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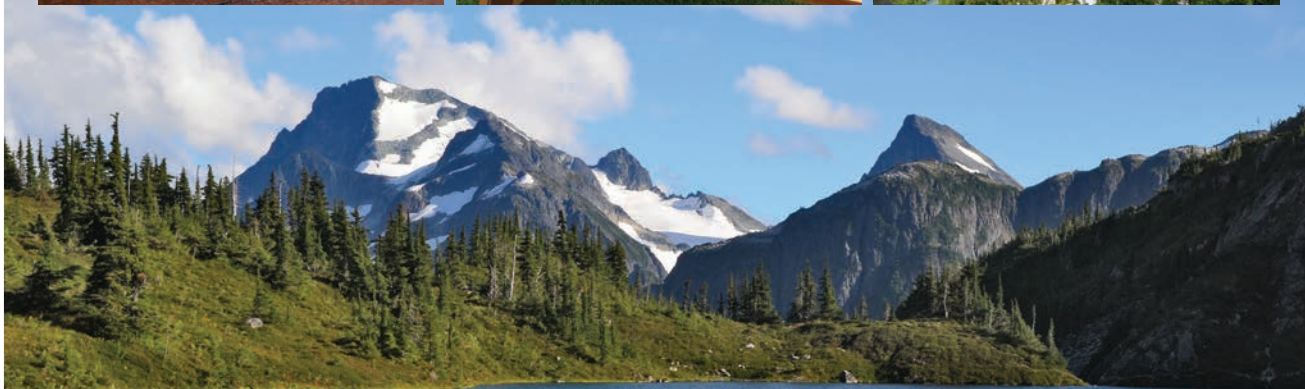
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Custer, South Dakota



➤ Outdoors RV's Titanium trailers are up for adventure in out-of-the-way places. Page 27

**On the cover:** From folding tent campers to lightweight trailers and toy haulers, there's a wide range of new RVs for \$21,000 or less.

## It's a Celebration!

We're honoring the 50th anniversary of our sister publication, *MotorHome*, and showcasing readers' RV modifications



"My name is Chris, and I'm an RV nut." Picture fellow enthusiasts welcoming me with "Hi, Chris!" at the local meeting of RV Addicts Anonymous.

I've owned a number of RVs over the years, and I get the biggest charge out of customizing and renovating them to my taste. The Coleman travel trailer that frequently graces these pages was purchased as a project rig, and it has not disappointed in that regard. We have done all kinds of installations in it, including solar, leveling and entertainment systems, LED lighting, appliances, furniture, and the list goes on. We'll continue this year with more projects to inspire you.

We know *Trailer Life* readers have their own ways of customizing their rigs, and, like fixed homes, they are expressions of personal taste. Look at Pinterest, and you can see how folks have taken old RVs and made them into rolling abodes that barely resemble the original vehicles. There are lots of great ideas out there, and many are never seen by anyone other than their loving owners and a few campground neighbors or social-media friends.

Have you modified your RV? If the answer is yes, we want to see and hear about it — and we'll pay you \$50 if we publish your story. To be considered, email a 200-word description of the modification to [info-tl@goodsam.com](mailto:info-tl@goodsam.com), along with a few good high-resolution photos, and put "Trailer Life Mod" in the subject line. Make sure to mention how much time and money were spent on the project.

Whether you're modifying your RV or camping in it, time flies when you're having fun. *Trailer Life* debuted 77 years ago this month, and our "baby" sister magazine, *MotorHome*, turns 50. *MotorHome Life*, as the publication was originally titled, launched in 1968, as RVing was really taking off. Like *Trailer Life*, *MotorHome* has survived fuel shortages, market swings and financial crises, and today it is the only printed magazine in North America that is dedicated to motorized-RV enthusiasts. Happy 50th, *MotorHome*!

For summer-vacation reading, be sure to pick up a copy of *MotorHome's* July anniversary issue, and don't forget to pick up *Trailer Life*. We have lots of fun stuff in this issue, starting with Alan Rider's trip to far-off Bella Coola, British Columbia (page 46), and Emily Fagan's visit to the charming small town of Maysville, Kentucky (page 67). Thinking about buying a new rig but don't want to spend a fortune? Stephanie and Jeremy Puglisi round up a dozen new models priced under \$21,000 (page 34). Bruce W. Smith tests a new breed of pop-up, the Taxa Outdoors Mantis Trek (page 20). And Chris Hemer walks through two of the latest travel trailers from Outdoors RV (page 27) and Bigfoot (page 31).

There's lots to see and do this summer. Please do it safely — and have a ball! See you down the road! 🚐

— Chris Dougherty, Technical Editor

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## Fifth-Wheel Flashbacks

I just read Emily Fagan's "Budget-Friendly Fivers" in the May issue. I wish more RV manufacturers would come out with small, lightweight and more affordable fifth-wheels.

I never could figure out why manufacturers dropped the small models they used to build and decided fifth-wheels needed to be super fancy and almost as big and heavy as a house. I remember when Jayco built fifth-wheels as small as 21 feet, and Fleetwood had several models under the names Wilderness, Prowler and Terry that were as small as 18 feet. Skyline built a few small Nomad and Layton fifth-wheels that were under 25 feet. One of my favorites in those days was the SunnyBrook 24CKS, a perfect small fifth-wheel.

In states where it is legal for a truck with a fifth-wheel hitch to tow two trailers, I still see some of those older fifth-wheels behind a truck and pulling a boat, especially in Michigan.  
**Vaughn Hobbs, Richmond, Indiana**

## Pump Down the Volume

Regarding "Constant Flow," Bob Livingston's great article on RV water pumps in the May issue, I really would have liked the pumps to have been rated for quiet operation. Our Keystone Cougar has its pump right alongside the bed — *noisy!* I've tried installing a different brand, placing a 1/2-inch rubber pad under the pump and adding insulation in the compartment, but no luck.

**Bill Bogdanoff, Star, Idaho**

I read the water-pump article with great interest since I'm in the market to replace mine, but I was disappointed there was no comparison on noise level. Not waking up the spouse at 5 a.m. when filling the coffeepot goes into my decision-making.

**Bill Rasner, Stephenson, Michigan**

There's nothing worse than waking up everyone in the RV when you use the bathroom in the middle of the night.

## Pacific Northwest Paint Job

We didn't want our trailer to be like every other one in the park, so we reached out to a friend, Ryan Henry Ward, a popular artist and muralist in Seattle, to paint the back of it. Once we saw the awesome results and received so many comments from fellow campers, we asked Ryan to paint the other three sides. We feel that the Sasquatch on the back, the campfire scene on the front, the woodland scene (shown here) and the water scene on the opposite side perfectly express our Pacific Northwest lifestyle.

**Tammy Bennett, Kirkland, Washington**



Our RV's water pump was so loud, you could hear it running from three sites away. Thanks to some modifications from our local Stewart's RV Center, it's bearable now.

**Tom Kutzlo, St. Clairsville, Ohio**

*Many RV owners complain about noisy water pumps, but unlike generators, they don't come with decibel ratings, and the noise problem can be compounded by poor installation at the factory. — Editors*

## TLC for Trailers

We live squarely in the middle of America and suffer through very cold winters. Reading *Trailer Life* entuses me to get through the season with our trailer full of antifreeze. I especially enjoyed Chris Hemer's May article, "Fresh Start," on Thetford's Fresh Water Tank Sanitizer, as we were about to refresh our beautiful little Lance trailer for the travel season. Thanks for such articles that directly apply to the care and feeding of our beloved RVs.

**Doug Allen, St. Charles, Missouri**

## Know What to Tow

Regarding "Bluetooth Airbags," Bruce W. Smith's May article on installing the Air Lift LoadLifter 7500XL, Shawn Smalley says his 2012 Ram 3500 SRW automatic has a max towing capacity of 13,300 pounds. I have the same truck, and the user's guide says towing

capacity is 22,700 pounds.

**Chris Hobbs, Sutter Creek, California**

*Like most tow vehicles, that truck came in a variety of configurations. To find tow limits on variously equipped trucks in that make and model, see our 2012 Guide to Towing. Twenty years' worth of tow guides are available online at [www.trailerlife.com/trailer-towing-guides](http://www.trailerlife.com/trailer-towing-guides). — Editors*

I was looking through your 2018 *Guide to Towing* and discovered that Nissan NV vans aren't included. Is there a reason for this omission? I've looked at many of the manufacturers' websites to obtain towing information, but I appreciate your cohesive annual list for quick reference and comparison.

**Jay Ryun, Enterprise, Alabama**

Chris Dougherty replies: *The 2018 Nissan NV full-size passenger van is a capable tow vehicle for many light-weight RVs, and we'll include it in our next Guide to Towing. According to the company's website, the NV3500 HD V-6 with the optional tow-hitch receiver can tow 6,200 pounds, and the V-8 with the standard Class IV tow hitch receiver can tow up to 8,700 pounds. As always, check with the manufacturer or dealer before buying to make certain the towing capabilities haven't changed, as they sometimes do midyear.*

## LETTERS

### Renewing RV Graphics

Thanks for "Changing Ones Stripes," Bill and Jenn Gehr's very informative April article on replacing RV exterior graphics. I am convinced that this is a job best left to the pros. Unfortunately, we live on the East Coast and are unlikely to make a trip to California to have the work done at the shop featured in the article. I expect there would be interest all around the country about shops closer to home that could do this work. Is there any way of locating them, other than hearing it on the grapevine?

**Ed Austin, Newport News, Virginia**

The company featured in the article, *RV Stripes, Graphics and More* by VIP Enterprises ([www.rvstripes.com](http://www.rvstripes.com)), can create vinyl graphics to suit your RV and ship them to an auto-paint shop in your area to have the old decals removed and the new graphics applied. Many shops that specialize in custom signage or decals for vehicles can also create replacement striping and graphics for RVs. — Editors



### Stick 'em Up!

I'm sharing a photo of the backsplash I put up in our 2017 Escape 21-foot fiberglass trailer. It makes the kitchen more warm and inviting. I encourage anyone who's even halfway thinking about installing peel-and-stick tiles in their RV after reading Bob Dawson's "Build a Better Backsplash" in the April issue to take the plunge and stick them on. I had the advantage of working with vinyl walls, so I was able to push the tiles in slightly and tuck the edges behind the window frame.

**Laura Pervier, Seatac, Washington**

For a step-by-step video of Trailer Life's do-it-yourself backsplash, go to our YouTube channel, *TrailerLifeDIY*. — Editors

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## Titus Canyon Revisited

The April article by Mary Taylor, "Another Side of Death Valley," brought back memories. Years back, my wife and I took our truck and trailer to Death Valley to see the wildflowers, but there had been no rain that year, so no flowers. We camped at Stovepipe Wells and followed the road the author took to Titus Canyon. At the top, I shifted into four-wheel drive to save the brakes on the descent, and the truck wouldn't move! I figured it was the transfer case, and the only thing I could do was coast the 10 miles down the canyon.

We now have a new truck and trailer, and are ready for the next trip to Death Valley. This time, I hope there will be flowers.

**Tom Vadon, Forestville, California**

## Sit-and-Swing Accessibility

I own a Northwood Fox Mountain 235RLS (tested in the November 2017 issue) and understand the situation discussed in Jim Georger's April letter, "Focus on FITness." Fortunately, I am slim enough to fit between the dinette and the kitchen counter when the slideout is retracted, so I can still get to the fridge and bathroom. My friend, who has the same unit, sits on the kitchen counter and swings his feet over. I recently visited a couple who has a similar floorplan (different brand) and told them about the sit-and-swing idea. They laughed and said they would try that.

**Robert Woischke, Schaumburg, Illinois**

## Kitty Camping Castle

We read with interest Jerry Smith's article, "RVing with Pets," in the March issue, as we spend three months a year camping with a dog and a cat. At our country home, our cat loves to go outside to explore, but when camping she had to be strictly an inside cat. To give her some relief, we purchased a Midwest 130 Cat Playpen, and now she can enjoy outside time with us at camp. Though she cannot roam freely, she is happy in her kitty castle, which has three levels to perch on, latches securely, folds flat



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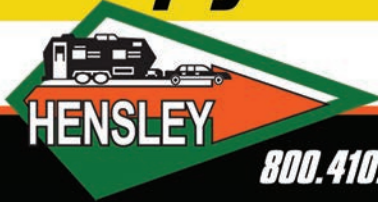
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## LETTERS

for transport and sets up in minutes. We got ours on sale for \$99, and it was a great purchase to keep our Zazu a happy camper.

**Laurie Chilcote, Angora, Minnesota**



### Back in Business on the Colorado River

I read "Weathering the Storm," Brenda McWilliams' February article about the effects of Hurricane Harvey on Colorado Landing RV Park in La Grange, Texas. We have been visiting Colorado Landing regularly since about 1993, and the campground was always clean and well-kept by friendly, efficient folks.

We were not prepared for the sight of the devastation as we pulled into the campground in October 2017, evidently around the same time as the author. The cleanup was just beginning, and there was debris everywhere and a great deal of damage. Fortunately, the RV sites near the temporary office were usable, so our reservation was honored. While we checked in, Sydney Newhouse at the front desk discussed the work ahead, and I was impressed by her can-do attitude and that of the owners and other workers.

We visited again in late March, and the campground was making real progress in repairing the damage left by the flooding. Colorado Landing RV Park is open for business. 📧

**Thomas Parrish, Livingston, Texas**

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From lush, green forests watered by morning fog (far left) to wide-open dunes skirting the Pacific (left), the Coos Bay area has everything it takes for a memorable vacation. (Below) RV and tent camping are favorite activities, and there's lots to see and do close to town during the summer months.

# Coasting in Oregon

Ringed by the Pacific Ocean and old-growth forests, Coos Bay offers an abundance of family activities

article by Jerry Smith

People say the western half of Oregon is "green for a reason," and that reason is obvious during winter, which is long and gloomy and wet. From late spring to early fall, however, the weather can be magnificent, ample reward for packing up the RV and heading to the Beaver State.

Few places in Oregon have more to do during these golden months than Coos Bay and the surrounding region where you can camp, fish, hike, or ride an ATV on acres of sand dunes, and enjoy more food and events than can be crammed into a single visit, all on a coastline with wide beaches and matchless rugged beauty.

Coos Bay is the only deepwater port on the Oregon coast, and it's a working port, too. You never know when an enormous freighter will glide under the historic McCullough

Bridge (built in 1936 and placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2005) and slide into a berth to offload cargo or take on timber bound for mills in Japan. Downtown, fishing vessels and private sailboats line the docks along the boardwalk, where you can buy fresh-caught salmon and crabs in season right off the boat.

Coos Bay takes advantages of its prime outdoor time with almost nonstop events and activities. North of town is a stretch of coastline known for its sand dunes, where people flock to challenge the hiking and ATV trails, stroll along the beach and bird watch. For a more relaxing day, there's the Oregon Coast Music Festival, held July 21 to 28 this year, featuring national and international artists playing jazz, Celtic, Native American and chamber music. Then

on August 25 and 26, the Blackberry Arts Festival showcases local arts, food, crafts and entertainment in the historic Marshfield District.

The Mill Casino, Hotel and RV Park is located right on the bay and acts as headquarters for many RVers visiting the Coos Bay region. From there, attractions such as Shore Acres State Park and the Oregon Dunes are just a short drive away. There are also camping facilities at Bastendorff Beach County Park (which accepts RVs up to 45 feet) and Sunset Bay State Park (up to 50 feet), both in nearby Charleston.

Just about everything you need to know, want to see or should fit into your schedule in the Coos Bay, Charleston and North Bend area can be found on the Oregon's Adventure Coast website. Because the region is so popular with travelers in the peak months, RV park and public campground reservations are a good idea.

## Oregon's Adventure Coast

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

## The Mill Casino, Hotel and RV Park

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## Instant Truck-Camper Shell

A clever design, the HideASide up-camper shell can turn a truck bed into sleeping quarters, a reprieve from wind or the beating sun, or a secure storage area (creator Rick Miller says it can even fit a dirt bike). The collapsible shell stores permanently within the dead space of the truck bed's sides and can be set up by one person in less than 10 minutes, according to the company.

The 16-gauge aluminum sides extend 18 inches from the top of the truck's side rails. Snap on the one-piece water-resistant, heavy-duty-fabric cover (made with the type of material used on convertible car tops), which goes front to back and along the tailgate via a four-piece crossbar system with a steel frame. *Voilà!* — instant camper shell.

The made-in-the-USA HideASide offers 47 inches of height inside at the center when extended. It works with trucks set up for fifth-wheel towing, as it will not interfere with the hitch. At this writing, the HideASide is available in white for 6½-foot truck beds, with 6- and 8-foot truck-bed fitments coming soon. MSRP is \$2,945. HideASide, 480-242-7392, [www.hideaside.com](http://www.hideaside.com)

## Go Ape for Nebraska

Eugene T. Mahoney State Park, midway between Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska, is open year-round and has two campgrounds with 149 spacious hard-surfaced RV sites. The area offers a plethora of outdoor activities as well as an aquatic center (open from Memorial Day to Labor Day). Adding to the park's fun list is the recently opened Go Ape Treetop Adventure, an aerial course with 40 suspended rope and steel-cable bridges, zip lines and other challenges weaving among hackberry and oak trees.

Nearby Platte River State Park is scheduled to open RV sites this fall.

**Eugene T. Mahoney State Park**  
[www.outdoornebraska.gov/mahoney](http://www.outdoornebraska.gov/mahoney)



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## NEWSWIRE

### EDUCATION



## Technical and Safety Conference

The annual Technical Education and Safety Conference staged by the RV Safety and Education Foundation (RVSEF) takes place September 27 to October 1 this year in Elizabethtown, Kentucky. On the agenda are seminars and training classes covering technical, driving and safety topics taught by premier educators in the RV industry, including Chris Dougherty, technical editor of *Trailer Life* and *MotorHome*. Hands-on driving classes are offered before and after the conference; space is limited, so be sure to contact RVSEF soon if you are interested. [www.rvsafety.com/conf-info](http://www.rvsafety.com/conf-info)

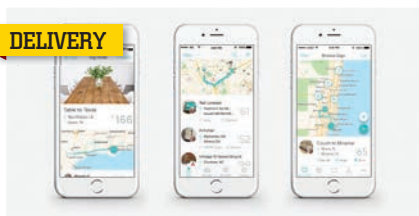
### TECHNOLOGY



## KZ's Level Best

Venture RV, a division of KZ RV, headquartered in Shipshewana, Indiana, has teamed up with LogicBlue Technology to use smartphone technology to level travel trailers. The LevelMatePro wireless leveling system is now available as standard equipment on Venture RV's SportTrek, SportTrek Touring Edition, Sonic and Sonic Lite towables. LevelMatePro calculates and displays the height required to achieve a level position. Using the app on a smartphone, a red indicator shows the areas where height needs to be added. When the indicator turns green, the RV is level. [www.venture-rv.com](http://www.venture-rv.com)

### DELIVERY



## "Shipping" Via RV

Heading out in your RV? Whether it's 100 or 1,000 miles or more, you can make money by delivering packages along the way. Roadie, an app-based shipping community, was founded on the notion that drivers headed in the right direction can deliver what others need, from bikes to furniture to even fine art. Deliveries can be tracked in real-time via a smartphone, and goods are protected up to \$500, with the option to purchase additional coverage. Pricing is determined by item, distance and urgency. Individuals can sign up to be Roadie drivers on the website; driver's license and auto insurance are verified. [www.roadie.com](http://www.roadie.com)

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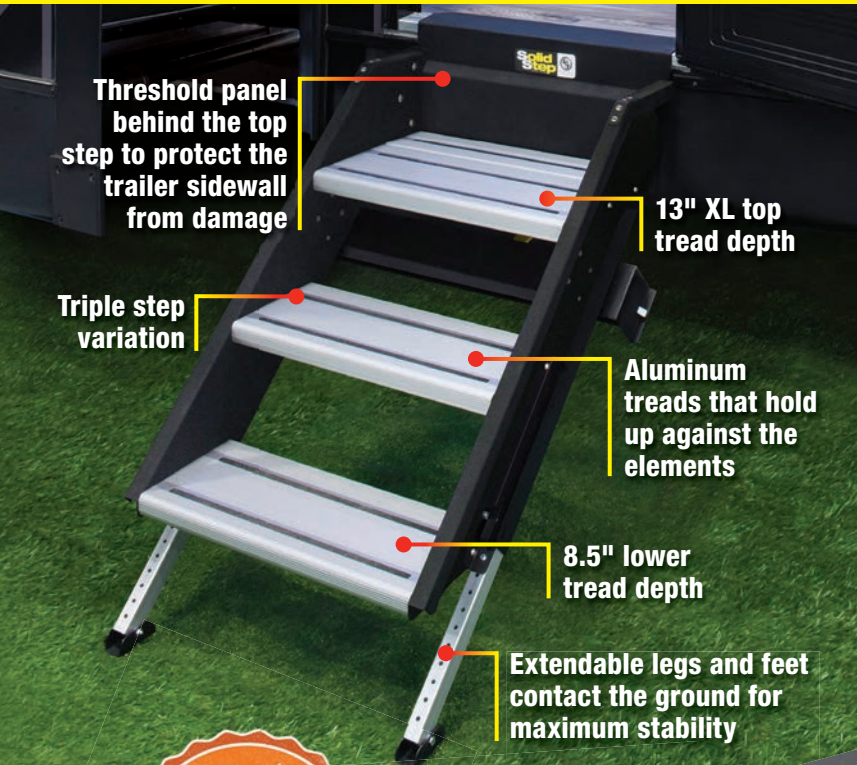
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## Hip Places to Camp

We recently spent the night in an Air OPUS pop-up trailer high atop a mesa at Songdog Ranch, which overlooks the central California valley. Songdog campsites have covered picnic tables, camp chairs and fire rings and are scattered far and wide for plenty of privacy.

Songdog is one of more than 285,000 largely undiscovered and nonpublic lands listed on Hipcamp, a website dedicated to finding new places to bring your RV, pitch a tent, or rent a yurt or cabin. Property owners contract with Hipcamp so others can enjoy beautiful and unusual places to camp, such as vineyards, farms, ranches and even a working shiitake mushroom farm. Campsites can be searched by location, amenities, price range and activities. Hipcamp, [www.hipcamp.com](http://www.hipcamp.com)

## Seventh-Annual Readers' Poll

It's here again — *Trailer Life's* annual online poll where readers decide the winning RV brands, products and destinations. It's time to tell us the places that make life on the road most enjoyable and the RVs, gear and tow vehicles that make getting there easier. Sharing your experiences with fellow RVers smooths the way for others, so please take a few minutes to visit the voting page on *Trailer Life's* website, where we've made it easier this year to cast your votes. We've also added a few new categories.

Voting ends on September 4, 2018. We'll announce the seventh-annual gold, silver and bronze winners in all categories in the January 2019 issue. 2018 *Trailer Life* Readers' Choice Awards [www.trailerlife.com/readers-choice](http://www.trailerlife.com/readers-choice)





# Aluminum-Clad Road Chief

Bowlus Road Chief travel trailers, the original riveted aluminum-bodied trailer created by William Hawley Bowlus, rolled out of a ranch in California during the 1930s. Sadly, building of the trailers stopped, but five years ago, the Bowlus name was bought, and the silver trailer is once again being seen on the roads and in campgrounds. The company stayed true to Bowlus' original aerodynamic design, while adding modern upgrades that include heated floors, charging options for phones, tablets and laptops, and a lithium battery system to run appliances off the grid.

Two Bowlus Road Chief variations are available, the On the Road Edition and the upgraded Limited Edition Endless Highways, both with an exterior length of 23 feet, 9 inches and interior height of 6 feet, 4 inches. Claimed base weights are 2,500 and 2,800 pounds, respectively, with gross vehicle weight ratings of 3,200 and 3,500 pounds. The Highways version was created for off-the-grid camping and has two large skylights.

Outside, the trailers are skinned in aircraft-quality sheet aluminum, while inside, the wood walls, ceiling and floor are screwed in (no glue is used), and everything comes apart so it's completely restorable. The furniture is wood as well. Midship is the living area with an Ultrafabrics-covered sofa and two-seater dinette that convert into two 6-foot, 1-inch-long beds.

The Road Chief's entry door is at the front and leads into the kitchen, which allows room for a kayak or bicycle to be carried in and attached via a lashing system for travel. The galley features a two-burner Italian cooktop, 3.1-cubic-foot 12-volt DC refrigerator, a microwave, and stainless-steel countertops and sink. Standard are a silent hydronic heating system, 10,000-Btu air conditioner and a 19-gallon freshwater tank.

The back bedroom has a wardrobe, a night table and memory-foam twin V-beds that convert into a king-size bed with storage below. The wet bath has teak seating and flooring, a stainless-steel sink, a cassette toilet and a marine-style showerhead that extends outside.

MSRP starts at \$137,000 (On the Road) and \$219,000 (Endless Highways) and includes bedding, towels, linen, dinnerware and cookware for four. Bowlus Road Chief, 855-426-9587 [www.bowlusroadchief.com](http://www.bowlusroadchief.com)



Bowlus Road Chief living areas have wood walls, furniture and floor. The Limited Edition Endless Highways is set up for four-season off-the-grid camping for up to seven days, according to the company.



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## Let It Slide

When an Oregon reader found a defective drawer in his out-of-warranty travel trailer, he asked RV Resolutions to appeal his case to the manufacturer:

► In June of 2016, my wife and I purchased a new Keystone Cougar 26SABWE from Highway Trailer Sales in Salem, Oregon. Last October, upon returning from a trip, I noticed the large drawer by the kitchen sink was pushed out at the bottom but tight at the top. It had always been a little hard to pull out, despite being lightly loaded, but on this occasion it was especially difficult.

Upon examination of the drawer, I discovered that the rear-upper support board was broken right where a large knot existed in the wood. This allowed the left and right slide rails to drop, causing the difficult removal.

A week later, I went to Highway Trailer Sales and spoke with Chris in the service department. I explained the problem, knowing the trailer was beyond the one-year warranty. He asked that I email the photos I had taken, along with the unit information, so he could contact Keystone on my behalf.

In November I received a call from Chris telling me that, because the trailer was out of warranty, Keystone

had declined to make any allowances. Later that month I called Keystone directly and spoke with Francesca. She told me the decision was final.

Even though the trailer is out of warranty, the board used in the construction was defective and certain to fail due to the large knot at the support area. Any help you can give will be appreciated.

**Robert Boice, Salem, Oregon**

[A month after we asked Keystone RV to review the case, Robert Boice wrote to us a second time:](#)

► I'm pleased to report a call from Missy Crisp, an adviser in Keystone's owner-relations department. She offered a goodwill gesture of \$150 to repair the drawer-support board on our Cougar. That check was received today. Thank you, *Trailer Life*.

**R.B.**

## Rear-Cap Restoration

[A reader in Maine turned to RV Resolutions for help after failing to get the manufacturer of his fifth-wheel to cover the costs of refinishing the fading rear cap:](#)

► I bought a new Cedar Creek fifth-wheel in 2014. Last year when I was waxing it, I noticed the paint was fading on the rear cap. I called Cedar Creek and spoke to Kelly Ware in customer service. She offered to ship the graphics for the cap at no charge and mail a check for \$750 to cover the repainting costs. I was not satisfied with that option because the estimate I had gotten to have the work done in Maine came to \$2,323.93.

Alternatively, she said I could tow the fifth-wheel to Topeka, Indiana, and have the cap replaced at a service center there at no charge. I wasn't satisfied with that option either because I would have to cover the cost of traveling from Maine and pay for lodging while the work was being done.

After that, I got in touch with Dave Terry, Cedar Creek's southeast regional sales representative, and sent him photos and information about the problem. He referred me to George Oliver, service director for Cedar Creek. I have been emailing and leaving phone messages but have not heard back from him.

I would appreciate any help you can provide in resolving this problem.

**Vernon A. Rogers, Levant, Maine**

### THE COMPANY RESPONDS

[We forwarded Vernon Rogers' account to Cedar Creek, a division of Forest River. A month later, we received the following note from a representative at the company:](#)

Cedar Creek has made contact with the customer to discuss his issues. At this time we have agreed on a resolution for customer satisfaction. Thank you for your interest on behalf of this customer.

**Denise Davis, Customer Service  
Cedar Creek Division, Forest River  
Topeka, Indiana**

[A few weeks later, we received a confirmation and thank-you note from Vernon Rogers:](#)

► I wanted to let you know that Forest River has resolved the problem with my fifth-wheel to my satisfaction. I appreciate your assistance.

**V.A.R.** 📧

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

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# Escape Hatch

Taxa Outdoors' adventure-style Mantis Trek and GMC's Canyon Denali diesel make an outstanding combo for off-grid camping

One of the beauties of owning a travel trailer is being able to bug out at a moment's notice to escape the pressures of day-to-day life and relax somewhere quiet while still enjoying a comfortable shelter. For many outdoorsy types, myself included, the ideal getaway trailer needs to be light in weight so it can be towed easily by a four-wheel-drive SUV or a midsize pickup and small enough to tuck into tight spots. To have the freedom to camp wherever the road may lead, the trailer also needs to be self-contained and offer the conveniences of home, though pared down. And it doesn't hurt if it has great eye-appeal.

Those are the very virtues that caught my attention when I saw the newest and largest offering in Taxa Outdoors' lineup of adventure-style trailers, the Mantis Trek. Its "NASA-

inspired" exterior design, with a subdued gray-and-matte-black paint scheme over an aluminum-skinned body, makes it look like the CIA might use it when setting up camp in some remote location. Drop down its four stabilizer legs and pop up the tented roof, and in silhouette it does, to some degree, resemble a praying mantis.

The Mantis Trek weighs just shy of 3,000 pounds dry, and in travel mode measures 19 feet long and a couple inches under 7 feet high, making it an easy tow behind many of today's SUVs, Jeeps and midsize pickups. Its sleek, low-profile design helps maximize towing fuel economy, while the pop-up roof provides ample interior headroom for moving around the living quarters.

The real test of a camping trailer is how it performs when it's time to bug out, so my wife and I left the 'burbs for the



boondocks, towing the Mantis Trek behind a new GMC Canyon Denali diesel. Our goal to disconnect from the hustle-and-bustle of the digital world for a few days took us to the eastern shoulder of the Oregon Cascades.

### Light Touch

One of the interesting features we discovered while loading up the Mantis Trek is that it doesn't have cabinets, drawers or a closet. In place of cupboards, it has cubbies cut into the marine-grade birch plywood along the back wall of the galley and under the countertops on both sides of the trailer's midsection. It's a storage design shared with many teardrop and expedition-type trailers.

Instead of drawers, six milk-crate-style containers slip into cubbies under the countertops and are secured by bungee cords. The honeycombed plastic crates make it easy to transfer food and camp gear from the house to the trailer, and they serve double duty as footrests and seats. It's one of numerous weight-saving methods Taxa used in the trailer's design, and it makes it easy to visually identify what's in each storage spot.

The Mantis Trek also has ample storage in open sections hidden beneath the rear couch/double bed and forward sofa/bunk beds. These are ideal spaces to keep bulky items such as sleeping bags and backpacks. There's also a web-type cargo net suspended

beneath the ceiling above the rear bed to stow more clothing and light gear.

Bigger items can be secured on two roof-top racks (one front, one rear) that handle several hundred pounds of additional gear, such as a canoe, kayaks or cargo carriers. Bikes, jerry cans, folding chairs or whatever else might be needed on an extended camping adventure can also be secured to the rear rack that also serves as a sturdy, protective bumper.

Clearly, Taxa designed the Mantis Trek to accommodate the needs of those who prefer to travel loose and light in pursuit of outdoor adventure. We loaded up the crates, tossed in our sleeping bags and backpacks, filled the 2.8-cubic-foot Dometic 12-volt DC refrigerator-freezer, made sure the twin 5-gallon LP-gas cylinders on the A-frame were topped off and filled the 20-gallon freshwater tank. Time to hit the road.

### Camp Setup

The Mantis Trek has all the requisite features to take advantage of full hookups or dry camping. The street side of the trailer has the freshwater-fill inlet, solar-panel plug receptacle, 30-amp 120-volt AC service receptacle, fresh-

water inlet, exterior shower hookup and the access panel to the cassette toilet that takes the place of a traditional blackwater tank. The test trailer was also equipped with twin Group 27 deep-cycle batteries and a 40-amp converter, so there was ample electrical power wherever the trailer came to rest.

In our case that was the Deschutes National Forest's Lower Bridge Campground, about 10 miles downstream from Camp Sherman along the banks of Oregon's famed Metolius River. Most of the spaces in this campground are relegated to tent camping, but a few sites can accommodate a 40-foot trailer-and-tow-vehicle combo.

We backed into a spot that was less than a dozen yards from one of the best fly-fishing rivers in America, and the Mantis Trek and GMC Canyon Denali fit with room to spare. I enjoyed the maneuverability of the combo, which has a small enough footprint to easily navigate over narrow gravel and dirt roads and into snug campsites.

Setting up the Mantis Trek is a no-brainer. You open the wide but low door, duck inside the trailer and release the pop-up tent roof's two side latches. A moderate amount of forward and upward



(Above, clockwise from top) By folding down the split-back bench seat, the rear of the Taxa Mantis Trek becomes a queen-size bed. The back of the front couch flips up, transforming it into an upper bunk. For transporting a cargo carrier or outdoor gear such as a canoe, kayaks or mountain bikes, the roof has steel racks in the front and rear. (Left) Cross-flow ventilation is abundant in the Mantis Trek. The windows open wide and are outfitted with multiple click-stops, and the flaps on the tent-top windows have zippers and hook-and-loop fasteners.

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pushing instantly raises the interior ceiling height from 4 feet, 7 inches to nearly 8 feet at the highest point. Two hook-and-loop fasteners wrap around each of the arms to keep them in place.

Rocker-style light switches near the entryway make it easy to turn on a variety of interior and exterior LED lights, while another fused panel on the face of the galley controls the water pump. That's also where the digital controller for the Truma Combi space-and-water-heating system is located. We put the ultra-compact Combi's 14,300-Btu furnace to the test on two nights camping along the river when temps unexpectedly dipped down into the mid-20s. Happy to say, it kept the Mantis Trek interior toasty.

Should our trip have been in the heat of summer or in a hot, humid climate, the cross-ventilation afforded by the roof tent's screened windows and the flip-open windows on the trailer's hard sides would have kept us comfortable. If cross-ventilation isn't enough and you're plugged in to a 120-volt AC power source, the Mantis Trek comes with a built-in 6,000-Btu air conditioner that's mounted on the galley countertop.

## Beds and Bath

When it's time to sack out, the Mantis Trek can easily sleep two adults on the convertible rear bench that spans the

6 feet, 10 inches between the insulated foam-core aluminum walls. The split-back seat folds flat into a queen-size bed that is plenty big for 6-foot-plus occupants to stretch out.

Although the pads that cushion the bench and converted bed look soft and inviting, looks can be deceiving. When we plopped down, we were greeted by a hard, firm surface. Fortunately, we had a couple of extra sleeping bags and a sleeping pad, which we laid on top of the cushions.

As for the bunk beds at the front end, the back of the bench flips up and latches to turn it into the upper bunk. The bunks are narrow, and the pads are just as firm as those in the rear, so anyone other than kids or a petite adult will probably find them uncomfortable. The sleeping space is also tight, both in width and height between bunks, requiring some agile moves to get into and out of a sleeping bag.

We rose early to make a typical camp breakfast of home fries and eggs using the two-burner Dometic stove tucked beneath the glass top on the galley counter. The stainless sink and stovetop are one unit, and are easy to use, but I wished for a few more inches between the burners so cooking wasn't limited to a 10-inch



Made from marine-grade birch plywood, the galley houses a two-burner Dometic stove-and-sink combo and offers more than enough counter space for meal prep.

skillet on the larger burner and a little coffeepot on the smaller one.

RVers used to sharing a meal at a dinette will find eating in the Mantis Trek a bit different; the trailer doesn't have a dedicated table or chairs. You place the dished-up food on a corner of the counter and sit on the rear bench or pull up a milk crate, or you pass the plate through the flip-open windows, as with a food truck, and eat outside. It's a very utilitarian arrangement not typically found in a \$40,000 travel trailer

The Canyon Denali and Mantis Trek are small enough to get around on back roads and equipped to handle whatever conditions come their way.



but is typical on the serious adventure/overland-style camping trailers available today.

The bathroom setup is equally minimalistic. The Mantis Trek is equipped with the aforementioned electric-flush cassette toilet that is forward of the galley counter and hidden beneath a removable top. It's cozy but functional. Not having a blackwater tank saves space and weight, and the cassette system makes it convenient when disposing of waste.

Taking a shower inside requires raising a plastic curtain that encloses the facilities. The Truma Combi water heater is a good one, so even a quick shower is enjoyable. The heavy black vinyl covering the inch-thick tongue-and-groove wood floor is impervious to water, as well as grime tracked in from outside.

We spent three days with the Mantis Trek and found it to be one of the easiest trailers of this size and type to tow, maneuver and set up. It's well constructed inside and out, and has an interesting mix of design features shared among traditional travel trailers, teardrops and expedition-style trailers.

### Midsize Tow King

Having a well-equipped, nicely styled camping trailer to get away from it all is great, but it's only part of the equation. You need a vehicle that can get the trailer to your destination in a manner that makes the journey enjoyable and drama-free. GMC's 2018 diesel Canyon Denali Crew Cab shortbed 4x4 does just that, as we learned firsthand during our time

### TAXA OUTDOORS MANTIS TREK

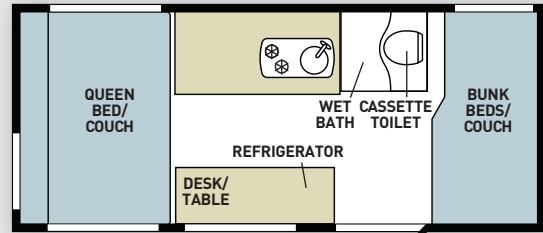


ILLUSTRATION BY ROE ROY

with the Taxa Mantis Trek.

GMC's diesel four-door is as sweet a tow vehicle as you're going to find in the midsize-pickup segment. The 181-horsepower, 2.8-liter "baby" Duramax turbo-diesel has more pulling power than the 308-horsepower 3.6-liter gas V-6 that comes as the standard engine, and it delivers 10 percent better fuel economy.

Tow power comes from torque, and the Duramax cranks out 369 lb-ft at 2,000 RPM, compared to the gas V-6's 275 lb-ft at 4,000 RPM. The Denali-trim Canyon's pulling power was put to the test towing across the Oregon Cascades and Coast Range passes. Not once did the 3,500-pound trailer feel like



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it was a burden, nor did we expect it to be, considering that this model Canyon has a max tow rating of 7,600 pounds. I loved the grade-braking and shift points of the diesel's six-speed automatic.

The diesel's pulling power comes alive when the tach rolls past 1,800 RPM, and the little Duramax inline-four pulls far stronger than the V-6. The four-wheel-drive Denali Canyon is also comfortable, quiet and fuel-efficient. We averaged 13.4 MPG towing the Mantis Trek and 30.1 MPG driving solo, a phenomenal figure for a pickup on the open road.

The shortbed crew cab rode and handled more like a luxury sedan than a truck and absorbed road irregularities with aplomb. The Denali trim provided all the amenities and latest safety features to keep us quite relaxed on our long camping trip with the Mantis Trek. The only upgrade we would have liked to have had on the Denali would be all-terrain tires instead of the street treads, which would have made our off-pave-ment drive time a little more relaxing. 🚚

## SPECIFICATIONS

### 2018 TAXA OUTDOORS MANTIS TREK

Exterior Length	19'
Exterior Width	7' 6"
Exterior Height	6' 10"
Interior Width	6' 10"
Interior Height, Closed	4' 7"
Interior Height, Open	5' 11" to 7' 10"
Construction	Laser-cut, CNC-bent, powder-coated HSLA steel frame. Kynar-coated aluminum panels with insulated foam core
Freshwater Cap.	20 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	22 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	N/A
LP-Gas Cap.	10 gal.
Water Heater Cap.	2.6 gal.
Refrigerator	2.8 cu. ft.
Furnace	14,300 Btu
Air Conditioner	6,000 Btu
Converter	40 amp
Batteries (2)	Group 27, 12-volt; dealer installed
Tires	ST 235/75R15
Suspension	Single torsion axle
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full; no cargo)	3,245 lbs.
Hitch Weight	420 lbs.
Axle Weight	2,570 lbs.
GVWR	3,800 lbs.

GAWR	4,000 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	555 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$41,500
MSRP, As Tested	\$41,500
Warranty	3 years/structural 1 year/electrical, plumbing

### Taxa Outdoors

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### 2018 GMC CANYON DENALI CREW CAB SHORTBED 4X4

Engine	2.8L Duramax I-4 turbo-diesel
Horsepower	181 hp @ 3,400 rpm
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Transmission	6-speed automatic
Axle Ratio	3.42:1
Curb Weight	4,706 lbs.
GVWR	6,200 lbs.
GCWR	12,700 lbs.
Max Tow Cap.	7,600 lbs.
Fuel Economy/Solo	30.1 mpg
Fuel Economy/Towing	13.4 mpg
MSRP, Base	\$43,070
MSRP, As Tested	\$48,290

### GMC

800-462-8782, [www.gmc.com](http://www.gmc.com)

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# Titanium Tough

On or off the grid, Outdoors RV's top-of-the-line 260RLS makes "roughing it" smoother

**R**ving is supposed to be about getting away from it all, yet, paradoxically, some trailers aren't built to withstand the journey. Anyone who's ever traveled beyond the comforts of an RV park or public campground knows that the roads less traveled are no place to go without the right equipment. Rough-hewn roads, unexpected mountain weather and the occasional rock or wayward tree limb can hinder your travel plans, at best, and put a complete halt to them, at worst.

La Grande, Oregon-based Out-

doors RV Manufacturing (ORV) was launched in 2009 for the specific purpose of serving the adventurous traveler. Located in the rugged Grande Ronde Valley, ORV is staffed by outdoor enthusiasts who understand the importance of a trailer designed for all-season camping in out-of-the-way places. Three series of trailers — Back Country, Mountain and Titanium — are designed with outdoor enthusiasts in mind, but all share features intended to make "roughing it" as smooth as possible, from the custom-built frame to fully enclosed

and heated holding tanks, thermal-pane windows and generous fresh-water capacity.

As you may have surmised from the name, Titanium is the top trim level, aimed at buyers who relish the extra amenities offered by luxury-trimmed trucks like the Ford King Ranch, GMC Denali, Toyota Tundra 1794 and others. One of its most popular travel trailer floorplans in the Titanium Series is the 260RLS, a versatile layout that is earmarked for families. A single large slideout on the street side houses a roomy sleeper sofa and a residential-size 45-by-84-inch Mountain Dinette that can easily seat four adults and also converts into a bed. Two entry doors, one for the living area, one for the front bedroom/bathroom, provide additional convenience. For example, if someone needs to make a bathroom visit while on the road or at the campsite, it's just a short trip through the front door.

The rest of the living area is



The handsome gray and black exterior features dual entry doors, frameless tinted windows, aluminum wheels and a diamond-plate front rock guard to prevent damage on unpaved roads.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER



thoughtfully designed and stylish as well. A large rear bay window serves as the backdrop for two comfortable rocker-recliners, which are separated by a table with a faux reclaimed-wood finish that is a welcome departure from plain ol' brown. It's a great place to lounge and supervise dinner preparation in the curbside galley, which is more than adequately equipped for

**(Above, from left) Lots of wood and simulated wood finishes give the 260RLS floorplan a rustic-cabin feel that is comfortable and inviting. A well-equipped kitchen with stainless-steel appliances provides contemporary contrast. The comfortable front bedroom offers plenty of storage.**

assembling meals.

The cabinetry and solid-surface countertop are angled toward the chef for a more intimate feel, with everything within easy reach. A large stainless-steel double-bowl sink is

surrounded by plenty of workspace, and there's a flip-up extension at the end for even more countertop. Stainless-steel appliances abound, including the Suburban range/cooktop, vent hood and High Pointe microwave. In a

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nod to cabin chic, the refrigerator door has a dark wood-stain appearance, which provides nice contrast. Near the front of the living area on this side are a large pantry and a television that is well positioned for viewing from the dinette, sofa and at least one recliner.

The bathroom/bedroom arrangement may look odd at first, with two doors at the front of the living area, but there is a method to the madness. The door to the left goes directly to the bedroom, while the one on the right enters the well-equipped and roomy bathroom with upscale features like a glass shower door and a stainless-steel sink. A sliding door provides access to the bedroom, which features a comfy queen bed and a wardrobe in a small streetside slideout. There is also storage on either side of the bed as well as above, plus large nightstands on either side and space underneath the bed platform.

Outside, the premium features continue. Frameless windows and alu-



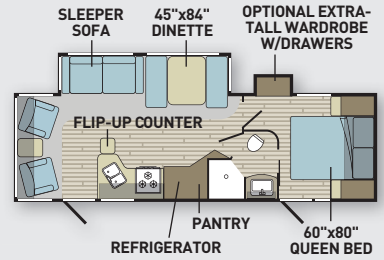
minum wheels are a nice touch, but it's where most people don't look that ORV goes the extra mile. Goodyear tires, MORryde suspension and Monroe gas-charged shocks help ensure the trailer can withstand rough roads. And because outdoor adventures usually require a lot of gear, there's a huge pass-through storage compartment up front that is nicely finished, well lit and lined with plastic tread-plate material.

Unless you build it yourself, you'll be hard-pressed to find a better-equipped trailer than the ORV Titanium Series, especially for the value. 🚐

Special thanks to Apache Camping Center in Portland, Oregon.

503-659-5166, [www.apachecamping.com](http://www.apachecamping.com)

## QUICK INFO



<b>Exterior Length</b>	31' 9"
<b>Exterior Width</b>	8'
<b>Interior Height</b>	6' 11"
<b>Exterior Height</b>	11' 5"
<b>Freshwater Cap.</b>	80 gal.
<b>Black-/Gray-Water Cap.</b>	50/40 gal.
<b>LP-Gas Cap.</b>	14 gal.
<b>UVW</b>	7,670 lbs.
<b>Hitch Weight</b>	775 lbs.
<b>GVWR</b>	11,000 lbs.
<b>MSRP, Base</b>	\$58,921

### Outdoors RV Manufacturing

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**WALK-THROUGH:** BIGFOOT 25B25RQ

# Finding Bigfoot

Discover a Canadian-made travel trailer designed for all-season camping and entertaining



The horizontally opposed walk-around queen bed is comfortable and has storage below.

**H**ave you noticed? Travel trailers have grown quite complex. Once an icon of simplicity, devoid of all but the bare necessities, towable RVs now offer creature comforts that were unimaginable 20 years ago. But for those of us who want a trailer that harks back

to a simpler time, the 2500 Series 25B25RQ from Bigfoot Industries could be the answer.

Slideouts? Not a one. Electric fireplace? *Uh-uh*. But what the 25B25RQ does offer is Bigfoot's famous two-piece fiberglass construction, high-density insulation, thermal-pane windows, and heated and enclosed holding tanks that make every trailer the company builds capable of four-season fun.

Headquartered in British Columbia, Bigfoot offers eight floorplans in the 2500 Series, and the 25B25RQ is one of the largest at 25½ feet

(denoted by the second "25" in the naming convention). As you enter the trailer through the front door, you are greeted by the generously sized living and dining area, with a large, fixed dinette that converts into a sleeping space. The street-side dinette bench extends into another seating area, so there is plenty of room for dining or entertaining.

A large window up front and windows on either side make the space light and airy, a feeling that was



(Left) The bath area offers plenty of counter and cabinet space, a stainless-steel sink and a molded fiberglass shower. (Below) The sleek fiberglass body features a full-length awning.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER

**WALK-THROUGH: BIGFOOT 25B25RQ**

enhanced by the sample unit's Driftwood Windswept decor with the leather upgrade. And where many newer models come with blackout shades only, Bigfoot still equips its trailers with versatile day/night shades. Storage is plentiful, with an overhead cabinet up front and on the street side, as well as another compartment behind the curbside dinette bench.

The kitchen is both handsome and well-equipped, with stainless-steel appliances and dark cabinetry with brushed-nickel pulls. A three-burner range with a cover is topped by a vent hood and a High Pointe microwave, and there is adequate overhead storage space for essentials. Below, a functional workspace features a countertop extension near the entry door, as well as a cover for the large, round stainless-steel sink.

Beneath the oven are two large, deep drawers that would be good places for pots, pans and baking sheets, and three drawers next to them are suitable for smaller items. Under the sink is a tip-out compartment for brushes and sponges, as well as a large cabinet with a shelf. Opposite the stove on the street side is an 8-cubic-foot stainless-steel refrigerator, and attached to its cabinet on the dinette side is a TV mount with an extending arm (the TV itself is an extra-cost option).



(Right, from top) The Bigfoot 25B25RQ's galley is equipped with all stainless-steel appliances and handsome, well-made cabinetry. A front dinette has plenty of elbow room for mealtime or entertaining.

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The street-side bathroom is amply proportioned for a trailer this size, with plenty of countertop space, a small stainless-steel sink and a double-door, mirrored medicine cabinet. Beneath the countertop are two drawers and a large compartment underneath the sink. To the right of the lavatory is a nicely finished one piece-fiberglass shower with a molded bench, soap shelf and plastic retractable shower curtain.

Sensibly placed across from the bathroom is a large, mirrored wardrobe cabinet with a cedar-lined floor and plenty of room for hanging clothes. Underneath the cabinet are four small drawers, as well as a larger one at the bottom that would be a perfect spot to store shoes.

Equipping the bedroom with a 60-by-74-inch bed when there is no slideout might seem like a challenge, but Bigfoot did an admirable job with its use of space here. The bed is horizontally opposed, so there is walk-around space, and even plenty of storage,

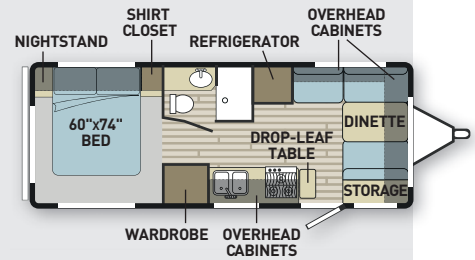
courtesy of the overhead cabinets, shirt closet with drawers and nightstand. Under-bed storage offers more room for a comforter, extra pillows or other bulky items.

The sleek exterior features standard aluminum wheels, a continental kit for the spare tire, an exterior shower, black-tank flush, patio awning with LED lighting, and dual LP-gas cylinders — something you'll appreciate during winter camping. Popular options include an 11,000-Btu air conditioner, 2.5-kilowatt Cummins Onan generator, power A-frame jack, solar panel and more.

Lightweight and aerodynamic, the fiberglass Bigfoot 25B25RQ pairs well with today's crop of fuel-efficient half-ton trucks. For those seeking a high-quality, low-maintenance travel trailer, it's an ideal four-season companion for outdoor adventures. 🚐

Special thanks to Apache Camping Center in Portland, Oregon.  
503-659-5166, [www.apachecamping.com](http://www.apachecamping.com)

## QUICK INFO



<b>Exterior Length</b>	25' 6"
<b>Exterior Width</b>	8' 4"
<b>Interior Height</b>	6' 4"
<b>Exterior Height</b>	9' 2"
<b>Freshwater Cap.</b>	45 gal.
<b>Black-/Gray-Water Cap.</b>	45/45 gal.
<b>LP-Gas Cap.</b>	10 gal.
<b>UVW</b>	4,863 lbs.
<b>Hitch Weight</b>	610 lbs.
<b>GVWR</b>	7,500 lbs.
<b>MSRP, Base</b>	\$56,965

### Bigfoot Industries

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# 12 UNDER \$21,000

## A DOZEN FUN AND FUNCTIONAL TRAILERS THAT WON'T BREAK THE BANK



**T**he face of the average RV consumer has changed substantially over the past few years, and manufacturers are slowly but steadily adapting to the shift. Reports from the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) point to a surge in young families and millennials entering the RV market, and these new buyers have tastes and preferences that set them apart from the Baby Boomers who have driven RV sales for decades.

The most important difference for this demographic may be their budgets. Although many people are looking to buy RVs earlier in life, they want to do so at a significantly lower price point. The good news for these shoppers is that the entry-level market for towable RVs has never been hotter, and manufacturers are eager to get a slice of the pie. Every model year brings more floorplan options and more features.

Now, if you hang out long enough with RV shoppers, you might hear the common complaint that all entry-level

trailers look the same. This may be true if you are visiting only smaller, local RV shows or dealerships. However, a quick glance at the pages that follow shows that, for those willing to expand the search, there's an incredible range of trailers available for \$21,000 or less.

From rugged teardrops like the T@G Boondock to family-friendly bunk models like the Sonic Lite 169VBH, there is something for every shopper. Folding tent campers, hybrids and toy haulers all appear at this price point, and many show off creative new

design trends like murphy beds and hidden bunks. Want to stand out from the crowd? A few of the models in this roundup offer bold exterior colors like cherry red and canary yellow.

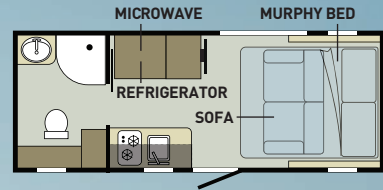
Many first-time RV shoppers do not own a heavy-duty tow vehicle, and they have no interest in purchasing one. The new trailers featured here demonstrate that manufacturers are providing plenty of ultra-lightweight options that can be towed by suitably equipped SUVs and other family vehicles. Companies like Taxa Outdoors and Purple Line are using aluminum to build high-quality trailers that have a dry weight under 2,000 pounds. Some even fit in a standard garage.

Bottom line? You can stick to your budget and still find an RV that's fun and functional. The hard part won't be figuring out how to pay for it but deciding between all the different options.

**(Above) The \$21,000 Cricket Camp features a big rear hatch that brings the outdoors inside.**

## Jayco Hummingbird

Murphy beds are having a moment in the RV industry, and for good reason. In the **16MRB**, the bed easily folds up into the wall, allowing for comfortable living space and a large bathroom in a trailer less than 20 feet long. The kitchen is fully outfitted with a sink, two-burner cooktop, 3-cubic-foot refrigerator, convection microwave and a pantry. The television is positioned for comfortable viewing from the couch or the bed when folded down. A folding table can be set up for dining inside or out and tucks away in a designated storage cabinet when not in use. The rear bathroom has a closet, a linen cabinet and a roomy shower. On the



outside are large front and rear storage compartments, a 10-foot awning and an outdoor shower. Goodyear tires are now standard on all Jayco models, and the optional Baja package comes with upgraded 15-inch off-road mud tires, double-entry steps and an enclosed underbelly with insulation.

Exterior Length .....	19' 9"
Exterior Width .....	8' 1"
Interior Height .....	6' 6"
Exterior Height .....	9' 2"
Freshwater Cap .....	25.6 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.....	25.4 gal./25.4 gal.
LP-Gas Cap. ....	5 gal.
UWW, Base .....	2,700 lbs.
Hitch Weight .....	340 lbs.
GVWR .....	3,750 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$17,984

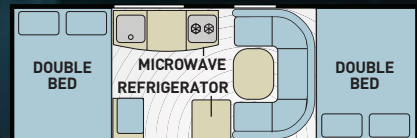
**800-283-8267, www.jayco.com**

## Purple Line OPUS

Available in orange or blue with a gray pop-up tent, the **OPUS Original** is a folding camper with unique style and functionality. When folded, the trailer's low profile offers ease of towing and storage. This is especially appealing to those looking for a light-weight RV that parks in a garage. The reinforced top contains universal roof racks, and the Great Western package provides roof-rack bars with a carrier for bikes or kayaks. The manufacturer reports that the heavy-duty canvas, aluminum frame and insulated panels will withstand year-round weather conditions. The interior is sleek, modern and practically luxurious for a folding camper. Double beds are on both ends, and a U-shaped dinette transforms into a third double bed. The kitchen has a sink, cooktop, microwave and refrigerator. A



portable toilet and shower come in handy when camping in rustic locations. The Air OPUS inflating-tent option adds to the cost but makes setup a breeze.



Exterior Length .....	14' 3"/closed, 20'/open
Exterior Width .....	6' 4"
Interior Height .....	8'/open
Exterior Height.....	3' 10"/closed, 13' 11"/open
Freshwater Cap.....	N/A
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.....	N/A

LP-Gas Cap. ....	5 gal.
UWW, Base .....	1,577 lbs.
Hitch Weight .....	100 lbs.
GVWR .....	3,500 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$19,799

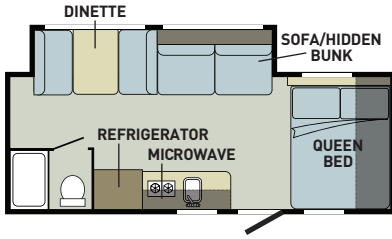
**925-215-7315, www.opuscamper.us**

## Forest River Cherokee Wolf Pup

The **18T0** sets itself apart from the pack by offering a super-slide on a single-axle trailer with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) under 5,000 pounds. This opens up the interior and provides great living space in a small package. Standard features include front and rear stabilizer jacks and a double-step entry, but the most interesting feature in this floorplan might be the hidden bunk that resides above the jackknife sleeper sofa. This transforms a couple's rig into a trailer that works for a variety of different buyers. Some empty nesters like to have room for



# 12 UNDER \$21,000



occasional visits from children or grandchildren. Other families are looking for a floorplan that offers comfortable sleeping arrangements in a small, lightweight trailer. The bathroom has a kid-friendly tub-and-shower combo, and the kitchen has great

counter space, with a residential-style faucet, a refrigerator, microwave and two-burner cooktop. Faux bricks line the wall along the back.

Exterior Length .....	22' 9"
Exterior Width .....	7' 1"
Interior Height .....	6' 6"
Exterior Height .....	10' 6"
Freshwater Cap.....	32 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.....	23 gal./23 gal.
LP-Gas Cap. ....	5 gal.
UWW, Base .....	3,797 lbs.
Hitch Weight .....	525 lbs.
GVWR .....	5,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$19,136

**260-499-2100, www.forestriver.com**

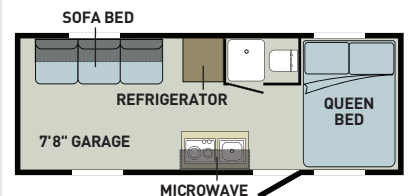


## Travel Lite Falcon

The lightweight **F-23TH** is a toy hauler that doesn't need a heavy-duty truck to tow it. The dual-axle trailer has 7 feet, 8 inches of garage space to hold a dirt bike, motorcycle, four-wheeler or kayaks. The garage contains a jackknife sofa that converts to a bed. The kitchen is small but efficient, offering a two-burner cooktop, 5-cubic-foot refrigerator, microwave and a pantry. Interior decor combines stainless steel and wood finishes, making the design feel modern and on trend. Two skylights bring plenty of natural light into the space, including one in the wet bath. The queen bed is arranged east to west, so there is no room to walk around it. Windows on either side of the bed are sliders, which offer much better ventilation than some other options. Outside, 10-inch-wide Michelin tires are on standard 18-inch rims. Exterior color choices range from black, white and graphite metallic to attention-getting red.

Exterior Length .....	22' 9"
Exterior Width .....	8' 4"
Interior Height .....	6' 3"
Exterior Height .....	8' 6"
Freshwater Cap.....	31 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.....	30 gal./30 gal.
LP-Gas Cap. ....	10 gal.
UWW, Base .....	3,120 lbs.
Hitch Weight .....	330 lbs.
GVWR .....	6,480 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$20,931

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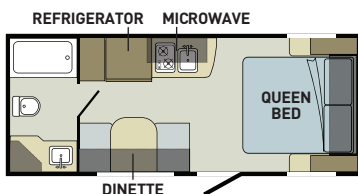
## Starcraft Launch Outfitter 7

Although the **17QB** does not have any slides, the interior seems roomy, thanks in part to a 6½-foot ceiling height. On the outside, fiberglass and neutral graphics give the trailer a fresh, modern look. Otherwise, the RV offers a standard workhorse layout for couples in a very affordable package. The walk-around queen bed is a definite plus for many owners, with overhead storage and a wardrobe on each side. The kitchen has a refrigerator, microwave, two-burner range and a pantry. The residential-style high-rise faucet offers

a nice bit of function and design in a small space. The single-basin sink leaves some countertop available for food preparation. In the rear of the trailer, the bathroom has a tub and shower, along with plenty of space for linens and toiletries. A 12-foot electric awning comes standard, as do exterior speakers, an outside shower and an insulated, enclosed underbelly.

Exterior Length .....	21' 6"
Exterior Width .....	7' 1"
Interior Height .....	6' 6"
Exterior Height .....	10'
Freshwater Cap.....	26 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.....	9 gal./15 gal.
LP-Gas Cap. ....	5 gal.
UWW, Base .....	3,120 lbs.
Hitch Weight .....	292 lbs.
GVWR .....	3,750 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$18,561

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# 12 UNDER \$21,000

## Escape Trailer

The 17A is a molded-fiberglass travel trailer, a construction method that results in an extremely lightweight and stylish rig capable of being towed by many SUVs and minivans. These trailers are built to order at a manufacturing facility in British Columbia,

Canada. Buyers can travel there, adding to the romance of acquiring such a unique rig, or have the finished trailer delivered for an additional fee. The 17A floorplan has a permanent bed up front, a kitchen, and a four-person dinette in the back that can

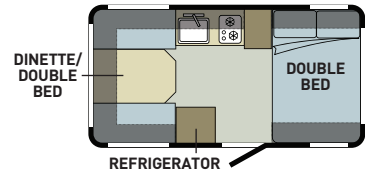
be converted into an additional bed. There is no wet bath in this model; that luxury requires upgrading to the 17B. The 17A also does not come with black- or gray-water

tanks, but they can be ordered as optional features. Many overhead cabinets are built in along the ceiling, giving owners a lot of storage for such a small space. Outside, a 10-foot power awning, bubble levels and a 2-inch bike receiver are standard features.



Exterior Length .....	17' 8"
Exterior Width .....	6' 8"
Interior Height .....	6' 2"
Exterior Height .....	8' 2"
Freshwater Cap. ....	20 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap. ....	Optional
LP-Gas Cap. ....	10 gal.
UWW, Base .....	1,970 lbs.
Hitch Weight .....	250 lbs.
GVWR .....	4,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base .....	\$25,650 CAD

855-703-1650, [www.escapetrailer.com](http://www.escapetrailer.com)

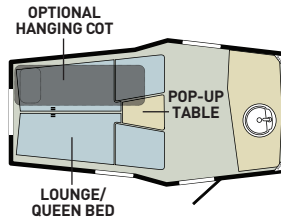


# MAXXIS® TIRES



## Taxa Outdoors Cricket

The **Cricket Camp** is perfect for those who are ready to stop sleeping on the ground in a tent but want to stay true to the spirit of rugged, outdoor adventure. Designed by a former NASA architect, the pop-up-roof trailer looks like nothing else in the RV industry, both inside and out. Aluminum-and-steel construction creates a strong yet lightweight body that can be towed by many four-cylinder vehicles. All-terrain tires on 15-inch aluminum wheels will easily venture far from civilization. Comforts not typically found in the middle of nowhere include 15-gallon gray- and freshwater tanks, plus an outdoor shower with hot and cold water. Inside are seats that convert to a queen-size bed. Hanging dual cots are available as an option and can sleep two kids. The kitchen offers a nice amount of counter space and storage, with a sink, two-burner stove and six storage cubbies.



Exterior Length ..... 15'  
 Exterior Width ..... 6' 7"  
 Interior Height ..... 6' 6"/open  
 Exterior Height ..... 6' 9"/closed  
 Freshwater Cap ..... 15 gal.  
 Black/Gray-Water Cap ..... N/A/15 gal.  
 LP-Gas Cap ..... 10 gal.  
 UWW, Base ..... 1,500 lbs.  
 Hitch Weight ..... 150 lbs.  
 GVWR ..... 2,500 lbs.  
 MSRP, Base ..... \$21,000

713-861-2540, [www.taxaoutdoors.com](http://www.taxaoutdoors.com)

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\*3 ply sidewall construction

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# 12 UNDER \$21,000

## inTech Flyer

For those looking to cart their toys and still stay lightweight, the **Explore Flyer** may be just the ticket. One of the smallest toy haulers out there, the basic model is pretty much a box trailer with a counter and cabinets at the front. The good news is that buyers can choose

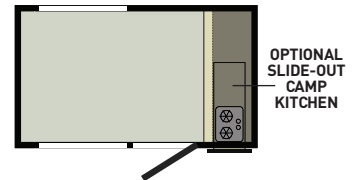
from a ton of options, including a slide-out camp kitchen, and still remain at an affordable price point and ultralight weight. Add a tip-out bed to create a unique hybrid toy hauler, and throw in a removable dinette table for a nice place to eat or play a game of cards at the end

of the day. The roof-rack system works for hauling a canoe or kayak, and a 2-inch receiver handles a rack for bikes. The trailer comes in three interior colors (cherry, maple and light gray) and six exterior colors (pewter, white, black, gray, red and silver).



Exterior Length.....	13' 9"
Exterior Width.....	7' 8"
Interior Height.....	5' 6"
Exterior Height.....	7' 6"
Freshwater Cap.....	N/A
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.....	N/A
LP-Gas Cap.....	Optional
UJW, Base.....	1,400-2,050 lbs.
Hitch Weight.....	290-390 lbs.
GVWR.....	2,990 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$10,118

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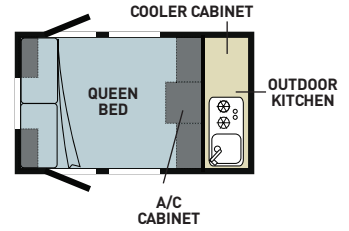
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12 UNDER \$21,000

**nüCamp T@G**

The lightest trailer in this roundup is the **T@G Boondock**, an aluminum-frame teardrop made for off-road adventures. The interior has just enough room for a queen-size bed, but nüCamp makes the most of the surrounding wall space. Overhead storage cabinets line the front and rear walls, along with shelving. The small trailer also packs in a television, an air-conditioning unit and a stereo system. A rear hatch opens up to a well-appointed outdoor kitchen with a sink, an electric cooler, two-burner cooktop, outlets and storage. The Boondock package includes knobby off-road tires, a Yakima roof rack and a diamond-plate A-frame box. Exterior graphics can be ordered in black, bright yellow or cherry red. For those whose camping taste favors glamping instead of rugged exploration, choosing the Sofitel package adds high-end interior and exterior finishes.

Exterior Length .....	9' 6"
Exterior Width .....	6' 8"
Interior Height .....	3' 11"
Exterior Height .....	6' 4"
Freshwater Cap .....	11 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap .....	N/A
LP-Gas Cap .....	5 gal.
UWW, Base .....	1,150 lbs.
Hitch Weight .....	132 lbs.
GVWR .....	2,200 lbs.
MSRP, Base .....	\$15,194



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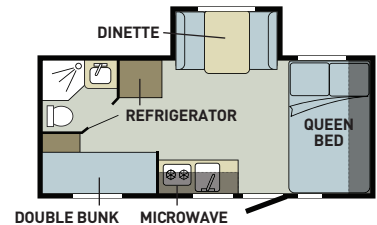
## KZ Escape

The **E191BH** manages to squeeze everything a family needs into a fairly compact space. The trailer also offers build features not always available in the ultra-lightweight market, such as maple cabinets and a 5/8-inch tongue-and-groove plywood floor. The master bed runs east to west at the front of the rig with a large picture window bringing in natural light and surrounding views. The booth dinette is on a slide, opening up floor space and eliminating traffic jams that often happen in small trailers. Across from the dinette is a kitchen with a two-burner cooktop, 4-cubic-foot refrigerator, a microwave, sink and a bit of counter space. Two bunks nestle into the back next to the bathroom, and the bottom bunk flips up for extra storage space. The Off-Road Package adds a holding-tank heater.



Exterior Length.....	21' 11"
Exterior Width.....	7' 6"
Interior Height.....	6' 6"
Exterior Height.....	9' 4"
Freshwater Cap.....	20 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.....	32 gal./32 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.....	5 gal.
UWW, Base.....	3,233 lbs.
Hitch Weight.....	446 lbs.
GVWR.....	4,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$19,130

**866-472-5460, www.kz-rv.com**



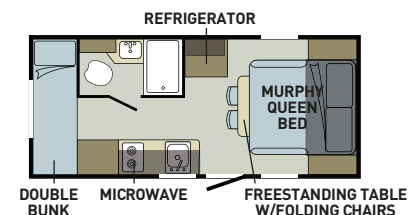
## Venture RV Sonic Lite

It's almost hard to believe how much functionality is packed into this 21-foot-plus travel trailer. The **SL169VBH** has a murphy queen bed up front with wardrobe closets on both sides. When the bed is folded up, folks can enjoy the nicely sized sofa and set up the free-standing table with two folding chairs, transforming the space into a dinette. Having the front of the trailer function as a bedroom, living area and dining room frees up space for a bathroom with a 36-inch tub. Parents of small children will especially appreciate this feature. Parents will also like the double

bunks at the rear of the rig, along with the large door behind them that allows for easy loading of gear. The trailer comes prewired for solar and a backup camera, and a black-tank flush and LED-lit power awning are standard.

Exterior Length.....	21' 4"
Exterior Width.....	7' 6"
Interior Height.....	6' 10"
Exterior Height.....	9' 5"
Freshwater Cap.....	38 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.....	30 gal./30 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.....	5 gal.
UWW, Base.....	2,990 lbs.
Hitch Weight.....	410 lbs.
GVWR.....	4,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$19,999

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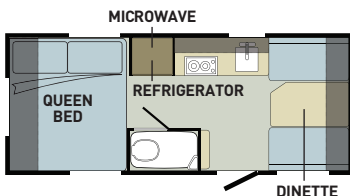


## Winnebago Minnie Drop

If you are one of those RV shoppers who complain about brown textiles and dated graphics, the Minnie Drop has you covered with eight boldly colored exteriors (including yellow, orange, cherry and blue, and optional wood-grain graphics) and a lovely, bright interior palette. The **1710** has a dedicated queen bed in the rear with storage options above and below, plus a dinette up front that can be converted into extra sleeping space. The kitchen offers a fair amount of countertop for a coffeemaker and food prep, and comes with a convection microwave, a single-basin sink, a two-burner cooktop and a refrigerator. Take notice of the kitchen drawers and outlets, two things that are often absent in smaller trailers. The wet bath may be a squeeze for some folks, but it's no problem for others. Exterior storage is at a premium in trailers of this size, so the front-mount sewer hose tube is a nice addition.

Exterior Length.....	18' 4"
Exterior Width.....	8'
Interior Height.....	6' 5"
Exterior Height.....	9' 3"
Freshwater Cap.....	31 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.....	25 gal./25 gal.
LP-Gas Cap. ....	5 gal.
UWW, Base.....	2,360 lbs.
Hitch Weight.....	290 lbs.
GVWR.....	3,500 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$20,644

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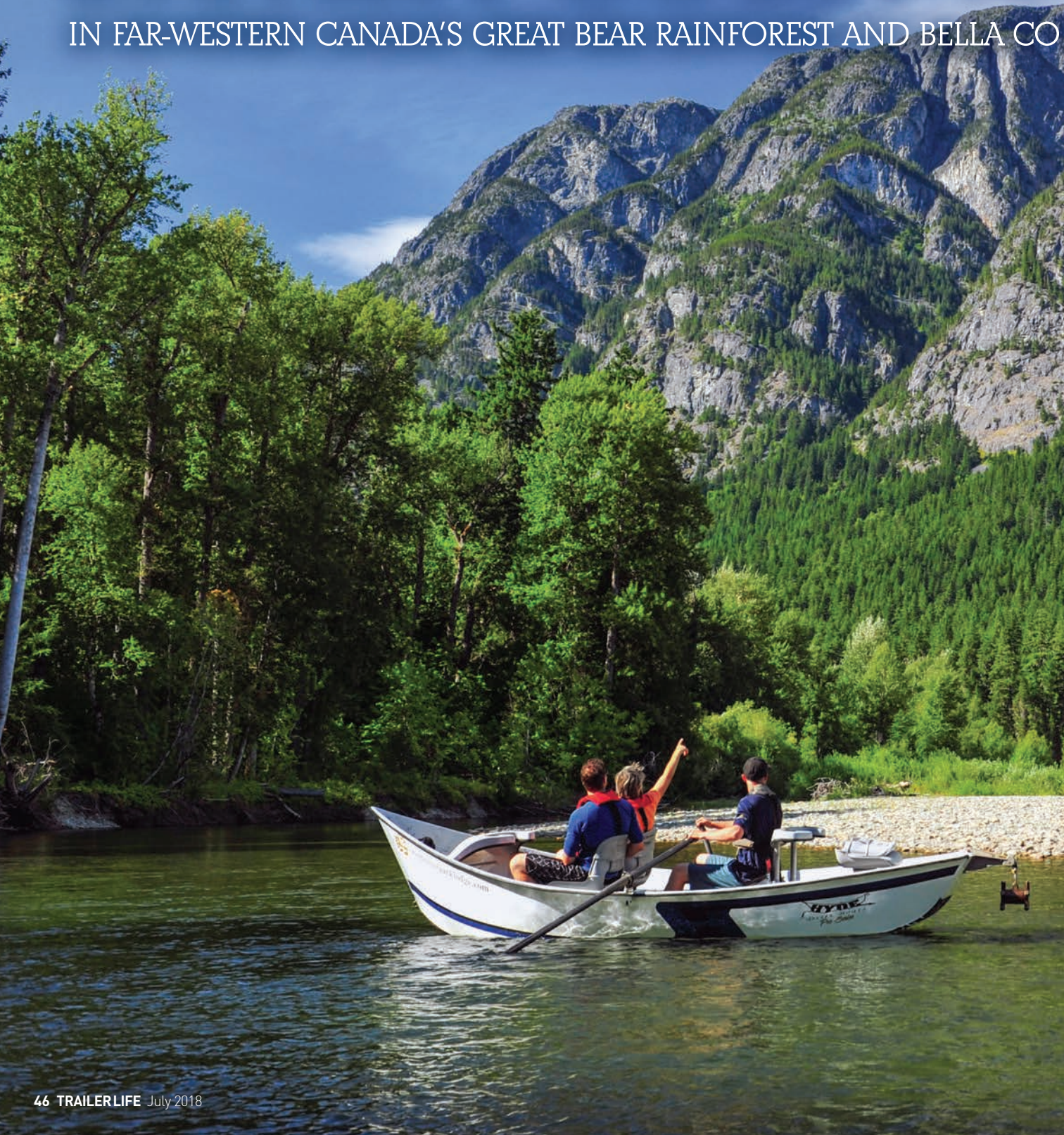
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article by Alan Rider

# OFF THE BEATEN PATH IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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# IA

## OLA VALLEY, THE ADVENTURE STARTS WHERE THE HIGHWAY STOPS

The end of the road. While some may see this phrase as having negative connotations, I'm here to argue otherwise. Because I've been to places where the road ends, and I can tell you that, without fail, every end holds the promise of a new beginning.

Case in point: the small fishing village of Bella Coola. Located on the central coast of British Columbia where its namesake river empties into the Pacific Ocean, this town is the last outpost on Provincial Highway 20. But, as far as I'm concerned, it's one of the first places RVers with an adventurous spirit ought to put on their list of dream destinations.

### WAY OUT THERE

From its snowcapped peaks and fresh air to its abundant wildlife and mild weather, the 50-mile-long Bella Coola Valley has any number of appealing qualities. The truth of the matter, though, is that its greatest strength — its remoteness — may also be its most notable weakness. You see, Bella Coola isn't one of those places you stumble upon by accident. It takes a fair bit of pluck to reach it, whether by land or sea.

Getting to this lonely dot on the map involves following Highway 20 west for 283 miles from the town of Williams Lake, a trip that includes some stretches of rough pavement. To make things more interesting, the drive is capped off with



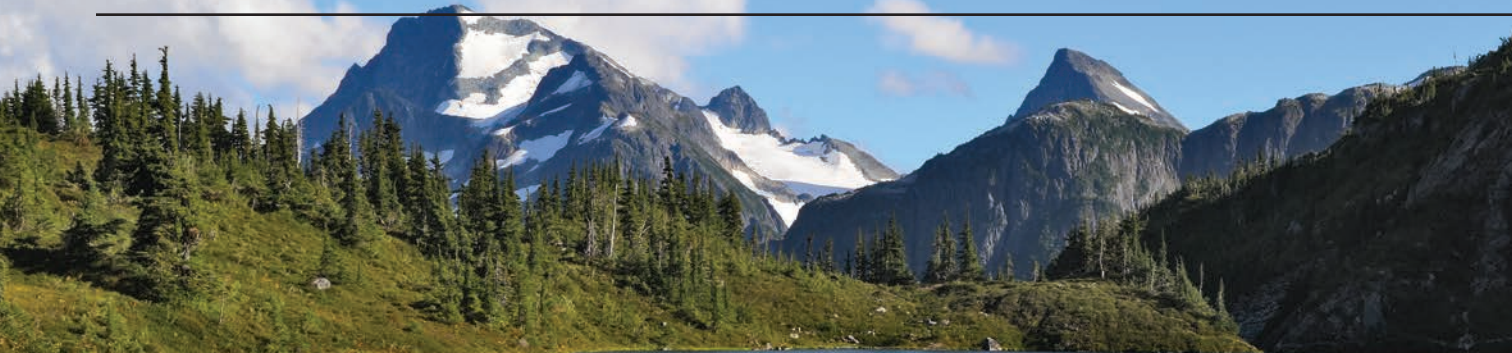
tackling Heckman Pass — better known simply as “the Hill” — an 18-mile descent full of loose gravel, hairpin turns and steep drop-offs.

That said, the trip is entirely doable hauling a trailer with any well-maintained tow vehicle that can be shifted into lower gears. If you have a truck with four-wheel-drive or a diesel exhaust brake, you should be able to make the slow crawl downhill without breaking a sweat.

If that sounds a little too stressful, a ferry can transport you and your RV from Port Hardy on the northern tip of Vancouver Island to Bella Coola from mid-June through September. Either way, getting here is an adventure in itself.

PHOTOS BY GEOFF MOORE

**Dream destination: Getting yourself and your RV to British Columbia's Bella Coola Valley takes some doing, but the payoff — stunning scenery, fresh air, mild weather, abundant wildlife and more — makes it worth the effort.**



### PICTURE PERFECT

Once you've arrived at the valley floor, you'll find your efforts have been handsomely rewarded by Bella Coola's stunning scenery. The first and foremost attractions are British Columbia's Coast Mountains. Their jagged summits soar to nearly 12,000 feet and include a Matterhorn look-alike and the aptly named Mount Stupendous.

In fact, nearly everywhere you turn,

you're surrounded by jaw-dropping scenery. Heading off into the still-wild backcountry by way of reasonably well-maintained unpaved forest service roads will add even more wonder as you stop to enjoy a picnic lunch amid views of dramatic Odegaard Falls and alpine ponds like Hammer Lake.

To top it all off, the Bella Coola Valley's climate is relatively dry and sunny, thanks to its location 100 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean.



Pristine alpine lakes and soaring mountain peaks are just a sample of the natural attractions that await at the end of the road or ferry route. (Inset) The downside of visiting the Bella Coola Valley? The setting can be so relaxing and the scenery so spectacular, you won't want to leave.

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### LOCAL FOLKS

This valley has been home to the native Nuxalk people for thousands of years. Today, the Nuxalk continue producing their highly regarded traditional crafts, including ceremonial masks, totem poles, quilts, pottery and more, which you'll find for sale in a number of local galleries and artists' studios.

If you're wondering where the small neighboring community of Hagensborg got its Nordic name, there's a simple explanation. A century after Angus MacKenzie became the first white man to reach the Pacific by overland route in 1793, a dozen years before Lewis and Clark, a group of Norwegian homesteaders came to settle this part of the glacially cut valley because of its resemblance to their home country.

This hardworking, pioneer spirit also helps explain why Bella Coola is one of only three places on British Columbia's central coast where the ocean is accessible by road. In 1953, locals got fed up with the government's refusal to extend Highway 20 from Anahim Lake down the Hill to the town. So they scraped together \$250, plenty of dynamite and heavy equipment, and cut their own road to the valley below.

**(Right, top to bottom) Whether it's paddling a sea kayak past the Tallheo Cannery, one of the few remaining fishing canneries on British Columbia's Northwest coast, or hiking to the Thorsen Creek petroglyphs, a visit to the Bella Coola Valley is best spent outdoors.**



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**WILD TIMES**

Wildlife viewing is a prime attraction, as you might imagine from a town that is the jumping-off spot for the Great Bear Rainforest — at 25,000 square miles, it is one of largest swaths of unspoiled temperate rainforest in the world.

On our visit, we encountered a full-grown grizzly before we even made it to our campsite. Had we been here six weeks later when the salmon were running up the Bella Coola and

its tributaries, we were told we'd have seen dozens of black and brown bears fattening themselves up for the long winter ahead. Bald eagles are an equally common sight. And, if you're very lucky, you may even lay eyes on more elusive creatures that call this valley home including wolves, cougars and mountain goats.

One of the best ways to increase your chances of spotting and perhaps photographing all this wildlife is by



**GETTING TO BELLA COOLA**

Bella Coola is a scenic 620-mile drive north of Vancouver, British Columbia, by way of highways 97 and 20. A packed-dirt road, Highway 20 crosses Tweedsmuir Provincial Park and summits Heckman Pass. Despite switchbacks and steep grades, the pass, known as “the Hill,” is considered drivable by RVs of all sizes, though downshifting is essential. If you go, don't miss the drive (sans trailer) to Purgatory Lookout on the unpaved Nusatsum Forest Service Road.

**DriveBC Road Conditions**

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This year the British Columbia ferry service launched a direct route from Vancouver Island's Port Hardy to Bella Coola, transporting passengers and vehicles across Queen Charlotte Strait and up the North Bentinck Arm of Burke Channel from June 19 through October 1. The trip takes 10 hours, and reservations are strongly recommended. BCFerries also operates a seasonal ferry to several central coast locations including Bella Coola.

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**For More Information**

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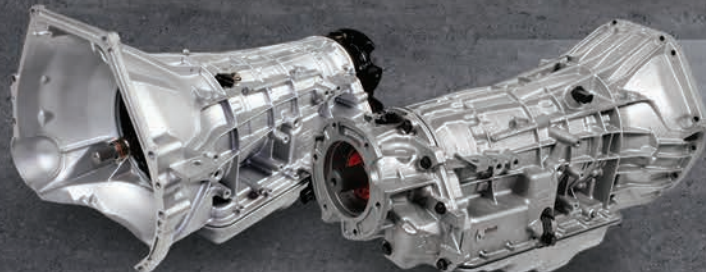


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arranging to go out with a local guide. Many of them use oar-powered drift boats to float quietly down the river, giving you a chance at getting up-close views without spooking the animals.

Other guide services offer tours by sea kayak where you can paddle to an old abandoned cannery or soak in picturesque natural hot springs. Scenic powerboat excursions take you further out into the waters of the Inside Passage where orca and humpback

whales can often be spotted swimming along the wild and unpeopled North Bentinck Arm.

### HOOKS AND HIKES

For those who prefer their wildlife wriggling on the end of a line, Bella Coola's streams and mountain lakes are filled with everything from pink salmon to rainbow trout. There's even an outfitter who'll give you the chance to snorkel with salmon, in case you want



PHOTOS BY STEVE HARKIES, MICHAEL WIGLE

(Top) Grizzly bear sightings are not uncommon in the Bella Coola Valley. (Above) One of two commercial RV parks in the area, Rip Rap Camp has full hookups and killer views.

to reach out and touch your dinner.

At the literal end of the road, you'll find Bella Coola's public docks. The docks are home to a number of fishing guides that offer saltwater anglers a chance to catch their limit of halibut, lingcod, prawns and even Dungeness crabs.

If you prefer to commune with nature on land, the Bella Coola Valley and nearby Tweedsmuir South Provincial Park have miles of trails waiting to be explored. There are also outfitters who can do everything from setting you up with the gear you'll need to guiding you through the vast wilderness that lies just beyond the campground.

To see more of the area in less time, consider taking to the air aboard a small flight-seeing plane. Heli-hiking — being dropped off by helicopter on, say, a remote mountaintop for a day hike — is also a possibility.

Despite all this natural beauty, visiting the Bella Coola Valley is clearly not a trip for everyone. But for RVers with a strong curiosity and sense of adventure, the end of this road may be just the start of many way-off-the-beaten-path experiences to come. 🐾

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# Great Grills of Fire

SUMMER'S HERE, THE WEATHER'S FINE, AND FRIENDS ARE DROPPING BY. IT'S TIME TO TAKE THE COOKING FROM THE GALLEY TO THE GRILL

A hundred and fifty years ago, at the end of a long day on the trail, pioneers circled the wagons, started a fire, and cooked up a mess of sourdough biscuits, beans and buffalo steaks. Today's travelers tow or drive plush RVs instead of creaky Conestogas, but the appeal of cooking outdoors is as strong as ever. Not only does it pay homage to the hardy souls who blazed trails across the country, it's a lot easier with modern equipment such as propane grills, and you don't have to worry about finding food for the oxen.

Unlike our pioneer ancestors who cooked over fires fueled by found wood and the odd cow chip, modern RVers have lots of options for outdoor grilling and barbecuing. Closest in spirit to the campfire is a charcoal grill, which gives meat a tasty charbroiled flavor that's hard to match with any other method. But it has drawbacks if you plan to cook most of your meals with it — most significantly, warm-up time. It might be fun for the first few meals, but waiting 20 minutes for the coals to get hot enough to put the meat on the grill can get old for some folks.

Electric grills top the convenience charts, though the flavor infused into food from a gas or charcoal grill will be missing, plus they may limit where you can grill

since, obviously, you need electricity.

Propane, the grill of choice for many RVers, can be plumbed into your RV's LP-gas system or to a separate propane cylinder so you're always close to fuel. It heats up right away, cools down fast and is relatively easy to clean. Many propane grills are light enough for one person to carry, and some fold down to fit in an exterior storage compartment while traveling.

Not all propane grills are created equal. Smaller is better since it's easier to carry, deploy, clean and store — but only up to a point, unless cooking a burger or two at a time is your idea of fun. Choose a grill based on how many people you expect to cook for at the

same time, and maybe get one just a skosh bigger in case guests drop by.

Grill bodies range from simple metal tabletop boxes to cast-metal and stainless-steel units with stands and tables. Grates and burners are similarly wide-ranging, from basic metal that doesn't last too long to porcelainized cast-iron and stainless steel. How the burners are protected from drips, and how the diffusers inside are made will make a big difference in how well the grill maintains even heat across its surface.

With commercially made grills, as with most everything else, the more you spend, the better the grill. For RV use, size and weight are important considerations, but be sure to look closely at Btu output and other features as well, as your grilling success and sanity will be at steak!

Grilling can be a messy business. In addition to having a grill that's easy to fold up and store, you want one that's easy to clean. Many grills come apart for



cleaning and have integrated drip trays that expedite grease disposal. If you're going to store your grill inside an RV compartment, try to get one that has an available sealable carry case, and clean it as well as possible to keep smells and critters at bay.

When using a grill next to your RV, keep in mind that it's a source of high heat. Placed too close to fiberglass siding or stick-on vinyl graphics, your grill can cook more than your food. Use a spray bottle full of water to reduce flare-ups from fatty meats. Extra preparedness points are awarded for keeping an actual fire extinguisher nearby.

You'll probably already have cutlery and plates on board, so adding a long-handled fork, tongs and a spatula can complete your grilling kit. A digital meat thermometer is a great idea, too, as is a cook station, a portable kitchen counter that folds out and gives room for prepping salads and side dishes; some include wash basins for cleaning up. For campsites without a picnic table, a folding table and seats can make any barbecue an occasion.

Even before you defrost the steaks, make sure the site you're planning to visit allows outdoor cooking. In some RV parks, and in some seasons, the fire hazard is so great that grilling outside the RV is prohibited. While you're planning your trip, make note of when you're passing through areas known for particular foods, and plan menus around what's available. You really can't visit either coast, for example, without fitting a salmon feast or a clambake into your schedule. And there's no corn like fresh corn from the Midwest, picked and sold the same day from a roadside stand.

Here's a selection of some of the most popular grills, accessories and hardware to make your outdoor cooking experience a great one. From charcoal grills for die-hard flame fans to propane grills and electric ones, whether you're whipping up a feast for the family, a party or just yourself, you'll find something here that'll light your fire.

## Outdoor Grills



▲ Made for outdoor RV use, the stainless-steel **Camco Olympian 5500 Grill** (\$185.99) has a quick-disconnect hose and valve to use with the built-in low-pressure connector on your RV. The easy-to-assemble grill has 180 square inches of cooking area and a cast-iron smoker plate for the fullest flavor while minimizing grease fires. A bracket for an RV mounting rail is included, along with folding legs for tabletop use.

▼ Designed for open-flame drip-through grilling, the **Coleman RoadTrip Classic Grill** (\$244.99) comes with removable surfaces so you can use it as a grill, a griddle or a stove. Setup is fast and easy on the included stand or a tabletop. The side tables are detachable, and the cooking surface measures 285 square inches. The grill operates on 16.4-ounce propane cylinders and is adaptable to 20-pound cylinders (hose and cylinders sold separately).—



▲ The **Smoke Hollow Vector Series Smoking Tabletop 3-Burner Gas Grill** (\$169.99) comes with two 6,500-Btu burners and a 3,500-Btu smoke-tray burner that heats 367 square inches of cooking area. A chrome-plated wire warming rack keeps food warm, and a porcelain-coated pan lets the chef add wood chips for more flavor. The folding sides hold utensils and food nearby, and the lid detaches to accommodate large pots and pans. Three steel legs provide stability and fold away for storage. A hose to connect to a 20-pound propane cylinder is included.



▲ Featuring a recontoured lid to accommodate whole chickens or roasts, the **Weber Q 2200 Portable Propane Grill** (\$249) has stainless-steel burners and fast, reliable ignition. Split grates simplify cleaning and allow use of a griddle over one side of the burner. Ergonomic side handles and sturdy front and rear cradles are standard. The grill works with disposable propane canisters or a refillable cylinder and an adapter (not included).



## Great Grills of Fire



▲ True to its name, the **Weber Go-Anywhere Charcoal Grill** (\$54.99) is easy to take along. The compact grill weighs less than 15 pounds and has a 160-square-inch plated-steel cooking grate. The plated-steel legs pivot to lock the lid for transport, and the whole grill lifts easily with three glass-reinforced nylon handles. Rust-resistant aluminum dampers and a porcelain-enamel bowl and lid add durability.

### ▶ Camping World's Low-Pressure Stainless Steel Grill (\$139.99)

attaches directly to your onboard



propane supply and mounts on an RV side wall or can be placed on a tabletop. It offers 10,000 Btu of grilling power and a porcelain-enamel grid with a roomy 305 square inches of cooking area. Features include piezo ignition, a built-in temperature gauge, a cool-touch stainless-steel handle and a heavy-duty carrying bag. A hanger bracket is included for attaching the grill to a mounting rail (sold separately) on your RV's side wall.

▶ The already assembled **Char-Broil Portable Grill2Go X200 Gas Grill** (\$149.99) features durable die-cast aluminum construction, a push-button ignition and a lid-mounted temperature gauge. The Tru-Infrared cooking system means no flare-ups, according to Char-Broil. The cooking area measures 200 square inches, and the main burner puts out 9,500 Btu. Assembled height is 13¾ inches, and width is 23½ inches. An optional carrying case sells for \$69.99. ▼



▲ The **Char-Broil Patio Bistro Tru-Infrared Electric Grill** (\$199.99) plugs in for a no-fuss barbecue experience. The porcelain-coated cooking grates are rust-resistant, and the company claims everything from steak to vegetables cooks evenly. The grill weighs less than 30 pounds, and assembled dimensions are 25.6 by 39.8 by 39.8 inches. Color choices are red, black and graphite.



▼ The steel-crafted **Coleman Camp Propane Grill/Stove** (\$109.99) has a grill and stove so you can sauté up a side of mushrooms for your steak while it is grilling alongside. The stove fits a 10-inch pan, and the grill area is 130 square inches, both rated at 20,000 Btu. WindBlock panels shield the flame from wind and double as side tables. A removable grease tray makes cleanup quick.



## Cook Stations and Tables

▶ The steel-framed **GCI Outdoor Master Cook Station** (\$120) uses Slim-Fold technology for easy setup and takedown. The one-piece cook station has three plastic side tables with beverage holders and hooks to hold cooking utensils and a trash bag. It also features an extended aluminum countertop, a lower rack for storage, a telescoping lantern pole and a soft-shell sink with a drain that collapses when the unit is folded. When packing up, it folds flat to 21.7 by 5.9 by 34.8 inches and includes a carrying handle.



▼ The smaller **GCI Outdoor Slim-Fold Cook Station** (\$80) also sets up and takes down quickly, thanks to its one-piece design. It comes with an aluminum countertop, a lower rack for storage, and four plastic fold-out side tables that offer beverage holders and glassware hooks that double as a place to hang a garbage bag.





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\* Transfer Manufacturer's Ratings from previous page.

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▲ The **Fold-N-Half Table with Heat Resistant Top and Storage Bins** (\$77.99), available at Camping World, has room to stash utensils and grilling accessories, with zippered entries for easy access. The aluminum frame adjusts to three table heights, from 21½ inches to 31½ inches. The 19-pound table is weather-resistant for short-term outdoor use and comes with a carrying handle for easy transport.



◀ The **Picnic Time Picnic Table** (\$123.15), also available at Camping World, seats four and has a maximum weight capacity of 250 pounds per seat and 20 pounds for the table. The basket-weave

seats are made of molded polypropylene, and the top is ABS plastic and includes a hole in the center for a beach umbrella. The 20-pound table and seats collapse into a compact package for carrying and storage. Shown in royal blue, the table is also available in hunter green, red, silver and black.

▶ If you're short on storage space and lacking a table for outdoor use, the **Tailgater Tire Table** (\$139.95) transforms a tire into a table in less than a minute. Hook the collapsible table's bracket over your RV or tow vehicle's tire for a 23-by-29-inch platform for dining outside. For extra support, extend the center leg. The powder-coated-steel Tailgater weighs about 12 pounds and fits a range of RV and automotive tires on 14-inch and larger rims, including rear-mounted spares.



## Grilling Gadgets

▼ The **Mr. Bar-B-Q 18-Piece BBQ Tool Set** (\$21.99), available at Camping World, has everything you need to be a master of the barbecuing arts, including a metal spatula with a serrated side and a built-in bottle opener, tongs, a fork, a basting brush, a grill brush, four skewers and eight corn holders. All tools come with hardwood handles and fit neatly into the included hard-sided carrying case.



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▶ The **Magma 5-Piece Telescoping Grill Tool Set** (\$108.99)

features cooking implements with adjustable lengths to keep your hands at a safe distance from the heat during grilling. After the meal, they collapse to shorter lengths for convenient storage in the included carrying case. Made of marine-grade polished stainless steel, the tools come with rubberized soft-touch handles.



▶ For those who like hands-on campfire cooking, the **GrubStick** makes it simple to toast s'mores and grill burgers without scorching your arm. Telescoping handles extend 30 inches and attach to accessories like the Grubcage, Burgcage, Grubpocket, Fork, Bacon Clip and Grabber for grilling any assortment of, well, grub. Prices start at \$29.95 for the Intro Kit and go up to \$139.95 for the Master Kit. Look for recipes on the website.



▶ The **Char-Broil 4-Piece Comfort Grip Tool Set** (29.99)

includes a basting brush, a fork, a spatula and tongs, all made of stainless steel and equipped with comfort-grip handles.



▶ The **Magma Padded Grill and Accessory Carrying/Storage Case** (\$109.99) fits most portable rectangular grills with a 12-by-24-inch or smaller cooking surface. Along with the compartment for the grill, it has pockets for storing a serving shelf, a griddle and a tray. A side pocket accommodates up to three 1-pound propane canisters and two control-valve regulators.



▶ Who wants to be tied to the edge of the grill when they can lounge in a camp chair and keep an eye on things with a smartphone and the **Weber iGrill 2** (\$99.99)? The app-connected digital meat thermometer lets grill masters cook with confidence and precision, notifying you once the food has reached the perfect temperature.



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## RV Grilling Accessories



▲ Mounted to any 4-inch box-beam bumper, the **Outdoors Unlimited Bumper Grill Arm Assembly** (\$139.95) transforms the back of an RV into an outdoor barbecue when a mountable RV grill is attached. The arm pivots at two points and extends up to 25 inches away from the RV, making it safer than a standard wall mount. The grill arm is made of black powder-coated 14-gauge steel and comes with mounting hardware and a locking pin.



▲ The **Camco Universal RV Grill Mount** (\$68.99) lets you attach a Kuuma brand or Olympian 5500 (2014 and later), 4500 or 3500 grill to your RV's existing mounting rail. Made of black anodized stainless steel and aluminum, the bracket features thumbscrews for easy mounting and stability, and is available at Camping World.

▶ The 24-inch **Camco Pigtail Propane Hose Connector** (\$82.49) lets you connect a large propane cylinder to an RV's propane



regulator. It comes with an ACME nut and a 1/4-inch inverted male flare, and is rated at 200,000 Btu per hour. Safety features include thermal protection in case of fire and excess-flow protection in case of a broken line. The pigtail hose can be used with a 20- or 30-pound refillable propane tank and connected to a regulator or a four-port brass tee fitting.

▶ The **Camco 90-Degree Brass Propane Tee** (\$90.99) connects to an RV's propane cylinder so you can add another appliance, like a second grill. The brass tee is made for use with portable propane cylinders and works with ACME and POL connections. It has thermal protection in case of fire and excess-flow protection in case of a broken gas line, and comes with a 5-foot hose.



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## Great Grills of Fire

▶ The **Marshall Excelsior MER471 Flow-Longer-Plus Propane Adapter Kit** (\$85.99) lets you hook up small, portable appliances to the RV's LP-gas supply rather than using disposable propane canisters.



▶ The **MB Sturgis Type1 Sturgi-Flow Kit** (\$105) is used in a dual-cylinder travel trailer between



one propane cylinder and a two-stage regulator to connect a portable propane grill.



▶ The **MB Sturgis Quick Disconnect Tabletop Regulator** (\$32) is used to connect a 1-pound disposable cylinder to an RV-mountable grill with a male quick-disconnect inlet. 🚚

## Campsite Cooking Contacts

**Camco**  
www.camco.net

**Camp Chef**  
www.campchef.com

**Camping World**  
www.campingworld.com

**Char-Broil**  
www.charbroil.com

**GCI Outdoor**  
www.gcioutdoor.com

**GrubStick**  
www.grubstick.com

**Marshall Excelsior**  
www.marshallexcelsior.com

**MB Sturgis**  
www.mbsturgis.com

**Outdoors Unlimited**  
www.ouioutdoors.com

**Tailgater Tire Table**  
www.tailgatertiretable.com

**Weber**  
www.weber.com

Not all manufacturers sell directly. Some items may be available at home-improvement stores, discount chains and online retailers.

First shown in the July 1888 issue of *Trailer Life* (then called simply *Trail Life*), the **Chuckwagon Cooking Set** consisted of sturdy implements including kettles, an iron spit, buckets for ingredients (or, when upturned, seating), a coffeepot, a set of tin cups, sulfur matches and kindling. Setup was time consuming, and cleanup was often ignored, adding a distinctive flavor to food. MSRP was \$5 or the equivalent in buffalo hides, whiskey or gunpowder.



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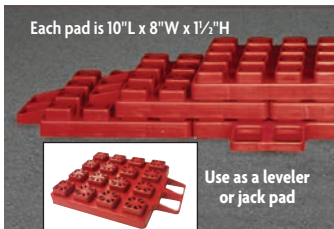
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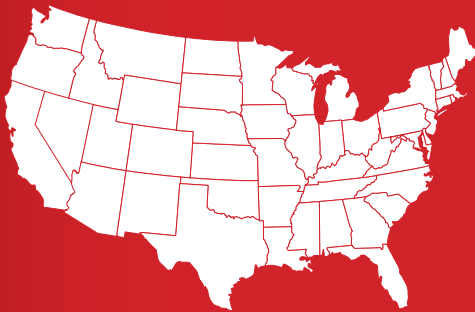
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# KENTUCKY CROSSING

A RIVER RUNS THROUGH THE CHARMING SMALL TOWN OF MAYSVILLE, AND ITS ROOTS RUN DEEP

In Maysville, Kentucky, a treasure trove of American history and a fun, friendly community await RV travelers on the banks of the Ohio River. When my husband, Mark, and I first spotted Maysville's church steeples and brick buildings from our campsite across the river in Aberdeen, Ohio, we were enchanted and quickly crossed the bridge to check out the town. To our amazement, we were warmly welcomed by the locals who reached out to us like long-lost family, and a quick day trip turned into a two-week stay.

Oozing charm from every corner, Maysville's downtown boasts beautifully patterned brick streets and graceful architecture dating back as much as two centuries. The buildings are colorful and varied, standing cheek by jowl throughout downtown. Each one is unique and lovingly maintained, and we had to smile at the jaunty, not-quite-square windows and door frames of yesteryear. Short, skinny buildings squeeze in between tall, wide ones, and

we learned that the seven row houses at the far end of town, built in 1886, were named for the days of the week.

But it was the huge murals painted on towering concrete walls along the back side of town that caught our attention because these images tell a

rich history. Although there are now nearly 9,000 residents in Maysville, Indian buffalo hunters once chased bison through this part of Kentucky. In the 1700s early settlers arrived on flat boats they dismantled to build their houses, and one of the town's founders was Daniel Boone. He had a tavern on the water's edge near what is now Limestone Landing, and his cousin lies in the town's Pioneer Graveyard. By the 1800s paddleboats plied the Ohio River, connecting Maysville to towns up and downstream, and later in the century train tracks ran along the riverbanks.

We followed the murals to Limestone Landing where city worker Terry Stamper showed us that these murals were painted on the town's side of a floodwall. The wall has protected Maysville from the mighty Ohio ever since the flood of 1937 wiped out all the buildings that once overlooked the river on Front Street. It was hard to imagine that the peaceful and serene waterway in front of us could inflict such destructive forces on this riverside town, but major floods in 1884, 1937 and as recently as 1997 left the town reeling.

Fortunately, Stamper explained,

THE OHIO RIVER IS WHAT PUT MAYSVILLE ON THE MAP CENTURIES AGO AND, IRONICALLY, THAT SAME RIVER HAS THREATENED TO TAKE THE TOWN OFF THE MAP WITH VIOLENT FLOODS EVER SINCE.



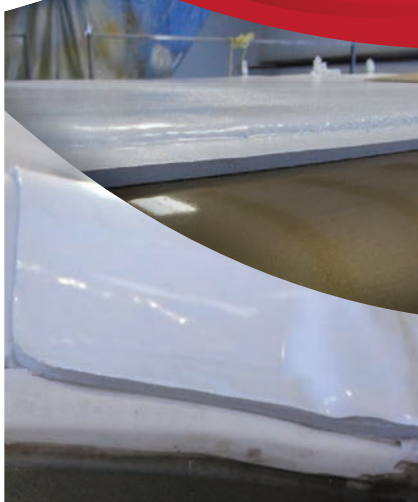
Maysville charms visitors with pretty church steeples, elegant historic buildings and a lively, friendly spirit.

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they've always had several days' notice before a flood arrives, plenty of time to close the floodwall gate by placing hundreds of interlocking square panels into the opening in the wall that leads to the boardwalks by the river's edge. In 1997, after sealing the wall shut, Stamper walked along the train tracks behind the top of it to watch the floodwater rise and saw a house, intact, floating downstream.

With that kind of natural foe lying in wait at the town's doorstep, it's not surprising that Maysville has a strong community spirit and gathers together in the face of adversity. The walls lining the tunnel under the train tracks are decorated with clay tiles made by local high school kids in the 1990s. Each tile has the imprint of a child's hand, and the ones near the bottom are water-stained from years of the river overflowing its banks into the tunnel.

One day, as we watched huge barges transporting cargo in both directions on the river, we heard that a World War II battleship was due to pass by within an hour. A class of first-graders sat along the edge of the water waiting for its arrival while learning lessons from their teacher about the importance and history of the Ohio River.



## IF YOU GO

To reach the small town of Maysville from Cincinnati, travel southeast for an hour on U.S. Route 52, part of the Ohio River Scenic Byway. In Aberdeen, cross the Simon Kenton Memorial Bridge into Kentucky.

### City of Maysville, Kentucky

606-563-2596  
[www.cityofmaysville.com/visiting-maysville](http://www.cityofmaysville.com/visiting-maysville)

### WHERE TO STAY ABERDEEN, OHIO

**Lively Lady Campground**  
606-584-8389

### DOVER, KENTUCKY

**Drifter's Paradise Campground Resort**  
606-842-1259  
[www.driftersparadisecampground.com](http://www.driftersparadisecampground.com)

### MAYSVILLE, KENTUCKY

**Maysville River Park and Marina**  
606-541-6283  
[www.cityofmaysville.com/contact/maysville-river-park-marina](http://www.cityofmaysville.com/contact/maysville-river-park-marina)

### RIPLEY, OHIO

**Logan's Gap Camping Resort**  
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Colorful buildings stand side by side along historic brick roads, and a fountain is the centerpiece of Market Street.

The backbreaking harvest of delicate tobacco leaves has brought the Maysville community together for generations.



### SMALL-TOWN SPIRIT

Up in town we stopped at the Parc Café for coffee and muffins in a lovely outdoor garden. During our stay, we discovered that good eats are a part of everyday life in Maysville, and one of the best spots for a tasty morsel or a gourmet meal is the Maysville Institute of Culinary Arts where students show off their newly acquired baking and cooking skills to lucky patrons for pennies on the dollar.

The culinary school is located in the historic Cox Building, which also houses a gallery and the city's visitor center. Photos in the lobby show images of the building with flames bursting out the upper windows when it nearly burned to the ground in 2010. When we poked our heads into the second-floor visitor center, a spacious room with huge windows, we were greeted by Suzie Pratt, an exuberant and petite woman

with a huge smile. Urging us to follow her, she told fascinating tales about the building and local history, as she took us on a tour.

The Cox Building was originally a Masonic temple, and when it nearly burned down, the task fell upon Pratt to oversee its reconstruction and renovation. Prowling around the building's nooks and crannies with the contractors, she found artifacts that revealed (or perhaps further mystified) the secret society of Freemasons. From door hinges engraved with the society's square-and-compasses symbol to unusual stairways and hidden rooms, the building was loaded with icons of Freemasonry. When we entered the Asylum, a room where some of the most important rituals took place, we were stunned by the brightly colored murals

(Below) A few miles from Maysville, the historic settlement of Washington was incorporated in 1786 and has been processing mail since 1789. (Right) Graceful Victorian architecture is a hallmark of Maysville.



## PICTURE



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**(Above)** In the mid-1990s, high school students made clay-tile imprints of their hands that now line the tunnel under the Ohio River floodwall. **(Right)** Brick streets and alleys add to Maysville's charm.



that covered the walls and ceiling.

Around the corner, we stopped for a beer at O'Rourke's Neighborhood Pub. We were simply looking for an end-of-the-day pint, but as we walked into the bar, a man drew a chair out from a big table and invited us to sit down and join him and his friends. It turned out, he was the owner of the bar, Norbert Gallenstein, and over the next few hours he introduced us to everyone who came into the pub. We felt like visiting royalty, and by the end of the evening we had met a complete cross section of Maysville society, from workers at the power plant to attorneys, business owners and even the mayor.

We were surprised that two strangers would be so warmly welcomed into such a tight-knit group, but we were even more astonished that everyone in the place had grown up together and had known each other

all their lives. Not only had they gone to the same kindergarten, but their parents had, too, and in many cases so had their grandparents. Nowadays, many small towns are home to as many new arrivals as old-timers. But Maysville is different, and its roots go deep.

Norbert invited us on a tour of the surrounding area, and history came alive as he showed us the sights. As we had discovered already, the Ohio River is what put Maysville on the map centuries ago and, ironically, that same river has threatened to take the town off the map with violent floods ever since. But it was the region's soil and ideal climate for growing burley tobacco (the tobacco that gives cigarettes their flavor) that gave Maysville a valuable product and the means to prosperity.



At Lively Lady Campground in Aberdeen, Ohio, trailers line up on the river's edge where they have a front-row view of Maysville's skyline on the Kentucky shore.

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Shown in Oxford Walnut

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### Euro Chair Recliner



Shown in Oxford Walnut

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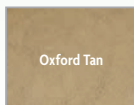


Shown in Oxford Tan

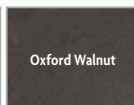
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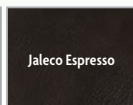
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\*Not available for Euro Chair Recliner

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**MEET AND GREET**

We just happened to be in Maysville during the tobacco harvest, and Norbert took us to one of the few remaining tobacco farms. The tobacco harvest is best done by hand because the leaves are so delicate, and we watched a group of young men carefully cutting and carrying the enormous leaves to a truck and then driving each load to a nearby barn. At the barn the men nimbly leapt into the rafters and began a kind of bucket brigade,

passing tobacco leaves from the ground floor to the highest beams, three or four stories up, to hang each individual leaf from the rafters to dry.

The tobacco harvest is backbreaking work in miserably sultry conditions, but Norbert smiled wistfully as he explained that just about every high school kid in town, college-bound or not, had worked the fields. Just as the Ohio River unified Maysville because of its constant threat of devastation, the tobacco






**The St. Patrick Church steeples pair up with the twin columns of the Simon Kenton Memorial Bridge. Daniel Boone owned a tavern near where the bridge now stands.**



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fields brought generations of residents together in their young-adult years to harvest its most vital product.

With the waning of the tobacco industry, the region has had to get creative to find ways to replace it. As we passed endless soybean fields that had once been planted with tobacco, Norbert described how Maysville has overcome what could have been an insurmountable challenge. During the past 15 to 20 years, business and government leaders have come together to renovate the downtown buildings from their once deteriorating state and make the historic brick streets the heart of a vibrant community once again.

We saw this in action one afternoon when we participated in the Katie DeSpain Memorial 5K Run. After working up a thirst running through the streets of town, runners and other townsfolk took part in a huge block party in the streets, complete with barbecue grills churning out burgers by the dozen, a deejay with a lively lineup of tunes, and kids jumping up on a picnic table to dance like no one was watching.

During our stay, several outdoor events took place on the city streets, and each time we mentioned that we were thinking about moving on in our travels, our newfound friends would tell us we had to stay a little longer because of the fun things coming up on Maysville's social calendar.

Each season the beautifully restored 1889 Washington Opera House hosts free performances as well as a full





On the town side of the Ohio River floodwall, murals depict the area's history. This scene illustrates brick-lined Market Street, a gathering place then as it is now.

lineup of professional productions put on by the Maysville Players. We enjoyed a terrific free concert by an Elton John impersonator and were impressed by the variety of theatrical events scheduled for the coming year. The historic Russell Theatre at the other end of town is undergoing renovations but is still showing movies.

At Kentucky Gateway Museum, we were captivated by the famous Kathleen Savage Browning miniatures exhibit, which displays dozens of replicas of historic buildings from around the world built to an exact 1/2 scale. The centerpiece is a stunning miniature of Princess Diana's ancestral home, London Spencer House. Peering inside, we could see tiny portraits of Diana herself.

A few miles from town, we stepped back in time when we visited the village of Old Washington where some of the buildings are originals made from the planks of settlers' flat boats. Amazingly, two parents and 13 children lived in the modest George Mefford House. The antique post office, built in 1789, was the first one west of the Appalachian Mountains, and it is still in use today. Over in the nearby town of Augusta, we took a ferry across the Ohio River. Free for foot traffic and \$5 for a car, this was a fun way to get out on the river.

We enjoyed Maysville so much, we found it hard to leave. If you take your RV along the Ohio River, be sure to pay Maysville a visit. Perhaps you, too, will find a quickie stopover becomes a much longer stay. 🚐



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# SUSPENSION NIRVANA

ROADMASTER, EXPERTS IN DINGHY TOWING, INTRODUCES THE COMFORT RIDE SLIPPER LEAF SPRING AND SHOCK ABSORBER SYSTEMS TO ROAD-WEARY TRAILER AND FIFTH-WHEEL OWNERS

**T**railers and fifth-wheels take a lot of punishment on the road. Suspensions, designed to counter this abuse, have not changed much over the years, and in most cases are the same ones found on chassis that date back a very long time. (The old line “This isn’t your grandfather’s vehicle” does not apply.) While stock suspensions hold the chassis off the ground, controlling the ride is not a strong attribute.

Leaf springs tied to shackles and a center-mounted equalizer are supposed to counter the bumps in the road but, with few exceptions, are not very effective. Roadmaster,

a company immersed in the tow-bar business, catering to owners towing vehicles behind their motorhomes, has expanded its offerings in the towable arena with the introduction of the Comfort Ride Slipper Leaf Spring Suspension and Shock Absorber systems.

The concept is simple, and the result is a game changer in the way trailers and fifth-wheels handle all road conditions.

One might ask, “Why worry about ride quality inside a trailer when towing since no one is back there to feel the shakes, rattles and rolls? That’s a valid question, but subjecting a trailer to a constant 4.0-magnitude earthquake



Roadmaster's Comfort Ride Slipper Leaf Spring and Shock Absorber systems bolt on to the frame with only minor drilling needed to mount the center box.

takes its toll over time and leads to premature damage, not to mention the destruction to items stored in the inside and outside compartments. Smooth out the ride, and the trailer will last longer without seams separating and the resultant water leaks. Unfortunately, structural and component fatigue can lead to inconvenient issues while traveling and, ultimately, an early trip to the salvage yard.

The concept is not rocket science, nor is it new, but the simplicity of



**1)** Jack stands are needed to support the frame and allow the suspension to hang. The trailer must not be lifted by the axles, which are stabilized only with floor jacks. **2 and 3)** Once the tires are removed, the tie plates are unbolted to free the axles from the springs.



**4)** The U-bolt is removed and set aside for use later in the install. **5 and 6)** The bolt is removed from each hanger and existing equalizer **(7)** so that the spring assembly **(8)** can be dropped from the frame. **9)** Spring-hanger flanges will need to be spread slightly to make room for the new spring eyes. This can be done easily with an adjustable wrench. It's important not to open the spacing too wide.

**Editor's note:** Author and Publisher Emeritus Bob Livingston has an equity position in Roadmaster's Comfort Ride Slipper Leaf Spring and Shock Absorber systems.

## SUSPENSION NIRVANA



the system is brilliant when applied to trailer suspensions. It solves an inherent design problem, whereby leaf springs are tied to equalizer shackles and frame-mounted hangers via eyes in the spring ends, restricting the movement needed to smooth out the ride effectively.

Leaf springs have been around for more than 75 years, and equalizers have been on the scene since 1945, and virtually nothing has changed. This legacy method of damping the ride seems incongruent with the evolution of trailers and fifth-wheels. While the equalizer does move the springs somewhat, securing the springs at both ends minimizes flex needed to cushion the ride and links the front and rear springs and axles, transferring the forces between the front and rear axles. For example, when the rear tires hit the same bump or pothole, the impact migrates

**10)** Before mounting the center box over the original equalizer hanger, it may be necessary to unbolt the LP-gas line on one side of the trailer and move it out of the way slightly **(11)**. The clamp can be reinstalled after the center box is mounted. **12)** In most cases, a piece of the underbelly material will have to be cut with a utility knife and removed from the frame to allow the center box to be seated properly. When the project is finished, the underbelly can be resealed with spray-foam insulation. **13)** The center box is placed over the existing equalizer bracket. **14)** A 2-inch pipe spacer is used to prevent the flanges from bending. **15)** Once the bolt is in place, the box will be centered properly and be ready for bolting to the frame.

to the front axle. The Comfort Ride breaks that connection, creating more of an independent-axle suspension action, which is known to be more effective.

The other issue is bushing wear. Stock bushings seated in the eye ends

of the springs have a tendency to wear out prematurely, creating slop in the system that can affect axle alignment and lead to shackle failure. The bushings in the Comfort Ride springs are made by Never Fail and will last a lifetime. They are made of a super-hard



**16)** Holes for the 3/8-inch self-tapping bolts provided to secure the box to the frame must be drilled first. An easy way to start this process is to use a 1/8-inch self-drilling (Tek) screw to make smaller pilot holes and keep the box from moving. **17)** One screw at a time is then removed, and a 2 1/64-inch bit is used to drill the final pilot holes. **18)** Red thread sealer is used on the self-tapping bolts before driving through the box and into the frame with an impact wrench **(19)**.



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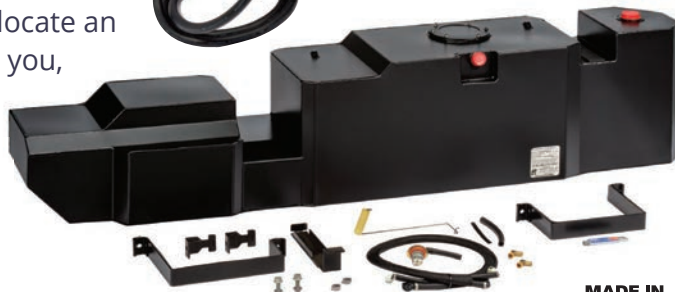
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## SUSPENSION NIRVANA



material (proprietary secret) impregnated with molybdenum and graphite, and will conform to the shape inside the spring eyes. This is a far cry from brass or nylon, which will deform or wear out, sometimes after the first trip.

While the systems can be installed independently of each other, for the ultimate results, Roadmaster highly recommends utilizing the gas shocks, which bolt on seamlessly. High-quality gas shocks mitigate uncontrolled shock and rebound when traveling over uneven pavement where dips, potholes and other maladies tend to rattle the trailer structure.

Another key element in this shock-absorber system is the mounting position. Rarely are shocks provided by the factory, and they are often installed in a more horizontal position because of space limitations, virtually negating any benefit. The patented Roadmaster brackets solve this problem by keeping the shocks mounted closer to vertical, allowing them to better control spring rate by taking full advantage of the gas-regulated valving. The shocks are also positioned on an outward, 15-degree angle (spring to frame) to help with lateral movement and sway. Configuring the brackets this way improves

**23) Spring end is pivoted until relatively level and on the pipe spacer that will be positioned inside the center box. 24) Roller is installed above the spring end. 25) Bolts go through the specified holes in the center box from the inside to allow clearance for the shocks that will be installed later. Thread locker is applied, and bolts are torqued to the specified values printed in the instructions. 26) Springs are indexed into holes in the axle brackets so they line up properly.**

**20) The bolts are then torqued to 40 ft-lbs. 21) Thread sealer is applied to the spring eyebolts (22) before driving into the frame hangers. The existing bolts are used for the install, so it's important to refrain from driving out the threads with a hammer when first removed. A center punch will prevent thread damage (not shown).**

movement front to back, side to side and up and down, something no other shock mount has ever accomplished.

Installing the kits may seem a little daunting to those who have not tackled this type of project, but in reality it is relatively simple, guided by precise instructions. The trailer frame will have to be lifted and placed on jack stands so the suspension hangs; floor jacks are used to stabilize the axles. Care must be taken with jack lifting points; it's important not to lift the trailer by the axle. From here, the wheels are removed to gain access to the suspension, and it's just a matter of unbolting old parts and installing the new ones. Everything fits like a glove, and only four holes are drilled into the

frame on each side. Figure on about three hours of labor when the job is done at an accomplished service center.

To test the systems, we asked Redlands Truck and RV Performance Center in Redlands, California, to install the parts on a 2018 Keystone Montana fifth-wheel that was factory equipped with 6,000-pound Dexter axles. The techs at Redlands bank on their vast experience servicing and repairing motorhomes, and have recently moved into the towable space, so making the Comfort Ride swap was a piece of cake.

All the parts in both kits were proven by Roadmaster before release to ensure that they will hold up to years of punishment on the road. This is accomplished by using com-



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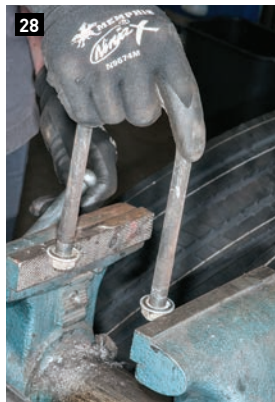
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## SUSPENSION NIRVANA

puterized Finite Element Analysis (FEA), which establishes guidelines to ensure superior product longevity, quality and safety. It's the same type of testing used by NASA when prototyping new designs. The spring and shock components have also been field tested by a number of full-time RVers who have logged more than 50,000 miles. The equipment, which is offered to the OEM market under the All-American Suspension System nameplate, passed the brutal Navistar test track with flying colors.

While I have personally tested the system under a fifth-wheel for 15,000 miles on jaw-rattling highways, the most recent installation solicited the assistance of a professional long-haul truck driver who has logged more than 2 million miles of commercial driving. The driver, who owns the Montana, noticed an immediate seat-of-the pants difference in the way the system improved ride quality and chucking. On his cross-



**27)** Original U-bolts will need to be closed slightly to fit in the new tie plates. This can be done by placing the nuts on the ends and hitting with a hammer while on a solid surface. **28)** A vice can also be used to close the gap. **29)** U-bolts are positioned under the axle and through the new tie plate, which is also the mounting bracket for the shock absorbers.

country trip, right out of the Redlands Truck and RV gate, he reported improvements in how supplies fared in cabinets, and continued to gloat over the ride and handling, especially in extremely windy conditions.

During my testing tenure, items were placed strategically inside

the fifth-wheel and monitored for movement. Supplies previously disheveled after stints on the road remained neatly stacked with the new suspension parts in place, a strong indication that the "earthquake" inside the fifth-wheel has been tempered enough to make a big difference in ride

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quality. The components, which are maintenance-free, showed no signs of wear in any of the test trailers. I was so impressed with the system that I actually became part of the research and development team and have an equity position in the product.

Kits are available for axles rated at 6,000, 7,000 or 8,000 pounds. The system for the test fifth-wheel has a \$975 MSRP for the Comfort Ride Slipper Leaf Spring kit and \$550 for the shock absorbers. The parts are covered by a one-year warranty.

Roadmaster's introduction of the Comfort Ride kits to the towable market represents one of the biggest developments in trailer suspensions since leaf springs were invented. Your trailer will thank you for the "support." 🚚

**Roadmaster, Inc.**

800-669-9690, [www.roadmasterinc.com](http://www.roadmasterinc.com)

**Redlands Truck and RV  
Performance Center**

888-249-0124, [www.redlandstruckservice.com](http://www.redlandstruckservice.com)



**30)** Once all the bolts are in place and snugged evenly, a torque wrench is used for final tightening. **31)** Redlands Truck and RV Performance Center prefers to use torque paint to let other mechanics know that the bolts have been tightened to specified values. **32)** Shock absorbers bolt to the center box using a wedge to keep them at the proper angle. **33)** Once both ends are bolted and tightened properly, the retaining strap can be cut, allowing the shocks to seat into the mounting brackets.

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# AQUA GO TO GO



## TRUMA'S NEW SERVICE CENTERS AND MOBILE UNITS MAKE IT EASIER TO UPGRADE TO THE COMPANY'S EFFICIENT ON-DEMAND WATER HEATER

**T**ruma is a name that RVers in North America are getting to know pretty well. The German mobile-appliance manufacturer, named after President Harry S. Truman, has been offering the AquaGo instant and endless hot-water system here for a few years, and despite a somewhat higher cost versus the competition, its features, design and quality are getting lots of attention. So much, in fact, that I elected to have one installed on our Coleman trailer after sampling the system on the Oliver Legacy Elite II for the June *Trailer Life* Test.

Truma doesn't sell the AquaGo to consumers for self-installation. To ensure proper installation and long-term reliability, the system can be installed only by a qualified technician at an RV dealership or one of the company's new regional service centers, which also offer

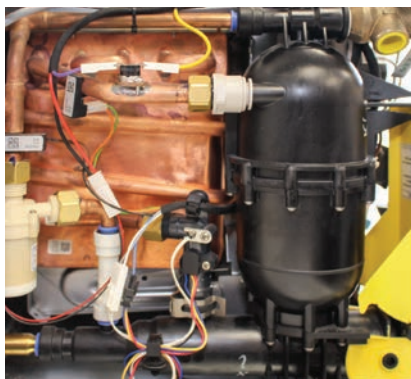
mobile service.

We visited the Truma Factory Service Center in Lakeland, Florida. It is the first of its kind, though others will be opening soon in Arizona and California. The Lakeland center is run by Dave Lehman, the company's mobile-service provider in Florida and an RVDA/RVIA master certified RV technician. Having the AquaGo Comfort installed was an easy choice, since installation was free with the purchase of the unit, thanks to a special offer

◆ **Precise engineering and assembly are evident in this cutaway of the AquaGo Comfort water heater. The mixing vessel (black tank in the foreground) keeps a small amount of water up to temperature, allowing for instant hot water during the startup phase of the burner.**

Truma has been running in Florida. If you're in Florida but can't make it to the shop, Lehman will come to you and install the unit for free, though there are service and mileage charges in addition to the cost of the unit.

The AquaGo has a microprocessor-controlled, infinitely variable burner system that ranges from 20,000 to 60,000 Btu. The sensors, mixing vessel and microprocessor ensure that the output temperature is always a steamy 120 degrees Fahrenheit. A key feature is how the AquaGo regulates the temperature, which is not dependent on flow rate. This type of technology ensures that the unit does not produce temperature swings at a low flow rate. Since the burner is not subjected to only one or two stages, the unit can achieve a constant 120 degrees at .4 gallons per minute, which helps the AquaGo maintain its water conservation status. The AquaGo isn't exactly tankless because it has a small water



## HEAT WAVE

The AquaGo hot-water system can be installed in place of just about any RV water heater with minimal modifications to the exterior wall of the RV. Doors are available in white or black, or can be custom painted by a body shop to match the RV's paint scheme.





**1)** To install the AquaGo Comfort, the trailer's original 10-gallon gas/electric water heater was removed, and a small piece of wood was cut and screwed down to level the unit. **2)** With the new water heater installed on the outside, butyl tape is layered behind the flange to ensure a good seal on the trailer's aluminum siding. The power switch, LED status and diagnostic lights are on the right. **3)** In this trailer, the flexible LP-gas hose made the connection easy. The plumbing was tight, but it fit. The 12-volt DC connection was made, and the 120-volt AC line was capped off in a box. **4)** The AquaGo Comfort comes with a selector switch for inside the RV, and we opted to install it by the utility panels because we had a good wire run. Often the switch will be installed on a cabinet close to the water heater. **5)** The original water-heater switches can be removed if blank plugs can be found to plug the holes. The gas-power-switch wiring needs to be connected inside the panel, and the electric-switch wiring needs to be capped and taped.



reservoir or mixing vessel (about the size of a soda bottle) to keep hot water at the ready, providing a buffer between the start of water flow and ignition of the burner.

An LED-lit selector switch installed inside the RV makes it easy to control the AquaGo Comfort in four modes: Eco, Comfort, Antifreeze and Clean. Truma also offers an AquaGo Basic model with an on/off switch but no remote switch or mode options. In both models, an LED in the water heater will flash an error code, making it possible to diagnose an issue within a few minutes.

The Comfort system has a circulation pump to keep water in the mixing vessel at the correct temperature and the unit from freezing in cold weather. The pump is used in the Clean mode with decalcification tablets that are available from Truma. The company also offers an antifreeze kit with a 12-volt DC heater that keeps the unit from freezing while in transit without having to drain it, as the AquaGo cannot be on while the vehicle is in motion. Draining the system is simple, however, using the Easy Drain Lever.

The AquaGo operated exactly as designed on the Oliver and Coleman trailers. The unit is almost silent, which is a big improvement, and is far lighter than a 10-gallon standard water heater by around 80 pounds. It also has a very light

appetite for LP-gas, the only energy source for the burner.

The Truma AquaGo Comfort retails for \$1,233 and has a two-year warranty when registered immediately after installation or following the purchase of a new RV with a unit installed at the factory. Installation for most replacement applications is capped at \$250 when done at a Truma Factory Service Center, after the free offer expires. 🚐

Truma, 855-558-7862, [www.truma.net](http://www.truma.net)



**6)** The AquaGo's cover door hangs down when fully unlatched and lifted off. In this case, it extends over the furnace vent, so care must be taken to ensure the furnace is not running when the cover is off.

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# Key to Success

Bolt's lineup of one-key-fits-all security locks does away with clunky keychains

DIFFICULTY	1 2 3 4 5
TIME TO COMPLETE	5 MINUTES
TOOLS NEEDED	NONE

**T**hey say good fences make good neighbors. If that axiom is true, it could follow that good locks make good RVers.

In this day and age, you have to secure your stuff, and between locking up the bikes, the portable generator, the truck-bed locker and the hitch mount, and securing the trailer in storage, that's a lot of locks. And a lot of keys. Besides the hassle of carrying a hefty keychain, it can be difficult to keep track of which key belongs to which lock.

Yes, there are a number of one-key solutions on the market, but they tend to be limited to an initial purchase and don't work across multiple types of locks. Bolt Lock has come up with a unique solution: an assortment of locks that are mechanically matched to the tow vehicle's ignition key. You can purchase a single lock or sev-



Bolt's single-key locks come factory-sealed. Once the seal is broken and the lock is keyed, it can't be rekeyed.

eral, and later add as many as you like.

So, how does Bolt even do that? According to the company's website, "The first time you insert your ignition key into the lock, the spring-loaded plate tumblers move up and down until they are matched exactly to your key." As the key is rotated in the lock for the first

time, the positions of the plate tumblers are permanently set to the key.

The Bolt system includes different types of locks, including several specifically for trailer towing and storage. There's a Receiver Lock (\$31.99), a Coupler Pin Lock (\$29.99) and an Off-Vehicle Coupler Lock (\$74.99). For fifth-wheel owners, there's a Collar-Kingpin Locking System (\$14.99) that works with the Receiver Lock to secure the kingpin.



## « ONE KEY TO RULE THEM ALL

Locks are a fact of life for RVers, but that can lead to confusion finding the right key for the lock at hand and frustration when that key is lost. Bolt Lock has come up with a straightforward solution with its series of one-key-fits-all locks.

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**A)** Bolt's 5/8-inch Receiver Lock keeps the 2-inch receiver hitch in place and secure. It also prevents the unhitched trailer from being stolen.

The locks work with ignition keys for many makes and models, particularly trucks and SUVs. To determine if yours is compatible, check the vehicle finder at [www.boltlock.com/find-your-lock](http://www.boltlock.com/find-your-lock).

We tried out several of the Bolt locks, all keyed to a Ram 1500. At first, we were stumped because the 2015 Ram Outdoorsman has an electronic key fob. It took a moment or two to realize we could use the valet key that is hidden inside the key fob. Within minutes, we had several locks keyed to the truck's ignition key.

A couple of obvious uses for the Bolt Cable Lock (\$39.99) are to secure the generator in the truck bed while traveling and to the trailer's A-frame or bum-

per when in camp. The lock is attached to a 6-foot vinyl-coated coiled cable, plenty long enough for other jobs like making sure the bikes or a barbecue grill are secure.

We've been using the standard Bolt Padlock (\$21.99) on our rack-mounted cargo carrier. The padlock has a 2 1/4-inch hardened-steel shackle, so it's big enough for oversize latches or chains. Of course, we're also using the 5/8-inch Receiver Lock to keep the ball mount from being stolen when it's on the truck.

Bolt products feature auto-return spring mechanisms, so they lock when the key is removed. They have what's called plate-tumbler sidebars that help prevent bad actors from picking them.

**B)** The Off-Vehicle Coupler Lock is a theft deterrent when the trailer is in storage, preventing a thief with a vehicle from hitching up the trailer and towing it away.




B



**C)** The 6-foot Bolt Cable Lock is a good solution for securing a portable generator or other items from bikes to a spare tire or a barbecue grill. **D)** The Coupler Pin Lock keeps the coupler from coming loose and also helps secure the trailer to the hitch. The lock's stainless-steel pin fits couplers in snug 1/8-inch increments.

All are weatherproof with stainless-steel lock shutters to keep out dirt and moisture. And they come with a limited lifetime warranty.

There is one downside to the Bolt system. If you change vehicles, there isn't a way to rekey the locks to your new ride. Bolt's website claims that's more of a feature than a bug, as it ensures the best possible security. If the locks could be rekeyed, the company's logic goes, it would be too easy for a thief to do just that. To soften the blow, Bolt has a loyalty program that provides a discount coupon for customers to use on a new Bolt system when the original vehicle is sold or no longer in service.

Bolt Lock is a division of Strattec Security Corporation, a leading manufacturer of automotive locks and keys. To find a retailer, check the store finder on Bolt's website. 

**Bolt Lock**  
844-972-7547, [www.boltlock.com](http://www.boltlock.com)



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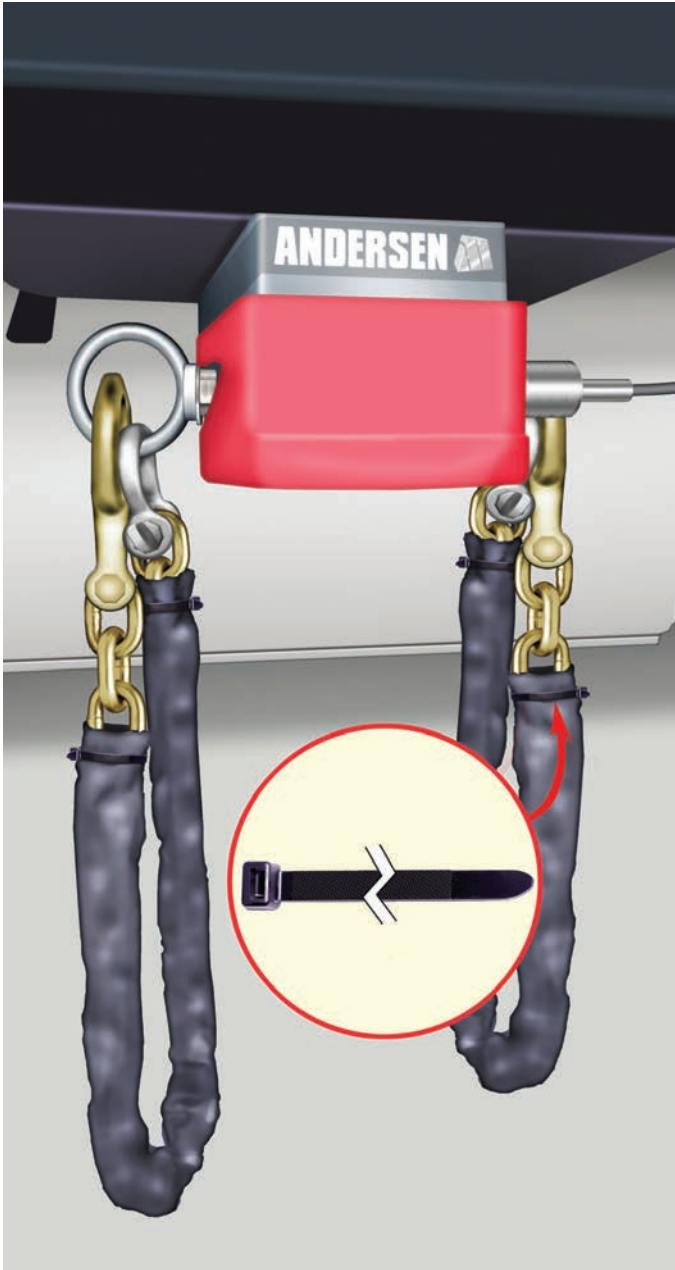
3 months after buying our new 5th wheel we had a height related accident. Entering a fuel stop we cleared the Overhead Canopy, but after fueling up, on the way out we hit it, crushing our AC unit and damaging the roof. **Two weeks and \$7000 later we finally got our rig back.**



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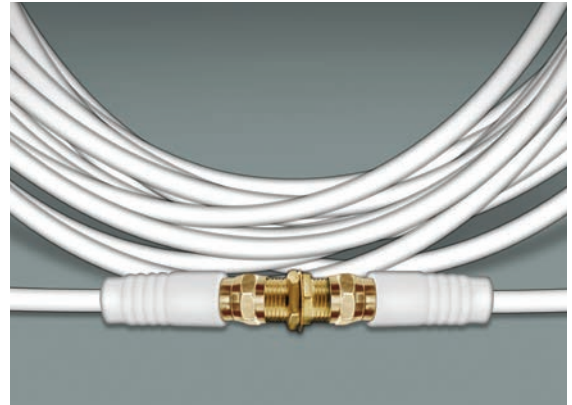


## Clank-Free Safety Chains

The safety chains on my Andersen fifth-wheel hitch attach from the pin adaptor to the gooseneck tie-downs in the truck bed and would clank against the hitch while under way. To keep the noise and rattle down, I covered the safety chains with bicycle inner tubes. Now the ride is much quieter.

**Paul Schwengel, Ellison Bay, Wisconsin**

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



## Cable Connections

After bending and snapping off several coaxial-cable core pins, I came up with an inexpensive and dual-purpose solution. When not in use, I coil the cable and screw both ends into a coaxial connector. This protects the pin on both ends. I also carry two cable lengths — a long one and a short one. If the distance from the cable connection at the RV site to my trailer is longer than the long cable, I can extend the length by using the connector to add the short cable. These connectors can be purchased at any home-improvement or hardware store.

**Vivien Hamelin, Port St. Lucie, Florida**

## QUICK FIX

### No-Mess Grease Applicator

Those of us who tow travel trailers know the importance of keeping the ball and the weight-distributing hitch lubricated so that metal is not rubbing on metal. There are many opinions on the best lubricant to use, but I prefer a multipurpose grease. The problems were how to store the lubricant and how to apply it without making a mess.

My solution: I took an old Elmer's Rubber Cement jar that had the brush on the lid, cleaned the jar and the brush, and then filled it with the grease. I now have a secure storage container, and it's easy to apply the grease using the brush. It's clean and quick.

**Don Theall, Hurricane, Utah** 🗨️





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Roadmaster's Quick Foot is a big improvement over wooden blocks and an ideal replacement for worn-out, damaged or hard-to-use A-frame-jack extensions. Simply slide the jack tube

inside the Quick Foot and pin it, and the heavy-duty extension stand easily adjusts in 2-inch increments to provide up to 6 inches of additional height. The Quick Foot features a 7-inch-diameter foot plate that spreads the trailer's hitch weight over more ground surface to reduce sinking and increase stability. Made of zinc-plated steel, the Quick Foot fits standard A-frame jacks, manual and electric, with 2-inch-diameter inner tubes, and stores right on the jack.

**MSRP: \$54**  
**800-669-9690, www.roadmasterinc.com**  
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### Under-Step Cubbie

RVers are always looking for places to store their gear, and MORryde now offers a practical cache that takes advantage of otherwise empty space. For RVs equipped with MORryde StepAbove or Lippert Solid Step entry steps, the Step Storage Box provides a locking compartment that supplies 1.5 cubic feet of newfound space for stowing items such as tools, tire chocks, safety chains and cleaning supplies. The 28.7-by-13.5-by-13.5-inch Step Storage Box fills the vacant space beneath the entry door where the trailer's original folding steps were mounted. Made of powder-coated steel, the box bolts into place, and the door can be locked so the contents are secure.

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### Bug-Free RV

Problems with pets climbing out through the screen-door-handle access slide and mosquitoes and other insects flying or creeping in can be solved by installing the peel-and-stick RV Bug Stop, a spring-loaded automatic slide closer. The RV Bug Stop attaches to the outside of the screen-door slide channel using industrial-strength double-sided tape. The lip on the anodized-aluminum

closure catches the slide, so when it is slid open, pressure is placed on a spring inside the device. Releasing the Bug Stop automatically returns the spring tension, and the slide goes back to the closed position to keep pets in and bugs out.

**MSRP: \$24.95**  
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PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURERS

## Transmission Conversions

Custom Automatic Conversions (CAC) markets Allison automatic transmissions, along with wire-harness kits, adapter kits and transfer-case adapter kits for upgrading trucks with Ram Cummins and Ford Power Stroke engines. The company can also help Allison 545 and 643 owners upgrade for heavier-duty service. CAC claims the Allison transmission is three times stronger than any other automatic transmission and is built to withstand high torque (up to 1,000 lb-ft) without overheating. This is accomplished in part by using programming that locks the torque converter after second gear and remains locked back to about 15 MPH, eliminating slippage and reducing heat. CAC provides remanufactured Allison transmissions and adapter kits for do-it-yourself



or service-center installations. Transmissions and kits are available for Allison third- and fourth-generation automatics.

**865-253-1133, www.caconversions.com**  
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## High-Performance Battery

When the need to replace the batteries in your RV or add solar power arises, Lifeline Batteries' 6-volt GPL-6CT offers plenty of power storage. This absorbed-glass-mat (AGM) battery measures just 10.28-by-7.06-by-13.02 inches, yet it has 300 amp-hours of reserve capacity and 1,150 cranking amps, ideal numbers for any deep-cycle application. The battery is leak-proof and spill-proof, and can be equalized when paired.

**MSRP: \$415. 800-527-3224, [www.lifelinebatteries.com](http://www.lifelinebatteries.com)**

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## Easy-to-Reach Oil Cooler

Ford 2008 to 2010 6.4-liter Power Strokes are notorious for costly clogged and restricted oil-cooler issues that require the removal of a number of engine components to reach the unit for repair or replacement. The Bullet Proof Diesel Oil Cooler Relocation Kit moves the factory oil cooler from under the turbocharger to an easily accessible location on the firewall, cutting service time by more than half. In addition, the conversion to a spin-on oil filter is claimed to improve oil cooling and eliminate problems often experienced with the stock configuration, so there are no more broken oil-filter-to-crankcase drain valves or engine-oil bypass valves to worry about. A division of Neal Technologies, Bullet Proof Diesel is based in Mesa, Arizona. The company's other products for diesel vehicles include engine oil systems, EGR coolers, fuel-injector control modules, water-pump assemblies and mounting brackets.

**MSRP: \$1,895**

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# RV CLINIC'S TOP 20 FAQ

## A ONE-STOP SHOP FOR ANSWERS TO READERS' MOST-ASKED TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

**T**railer Life's RV Clinic column receives a wide range of questions from readers looking for help and advice. While we always do our best to provide detailed answers, we noticed that a lot of the same questions kept coming up. After all, new RVers are constantly entering the fray. Like good stewards of the RV lifestyle, we kept answering them over and over.

Then one day we had a brainstorm: Why don't we compile the most frequently asked questions (FAQ) and put them in one article along with the answers? So we did. In addition to publishing the top 20 questions and answers here, they will be available on our website, [www.trailerlife.com](http://www.trailerlife.com), so readers can refer to them in the future.

### Q: Can I tow this [overweight] trailer with my [underpowered] tow vehicle?

**A:** The short answer is no. Sorry. Tow ratings are put there for a reason — to ensure that the vehicle can do a safe job towing the trailer of your choice, at a performance level that pleases the operator, without wearing out prematurely or, worse yet, failing suddenly. We often get readers who ask why this year's model can tow more than the previous year's, even though the equipment seems exactly the same, and that can come down to something as small as a decrease in weight or a change in equipment (think bigger brakes or a transmission upgrade) that make this year's vehicle more capable than last year's. A manufacturer may

also change its testing procedures, resulting in different numbers.

Always think of a tow vehicle and trailer as a team. If you already have a tow vehicle and are looking for a trailer to tow with it, make sure you know the tow rating and seek an appropriately sized trailer. Most such tow ratings are available in the yearly towing guides available on our website ([www.trailerlife.com/trailer-towing-guides](http://www.trailerlife.com/trailer-towing-guides)). Generally speaking, it's best to choose a trailer that has a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) that is the same or less than the maximum tow rating of the vehicle. That way, you leave yourself a good safety (and performance) margin.

If you already have a trailer, it's a good idea to get it weighed with the

freshwater tank and LP-gas cylinders full, and the trailer packed with all the supplies you usually bring on a trip, or use the trailer's GVWR. Then choose a tow vehicle that can tow at least that amount — preferably more. If you're buying the tow vehicle and trailer at the same time, consider that most people get more emotionally attached to the trailer when they go shopping, so choose the trailer you want first, then find a tow vehicle that can handle it easily.

### Q: Can I increase my tow vehicle's tow rating?

**A:** In most cases, the answer is no. While changing the vehicle's official tow rating is a difficult process that requires extensive and costly testing and certification, you may be able to make some changes that affect its towing ability.

A manufacturer's tow rating is based on a lot of different criteria, including suspension, brakes, steering components, engine power and engine cooling. What you're changing or modifying may not be the weak link in the system that improves that towing ability. However, there are some exceptions.

The same make and model tow vehicle may have been available with three different gear ratios, with the lowest one (numerically higher) assigned the highest tow rating. By swapping the ring and pinion to a lower available ratio (for instance, changing from 3.54:1 to 4.10:1 gears), you can effectively tow the amount listed for that specification (all other things being equal, of course).

The difference between a series 2500 and 3500 truck may be something as simple as the rear spring pack and the tire load range, for example. While items that improve performance, such as a tuner or exhaust, may make the tow vehicle run stronger, they won't increase the tow rating. In any case, always conduct thorough due diligence before making any changes to a tow vehicle. Safety and reliability

### THE TECH TEAM



**CHRIS DOUGHERTY:** Technical editor for *Trailer Life* and *MotorHome*, Chris is an RVDA/RVIA certified technician and lifelong RVer, including 10 years as a full-timer.



**CHRIS HEMER:** *Trailer Life* and *MotorHome*'s previous technical editor, Chris has been an RV journalist for 20 years and is an avid camper and outdoor enthusiast.



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



**BOB LIVINGSTON:** An RV/MH Hall of Fame inductee and publisher emeritus of *Trailer Life* and *MotorHome*, Bob is a full-time RVer and frequent *Trailer Life* contributor.

should always come ahead of performance.

### **Q: How do I weigh my tow vehicle and trailer?**

**A:** The easiest way to get an accurate picture of what your tow-vehicle-and-trailer combination weighs is with a commercial truck scale (an internet search for “truck scales near me” or “CAT scales near me” should yield multiple results). Make sure the freshwater tank and LP-gas cylinders are full, and load the tow vehicle and trailer with all of the supplies you would normally bring on a trip. Weighing the rig before an actual trip is a good way to kill two birds with one stone.

When you arrive at the scale, tell the operator what you want to do and ask for instructions. On a typical commercial scale, you drive only the tow vehicle’s front wheels onto the scale, then the rear, then the trailer. A multi-platform scale allows you to do this all at once. This will give you front-axle, rear-axle and total weight. Driving the tow vehicle off the scale, and then disconnecting the trailer while the trailer’s axles and A-frame jack are on the scale will give the trailer weight only. The scale operator can print out and review the numbers with you. Most commercial truck scales have multiple-scale pads that will weigh the front, rear and trailer axles at once.

Keep in mind that this is still just axle weight, and it won’t show if one side of the trailer is heavier than the other, for example. To get a truly accurate picture of what your rig weighs, you’ll need to find a shop with individual wheel scales. Doing this will help you find out if one or more wheel positions are overloaded, or if the tires on that axle require higher inflation pressure to carry that load. A visit to [www.rvsafety.com](http://www.rvsafety.com) will show where RV weighing events are being held.

### **Q: What do all those weight ratings mean?**

**A:** The ratings the RV and automotive industries use to specify maximum weights can be confusing, especially

if you’re new to RVing. However, you’ll need to understand them because you’re going to see (and read about) them a lot.

**GVWR (gross vehicle weight rating):** The maximum amount the vehicle is rated to weigh.

**GAWR (gross axle weight rating):** The maximum amount the axle in question is designed to carry. The GAWR includes the weight of the axle.

**GCWR (gross combined [or combination] weight rating):** The maximum allowable combined weight of the tow vehicle, passengers and cargo, plus the weight of the trailer and its cargo.

**UVW (unloaded vehicle weight):** The stated unloaded weight of the RV when it left the factory. The UVW does not include water, LP-gas or dealer-installed accessories.

**NCC (net cargo capacity):** Used up to the year 2000, this is the maximum allowable weight of all personal belongings, freshwater, LP-gas, dealer-installed accessories, etc. Since this is a somewhat ambiguous figure, it was rectified with the introduction of CCC in 2000, which is still used today.

**CCC (cargo carrying capacity):** The trailer’s GVWR minus its actual weight with full LP-gas cylinder(s).

**Wet CCC:** The trailer’s GVWR minus the trailer’s actual weight with the freshwater system full.

**SCWR (sleeping capacity weight rating; motorized RVs only):** The number of sleeping positions designated by the manufacturer, multiplied by 154 pounds. The U.S. Department of Transportation uses 154 pounds as the average passenger weight when calculating vehicle payload statistics.

**Payload Capacity:** The tow vehicle’s GVWR minus its road-ready (wet) weight. Payload includes passengers and cargo, not just cargo, as is commonly thought.

### **Q: Should I get a trailer or a motorhome?**

**A:** The first step to a satisfactory answer is to ask yourself (and your significant other, if you have one) how you want to travel. If you plan on long stints behind the wheel and short

overnight stays, a motorhome is usually a better choice because it has more room in the driver’s compartment, and you can use the bathroom or kitchen while traveling. A tow vehicle and trailer may not be as comfortable to drive, but when you get to your destination, some owners believe trailers tend to “live better” for extended stays (comparing apples to apples, of course).

Then, consider how you would like to get around your destination while you’re staying there. Do you want to drive a tow vehicle or a car that you tow behind a motorhome? If the latter, be sure to shop wisely for a car that can be towed on all four wheels (dinghy-towed or flat-towed), make sure the equipment for towing is readily available (base plates, for example), and be prepared to spend extra money on accessories like an auxiliary brake system for the dinghy vehicle and having the car wired so that its brake lights and turn signals mimic those of the motorhome towing it. If you’re lucky, you might be able to find a used car that has already been set up for dinghy towing.

Other considerations have to do with towing and breakdowns. It can be more of a challenge to find a repair shop to service a large motorhome than a dealership or other shop to service a tow vehicle. If your motorhome breaks down or requires service when you’re traveling, you may need to find a motel to stay in until repairs are made, but if you’re towing a dinghy, you’ll at least have transportation. If your tow vehicle breaks down, you can have your trailer towed to a campground and still have a home, and rent a car or “Uber it” to get around until your tow vehicle is fixed.

### **Q: Why are my trailer’s tires wearing unevenly or blowing out prematurely?**

**A:** There can be a lot of reasons. If you’ve just purchased a new trailer, it may have been equipped with cheap imported tires. To be fair, some brands are better than others, but keep in mind that tires are one of the most

common places RV manufacturers cut material and component costs to keep retail prices down.

To reduce the likelihood of a tire failure, make sure the tires are properly inflated and not overloaded. If they're blowing out with abnormal regularity, it is likely that you are overloading the trailer and/or subjecting the tires to atypical usage — for instance, frequently backing into a sharp driveway (which puts a lot of

load on the sidewalls), clipping curbs as you go around corners or driving over potholes.

Of course, uneven tread wear should be your first clue that something isn't right, and alignment may be the key. Many readers have asked, "How can trailer tires be out of alignment?" It's possible that the axles were not installed square with the chassis or parallel to each other, and the tires are "scrubbing" as the trailer

travels down the highway. It could also be that the cheap plastic factory leaf-spring bushings have worn out, creating "slop" in the suspension that is allowing misalignment. An overloaded axle may be bowed down in the middle due to excess trailer weight, and that can dramatically change tire camber. Hitting a large pothole or curb can cause an axle spindle to bend, resulting in abnormal tire wear.

Alignment issues are characterized by an inner/outer edge wearing more quickly than the rest of the tire, or "feathering," where the tread feels smooth in one direction and sharp in the other when you run your hand across the tread (not up and down). A balding center section means the tires are overinflated; balding outer edges mean they're dangerously underinflated. A good commercial alignment shop or one that specializes in trailers should be able to identify and correct the problem for you. Balancing tires can improve tread life and reliability, to say nothing of reducing wear and tear on the suspension and trailer body. Less tire vibration means a smoother ride for all components.

**Q: Can I use Light Truck tires on my trailer?**

**A:** In a word, yes. Many RVers are making the switch to Light Truck (LT) tires because some of the Special Trailer (ST) tires can have quality issues that affect reliability. The main differences between the two types is that ST tires have heavier sidewalls to handle forces common in trailering (such as tire "side scrub" when backing) and may contain more UV-resistant materials to help the tires last while the trailer is in storage. However, LT tires are also designed to carry load, and as long as they are properly inflated and do not exceed the wheel's rating when inflated to the correct pressure, we see no harm in using them.

You should not, however, use passenger car tires on a trailer. They are not designed for high inflation pressures and heavy loads, and their thinner sidewalls can contribute to increased trailer sway.

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## Q: Should I upgrade the size of my tow vehicle or trailer tires?

**A:** That depends. Your tires are part and parcel to the tow vehicle's and trailer's load ratings, so just adding a tire with a higher load range doesn't mean you can carry more weight. However, a tire with a higher load range can typically be run at a lower inflation pressure at the same load, which may smooth out the ride somewhat. Just remember that a higher

load range tire will also have a higher maximum inflation pressure, which may exceed the rim's rating, and that can have catastrophic consequences.

On a dually, tire choices can be even more important, as too wide a tire can cause what's known as "dual kissing" where the sidewalls of the rear-tire pairs touch — a very bad thing. On a trailer with two or three axles, you also don't want the tires to be large enough that the adjacent tire treads

can contact each other, and you need to make sure there's enough wheel-well clearance.

Always consult a tire professional when considering an upgrade.

## Q: Are nitrogen-filled tires a good idea, and are they worth the money?

**A:** It depends. Nitrogen-filled tires run slightly cooler and are less susceptible to natural deflation, which is the air loss most tires experience over time while sitting. That said, tire pressures must be monitored, and many tire shops and service stations don't have nitrogen filling, so the tires are topped with air anyway. Given that nitrogen-filled tires won't perform better, last longer or improve fuel economy, and that nitrogen isn't readily available, we'd have to say probably not. Spend the money on a good tire-pressure monitoring system instead.

## Q: Why does my travel trailer sway so much?

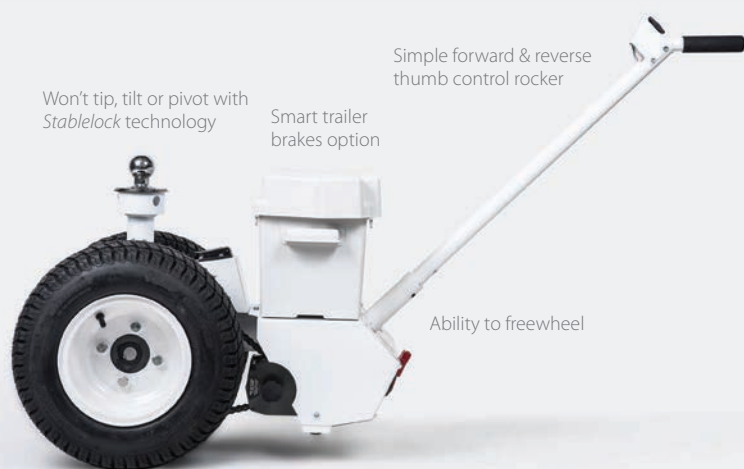
**A:** The most common cause is insufficient hitch weight. Your travel trailer should carry a minimum of 10 percent of its weight on the hitch when it is loaded and ready for travel. To determine hitch weight, drive your tow vehicle and trailer onto a small-size single-platform scale until only the rear wheels of the tow vehicle are on the scale. On a large commercial multi-platform scale, make sure each tow rig wheelset is on a separate scale. Record that weight. Drive off the scale, disconnect the trailer, then drive only the tow vehicle onto the scale until its rear wheels are in the same position. Alternately, tell the scale operator what you are trying to achieve, and let him or her guide you.

If you find there is insufficient hitch weight, locate the freshwater tank first. If it's in the rear, travel with it empty (or near empty); if it's up front, fill it up. Shift heavy cargo to the front and load the heaviest cargo in the forward-most compartment(s). In extreme cases, weight may also be added to the front of the trailer in the form of ballast, but this should be



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Long travel trailers (25 feet or more), especially the "ultralight" variety, have a tendency to sway simply because there is a lot of surface area to catch the wind and insufficient weight in the trailer to keep it in line. Use of a weight-distributing (WD) hitch with an anti-sway component or a stand-alone friction-type sway control in addition to proper loading can help in these situations. Low tire pressure, worn shock absorbers, worn steering and suspension components, and a badly adjusted WD hitch can all contribute to trailer sway. When towing, the trailer should be parallel with the ground. Any tip toward the rear of the trailer will increase sway.

**Q: How can I keep my RV's freshwater from smelling and tasting bad, and how can I fix it if it does?**

**A:** Freshwater that has been stored awhile can grow all kinds of critters that can adversely affect the taste and smell of your RV's freshwater and make hot water smell like rotten eggs. The bacteria that creates this smell is offensive but harmless. The first step is to completely drain the system. Locate the low-point drains for the freshwater tank and the water heater. Then turn on every water outlet in the trailer (sinks, shower, exterior shower, etc.) until water stops coming out.

The NFPA 1192 RV standard procedure, which is approved by the U.S. Public Health Service, details the most common way to sanitize the system. 1. Prepare a chlorine solution using 1 gallon of water and ¼ cup of plain household bleach (sodium hypochlorite solution). With the tank empty, pour the chlorine solution into the tank. Use 1 gallon of solution for each 15 gallons of tank capacity. This procedure will result in a residual chlorine concentration of 50 parts per million (PPM) in the water system. If a 100-PPM concentration is required because of growth or contamination, use ½ cup bleach with 1 gallon of water to pre-

pare the chlorine solution. 2. Complete filling up the tank with potable water. Open each faucet and run the water until a distinct odor of chlorine can be detected in the discharged water. Do not forget the hot-water taps, and the water heater must not be in bypass mode. 3. Allow the system to stand for at least four hours when disinfecting with 50-PPM residual chlorine. If a shorter period is desired, a 100-PPM chlorine concentration should be per-

mitted to stand in the system for at least one hour. 4. Drain and flush the whole system with potable water.

If you search the web, you're likely to find at least half a dozen opinions on how to do this, and most of them require waiting several hours or overnight for the bleach to do its job. Using Thetford's Fresh Water Tank Sanitizer system takes the guesswork out of the process, and it is effective and environmentally friendly as well. Both bottles

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**Q: What can I do to keep my tow vehicle's aft end from being too low when hitched up to my trailer, or the back of my truck and the front of my fifth-wheel from riding too high?**

**A:** The most common towing-setup problem, with apologies to our read-

ers, is a sagging rear end. This can be a sign of excessive trailer hitch weight or fifth-wheel pin weight, but not always. The first step should be to weigh the tow vehicle and trailer at a commercial scale and determine if, in fact, there is too much weight being carried by the tow vehicle's rear axle. "Too much" can mean an excessive amount of trailer hitch weight or fifth-wheel pin weight (more than 10 to 12 percent for a travel trailer or more than 20

percent for a fifth-wheel), or too much weight for the tow vehicle to carry.

If the weight on the rear axle does not exceed the tow vehicle's GAWR, then you're in good shape and the problem can be easily corrected. For a travel trailer, try tightening the tension on the WD hitch spring bars first (you do have a weight-distributing hitch, right?). As an aid to help support some weight, there are a variety of products to help address suspension sag including aftermarket helper springs, airbag kits and more. For fifth-wheels, the same rules apply, except for the hitch part. Note that adding aftermarket suspension aids such as airbags does not increase the vehicle's tow rating, GAWR, GVWR or any of the manufacturer's specifications.

A fifth-wheel that is too high in the front not only looks strange, it can create a contact point at the rear of the truck bed, because the cabover section of the trailer is too close to the truck's bed rails. There are really only two ways to correct this — lower the rear of the truck or raise the ride height of the trailer. Lowering the truck a couple of inches can be accomplished with re-arched or lighter-duty leaf springs, or a suspension adjustment on some trucks, while the trailer can be raised with what is commonly called an axle "flip kit." Leaf springs on a trailer are typically located underneath the axle; a flip kit locates them on top, thereby raising the trailer several inches. Using lighter springs on the tow vehicle can cause a loss of hauling capability, so consider your options carefully. When flipping the axles on a trailer, be aware of the increased overhead clearance.

As a rule, we recommend maintaining at least 6 inches of clearance between the truck bed rails and the underside of the trailer front section to allow for unhindered, damage-free independent movement between the truck and trailer.

**Q: Will adding an axle "flip kit" to raise my trailer's chassis and body height adversely affect the handling?**

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**A:** Not typically. While raising the trailer does change its center of gravity, it's usually not enough to affect handling characteristics. Note that this applies to your average axle flip, not extreme lifts done for cosmetic reasons.

**Q: Should I put a cover on my RV when it is in storage?**

**A:** Opinions vary greatly on this one. While a good UV-resistant cover will

protect the RV's finish if it's stored outdoors in sunny weather, an ill-fitting or neglected cover, or the use of an inexpensive plastic tarp can do more harm than good. Flapping material, combined with dirt that can collect underneath, can cause severe abrasion to the finish. Make sure the cover fits properly and is snugly fastened, and that you check on it regularly.

In wetter locales, a waterproof cover can help prevent mold and

mildew from forming on the outside of the rig, which would normally require hours to remove come travel season. Again, make sure it fits properly, and leave one or two roof vents plus a few windows slightly open to promote movement of fresh air through the interior.

**Q: How do I keep moisture and rodents out of my RV?**

**A:** If you live in a damp climate, moisture will collect inside, no matter what you do. If the RV is in storage long enough, you could return in the spring to find mold on the seat cushions and warped cabinet doors.

A good way to prevent this problem is with a desiccant product that draws moisture out of the air. A quick internet search will uncover a variety of products, from chemical alternatives that require no power source to battery-operated solutions and plug-in dehumidifiers. If your storage spot has 120-volt AC power available, a plug-in dehumidifier, with a drain that dumps the accumulated water outside the RV, is the best way to keep the RV dry inside.

As for rodents, that's a tough one. If they really want in, there's not much you can do to stop them, but you can make your RV less attractive to them. When putting the rig in storage, make sure you clean it completely and remove all traces of food, including crumbs. Carefully examine the underside to make sure there are no areas where the rodents can easily enter, and fill any gaps with expandable foam.

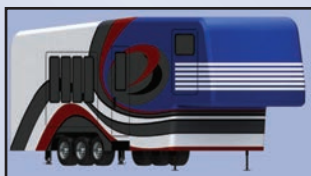
Some readers have suggested that steel wool can discourage entry. We've heard dozens of other proposed solutions, from battery-powered ultrasonic devices and botanical products used inside the RV that mice apparently don't like the smell of, to poison, which we don't recommend. A product that we hear is effective, albeit expensive, is Mouse-Free ([www.mouse-free.com](http://www.mouse-free.com)), a peppermint-laced spray-on undercoating for RVs. For RVs that move, it has to be replaced annually, which is quite pricey. We've never heard of one

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### Q: Is it safe to leave my RV plugged in while in storage?

**A:** That depends. Some RVs are equipped with a standard converter/charger that can overcharge and damage the battery(ies). A "smart" converter/charger, on the other hand, offers four stages: Bulk, which quickly gets batteries to near 90 percent charge; Absorption, which tapers the amperage down and slowly charges them for the remaining 10 to 20 percent of charge; Float, which keeps them topped off at a lower voltage; and Equalize, which increases battery voltage to remove sulfation on the battery plates.

Check with your dealer or local RV professional to find out which type your RV has. If you have a standard "dumb" converter, the upgrade to a smart model will be worth the investment. If in doubt, leave the con-

verter disconnected and connect the battery(ies) to a maintenance charger to keep it or them topped up for the next use. Keeping them charged also will prevent freezing in most climates.

### Q: How can I keep my trailer's battery(ies) from going dead when I'm not using the RV?

**A:** Most RVs have a parasitic electrical drain on the system, such as a carbon-monoxide sensor, LP-gas sensor, electric clock, or a stereo with station presets and built-in clock display, and over time they'll discharge the battery(ies). If you want to prevent this from happening, make sure to disconnect them using the master switch (usually located in a storage compartment, if equipped) or physically disconnect the cables.

If you want to keep the battery(ies) charged, consider using a smart converter/charger (see above) or connecting them to a maintenance charger. Note that even disconnected batteries can lose up to 3 percent of their charge per month in storage. The new lithium batteries don't have these issues.

### Q: How can I keep items in my trailer from shifting or breaking during travel?

**A:** You might be surprised to learn that your trailer has no suspension other than the leaf springs, so the ride can get pretty rough in there. You can work with an RV center to add the appropriate shock absorbers or swap the suspension for a complete system like rubber torsion-sprung axles, Roadmaster's Comfort Ride ([www.roadmasterinc.com](http://www.roadmasterinc.com)), Lippert Components' Equa-Flex or Center Point suspension ([www.lci1.com](http://www.lci1.com)), or MORryde's LRE/CRE and SRE suspension systems ([www.morryde.com](http://www.morryde.com)), which incorporates shocks and goes a long way to smooth out the ride. You should also check to see if your trailer tires have been balanced (look for balancing weights on the rims) and, if not, visit a tire shop and have it done. Not only will these steps smooth out the ride, they'll also improve tire life. **(continued on page 108)**

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- Parallel ready with ability to connect with another Champion digital hybrid or inverter
- Champion support - 3 year limited warranty with FREE lifetime technical support

## BENEFITS

 **17** HRS.\*  
RUN TIME

 **64** dBA\*\*

 **82** LB.

\*Run time is for operation at 25% load.

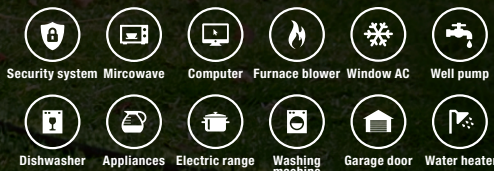
\*\*As measured from 23 ft. (7 M)

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Among Champion's wide assortment of powerful and affordable portable generators, the 3,500-watt Digital Hybrid Open Frame Inverter Model 100302 offers unique features that make it ideal for camping, RVing and other outdoor pursuits.

Equipped with Quiet Technology—integrated digital components typically found in more advanced inverters—Champion has cut the noise level by 50%, plus reduced its size and weight by 20%, compared to its traditional 3,500-watt generator models. With a noise level of only 64 decibels, measured at 23 feet, the portable power plant is just slightly louder than normal conversation. And at only 20½" x 18" x 17¾" and 81.6 pounds, it's small enough and light enough to pack in an RV storage bay, car trunk or the back of a pickup truck without taking up valuable cargo space.

Producing 4,000 starting watts and 3,500 running watts, the Digital Hybrid model can start and run a 15,000 BTU RV air conditioner. You can also confidently connect your sensitive electronics to its clean inverter power (less than 3% total harmonic distortion or THD), allowing you to enjoy your TV and satellite system anywhere.

Powered by a 224cc Champion OHV gasoline engine, the Digital Hybrid offers an extended run time of up to 17 hours at 25% load on 2.9 gallons of gasoline. Plus, Economy Mode monitors power consumption in real time to reduce electrical load so the engine idles at lower RPMs, providing quieter operation, extended engine life and higher fuel economy.

#### **Easy Operation**

Thoughtful design makes the Digital Hybrid easy to use. All the controls are located on the Quick Touch Panel, near the manual pull start handle. The open frame design protects the working components and conveniently provides hand hold positions for easy portability. The open frame also significantly contributes to the lighter weight of this inverter, compared to a typical enclosed generator of similar size and capability.



### RV Ready

Champion has designed the Digital Hybrid with the needs of RVers in mind. It comes equipped with a built-in 30-amp TT-30R receptacle for plugging in your RV, along with two 20-amp 5-20R receptacles for other 120-volt accessories. It also offers a 12-volt DC automotive-type outlet with dual USB adapter for charging phones or tablets, or for powering 12-volt accessories in camp. The Digital Hybrid is parallel ready, allowing you to connect either a second Digital Hybrid or another traditional Champion inverter compatible with the optional parallel kit (Model 100319, sold separately) for twice the power. Connecting two Digital Hybrid models with the parallel kit also gives you a 50-amp outlet to plug in an RV with 50-amp service and more appliances and accessories to power.

Having the option to pair two Digital Hybrid models also offers the versatility to choose the amount of power output you need—use one Inverter for tent camping or tailgating, two for higher power needs—for economy as well as for convenience. No need to power up a big generator just for lighting and small appliances.

For additional convenience, an optional two-wheel kit (Model 40065, sold separately) can be easily installed. The smooth-rolling, never-flat tires and convenient pull handle aid in maneuvering and transporting the generator. To protect the Digital Hybrid generator when not in use, a durable cover (Model C90011, sold separately) slips on over the unit after it has cooled down to protect against dust and weather.

The Digital Hybrid generator is CARB-compliant for 50-state use. Like all Champion generators, it's backed by a three-year limited warranty and free lifetime technical support is just a phone call away. It comes with battery charging cables, USB adapter, oil funnel and owner's manual. All you need to power it up is gasoline and 10W-30 oil. No assembly is required. For more about the Champion Model 100302 Digital Hybrid Generator and other Champion inverters and generators, visit [championpowerequipment.com](http://championpowerequipment.com).



The inverter-equipped Digital Hybrid generator produces clean power that's suitable for power sensitive electronics.



All controls and outlets are conveniently located on one side of the generator for easy access.

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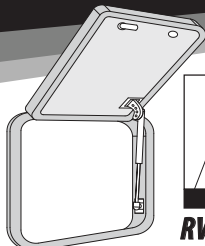
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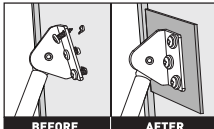
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## Hatchlift Products

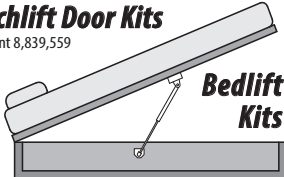


### RV Door Repair Kits

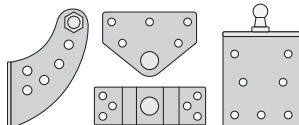


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(continued from page 102)

### Q: How can I keep my trailer from rocking when we walk around in it?

**A:** Depending on the trailer and how it's built, movement inside can be a problem, especially if you're a light sleeper. If your trailer doesn't already have stabilizing jacks, a good RV center can easily install them. If it does, consider adding a jack-stabilizer kit. JT's Strong Arm ([www.lci1.com/jt-strong-arm](http://www.lci1.com/jt-strong-arm)) makes a popular system that ties the jacks together and to the trailer frame in a diagonal brace fashion. Additionally, stabilizing wheel chocks can prevent fore and aft movement on dual- and triple-axle trailers by locking the wheels/tires together. These additions may not solve the problem completely, but they will definitely make a difference.

### Q: Where can I find a wiring or plumbing diagram or owner's manual for my older RV?

**A:** You probably won't be able to. Believe it or not, many current manufacturers don't have wiring or plumbing diagrams or schematics available for customers, and the odds of you finding one for an older RV are even slimmer. Like anything rare or hard to come by, your best odds are to search Google, eBay and Craigslist on a regular basis, or find an online RV owners' club or forum for your particular make and model and see if anyone has had luck finding these materials.

As for an owner's manual, you can often find them online in a forum or via the manufacturer's website. Most new RVs come with a folder full of appliance or accessory owner's manuals for the equipment onboard, from the television(s) to the microwave, which are a good reference and can also be replaced online. If you have a component or appliance question, you'll have better luck simply contacting the manufacturer of that component. 📧

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



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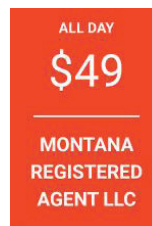
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# READER SERVICE

## TRAVEL TRAILERS & FIFTH-WHEELS



**NEW 2019 DRV Mobile Suite 36RSSB3 (Loaded)**  
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**NEW 2019 Heartland Landmark 365 (Loaded)**  
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**For Classifieds Rates:**

**Contact: Katey Purgatorio**

**Phone: 847-229-6756**

**Fax: 270-495-6278**

**Email: [katey.purgatorio@goodsam.com](mailto:katey.purgatorio@goodsam.com)**

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# HARBOR FREIGHT

QUALITY TOOLS AT RIDICULOUSLY LOW PRICES

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**U.S. GENERAL** **SUPER COUPON**

30", 4 DRAWER TECH CART

Customer Rating ★★★★★

- 12,600 cu. in. of storage
- 580 lb. capacity
- Heavy duty gas struts hold lid open at 90 degrees

**NOW \$999** **NEW** ~~\$1499~~

COMPARE TO \$799.95 **SAVE \$699**

ITEM 64096

Side tray sold separately.

COMPARE TO SNAP-ON MODEL: KRBC10T0PC

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**CENTRAL PNEUMATIC** **SUPER COUPON**

6 GALLON, 1.5 HP, 150 PSI PROFESSIONAL OIL-FREE AIR COMPRESSOR

Customer Rating ★★★★★

- Air delivery: 2.5 CFM @ 90 PSI
- 3.4 CFM @ 40 PSI

**NOW \$999** ~~\$1249~~

COMPARE TO \$169.99 **SAVE \$70**

DEWALT MODEL: DWFP55126

ITEM 62511/62894/62380/68149/67696 shown

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**FREE** **SUPER COUPON**

WITH ANY PURCHASE

**Grant's**

MICROFIBER CLEANING CLOTHS PACK OF 4

COMPARE TO \$5.99 **PROELITE**

ITEM 63358/63925 63363 shown

• 12" x 12"

• Non-Abrasive

LIMIT 1 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**20% OFF** **SUPER COUPON**

ANY SINGLE ITEM\*

LIMIT 1 coupon per customer per day. Save 20% on any 1 item purchased. \*Cannot be used with other discount, coupon or any of the following items or brands: Inside Task Club membership, Extended Service Plan, gift card, open box item, 3 day Rolling 1st Sale item, compressors, floor jacks, safes, saw mills, storage cabinets, chucks or carts, trailers, trenchers, welders, Admiral, Ames, Ames Safety, Dewalt, Dayton, Eastman, Fisher, Hitachi, Ingersoll Rand, Jaxxon, Lyncor, Poulton, Predator, Taligator, Viking, Wilcox, Zoro. Not valid on prior purchases. Non-transferable. Original coupon must be presented. Valid through 10/12/18.

**SUPER COUPON**

HEAVY DUTY FOLDABLE ALUMINUM SPORTS CHAIR

Customer Rating ★★★★★

**NOW \$199** ~~\$299~~

COMPARE TO \$49.99 **SAVE 60%**

COLEMAN MODEL: 2000020293

ITEM 62314/63066 66383 shown

LIMIT 6 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**HARDY** **SUPER COUPON**

MECHANIC'S GLOVES

Customer Rating ★★★★★

**NOW \$3.99** ~~\$5.99~~

SAVE 73%

COMPARE TO MECHANIX \$14.99

MODEL: S075800

ITEM 62434, 62426, 62433, 62432, 62429, 62428 shown

LIMIT 9 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**PITTSBURGH** **SUPER COUPON**

#1 SELLING JACKS

RAPID PUMP® 1.5 TON LIGHTWEIGHT ALUMINUM SERVICE JACK

Customer Rating ★★★★★

- 3-1/2 pumps lifts most vehicles
- Lifts from 3-1/2" to 14-1/8"
- Weights 34 lbs.

**NOW \$599** ~~\$799~~

SAVE \$40

COMPARE TO \$99.99 **SAVE 37%**

DURALAST MODEL: T8150168

ITEM 68053/62160 62496/62516/60569 shown

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**COVER PRO** **SUPER COUPON**

10 FT. x 10 FT. POPUP CANOPY

Customer Rating ★★★★★

**NOW \$549** ~~\$649~~

COMPARE TO \$88.11 **SAVE 37%**

GUIDESMAN MODEL: 163207

ITEM 62898/62897/62899 shown

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**BADLAND** **SUPER COUPON**

Battle Tested

2500 LB. ELECTRIC WINCH WITH WIRELESS REMOTE CONTROL

Customer Rating ★★★★★

- Weights 14.3 lbs.
- 11-1/8" L x 4-1/2" H

**NOW \$499** ~~\$699~~

COMPARE TO \$179.99 **SAVE \$130**

SUPERWINCH MODEL: 1125220

ITEM 61840/61297/63476/61258 shown

Voted Best Winches

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**PORTLAND** **SUPER COUPON**

1750 PSI ELECTRIC PRESSURE WASHER

Customer Rating ★★★★★

- 1.3 GPM
- Adjustable spray nozzle

**NOW \$199** ~~\$399~~

SAVE \$99

COMPARE TO BRIGGS & STRATTON \$179.99

MODEL: 20800

ITEM 63255/63254 shown

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**drillmaster** **SUPER COUPON**

18 VOLT, 3/8" CORDLESS DRILL/DRIVER WITH KEYLESS CHUCK

Customer Rating ★★★★★

Includes one 18V NiCd battery and charger.

**NOW \$169** ~~\$199~~

SAVE 71%

COMPARE TO BLACK & DECKER \$59.99

MODEL: GC1801

ITEM 69651/62868 62873/68239 shown

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**GENTECH** **SUPER COUPON**

2/10/50 AMP, 12 VOLT BATTERY CHARGER/ENGINE STARTER

Customer Rating ★★★★★

**NOW \$299** ~~\$499~~

SAVE 57%

COMPARE TO \$69.99 **SAVE 82%**

SCHUMACHER ELECTRIC MODEL: SC1250

ITEM 60581 60653 shown

LIMIT 3 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**THUNDERBOLT** **SUPER COUPON**

100 WATT SOLAR PANEL KIT

Customer Rating ★★★★★

2X MORE POWER

**NOW \$149** ~~\$199~~

SAVE \$175

RENEWABLE ENERGY ANYWHERE

COMPARE TO \$325.92 **SAVE \$176**

SUNFORCE MODEL: S0180

ITEM 64335/63585 shown

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**SUPER COUPON**

7 FT. 4" x 9 FT. 6" ALL PURPOSE/WEATHER RESISTANT TARP

Customer Rating ★★★★★

**NOW \$299** ~~\$499~~

SAVE \$88

COMPARE TO BLUE HAWK \$88

MODEL: B88X10-Y

ITEM 69249/69115/69137/69129/69121/877 shown

LIMIT 9 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**JUPITER** **SUPER COUPON**

2000 WATT CONTINUOUS/4000 WATT PEAK POWER INVERTER

Customer Rating ★★★★★

**NOW \$129** ~~\$169~~

SAVE \$120

COMPARE TO \$249.99 **SAVE 48%**

STRONGWAY MODEL: S3071

ITEM 63426/63429 shown

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**PITTSBURGH** **SUPER COUPON**

CLICK-TYPE TORQUE WRENCHES

Customer Rating ★★★★★

- Reversible

Item 239 shown

LIFETIME WARRANTY

DRIVE	ITEM
1/4"	2696/61277/63861
3/8"	807/61276/63880
1/2"	62431/239/63882

**NOW \$99** ~~\$199~~

COMPARE TO \$84.97 **SAVE 88%**

HUSKY MODEL: H20TWA

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**SUPER COUPON**

LED WORK LIGHTS

A. 27 LED

ITEM 69567/60566/63601 63878/63991/64005/67227 shown

B. 39 LED EMERGENCY

ITEM 62417/62574/63722 63879/64115/62158 shown

**NOW \$299** ~~\$399~~

YOUR CHOICE

COMPARE TO UTILITECH \$4.97 **SAVE 39%**

MODEL: FT-L0W1424-1

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**HaulMaster** **SUPER COUPON**

TRIPLE BALL TRAILER HITCH

Customer Rating ★★★★★

**NOW \$199** ~~\$339~~

COMPARE TO REESE \$49.99 **SAVE 60%**

MODEL: T068833

ITEM 61914

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**SUPER COUPON**

AMMO BOX

Customer Rating ★★★★★

**NOW \$399** ~~\$699~~

SAVE \$60

COMPARE TO RANGEMAXX \$99

MODEL: 1312-92

ITEM 63135 61451 shown

LIMIT 8 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**HaulMaster** **SUPER COUPON**

4 PIECE, 1" x 15 FT. RATCHETING TIE DOWNS

Customer Rating ★★★★★

- 400 lb. working load

**NOW \$699** ~~\$1199~~

COMPARE TO ATE TOOLS \$40.88 **SAVE 82%**

MODEL: S3079

ITEM 63057/63056/63094 90984/63150/61524 shown

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*



# IDEAL FOR RVs, TAILGATING AND PEOPLE ON THE GO

## PREDATOR BEATS HONDA\*

**SCISSOR**  
SUPER COUPON

### 3500 WATT SUPER QUIET INVERTER GENERATOR



3500	MAX. STARTING WATTS	3000
3000	RUNNING WATTS	2800
100 LBS.	WEIGHT	131 LBS.
2.6 GAL	TANK SIZE	3.4 GAL
4	OUTLETS	4
YES	OVERLOAD PROTECTION	YES
212 cc	ENGINE SIZE	196 cc
YES	LOW OIL ALERT	YES
YES	PARALLEL CAPABLE	YES
YES	POWER SAVER	YES



**NOW**  
**\$699<sup>99</sup>**

**\$749<sup>99</sup> PRICE \$1,999**

**PREDATOR 3500**  
Customer Rating  
★★★★★ ITEM 63584



LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**HONDA EU3000iS1A**  
\*HONDA EU3000iS1A stated specs

**SCISSOR**  
SUPER COUPON

### HIGH WATT PORTABLE GAS GENERATOR



8-13 HRS	RUN-TIME**	8-13 HRS
8750	MAX. STARTING WATTS	6500
7000	RUNNING WATTS	5500
420 cc	ENGINE SIZE	389 cc
YES	ELECTRIC START	YES
YES	★ BEST BUY WINNER★ 3 YEARS IN A ROW***	NO

**NOW**  
**\$529<sup>99</sup>**

**\$599<sup>99</sup> PRICE \$2,699**

**PREDATOR 8750**  
Customer Rating  
★★★★★  
Wheel kit and battery sold separately.  
ITEM 63086/68530/63085 shown  
ITEM 63087/63088/68525  
CALIFORNIA ONLY



LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*



**HONDA EM6500SXK2AT**  
\*HONDA EM6500SXK2AT stated specs  
\*\*Based on actual product comparison testing  
\*\*\*As rated by leading consumer product testing publication

**PREDATOR**

**SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

Customer Rating  
★★★★★



#### 2000 WATT SUPER QUIET INVERTER GENERATOR

- 4.7 hours run-time
- 79.7cc air-cooled OHV gas engine
- Recoil start
- Low oil indicator

**NOW**  
**\$449<sup>99</sup>**

**\$499<sup>99</sup> SAVE \$549**  
COMPARE TO **\$999**  
HONDA MODEL: EU2000i

ITEM 62523



LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**PREDATOR**

**SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

Customer Rating  
★★★★★



**SUPER QUIET**

#### 4000 MAX. STARTING/3200 RUNNING WATTS 6.5 HP (212 CC) GAS GENERATOR

- 10 hours run-time @ 50% capacity
- Low oil indicator / low oil shutdown

**NOW**  
**\$289<sup>99</sup>**

**\$339<sup>99</sup> SAVE \$1,709**  
COMPARE TO **\$1,999**  
HONDA MODEL: EM4000SX

Wheel kit sold separately.

ITEM 69729/63080/63079 shown  
ITEM 63090/63089  
CALIFORNIA ONLY



LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**HaulMaster**

**SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

Customer Rating  
★★★★★

#### STEP STOOL/WORKING PLATFORM

- 350 lb. capacity



**NOW**  
**\$199**

COMPARE TO **\$57<sup>55</sup> SAVE 65%**  
GPL MODEL: H-21

**\$29<sup>99</sup>**  
ITEM 62515/66911 shown



LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

Customer Rating  
★★★★★

#### SOLAR ROPE LIGHT

- Great outdoor accent lighting
- Super bright light



**\$12<sup>99</sup> NOW \$8<sup>99</sup>**

**SAVE 70%**  
COMPARE TO **\$29<sup>97</sup>**  
HAMPTON BAY MODEL: 82056-05SSR 68353 shown  
ITEM 62533/63941



LIMIT 8 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**CHICAGO** ELECTRIC POWER TOOLS

**SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

Customer Rating  
★★★★★

- Laser guide



#### 12" SLIDING COMPOUND DOUBLE-BEVEL MITER SAW

**NOW**  
**\$129<sup>99</sup>**

COMPARE TO **\$299**  
KOBALT MODEL: SMI305SLW  
ITEM 61969/61970/69684 shown

**\$194<sup>99</sup> SAVE \$169**  
Blade sold separately.



LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 10/12/18\*

**HaulMaster**

**SCISSOR** SUPER COUPON

Customer Rating  
★★★★★

#### 72" x 80" MOVING BLANKET



Customer Rating  
★★★★★

**NOW**  
**\$5<sup>99</sup>**

COMPARE TO **\$19<sup>99</sup> SAVE 70%**  
BLUE HAWK MODEL: 77280  
ITEM 69505/62418/66537 shown



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# South Dakota Sparkler

Custer's Old Time Country Fourth of July

**D**eep in the heart of South Dakota's Black Hills, Custer is revered for nearby Custer State Park, but proximity to roaming bison and RV campsites isn't the town's only charm. Topping its calendar of annual events, Custer puts on a classic Independence Day celebration each summer, dubbed the Old Time Country Fourth of July.

This year's festivities take place July 3 and 4 with all the traditional fanfare. During our visit, a stirring flag-lowering ceremony at Veterans Memorial Park set a patriotic mood the evening before the big day.

The next morning, we joined the crowd assembling for the parade. It kicked off with a thunderous roar when a B-1 bomber from nearby Ellsworth Air Force Base buzzed onlookers on a flyover down Main Street. Feeling the rumble in our chests, we watched the plane's underbelly pass right over us. The crowd whooped and hollered when it dipped its wings and climbed back into the sky, afterburners glowing.

Then the parade arrived with kids on bikes decked out in red, white and blue, and flags and balloons flying. Uncle Sam followed on stilts, and horse-drawn wagons, antique cars and a fire engine rolled by. The festive holiday spirit continued as a band played all afternoon.

As evening neared, throngs of people set up chairs on hillsides and parking lots in anticipation of the fireworks. Suddenly, sirens wailed all around us, as fire trucks and police cars circled the streets. The display that followed was breathtaking, as one blast after another burst into the night sky with an ear-splitting boom and a glittering spray.

The stunning finale left everyone grinning, and we all wished each other a happy Fourth and a good night, as we folded up our chairs and headed back to our homes and our homes on wheels. 🚚

## Red, White and Blue Salute

From a moving flag ceremony and a Main Street parade to a patriotic fireworks display, Custer's Old Time Country Fourth of July lives up to its name in the Black Hills.



# Durango Fifth Wheels – the Best Products We've Ever Offered!



With so many new updates, features and options,  
K-Z's entire 2018 Durango 5<sup>th</sup> wheel lineup is shaping up  
to be, hands down, the **best** we've ever offered ... **EVER!**



Durango Sport D250RKS



## *Durango Sport*

Durango Sport exhibits the signature Durango style in a price-efficient package families appreciate!



Durango 1500 D286BHS



## *Durango 1500*

The 1500 is the only mid-profile lightweight luxury 5<sup>th</sup> wheel to offer a 2-year warranty that's approved for full time living!



Durango 2500 D325RLT



## *Durango 2500*

Need a little more space? Step up to the 2500 series. A full-profile 5<sup>th</sup> wheel boasting the best value on the market!



Durango Gold G384RLT



## *Durango Gold*

Thoughtfully designed, beautifully livable, these luxury 5<sup>th</sup> wheels set the gold standard for fulltime RV living!



**True 2-Year Warranty!**  
K-Z's 24-month hitch-to-bumper limited warranty umbrella is the best 2-year warranty in the business, covering more than 1,500 operations codes for a full two years, and protects your investment while you enjoy your new RV.



QUALITY . RELIABILITY . INNOVATION

**kz-rv.com**

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