gerald Crockett, McDonough, Georgia

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

Progressive Industries was acquired in April 2017 by another corporation. As with any acquisition, there have been numerous areas of transition. The timing of our warranty transition affected Mr. Crockett in an unfortunate way, and it seems the appropriate information and documentation were not implemented or executed. We are in

the process of replacing Mr. Crockett's product with a brand-new model, the EMS-PT50X.

We pride ourselves on our lifetime warranty and excellent customer-service group, and understand the importance of providing the best surge-protection products in the RV industry.

Progressive Industries now has a new online warranty-claim database that is clear and concise, allowing for excellent communication between us and our valued customers.

Joe Casale, Operations Manager

Progressive Industries, Apex, North Carolina



Shortly after hearing from Joe Casale, we received the following note from Gerald Crockett:

► I am happy to inform you that I received a new EMS-PT50X surge protector from Progressive Industries. My thanks to Progressive and RV Resolutions for your help in resolving this issue.

G.C.

Fifth-Wheel Fixes

After experiencing ongoing problems with their fifth-wheel, a Texas couple turned to RV Resolutions:

► We purchased a new Forest River Wildcat on June 3, 2016, from Garland RV Sales in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, and are living in it temporarily while we build a new home.

After moving the trailer to Llano, Texas, the stairs were creaking and felt soft, and the outside panels were separating on both sides. The air conditioner stopped working — not a good thing in Texas — and the water heater kept running constantly. Closet doors had come off, scratching the wood, and a bracket had broken. The rubber seal on the bedroom slide either fell out or was never put on. Warranty repairs were made, and we were without the trailer for five weeks.

In April 2017, we moved the trailer to Burnet, Texas, about 35 miles away. After setting it up, we noticed a soft spot in the floor close to the door and reported this to Forest River. The soft

spot later expanded to the kitchen and living room. Other reported items included the outside panel on the driver's side coming apart again, the air conditioner running constantly while putting out very little cool air, and the A/C and furnace unit in the bedroom never really working.

We contacted some lawyers regarding the lemon law but were told they could not represent us because Forest River had voided the warranty, claiming the fifth-wheel was our permanent residence. After we contacted the lawyers, Forest River initially refused to repair the items, even though they were covered under the original warranty. Now they have decided to fix the trailer, and they had someone pick it up to tow it to the

manufacturer's facility in Indiana.

We do not want this trailer returned to us because we have had too many major problems with it, even after repairs. Any help with this situation would be wonderful.

**David and Vesta Luna
Burnet, Texas**

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

Forest River has been working directly with the customers to resolve the issues. Currently, they are being traded into a new replacement unit. We believe the issues outlined in their letter have been resolved. Thank you for your involvement.

**Duane Casteel
Consumer Affairs Manager
Forest River, Elkhart, Indiana**

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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www.heartlandrvs.com

The Heart of Family Recreation

Heartland Recreational Vehicles, LLC, Circle 115 on Reader Service Card

Winnebago “Wo

The retro-looking Minnie Drop 1790 offers full amenities in a compact

From the very first glance, the Minnie Drop screams Americana. This little travel trailer has a nostalgia-inducing look, even for those who weren't around when today's classic RVs were new. It's easy to identify with what Winnebago is trying to convey visually, and even emotionally — who doesn't see wood paneling on a vehicle and feel

like all is right with the world? It harks back to a time when life was simpler (or at least we perceived it to be so), when you could hitch up the trailer to the family sedan and take off at a moment's notice to find your next adventure. And when the word “Winnebago” was synonymous with “RV.”

Winnebago has smartly capitalized

on that by combining a retro look and modern elements in the Minnie Drop — formerly known as the Winnie Drop but part of a rebranding shift that changed trailer names from Winnie to Minnie. The pod-reminiscent trailer comes in eight colors with the Woody panel, two lengths (18 feet, 4 inches and 20 feet, 4 inches) and six floorplans, with five



(Above, from left) The Minnie Drop 1790 has a spacious kitchen with a two-burner LP-gas cooktop and a sink with a high-arched faucet in front of a rear-facing window. The U-shaped dinette has a pull-out folding table with roomy cabinets above and underneath the seats.



odie”

rear-kitchen travel trailer

of those having a slideout. In addition, a special-edition Realtree camouflage graphics version is available in Hunter Green Noble Classic.

The Minnie Drop’s amenities vary with the layouts: five have queen beds, while one has bunk beds; four have U-shaped dinettes, while two have a traditional dinette; one has an

exterior pull-out kitchen off the back end of the trailer; some have entertainment centers in the galley, while the bedroom TV swivels around for viewing in the galley in some models.

For our test, we stayed in the 20-foot, 4-inch 1790. We enjoyed the throw-back impression while welcoming the Drop’s contemporary amenities, such as the blue LED awning light, which is placed against the exterior side wall so it can still illuminate the patio area even when the awning is retracted. Our RVing forebears weren’t able to extend

those awnings with the push of a button, and having dealt with plenty of manual awnings ourselves, we sure liked that modern update.

The patio area was an enjoyable place to relax. The Jensen JWM6A stereo/DVD player inside included exterior speakers so we could enjoy music outside via the radio, CD or an iPod or smartphone. By downloading the jControl app for Apple or Android devices, we could control the stereo and stream content while lazing under the awning. There’s an exterior 120-volt





AC outlet at the rear edge of the trailer, and an exterior shower is tucked in a panel near the front on the streetside.

Construction is, of course, also contemporary, with its $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch five-ply tongue-and-groove plywood floor, aluminum frame, block-foam insulation and gel-coat fiberglass exterior, as well as square-tube-welded rubber-torsion axles. The manual-crank stabilizing jacks were a breeze to deploy and retract. The pass-through storage at the front of the Drop is roomy and lighted.

Inside, the look is as clean as the outside. Just as we appreciated the respite from Winnebago's usual "swoosh" graphic on the Minnie's exterior, we liked the interior decor that was free of abstract, artsy patterns in dark colors. Light-colored walls and cabinetry blend

(Above, from left) Food preparation and storage are well handled with the Drop's High Pointe convection/grill microwave and 3-cubic-foot Dometic RM2351 refrigerator, and the spacious cabinets just inside the trailer's entry door can be used as a pantry or wardrobe. The street-side exterior shower comes in handy for rinsing off outdoor equipment — and dusty campers.

with fabric valances around the windows and mossy-green curtains, dinette back and bedspread. The countertop and dinette seats are black with brown swirled in, but only as an accent that doesn't dominate the color palette. The wood-pattern laminate floor is easy to keep clean. Overall, the combination made for quite a pleasant environment.

An integral part of a pleasant interior is lighting. While the small windows over the bed, dinette and kitchen sink don't allow for much natural light, Winnebago made up for that with several in-ceiling LED fixtures — five along the center of

the unit plus another in the bathroom. The flaw with those, though, is the brightness — they were all very bright, as LEDs tend to be, and there is no dimming feature. Apart from the TV on the wall next to the bed, there was no muted lighting. We'd like to see that addressed, and it wouldn't hurt to enlarge the windows, too. The blinds could also be a little more opaque for better privacy.

We did like that the kitchen window was above the sink, allowing for natural light when preparing a meal. In fact, we appreciated that the kitchen is placed at the rear, rather than midship, with a large countertop space. It's well-appointed with a two-burner range, a cover for the single-basin sink, a convection/grill microwave and a 3-cubic-foot refrigerator. The range worked fine for our needs, and the refrigerator was handily placed.

For me, the refrigerator is one of the most important elements in an RV because it's one of the things that gets used most. It kept all of our items cold, despite the heat outside, and the freezer has its own compartment, so frozen items stayed that way without affecting the refrigerated items, and vice versa.

WINNEBAGO MINNIE DROP 1790

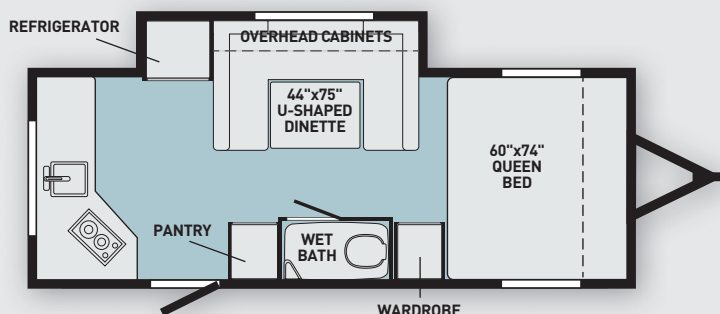


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(Top) The storage shelf above the queen-size bed is a nice place to stow books or electronics, and the TV pulls around the corner for dinette viewing. (Above) Outside, the awning lights are set against the side wall for illumination at night, even when the awning is retracted.

It was also spacious with room for a gallon of milk — always a benchmark for folks who like their breakfast cereal and coffee at all times of the day.

Because of the sloped shape of the trailer's back end, there aren't any overhead kitchen cabinets, but the two under-counter cabinets are quite roomy, with a set of three drawers for silverware and such between them. I would like to have racks or pegs on the side walls, but you can certainly add things like that yourself. There's also a big food pantry with shelves to the right of the entry door that I used to store clothing and extra linens.

Placing the kitchen at the rear keeps the main living area more open, with all the spaces dedicated to their own purpose rather than split up, making the Drop feel more spacious than a unit this size often does.

We were impressed with the amount of storage in the Minnie Drop. Apart from the spacious kitchen and pantry, there's cabinetry over and under the dinette, as well as a wardrobe between the bed and bath for hanging clothes, plus drawers below. Larger items will need to be stored underneath in the ex-



terior storage or in the tow vehicle, but there was plenty of room for everyday sundries, and then some.

The U-shaped dinette contributes to the Drop's spacious feel, but we weren't sure about how much we liked using it, functionally speaking. Being used to traditional dinettes, it took time to get used to. The table, which fits so snugly in the cutout, had to be pushed out completely every time one of us got up from the wall side. Then we had to push the table back in to make room to get around it in the aisle. Additionally, the vinyl seats started to sag where we sat the most often after just a few days. The cushions will need to be made firmer by the manufacturer or replaced by the user if they're meant for long-term use.

When it was time to put work away and get some shut-eye, the queen bed at the front did the job. "Landlocked" beds like this — walled in on three sides — aren't our preference, but this one felt roomy, and there was an overhead shelf for a little extra storage, as well as a small bedside ledge. The comfortable mattress was a pleasant surprise, and we slept well on it without needing a mattress pad or other enhancement. There were also handy electrical and USB outlets.

That brings us to the bathroom, which is placed in the center of the 1790 on the curbside. In smaller RVs like this one, sacrifices must be made somewhere, and it's simply a matter of finding a floorplan that makes sacrifices you can live with. With the Minnie Drop, that's manifested through a wet bath — a toilet and shower combination — in four of the six floorplans. This means work-arounds such as removing the toilet paper from the room before using the shower, and drying the floor and fixtures after a shower and replacing the toilet paper before doing your business.

Even so, not all wet baths are created equal. Here, the bathroom door didn't go all the way to the ceiling — good for releasing shower steam, but it allowed some water to escape while showering — and the door itself was tough to latch. The dimensions are especially small, even for a combination space like this. There isn't much room

SPECIFICATIONS

2018 WINNEBAGO MINNIE DROP 1790

Exterior Length	20' 4"
Exterior Width	6' 5" box / 8' fenders
Exterior Height	9' 3"
Interior Width	6' 2"
Interior Height	6' 5"
Construction	Aluminum structure, laminated walls with block-foam insulation, one-piece fiberglass roof
Freshwater Cap.	31 gal.
Black/Gray-Water Cap.	25/25 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	5 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	3 cu. ft.
Furnace	18,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu
Converter	55 amp
Battery	Dealer supplied
Tires	235/75R15C
Suspension	Rubber torsion
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full; no cargo)	3,460 lbs.
Hitch Weight	520 lbs.
Axle Weight	2,940 lbs.
GVWR	3,800 lbs.
GAWR	3,500 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	340 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$22,251
MSRP, As Tested	\$23,739
Basic Warranty	1 year limited

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for use of either the shower or toilet, even for shorter users, and the ceiling topped out at 6 feet. There was no mirror in the bathroom (or anywhere at all in this trailer), so we didn't have one to use for shaving, brushing hair or applying makeup. Plus, any use of the sink, such as washing hands and brushing teeth, required using the showerhead, the only water outlet.

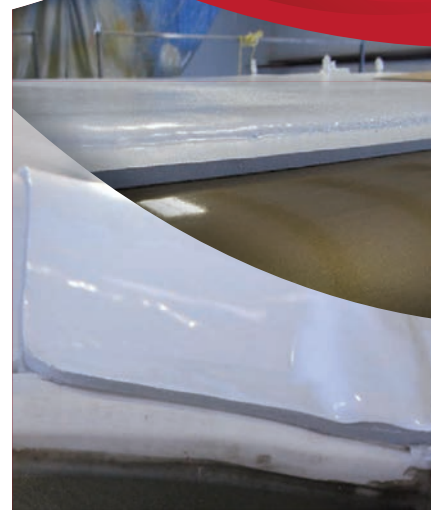
Overall, the Minnie Drop is a great-looking travel trailer with just the right mix of modern amenities and bygone ambience. The Woody graphics on this test unit are an option, and there's a very long list of features that come standard on all Minnie Drops. If you're interested in a lightweight travel trailer with a compact floorplan that offers a lot of must-haves, the Drop is worth a serious look. 🚐

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AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE RV CAPITAL'S KEY TRADE SHOW WEEK

Given the recent record-breaking sales performance of the RV industry — led in large part by the travel-trailer segment — manufacturers could be excused if they looked at the 2018 model year less as a time to introduce new concepts and more as an opportunity to simply catch up with order backlogs that, in some instances, stretch well into the new year. But that's not the case.

As seen at last September's annual Elkhart County RV Open House, a trade-only RV show in and around Elkhart, Indiana, that has evolved into one of the premier industry events, RV manufacturers aren't taking a breather. Granted, no manufacturer reinvented the wheel, so to speak, but a number of them did reinvent how they go about maximizing space inside and outside a wide array of travel trailers and fifth-wheels.

Consider the new **Starcraft GPS**. The GPS was developed with three goals in mind: more storage, increased tank capacity and improved outdoor living — and everything had

to fit on a travel trailer that hit a targeted dry weight of 6,000 pounds or less.

To meet those objectives, the GPS was developed as a V-nose trailer. The design isn't new; several companies have introduced V-nose units to varying degrees of popularity in the past 10 years or so. However, most of those V-nose units (so-named because the "house" of a V-nose trailer is built over a portion of the unit's A-frame) integrated the odd-shaped front space into an odd-shaped living space, be it part of a front galley, bathroom or even a bunkhouse.

Starcraft designers and engineers dedicated that front space to what the company calls its Sport Locker — a walk-in cargo room with a 750-pound capacity. Developed in partnership with Lippert Components, Inc. (LCI), the lockable Sport Locker sits atop a specially engineered tongue and is accessed by LCI's Solid Step through a full-height door. The aerodynamic wedge shape of the Sport Locker is achieved by seamless-laminated side walls angled to form the wedge, which is capped by a sloped fiberglass roof.

But the real selling point of the GPS may be found in back, where the travel trailer has incorporated a "porch." Tucked up against the rear of the unit in toy-hauler fashion when not in use, the ramp door is accessed through patio doors in the



Forest River No Boundaries

TRAVAGANZA

HERE MANUFACTURERS ROLL OUT THE LATEST OFFERINGS



rear wall of the GPS and boasts a power awning developed in partnership with Carefree of Colorado. The back porch becomes a screen room when side walls are installed with an integrated zipper, and when the weather gets rough, the side walls have roll-down vinyl windows.

And did we tell you the GPS, initially available in the 27-foot, 2-inch 230MLD and the even shorter 24-foot, 3-inch 210RLD, also boasts a 106-gallon freshwater tank?

Judging by units that made their debut at RV Open House, one trend that seems to be picking up steam is a move to what are being tabbed “adventure trailers” — smallish, lightweight travel trailers designed for enthusiasts who spend most of their time outdoors and essentially use the vehicle as a home base.

New variations on this theme include the **Little Guy Plus** from Liberty Outdoors, the new parent of Little Guy Worldwide, a company known for teardrop trailers. Teardrops could probably be considered the original adventure trailer, and the \$22,000 MSRP Little Guy Plus features the typical kitchen arrangement behind its rear hatch — but the 18-foot, 2,000-pound Plus also features a second kitchen inside.

Yet another concept in the genre was unveiled by inTech RV. A relatively new RV builder, the company was founded in 2011 as a manufacturer of all-aluminum motorsports and industrial trailers before branching out. The **inTech Luna** is an 1,800-pound modified teardrop with a 2,200-

pound gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) and a unique front-leaning design that incorporates a full-width tinted front windshield. Inside, the company also ratcheted up the features on the \$16,000 to \$19,000 MSRP unit, which include a three-burner stove/sink combination from Dometic with a commercial-style faucet, a stainless-steel microwave, Dometic 12-volt refrigerator, futon-style seating/sleeping and an optional 40-inch flat-screen TV.

A third adventure trailer design came out of the engineering group responsible for Forest River’s R-pod. But what differentiates the new **Forest River No Boundaries** — or No-Bo, as the bold black-and-green logo on its side and back proclaim — isn’t just its attention to things important to outdoor enthusiasts but also the breadth of floorplans. For now, No-Bo offers six models: two modified teardrops and four more-conventional travel trailers, with MSRPs ranging from \$13,000 to \$22,000.

“No Boundaries is a product line that will have 10 to 12 different floorplans ranging from 12 to 26 feet in length

Little Guy Plus



Trendsetting trailers were on display as far as the eye could see, as dozens of RV manufacturers introduced shiny new models and floorplans at September’s Elkhart RV Open House, the industry-only show attended by thousands of dealers from across North America.

ELKHART EXTRAVAGANZA

and carrying 1,500-pound to 3,500-pound tow ratings, so this caters to the four- and six-cylinder tow vehicles,” said Forest River General Manager Kevin McArt. “A couple of the models are built so that you can put them inside your garage even with the Rhino-Rack on it.”

The Rhino-Rack deserves special mention, because it’s what helps make No Boundaries easily recognizable as a gear-hauler for adventurers. Essentially, the mix-and-match system allows consumers to select which component they need for whatever gear they want to carry. There are even components designed to carry jerry cans for additional fuel or potable water. A “step seat” that quickly fits onto the tires provides easy access to the rack or a convenient place to remove muddy hiking boots.

RV Open House also was the launching pad for the newly rebranded **Winnebago Minnie** lineup of towables.

Formerly carrying a number of names beneath the Winnebago Towables umbrella, the company’s trailer offerings (which don’t affect its Grand Design division) will now be branded as the Micro Minnie, Minnie Drop, Minnie and Minnie Plus. Winnebago’s Ultralite and Instinct travel trailers, along with its Voyager fifth-wheel, will now carry the Minnie Plus moniker.

“With the launch of our Minnie brand, we will now have five species of trailers under the same nameplate that share a lot of the same features including internal wood choices and fabric options,” said Winnebago Towables Director of Marketing Mark Gerber. “We are branding the rollout as ‘Minnie Time,’ giving customers, and salespeople, an easy, logical progression under one name.”

Here are a number of other new models and floorplans that caught our eye in Elkhart.



COACHMEN

According to Bob Dumm, general manager overseeing Coachmen’s Apex and Freedom Express lines, the impetus for the **Apex 251 RBK** was simple: “We took the best of two of our best-selling floorplans and combined them.

“With this unit, you’ve got a nice rear bath with a large shower area, a nice sofa dinette within a galley slide, and a 60-by-80-inch queen bed,” Dumm noted, adding that the trailer

also features an exterior camp kitchen. Standard upgrades across the Apex line include larger baggage doors for the pass-through storage compartment, countertops with round-over edging and a backup camera mount.

Joining Coachmen’s growing lineup of 7½- and 8-foot-wide Apex towables, the 28-foot, 11-inch 251 RBK has a 4,984-pound dry weight, a cargo-carrying capacity of 2,000 pounds and an MSRP of \$23,900.

CRUISER RV

For 2018, Cruiser RV has redesigned the typical double-over-double bunkhouse to create a more livable space. The 2018 **Shadow Cruiser 277BHS** still includes a queen master bedroom up front, but instead of having the entertainment center crowding the end of the bed, a

wall with a sliding door closes off the bedroom, and an L-shaped galley sits just aft of the wall. Theater seating and a dinette are housed in the streetside slideout across from a large HDTV and a Furrrion DVD stereo with app control.

The entry door has been moved toward the rear, just in front of the bunk beds. The rear double-over-double bunks are next to a full-corner bath, which features a window and a 36-by-30-inch shower.

With MSRPs ranging from \$29,000 to \$32,000, the well-equipped Shadow Cruiser carries a nice list of standard equipment, including a 13,500-Btu air conditioner (a 15,000-Btu air conditioner upgrade or dual air conditioners is optional), an electric awning with LED lighting and a two-tone painted front cap with LED lighting.



Shadow Cruiser 277BHS



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DRV

DRV Luxury Suites has worked to develop a reputation for building residential-style fifth-wheels and toy haulers equipped with every comfort and amenity. But high-end amenities and lots of room add plenty of weight, so last year the builder introduced the lighter, less expensive Mobile Suites Aire line of fully outfitted fifth-wheels.

For 2018, DRV has added a toy hauler to the Aire line. The **Mobile Suites Aire 413** stretches 41 feet from pin box to rear cap and offers 4,200 pounds of cargo-carrying capacity to its 21,000-pound GVWR, leaving plenty of room for toys and gear while still touting luxury features such as hardwood cabinets, solid-surface countertops, a stainless-steel Furrion oven and cooktop, and a residential refrigerator with ice and water in the door.

The 413 boasts a 12-foot garage with a half bath, washer-dryer hookup and a MORryde rear door with fold-out patio rails. The garage area also has elevated bedding, an LED TV and a stereo system. The \$125,000 MSRP toy hauler comes standard with three 15,000-Btu air conditioners, a 55-inch LED TV and an electric fireplace.



FOREST RIVER

Among several changes for Forest River's XLR line of fifth-wheel and travel trailer toy haulers is the debut of the All American Super Suspension, an

optional package exclusively available on its Thunderbolt, Nitro and Hyper Lite XLR models.

"This new suspension proved to be a genuine game changer during extremely challenging durability testing," said General Manager Brent Stevens. "Energy transmission into the RV was reduced by 50 to 94 percent," which translates to less stress on cabinets, appliances, TVs and the overall structure, Stevens pointed out.

Other changes for the XLR line include full-body paint with an "edgier" design and a more contemporary interior featuring a power recliner sofa with USB ports. Among the line's standouts, Stevens said, is the 45-foot **XLR Thunderbolt 422AMP**, with an MSRP in the \$110,000 to \$115,000 range. The 422 features two patios, one and a half baths and a 12½-foot garage.



GRAND DESIGN

Grand Design introduced two new floorplans — the 290BH bunkhouse and the rear-living 295RL — to its recently launched **Reflection 150 Series**. The line's four floorplans range from 27 to 34 feet with retail price points of about \$30,000 to \$40,000. Designers focused on hitting dry weights of 6,500 to 8,500 pounds and hitch weights from less than 1,200 pounds to about 1,400 pounds to fall within half-ton trucks' payload capacities, said General Manager Micah Staley. Including a lot of storage and counter space was also essential.

"We didn't want to sacrifice a lot of the amenities, quality construction, the insulation and the capacities," Staley said. "We're excited about it, especially because the Turning Point pin box gives it a 90-degree turn in a shortbed truck without the need of an expensive slider hitch."



Road Warrior 426



Cyclone 4270

HEARTLAND

Heartland introduced the **Cyclone 4270** floorplan in its line of luxury fifth-wheel toy haulers. One of 11 floorplans, the three-axle 4270 extends 44 feet, 11 inches and has a 20,000-pound GVWR and a \$119,000 MSRP. In addition to a ramp/patio off the rear 13-foot garage, the toy hauler features a side patio with a Zero Gravity door.

"It actually has the largest living space that we've ever debuted in a toy hauler this size," said A.J. Jones, senior general manager. The bath-and-a-half unit comes with what Jones called a "perfectly placed" 55-inch TV that everyone seated on the five-person couch and at the high-rise bar can view.

Heartland's other luxury toy-hauler brand, Road Warrior melds a 13-foot garage with the kind of luxury features expected in higher-end fifth-wheels. New for 2018, the **Road Warrior 426** is a triple-axle, 20,000-pound-GVWR fifth-wheel filled with high-tech features including LED TVs, a Furrion stereo with app control, USB receptacles everywhere — even in the theater seating — and some amazing LED lighting effects.

Other standards on the \$97,698 MSRP 426 include a treehouse loft for the kids, the MORryde Zero-G entry step and three high-efficiency Dometic 15,000-Btu rooftop air conditioners that can run on a single 50-amp service.



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ELKHART EXTRAVAGANZA



HIGHLAND RIDGE

Highland Ridge introduced the **Open Range 3X384RLS** with an innovative layout for its front master bedroom. Measuring in at 39 feet, 10 inches with a 16,450-pound GVWR, the bedroom has a sofa tucked into the front wall, flanked by end tables, with one that has an integrated wine cooler. The bed is built into a streetside slideout and is directly across from a 32-inch flat-screen TV and electric fireplace. The entire bedroom suite can be closed off by a French door.

"There's plenty of closet space, a

nice big closet for a stackable washer-dryer, and a very open concept — almost like it's another living area in the bedroom," said Senior Director of Product Development Randy Graber of the \$79,000 MSRP 3X384RLS.

The fifth-wheel's living area has opposing 7-foot-tall, 42-inch-deep slideouts, a kitchen island, a two-seat sofa along the rear wall, and theater seating for two opposite the entertainment center.



JAYCO

Featuring a rear entertainment area

and an outside kitchen with a lower-than-typical height, the 29-foot, 2-inch **Eagle HT 25.5 REOK** has a "minimum advertised price" of about \$39,900 and checks in at 7,625 pounds unloaded.

The single-bath fifth-wheel — the shortest in the Eagle HT line — boasts two streetside slides. Curbside, the well-appointed galley is just off the entry door. An outdoor kitchen, 20-foot awning and the lack of a curbside slide maximizes use of the campsite space, said Chris Barth, senior director of product development.

Barth also noted that the 25.5 REOK offers a host of innovations, including Goodyear Endurance tires, a BAL 5.3 Auto-Leveling System, Orbital RPB (a non-slider, 90-degree rubberized pin box that's designed specifically for shortbed trucks) and MORryde's StepAbove entry steps.

"We wouldn't have actually been able to build this floorplan except for being able to place the StepAbove over the axles," Barth said.



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KEYSTONE

It's not often an innovative new floorplan catches the industry's attention, but

such might be the case with the **Sprinter Limited 3551 FWMLS**, a four-slide fifth-wheel with a fully equipped rear kitchen.

Stretching 39 feet, 3 inches with a dry weight of about 10,500 pounds, the 3551 features a galley outfitted with a three-burner Dometic stovetop and oven flanked by large drawer stacks and cabinets, one of which holds a microwave. A streetside slide houses an 18-cubic-foot residential

refrigerator with a pantry cabinet or two side-by-side RV refrigerators. Between the cooking area and main cabin is a peninsula with a wraparound bar-height counter.

"The beauty of this is a very original bar design that can seat up to four people with a giant window looking right over the campsite and a space for meal prep with a residential range hood," said Product Manager Jonathon Gust of the \$68,500 MSRP fifth-wheel.



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K-Z

The fact that the Durango Gold series stands as the premier brand within the K-Z RV family says a lot for the firm that has been building towables for more than 40 years. And the front-living-room, bath-and-a-half **Durango Gold 385 FLF** stands at the top of the lineup.

The five slides in the \$85,000 to \$100,000 MSRP fifth-wheel include two in the living room with a super sleeper sofa in each, another pair of opposing slides in the main-level galley with a dinette curbside and a cooking area and range streetside, and a streetside slide for the king bed in the rear bedroom. The rear bath spans the width of the fifth-wheel.

Additional features in the Durango Gold include a coat closet at the entrance, and a full pantry, an optional dishwasher and larger refrigerator in the kitchen.





LANCE

National Sales Manager Gary Conley said Lance believes it has a winner with the **1475**, a 19-foot, 8-inch trailer with two captain chairs and a table across from the kitchen and a dry weight of less than 2,600 pounds. For 2018, Lance added a 7-foot-long, 1-foot-deep optional curbside slideout that contains a sofa with kickout footrests. Two swivel tables provide ample dining or desk space. Over the sofa is a window that opens outward.

The rest of the layout includes an east-west bed up front, a three-piece bath and a well-appointed streetside kitchen featuring Euro-cabinets with

interior LED strips that light automatically when the curved door is opened. The Euro-design influence also is carried to the exterior, where Lance has gone to a more linear graphics scheme. Also noteworthy are standard Goodyear Endurance tires on new aluminum wheels with color-coordinated accents.

"It's only a 14-foot box, but it counts almost more like a 20-footer with what we've done," Conley said. The trailer has an MSRP of about \$32,000.



LIVIN' LITE

As noted by Dave Boggs, general manager of Livin' Lite, the company

has stayed true to its all-aluminum roots while still managing to incorporate upgrades. That's a description Midwest Regional Sales Manager Robbie McClure concurs with when describing the new **CampLite 21BHS**, which comes in a half-dozen exterior colors, sleeps six and has a \$32,000 MSRP. Also available is a Platinum Package that includes interior accent lights and Deluxe Chrome Graphics.

"The big thing about the Livin' Lite CampLite products is that we still have an all-aluminum, all-composite construction, so this 21-footer weighs in at just 3,600 pounds — with tandem axles," said McClure. "There's no wood in any of the structure at all."

"Plus, instead of using painted aluminum exteriors, we actually went to a high-gloss Noble Select fiberglass from Crane Composites with chrome graphics on it," Boggs added. "And we've offered solid-surface countertops, new Euro dual-pane windows and an enclosed and heated underbelly."

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ELKHART EXTRAVAGANZA



SUNSET PARK

Sunset Park debuted the newest addition to its lineup of travel trailers and toy haulers, the **Sunray Classic T-109**. At just under 12 feet, the \$14,408 MSRP T-109 is the smallest trailer made by the manufacturer.

In typical teardrop fashion, the rear wall opens to reveal a chuck-wagon-style kitchen with a microwave, sink, cooktop and optional three-way refrigerator. A wall-length gaucho in classic vinyl spans the rear wall for sitting and sleeping, and offers pass-through storage beneath it. The trailer comes with a furnace, night shades for privacy and an AM/FM/CD stereo.



WINNEBAGO

Winnebago's renaming of its towables lineup to fit beneath the "Minnie" umbrella coincides with a sweeping array of upgrades for 2018. Built on a BAL NXG frame, the almost 37-foot **Minnie Plus 30RLSS** is an all-new triple-slide travel trailer with a host of upscale amenities.

The rear living room features a trifold sofa across the back wall, optional theater seating and a dinette across from an entertainment center with an LED TV and stone-surround fireplace. The galley has a wealth of solid-surface counter space and includes an oval island with a sink, a double-door refrigerator and loads of storage.

A dual-entry bath — with glass-surround corner shower, ceramic commode and stainless-steel sink — sits off the side-aisle hallway, followed by the front master bedroom with a queen bed in a front slideout, augmented by a full wardrobe across the front wall. The cavernous front storage also features a unique lift-up shelf that creates a large vertical space that can be locked.

The new \$45,682 MSRP Minnie Plus has a full-fiberglass front cap and a fiberglass-clad exterior that is available in eight colors. 🚐



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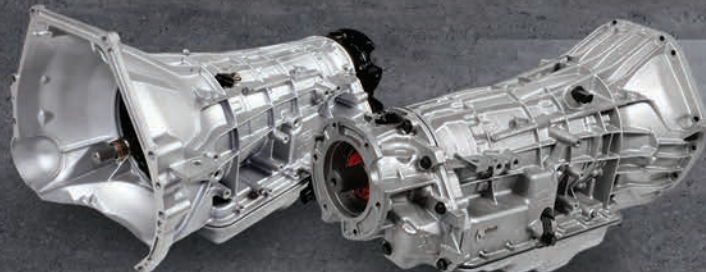


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GET SHORTY

ONCE A LIMITING FACTOR IN FIFTH-WHEEL TOWING, THE 6-FOOT TRUCK BED IS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE WHEN EQUIPPED WITH A PULLRITE SUPERGLIDE HITCH

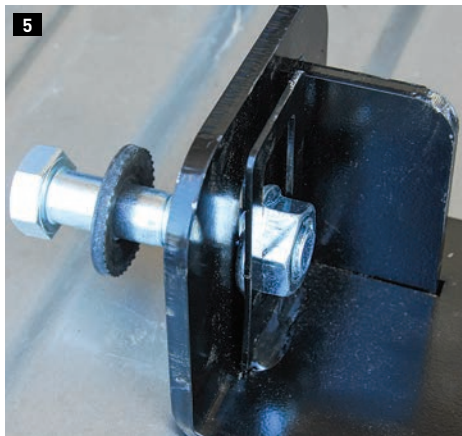
The shortbed extended-cab pickup is arguably the most versatile vehicle you can buy. It seats five to six, has enough room in the cargo box for work or play essentials, and is tough enough to go pretty much anywhere your imagination can take you. One of its few limitations is revealed only when considering a fifth-wheel trailer. That same shortbed that allows better maneuverability around town puts the trailer's front cap in dangerous proximity to the rear of the cab, often creating disastrous consequences in tight turns.

The RV-hitch industry was not without a solution to this problem — namely, the “sliding” fifth-wheel hitch, which moved the pivot point

rearward during turning maneuvers, thereby providing adequate cap-to-cab clearance. Early examples, however, were strictly manual in

operation; the owner had to have the presence of mind to operate one or more levers in the bed of the truck before and after executing a turn, a process that was hard to live with and easy to forget.

Unless you have masochistic leanings, the obvious choice today is an automatic sliding hitch. Designs vary, but the essential common denominator of these hitches is that they begin to move rearward as the vehicle



starts to turn; the sharper the turn, the farther back the hitch moves to ensure there is adequate clearance. In this way, the truck owner can enjoy the convenience of a shortbed truck during the week and still tow a fifth-wheel when it's time to skip town for a few days.

One of the most popular automatic sliding hitches on the market is the SuperGlide by PullRite. It operates through mechanical cam action and a capture plate that restricts the kingpin on the trailer from turning in the fifth-wheel plate on the SuperGlide. Once the truck begins to turn, the "captured" fifth-wheel plate forces the large roller of the turntable

1) This 2003 Chevy 2500 shortbed had been purchased used and had been fitted with a fifth-wheel hitch at some point in its history. We don't know what hitch it was or who installed it, but modern installation practice is to bolt on the mounting brackets, not weld them. **2)** Because the PullRite mounting brackets are designed to fit flush against the frame, the old brackets had to be removed first with a cutting wheel. **3, 4)** Once the old brackets are removed, the frame is ground smooth and painted to protect it against corrosion. **5)** Mounting brackets are located on top of the frame, with top plates that butt up against the bottom of the truck bed. PullRite installs these ingenious little nut tabs underneath both of the slotted bolt holes to hold the flange nut in place and stop it from turning, so installation can truly be a one-person job. **6)** As the saying goes, "Measure twice, cut once," but in the case of installing a fifth-wheel hitch, it's more like, "Measure two-dozen times, drill once." The base rails must be located so they are centered in the bed from front to back and side to side, and they must be parallel to each other and positioned so that they will line up correctly with mounting-bracket holes underneath. Sound intimidating? PullRite offers a template to make it easier.

7) Once satisfied that the measurements are correct, the technician drills small pilot holes using the base rails as a guide. **8)** The holes are then drilled to $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch in diameter. The other two adjacent holes are from the previous hitch.





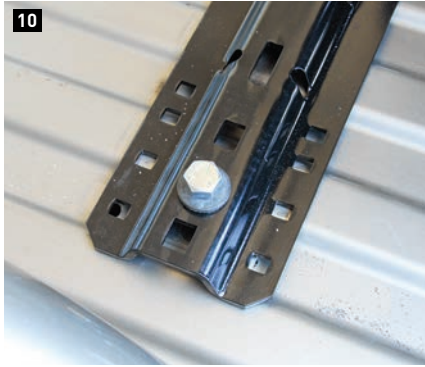
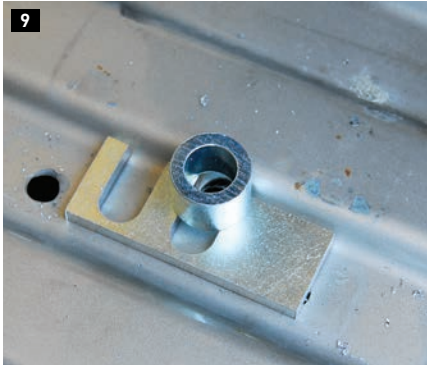
SAFETY IN NUMBERS

All of the trucks currently on the market have to conform to the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) J2807 towing standard, which sets guidelines as to how the vehicle must perform in a variety of situations. First published in 2008 and currently adopted by all the major OEMs (Chevy, Ford, Ram, Toyota and Nissan) the document helps clarify what is expected of the vehicle and establishes an “apples to apples” criteria that helps level the playing field in an increasingly competitive market.

What you may not know is that there is also an SAE standard for fifth-wheel hitches, called J2638, which is only voluntary as of this writing. In fact, there isn't even a current DOT regulation that requires the testing of fifth-wheel hitches — surprising, considering the loads and stresses these components are regularly subjected to.

PullRite is one fifth-wheel hitch manufacturer that voluntarily conforms to the J2638 standard. “We believe it adds to the credibility of both the product and the company when it is being proactive in this manner,” explained Scott Later, national sales manager for PullRite Towing Systems. “Without a testing standard, it is anyone’s opinion as to whether [the hitch] is strong enough or even overbuilt. With all that we’ve learned through the rigorous testing laid out by the SAE standard, and our own additional testing, we’re a more confident manufacturer and can reduce our risk for liability while producing better products for our customers.”

The SAE dynamic testing requires 300,000 cycles in three different directions (up and down, side to side and front to back), or 900,000 cycles in total, with weight in excess of the hitch’s rating, according to Later. “Trucks and trailers are getting more and more expensive,” he said. “We believe that knowledgeable buyers will choose tested products over those that aren’t, to protect their investment and keep them safe while enjoying the RVing experience.”



9, 10 These bed shims and spacer tubes supplied in the kit help distribute the load evenly so neither the truck bed nor the base rails are damaged when the bolts are tightened. **11** Here you can see that the bolt has passed through the base rail and the frame bracket top plate with the captured nut described earlier. **12** The base rails are secured by a total of six fasteners once their installation is complete. **13** Now it's time to prepare the hitch for installation. This baby weighs around 190 pounds, so C&S uses a forklift to raise it to truck-bed level until it is ready for its new home. These feet mount to the hitch base on each corner and fit into the slots in the base rails. **14** With help from a skilled forklift operator, the hitch assembly is carefully positioned onto the base rails in the bed for a trial fit.

cam-arm assembly to rotate and roll along the path of the cam slot to begin the turn. This action pulls the plate and turntable assembly away from the cab of the truck — the more you turn, the more it moves back.

While the SuperGlide is a proven product that operates as designed

in the correct application, it's important to note that the width of the trailer and the location of the kingpin in relation to the front cap of the trailer are critical in determining if the truck and trailer are compatible for use with the SuperGlide. Shortbed trucks have

limited cab-to-rear-axle space to work with, so if the kingpin is located too far under the nose of the trailer, the SuperGlide may not be able to move the trailer back fast enough to allow the necessary clearance. If in doubt, contact PullRite's customer-service department for assistance.

We recently acquired a clean 2003 Chevy 2500 shortbed truck for use in our test fleet that we felt was an ideal candidate for the SuperGlide 16K hitch (part number 2700). The truck had already been used to tow a fifth-wheel, but the hitch was not part of the deal, and the brackets, which had been welded into place, were suspect.

So, we contacted PullRite for the hitch and an ISR-Series HD Custom Mounting Kit (part number 2224) designed for 1999 to 2010 Chevy 2500 and 3500 trucks. This kit is rated up to 24,000 pounds and bolts into place

using supplied hardware. For the installation, we contacted C&S RV Service Center in Oxnard, California, where the job was completed in about two hours. Installation time (and related labor costs) will vary depending on the application.

Once the hitch was installed in the Chevy truck, it was used to tow the Northwood Fox Mountain 235RLS fifth-wheel from Oxnard to Pala RV Resort in San Diego County for the November 2017 cover story. It took some time to get used to the idea that the front cap wouldn't crash into the back of the cab of the truck during a turn, but after a few hundred miles and numerous directional changes (including backing into some spots), those using the truck got into a comfort zone.

The PullRite SuperGlide works as promised and is a viable no-worries



15) Once it was determined that the hitch was positioned correctly, the frame bracket is used as a template to drill the mounting holes. PullRite supplies the bracket with several holes already drilled to meet the needs of different applications. **16, 17)** Since the frame changes to a box section from a C channel as it gets closer to the cab, the supplied bolt leader (aka fish wire) is used to pull the bolt through the forward mounting hole. Teeth underneath the bolt head prevent it from turning when the nut is tightened. **18)** The completed driver's side frame bracket.



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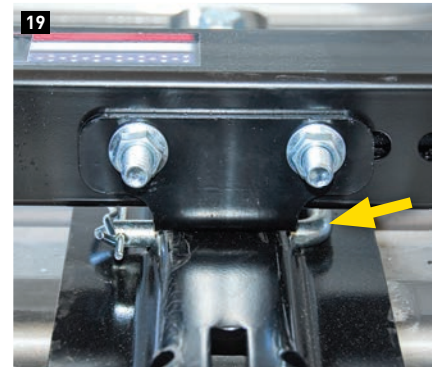
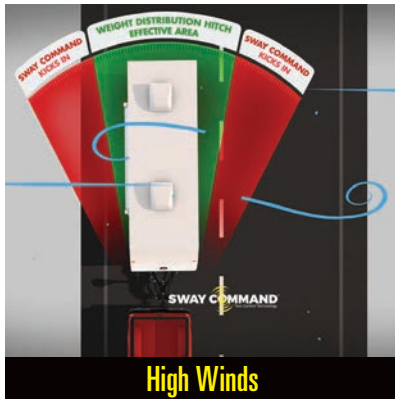
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19) As noted in an earlier step, the feet mounted to the hitch base fit into the slots in the base rails. The hitch assembly is then secured by a pin (arrow) at each corner so it can be quickly removed if needed (that is, if you have a hoist or a couple of strong friends handy). **20, 21)** This simple demonstration shows how the SuperGlide moves rearward the more it is turned.

Quick Facts

- Factors that can contribute to severe trailer sway include emergency maneuvers, high winds, large passing vehicles, and hilly, uneven highways
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Every autumn like clockwork, kids head back to school, leaves start to change color, and RV show season kicks off across North America. RV shows can offer great deals for consumers, but they can also be overwhelming and intimidating. In fact, many folks walk away more confused than ever, heads swimming with floorplans and prices.

The secret to RV show success — whether you are in the research stage or ready to buy — is being prepared and having a strategy. Doing some legwork in advance and setting clear goals will ensure that you conquer the RV show, instead of feeling like the RV show conquered you.

It's important to note that not every RV show is created equal. A small handful of annual shows display more than





The variety of models and floorplans at large RV shows can be overwhelming to first-time buyers. Bring along a notepad or use your smartphone to keep track of features you like and ones that don't appeal. You can use your phone's camera to take photos of show pricing, model numbers and rig information, and get interior and exterior shots of RVs.

1,000 rigs in open-air arenas. These include the Hershey, Pennsylvania, show (branded as America's Largest RV Show), the Florida RV SuperShow in Tampa and the California RV Show in Pomona. These mega RV shows are more than just shopping events. They also offer a variety of vendors, entertainment and educational seminars.

Large shows are great for exploring a wide selection of models from many manufacturers and dealers. However, they can also be more difficult to navigate and require more preparation and planning. Other events like the Chicago RV and Camping Show and the Boston RV and Camping Expo are not quite as large but still display hundreds of rigs from a variety of manufacturers.

Then there is the smallest type of RV show where a local dealer sets up in a shopping-center parking lot or

stadium, showcasing current inventory. These shows are often limited in their selection, and without competition from other dealers, competitive pricing is not guaranteed.

Bottom line? The larger RV shows can be overwhelming but are more likely to have a larger inventory and more competitive prices.

Whether you are just kicking tires or ready to write a check, here are some ways to get the most out of an RV show experience.

10 Tips for RV Show Shopping

1. Do some online reconnaissance. Go to the RV show's website ahead of time and download a map of the show onto your smartphone along with any available coupons. Check out the parking guidelines and cash policies, since some shows do not accept credit

Don't let other shoppers deter you from fully inspecting an RV. Sit on all the furniture, pretend to make a meal in the kitchen, stand in the shower and lie on the bed. Ask a sales rep to bring in the slides to see what the rig is like in travel mode.



cards for admission fees. Also look into food options and vendors.

2. Attend the show on the quietest day possible. Not everyone has a flexible schedule, but if you can avoid the Saturday crowds, the RV show experience will be exponentially more enjoyable. Other options include Friday before the after-work crowd and Sunday afternoons.

3. Bring water, snacks and perhaps even lunch. Check show policies in advance, and fill a backpack with refreshments if allowed. RV shopping can be surprisingly exhausting, so stay

DOING SOME LEGWORK IN ADVANCE AND SETTING CLEAR GOALS WILL ENSURE THAT YOU CONQUER THE RV SHOW, INSTEAD OF FEELING LIKE THE RV SHOW CONQUERED YOU.



hydrated and prevent blood-sugar crashes. If food is not allowed inside the show, consider packing a cooler of sandwiches and eating tailgate-style in the parking lot.

4. Agree to a shopping plan. If you are attending a show with a friend or significant other, chat about a general strategy ahead of time. Some people want to look at every rig on display. Others want to curtail window shopping and stay focused. Talking in

advance will manage expectations and limit frustrations.

5. Have a system for recording information. It's very easy to lose track of which rigs you liked after a long day of RV show shopping. Some folks use their phone to take pictures of the model number, specs, exterior and interior. Others prefer writing the information in a notebook or on a clipboard. To limit confusion, take a brochure only if you are seriously considering a unit. No



There are definitely deals to be had at RV shows. Do your research in advance and come prepared to take advantage of competitive pricing when you spot it.

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matter what, do not rely on memory.

6. Talk to the manufacturers' representatives. At the larger shows, RV manufacturers send representatives to support the dealers. They are a great resource of information since they usually know the models much better than the dealership's salespeople. If you have specific questions or concerns about a model or want help comparing two units, ask to chat with a rep.

7. Don't get rushed into an impulse purchase. An RV may be one of the larger purchases you ever make other than your home. Don't get pressured to buy something without due diligence on pricing, financing and towing setups.

8. Check out dealers' online reviews and service centers. The dealer you purchase from will be responsible for handling all warranty work during the coverage period. Building a relationship with a reputable dealer that runs an efficient and effective service center will make all the difference in your RV experience.

9. Don't be embarrassed to check out the entire RV. Some shoppers feel awkward spending too much time in an RV with so many other people around. If you are seriously considering a purchase, lie on the bed, sit on the toilet, stand in the shower and pretend to cook a meal in the kitchen. Test out all the couches to make sure they are actually comfortable. And, yes, ask the salesperson to bring in the slideouts to see if you can access the refrigerator and bathroom while traveling.

10. Attend seminars. In all the

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excitement of shopping, some people miss out on one of the best opportunities available: educational seminars. Many RV shows offer seminars by leading industry experts. Schedule a break and take the opportunity to learn about towing safety, RV maintenance, travel tips and more.

Advice for Newbie RVers

Many shoppers visiting an RV show have never owned an RV and aren't really sure what would be best for their lifestyle. If you fall into this category, do some legwork in advance to avoid being overwhelmed and paralyzed by too many choices.

Ask yourself the following questions to narrow down your shopping list:

- Do I want a towable or motorized RV?
- What size RV will be comfortable for my family?
- What is the capacity of my tow vehicle or future tow vehicle?
- What is my budget?

Also, listen to advice from experienced RVers. It can be tricky to figure out exactly what you want in an RV if you have never owned one before. Asking other owners about their RVs is a great way to gain insight and avoid making the same mistakes that others have made.

Advice for Seasoned RVers

It is sometimes said that people start shopping for their second RV the day they bring home their first one. If you are among the many RVers looking to upgrade, here are a few steps you can take to ensure your new RV is everything you dreamed of and more:

- Make a list of pros and cons for your current RV.
- Be honest about how you use your current RV.
- Have a list of non-negotiables like an outdoor kitchen or dedicated beds.
- Know the key numbers: tow ratings, cargo carrying capacity, gross vehicle weight rating.
- Establish a budget and stick to it.

It's easy to get sucked in by state-of-the-art features on shiny new RVs at shows, but nothing will dampen your camping mojo more than spending too

much money or buying a trailer that is too heavy for your vehicle to tow. Stay focused on what is important to you and make sure the upgrade is actually an improvement for your personal RV lifestyle.

RV shows can be the perfect chance to compare a variety of different manufacturers, models and floorplans, all in one place. They can also offer the opportunity to get a great deal on your first or next RV. Preparing a little

in advance and developing a game plan will help you conquer the RV shows this season. 🚐

RV Show Resources

Locations and dates for many RV shows can be found on the following websites:

Go RVing

www.gorving.com/where-to-find/rv-shows

GS Media and Events

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SWAY CONTROL REIMAGINED



CAMCO EAZ-LIFT'S RECURVE R6 WEIGHT-DISTRIBUTING HITCH IS A NEW TAKE ON TOWING STABILITY

Towing a trailer without a sway control can be a white-knuckle experience, if the trailer-and-tow-rig setup can't be adjusted for proper balance and the weight-distributing (WD) hitch isn't properly adjusted. A sway-control device is not required on every trailer-towing setup, but when all other sway solutions have been checked and adjusted, it is an effective tool to achieve smoother sailing on the road. Some WD hitches have an integrated sway-control feature that provides resistance to sway. Although these systems can be very effective, they can be a deterrent to trailer movement during cornering or when maneuvering into a tight campsite.

Manufactured by Camco, Eaz-Lift's ReCurve R6 weight-distributing hitch is designed to deliver sway control only when needed. If trailer movement exceeds 10 degrees in either direction, which would be the case during turns and when backing into an RV site, the sway control is automatically disengaged so the trailer can be maneuvered without any

resistance. The ReCurve R6's unique pivoting trunnion head (ball mount) uses two spring-loaded engagement balls to provide proportional sway control, which can be turned off using the included Allen key for towing more slowly in slippery conditions. Because the trunnion pivots, staying in-line with the trailer frame, the hitch can be attached and removed with the truck at

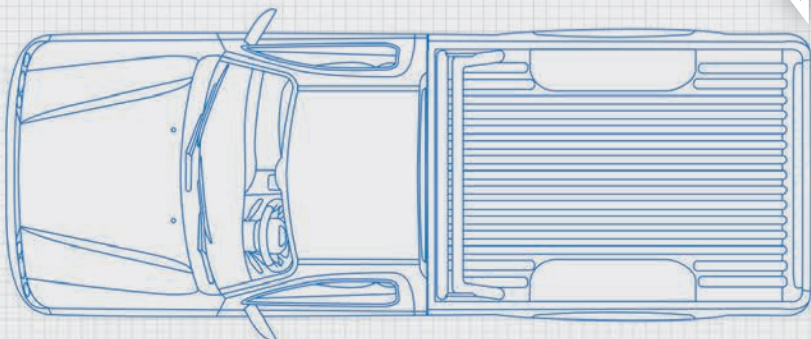
extreme angles to the trailer.

To see how well the ReCurve R6's adaptive sway control works, we installed a 1,000-pound-rated hitch (Camco item number 48733, Camping World part number 85060) on a 27-foot travel trailer. Interestingly, the company has a unique way of designating capacities, and the 1,000-pound system is actually rated for a maximum of 1,200 pounds of hitch weight and 12,000 pounds of gross trailer weight.

Before installing any weight-distributing hitch, the height of the front and rear of the tow vehicle must be measured. These measurements are commonly taken at the bumpers or the highest point of the wheel wells. Also, the trailer must be leveled, front to back, and the height of the trailer's coupler

STOP THE SWAY

Unbalanced or excessive loads, improper hitch weight and underinflated tires are all correctable causes of sway. Other causes include gusts of wind, uneven roads, passing semitrucks and quick-avoidance maneuvers.





determined. The specified height is the coupler's height plus $\frac{1}{8}$ inch per 100 pounds of hitch weight. The test trailer had 850 pounds of hitch weight, so we added $\frac{1}{16}$ inch to the coupler height.

The process is started by sliding the ball-mount shank into the truck's hitch receiver and inserting the pin and

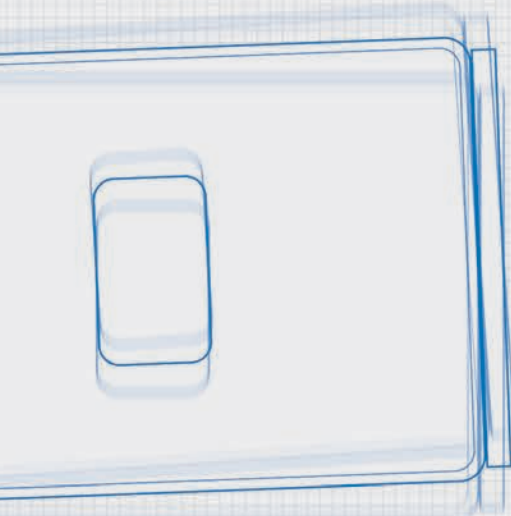
1) A $2\frac{5}{16}$ -inch ball is preinstalled on the ball mount. **2)** Sway control can be engaged or disengaged with the included 8mm Allen wrench. **3)** A $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch 12-point socket can be used if the thumbscrew is difficult to turn. Here it turned easily by hand. **4)** The engagement ball guides and the trunnion-spindle grease fitting should be checked for proper lubrication before each use.

spring clip. The ball mount was then slid upward on the shank until the top of the ball was at the correct hitch height. The holes in the shank are $\frac{1}{4}$ inches apart, so it may be necessary to move the head up or down until the holes in the ball mount align with the nearest holes in the shank. Several shanks are available from Eaz-Lift in higher or lower applications or for use with 2-inch or $2\frac{1}{2}$ -inch receivers. Once the correct location was determined, the bolt, lock washer and nut were installed finger-tight in the bottom hole.

The angle of the ball mount determines how much tension is placed on the spring bars while towing and is adjustable by turning a thumbscrew inside the head. Too much or too little

tension will result in an uneven distribution of weight on the tow vehicle's axles. The best way to verify correct spring-bar tension is to start by adjusting the top plate of the ball mount parallel with the ground and testing the fully installed hitch under load.

The previously measured truck heights should change by approximately the same amount when the trailer is attached. If the difference between front and rear measurements is more than 1 inch, the angle of the ball mount will need to be adjusted. It will probably require two or more attempts to get the tilt correct, as this is a trial-and-error process. Once you hit the road and get a feel for how the setup tows, you may want to stop and make some further



SWAY CONTROL REIMAGINED

fine-tuning adjustments as needed.

After the initial spring-bar angle was set, the top bolt, serrated washers and nut were inserted and tightened, and the setscrew located below the thumbscrew was tightened to lock the position in place. The upper and lower bolts were tightened to 260 lb-ft.

To determine the correct position of the hookup brackets, the trailer was coupled to the ball mount, and the spring bars were inserted in the trunnion. The sway control was disengaged, and the trunnion was positioned square to the trailer so the ends of the spring bars were at equal distances from the center of the ball. The hookup brackets are designed with 2-inch offsets to clear obstacles that might be in the way, such as battery trays. We aligned the hookup brackets with the spring-bar studs and installed the spacers, bolts and nuts.

To assess the performance of the hitch, the sway control was turned off, and the test trailer was connected to a GMC Yukon Denali at approximately a 30-degree angle. With the trunnion free to rotate, hooking up the hitch at an angle was no different than a straight-on approach. Lifting the spring bars onto the brackets required little effort using the hookup tool.

Eaz-Lift recommends raising the front of the trailer 3 inches higher than level after connecting the truck and trailer with the A-frame jack to make installing and removing the spring bars easier. We found that the spring bars must be fully seated on the hookup brackets to install the retaining pin; if they're off even slightly, the pin won't go in. We turned the sway control on before towing.

Towing the trailer with the ReCurve R6 in place proved that the adaptive



5) After determining the correct hitch height, the bottom bolt is installed. **6)** The hookup-bracket offsets are opposite each other, allowing them to face forward or rearward depending on which side of the frame they are installed. The brackets can be inverted to use with bottom-mounted hitch-ball couplers. **7)** The spring bars are easily lifted onto the hookup brackets with a special tool. **8)** The retaining pin is inserted through the inner holes in the hookup brackets. **9)** The top-loading spring-bar design increases ground clearance compared to conventional round-bar hitches.

sway control works extremely well. The most noticeable aspect of towing with the ReCurve R6 was how quiet it was. Gone were the noises normally associated with WD hitches. Even when backing up at nearly the maximum maneuvering angle, no noise could be heard in the tow vehicle. Slow-speed sharp turns were effortless due to the sway control automatically disengaging. The hitch prevented bouncing

over bumps and ruts, keeping the ride smooth, and we appreciated that there was no need to remove a sway control before backing the trailer.

The Eaz-Lift ReCurve R6 (part number 48733) has an MSRP of \$801.49 and is available in three sizes with up to 14,000 pounds of towing capacity. 🚚

Eaz-Lift/Camco Manufacturing
800-334-2004, www.eaz-lift.com



10) Turning the trailer more than 10 degrees causes the engagement balls to no longer contact the trunnion, automatically deactivating the sway control.



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**RV SHOW
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MARVEL CHARACTER APPEARANCES

GS | MEDIA & EVENTS

Map#	Event Name	Dates**	Venue
01	Colorado RV Adventure Travel Show	1/4/18 - 1/6/18	Colorado Convention Center
02	Wisconsin RV Show	1/5/18 - 1/7/18	Wisconsin Center District
03	Knoxville RV Show	1/5/18 - 1/7/18	Sevierville Convention Center
04	Greater Atlanta RV Show	1/5/18 - 1/7/18	Georgia Int'l Convention Center
05	South Carolina RV & Camping Show - Greenville	1/5/18 - 1/7/18	TD Convention Center
06	Mid America RV Show	1/11/18 - 1/14/18	Kansas City Convention Center - Bartle Hall
07	Washington Camping RV Expo	1/12/18 - 1/14/18	Dulles Expo Center
08	Greater Chicago RV Show	1/12/18 - 1/14/18	Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center
09	New Jersey RV & Camping Show - Edison	1/19/18 - 1/21/18	New Jersey Convention & Exposition Center
10	Lexington RV Show	1/19/18 - 1/21/18	Kentucky Horse Park
11	Cincinnati - Dayton RV Show	1/25/18 - 1/28/18	Dayton Convention Center
12	Greater Phoenix RV Show	1/26/18 - 1/28/18	Phoenix Convention Center
13	Minneapolis/St. Paul RV, Vacation & Camping Show	2/9/18 - 2/11/18	Minneapolis Convention Center

*Good Sam Club members save 50% on up to two (2) adult admission tickets. **Dates subject to change.

^Retail value Buyers Guide \$7.99, MotorHome Magazine \$4.99, Trailer Life Magazine \$4.99. GS058263-0917

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Map#	Event Name	Dates**	Venue
14	Richmond Camping RV Expo	2/9/18 - 2/11/18	Richmond International Raceway Complex
15	Chattanooga RV Show	2/16/18 - 2/18/18	Chattanooga Convention Center
16	Atlantic City RV & Camping Show	2/16/18 - 2/18/18	Atlantic City Convention Center
17	Gulf Coast RV Show - Mobile	2/16/18 - 2/18/18	Mobile Convention Center
18	Harrisburg RV & Camping Show - Pennsylvania	2/22/18 - 2/25/18	PA Farm Show Complex & Event Center
19	Columbus RV Show	2/23/18 - 2/25/18	Greater Columbus Convention Center
20	Colorado RV, Sports & Travel Show	3/1/18 - 3/4/18	National Western Complex
21	Central Illinois RV Show - Peoria	3/2/18 - 3/4/18	Peoria Civic Center
22	Rhode Island RV & Camping Show	3/2/18 - 3/4/18	Rhode Island Convention Center
23	Virginia RV Show - Hampton	3/9/18 - 3/11/18	Hampton Roads Convention Center
24	Springfield RV & Camping Show	3/23/18 - 3/25/18	BOS Convention Center
25	Greater Tucson RV Show	3/23/18 - 3/25/18	Tucson Convention Center
26	Good Sam Indy RV Super Show	4/12/18 - 4/15/18	Indianapolis Motor Speedway

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READERS TELL US THEIR TRUSTED BRANDS AND BUSINESSES
IN *TRAILER LIFE'S* SIXTH-ANNUAL RV SURVEY

No one knows RVs and RVing better than *Trailer Life* readers. That's why each year since 2012 we've asked you to report on the products you use and the places you love to determine our Readers' Choice Awards, the cream of the crop of the RV realm. Our annual online poll surveys your favorite RVs, tow vehicles and supplies, along with preferred

travel and service destinations. The results from last year's ballot have been tabulated, and we're pleased to announce the gold, silver and bronze winners in 30 categories. Congratulations to all of our honorees, and a big thanks to the thousands of readers who shared your knowledge and experience for the benefit of other RV enthusiasts. You're all good as gold.

RVS AND TOW VEHICLES

FIFTH-WHEEL TRAILER



● **GOLD: KEYSTONE**

Keystone is North America's number-one manufacturer of fifth-wheel trailers, including the Montana, the top-selling fifth-wheel for the past 15 years. Keystone operates manufacturing facilities in Indiana and Oregon, and has nearly 1,000 North American dealer locations. The company recently introduced a three-year limited structural warranty on new models. 866-425-4369 www.keystonerv.com/fifth-wheels

SILVER: GRAND DESIGN

574-825-9679 www.granddesignrv.com

BRONZE: FOREST RIVER

574-389-4600 www.forestriverinc.com/fifthwheels

FOLDING CAMPING TRAILER



● **GOLD: JAYCO**

In 1968, its first year in business, Jayco sold 132 folding camping trailers, commonly known as pop-ups. Since then, the company has built more than a million RVs and is now part of Thor Industries. For 2018 Jayco offers four Jay Sport pop-up floorplans with easy-to-use lifting systems. The new Jay Sports are backed by a two-year basic warranty and a five-year tent warranty. 574-825-5861, www.jayco.com/products/camping-trailers

SILVER: FOREST RIVER

574-389-4600, www.forestriverinc.com/campingtrailers.aspx

BRONZE: ALINER

724-237-5227, www.aliner.com

TOY HAULER



● **GOLD: KEYSTONE**

Founded in 1996, Keystone is a top manufacturer of towable RVs, including six toy-hauler lines known for their lightweight construction and contemporary decor: Carbon, Cougar, Fuzion, Impact, Outback and Raptor. To keep up with rising demand, the company recently increased its customer-service staff and inventory of warranty parts. 866-425-4369 www.keystonerv.com/toy-haulers

SILVER: FOREST RIVER

574-389-4600 www.forestriverinc.com/toyhaulers.aspx

BRONZE: HEARTLAND

877-262-8032 www.heartlandrvs.com/toyhauler-class

TRAVEL TRAILER



● GOLD: LANCE

Lance made its mark as a manufacturer of truck campers after getting its start back in 1965. Since then, lightweight travel trailers and toy haulers have become significant parts of the Southern California company's product line, with Lance paying the same careful attention to the design, construction and durability of its towable RVs as it has always given to its segment-leading truck campers.

661-949-3322

www.lancecamper.com/travel-trailers

SILVER: FOREST RIVER

574-389-4600

www.forestriverinc.com/traveltrailers

BRONZE: JAYCO

574-825-5861

www.jayco.com/products/travel-trailers

TRUCK CAMPER



● GOLD: LANCE

In the 53 years since Lance introduced its first truck camper, the company has earned a reputation as a manufacturer of innovative, long-lasting RVs and amassed a loyal following of repeat customers. For 2018 Lance offers nine hard-wall truck campers that include the flagship double-slide 1172.

661-949-3322

www.lancecamper.com/truck-campers

SILVER: NORTHWOOD

800-766-6274

www.northwoodmfg.com/truck-campers

BRONZE: TRAVEL LITE

855-831-3525, www.travellitecampers.com

TRUCK FOR TOWING



● GOLD: FORD

The popular lineup of Ford trucks begins with the F-150 full-size pickup, the best-selling vehicle in America. Beyond its high-strength aluminum-alloy body, the 2018 F-150 offers a number of new powertrain choices. For heavy-duty towing applications, the F-250, F-350 and F-450 Super Duty trucks have a new optional Trailer Reverse Guidance camera system that makes hitching up a snap.

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

SILVER: GENERAL MOTORS

800-222-1020, www.chevrolet.com/trucks

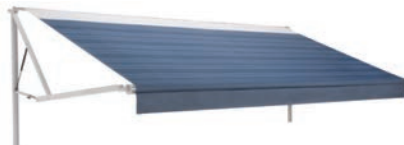
888-988-7267, www.gmc.com/trucks

BRONZE: RAM

800-423-6343, www.ramtrucks.com

ACCESSORIES AND SUPPLIES

AWNING



● GOLD: DOMETIC

Dometic produces a wide range of awnings, slide toppers, screen rooms and related accessories for the RV market. The company's awnings are available in manual and remote-controlled models with innovations ranging from LED lighting and power connections on awning roller tubes to sensors that detect high winds and retract shades automatically.

800-544-4881, www.dometic.com/usa

SILVER: CAREFREE OF COLORADO

303-469-3324

www.carefreeofcolorado.com

BRONZE: AWNINGS BY ZIP DEE

800-338-2378

www.awningsbyzipdee.com

BATTERY

● GOLD: INTERSTATE

Interstate is a leading supplier of automotive and RV power that has been in business since 1952. The company's dual-purpose RV batteries feature an expected service life that is twice that of conventional alloy AGM batteries, and the batteries are backed by a three-year warranty.

866-842-5368

www.interstatebatteries.com



SILVER: OPTIMA

888-867-8462, www.optimabatteries.com

BRONZE: TROJAN

800-423-6569, www.trojanbattery.com

CLEANING PRODUCT



● GOLD: MEGUIAR'S

Established in 1901, Meguiar's offers a wide array of supplies for interior and exterior care and maintenance of RVs, cars, trucks, motorcycles and boats, and makes a number of products designed specifically for RV use.

800-347-5700, www.meguiars.com/en

SILVER (tie): CAMCO

800-334-2004, www.camco.net

SILVER (tie): PROTECTALL

800-322-4491, www.protectall.com

BRONZE: WASH WAX ALL

800-927-4929, www.washwax.com

ENGINE OIL



● GOLD: SHELL ROTELLA

Developed by Shell, the Rotella lineup

of heavy-duty engine lubricants includes straight-grade, full-synthetic and synthetic blends with features to help control wear, deposits and oil breakdown. Rotella T4 and T5 meet the new API CK-4 diesel standards for improved emission control. 888-467-4355, www.rotella.shell.com

SILVER: MOBIL 1

800-662-4525, www.mobiloil.com

BRONZE: AMSOIL

800-956-5695, www.amsoil.com

FIFTH-WHEEL HITCH



● **GOLD: B&W**

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

SILVER: DEMCO

800-543-3626, www.demco-products.com/rv-towing/hijacker

BRONZE: PULLRITE

800-443-2307, www.pullrite.com

FUEL ADDITIVE



● **GOLD: LUCAS OIL**

Lucas Oil's popular fuel additives include conditioners, boosters and stabilizers, many of which can be found

on the shelves of auto-part stores and discount retail chains. The company also produces motor oils, cleaners, detailing kits and greases.

800-342-2512, www.lucasoil.com

SILVER: POWER SERVICE

866-506-6572, www.powerservice.com

BRONZE: SEA FOAM

952-938-4811, www.seafoamsales.com

GENERATOR



● **GOLD: HONDA**

Honda is a leading provider of lightweight and quiet portable generators. The company's

2,000-watt inverter generators supply hours of consistent electrical current without refueling and are popular with RVers.

770-497-6400, www.powerequipment.honda.com/generators

SILVER: CHAMPION

877-338-0999 www.championpowerequipment.com

BRONZE: CUMMINS

800-888-6626, www.power.cummins.com

HOLDING-TANK TREATMENT



● **GOLD: THETFORD**

The number-one supplier of sanitation products for the RV market, Thetford makes holding-tank chemicals that effectively break down waste and control odors. Its top seller, Aqua-Kem, comes in biodegradable liquid, granular and toss-in forms. 800-543-1219, www.thetford.com

SILVER: TRAVEL JON

800-348-3505, www.centurychemical.com

BRONZE: CAMCO

800-334-2004, www.camco.net

PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING PRODUCT



● **GOLD: 5 STAR TUNING**

A family-run business based in Florence, South Carolina, 5 Star Tuning specializes in custom tuning applications for towable and motorized RVs. The company's tuners are said to help unlock additional torque, horsepower and efficiency in vehicles, even in mountainous terrain. 843-536-1244, www.5startuning.com

SILVER: BANKS POWER

800-601-8072, www.bankspower.com

BRONZE: K&N ENGINEERING

800-858-3333, www.knfilters.com

REFRIGERATOR



● **GOLD: DOMETIC**

Designed to withstand the rigors of RV travel, Dometic refrigerators come in numerous shapes, sizes and styles, from double-door built-ins to freestanding fridges and wine chillers. RVer-friendly features include automatic locking systems, versatile racking and adjustable shelf guards. 800-544-4881, www.dometic.com/usa

SILVER: NORCOLD/THETFORD

800-543-1219, www.norcold.com

BRONZE: SAMSUNG

800-726-7864, www.samsung.com/us/home-appliances/refrigerators

RV COVER



● **GOLD: ADCO**

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offers covers for RVs and RV tires, windshields, side-view mirrors, LP-gas cylinders and rear bike racks.
800-541-2326, www.adcoprod.com

SILVER: ELEMENTS

888-626-7576
www.campingworld.com/elements

BRONZE: CALMARK

800-838-7236, www.calmarkcovers.com

SATELLITE HARDWARE



● **GOLD: WINEGARD**

Winegard's wireless, satellite and over-the-air antennas let RVers watch the big game or local news from the comfort of their campsite. Since the company's inception in 1953, Winegard has designed more than a thousand models, including satellite-TV antennas that work with Dish, DirecTV and Shaw Direct. Its new Connect internet extender increases the range of Wi-Fi and cellular signals in RVs.

800-472-1039, www.winegard.com

SILVER: KING

952-922-6889, www.kingconnect.com

BRONZE: TV4RV

541-244-0250, www.tv4rv.com

SATELLITE-TV PROVIDER



● **GOLD: DISH**

Dish offers equipment and programming so RVers can tune in to hundreds of channels of high-definition TV almost anywhere they travel. Packages offer pay-as-you-go options that let users purchase only the months of satellite service they need with no long-term contract.

800-472-1039, www.dishformyrv.com

SILVER: DIRECTV

888-777-2454, www.directv.com

BRONZE: SHAW DIRECT

888-554-7827, www.shawdirect.ca/english

TIRES



● **GOLD: MICHELIN**

While Michelin doesn't make tires specifically for trailers, it manufactures a variety of tires suitable for RVs and tow vehicles, including XPS Rib LT tires, a popular ST replacement. The new X Line Energy Z features an innovative tread compound and is guaranteed to deliver better mileage than similar tires.

866-866-6605, www.michelinrvtires.com

SILVER: GOODYEAR

800-321-2136, www.goodyearrvtires.com

BRONZE: MAXXIS

800-462-9947, www.maxxis.com

TIRE-PRESSURE MONITORING SYSTEM



● **GOLD: TIREMINDER**

Working with a smart device or as a stand-alone system, the TireMinder TPMS has lightweight transmitters that keep tabs on trailer and tow-vehicle tires, checking air pressure and temperature, and alerting drivers with visual and audible alarms. The company's new solar-powered system is designed for dual- or single-axle trailers with tires inflated up to 70 PSI.

772-463-6522
www.minderresearch.com/tireminder

SILVER: HAWKSHEAD

888-321-8767, www.tpms.ca

BRONZE: TRUCK SYSTEM TECHNOLOGIES

770-889-9102, www.tstruck.com

TOILET



● **GOLD: DOMETIC**

A worldwide manufacturer of products for recreational vehicles, Dometic designs toilets for RV use that include macerator, vacuum and portable units. For a residential feel, Dometic provides a range of ceramic-bowl toilets in standard and low-profile heights with powerful flushing technology.

800-544-4881, www.dometic.com/usa

SILVER: THETFORD

800-543-1219, www.thetford.com/products/toilets/rv-toilets

BRONZE: NATURE'S HEAD

251-295-3043, www.natureshead.net

TRAVEL-TRAILER HITCH



● **GOLD: EQUAL-I-ZER**

Made in America 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

SILVER: FASTWAY

877-523-9103
www.fastwaytrailer.com/e2-hitch

BRONZE: BLUE OX

800-228-9289
www.blueox.com/trailer-towing

TRUCK-BED LINER



● **GOLD: LINE-X**

A leading provider of spray-on truck-bed liners, Line-X has more than 500 locations that apply the company's fast-curing polymer coatings. Installed

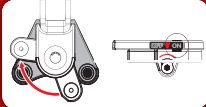
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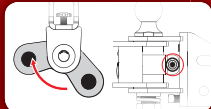


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SILVER: RHINO LININGS

800-422-2603, www.rhino linings.com

BRONZE: BEDRUG

615-847-0020, www.bedrug.com

RETAIL, SERVICE AND TRAVEL

FUEL STATION



● **GOLD: PILOT FLYING J**

RVers looking for a reliable place to fuel up frequently stop at the gas and diesel pumps at Pilot Flying J. More than 650 travel plazas across North America offer overnight parking, dump stations, LP-gas refills and certified truck scales, in addition to designated RV lanes at some locations. RVers can also take advantage of clean restrooms, hot showers, fast-food options, Wi-Fi and rewards programs. 877-866-7378 www.pilotflyingj.com/rv-services

SILVER: COSTCO

800-774-2678

www.costco.com/gasoline.html

BRONZE: LOVE'S

800-655-6837, www.loves.com

RV CAMPGROUND/RESORT



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

Opened in 2016, Pala's 10-acre RV resort is now a 10/10*/10-rated destination that's a free shuttle ride away from its namesake casino complex. The Southern California resort offers 100 full-hookup campsites, free Wi-Fi and cable TV, clean restrooms

and showers, a heated swimming pool, a fenced dog park, organized activities and round-the-clock security. 844-472-5278 www.palacasino.com/resort/rv-resort

SILVER: PECHANGA RV RESORT TEMECULA, CALIFORNIA

877-997-8386, www.pechanga.com/rvresort

BRONZE: DISNEY'S FORT WILDERNESS RESORT ORLANDO, FLORIDA

407-824-2900

www.disneyworldcamping.com

RV CASINO RESORT



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

A world-class gaming facility near San Diego with 2,000 slot and video machines, nearly 100 table games, 10 restaurants, two lounges and a 2,000-seat event center, Pala is a state-of-the-art casino complex with a Readers' Choice Awards gold-winning RV resort just minutes away. 877-946-7252, www.palacasino.com

SILVER: PECHANGA RESORT AND CASINO TEMECULA, CALIFORNIA

888-732-4264, www.pechanga.com

BRONZE: SEVEN FEATHERS CASINO RESORT CANYONVILLE, OREGON

800-548-8461, www.sevenfeathers.com

RV RETAILER



● **GOLD: CAMPING WORLD**

America's largest retailer of RV supplies, accessories and new and used RVs is a one-stop destination for all things RV. Based in Bowling Green, Kentucky, Camping World now operates 130 conveniently located supercenters and an

extensive online store. Onsite facilities offer RV repair and maintenance work.
888-626-7576
www.campingworld.com

SILVER: LOCAL DEALER

BRONZE: AMAZON

888-280-4331, www.amazon.com

SIT-DOWN RESTAURANT



● GOLD: CRACKER BARREL

Established in 1969, the chain of Cracker Barrel Old Country Store restaurants now extends to 645 locations in 44 states, dishing up chicken-fried steak, biscuits and gravy, along with down-home Southern hospitality to 217 million guests a year.
800-333-9566

www.crackerbarrel.com

SILVER: RED ROBIN

877-733-6543, www.redrobin.com

BRONZE: APPLEBEE'S

888-592-7753, www.applebees.com

STATE TO RV IN



● GOLD: OREGON

From Crater Lake to the Columbia River and Cannon Beach to the Cascade Range, Oregon has something for every RV'er. A mild climate and diverse terrain combine with a wealth of campgrounds to make RV travelers feel right at home. The top-notch Travel Oregon website provides an RV-park search tool as well as inspiring trip itineraries.

800-547-7842, www.traveloregon.com

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Throne Rehab

Swapping out your RV's commode to an Aqua-Magic Style II is a simple and inexpensive upgrade

DIFFICULTY	1 2 3 4 5
TIME TO COMPLETE	30 MINUTES
TOOLS NEEDED	SAE WRENCH SET

I'm a firm believer in comfortable commodes. Back in the day, there was little or no choice for RVers — either use the plastic boxlike toilet that came with the RV or opt for the facilities provided by the campground. But as the years passed, RV "toiletry" has come a long way. If you have an RV with a plastic toilet that's unsatisfactory, or maybe you bought a "pre-enjoyed" unit and want to replace the head just because, you're in luck. Today, there are more RV toilets to choose from than ever before.

The name Thetford is synonymous with RV sanitation. Heck, I remember the scent of Aqua-Kem as a kid in the early '70s. Other companies have come and gone, but Thetford is still right there in the number-one seat (no pun intended). And, while its plastic loos are very serviceable, the move up to a china throne is simple and affordable, and will make the go much more enjoyable.

The Aqua-Magic Style II is Thetford's entry-level china toilet, featuring a real residential-size seat. Owners can use the perfectly comfortable seat or upgrade it if desired. The high-profile model, which most RVers will likely opt for, has a



1) The first steps when replacing an RV toilet are to dump and rinse the holding tanks and drain the water system to reduce water spillage when removing the old toilet and water supply. In this case, the RV already had a water-line extension, but some toilets are hard-plumbed with PEX right up to the toilet valve. If the replacement toilet valve is in a different spot, an extension hose may be necessary to reach the new valve, or the PEX line can be cut to fit. Remember to check for the rubber cone inside the fitting and tighten these fittings hand-tight only. **2)** After the water is drained from the toilet, remove the two nuts holding the toilet to the flange. Here, a $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch ratcheting wrench is used for removal. Once both nuts are removed, the toilet can be lifted straight up. To keep odor down, carefully stuff an old throwaway rag in the flange opening. If you have a Fan-Tastic Vent fan, try switching it to the "In" mode so it pressurizes the unit and forces fresh air into the tank and up the vent stack. **3)** With the Aqua-Magic toilet inverted, the new seal is carefully placed on the bottom of the toilet opening, lip side down. Use only foam seals when installing an RV toilet; wax seals will deform and melt in an RV application, causing leakage. **4)** The Aqua-Magic toilet comes with new closet flange bolts, which should be used. Slide the old ones out and the new ones in. Lower the toilet onto the flange, guiding the bolts through the bolt holes in the toilet. If the original toilet is really old, the closet flange may have to be turned. Verify that the flange is tight and screwed into good wood. If the subfloor is rotted out, repair it before installing the new toilet.



ROYAL THRONE » The Aqua-Magic Style II is an economical and easy way to upgrade to a real china toilet. Installation can often be done in less than 30 minutes.

17½-inch-high seat. Flushing and adding water is simple via the two-position foot pedal. The ball valve is sealed with a self-cleaning gasket that is rinsed each time the toilet is flushed, and is easy to service, should it be necessary.

MSRP for the Aqua-Magic Style II is \$225. The toilet is available from RV dealers, Camping World and Amazon. The only options are the color (white or bone), profile (low for units mounted on a raised platform) and a water-saving hand sprayer, a great addition for quickly cleaning the toilet.

Replacing an RV toilet is easy, requiring only a few wrenches (ratcheting wrenches make this easier, but standard SAE will work fine, as will deep-socket ratchets). The freshwater line may need to be modified, but extension hoses are available at most hardware stores and home centers. 🚚

Thetford

800-543-1219

www.thetford.com/products/toilets



5



6



7



8

5, 6) Start tightening the nuts on the toilet flange bolts, then twist the toilet to adjust its direction, making sure it has been properly seated on the flange. Tighten the new nuts until the toilet is stable and the foam seal feels compressed, but do not overtighten. The replacement nuts are ¼ inch. The hardware kit includes attractive nut caps that slide over the nuts. **7)** Verify again that the gasket is in the PEX fitting and reconnect the freshwater line, tightening by hand. If the optional hand sprayer is being installed, cut the sprayer-hose fitting on the back of the toilet, connect the hose and assemble the sprayer. Attach the sprayer holder in a convenient spot. Turn on the water supply, flush the toilet and check for leaks. **8)** The Aqua-Magic Style II toilet has a powerful flush that covers the bowl well. Press the foot pedal halfway to add water to the bowl. Press it all the way to flush.

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Bumper Saver

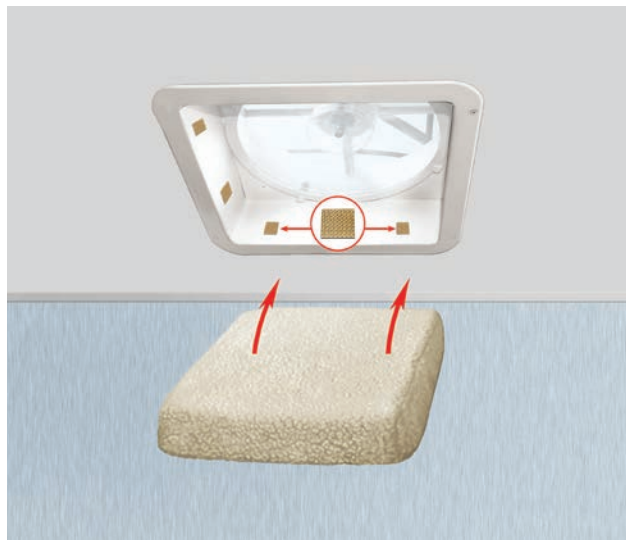
Over the past 40 years, I have hitched up boat and travel trailers of all sizes hundreds of times — and damaged a few bumpers in the process. Two years ago when I bought a new SUV, I was determined not to damage this one.

To protect my SUV's bumper, I fabricated a shield from ½-inch plywood. I lined one side of a 12x18-inch sheet of plywood with carpet. I then cut a notch along the edge in the center of the 18-inch side of the plywood wide enough that the plywood can fit snugly over the shank just in front of the ball mount. To use the shield, I place it over the shank with the carpeted side toward the bumper.

With the carpet facing the SUV's hatch (or the tailgate if using this on a truck), the bumper of the tow vehicle is protected if the driver overruns the ball.

After the coupler is engaged, I remove the plywood and place it on the ground, carpet side up. Now it becomes a comfortable place to kneel down to connect the chains and electrical cord located under the bumper.

Ron Presdorf, Saline, Michigan



Stick to It

We love the 14-inch-square Camco RV Vent Insulators that fit in the roof vents. The fleece-insulator “cushions” keep the trailer warmer or cooler, depending on the need, and also make our RV a little darker in the morning so the kids tend to sleep longer. Over time, however, the cushions become compressed and lose their ability to stay up in the vents. If one falls and lands on our dog, we practically have to peel her off the wall to get her to calm down.

I attached ¾-inch-square adhesive tape to the backs of the “hook” side of hook-and-loop fasteners and stuck them on the inside of the overhead vents to help hold the cushions in place. You can use whatever size and amount of hook strips are needed. I chose tan fasteners so they blend with the inside of my RV's vents.

Chuck Lewis, Oneida, New York

QUICK FIX

Custom Handrail Grip

The foam grip on our RV's Lend-A-Hand RV Hand Rail wore out, so we wrapped the handrail in the type of grip tape used on baseball bats and hockey sticks. It's soft to the touch, lightweight, moisture wicking and was an inexpensive fix that cleans off easily. As a bonus, the grip tape is available in a variety of colors, so you can keep the handrail basic black or create your own design.

Tracie Hill, Pahrump, Nevada

TECHNICAL EDITOR'S NOTE

The foam on Lend-A-Hand grips can tear and degrade over time. Tracie Hill's tip is a good one, particularly if you want an easy fix with a quick run to the store or would like to customize your RV's handrail. Otherwise, a replacement foam grip is available from the manufacturer, Stromberg Carlson Products, at www.strombergcarlson.com. Model number is FP-1002-R (Replacement Grip Wrap for one rail), and MSRP is \$9.95. 📧

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

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†After 3 months you will be billed \$15/mo unless you call to cancel. HBO® and related channels and service marks are the property of Home Box Office, Inc.

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Cargo Anchors

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MSRP: From \$7.95 each
602-620-1544, www.handetrack.com
Circle 145 on Reader Service Card



Steered Straight

Full-size Chevy and GMC pickups, vans and SUVs from 2001 to 2010 may suffer from lazy steering, inducing premature component and tire wear as they get up in miles. Cognito Motorsports has pinpointed a key component that contributes most to the loose steering: the idler pivot assembly and support bracket. Cognito's Idler Pivot with Gusset Kit [part IPAWG8] comes with a SuperSteer SS175 cast-aluminum idler-arm support with heavy-duty tapered roller bearings designed to reduce play and eliminate "steering slop." It also includes a weld-in gusset to strengthen the mounting support on the frame, stopping flex, according to the manufacturer. The kit fits all models, 2WD and 4WD.

MSRP: \$220
866-426-4648, www.cognitomotorsports.com
Circle 146 on Reader Service Card



See the Light

Having extra illumination in and around the RV is always handy, particularly in the dark recesses of closets, cabinets and exterior storage compartments. Light It's easy-to-install Stick On Lights illuminate those hard-to-see-in spaces by attaching just about anywhere in an RV. The adhesive-tape backing on each palm-sized light adheres to most surfaces, and the little round lamps turn on and off with a tap on the center. Available in white, black, silver and bronze, Stick on Lights are 5 1/4 inches wide by 2 inches deep, and emit 14 lumens. The energy-efficient LEDs run on three AAA batteries (not included).

MSRP: \$7.99/three-pack
888-296-8033, www.lightitled.com
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Oil Change

Shell Rotella T5 Ultra 10W-30 is the latest synthetic oil to meet the stricter API FA-4 requirements for newer low-emission diesel engines. Shell claims the low-ash formula delivers about 1.5 percent better fuel economy than synthetic 15W-40, reduces CO₂ emissions and offers improved lubricating qualities in hot and cold operating conditions. The heavy-duty engine oil has been enhanced with synthetic base oils and other additives to provide protection against wear, deposits and oil breakdown, according to the company. T5 Ultra 10W-30 has also been approved by some vehicle manufacturers for limited backward compatibility in previous-generation diesels that can run the lower viscosity oil.

MSRP: From \$34.99/gallon. www.rotella.shell.com
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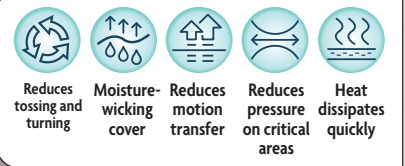
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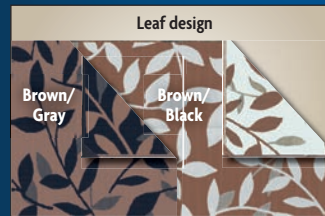
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Brown/Taupe #109225 Black/Tan #109224 Navy/Gray #109226

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Brown/Taupe
reverse side



Brown/
Gray

Brown/
Black



Black/
Tan

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BATTERY REPLACEMENT TIME

Q Since November 2015, I have been residing in a 2016 Forest River Grey Wolf 26BH. The trailer's converter/distribution panel is a WFCO. The storage battery is a deep-cycle Interstate SRM-24. Living full time in the trailer, I make good use of the 12-volt DC systems. Can you suggest a time period for replacement of the battery so I will not be experiencing low-battery voltage? I have not had a problem with the converter or battery voltage. I'm just trying to stay ahead of the game.

William Keenum, Rogersville, Alabama

A To start with, you can use your battery's age, and its original warranty, as an overall guide to how long the battery should last. For example, you may buy a battery with a 48-, 72- or even a 100-month prorated warranty. While that's no guarantee for battery life span, it's a guideline for when to start a closer inspection, although you may find the battery is still going strong after its designated warranty.

Your best bet to avoid an unexpected battery surprise



is to make sure you maintain the electrolyte level in the battery with distilled water. Have the batteries tested annually by a professional shop with a computerized battery charger/analyzer. Alternatively, you can test the electrolyte, which indicates the battery's state of charge and its ability to take a charge, and the static-electrical load, by purchasing the testers at a local parts store or at Sears, Harbor Freight or on Amazon. Using these tests, you can get an idea of where you stand on the "good to go" or "keep an eye on it" scale.

1995 WIRING DIAGRAM

Q I am looking for a wiring diagram for a 35-foot 1995 Holiday Rambler Aluma-Lite trailer. There's a ground-fault problem, and I cannot find a wiring diagram anywhere. Any ideas?

Don Hudnall, Texas City, Texas

A It's a fairly safe bet that you won't be able to locate a factory wiring diagram for your trailer, Don, especially since Holiday Rambler has changed hands since your trailer was built. You didn't specify the symptom when you said "ground fault problem," but it can usually be traced to a campground GFCI breaker on the campsite power post that trips when you try to plug it in to the 120-volt AC supply, or a GFCI outlet inside the trailer is tripping.

If the campground GFCI trips when you plug in the trailer, try shutting off the circuit breaker at the post, then plug in the trailer and flip the breaker back on. Many RVs will trip the GFCI breaker, even when nothing is technically amiss,

due to even a small load placed on the power supply when plugging in. In cases like this, you may successfully use the shut-down/plug-in/turn-on process.

You can also try this by shutting off one trailer circuit breaker at a time, which will help isolate a device or circuit that is causing the problem. For example, if you shut down the circuit that powers the converter and the campsite GFCI no longer blows, that's a troubleshooting clue you can follow.

Locating a ground fault can be frustrating, but it's mainly a matter of inspecting and testing every 120-volt AC electrical device and wiring component in your trailer — and having a wiring diagram probably wouldn't help a lot with that. It can be something as easy as a wall outlet that's gone bad and needs to be replaced or as mysterious as a bad ground connection that's not readily visible to the naked eye. I'd start by testing and, as needed, replacing any GFCI breakers inside the trailer. They are fairly sensitive devices, and yours are

20-plus years old, so corrosion, among other factors, can cause them to malfunction. I've seen brand-new GFCI wall plugs that have gone bad in new RVs.

Corrosion can be a significant factor in your case due to your RV's age and your location next to the ocean. That salt air can be an electrical killer over time. Check every 120-volt AC electrical connection throughout the RV, especially those exposed to the outside air such as back-of-refrigerator wiring. Loosen and retighten each wiring connection you can find and, if it looks really bad, disconnect the wire, clean everything with a wire brush or fine sandpaper and reattach it. A corroded connection builds up resistance, and that can cause a GFCI to blow under load. Carefully inspect the outside outlet, which is susceptible to moisture. Also, an electric water-heater element that has failed can cause a ground fault. It's going to call for some searching, but you or a qualified RV repair center can usually find and cure the problem.

TECH EXPERT



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.

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Q I have a 2012 Dutchmen Denali 262RLX fifth-wheel. We camp year-

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95275 shown

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ITEM 62859/63055
62860 shown

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round, and there are several state parks on the beach where we like to camp in the summer. Since they are on the beach, there are few trees for shade, and the RV gets sun all day long. The RV came with a Dometic 13,500-Btu A/C with ducted vents, but it really struggles in the heat of the day.

The RV is built ready to install a second A/C in the bedroom. I would rather replace the existing 13,500-Btu A/C with a 15,000-Btu A/C, then the system will all stay ducted and quieter than running two A/C units, or I can just add another 13,500-Btu A/C in the bedroom. If I replace the 13,500-Btu A/C with a 15,000-Btu A/C, will it do the job and cool as well as just adding a second A/C? Either way, the cost seems to be about the same.

Dan Higgins, Pensacola, Florida

A Your part of the country certainly puts an air conditioner to the test, Dan, so we understand your dilemma. Installing a 15,000-Btu A/C unit will gain you only 1,500 Btu of additional

cooling, which may not get you to the desired comfort level. Be aware that it's not going to make a gigantic difference, although the use of a newer, more-efficient A/C unit will also be an improvement.

Installing a second A/C will require 50-amp service for running both units. Since your RV has the second A/C prewire, it has 50-amp capability, and as long as the campground has 50-amp service available, you will be able to run both air conditioners.

If you're connected to 30-amp service, consider doing what we have done with some test units in hot weather: Close off the bedroom and run the living area A/C full blast during the day, then vice-versa when you go to sleep at night.

NEW TRAILER FLOOR

Q We want to replace the flooring in our fifth-wheel. It is a 34-footer with three slideouts. We have talked with a business that does this out of Oklahoma

City. Since I don't want carpet, they suggest porcelain tile. Do you agree with this, or would a laminate be better?

Tess Crane, Perkins, Oklahoma

For any number of reasons, I'd go with the laminate flooring, Tess. Porcelain tile is far heavier than laminate flooring, which could result in your trailer being overloaded, depending on its current weight and cargo capacity, of course. Laminate flooring looks great, is lighter weight, easy to keep clean, easier to install and highly durable. Porcelain tile or similar tile products are used successfully in higher-end fifth-wheel trailers and motorhomes, but these are built with that added weight in mind. Given a choice during a remodel, I'd go with the laminate.

MICROWAVE WIRING

Q I have a 2012 Keystone Laredo that had a wiring problem when it was purchased. The problem was that I

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could not use the microwave while the air conditioner was on. I found that both were wired to the same breaker. The one breaker that was not used in the panel was marked fireplace, which I did not have, so I moved the microwave to that breaker. Happily, that solved the problem.

Frank Bender, Westchester, Illinois

A Thank you for the electrical tip, Frank. It looks like you found a solid solution to the problem. Overloading one circuit breaker will cause the problems you mentioned, and distributing the load is a good fix. Just make sure the breaker is matched to the wiring gauge for the load (i.e. 14 AWG wire for 15 amps, etc.)

MICROWAVE NEAR-MISFIRE

My unit is a 2011 Jayco model 242 Jay Feather Select travel trailer. When I turned on the exhaust fan, its light and the light above the sink, either individually or collectively, dimmed or did not light at all, and the outside clearance lights came on. It was frustrating.

A repairman found the problem behind the microwave. There are two wooden runners that the microwave has to sit on. The wires for the fan and lights are supposed to be routed under the runners; however, the installer placed the wires on top of the runners where they frayed and made contact. The solution was to cover the frayed wires with tape and route them under the runners that support the microwave.

Joseph Gorka, Deptford, New Jersey

Thank you for the wiring diagnosis and solution, Joseph. It never hurts to inspect even the most unlikely places when troubleshooting an electrical problem.

AXLE ALIGNMENT AND TIRES

After reading October's RV Clinic, I'm sure you've received plenty of letters about tires. I have owned two trailers and four fifth-wheels, but tires and alignment problems are getting to be more of an issue in the last few years. Nobody signs up for a blowout when on vacation.

Four months ago, I noticed severe

tire wear on both tires on the rear axle of our 33-foot Keystone Cougar fifth-wheel. I took it to a specialty tire and alignment shop and paid more than \$700 to have the axle straightened and two tires replaced. The shop manager stated that bent axles are not unusual and thinks they come off the assembly line without the manufacturer taking time to include an alignment.

Two weeks ago, 15 miles east of Reno, Nevada, our Cougar had a blow-

out in the westbound lane of Highway 80. The tire, rim, underbelly, insulation and skirting for most of the length of our fifth-wheel were demolished. Good Sam Roadside Assistance was on the job, but it took the local tow-truck outfit 2½ hours to arrive while 18-wheelers blew by. It was nerve-wracking.

We arrived at a reputable nationwide tire shop the next morning, and the manager pointed out we were lucky to get in. I said, "I know, (continued on page 71)

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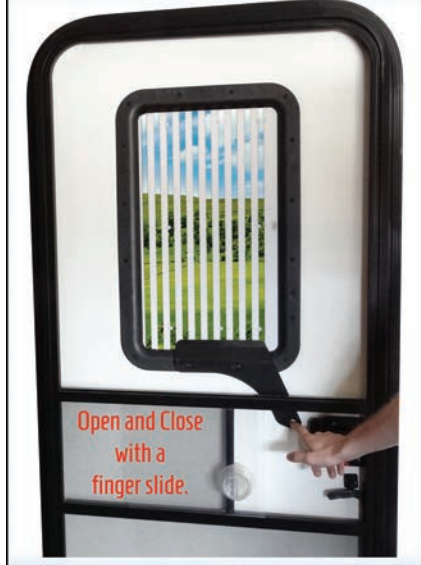
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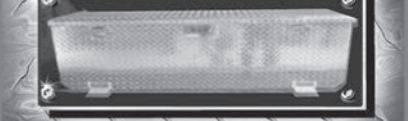


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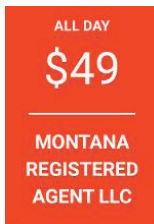


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we had a spare." But he said, "That's not what I mean. Did you see the one remaining original tire?" The tread on the remaining tire was starting to peel. We couldn't have made it 10 more miles! The shop manager stated that the tires on many RVs are at the very bottom of the load range required and my experience was not uncommon. He also stated that the original tires were low quality.

I now have four correctly rated tires and a straight axle. Most important to note is that the original tires did not have even 8,000 miles on them! I have spent more than \$1,000 for new tires, which should have been on the rig in the first place. I suggest all RVers check their tires before the next trip.

Dennis Dougan, Corralitos, California

It's good to hear you found and corrected the problem, Dennis, and, as you suggested, we hear a lot about trailer tire problems these days. Trailer axle alignment is sort of roughly set at the factory when the axles are installed on the frame, but it's usually far from a precise process, as many trailer owners have discovered. A shop that knows trailer-axle alignment, and how to correct it, is a valuable asset that can solve a world of tire-wear problems.

Having the trailer weighed (especially with individual scales, which many specialty shops have as well) when packed and ready for travel is an important step that may reveal if the trailer is overloaded or heavier on one side, for example. Using correct tire inflation pressure is also important, and good quality tires help, too, of course.

Finally, be sure to have your trailer tires balanced because, as with tow rig tires, it helps them last longer, they wear more evenly and it provides a smoother ride for the trailer and its contents. Because tire balancing is cheap, it's cost-effective insurance.

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Q My other half and I just purchased another trailer that is well within the weight limits for our truck. I wanted a washer and dryer but ended up with-

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out one because trailers of the size and weight that we purchased don't carry such luxuries. We bought a 29-foot, 8-inch Grand Design Imagine 2600RB. We plan to be away for three months next summer and need the laundry facilities.

I despise coin-operated laundries for a number of reasons and would give anything to have a washer and dryer in our unit. I have done some research and found these cute little washers with spin cycles, and some are set up to do both washing and drying. Lowe's carries an LG Sidekick 1-cubic-foot 27-inch pedestal washer. It weighs 100 pounds and would fit in our space. Why in the heck can't the trailer manufacturer allow room for hookups in a cabinet for one of these as an option? Perhaps you have the ability to sway some of these trailer factories to lean in my direction!

Charli Cusolito, Sahuarita, Arizona

A Thank you for suggesting that we might be able sway the manufacturers, Charli, but we just report the facts — we can't influence their decisions. In any case, the reason there is usually no washer-dryer prep on travel trailers is that buyers of these units typically don't stay in them for extended periods like they might with a large fifth-wheel.

Many RVers prefer use of their limited storage space over the convenience of a built-in washer-dryer. Some manufacturers make the washer-dryer prep and plumbing available as an option on the smaller models, but you may need to hire a plumber and electrician experienced with RVs or a Certified RV Technician to make your rig ready for laundry chores.

TIRE TEMPERATURE

Q In the October Letters column, Jim Hoy talks about buying new tires for his fifth-wheel and also a tire-pressure monitoring system. He makes it sound like he noticed a temperature increase on his fifth-wheel and truck. I thought a new setup would allow for lower temperatures in the tires. What am I missing here?

Jim Kent, Austin, Colorado

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A The tire temperature increase Jim Hoy reported during operation is perfectly normal. All tires warm up to varying degrees when driving and towing, but not all tires warm up the same. For example, how a tire is constructed makes a difference. A tire warms up due to friction and flexing, which is why a tire that's underinflated will heat up more and can fail more frequently. Speed and loading also affect tire temperature. The trailer is carrying far more weight on those four tires than is the towing truck, so its tires will naturally heat up more. As long as those temperatures don't go sky high, Hoy is well within the safe operating range for his RV's new tires.

WASHER-DRYER LINE WINTERIZING

I have a Keystone Montana with the same preinstalled washer-dryer hookups as Patric Pike ("Solution to Freshwater Odor," September 2017). I also never intend on using these hookups. The first year we had the unit, I did winterize these lines and sanitized them the following spring. I realized what a hassle this was for something I would never use.

So, here is my solution to the problem: I drained the system, blew out these lines to make sure no water was in them, and then installed shutoff valves on the cold- and hot-water lines underneath the bathroom sink. Turn the valves off, and you never have to winterize or sanitize these lines again. If you ever do want to use the washing-machines lines, just turn the valves on, sanitize them, and away you go.

John Spilker, Chehalis, Washington

Thank you for the suggestion, John. Those washer-dryer lines are frequently overlooked when winterizing, and your modification seems like an excellent solution for those who don't need the washer and dryer. 📧

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

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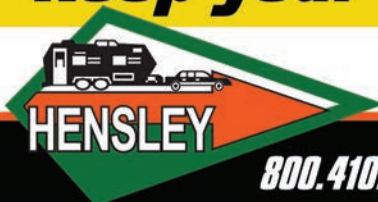
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Rainbow of Rock

Arizona's Petrified Forest National Park mesmerizes with crystalized wood and colorfully banded badlands

Contrary to its name, northeastern Arizona's Petrified Forest is not a forest at all, but before our first visit we didn't know that, and we drove through the park expecting to see stands of trees in an ancient stone forest. Instead, we discovered that the Petrified Forest is actually a vast, barren desert land that was once a muddy swamp.

Eons ago, enormous trees from dense forests floated downstream and sank deep into the muck where they were buried on top of one another. Over the millennia, minerals seeped into the logs and crystalized, transforming the trunks into stone. These petrified logs were hewn into sections by environmental forces, and they now lie scattered about the park. Some trunks are almost completely intact, stretched out for 50 feet or more on the ground, neatly sectioned. Others are short and upended, as if a woodcutter had just finished readying them for splitting.

The best way to ponder the staggering metamorphosis from wood to rock is to wander among the logs. We were enchanted by an area called Jasper Forest where we descended down a narrow trail into a wide valley strewn with petrified logs of every imaginable shape, size and color. Each quartz log was rich with yellow, red, orange and purple hues.

We strolled from stump to stump in the golden hour before sunset, mesmerized by the vibrant tree rings and sparkling rainbow of colorful minerals. Thin, pale stone woodchips littered the ground around the stumps, but unlike wood, when tapped on a rock, they tinkled like pieces of glass.

We hiked the paved Blue Mesa Trail into a wonderland of horizontally striped lavender hills. The trail wound in and out of a sea of towering conical mounds where identical blue, purple and white stripes crossed each hill. In between, tucked into the creases and folds, piles of petrified logs appeared to tumble downhill, as if a giant had stood on top and rolled them down like bowling balls.

Petrified Forest National Park is a spellbinding destination for an RV trip, but as we discovered, you have to get out and hoof it a little to find its true magic. 📍



Full-Quartz Press

Set in a high-desert landscape that chronicles the millennia with each colorful layer, Petrified Forest National Park rolls out ancient logs that sparkle with iron, carbon and manganese.

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