POSITIVE CONNECTION
BOOST WI-FI
SIGNAL STRENGTH

PAIRED POWER LINK TWO PORTABLE GENERATORS

GOOD ATTITUDE FIND A LEVEL SPOT ELECTRONICALLY

FOLLOW THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

SEVENTH-ANNUAL

READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

Page 40



Family Friendly

NIMBLE AND SURPRISINGLY SPACIOUS,
THE WINNEBAGO MICRO MINNIE IS
READY FOR CAMPGROUND ACTION

TIRE TIPS FOR TOW VEHICLES BIKING FOR FUN AND FITNESS

TRAVEL LIGHT > VENTURE SONIC 231VRK



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# **Tire Troubles**

RVers are having a hard time with trailer tires. Knowing how to take care of them properly can lead to safer travels

e have been getting lots of letters and emails about Special Trailer (ST) tires. Having been in the RV world for a long time, I have seen my share of blowouts and the resulting damage to the trailers. In response to a recent RV Clinic Q&A, we received a letter from a concerned reader saying we had neglected to mention that ST tires are rated to only 65 MPH.

While this is not entirely true, as there are ST tires rated above that threshold, the majority don't list a speed rating and therefore default to the 65-MPH rule. Exceeding this speed causes adverse flexing and rapid heating of the tire casing, which can

Tire inflation, condition, alignment, maintenance, age and exceeding the trailer's weight ratings are all factors in how long a tire will last.

lead to blowouts. Of course, the speed rating isn't the only factor. Tire inflation, condition, alignment, maintenance, age and exceeding the trailer's weight ratings are all factors in how long a tire will last.

When I hear stories of RVers losing multiple tires on a trip, violations of the above factors come to mind. But we've discovered that even people who are diligent about their vehicles'

tires and weights have been having failures. A case in point was during a cross-country adventure last summer taken by Publisher Emeritus Bob Livingston and his wife, Lynne. Early in the trip, they had to replace two full sets of tires on their fifth-wheel and the front tires on their two-year-old truck, not to mention a couple of bicycle tires.

In fairness, four of their new tires are Goodyear Endurance radials that replaced really cheap trailer tires they had to buy on the road. However, Bob is Bob, and he has a tire-pressure management system and an onboard air-compressor system, and weighs the combo religiously to stay well within the weight ratings. He also checks the tires at stops when traveling, and he noticed the tires were failing before any of them actually blew out.

> It's no secret that there have been issues with some imported ST tires. While there appears to be action to remedy the situation in the future, that doesn't help RVers now. So here's some advice.

First, take care of the tires like they are your children. Weigh your RV and check tire

pressures regularly, including the spare. Get a TPMS. Inspect the tires for wear and replace them immediately if issues are suspected. And consider upgrading to higher weight-rated, speed-rated ST tires.

Drive safely, remember to check the tires, and we'll see you down the road!

- Chris Dougherty, Technical Editor

# THE SPIN ON TOW-VEHICLE TIRES

Tires are what keep RVs on the road, whether they're on the trailer or the tow vehicle. Jerry Smith focuses on the latter this month in our Tow-Vehicle Tire Guide (page 42), but his maintenance tips apply to all types of tires. Following his advice can help you make the most of those expensive black-rubber doughnuts.



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# HOOK UP AND GO

I read with great interest November 2018's "Hook Me Up" by Chris Hemer, as I have always wanted to see a guide to the many styles of hitch systems. We pull using a 2012 Chevy Silverado 1500 with the smaller 5.3-liter V-8. and I've used the Equal-i-zer sway-control hitch for years. Recently, we upgraded to a larger travel trailer that came with an Eaz-Lift weight-distributing hitch. I was a bit disappointed at first that it was not an Equal-i-zer, but it is working well and has good reviews. I appreciate the article. Pete Honer, Waupaca, Wisconsin



# HAVE A COMMENT?

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or Trailer Life, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Please include your full name, city and state or province.



# **⊙** Tow-Vehicle Trends

November's "Towing 2019" by Chris Hemer about the newest tow vehicles has reinvigorated some thoughts I've had about the trend of the truck market to move toward higher-end packages. I think it's a false market created mostly by dealerships that capitalize on the instant-gratification character of the consuming public. Dealerships order higher-end vehicles, and then their sales teams push them onto the consumers. The choice is a Limited Platinum package or a white fleet truck with hand-crank windows. I refuse to purchase a glamoured-out model that I'm afraid to do dirty work with, so I have to special order and wait six to eight weeks or find one used. Nate Travers, Taylor, Alabama



# **POLL RESULTS:** BOOKING AHEAD

# WHAT'S YOUR RV TRIP-PLANNING STYLE?

76% Reserve Campsites in Advance 24% Rarely Make Reservations

.....

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In "Towing 2019," you cite the Hyundai Santa Fe as being able to tow 3,500 pounds. In many states, trailers rated at 3,500 pounds or more must have trailer brakes. Without them. that SUV will not be equipped with enough braking power to stop its own weight plus 3,500 pounds behind it. Tow-braking ability should be paramount.

# Cecelia Miller

Black Hawk. Colorado



# Diesel or Gas Debate Redux

I read with interest November's letters to the editor about September's "Diesel Versus Gas" article, in particular the one from Joe Washcovick about the Ford F-150 EcoBoost towing a 34-foot trailer, since that is essentially the same as our rig. Our experience has been quite different from Washcovick's.

In 2013 we purchased a new F-150 4x2 SuperCab longbed with the EcoBoost engine and max towing package. Our trailer has a dry weight of about 7,800 pounds, and we have had no trouble towing it over the Rockies. We have a ProPride 3P hitch to handle the side-sway problem, and we had the trailer's drum brakes replaced with Kodiak disc brakes. We

have been very happy with this truck-and-trailer combination as modified.

#### Vernon Matzen

Raleigh, North Carolina

I found "Diesel Versus Gas" to be interesting and informative. However, I felt that it focused on power and performance. The tremendous braking advantage of a diesel over gas should also be recognized. I started pulling our 9,000pound fifth-wheel with a GMC 1500 5.3-liter gas engine and soon learned my true braking ability was only from the trailer brakes. I then upgraded to a GMC Sierra 2500HD with the Duramax diesel. Between the transmission and the engine-brake feature, those downward grades are much more manageable, and the risk of heating up my trailer brakes is reduced.

Paul Conover, Milton, Vermont

If you are going to buy a threequarter-ton for the benefits of that size truck, a diesel is the way to go, considering the cost of ownership and the sale or trade-in value. By recovering most of your investment on the back end and then adding in the better fuel mileage that Chris Hemer wrote about, a three-quarter-ton diesel is the cheaper truck to own, start to finish. Plus, there's the fun of passing big rigs on mountain passes while towing 13,000 pounds.

# Chris Efferson

Greenwell Springs, Louisiana 🗖



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GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK

# Off-Peak Experience

As one of the most-popular national parks celebrates its centennial, a winter or shoulder-season visit beats the crowds

-by Valerie Law

This year marks the centennial of Grand Canyon National Park, the ultimate bucket-list destination for many RVers and sightseers from around the globe. Millions flock to the national park each year to hike and bike its trails, ride mules and horses, and take river trips and helicopter rides, all while drinking in the beauty of one of the world's most spectacular natural wonders.

All those visitors can make RV campsites hard to come by in peak season, but the rest of the year it's a different story, particularly for midweek and non-holiday stays. During the spring and fall shoulder seasons, the park's scenic drives and viewpoints are frequently uncongested, and crowds are few in winter. Spring and fall temperatures can be on the cool side at this elevation, and winter is downright chilly with a chance of snow, but conditions are

often ideal for canyon gazing and selfie taking.

Unlike the North Rim, which closes to the public in winter, the South Rim remains open, with a couple of in-park campgrounds hosting RVers year-round. Mather Campground, managed by the National Park Service, keeps its Pine and Sage loops open all winter. For March through November stays, the campground accepts reservations up to six months in advance at www.recreation.gov, while campsites are available the rest of the year on a first-come, first-served basis.

Mather Campground doesn't have hookups and limits RV length to 30 feet, but neighboring Trailer Village RV Park offers full-hookup campsites for RVs up to 50 feet. The Good Sam Park takes year-round reservations up to 13 months in advance at www.visitgrandcanyon.com.

From both campgrounds, the paved Village Greenway trail leads to the Grand Canyon Visitor Center, where a 20-minute movie and handson exhibits offer a compelling introduction to the park. The Village Greenway continues to the South Rim and more miles of paved walking and biking trails with picture-postcard views.

South of the Grand Canyon, several Good Sam Parks and other RV campgrounds are situated near Interstate 40. RVers staying outside the park can leave their vehicles behind and hop aboard the Grand Canyon Railway in Williams, or take a Greyhound bus or shuttle van from Williams or Flagstaff, then ride the free buses within the park.

# **FREE PASS**

Admission to all National Park Service sites is free this year on January 21, Martin Luther King Jr. Day. If you venture to the Grand Canyon, make sure your RV is ready for below-freezing temperatures. While daytime highs in January are typically in the 40s Fahrenheit on the South Rim, overnight lows dip to a frosty 18 degrees on average. www.nps.gov/grca

• Expect sublime views of the Grand Canyon whatever season you go, but be prepared for subfreezing nights and dress in layers if you explore the South Rim in winter.



# EarthCruiser Goes MOD

A leading manufacturer of overland-expedition vehicles, EarthCruiser recently unveiled the MOD, short for My Own Design, a lightweight, customizable pop-up truck camper. "This is a really cool concept where folks can readjust the floorplan to fit their travel needs," says Brent Baker, EarthCruiser's director of business development and marketing.

The camper looks sleek on the outside, and inside it features prebuilt PAKs (personalized accessory kits) that can be attached to mounting points or T-tracks. Six of 10 PAKs have been designed, and the company is working with mountain-biking and fishing experts to develop kits tailored to those pursuits.

Utilizing a one-piece fiberglass shell, the MOD is claimed to weigh as little as 700 pounds for the 300 model (\$22,000), which is designed for most midsize trucks. For full-size trucks, the 400 model (\$23,500) weighs 800 pounds, not including options, according to EarthCruiser. All MODs come standard with a cabover bed and corner storage unit that houses the 12-volt DC electricalsystem wiring and controls. — Damian Fagan

www.earthcruiser.com

# Camp of Enchantment

 Vintage campers, craft beer, live music and the beautiful backdrop of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains — what more can one ask for? Known as Hotel Luna Mystica, this eclectic 12-acre campground is situated just outside Taos, New Mexico, and offers 18 classic trailers and 60 campsites.



Ranging from a 1951 Royal Spartanette to a 1972 Mobile Scout, each lovingly revamped trailer is outfitted with a kitchen, bathroom, bed and deck but adorned with its own unique style. For guests willing to share quarters, a hostel trailer

offers beds for \$30 a night. For those traveling with an RV, dry sites go for \$25 a night or \$150 a week and include use of the shower facilities. Next door is Taos Mesa Brewing, home to live music and events every day of

the week, as well as a restaurant. Five minutes down the road is the famous Rio Grande Gorge. — Cate Battles

www.hotellunamystica.com



At an elevation of 6,969 feet, Taos, New Mexico, easily surpasses Denver's Mile High City, but the altitude can take some acclimation. If you stay at Hotel Luna Mystica, go easy on the Black Widow Porter at neighboring Taos Mesa Brewing.

# **BIG DEBUTS**

The new year is ringing in some popularly priced travel trailer and fifth-wheel lines



# **Heartland Milestone**

With starting prices from \$40,000 to \$50,000, the Milestone fifth-wheel features a straight-roof design that allows for lofty 6-foot, 5-inch-tall slideouts. Among the four debut models are an elevated rear-den layout, a bunkhouse with two full baths, and a mid-bunk, bath-and-a-half. Lengths range from 40 feet, 4 inches to 42 feet, 8 inches, and the gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) is 15,000 pounds for all models. www.heartlandrvs.com



# **Venture RV Stratus**

Designed with young families in mind, the Stratus turns heads with brightly colored exteriors. The kitchen feels like home with a pantry, a large sink and an 8-cubic-foot refrigerator. In the bedroom, sizable nightstands are backed by USB ports, and a residential mattress is among the upgrades. Initially offered in six models from 28 feet, 7 inches to just over 32 feet, the new line of lightweight travel trailers has gvwRs from 7,000 to 8,300 pounds. Base MSRP: \$31,605. www.venture-rv.com



# **Winnebago Micro Minnie**

Winnebago ramps up its growing fleet of trimmed-down towables with the Micro Minnie fifth-wheel. Five models are available, each measuring 26 feet, 9 inches with a GVWR of 7,700 pounds. The new line of compact fivers is designed to be towed by some half-ton pickups and SUVs, and narrow enough at 7 feet so extended side-view mirrors may not be necessary. Base MSRP: \$34,503. www.winnebagoind.com

# **Road Warriors, Unite!**

Full-time travelers share the secrets of their professional success

Every year in early spring, a group of adventurous RVers congregates to inspire one another as they build businesses on the road. This year the RV Entrepreneur Summit convenes at Lake Guntersville State Park Campground in Guntersville, Alabama, March 21 through 24, providing speakers, workshops and activities for business creators and dreamers alike.

Brainchild of full-time RVers Heath and Alyssa Padgett, the event was created in 2017 to address a growing number of full-timers' needs to network with others like themselves — road warriors who launch businesses that support their traveling lifestyles and achieve their personal and financial goals.

The event has grown from 120 attendees in its first year to an anticipated 300 this year, and yet the venue remains intimate and energizing. It gathers long-term RVers with first-timers and those just dreaming of a full-time lifestyle for an inspirational sharing of ideas, contacts, support and synergy. Participants also manage to have a lot of fun along the way. In fact, many of them stick around for an extra week or two, finding it hard to leave this close-knit gathering of their "tribe."

Standard passes to the 2019 conference are sold out, but some \$300 tickets will be available online in January. Full-hookup campsites are discounted to \$20 per day for attendees. — Shellev Dennis www.therventrepreneur.com



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# **FULL-SIZE TRUCKS**

Our five-part online series profiles new domestic and imported pickups, with a focus on towing features and capabilities ("2019 Trucks for Towing").

# STORAGE STRATEGY

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# EACILON

From casual cruising to mountain biking and road riding, RVers are spinning another set of wheels

y Emily Fagan

amping and bicycling go hand in hand, and some of our favorite times in the RV lifestyle have been when we stayed in beautiful places near scenic trails that we explored at leisure on two wheels. Riding a bike is slow enough to let us stop and smell the flowers but fast enough to cover some real ground and see a lot of things

# PARK AND RIDE

There are many different kinds of cycling, from mountain biking and road riding to leisurely cruising. Pedaling around the RV park on a bike is a great way to get some fresh air, and many public campgrounds are situated on or near bike trails.

The gradual transformation of thousands of miles of former rail lines to gravel or paved paths has been a boon to cyclists. These rails-to-trails routes usually go through pretty scenery and are often marked with plaques explaining local history and how the railway was used back in the day. In some places, train depots still stand sentry at various points along the trails.

In our travels, we have ridden many delightful rails-to-trails routes. Some are as long as 100 miles, and we have tackled them in sections,

doing out-and-back rides from each camping spot. Idaho's Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes, South Dakota's Mickelson Trail in the Black Hills, Minnesota's Paul Bunyan and Heartland State Trails, and the New River Trail in Virginia all offer long-distance rides that roll through interesting countryside from one small town to the next.

Some communities have bike paths that connect to nearby rails-to-trails routes. Sun Valley, Idaho, and the neighboring towns have so many paved paths that we have yet



to ride them all, despite visiting several times.

A few national parks offer paved paths that weave between the sights, and the National Park Service has been lengthening many of these. The bike path at Utah's Bryce Canyon is a thrilling ride from Red Canyon at one end to Inspiration Point at the other, with wonderful twists and turns through the ponderosa pine forest in between. In Wyoming the paved path through Grand Teton National Park wanders along the base of stunning mountain peaks, and a ride at dawn may yield a moose sighting.

Florida's Gulf Islands National Seashore near Pensacola Beach has a paved path that's lined on both sides with sugar-white sand. Crashing emerald waves fill the views on one side of the trail, while the mirrorlike Intracoastal Waterway calmly laps the other. In Alberta, the bike path at Waterton Lakes National Park offers awe-inspiring views as you drop down into the heart of the park at the lake.

All of these trails are ideal for cyclists of any age or ability. Toddlers can be towed in a bike trailer behind mom or dad's bike, and seniors can take a spin of just a few miles on a cruiser bike and not worry about uneven ground or steep climbs or descents. Electric bikes make the rides even easier.

# MOUNTAIN BIKING

For more athletic and ambitious cyclists, thousands of miles of challenging mountain-biking routes ribbon the country. Trails in Sedona, Arizona, and Moab, Utah, wind through gorgeous red-rock vistas that are as spectacular as the trails are treacherous. For a softer landing, the woods around Bend, Oregon, are a great place to practice and improve mountain-biking skills.

We have found that the most versatile bicycles for our full-time RVing lifestyle are mountain bikes, even though we prefer road riding. Most often we set up camp near dirt roads,

EVEN IF WE AREN'T "SHREDDING THE GNAR" ON SINGLE-TRACK TRAILS, WE APPRECIATE OUR FULL-SUSPENSION MOUNTAIN BIKES AS WE BUMP ALONG ON RUTTED TWO-TRACK FOREST ROADS.

# TICKET TO RIDE

Mountain biking intimidated me until I attended one of **Lindsey Richter's Ladies** AllRide camps. Despite being a group of 28 women from 19 to 58 whose skill level ranged from "I haven't ridden a bike since I was 10" to one young woman who was training for the pro circuit, the workshop got everyone spinning their wheels. I was astonished to find myself jumping my bike off boxes into soft grass on the first day.

The camps take place around the country and teach mountain-biking skills in an encouraging environment. Check the website for the 2019 schedule. - Emily Fagan www.ladiesallride.com



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so even if we aren't "shredding the gnar" on singletrack trails, we appreciate our full-suspension mountain bikes as we bump along on rutted twotrack forest roads. No matter the terrain or where we're going, our mountain bikes can handle it.

#### ROAD CYCLING

Road riding is a special challenge because many streets are clogged with traffic and don't have sufficiently wide bike lanes or shoulders to make bicycling safe. Road riders can look for suitable routes online, but one of the best ways to discover good cycling roads is to search for a local bike club and join a group ride. Many bike clubs welcome visitors, and weekend mornings are when they usually ride together.

Some RV parks and resorts furnish bicvcles for rental or even complimentary use. Wavpoint Ventura. a Southern California RV park with vintagetrailer lodgings, allows guests to borrow its beach-cruiser bikes free of charge.



As soon as you are pedaling in the paceline, you'll feel right at home without needing to know the roads, and when you stop for the traditional coffee afterward, you can get everyone's best tips and advice for other things to see and do in the area. From Southern California's San Diego Bike Club to the North Florida Bike Club in

# **● SPIN DOCTOR**

As bicycling enthusiasts and full-time RVers, my wife, Lynne, and I consider bicycles as pretty much "standard equipment." We strive to choose RV parks for their proximity to good riding roads or trails, so the bicycles can be used as convenient transportation and to keep our bodies in motion after long stints behind the wheel.

My ride of choice is a highperformance, carbon-frame road bike, but it's not always practical when staying in campgrounds with gravel or dirt roads, and when there is access to nearby unpaved trails. That's where a mountain

bike comes in handy, but carrying multiple bicycles complicates the process. Unless riding on technical single-track trails is on the agenda, switching to a lightweight gravel bike might be a practical alternative — in lieu of hauling two or three bicycles.

The market is flooded with specialized racks that are designed to carry multiple bicycles. Unfortunately, many of the hitch-receiver, rail-type racks are not recommended for RVs. Rough roads torture bicycle racks. and we learned the hard way that manufacturer warnings should

be heeded. Last summer, one of the arms that holds my bicycle in place on a very expensive rack broke off the rail support, which left the bike dangling in its cover. Without the cover, the bike would have been lost. Racks designed for heavier, electric-assist bicycles have higher ratings, and some are approved for RV use.

The elements are tough on bicycles, and a good cover can mitigate potential damage. Even so, I service our bikes frequently, paying careful attention to the drivetrain. Regular chain and gear cleaning, and the use of a dry lubricant, will

keep the wheels spinning.

To protect our bikes from theft, I use %-inch cables and Kryptonite New York locks to help maintain "ownership." They are always locked while on the road and in an RV park.

Bicycling is a great way to enjoy the RV experience. Not only is it exhilarating, as it was while ascending mountain roads in Colorado at 9,200 feet in elevation last summer, it makes it easy to enjoy the landscape while maintaining a decent level of fitness. In other words, "countering happy hours" in RV parks. - Bob Livingston



Jacksonville, we have loved riding with local biking groups in places where we've gone RVing.

#### **BIKES ON BOARD**

Bicycle rentals and even loaners are available at some RV campgrounds and bike shops, and a number of communities now have bike-share programs. For RVers traveling with their bikes, a secure way to transport them is needed.

Bike racks vary tremendously in style and quality, and some methods for carrying bikes are preferable to others. When we started RVing, we mounted a specially designed bike rack on the roof of our pop-up tent trailer. When we moved up to a 27-foot travel trailer and started full-timing, we traveled for a year with our cyclocross bikes in the truck bed under a cap. The cap provided excellent weather protection for the bikes as well as a roomy place to carry them.

The most common solutions for fifthwheel owners is to mount a bike rack in the hitch receiver on the back of the trailer or lash a single bike onto the trailer's rear ladder, because there isn't enough room

No matter where they park their fifth-wheel, author Emily Fagan and her husband, Mark, love to get out on their bikes and go exploring. Pedaling down forest roads brings them closer to nature, while joining local bike clubs' weekend rides makes it easy to enjoy road riding without knowing the area. for bikes in the pickup bed under the fifth-wheel overhang. Some custom bike racks are designed to use two hitch receivers welded to the frame of the trailer for added rigidity.

One downside of carrying bikes on the back of the trailer is that they extend the overall length of the rig a few feet, making the back end of the trailer swing a little wider during tight turns. Also, the bikes are exposed to the elements and road debris flung up by the trailer's wheels. A bike cover or well-tied tarp can protect bikes from

# RACK 'N' ROLL

- A) Keeping up with demand, RV manufacturers have been offering more choices for transporting bicycles. Oliver fabricates a custom aluminum bike rack (shown) for its fiberglass travel trailers, and also has an add-on 11/4-inch rear-bumper receiver that can support a hitch-mounted rack.
- B) Hitch-mounted tray-style racks provide a stable platform for bikes and are easy to set up and load.
- C) Hitch-mounted racks have the added benefit of being able to move from the trailer to the tow vehicle, if both have receiver hitches.
- D) Pace Edwards' UltraGroove retractable truck-bed cover accommodates the crossbars of most Thule and Yakima racks, allowing bikes to be transported above the truck bed.
- E) The Jayco Hummingbird is among the new RVs with a bike rack on its options list, ensuring that the rack won't void the manufacturer's warranty. Mounted over the trailer's tongue jack, the Jack-It carrier provides a perch for two bikes and allows the driver to see







SHAWN SPENCE, EMILY AND MARK FAGAN, BOB DAWSON AND JAYCC





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road grime and rain. A seamstress who specializes in canvas work made a custom bike cover for us out of UV-resistant and water-repellent Sunbrella fabric.

One benefit of fifth-wheel trailers is that bikes can be "garaged" under the fifth-wheel overhang while in camp. This not only protects them from bad weather, but they can be locked to one of the landing legs with a conventional bike lock. Granted, a clever thief could brace the trailer and raise the landing jacks to steal the bikes, but we haven't heard of that happening.

Many lightweight trailers aren't built to support the added weight of a rack and bikes, and mounting a bike rack may void the RV's warranty. Before investing in a rack, make sure it is approved by the manufacturer of your RV. In addition, some bike-rack companies don't warranty the use of their racks on the back of RVs.

Unsuitable or poor-quality racks can cause damage to bikes. When we moved into a fifth-wheel, our cyclocross bikes were damaged because the rack held them in position with clamps around the top tubes. Tray-style racks are a better design because they cradle both wheels and use a telescoping arm to secure the front wheel or frame. Some clever racks transform into bike stands for repairs and maintenance.

Toy-hauler RVs offer an ideal setup because bicycles can be strapped down inside the trailer's garage. This keeps them out of the elements and out of sight of thieves, and protects them from rear-end traffic accidents.

Occasionally, you may want to travel in your tow vehicle with the bikes but not the trailer, especially if the bike trail starts more than a few miles from the campground. At those times, a hitch-mounted bike rack can be moved from the trailer to the hitch receiver on the tow vehicle. Racks can also be mounted on the roof of the tow vehicle, in the bed of the truck or on top of a truck-bed cover with side rails that fit bike-rack hardware.

Bikes can even be hung over the truck's tailgate with the front wheel

outside the bed and the rest of the bike inside the bed. Specially designed pads secured with straps can protect the truck from scratches. A furniture pad also works in a pinch for short distances.

Better racks have built-in locks so bikes can't be stolen. For racks that don't have a lock, a conventional bike lock can do the trick if you can find a place to secure it to the tow-vehicle frame. Likewise, if you plan to ride your

bike to a coffee shop or run errands with it, a small bike lock or U-lock will stop most thieves.

For many of us, bicycling is a natural extension of the RV life, and no matter what you ride, where you go or how you get your bike there, there's nothing like that feeling after a glorious hour in the saddle when you relax with a cool drink or cup of coffee and say, "Wow, what a ride!" 🎞





# Family Comfort

Winnebago's Micro Minnie has a lot more room than the name suggests, and features a Murphy bed

- by Stephanie and Jeremy Puglisi

he recession of 2007 to 2009 hit the RV industry hard, but it also caused many of the major manufacturers to innovate in the travel trailer segment. The industry realized that if first-time buyers did not have to purchase a new heavy-duty truck and an RV at the same time, the barriers to RV ownership could be lowered dramatically. The RV industry gambled, and gambled correctly, that if manufacturers made their RVs lighter, many consumers would realize that a suitable tow vehicle was already sitting in their driveway.

A decade ago many of these

compact ultralight trailers were entry level in terms of price and quality. But not anymore. This entire segment has matured and exploded in popularity. The options, in terms of price and amenities, are various and appealing to a wide demographic of buyers. Young families and empty nesters (and everyone in between) are purchasing ultralights. There is even a downsizing trend among seasoned RV owners. You don't need a 40-foot fifth-wheel to experience all of the comforts and conveniences of a modern RV. A compact ultralight might just do the trick.



sites to choose from in most public campgrounds. A compact ultralight trailer is also the twists and turns of campgrounds that were designed when RV's were smaller. They are also easier to store.

downsize-trailer segment is the 2019 Winnebago Micro Minnie 2306BHS, which offers a generous amount of livability, even if the name suggests the opposite.

# **OUTSIDE THE BOX**

If this review hinged on the exterior look of the trailer, the Micro Minnie 2306BHS would get two thumbs up. The Noble Classic high-gloss fiberglass side walls are sleek and fashionable. The test

easier to navigate through

A good choice in the



- C) pantry D) TV
- E) convertible dinette
- H) 54"x74" Murphy bed I) two-way refrigerator
- I) linen closet

trailer featured the Champagne exterior, but if you don't want to blend in with the campground crowd, a Cherry or Yellow paint job will hit the mark. The average age of the RV buyer is getting lower every year, and new shoppers often complain that everything looks the same. Winnebago offers eight stylish exterior options in an industry that often plays it safe with design.

Color is not the only

thing that stands out about the Micro Minnie's exterior. Winnebago is using high-quality and notable materials in the construction of this trailer body. The fiberglass walls are layered with Azdel Onboard composite panels, which add durability and resistance to water damage. The BAL-engineered chassis is designed to be both lightweight and extremely durable, using huck bolts and interlocking dimples, which eliminates welding. Other manufacturing materials worth a mention include the exterior-grade tongueand-groove plywood flooring fastened to an aluminum floor frame, offering a more stable foundation for the rest of the trailer components.

It may not be as important as build quality, but awning size can be a





# TRY IT ON FOR SIZE

The benefits of a shorter. lighter rig are many. Instead of having to purchase an expensive heavy-duty truck, you have the option of purchasing a comfortable and immensely drivable (and increasingly fuel-efficient) half-ton pickup. Not into pickup trucks? A properly matched SUV might make the perfect daily driver and tow vehicle for a compact ultralight.

You will also have more options for booking great campsites, particularly in state and national parks. Owners of large fifth-wheels and motorhomes have fewer

# OFF-THE-WALL BED

Murphy beds have exploded in popularity lately, but they do have pros and cons. Although they are easy to set up and contribute to more living space, they lack privacy for parents who are traveling with kids. With the bed in its upright position (top left), a sofa adds to the seating options.

deal breaker for some. On this Micro Minnie, a 15-foot awning extends from the door to the rear of the rig, providing shelter from the sun or the rain. During our stay in Indiana, it was either pouring rain or blazing hot. We certainly appreciated the awning

# WHAT'S COOKIN'?

Right: For a smaller RV, the Micro Minnie 2306BHS offers a fully functional kitchen with a threeburner range (far right), two-way refrigerator, and ample counter space for food prep and a coffee-and-tea station. We cooked a complete Sunday dinner and felt like we had the space and functionality of a much larger rig.

under both conditions.

The Micro Minnie has a heated, insulated and enclosed underbelly for those looking to stretch their camping season into cooler months. If you're really concerned about staying toasty warm in chilly temperatures, consider upgrading to the Extreme Weather Package for additional reflective foil insulation.

We were plugged into campground power during our whole stay, but for those who like to dry camp, the 2306BHS comes prepped for solar power by Zamp Solar. This means you can purchase a portable solar-panel kit from Zamp or another aftermarket supplier and easily connect it to the trailer. Many solar companies use the same two-pin connector as that used by Zamp, so the hookup is easy. The size of this RV allows it to fit into more remote campsites, which often do not offer electric hookups. So if you are thinking about dry camping but still would like to enjoy the comforts of the RV, adding a solar panel or two will allow you to keep the battery charged and use the 12-volt DC appliances.

Note that if you want to use any of the 120-volt AC outlets when not hooked up to shorepower, you will need to add an inverter and upgrade the trailer's battery bank or use a generator. Also keep an eye on those





Speaking of tanks, a black-tank flush on this 2306BHS is a truly great RV feature that we would never want to be without, but it is located on the door side of the RV. This isn't a huge deal, but we did find it to be a minor inconvenience. We had to run a hose from the water spigot on the hookup side to the opposite side of the RV. Most owners prefer to have tank-maintenance valves and connections on the hookup side.

The only exterior feature that gave us real cause for concern was a very low-lying sewer pipe. We noticed right away that this could easily be an issue on pitched or uneven terrain. Fortunately, Winnebago offers an optional off-road kit that includes a suspension lift at the axle to boost the trailer height a few inches to provide additional ground clearance. In the future, we hope Winnebago offers a standard solution to what we see as an accident waiting to happen.

# INSIDE SCOOP

The real question for families is whether the interior of a 25-foot-plus travel trailer could be functional. Is there enough space to fit in all the stuff? Would a family be able to hang out comfortably inside? Could family-size meals be cooked in the kitchen? And is a Murphy bed as easy to open and close as they claim?

We'll tackle the last question first, since the real-world functionality of the Murphy bed in the 2306BHS was our number-one question. In theory, a fold-up bed takes care of a lot of small-trailer issues. You don't have to choose between a dedicated sleeping or seating area or transform a U-shaped dinette into a bed every night.

Throughout the week, we exclaimed repeatedly over certain features that seemed particularly impressive in a small trailer: the intuitive kitchen layout, the spacious bathroom, the ease of the Murphy bed setup.

tank sizes if dry camping is your style. The 2306BHS can carry 31 gallons of fresh water. The black and gray tanks can each carry 35 gallons of waste, all a little light on capacity for boondocking.

It took a little bit of practice, but after three or four trial runs, we were masters of the 54-by-74-inch Murphy bed, requiring less than a minute to open and close it. There were latches to lock the bed into

the open position, which circumvented unintentional closing — a safety concern expressed from other RVers. It was also possible to close the bed easily with all of the bedding still on it. The mattress was a bit firm for our taste, but more picky sleepers can replace the standard mattress. With the Murphy bed, an owner would need to be sure a replacement mattress was flexible enough to allow

the mechanism to function.

When the bed was folded up, we enjoyed sitting on the comfortable leatherette couch. The table space on either side came in handy throughout the week for a cup of coffee or magazine.

The twin bunks, measuring 28 by 72 inches, were perfect for two youngsters. The Teddy Bear Mattresses were comfortable, and there was plenty of room at the end of the beds for storing three packing cubes that we use when traveling in an RV. One thing to note is that the top bunk has a window but the bottom bunk does not. This is a trade-off for a very convenient feature. The bottom bunk flips up, and an exterior door allows for easy loading of bikes or other gear. The best part about this feature is that the generous amount of carrying capacity on the 2306BHS (2,440 pounds) means you can safely bring your "toys" and not worry about overloading the rig.

At night, the dining booth was converted for our five-year-old, and

while he was perfectly comfortable, we were reminded of why dedicated beds are best for families. The Winnebago is a very suitable trailer for a family of three or four.

Speaking of sleeping comfort, the 13,500-Btu air conditioner worked efficiently and effectively to circulate air throughout the trailer, even cooling the bunks, which are mostly tucked away behind walls. It is not a quiet system, however, and those sensitive to sound should be aware of that.

This trailer's Graphite interior color scheme is a departure from the more traditional RV interior. Many people complain about the layers and layers of brown in RVs. No brown is to be had in this Micro Minnie. The creams, grays and black create a light, open feeling inside a relatively small trailer.

The kitchen may have been the superstar standout in the 2306BHS. It is fully functional with a double sink,

Minnie Golden der Arte de la Contraction de la C

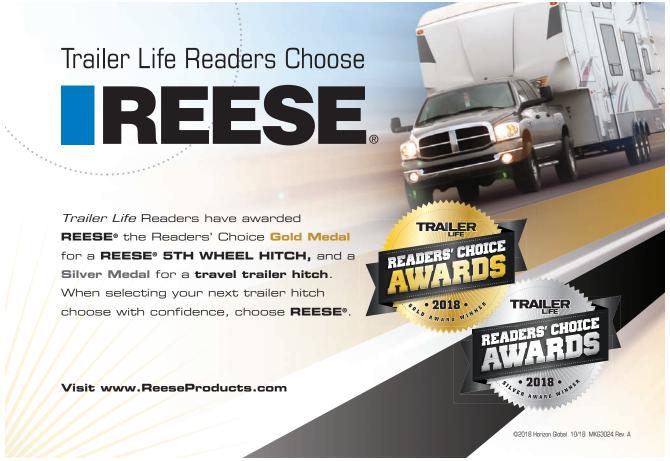
# **+** WHAT WE LIKED

Design and functionality are spot on for a family of three or four. The Murphy bed layout, spacious bathroom and roomy kitchen fit plenty of flexible living space into a small footprint.

#### WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE

The optional lift kit for the axles should be a standard feature for sewer-pipe clearance. Upgraded trailer tires would fit nicely with the other high-end manufacturing features.

three-burner range, oven, microwave and two-way refrigerator. There's a surprising amount of cabinet and drawer space. We were able to fit all of our camp-kitchen basics and pantry



supplies. Spaghetti and meatballs is a comfort food for most families while on the road, and we cooked an entire Sunday dinner in the Micro Minnie. The flip-up counter extension was perfect for providing additional food-prep space. There are also USB outlets below the top cabinets and 120-volt AC outlets for a coffeemaker or other kitchen appliances.

The bathroom is surprisingly roomy and includes a nice-size shower. The configuration of pieces meant we could easily use the toilet without banging our knees into the walls or cabinets. The vanity and medicine cabinet had plenty of room for our family's toiletries.

When the booth dinette wasn't acting as a bed, it functioned well as a place for eating, working or playing cards. The dinette is in a deep slideout, and while we didn't love the modest step up from a convenience perspective, it was comfortable and roomy for all five of us. There was a nice view of the LED TV from a few spots on the dinette, but not from the seats closest to the window. The Jensen stereoand-speaker system was easy to use, making it simple to listen to music from our smartphones in various interior and exterior zones.

Throughout the week, we exclaimed repeatedly over certain features that seemed particularly impressive in a small trailer: the intuitive kitchen layout, the spacious







bathroom, the ease of the Murphy bed setup. We offered daily thanks for the Thin Shade Ready privacy shade on the door, since the master bed is located right next to it.

The wardrobe space next to the master bed is quite limited, which is expected in a 7-footwide trailer. Folks traveling with more than two people will have to get creative with clothing storage. We thanked the gods of RVing more than once that all five of us had packing cubes to help keep the trailer neat and organized.

# **BOTTOM LINE**

What's the final verdict? Could we spend a vacation in such a small space and still love each other at the end of the week? The answer was an emphatic yes...and no.

# **SPECIFICATIONS**

| SPECIFICA                              | TIIONS             |
|--|--------------------|
| 2019 WINNEBAGO MICRO                   | MINNIE 2306BHS     |
| Exterior Length                        | 25' 5"             |
| Exterior Width                         | 7'                 |
| Exterior Height 10                     | O' (including A/C) |
| Interior Width                         | 6' 10"             |
| Interior Height                        | 6' 4"              |
| Construction Welde                     | d-aluminum-tube    |
| side walls, high-gloss fil             | berglass exterior, |
| Azdel backer for fiberglass walls,     |                    |
| BAL chassis secured                    |                    |
| huck bolts, exterior-grade tongue-and- |                    |
| groove plywood flo                     |                    |
| aluminu                                | ım floor supports  |
| Freshwater Cap.                        | 31 gal.            |
| Black-/Gray-Water Cap.                 | 25/25 gal.         |
| LP-Gas Cap.                            | 10 gal.            |
| Water-Heater Cap.                      | 6 gal.             |
| Refrigerator                           | 6 cu. ft.          |
| Furnace                                | 18,000 Btu         |
| Air Conditioner                        | 13,500 Btu         |
| Converter                              | 30 amp             |
| Battery                                | Dealer supplied    |
| Tires                                  | ST205/75R14        |
| Suspension                             | Torsion            |
| Weight (freshwater, water heater,      |                    |
| LP-gas full; no cargo)                 | 4,560 lbs.         |
| Hitch Weight                           | 495 lbs.           |
| Axle Weight                            | 4,065 lbs.         |
| GVWR                                   | 7,000 lbs.         |
| GAWR (2)                               | 3,700 lbs.         |
| Cargo Carrying Cap.                    | 2,440 lbs.         |
| MSRP, Base                             | \$31,573           |
| MSRP, As Tested                        | \$31,784           |

# Winnebago Industries

Basic Warranty

www.winnebagoind.com Circle 143 on Reader Service Card 1 year

The size and layout of the Micro Minnie 2306BHS functioned beautifully, offering individual and communal spaces, as needed. We didn't feel jam-packed when doing basic daily activities like showering, cooking, eating or watching television. The Murphy bed was as easy and intuitive as we had hoped.

The real hiccup to us was making and unmaking the dinette into a bed. It was a comfortable place to sleep, but we weren't thrilled with that daily routine. That being the case, we suggest that the Micro Minnie 2306BHS is a wonderful first travel trailer for a family with no more than two kids. If you are looking for a well-constructed, well-designed RV that you could pull with a suitably equipped large SUV or half-ton truck, this should be on your list.

Clockwise from top left: The bathroom is a real standout with a good size shower and room for toiletries. The twin bunks are comfortable, and the lower one lifts for access to an exterior door for storing bikes and other big gear. When the dinette isn't set up for sleeping, it comfortably seats two adults and two kids for dinner or a game of cards.

# BRAKE THROUGH!



Introducing REDARC Tow-Pro Elite, the revolutionary new Electric Trailer Brake Controller.

The award winning Tow-Pro Elite is designed and made by REDARC, an Australian company that's been around for almost 40 years.

**Safe braking at your fingertips.** With fingertip control it delivers smooth, safe braking on all trailer types. The control knob can be mounted on the dash and the main unit is so compact it can be hidden away where the driver's knees can't knock it accidentally. It's easy to install and is suitable for both 12V and 24V vehicles.

**Tow-Pro Elite is the only brake controller on the market with 2 types of braking modes:** 'Proportional Mode' (Inertia sensing) for highway conditions and 'User Controlled Mode' for offroad. No other brake controller can match Tow-Pro Elite. Visit redarcelectronics.com/towpro









WINEGARD'S CONNECT 2.0
ALLOWS USERS TO TAKE
ADVANTAGE OF FREE WI-FI
BY PULLING IN DISTANT
SIGNALS, AND CAN BE SET UP
FOR INDEPENDENT 4G LTE
DATA SERVICE

- by Bob Livingston

Choosing an RV park has always revolved around the type of sites and the amenities offered as part of the fees. Full hookups are probably the most important feature, but running a close second these days is whether the facility has Wi-Fi and the quality of the service. For many travelers, staying connected can make or break a trip, and even though the Wi-Fi service in RV parks is getting a little better, the need to improve reliability and signal strength is a common concern. Winegard's ConnecT Wi-Fi extender is just the ticket for those who thrive on social media or need to stay in touch for family or business reasons.

The ConnecT 2.0 4G2 4G LTE + WiFi Extender's full name may be a mouthful to recite, but the latest model (WF2-435) needs that long designation to describe its ability to pull in distant Wi-Fi signals with the added benefit of using a proprietary data plan or one supplied by an outside cellular-service provider. The features are mutually exclusive, but the end result is the same: improving Wi-Fi connectivity when in an RV park.

It's fair to say that most users will use the ConnecT to bring in free Wi-Fi and boost the signal strength appreciably to actually make it possible to feed a Facebook

© Winnegard's ConnecT looks like a mini satellite dish and mounts easily on the roof of just about any RV. It can bring in signals that are too weak for many devices.



addiction, peruse the internet and work email from their site. Campground Wi-Fi has a dubious reputation, which is usually the result of a sparsely populated antenna system. If you happen to be parked too far away, getting a solid connection can be maddening. The Winegard device "pulls in" distant signals using three Wi-Fi and two 4G LTE high-gain antennas under a roof-mounted dome that looks like a mini satellite dish. It's only 16 inches in diameter and 8 inches high, and weighs a scant 3.75 pounds.

The other aspect of the Winegard antenna is its ability to operate as an independent cellular-data network. Loaded in the antenna is a Winegard SIM card that can be activated to allow the dome to function as a 4G LTE router and provide fast data service without throttling the service when the subscribed level of data is consumed — a practice common among conventional cellular providers. But there is a caveat: The cost is on the high side, especially for those who consume a lot of data on a monthly basis.

Recently, Winegard announced a reduction in its 10GB plan, shaving \$15 off the original \$80 rate. Those with a more insatiable appetite for data can choose the 20GB plan for \$150 a month, or there are two less expensive rates for occasional users. One is \$20 for 1GB, which is almost useless in real-world conditions, and a 3GB plan for \$35, which is also very limited for most users.

Published speeds via the 2.4-gigahertz system are 450 megabits per second for up- and downloading (claimed to be faster than current data devices from wireless providers), making video streaming possible, but again, data caps will preclude practical usage for more than occasional online TV viewing. In all cases, there are no long-term commitments or contracts, and data can be added as needed.

Alternatively, the ConnecT supports data plans from

1) ConnecT is preloaded with a proprietary SIM card that is used to subscribe to the company's data service. The system supports Verizon and AT&T SIM cards, which should be swapped before installing the dome on the roof. The reset button and necessary coding are also behind a protective cover. 2-3) A little measuring-tape time is necessary for determining the final location of the dome. The dome must be at least 12 inches from the right or left edge of the RV and any other accessory. A close-to-level location is required.

AT&T and Verizon, but the price is also rather steep. At press time, the antenna is compatible only with SIM cards provided by AT&T and Verizon, and we discovered that the rates for such service can be expensive, so research the plans carefully. Rates, of course, are a moving target, and

Verizon, for example, did not offer its Beyond Unlimited plan for the ConnecT at press time.

As full-timers, we rely on data service from Verizon that's tied to our cell phones. The additional cost to activate a Verizon Jetpack mobile Wi-Fi hotspot is only \$10 a month,













4) Once the location for the ConnecT 2 is determined, the flange screw holes are marked for pilot drilling (5). 6) The area around each drilled hole is cleaned with an alcohol prep pad or a mixture of 50-50 water and alcohol.



and it provides pretty good service for our needs. But Verizon throttles the data speed after reaching 15GB during any one month, so we also appreciate Wi-Fi availability in RV parks. That's where the ConnecT really shines. We tested the system in a variety of RV parks last summer, during peak occupancy and usage, and found the antenna to be invaluable. It pulled in signals emanating from centrally located antennas, typically too far from our sites. As long as the RV park's system











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7) A dab of self-leveling sealant, formulated for the roof type, is applied before placing the dome into position and tightening the provided screws. 8) Sealant is used to cover the screwheads after tightening. 9) The bathroom roof vent made a perfect entry point for the power cable. The MaxxAir cover was lifted off to expose the vent frame, and a hole was drilled (10) to allow for cable routing.

was active and providing adequate signal strength for the ConnecT antenna to process that signal, we were able to improve our connection to the Wi-Fi.

Interestingly, the ConnecT antenna reaches out beyond the RV park borders and has the capability to pick up Wi-Fi signals from commercial establishments, like coffee shops, and public places. Of course, access to Wi-Fi signals that have security protection will require the use of a password to activate through the ConnecT. The range is pretty impressive (up to 2 miles, depending on conditions), and logging on to these sites, arguably, presents an ethical element, since using service designed for paying customers — and not password-protected might be considered a breach of trust. We buy lots of coffee at Starbucks, for example, and never bring our computer, so we are comfortable using its Wi-Fi service at times, if there's a store close to where we're parked.

While some people might consider the Verizon Jetpack a redundant Wi-Fi source, we found additional versatility by connecting it through the Winegard

11-12) A 20-foot extension power cable (not shown) is provided with the kit. For the test installation, the cable from the dome was long enough to reach the switch location in the bathroom roof-vent shroud. The terminal for connecting the extension cable was not needed and is cut off to allow for routing through the vent frame. 13) When the power cable is routed through the roof, an entry plate is used to protect against moisture intrusion. A generous application of roof sealant must be used under the entry plate, if used. 14) The 16-inch-diameter dome fit nicely between two solar panels and cleared the roof vents within specifications. Fortunately, there was still enough space to walk on an already crowded roof.



dome. For one, the reach could be extended from inside the RV without physically carrying the device to an outside setting. But a more important aspect provides additional security when allowing others to use your Jetpack. By setting up guest access via the ConnecT, the Jetpack's password does not have to be shared, which can be an important aspect in today's hacking-hungry world. When we disconnect the connection to the dome, access to the Jetpack is blocked.

#### MAKING THE CONNECTION

Installation is not difficult, but it does require a stint on the roof. Winegard has very specific requirements for locating the dome, and owners must make sure the spot for mounting is level and 12 inches from the edges of the roof and other devices, like the air conditioner(s) and satellite dish. The centerline of the dome must be parallel to the centerline of the RV; the dome is positioned so the

**ECH TIP** >> Owners planning on using a SIM card from an outside provider should do it before mounting the dome. Otherwise, plan on a trip to the roof with a screwdriver to remove the access plate and swap the SIM cards.











15) The bathroom roof-vent shroud was removed, and the area was measured for placement of the on/off switch and panel (16).

connections are toward the rear. All the hardware for the installation, except for a 3-amp inline fuse and cable clamps, is provided in the kit — including the entry plate needed to route the power cable through the roof.

While on the roof, we discovered that the dome could be located nicely between the solar panels, providing just enough clearance to conform to specifications. Since the dome mounting point was close to the bathroom roof vent, we elected not to drill through the roof to route the power cable. Instead, we drilled a hole in the side of the vent base and ran the power cable to a location in the ceiling shroud. Power for the vent fan was already there, making the wiring simple. Although turning on the ConnecT requires a trip into the bathroom, we found this to be a good alternative to drilling another hole in the roof.

Simple hand tools are needed to complete the installation, and care must be taken to seal any entry points in the roof (in our case, the vent base) and screws with the appropriate sealant. Figure on about two hours to complete





the job, without rushing, which could lead to mistakes.

Once the ConnecT is secured to the roof and the switch is mounted. the system will need programming and possibly a software upgrade. Initial setup will require reconfiguring, but that happens seamlessly, if you follow the instructions closely. Users will also be encouraged to reset passwords; internet access will be required to make any changes and anytime the system needs to be connected to an











17) Measurements were taken for switch-panel placement in the vent shroud. 18) An outline of the switch opening was marked before drilling a hole in the shroud (19). 20) A 3-amp inline fuse, which is not provided with the kit, was wired into the cable. Since the roof vent was already wired for a fan, 12-volt DC power leads were readily available. 21) After routing the wire connectors through the hole in vent shroud, the switch and panel (22) fit nicely and are easy to access.

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New users will have the opportunity to change passwords and set up guest credentials. The computer is used to lock in available Wi-Fi signals, which becomes an easy task after learning the system.



outside Wi-Fi source. Hold on to the instructions, because unless you have a photographic mind, it will be necessary to refer to some of the steps. Also, the code encryptions are on the cover of the instruction manual, which will be necessary if the ConnecT ever needs to be reset.

Winegard's ConnecT will quickly become one of those devices you can't live without. Factor in the relatively low cost of \$369 (MSRP) for the 4G model, and the value becomes easy to amortize. Those who will never need LTE internet access via the SIM card can choose the non-4G model, which has an MSRP of \$209.

In either case, the ConnecT is poised to take much of the Wi-Fi-access frustration out of the RV lifestyle.

# **GREATER REACH**

Routing the Verizon Jetpack mobile Wi-Fi hotspot through the ConnecT dome extended the reach outside the RV while providing an additional layer of security when allowing others to tap into the device.



# Solid Step

Now available in double, triple and quad step configurations!



Solid Step

Now available with Lift Assist option! Featuring a Lift Assist Strut that makes lowering & raising your SolidStep easy!



# **Quick Facts**

- The Lift Assist strut keeps the SolidStep from dropping completely when disengaged from the door-jamb.
- The heavy-duty gas strut system that takes the weight off of the SolidStep makes it virtually weightless when it is released to the ground.
- Because of the Lift Assist strut, the weight of the SolidStep allows for minimal effort on lowering. Lowering the SolidStep with Lift Assist can even be done with one finger.



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# THANK YOU!

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The Energizer eZV parallel kit connects two eZV P-series portable inverter generators to increase the power supply and produce enough wattage to start and run air conditioners and large appliances.



RVers love creature comforts that require power to operate. While most AC power loads in RVs can be handled, at least temporarily, by an inverter, batteries and a solar array, larger loads like air conditioners still require shorepower or a generator. And those without large solar systems will still need to charge the batteries by plugging in to shorepower or using a 120-volt AC power source like a generator.

While there are a number of portable generators on the market, we enlisted two eZV P-series inverter generators and a parallel kit from Energizer Generators, a division of

Midland Power of Canada, to illustrate the versatility of carrying two lighter generators rather than one larger, harder-to-handle generator when not connected to shorepower. Two inverter generators can provide selectable power — from just enough to charge the batteries to enough power to run multiple appliances.

# **How Much Power Do I Need?**

Calculating the amount of power required from a generator system is pretty straightforward. It is a matter of adding up the amp draw of the 120-volt AC electrical devices that will run concurrently, including the

maximum amp draw of the battery charger, and converting that figure to watts.

The AC (or alternating current) RV electrical system is first rated for volts, amps and watts. Think of it like a hose connected to a pump in a 55-gallon drum of water. Volts are equivalent to the static (nonflowing) pressure on the system, amps are the flow (like gallons per minute), and watts are the overall capacity (or power) of the source. The water pump for the drum can pressurize the hose to 45 PSI and flow at 3 gallons per minute out of a 55-gallon source. The RV electrical system is the same: 120 volts AC, 30 amps, and then the wattage of the generator.

Amps are a major consideration. RVs generally have either a 30- or 50-amp system, which directly relates to RV power-cord types. A 30-amp cordset plug has three prongs or terminals: hot, neutral and ground. A 50-amp has four: hot 1, hot 2, neutral and ground.

Here's the confusing part: a 30-amp connection provides 30 amps of AC power, where a 50-amp actually provides two 50-amp legs or circuits,

# PREP WORK

Each Energizer portable generator needs to be prepped out of the box, which includes (1) adding motor oil, (2) removing the air filter and (3) oiling the filter before replacing it.

or 100 amps total, more than three times the available amps of a 30-amp connection. With a 50-amp system, the RV's breaker box, like at home, is split down the middle, so the breakers or loads on each have access to 50 amps. That's a big jump in available energy and demand. All RVs that are wired for two or more air conditioners from the factory will have 50-amp service.

Electrical adapters allow RVers to connect a 50-amp cordset to a 30-amp receptacle, for instance, but there are configurations for every combination. Downsizing from a 50-amp to a 30-amp connection severely restricts the number of devices that can be run simultaneously, and some high-amperage devices may not run on the reduced-amperage connection.

Amp draw can be calculated a couple of ways. One method is to use a multimeter with an AC amp-clamp and a test box to read the amps used on each leg. Unless the multimeter has a recorder, you won't be able to see surge amps, which can cause the power-source breakers to trip. The better and, frankly, less expensive way is to find the maximum amp draw of each device plus the battery charger/converter, and add them up.

To select the proper generator for your needs, amps will need to be converted to watts. An Ohm's law calculator is available for doing that at www.ohmslawcalculator.com. Total watts required to run appliances at the same time is the figure needed when choosing a suitable generator. For instance, to power 50 amps concurrently at 120 volts AC, you'll need a 6,000-watt generator, which can take up a huge amount of space and weigh hundreds of pounds — and drinks a lot of fuel.

Since maximum amp capacity may not be needed during a stay in a primitive location, utilizing two smaller generators of different sizes that can be used independently or combined is the easiest-to-carry and most energy-efficient option. Some portable inverter generators from the same manufacturer, like those in the Energizer eZV P-series, can be connected with a parallel kit to combine the output and increase the ability of both to serve occasional higher power needs.









# SAFETY TIP

When operating generators, make sure the engine exhaust points away from all RVs; carbon monoxide in the exhaust is poisonous and can be fatal if it penetrates an RV or other enclosed space.



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# **How Much Generator** Can I Carry?

A 6,000-watt generator, for example, can weigh 300 pounds, plus the mounting hardware and wiring, and cost more than \$7,000 installed in a fifth-wheel. That capacity generator is really too big to use as a portable system, and some large generators need to be permanently wired to a battery for starting and so on. Travel trailers may not have a spot for a generator that size, which means strapping one to the outside of the trailer or carrying it in the tow vehicle, which can create a weight imbalance and be dangerous.



Most portable inverter generators operate on

four-cycle gasoline engines, with a few two-way models able to run on propane gas or gasoline. Gasoline still remains the most available engine fuel, and generators that run on propane are slightly less efficient than their gasoline counterparts. While propane cylinders on trailers can be tapped into as a fuel source, refilling 30-pound LP-gas cylinders can be a challenge at times, and using them as a fuel source for generators means you'll be visiting filling stations more often. On the flip side, gasoline storage in a can poses other problems but is perfectly safe when approved for such service.

# How Loud Can the Generators Be?

The noise from higher-rated portable generators and construction-grade models found in home-improvement centers will be well above the acceptable threshold for national parks, which "cannot exceed a noise level of 60 decibels measured on the A-weighted scale at 50 feet" (36 CFR 2.12). Additionally, a big contractor-grade generator running outside will not only guarantee that there's no wildlife for a half-mile radius, but you'll













4) The starting battery on the eZV3200P needs to be removed and connected, then (5) reinstalled and strapped in place. 6) AC and DC outputs are protected by push-button reset circuit breakers with waterproof caps. 7) The eZV3200P control panel includes a twist-lock L5-30R 30-amp receptacle and a 5-20R 20-amp duplex receptacle. The generator is connected to the parallel kit. The LCD display shows the current status of the generator's output.

likely get really tired of the noise.

One of the benefits of portable inverter generators is quiet operation. The two generators tested, the Energizer eZV2000P and the eZ3200P, are quiet at 57 and 59 decibels, respectively, on full throttle at 50-feet facing the exhaust, or noisiest side, which surpasses national park quidelines.

# Pairing Up to Increase Power

To check the efficiency and practicality of using two generators, we connected the Energizer eZV2000P and eZV3200P inverter generators using the eZV parallel kit and set out for a shakedown test in a travel trailer with 50-amp service.

The Energizer parallel kit is super simple to use. Each eZV generator has a dedicated parallel port with a three-pin-keyed, threaded-lock connector. The RV plugs into an L5-30R 30-amp

# PARALLEL POWER

Some portable generators from the same manufacturer are capable of being connected to increase the power supply. The Energizer eZV3200P (left) and Energizer eZV2000P (far left) are two examples from among the inverter generators that are popular with RVers. When connecting two parallelcapable generators, it is important to have the proper parallel cable and follow the manufacturer's instructions.

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twist-lock connector or a 14-50R 50-amp receptacle. It is essential that the parallel kit is plugged into both generators before they are

started, and EcoMode must be set on both units. If you don't need the full capability of combined units, you can use one generator or the other and connect using common RV adapters to reduce to an L5-30R receptacle on the eZV3200P or a 15-amp receptacle on the eZV2000P.

Generators have two ratings: running watts and peak watts. Running

8) The control panel of the eZV2000P is simple and straightforward with a duplex 15-amp receptacle and a 12-volt DC connection for battery charging. 9) The eZV parallel kit has an L5-30R 30-amp twist-lock connector or a 14-50R 50-amp receptacle for plugging in the RV power cable. Both generators must be off when connecting the parallel kit and set on EcoMode.

> watts indicates the maximum the generator can put out on a continual basis, and peak or surge watts indicates a temporary buffer to allow for starting watts from motor-driven loads. You can expect to run the eZV3200P at close to 2,800 watts or about 23 amps, and the eZV2000P at 1,600 watts or about 13 amps. This combination will net 36 amps running — not too shabby consid-

#### SPECIFICATIONS



#### Energizer e7V2000P

| chergizer ezvzuuur |                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Engine4 strol      | ke, overhead valve,   |
| single cylinder    | r, forced-air cooling |
| AC Voltage         | 120 volts             |
| Rated Current      | 13.3 amps             |
| Rated Output       | 1,600 watts           |
| Max Output         | 2,000 watts           |
| DC Output          | 12 volts/5 amps       |
| Gasoline Capacity  | 1 gal.                |
| Start System       | Recoil                |
| Weight             | 44 lbs. empty         |
| MSRP               | \$629                 |
|                    |                       |

Energizer eZV3200P A stroke everbeed valve

| Engine             | 4 stroke, overnead valve,      |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| single             | e cylinder, forced-air cooling |
| AC Voltage         | 120 volts                      |
| Rated Current      | 23.3 amps                      |
| Rated Output       | 2,800 watts                    |
| Max Output         | 3,200 watts                    |
| DC Output          | 12 volts/5 amps                |
| Gasoline Capacity. | 1.95 gal.                      |
| Start System       | . Remote, electric and recoil  |
| Weight             | 96 lbs. empty                  |
| MSRP               | \$949                          |
|                    |                                |

Energizer Generators, Division of Midland Power, www.energizergenerators.com

ering the size, weight and price of the generators.

Prepping the generators out of the box took a bit of time, but this is a worthwhile process for new generator owners. If they are purchased from a power-equipment dealer, the prep work may be completed at the shop. The generators come with no motor oil, and the air cleaners are dry, so the new owner must fill the oil with the included oil filler and oil the air filter, in accordance with the provided instructions. This is good practice for servicing the units annually.

We found the Energizer eZV system to be well made and convenient to use. With both generators connected with the parallel kit, we had no problem running the 15,000-Btu air conditioner plus other loads like the TV and refrigerator. Noise was minimal, as expected.

The eZV3200P comes with a padded fold-up handle and wheels, and is solidly built. The addition of electric start with two key-fob remotes is pretty slick. If used solo, the eZV3200P can be started from inside the RV. Again, if you're not running the air conditioning or other high-demand loads, you'll be in good shape. Both generators start easily with the pull cord.

Controls are well laid out and marked. Fuel shut-off valves are easy to use. Both units have shut-off switches, and the EcoMode setting conserves fuel by reducing engine RPM when the load is light.

Both generators are relatively lightweight, with the eZV2000P weighing 44 pounds without fuel, while the eZV3200P weighs in at just under 100 pounds. This makes it practical to load them into the back of a pickup or onto a generator tray, although the 100pounder may require two people.

Energizer eZV P-series inverter generators are priced reasonably and provide ample power to make boondocking adventures more comfortable and enjoyable. The eZV2000P has an MSRP of \$629, the eZV3200P sells for \$949, and the parallel kit runs \$69.99. Custom-fit covers are available for \$20 each. The generators carry a threeyear warranty. 🗖



## WINER'S READERS' CHOICE CIRCLE



Trailer Life readers single out their favorite products and places in our seventh-annual **RV** survev

RVers have a reputation for helping one another, whether they're lending a hand to change a flat tire on the side of the road, sharing a spare fuse with their neighbors in the next campsite or offering advice on an online forum. Exchanging RV tips just comes naturally, and recommendations on

everything from favorite destinations to the best driving routes are dispensed like marshmallows at a campfire. For those new to the RV lifestyle, communitysourced knowledge is particularly valuable.

Tapping into RVers' willingness to share, each year *Trailer Life* conducts an online

survey to find the brands and businesses readers rely on most. The results from our latest poll are now ready for the big reveal, including several new categories. Without further ado, we present the gold. silver and bronze awards for 2018, stamped with your collective seal of approval.



#### **RVS & TOW VEHICLES** Fifth-Wheel Trailer

Gold: Grand Design Silver: Keystone **Bronze:** Forest River

#### Folding Camping Trailer

Gold: Jayco Silver: Forest River **Bronze**: Coachmen

#### **Toy Hauler**

Gold: Grand Design Silver: Forest River **Bronze**: Keystone

#### Travel Trailer

Gold: Forest River Silver: Airstream **Bronze**: Lance

#### **Tiny Trailer**

**Gold:** Airstream Nest Silver: Forest River R-pod **Bronze**: Winnebago Minnie Drop

#### Truck Camper

Gold: Lance Silver: Bigfoot Bronze: Northwood

#### Truck for Towing

Gold: Ford Silver: General Motors Bronze: Ram

#### **ACCESSORIES & SUPPLIES**

#### **Auxiliary Fuel Tank**

**Gold:** Transfer Flow Silver: Titan Fuel Tanks Bronze: Dee Zee

#### Awning

Gold: Dometic Silver: Carefree of Colorado Bronze: Lippert Components

#### Backup Camera

Gold: Garmin Silver: Furrion Bronze: ASA Electronics

#### Battery

Gold: Interstate Silver: Troian Bronze: DieHard

#### **Cleaning Product**

Gold: Meguiar's Silver: Camco Bronze: Armor All

#### **Engine Oil**

Gold: Mobil 1 Silver: Shell Rotella **Bronze:** Pennzoil

#### **Engine-Performance Product**

Gold: K&N

Silver: Banks Power Bronze: Bully Dog

#### **Entertainment System**

Gold: Kenwood Silver: Sony **Bronze:** Furrion

#### Fifth-Wheel Hitch

Gold: Reese Silver: B&W Hitches Bronze: PullRite

#### **Fuel Additive**

Gold: Lucas Oil Products Silver: Sea Foam Bronze: STP

#### Generator

Gold: Honda Silver: Cummins Onan Bronze: Champion

#### **Holding-Tank Treatment**

Gold: Thetford Silver: Camco/TST Bronze: Happy Campers

#### HVAC/Comfort System

Gold: Dometic Silver: Airxcel **Bronze:** RV Comfort Systems

#### Refrigerator

Gold: Dometic Silver: Norcold/Thetford **Bronze:** Furrion

#### **RV** Cover

Gold: ADCO Silver: Camco **Bronze:** CoverKing

#### Satellite Hardware

Gold: Winegard Silver: King

**Bronze:** KVH Industries

#### Satellite-TV Provider

Gold: Dish Silver: DirecTV **Bronze:** Shaw Direct

#### Tire-Pressure **Monitoring System**

Gold: TireMinder Silver: Truck System Technologies **Bronze:** Garmin

#### Tires

Gold: Goodyear Silver: Michelin **Bronze: Maxxis** 

#### Toilet

Gold: Dometic Silver: Thetford **Bronze**: Nature's Head

#### Tow-Vehicle Suspension **Enhancement**

**Gold:** Air Lift Company Silver: Blue Ox **Bronze**: Firestone Industrial Products

#### Trailer-Brake Controller

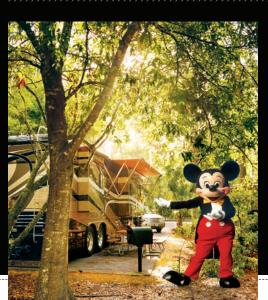
Gold: Ceauent Silver: Dexter Axle Bronze: Curt Manufacturing

#### Travel Trailer Hitch

Gold: Equal-i-zer Silver: Reese Bronze: B&W Hitches

#### Truck-Bed Liner

Gold: Line-X Silver: Rhino Linings **Bronze:** Duraliner



#### SERVICE & TRAVEL

#### **Fuel Station**

Gold: Pilot Flying J Silver: Costco **Bronze:** Love's Travel Stops

#### **RV** Campground or Resort

Gold: Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort, Florida Silver: Ocean Lakes Family Campground, South Carolina Bronze: Anchor Down RV Resort, Tennessee

#### **RV Casino Resort**

Gold: Seven Feathers Casino Resort, Oregon Silver: WinStar World Casino and Resort, Oklahoma Bronze: Pechanga Resort and Casino, California

#### Sit-Down Restaurant

**Gold**: Cracker Barrel **Silver**: Texas Roadhouse Bronze (tie): Denny's Bronze (tie): Olive Garden

#### State to RV In

Gold: Florida Silver: Colorado Bronze: California TL



When it's time to put tires on their tow vehicle, some people are happy to tell the tire shop to "just put on another set of what's on there now," grab some stale popcorn in the waiting room and browse a 16-yearold National Geographic until the mechanic tosses their keys back. But leaving the tire-buying decision to somebody else, especially a person who sells tires, isn't always the best choice. Matching the type of tire to driving conditions and being informed of proper maintenance will lead to good longevity and service, and ensure less frequent visits to the tire store.

#### Are You Ready to Re-Tire?

The decision to buy new tires isn't one to be taken lightly, since a set of four can cost anywhere from \$500 at the bottom end and up from there. To find out if your tow vehicle is ready for new rubber, do the Lincoln test. Put a penny between two tread blocks with Lincoln's head upside down and facing you; if you can see the top of Abe's head, you have a tread depth of 1/16 inch or less, so the tire is worn out. Even if they feel fine, the thinner tread is more susceptible to punctures, and the shallower tread grooves can't move water on a wet road out of the way fast enough to prevent hydroplaning.

When choosing new tires, it's almost always a bad idea to buy on price alone. If a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is. There are many offshore manufacturers flooding the market with seriously cheap

tires; do your homework before buying to ensure reliability and safety.

Age is also a factor in choosing whether to replace the tires. On the sidewall you'll see a series of letters and numbers beginning with "DOT." The four-digit number indicates the week and year the tire was made. For example, 4210 means the tire was made in the 42nd week of 2010. Generally, the accepted practice is to replace tires after seven years, even if the tread is at acceptable limits. Some manufacturers stretch that time-out period to 10 years as long as the tires were maintained properly and protected from the elements.

The rubber in tires deteriorates over time, and hot weather, direct sunlight, high concentrations of ozone in the air and other environmental factors all contribute to tire degradation. Long-term storage can also shorten tire life.

#### All-Season Versus All-Terrain

Pickups and SUVs that are never driven anywhere but paved roads and the occasional gravel trail to a campsite will do well with all-season tires. They're made primarily for highway use and can handle wet roads and even ice and snow without unnecessary drama. They offer a smooth, quiet ride and are available in load ratings that can easily handle towing a trailer or carrying a slide-in camper.

If you're an RVer who thinks the fun starts miles

after the road stops, you'll need a more aggressive, off-road-oriented all-terrain tire. Wide, deep tread grooves grip better on dirt and pick up fewer rocks than highway tires. In loose, muddy or sandy conditions, the extra traction can mean the difference between driving home, working to get yourself unstuck or walking out for help.

All-terrain tires exact a penalty for their roughcountry prowess. On the highway, they can be noisy and corner with less confidence than rolling on all-season tires, and they make for a harsh ride. The widely spaced tread blocks increase braking distances, decrease acceleration and wear faster. Those wide tread grooves are also vulnerable to punctures.

#### No Need for Speed

All-season tires come with a speed rating consistent with typical highway travel. Don't be tempted by "high performance" tires with a higher speed rating because they typically earn that rating by using thinner tread that wears faster. But that doesn't mean that lower speed ratings are preferred since they might not be built to handle the heat generated by heavier loads.

#### Carry That Load

The same goes for load rating. Use the load rating of the vehicle's original tires as a baseline, and never go lower. You can upgrade to a higher load rating, but that won't change the vehicle's overall load capacity. Tires should always be matched carefully to load, based on accurate weights from a certified scale.

#### Keep the Pressure On

Checking tire pressure is like making an appointment with the dentist. Most people don't think about doing either one until things have already gotten out of hand. Many people don't realize that tires are part of the vehicle's suspension; air pressure can affect handling, braking and ride. Proper inflation also has a direct effect on tire life. Underinflated tires heat up more quickly and run at a higher temperature. Heat is a tire's worst enemy, and too much of it can lead to anything from premature wear to outright failure — not to mention lower fuel mileage.

Most vehicles made after 2008 are factory-equipped with a tire-pressure monitoring system (TPMS) that warns the driver if one of the tires is underinflated. The potential problem with these systems is that the alert may be triggered only when the tire drops below the set pressure by a significant amount, sometimes as much as 25 percent. For example, in a tire that's designed to run at 80 PSI, the TPMS (depending on the model) might not alert you to a problem until the pressure drops to around 60 PSI, where load capacity, handling, braking, tread life and tire wear are all adversely affected.

A TPMS isn't foolproof, and failures aren't unheard of. That's why it's important to carry a good quality tire-pressure gauge and check pressure regularly to confirm the TPMS is functioning accurately. The pressure listed on the tire's sidewall is the maximum allowable cold pressure; you'll find those suggested pressures listed on the data sticker on the tow vehicle's driver-side doorjamb. If you run lower pressures when solo, be sure to inflate the tires to the necessary value when towing, to accommodate the extra load created by the trailer.

#### TIRE CARE

ce everything is riding on the tires, maintenance is paramount. The tires should be inspected at least once a month for uneven wear patterns, sidewall cracking, rocks and other debris lodged between the tread blocks, and punctures or holes in the tread. Make sure that all the valve-stem caps are on tight and no wheel weights have fallen off. Check tire pressures when the tires are cold, or at least three hours after driving, and don't forget to check the spare.

The aforementioned Mr. Lincoln method can be used to check tread depth or look for the tread-wear indicators on the tire. Alternatively, you can purchase a depth indicator at an auto-parts store. If you're not sure, replace the tires before leaving on the first trip of the season. Spending time at a tire shop in a strange place is nobody's idea of a vacation.

Rotate the tires regularly, at least every other oil change. This ensures that the tires all wear evenly, promoting longevity. If you feel an odd vibration that wasn't there before, find out the cause, perhaps a missing wheel weight or maybe something stuck in the tread, and deal with it immediately. Vibration seldom gets better, and the longer it goes on, the more it affects the vehicle's suspension.

If you hit something on the road or see a peculiar wear pattern on the shoulder of the tire tread, have the wheels aligned. Misalignment not only decreases tire life, it also affects handling and braking. Pulling to one side under braking might be a brake issue, but don't rule out misalignment.

When it comes to keeping tires clean, most tire manufacturers recommend using only water and mild soap. Some sidewall treatments and tire dressings contain petroleum distillates, which can accelerate the aging process in rubber by prematurely removing the protective chemicals added to the compound to fight deterioration.

If new tires for your tow vehicle are on the horizon, this guide can facilitate the shopping experience. Included are all-season and all-terrain tires. Tire prices are typically set by tire dealers and vary widely, so we've left them out. Shop around for the best price, and don't be afraid to haggle. But don't compromise your safety by riding on worn tires.





#### Bridgestone

Designed for all-terrain use, the **Dueler A/T Revo 3** features Bridgestone's new Traction Claw technology for better snow and off-road handling. A new tread pattern with large tread blocks and staggered shoulder lugs gives the Revo 3 an aggressive look and longer-lasting performance compared to the Revo 2. There are 36 available sizes.



For highway use, the **Dueler** H/T 685 uses heavy-duty steel belts and two-ply polyester construction. It's tough and confidence-inspiring for jobs ranging from towing to moving loads on the weekend. An innovative tread-to-road contact footprint allows it to adapt to the load and promotes even tread wear.



#### Cooper

The all-weather, all-terrain Discoverer AT3 4S has Adaptive-Traction Technology and is severe-weather rated. It stops on average 20 feet shorter in snow than the leading all-terrain tire, according to the manufacturer. The AT3 4S offers improved wet-weather performance, snow performance and fuel economy, and has significantly improved tread wear compared to the original Discoverer AT3.



The new Discoverer AT3 **XLT** adds to Cooper's line of powerful, shred-resistant all-terrain tires. It features Double Tread Technology and enhanced durability, and stops at least 10 feet shorter on wet roads than the leading competitor's tire, according to the manufacturer.



#### Falken

The **Wildpeak A/T3W** combines aggressive off-road and rugged-terrain capabilities without compromising pavement performance. The optimized tread design and silica compound are said to make the A/T3W an outstanding performer in wet or dry weather, and especially good in severe snow conditions. Full-depth sipes and grooves maintain consistent performance throughout the life of the tire.

An all-season highway tire, the Wildpeak H/T02 has a rugged upper sidewall to help meet the demands of towing. A silica-enriched compound provides superior wet-weather traction and tread life, and the optimized tread pattern has three variable pitches designed to offer an exceptionally quiet ride.

#### Firestone

**Transforce AT2** is targeted for all-terrain use on light and medium pickups and commercial vehicles. Its chipand tear-resistant compound helps the tire withstand rough gravel roads and features a deeper tread pattern that improves performance in snow and on wet roads. The new tread pattern also contributes to long-lasting durability over the service life of the tire, according to the company.

The **Transforce HT2** is designed for maximum highway performance and better fuel efficiency than Firestone's Transforce HT. Biting edges provide more grip in snow and slush, while improved chip and tear resistance, and an improved service life offer dependable all-season capability.



#### General Tire

An all-purpose, all-terrain tire, the **Grabber APT** is designed for on-road, off-road and snow performance. Comfort Balance Technology provides a cushioned tread that contains an absorption layer to isolate the vehicle from road disturbances, and DuraGen Technology offers high-strength construction for impressive durability in off-road situations and outstanding cut and chip performance on rough surfaces, according to the company.



The all-season **Grabber HTS60** features a stylish symmetric pattern with a strong center rib that's optimized for water evacuation. The broad contour gives the tire a muscular stance that provides a wide footprint, promoting even wear, excellent braking and responsive handling. Comfort Balance Technology contributes to a more comfortable and pleasant ride, the manufacturer claims.



#### Goodvear

The Wrangler Fortitude HT highway tire features wide circumferential grooves, full-depth sipes and an optimized tread design for confident traction in dry, wet or snowy conditions. The tread design is said to provide a quiet ride on the highway while offering increased tread life.



Made with Kevlar fiber and proprietary Durawall Technology, the Wrangler All-Terrain Adventure offers quiet highway performance and off-road capabilities. It features traction ridges and open shoulder blocks, resists sidewall cuts and punctures, and offers superior traction on wet and icy roads.





#### Maxxis

A premium highway tire designed for light trucks and SUVs, the **Bravo Series HT-770** features a ripple-sipe design that is said to reduce wear and improve traction on slippery surfaces. Dual circumferential grooves increase water dispersion for hydroplaning resistance, and multi-pitch tread blocks minimize noise. The sidewall is fine-tuned to improve the overall ride as well as stability during emergency maneuvers or heavy crosswinds.

The Razr MT has a new tread compound and chemical fillers for maximum tear resistance and tread life. and a dual-cord casing ply with intertwined reinforcement fibers



that dramatically improve casing strength for superior durability and toughness, according to the company. The new pattern features deeply sculpted center blocks that maximize mud traction, and stone and mud ejectors for a claimed improvement in self-cleaning performance and minimized rock retention.



#### Toyo

The commercial-grade Open Country C/T is an all-terrain tire developed for balanced on- and off-road work. Its high-turnup, three-ply polyester construction contributes to excellent durability and impact resistance, and the unique tread design and tough construction deliver long tread life and great traction in gravel, mud and snow, according to the company. Unlike some tires with similar aggressive tread, the C/T is said to provide a quiet, comfortable ride.

An all-season highway tire, the **Open** Country H/T is balanced for optimal comfort, quiet performance and sure handling in city and open-road driving. Stability ribs in the shoulder areas extend tread life and durability, and the symmetric, variable-pitch tread design contributes to a quiet, comfortable ride, as claimed by the manufacturer. Tuff Duty sizes feature extra-strong three-belt construction, deeper tread depth and less tread void, and are marketed for pickups towing trailers. 🗖



Bridgestone www.bridgestonetire.com

Cooper us.coopertire.com

Falken www.falkentire.com

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#### **NEW VENTURE**

The Sonic 231VRK matches contemporary looks and features with light weight and a reasonable price

QUICK INFO

WALK-THROUGH

Exterior Length......26' 9" Exterior Width......7' 6" Interior Height ...... 6' 10" Exterior Height ..... 10' 3" Freshwater Cap......38 gal. Black-Water Cap...... 30 gal. Gray-Water Cap. ..... 60 gal. LP-Gas Cap...... 40 lbs. UVW......4,340 lbs. Hitch Weight ...... 310 lbs. GVWR......5,200 lbs. MSRP. Base.....\$26.890

alancing light weight with the room and features today's RV buyers expect has always been a challenge for manufacturers. At a time when many consumers would prefer to tow a trailer with the vehicle that's already in their driveway, a trailer that's too heavy can lose market share to a lighter, similarly sized unit.

Venture RV, a division of K-Z, has always managed to produce lightweight trailers that have the right combination of contemporary looks and modern conveniences, and its latest model is the

> 231VRK, a rear-kitchen. single-slideout floorplan that fits the bill for family vacations. Built on a

rugged, U.S.-made BAL NXG frame, the Sonic looks to have the right stuff from the get-go, including a full-length power awning with integrated LED lighting, Lippert SolidStep entry step, a lighted power A-frame jack, large pass-through storage and polished aluminum wheels.

On the street side of the trailer, there are black and gray dump valves ahead of the slideout, and behind it are an outdoor shower, freshwater connection and a separate gray-water dump valve — which means either using a Y connection for sewer hookup or moving the dump hose from one valve to the other. This gives flexibility in floorplans without having long runs of black pipe going through cabinets and living space, plus it takes weight and balance into consideration. On the streetside rear corner are the cable, satellite and solar-charging ports.

Step through the entry door and you'll find yourself in a light, bright kitchen with an expansive, one-piece simulated marble countertop, double-bowl sink with matching cover, and a two-burner

A) refrigerator B) convertible dinette C) 60"x75" bed D) sofa sleeper E) pantry





Far left: The dinette and adjacent refrigerator (not shown) are located in a large streetside slideout that opens up the living space, which features simulated plank flooring and upholstery that blend nicely with the contrasting dark wood cabinetry. The midship bath is separated from the living area and bedroom by solid sliding doors. Left: Up front, the bedroom offers under-bed storage.

There were some disappointments, however. The decorative kick panel beneath the 7-cubic-foot refrigerator looked rough-hewn, and the vinyl applique around one side of the slideout was bubbling. To be fair, these could be due to a hurriedly assembled early production unit.

The aforementioned fridge shares the street-side slideout with a 48-by-65-inch

dinette that looks big enough for four but upon closer inspection can really seat only three adults comfortably. This is because the seatbacks aren't as long as the seat cushions, and the table isn't big enough to accommodate four plates plus drinks, serving dishes and the like. You might want to keep a couple of TV trays on hand. At bedtime, the dinette can be converted to a bed, as can the opposing 64-inch jiffy sofa, which is adjacent to a roomy pantry with shelves. A Furrion LED HD television



The 231VRK's attractive rear kitchen offers plenty of preparation and storage space and has simulated marble countertops, stainless-steel appliances and overhead cabinetry with frosted center panels.



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is located on the forward wall, next to a Furrion DVD player and head unit, and is connected to two interior speakers, and a pair of marine-grade outdoor speakers.

The midship bath is separated from the living area and front bedroom by solid sliding doors, which we appreciate. Nothing fancy here, but the use of space is well-conceived with a roomy countertop, floor-to-ceiling linen closet, a cubbie and shelf above the sink, and a mirrored medicine cabinet. A porcelain toilet with a foot flush was a nice surprise, as was the shower with a 36-inch tub for bathing the smaller members of the family.

Speaking of the bedroom, there is a firm 60-by-75-inch bed with



Right: The well-equipped bathroom has a floorto-ceiling linen closet and a porcelain toilet. The shower with a tub is a thoughtful feature that makes bathing small children easier. Below left: The Sonic rides on a rugged BAL NXG frame.

wardrobes and shelves on either side, plus underbed storage. The platform does not have struts to support it when open, and the mattress is not bisected, so retrieving items will be a two-person job. We would like to see a 120-volt AC outlet on both sides of the bed and more USB ports throughout.

The Venture Sonic 231VRK is a nice floorplan that could be ideal for modern families on the go.  $\blacksquare$ 

#### Venture RV, Division of K-Z RV

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### TOP LEVEL >>

THE LEVELMATEPRO BLUETOOTH UNIT AND MOBILE APP MAKE QUICK WORK OF FINDING THE BEST SPOT TO SET UP CAMP

- by Bob Dawson

PRO

Cost ..

Time 1 hour

RVers, for the most part, like to keep things LEVELMATEsimple. When a product comes along that streamlines a tedious task and doesn't cost \$139.99 an arm and a leg, we take notice. Difficulty... 🎤 🎾 🎾

Such is the case with the LevelMatePro Wireless Vehicle Leveling System. After a

super-simple install, followed by a free app download and a few calibration steps, the LevelMatePro eliminates the need to duck into and out of the trailer several times to check the bubble level and make adjustments after pulling onto a new campsite.

Possibly the best feature, the LevelMatePro displays, in inches or centimeters, exactly how far off level the trailer is, so you can determine if and how many leveling blocks or ramps will be needed, or if the onboard leveling jacks (if so equipped) will extend far enough to reach the proper attitude. If you're new at trailering and the whole leveling process is not yet an easy second-nature job, and you don't have automatic leveling, then this technology will

be a game-changer for you.

Once the unit is mounted on a wall inside the RV and the app is loaded on a smartphone or tablet, there's a calibration process that starts with leveling the trailer the traditional way — with a bubble level. The user's manual walks you through several setup screens where you indicate to the software how the unit is installed and provide information about your rig, such as length and width. This process is fairly intuitive, but be sure to follow the instructions carefully.

After calibrating, the LevelMatePro stores this position in its memory and provides information to match it each time you pull onto a campsite. A little real-world testing revealed this to be true. We pulled our travel trailer to several sites with varying degrees of side-to-side and frontto-back pitch and found in every case that the LevelMatePro gave us the info we needed to hit level first time, every time.

Available at Camping World, the LevelMatePro is a jump in technology that will make setting up your RV simpler and getting to the enjoyment of camping a lot guicker.

LogicBlue Technology, www.logicbluetech.com







#### SIMPLE SETUP

1) The LevelMatePro unit contains

a battery, a three-axis digital accelerometer that does the calculations and a Bluetooth transmitter that sends the data. 2) The other system component, the receiver of the data, is a free mobile app, compatible with most Apple and Android devices. 3) Mounting the unit requires just two screws. It's best to position it on an interior wall toward the front of the RV, according to the instructions. The unit should be close enough to the cab of the tow vehicle so it can pair with the app when used by the driver or passenger. Per the instructions, the unit does not need to be mounted in a perfectly level position. Eyeballing it will be sufficient, and the system will compensate during calibration.



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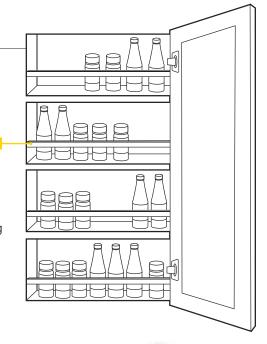


### SPICE UP A CABINET >

ABINET RAIL

We had just purchased a 2018 Keystone Montana 3731FL, packed everything up and headed out. When we arrived at our destination, we opened the cabinet where all the spice bottles had been lined up and discovered that they were everywhere. Since there was nothing keeping the bottles in place, I made rails to hold them in. I bought a piece of trim board, cut pieces to length and stained them to match the cabinetry. I then glued the rails in using Loctite Instant Mix 1 Minute Epoxy. It was a simple fix that works well, looks good and didn't cost much money. I was careful not to mount the rails too high so that there's room to get the spices in and out easily.

David Wery, Daggett, Michigan







#### No-Trip Cables

• My wife came up with this awesome solution to keep us from tripping over the satellite-dish cables to our RV. Slice a swim noodle partway through lengthwise and put the cables inside. We use three noodles to cover the distance of the cable's length from the dish to the entry point of our trailer. We are even able to bring one noodle up into the water and sewer port from under the trailer (inset photo). The highly visible colors of the noodles prevent us from tripping on the satellite or cables. Sections are connected with painter's tape to preserve the noodles for many uses. Any extra cable is rolled and tucked into the outside compartment next to the utility panel. We store the noodles (not our sewer hoses!) in the RV's rear square bumper when not in use.

Bud Linardy, Mayer, Arizona



#### Stav-Put Microwave Plate

Every time we got to our stop for the night, I had to put the glass microwave turntable plate back in place since it moved around during travel. My solution was to buy a swimming-pool noodle and cut a length that is about half an inch longer than the distance measured from the plate to the inside top of the cavity. We wedge in the foam noodle and no longer have to align the plate every time we arrive in a new location. John Clauser, Auburn, Pennsylvania

→ Swimming-pool noodles are incredibly versatile when parked on a site, while on the road and even when your RV is in storage. Slicing through noodles can be surprisingly fast and smooth, so take care. Always use a sharp razor knife and carefully make the cuts away from your body, hands and arms. Sections of noodles also work great for covering sharp edges when using a storage cover, to cushion the blow when crashing into slideout corners and kingpin boxes, to prevent scratching on bicycle frames when using a locking chain, and for supporting items inside while in transit. I also use swim noodles to stabilize our fifth-wheel's wine cooler when on the road. **Priorities!** 

-Bob Livingston Publisher Emeritus III



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



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### HELLO, LOLA!

A TOUCH OF WHIMSICAL VINTAGE FLAIR ADDS CHARM TO A CONTEMPORARY BUNKHOUSE TRAVEL TRAILER

#### **INVESTMENT © Cost**: \$4,650 | **Time**: 6 weeks

For two years I searched high and low for a 1950s Shasta. My heart was set on finding a vintage gem to remodel. There's something about the decor and styling in the '50s that I've always been drawn to. But everything was either too heavy to tow with our midsize SUV, had water damage or was on the other side of the country.

We stumbled across a new travel trailer, the Keystone Hideout 175LHS, with a bunkhouse floorplan that we loved, and it was light enough to tow with the Toyota Highlander. Priced under \$11,000, it was also within our budget. Instead of renovating an old trailer, I decided to take this brand-new blank canvas and transform it into the retro-style "glamper" I'd be dreaming of for years.

The Hideout was purchased on April 1, and our maiden voyage was scheduled for the middle of May, which gave me about six weeks to get the newly named Lola ready to hit the road. There was nothing special



about Lola's cream-colored exterior, so I took my stack of photos and visited several custom auto detailers, and found one that gave me a fair quote. Two weeks later, Lola had come to life. The original tan and brown decals were in the garbage, and the trailer had been coated in a lovely Tiffany Blue paint with silver stripes. Be still my heart!

We ordered vintage-look Shasta chrome wings from eBay, and my handyman hubby installed them to the rear of each side. Once the original tires are worn, we'll get a set of whitewalls. Along the main window,



I added a chrome flower box to display once set up at camp. The silk marigolds add a fun pop of color, because life is too short to be basic.

Inside, the walls were painted gray, and the cabinets, trim and doors were painted white. It took three days and multiple coats, but the finished results were worth it. The brown trim pieces were recovered in gray pleather. The factory-installed blinds were removed from each window, and blackout drapes were cut, hemmed and hung from curtain rods. Seat cushions were covered with new fabric, and a row of colorful bandanas was hung across the upper storage area.

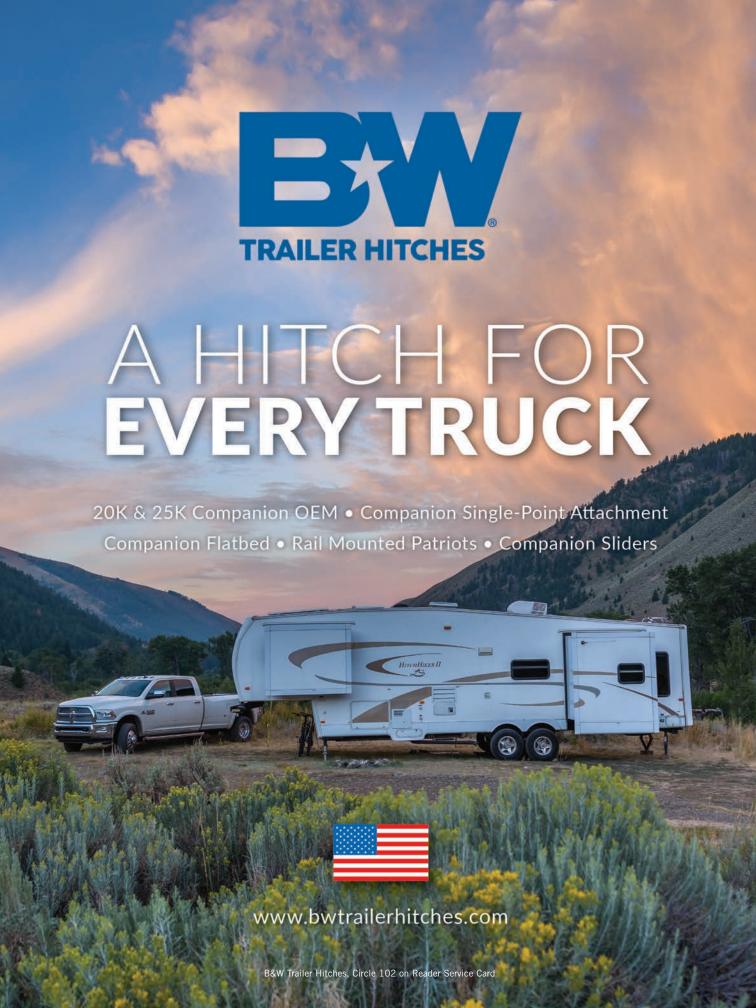
To add a touch of nostalgia from my childhood, I made tiny Troll succulent planters to sit in the kitchen windowsill. An inexpensive crystaldrop chandelier was hung over the dinette table. But my favorite interior-design elements are the small burlap canvases that our kids painted of Lola. They now hang outside their bunk nook.

— Brooke Daniels 🗖



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







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|------|---|-----------------|---|----------------------|
| Map# | Event Name                                      | Dates           | Venue                                       | City, State          |
| 01   | Wisconsin RV Show                               | 1/4/19-1/6/19   | Wisconsin Center District                   | Milwaukee, WI        |
| 02   | Knoxville RV Show                               | 1/4/19-1/6/19   | Sevierville Convention Center               | Sevierville, TN      |
| 03   | Columbus RV Show                                | TBD             | Greater Columbus Convention Center          | Columbus, OH         |
| 04   | South Carolina RV & Camping Show - Greenville   | 1/4/19-1/6/19   | Greenville Convention Center                | Greenville, SC       |
| 05   | Des Moines Boat & Sport Show                    | 1/4/19-1/6/19   | Iowa State Fairgrounds                      | Des Moines, IA       |
| 06   | Colorado RV Adventure & Travel Show             | 1/9/19-1/12/19  | Colorado Convention Center                  | Denver, CO           |
| 07   | Washington Camping RV Expo                      | 1/11/19-1/13/19 | Dulles Expo Center                          | Chantilly, VA        |
| 80   | Gulf Coast RV Show - Mobile                     | 1/11/19-1/13/19 | Mobile Convention Center                    | Mobile, AL           |
| 09   | Mid America RV Show                             | 1/17/19-1/20/19 | Kansas City Convention Center - Bartle Hall | Kansas City, MO      |
| 10   | Greater Chicago RV Show                         | 1/18/19-1/20/19 | Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center    | Schaumburg, IL       |
| 11   | New Jersey RV & Camping Show - Edison           | 1/18/19-1/20/19 | New Jersey Convention & Exposition Center   | Edison, NJ           |
| 12   | Des Moines RV & Outdoor Show                    | 1/18/19-1/20/19 | Iowa Events Center                          | Des Moines, IA       |
| 13   | Cincinnati-Dayton RV Show                       | 1/24/19-1/27/19 | Dayton Convention Center                    | Dayton, OH           |
| 14   | Topeka Boat & Outdoor Show                      | 2/1/19-2/3/19   | Kansas Expocentre                           | Topeka, KS           |
| 15   | Colorado Springs RV & Outdoor Show              | 2/7/19-2/9/19   | Colorado Springs Event Center               | Colorado Springs, CO |
| 16   | Minneapolis/St Paul RV, Vacation & Camping Show | 2/7/19-2/10/19  | Minneapolis Convention Center               | Minneapolis, MN      |
| 17   | Richmond Camping RV Expo                        | 2/8/19-2/10/19  | Richmond Raceway                            | Richmond, VA         |

Visit **GSEvents.com** for current schedule and information.



#### ENTER TO WIN PRIZES • EDUCATIONAL SEMINARS

| Map# | Event Name                                | Dates           | Venue                               | City, State          |
|------|---|-----------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 18   | Topeka RV & Sport Show                    | 2/15/19-2/17/19 | Kansas Expocentre                   | Topeka, KS           |
| 19   | Chattanooga RV Show                       | 2/15/19-2/17/19 | Chattanooga Convention Center       | Chattanooga, TN      |
| 20   | Atlantic City RV & Camping Show           | 2/15/19-2/17/19 | Atlantic City Convention Center     | Atlantic City, NJ    |
| 21   | Richmond Boat Show                        | 2/15/19-2/17/19 | Richmond Raceway                    | Richmond, VA         |
| 22   | Harrisburg RV & Camping Show-Pennsylvania | 2/21/19-2/24/19 | PA Farm Show Complex & Event Center | Harrisburg, PA       |
| 23   | Overland Park RV & Outdoor Show           | 2/22/19-2/24/19 | Overland Park Convention Center     | Overland Park, KS    |
| 24   | Central Illinois RV Show - Peoria         | 3/1/19-3/3/19   | Peoria Civic Center                 | Peoria, IL           |
| 25   | Rhode Island RV & Camping Show            | 3/1/19-3/3/19   | Rhode Island Convention Center      | Providence, RI       |
| 26   | Colorado RV, Sports & Travel Show         | 3/7/19-3/10/19  | National Western Complex            | Denver, CO           |
| 27   | National Capital Boat Show                | 3/8/19 -3/10/19 | Dulles Expo Center                  | Chantilly, VA        |
| 28   | Virginia RV Show - Hampton                | 3/8/19-3/10/19  | Hampton Roads Convention Center     | Hampton, VA          |
| 29   | El Paso RV Show                           | 3/15/19-3/17/19 | El Paso Convention Center           | El Paso, TX          |
| 30   | Springfield RV & Camping Show             | 3/22/19-3/24/19 | BOS Center                          | Springfield, IL      |
| 31   | Colorado Springs RV & Travel Expo         | 4/4/19-4/6/19   | Colorado Springs Event Center       | Colorado Springs, CO |
| 32   | Greater Phoenix RV Show                   | TBD             | TBD                                 | Phoenix, AZ          |

COMPLIMENTARY RV BUYERS GUIDE AT MOST SHOWS!\*

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#### SWIVEL SPOUT COLLAPSIBLE DISH DRAINFR

After dreaming about owning an RV for years, we bought a Keystone Bullet travel trailer last spring. On our first campout, I realized we needed some



type of dish drainer for the kitchen. Before our next trip, I picked up a dish rack at Dollar Tree but quickly realized a cheap plastic drainer was not going to work.

After searching for RV dish drainers online, I ordered the Prep Solutions Swivel Spout Collapsible Dish Drainer from Camping World. What initially caught my eye was the utensil caddy and the compact size when the drainer was collapsed.

The drainer arrived ready to use right out of the package and popped up easily. I was impressed by how solid it felt, without being overly heavy. The heft adds stability that keeps the rack from tipping so clean dishes stay put while they dry — a big plus.

The swiveling drain spout is another neat idea, but because the sink in our trailer is so deep, the spout won't hang over the side of it. I just use a washcloth to catch the excess water. When it's time to pack up, I flatten the drainer and slide it under the sink for storage. www.campingworld.com/101459



**STAFF PICK** This drainer solves the dish-drying problem in our travel trailer, and as a bonus, it folds flat for storage. Definitely a must-have for RVers. — Lorisa Pierson, Marketing Manager

10RE ONLINE: LORISA AND HER HUSBAND, RON, SHARE THEIR LIST OF ESSENTIAL CAMPING SUPPLIES, "30 MUST-HAVE ACCESSORIES FOR NEW RVERS," ON WWW.TRAILERLIFE.COM.

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#### TOW-PRO ELITE BRAKE CONTROLLER

Redarc Electronics' Tow-Pro Elite electric trailer brake controller is a remotely mounted system that offers proportional braking. The "brain" can be mounted in any position under the dash, and a control switch can be positioned to suit the driver. The control box automatically calibrates for positioning as long as it's attached to a solid surface, which eliminates the "knee-knocking" experienced when hanging a bulky controller under the dash.





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#### **RAIN CHECK**

After rainwater leaked into his fifth-wheel trailer, an Arizona reader asked RV Resolutions for help getting reimbursed for the repairs:

My wife, Sharon, and I purchased our 2017
Heartland Bighorn fifth-wheel in May 2016. We wanted to downsize, and the 3270RS was the perfect size and configuration for the two of us. In July 2016 we went to the Kaibab National Forest just north of

Williams, Arizona. On July 28, we drove to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon and left the fifth-wheel at the campground. Upon returning to the RV after a rain shower, we were greeted with a leaking slideout and soaked carpet.

I went up on the roof to check and saw an accumulation of pine pollen that had settled on top of the slideout. My thought was that the rain had caused it to swell and allow water to drip under the weather stripping. I cleaned and dried the slideout's roof, and with it retracted halfway, the leaking stopped.

Living in Arizona, we don't get a lot of rain, so I hoped this was a one-off occurrence. But then in May 2018, it happened again during a rainstorm in San Diego. Again, we pulled the slideout in halfway, and the dripping stopped.

I called Heartland, and the customer-service rep said our RV was past the one-year warranty, but he would discuss the matter and call me back the next day. I followed up with an email and some photos. I never heard back, despite sending a second email.

The place where I store my RV in Camp Verde, Arizona, has an RV repair facility, Frenchs RV Center. I asked Dan French to look at the leaking slideout, and he said he felt this was a "design flaw" with the way the slideout's roof is terminated on the backside of the molding material. He found that all three slideouts had the same issue, so all three were treated with the same fix at a cost of \$692.18. After the repairs were done, we



took the RV out on a weeklong trip and encountered more rain, but no water leaked into it this time.

I feel this is an expense that Heartland should cover due to the way the roof membrane was installed. I would appreciate any assistance in getting reimbursed for our out-ofpocket expenses.

Robert Goodale, Cornville, Arizona

#### THE COMPANY RESPONDS

**RV Resolutions forwarded Robert** Goodale's request to Heartland RV, along with his photos and receipts, and we heard back a few weeks later:

In review of the information that the Goodales have submitted. Heartland will agree to cover the costs that they incurred to correct the leak issue. This issue was noted with us while the unit was under warranty.

Anthony Roberts, Customer Service Heartland RV, Elkhart, Indiana

#### **Cool Customer**

A Tennessee reader asked for help when both air conditioners in his fifthwheel had to be replaced:

I purchased a new 2016 Forest River Sierra in August 2015. In April 2018, after taking the RV out only nine times, we noticed that the air-conditioning units weren't cooling like they had in the past. I contacted Mike's Mobile RV Service in Rogersville, Tennessee, and it was determined that the refrigerant had leaked while the RV had been in storage. I ended up having to purchase two new 15,000-Btu Dometic Brisk Air units for \$1.117.96.

Dometic denied my claim because it was past the two-year warranty. I am hoping for some kind of reimbursement. Jason Easterling, Gray, Tennessee

#### THE COMPANY RESPONDS

RV Resolutions shared Jason Easterling's circumstances with Forest River and received the following reply from the manufacturer:

We were able to reach out to Mr. Easterling and come to an agreement. Working with the vendor, the customer was reimbursed for his expenses. Curtis Gunter, Sierra Division General Manager Forest River RV, Elkhart, Indiana

#### NEED HELP RESOLVING AN RV ISSUE 2

RV Resolutions is Trailer Life's forum for the settlement of conflicts between consumers and RV dealers and manufacturers, accessory suppliers and service providers. After exhausting all other resources without success, mail a typed letter to Trailer Life RV Resolutions, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Include copies of appropriate bills and correspondence along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Selected letters will be edited and published unless otherwise requested.



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TECH RV CLINIC by Jeff Johnston

#### REFRIGERATOR **ELECTRIC OPERATION** >>

To save on electricity, I plugged the refrigerator directly into a garage outlet. Now the refrigerator doesn't work on electricity. It still seems to work OK on the gas mode. Did I blow a fuse or something worse? I have seen other fifth-wheels doing this. I try to bypass using the converter all the time.

Thomas Gerlach, Ramsey, Minnesota



Well, there are a couple of possibilities, Thomas. First of all, your RV refrigerator requires 12-volts DC and 120-volts AC power at all times to run on AC. Plugging the refrigerator into the garage receptacle and disconnecting the house battery (by switch or manually) will make it impossible for the refrigerator to operate, as the circuit boards require the DC power source. It's best to plug the RV in via the power cord. This way the converter/ charger provides the DC current, and the shorepower provides the AC. The batteries get charged at the same time, which is a bonus. Just be sure to keep the water up in the batteries.

If the fridge fails to work on AC when plugged into the RV, and you're sure there's good power (AC and DC) to the refrigerator, then you may be looking at a burned-out heating element or blown circuit board, which will require a visit by a certified service technician.

#### **Trailer-Axle Jacking**

I have a 2015 Excel Winslow 31IKE fifth-wheel trailer. Its camping weight is 14,900 pounds, with hitch weight of 2,000 pounds. I know manufacturers recommend jacking the unit by the frame, not the axle. I think if I place a bottle jack under the axle, so the lift point is where the leaf springs are bolted to the axle, I would be jacking at the strongest part of the axle. When I purchased the fifth-wheel from Peterson Industries, the rep stated that I could lift the unit by the four hydraulic

leveling jacks. Lippert said no to this, but I have seen it done at the service center.

Kenneth Phibbs, Powhatan, Virginia

There seems to be some disagreement in the industry about this, Kenneth, so we reached out to Kelly Ross, technical training manager for Lippert Components. "We don't recommend lifting the unit at any part of the axle. We always recommend following the manufacturer's instructions on this subject," Ross says. The reason for this is that most trailer axles are round, hollow tubes, rated for only a portion of the trailer's weight. Jacking

the trailer up via an axle concentrates all the weight on one spot of one axle, which can result in a bent axle.

With regard to using the leveling system to lift the unit off the ground, Ross adds, "We do not recommend lifting the unit with the leveling jacks. If this occurs during [the] leveling process, we would recommend that the coach be moved to keep the unit stable for a better camping experience."

The frame is the safest place to lift the trailer. Don't forget

to use jack stands or stacks of wood blocking underneath the frame as safety backups to the main jack.

#### **Black-Water Valve Leak**

I have a 2017 Jayco hybrid trailer. On our last trip, there was an accumulation of black water sitting behind the waste-pipe cap. There was so much that I needed to use a bucket to catch the not-so-nice water. I checked to make sure that the slide valve was securely closed before we moved to our next location. After arriving and setting up, I brought the bucket over to catch any black water, and once again there was more than a quart sitting behind the cap.

I took the trailer to the local dealership to have it checked. The technician called and told me there may be a \$70 charge for the inspection, if it is not a faulty mechanism. He also explained that, with the trailer not being level, black water can get through the slide valve. My response was, "Say what?! You're telling me that black water can get by the slide valve just because a trailer is not level?" I thought the purpose of the slide valve was to keep all the gray and black water behind it, and the section of pipe to the cap

MICE ADVICE: MORE ON RODENT INTRUSION

Mice have found their way into most trailers we've had. As a fix, we use plastic ice-cube trays (about 10) and place a cotton ball in each cube slot. Then we add a few drops of peppermint oil on each cotton ball and place the trays throughout the trailer and the basement storage areas. They last several months before they need to be refreshed.

No mice have ever entered during this time. Occasionally a mouse may come in if it's been a few months, when the oil has dried. We then add some fresh peppermint oil and leave a compartment or door open, and the mouse is happy to leave. Peppermint oil is not cheap; we buy it by the pint from Swanson Vitamins. Perhaps others can benefit from this information. Mike Salaby, Whitestone, New York

Thank you for sending along this suggestion, Mike. It certainly seems like one of the bettersmelling cures for the ever-present mouse-intrusion problem. As you've read, there are a wide variety of solutions, and yours is a good one to try.

should be dry. Please elaborate. Kevin Kobus, Prescott Valley, Arizona

It appears that the "technician" was terribly misinformed. With the black-water slide valve (also known as a blade valve) closed, there should be almost no fluid between the valve and the pipe cap. I say "almost" because if there's a long run (pipe) between the tank and valve, it's possible for a little

trailer is not level and not allowed to drain completely. But it shouldn't be enough to require being caught in a with age, but given that the one in your RV is leaking that badly, and it's only a couple of years old, tells me it could be defective, or it may have something stuck in the seal channel that's preventing it from closing completely.

wastewater to become trapped if the bucket. A slide-valve seal can wear out

FOR THE ANSWERS TO TRAILER LIFE READERS' TOP 20 TECHNICAL QUESTIONS, VISIT TECH/RV-CLINIC-FA

#### **Tow-Dolly Brakes**

I tow a car on a dolly with my motorhome from Canada to Florida and back every year. There's a problem that occurs often but not always. When I apply the brakes at low speed, less than 20 MPH, the tow dolly's brakes rapidly lock and unlock, causing the car and dolly to hammer against the tow ball in an alarming manner. I have replaced the master cylinder, the internal shock absorber, the wheel cylinders and the brake shoes. The dolly is mounted the recommended 19 inches above the ground on the ball.

Do you have any idea what might be causing this situation? I am even thinking of changing from surge brakes to electric brakes to stop this heartattack-inducing pounding! George Lyche, Kingston, Ontario

A couple of possible causes include improperly bled brake lines and a slight mismatch of the new parts. Air in the brake lines can cause intermittent brake performance, and the master cylinder also needs to be bled. There is a flow orifice in the cylinder, and the old one may have been smaller, so have that checked as well. There are also sliding pads on the sides of the mechanism that can wear out and allow too much lateral hitch-mount movement, and that can also cause erratic brake action. Switching to electric brakes with a brake control inside the motorhome is also a viable solution.

#### COMMENT: TRIPLE TOWING

→ One thing your answer to August 2018's "Double Towing" did not cover was that some states require a double endorsement on your driver's license when towing two trailers. It's not usually a problem until there is an accident; then you would legally be an unqualified driver at that point. Larry Brown, Holland, Michigan

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Thank you for the addendum, Larry. That's the kind of information people should look for when they do their research about towing two trailers, such as a boat behind a fifth-wheel. Lacking any federal standards for this, each state has its own requirements for towing an additional trailer. This is definitely one situation where it's best to be thorough when doing one's homework.



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#### Axle ID Error

My 2015 Livin' Lite 28-foot travel trailer seems to have a manufacturer error. The trailer information states it has 5,200-pound axles under it, although when I look at the rating on the axles under this unit it clearly shows each is rated for just 4,000 pounds. It's all original equipment, and I believe there was a mistake at the factory. I bought it for the 10,400-pound rating alone. Now I find it's good for only 8,000 pounds, and it's not acceptable for my needs. Any help here would be greatly appreciated. Mark Ford, Canyonville, Oregon

Your situation is an example of why it can be a good idea to inspect some components on your trailer and make sure everything matches the specifications list. It sometimes happens that the wrong information gets printed on the trailer's data label, found on the driver's-side exterior wall in the front corner, and that can throw an owner off. In this case it's definitely the right label (see the photo above) but the wrong axles. Other owners of similar models should check their axle labels and ratings because if one trailer was built with the wrong axles, there may be others out there similarly equipped.



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a short time by Thor Industries, but it's no

longer being manufactured. Your trailer

was built before the Thor purchase, so

the company is technically not responsi-

ble for covering warranty-type problems,

although I'm not familiar with the legal

panies products after such a company

purchase. That also somewhat explains

the lack of response from the factory in

that the staff there probably didn't know

the product, even though its connection is tenuous at best. Per a follow-up note

from reader Mark Ford, a new set of the

appropriate 5,200-pound GAWR axles is

being shipped to his dealer for instal-

lation at the manufacturer's expense.

loading. We want to commend Thor

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We contacted Thor Industries, and in this case the company is standing behind

what to do with your inquiry about a

product that's now nonexistent.

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#### **Pin-Weight Documentation**

I understand the answer to the "Hitch-Pin Weight Capacity" question (October 2018), but I understood that the pin weight documented on the RV is with the RV loaded with its maximum payload. So for Ervin Angler to determine if his truck can handle the new RV that he is looking at, I would think it would be a good idea to get the pin weight with the payload of

what he expects to carry.

Roderick Teed, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

Interpreting what's printed on an RV weight-statement label versus the reality of the vehicle can be a major challenge. As a rule, the weight-label figures are for the unit as it rolled from the factory, dry and without cargo, and accessories added by the dealer are not included. The manufacturer label



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#### also includes an explanation about the typically added weights and how a customer can use them to estimate the cargo capacity of the RV. The additional weights in consideration usually include

RV CLINIC

the weight of the freshwater tank based on capacity, how much propane and that weight, and so on. While the printedlabel pin weight is a good starting point, you need to do some estimating and calculating to arrive at a reasonably accurate weight figure.

While it's best to weigh the trailer, loaded and ready for the road, that's likely not possible with a new model on a dealer's lot. At the very least, a dealer working with a prospective customer can haul a trailer to a public scale, get the numbers, and then add the fluid and estimated cargo weights. RV weights can be complicated, but using the right methodology can deliver reliable numbers.

#### **Class C Arctic Package**

I am considering upgrading from my 28-foot Dutchmen trailer to a Class C motorhome. I like to ice fish and do late-fall and early-spring camping. I'd like to know if all Class C's are winter-camping-ready by default, or is it an option that I must order? Michael Harrison, Las Vegas, Nevada

Very few Class C motorhomes are truly ready for extreme winter camping conditions, Michael. Unless the manufacturer specifically promotes its product as a winter-ready rig, you'll need to order the "arctic pack" option. Be sure you get something with enclosed and heated holding tanks and dump valves, extra insulation in the body structure, dual-pane windows and other cold-weather amenities. If you plan to dry camp frequently, a solarbattery-charging system plus an extra house battery or two, to keep that furnace running all night, would also be a good idea. 🗖

#### HAVE A TECH QUESTION @

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

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MOM





















On the barrier island of Santa Rosa, the morning sky paints Pensacola Beach in pastel colors.



#### Florida's Morning Glory

Famous for its sugar sand and gemlike waters, Pensacola Beach dazzles at dawn

- by Emily Fagan

Pensacola Beach on the Florida Panhandle is known for its sugary soft white-sand beaches and shimmering jade water. But at sunrise one morning, my husband, Mark, and I crept down to the water's edge to watch the rhythmic undulations of the rose-colored sea lap across the hard-packed sand.

We were mesmerized by the patterns of pink

and peach as the sky reflected the pastel hues in the thin sheen of water that coated the sand after each wave receded into the gulf. Haunting cries of seagulls filled the salty air, and skinny-legged sandpipers scampered in and out of the tide, poking at the moist sand for choice morsels.

The morning breeze was cool on our cheeks, but the air quickly warmed

as the sun rose, radiating shifting shades of coral and orange and gold as it grew ever more brilliant in the heavens. Despite being a popular tourist and RVing destination, this special spot was all ours for one brief moment at dawn.

#### \varTheta If You Go

The Pensacola Bay area has plenty of places for RVers to stay. Among them is Pensacola Beach RV Resort, a Good Sam Park on Santa Rosa Island. 

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### **VENTURE RV**

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