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Erwin Hymer enters the towable market with European-inspired travel trailers. Page 9

**On the cover:** Tropical Palms RV Resort in Kissimmee, Florida, hosts the 2018 Oliver Legacy Elite II. Photo by Shawn Spence

## Better RV Service Coming to a Shop Near You

The RV industry rolls out a much-needed service-training initiative



It should come as no surprise that RV service is a bit of a speed bump in the overall success the industry is currently enjoying. With sales of new RVs at all-time highs, the supply of technicians, qualified or not, isn't keeping up with the pace. Add to that the increasing sophistication of our rolling abodes, and it becomes clear that education is the only way to bring the number of techs and the quality and efficiency of service up to par.

To this end, the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association has launched an initiative to increase technician training and certification across the nation, according to Matt Wald, RVIA's vice president of strategic initiatives. In a guest column in *RVBusiness*, Wald said a new service-training focus group was formed from industry experts with a mandate to "improve the consumer experience by providing as many RV technicians as quickly as possible with the knowledge, skills and abilities to diagnose and fix it right the first time, reducing repair-event cycle time."

"This is the most serious attempt ever made to addressing, correcting and improving the current state of our industry when it comes to technician training and retention," said Bob Zagami, executive director of the New England RV Dealers Association, adding that the industry has pledged up to \$5 million for the initiative.

Efforts to deepen the pool of skilled labor aren't unique to our business. Ten years ago Mike Rowe, host of *Dirty Jobs* and *Somebody's Gotta Do It*, formed the Mike Rowe Works Foundation, which encourages young people to consider careers in the building trades and provides scholarships to vocational schools. Some manufacturers are reeling from a lack of skilled tradespeople, as many young people think the best way to succeed is with a four-year degree. Rowe and others, including the RV industry, continue to prove that rewarding and lucrative blue-collar careers are ripe for the picking. As an RVer and a longtime member of the industry, I hope this initiative is successful in making RVing better for everyone.

At *Trailer Life*, making RVing better for readers is our mission. In this issue we test the high-quality Oliver Legacy Elite II fiberglass trailer (page 14) and check out the nicely equipped Little Guy Max teardrop (page 21). We also take stock of some heavy-duty haulers for big fifth-wheels (page 25) — not that you'll need one to tow the Oliver or the Max.

RVing season is in full swing, and I hope you are enjoying it. We sure are! See you down the road! 🚚

— Chris Dougherty, Technical Editor

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## Light Reflection

"On the Lighter Side," Chris Dougherty's April test of Grand Design's 150 Series Reflection 230RL, was right on. I just purchased the 220RK, which is only 26 feet, 7 inches long. I did a lot of looking to find a smaller fifth-wheel, and this fit the bill perfectly, with one exception — there are no 12-volt DC power outlets.

On the upside, Grand Design customer service is tops. They gave me the structural plans for the area over the battery compartment, and I found a safe route to run a dedicated 12-volt DC circuit to the bedside nightstands. These are very well-made fifth-wheels, and folks should take a look.

**Keith Powers, Durango, Colorado**

I was delighted to see your article on Grand Design's half-ton towable 230RL. After reading Chris Dougherty's very well-written article, I reviewed the specifications and was disappointed that the hitch weight was listed as 2,020 pounds. The sticker on the doorjamb of my 2010 F-150 with the trailer-towing package lists a max cargo capacity of 1,411 pounds. If I am correct, I would be 609 pounds over my load limit before I added family, dog and supplies to the trailer. I believe that 609 pounds over the max cargo would also exceed the axle rating.

**Ronald Prusinski, Plymouth, Indiana**

Chris Dougherty responds: *The Grand Design Reflection 230RL can be towed by suitably equipped half-ton trucks. As an example, Ford's 2018 F-150 XL SuperCrew 4x2 with the 157-inch wheelbase and 3.5-liter EcoBoost engine is rated to tow fifth-wheels up to 11,800 pounds with the maximum towing package.*

*The concern is payload and, of course, axle loading. On that same truck, the rear gross axle weight rating is 4,800 pounds, with a base rear curb weight of 2,055 pounds. This leaves 2,745 pounds of capacity on the rear axle. In the case of the 230RL we tested, the wet pin weight is 2,020*

## High-Sierra Scenery

I took this photo in March in the Alabama Hills near Lone Pine, California, thinking the travel trailer gave a nice sense of scale to the setting. Mount Whitney and the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada range are in the background, capped in snow from a recent storm.

**Brad Bolves, Reseda, California**



*pounds, and a basic fifth-wheel hitch and rails weigh about 145 pounds, leaving 580 pounds before the rear axle is overloaded — and some of the pin weight will be on the front axle of the truck, which has an additional 876 pounds of capacity.*

*We weighed the test unit with full water and LP-gas, adding 533 pounds. The weights listed in the manufacturer's brochure and on its website are for minimally equipped units with no options and no water.*

## Portable Power

I just read "Power Players," Emily and Mark Fagan's March article about portable gas generators. A big problem people are having with the newer inverter type of generators is that the EMS-HW surge protector from Progressive Industries won't allow power to the RV, making the generator useless. Progressive Industries' answer is to use the bypass switch, which is not an acceptable solution. In bypass mode, you have surge protection but none of the high/low-voltage or miswiring protections.

**Larry Schubert, Sedalia, Colorado**

Chris Dougherty responds: *This is a commonly discussed issue in RV and marine circles. Codes require that ground-to-neutral (G-N) bonding occurs only once in an electrical system, usually in the supply system (the campground, your house, etc.) and external from the RV. Some portable generators have the G-N bond internally, but most don't. In motorhomes, the transfer switch bonds the G-N wires when the generator is running and floats them when hooked to shorepower.*

*When using a portable generator, it's almost impossible to properly ground the system, so bonding the G-N balances it. When this doesn't happen internally in the generator, a common workaround is to use a dedicated 120-volt AC plug that has been wired to make the bond. For more on this, search the internet for "Edison G-N grounding plug." 🗨️*

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

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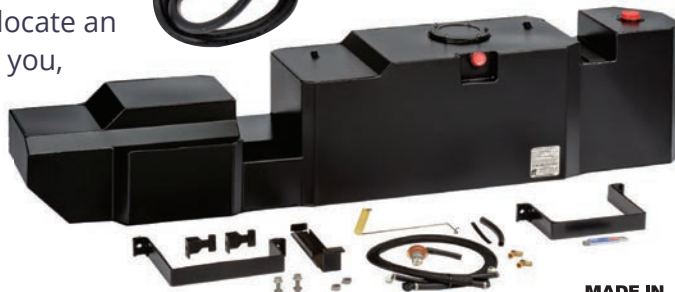
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The modern architecture of the visitor center at Parkin Archeological State Park stands in contrast to the ancient defensive moat in the foreground, bridged now by the walking trail.

PHOTO BY GUY SELBERT

## Still Standing in Arkansas

Parkin Archeological State Park preserves a unique American Indian site chronicled by Hernando de Soto's scribes

article by Pamela Selbert

Generally, 16th-century Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto and his party were not welcomed by the American Indian tribes they encountered, as the Spaniards' demands for food, interpreters and equipment often led to conflicts, and diseases they brought caused death.

But it happened at least once — so wrote the three scribes traveling with de Soto. In the summer of 1541, the explorers crossed the Mississippi into Arkansas near today's town of Parkin to find a gathering of friendly Casqui people waiting. They'd walked a mile from their village and invited the Spaniards to stay within its walls, but de Soto declined.

The Casqui — named for Chief Casqui, the ruler in de Soto's time — were Mississippians who occupied this 17-acre site on the St. Francis River from about A.D. 1000 to 1600. There were other villages in the area, but this was the largest, with about

2,000 residents and 400 homes built of cane. Originally a shallow moat (now dry but still visible) and a log palisade surrounded the village. Fields for growing corn, beans and other crops were outside the moat.

In 1994, the site, listed on the National Register of Historic Places and designated a National Historic Landmark, opened to the public as Parkin Archeological State Park. Much of what's known today about villages from the period, of which Parkin is the best preserved, is thanks to de Soto's scribes. The Spanish had come in search of gold and sites for new colonies, and to spread Catholicism, said Ryan Smith, park interpreter, adding that they stayed for about a month.

At the time, northeastern Arkansas was dotted with hundreds of mounds, nearly all later destroyed by treasure hunters or farmers. But one remains at Parkin: The platform

on which the chief's house was built. Over the years, treasure seekers and erosion altered its shape, but at 21 feet high and 200 feet across, it's still imposing.

Not long after de Soto's visit, the Parkin site was abandoned. It saw new life in the early 20th century as the Sawdust Hill Community, a sawmill town run by the Northern Ohio Cooperate and Lumber Company. The sawmill operated until 1946.

Today, there's a visitor center with a 12-minute introductory video, a museum and a gift shop. A ¾-mile paved trail winds through the site with panels explaining aspects of prehistoric and historic Parkin. The park is open Tuesday through Saturday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m. The museum and self-guided tours are free, and there's a small fee for guided walking tours.

### Parkin Archeological State Park

870-755-2500, [www.arkansasstateparks.com/parkinarcheological](http://www.arkansasstateparks.com/parkinarcheological)

### Nearby RV Parks

#### Memphis KOA Journey, Marion

870-562-3240

[www.koa.com/campgrounds/memphis](http://www.koa.com/campgrounds/memphis)

#### Tom Sawyer's RV Park, West Memphis

870-735-9770, [www.tomsaweyerrvpark.com](http://www.tomsaweyerrvpark.com)



## Erwin Hymer Towables

Ontario, Canada-based Erwin Hymer Group North America, manufacturer of Class B motorhomes, has entered the towable market with two travel trailers sporting European design elements. The Eriba Retro and Hymer Touring GT have the same floorplans with a king-size bed at the rear, a midship kitchen and a wet bath. A dinette with L-shaped seating at the front converts to sleeping for two with the table removed. Exterior length is 18 feet, 11 inches, and the trailers weigh in at less than 2,500 pounds (claimed)



Hymer  
Touring GT

with a gross vehicle weight rating of 3,000 pounds.

The bed takes up the entire width at the rear of both trailers, and there's overhead storage on three sides and more storage below. The kitchen's two-burner range and single-basin



Eriba Retro

stainless sink are set above an under-counter refrigerator. Freshwater capacity is 23 gallons.

The back-to-their-German-roots trailers feature pop-top roofs for additional headroom (8 feet, 5 inches) and come in various exterior colors. The Touring GT is available with a full or bottom-half-only stainless-steel look. Interior decors include light or dark cabinetry and fabrics.

The ultra-lightweight Eriba Retro and the Hymer Touring GT trailer lines are expected to be available at selected dealerships this summer. Retail prices were not available at press time.

**Erwin Hymer Group North America**  
519-745-0711, [www.gohymer.com](http://www.gohymer.com)

## NEWSWIRE

### MANUFACTURING



### Airstream Production Expands

Airstream, manufacturer of Class B motorhomes and iconic "silver bullet" travel trailers, is breaking ground on a \$40 million project to create a new 750,000-square-foot facility in Jackson Center, Ohio, with completion expected in 2019. Powered by renewable energy, the facility will create jobs, support improved quality

and increased production, and enhance experiences for Airstream customers, according to the manufacturer. Planned is a state-of-the-art training center to provide Airstream and dealer associates with a hands-on environment to earn certifications, learn new skills, and master production and maintenance techniques.

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

### ANNIVERSARY



### Jayco's 50 Acts of Kindness

Jayco, manufacturer of travel trailers, fifth-wheels, toy haulers, and Class A and C motorhomes, kicked off its 50th year in business in 2018 by sharing "50 Acts of Kindness" in communities that support the company. A division of Thor Industries, Jayco employs 4,100 people at four facilities. Examples of giving back

included supplying playground equipment and trees to parks supporting Boys & Girls Clubs, providing stuffed animals to pediatric wards at hospitals, donating food to dog shelters, furnishing police and fire departments with coffee and doughnuts, and giving away tanks of fuel to motorists.

[www.jayco.com/50th](http://www.jayco.com/50th)

### NEW PRODUCT



### Roadmaster's Towable Technology

Roadmaster Inc., primarily known for its dinghy-towing products, has expanded into the towable market with the introduction of its Comfort Ride Slipper Leaf Spring Suspension and Shock Absorber systems. The Slipper Leaf Spring Suspension replaces the stock springs and equalizers typically found on trailer and fifth-wheel chassis. Ride control and handling are said to improve dramatically using spring ends that ride on rollers rather than being connected to

traditional equalizers; the increase in flex offered by the free-moving spring ends and rollers limits road shock. Gas shock absorbers that can be integrated into the Slipper Leaf Spring hardware or installed independently are positioned vertically to offer the best compression and rebound damping. The bolt-on components will be available at RV retail stores nationally and are priced at \$950 for the Slipper Leaf Spring Suspension and \$550 (tandem axle) for the Shock Absorber.

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

PHOTO COURTESY SILVER DOLLAR CITY



## Branson Welcomes Thrill-Seekers

Missouri's Branson Silver Dollar City theme park claims it has the world's fastest, steepest and tallest complete-circuit spinning roller coaster, opened this past spring. The Time Traveler coaster has a 360-degree controlled spin that differs with each ride. Hop on board to experience a 10-story, 90-degree vertical drop, a zero-gravity roll and a top speed over 50 MPH. The thrills start right from the get-go with an out-of-the-station gravity-driven drop down an Ozarks mountainside. [www.silverdollarcity.com](http://www.silverdollarcity.com)

## Garlic Press

Gilroy, California, the self-proclaimed Garlic Capital of the World (there's even a Garlic Farm RV Park), has its enormous Gourmet Alley where guests can find garlicky dishes like shrimp scampi and even garlic ice cream. But Gilroy isn't the only place where lovers of the "stinking rose" can get their fix. From the West Coast to New England, here's a smorgasbord of garlic festivals to visit this summer and fall.

### Ocean Park, Washington

**Northwest Garlic Festival, June 16 to 17**  
[www.nwgarlicfestival.org](http://www.nwgarlicfestival.org)

### Gilroy, California

**Gilroy Garlic Festival, July 27 to 29**  
[www.gilroygarlicfestival.com](http://www.gilroygarlicfestival.com)

### North Plains, Oregon

**Elephant Garlic Festival, August 10 to 12**  
[www.funstinks.com](http://www.funstinks.com)

### Hutchinson, Minnesota

**Minnesota Garlic Festival, August 11**  
[www.sfa-mn.org/garlicfest](http://www.sfa-mn.org/garlicfest)

### Cleveland, Ohio

**Cleveland Garlic Festival, August 25 to 26**  
[www.clevelandgarlicfestival.org](http://www.clevelandgarlicfestival.org)

### Shawnee, Pennsylvania

**Pocono Garlic and Harvest Festival**  
**September 1 to 2**  
[www.pghfestival.com](http://www.pghfestival.com)

### Saugerties, New York

**Hudson Valley Garlic Festival**  
**September 29 to 30**  
[www.hvzf.org](http://www.hvzf.org)

### Bethlehem, Connecticut

**Garlic and Harvest Festival, October 6 to 7**  
[www.garlicfestct.com](http://www.garlicfestct.com)



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## Maine Attractions

Sandy Pines Campground in Kennebunkport, Maine, a 320-site, 9/10\*/10-rated Good Sam Park, kicks off summer with its Father's Day Vintage Camping Weekend, June 15 to 17. Owners of unique and DIY campers will converge to swap stories, and enjoy live music, a barbecue and outdoor games. All park guests are invited to join in and tour the classic campers.



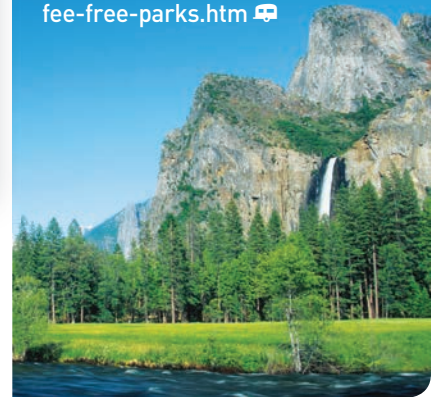
On September 22, to celebrate the fall equinox, Sandy Pines will host the Great Maine Camp Out, a family-focused night featuring an astronomy class, techniques for campfire cooking and fireside storytelling by local authors.

Sandy Pines Campground, 207-967-2483, [www.sandypinescamping.com](http://www.sandypinescamping.com)

## National Park Fee-Free Days

With June designated Great Outdoors Month and more than 400 national parks to explore, now's a great time to head outside and enjoy the fresh air and natural beauty. Looking ahead, there are still two more days this year to visit national parks sans entrance fees: September 22 (National Public Lands Day) and November 11 (Veterans Day).

[www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/fee-free-parks.htm](http://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/fee-free-parks.htm)



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Hayden lake, ID - 2015 Jayco Pinnacle 38FLSA - \$58,000



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## Delayed Delivery

Disappointed after waiting three months for the safety-chain holders he ordered, a Washington reader turned to RV Resolutions for assistance:

► I called Intelli-Hitch and ordered a couple of the company's chaining bras to keep my trailer chains from sagging. A charge of \$39.10 was posted to my credit card. After a month passed, I emailed Intelli-Hitch to ask why I hadn't received the chaining bras and was referred to Dustin Jones. I had a phone conversation with Mr. Jones, and he said he would get right on it.

It has now been nearly three months, and I still have not received the products. Although \$39.10 is not a great amount, this is poor service.

**Bob Showalter, Kennewick, Washington**

### THE COMPANY RESPONDS

I was first made aware of this customer-service issue when I received the letter from RV Resolutions. I immediately reached out to Bob Showalter directly to get him

the products he purchased. I also communicated that changes have been made within our organization.

Our company, J&B Industrial Services, purchased the rights to manufacture and sell Intelli-Hitch products at about the same time as the original purchase by Bob Showalter. Dustin Jones is the inventor and owner, but he is not involved with our day-to-day operation.

I apologize for the delay, and we have made this right with the customer.

**James Boyd, Sales Manager  
J&B Industrial Services, Lubbock, Texas**

Shortly after hearing from James Boyd, we received the following note from Bob Showalter, letting us know his complaint had been resolved:

► Thank you for your assistance in getting Intelli-Hitch to send me the two chaining bras. Actually, they sent me three — one more than I ordered.

**B.S.**

## Trailer-Axle Meltdown

After reading about warranty problems and positive outcomes in RV Resolutions, a couple of readers asked for help dealing with a reimbursement claim for work done on their travel trailer:

► In October of 2015, we purchased a CrossRoads Sunset Trail 26-foot trailer from RVs Northwest in Spokane Valley, Washington. In the fall of 2016, we headed across the country to see the autumn colors in New England. On the highway near Danbury, Connecticut, we threw a wheel bearing, and the tire caught on fire. Fortunately, we were able to get to the shoulder of the road and douse the fire, but not before the intense heat damaged the axle.

The following day we contacted Coach-Net, which provides a year of roadside assistance to new CrossRoads owners, and were directed to the nearest authorized repair facility. The technicians at Hemlock Hill RV in Southington, Connecticut, gave us a temporary repair so we could go to a nearby

campground. After being told it would take at least two weeks for a replacement axle to be delivered, we were instructed to pay up front for the repair, even though the trailer was under warranty.

We submitted a claim for reimbursement of the repair costs to Coach-Net on September 20, 2016. When we arrived home that November, we found a letter denying the claim, stating that it should be submitted to CrossRoads' customer-service department instead. We did so on November 21, 2016. Since then, we have repeatedly contacted CrossRoads requesting an answer to our claim but have had no response.

Can you help us? We don't have anywhere else to turn, since the company does not respond to our inquiries. We are enclosing copies of

our correspondence with CrossRoads and a statement of the charges that we paid at the time of service.

**Colleen Daley and Bruce Shaw  
Spokane, Washington**

We sent request-for-attention letters on behalf of Colleen Daley and Bruce Shaw to CrossRoads RV, a division of Keystone RV and subsidiary of Thor Industries. Months later, the couple wrote to fill us in on the resolution of their claim:

► Keystone contacted us on December 20, 2017, stating that our claim had been lost. We are happy to inform you that the company will be paying us the full amount of the repairs. Thank you for your time and consideration.

**C.D. and B.S. 📧**

**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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# High-Class

Oliver brings impressive quality and comfort to the custom-crafted Legacy Elite II

The old saying “you get what you pay for” rings as clearly in the RV world as it does everywhere else. Hailing from Hohenwald, Tennessee, Oliver Travel Trailers has built its business on producing some of the finest hand-made fiberglass trailers that money can buy. Attention to detail, extremely high level of customer service and factory-direct sales have served Oliver and its clients well.

The 2018 Legacy Elite II is a prime example of the models offered by Oliver, and this one, being the largest, was a perfect fit for a test trip to Tropical Palms RV Resort in Kissimmee, Florida. Five minutes from the entrance to Walt Disney World, Tropical Palms is a nice 200-site resort with paved pull-through sites, a swimming pool, 24-hour professional security and easy access to all the greater Orlando area has to offer.

The Legacy Elite II, with a twin-bed floorplan, has an overall length of 26 feet, which includes the custom-fabricated aluminum bicycle rack on the rear of the trailer. The removable rack has a Thule two-bicycle setup (\$1,199), which is strong and easy to use.

It’s important to note that this company fabricates the components it needs to make its trailers truly custom. The custom-built aluminum entry step is the strongest I’ve seen on any RV; the optional generator tray on the A-frame is rock solid. The strength of the aluminum stock and the quality of the welds are exceptional.

Oliver trailers feature a modular, clamshell design consisting of four separate hulls — two exterior, top and bottom, and two interior, top and bottom. This double-hull construction is remarkably strong, with a carbon-reinforced-fiberglass outer shell, a layer of Prodex (a roll-type R-16 insulation that is also a radiant and vapor barrier),

air space and then the inner hull. This means the inside of the trailer is like the outside: shiny white gelcoat similar to the surface found on boats.

The design offers several benefits when compared to typical RV construction. First, there are very few seams; the main body seam at the beltline overlaps and is sealed to prevent water intrusion. Necessary protrusions through the roof for hardware and accessories are all well sealed. Second is the inherent strength of the hull. There is quite literally no twisting or movement of the body. Third, the exterior gelcoat, like a boat, will remain untarnished for years, if well cared for. And, because the hull is made like a boat, it is impervious to water and condensation, which means it can’t rot. In the unlikely event of a plumbing leak, the lower hull has

chrome drains along the bottom to let the water run out. Even the insulation isn’t affected by water.

Minimalist graphics accentuate the clean, simple lines of the exterior, and, like the trailer itself, which is custom built for each buyer, the graphics are customized to match the color of the new owner’s tow vehicle. Oliver can even design custom graphics to the client’s wishes. For the test, we sent Oliver a photo of the truck we were using, and the company color-matched the graphics.

The Legacy Elite II is designed to be a go-anywhere, anytime RV. While we couldn’t test its cold-weather capabilities, the R-16 insulation and thermal-pane windows keep thermal transfer to a minimum, making the trailer suitable for winter travel. The LP-gas furnace warms the enclosed and insulated space below the floor where the holding tanks and plumbing are located.

During our stay at Tropical Palms, we enjoyed sitting outside under the lateral-arm Carefree of Colorado awning with acrylic fabric. The crank rod

**(Right, from left) The interior of the Oliver Legacy Elite II is exceptionally well made with admirable fit and finish of every component. Drawers are solid hardwood with dovetail joinery and full-extension, soft-close slides. Hatches have chrome marine latches. Storage is abundant for an RV this size, with hidden caches utilizing every inch of space. High-end electronics are used throughout. (Top right) Pictured at Tropical Palms RV Resort in Kissimmee, Florida, the 26-foot trailer has a crisp, clean appearance that is outdone only by the quality of its construction. An optional generator tray is available, shown here on the A-frame with a Champion Digital Hybrid inverter generator.**



# Fiberglass



is stowed just inside the trailer in the closet, which is easily within arm's reach from outside the entry door. Oliver has carefully placed the lighting on the outside of the trailer, with wall-mount LEDs that turn night into day for whatever work needs to be done around the rig, and ground-effect LEDs that create a pleasant campsite atmosphere. Exterior LP-gas fittings (\$299) are conveniently placed front and rear to connect a grill or even a campfire unit.

Storage space is extremely well conceived and abundant. Larger items like folding recliners will need to reside in the tow vehicle, but almost everything else will find a home somewhere in, on or around the trailer. The two 7-gallon LP-gas cylinders (\$129) are enclosed in an aerodynamic front cover, with an access hatch for opening or closing the valves. On the rear of the trailer, the full-size spare tire with a matching billet aluminum wheel is sequestered behind a continental-kit-style fiberglass cover. Below it is a custom-fabricated aluminum box built into the chassis, which houses the sewer termination and provides plenty of space for all the sewer hoses and fittings.

On the driver's side, a rear-storage compartment reaches across two-thirds of the trailer and is accessible from inside as well. The hatch for the compartment is made of the same carbon-reinforced fiberglass and is secured by a chrome marine latch. Behind this hatch are the remote sewer-valve handles, which operate the valves in the enclosed, heated space in the hull. Automotive bulb seals ensure integrity.



**(Above left) The front wet bath provides adequate space to get the job done, even for 6-footers. The chrome faucet on the stainless sink has a pull-out shower wand that attaches to a wall bracket. (Above right) The two-seat dinette is compact but functional, with storage under the forward seat, and it converts to a small single bed.**

Four optional 12-volt AGM batteries (\$1,199) on a locking slide tray are enclosed in a side-wall compartment in the middle of the trailer. The attention to detail is evident here as well, as the slide tray and wiring are well laid out and make battery service easy.

Freshwater connections and gray- and black-water flushing connections are easily accessible on the frame underneath. Cable and satellite TV connections are on the rear corner. The test trailer came equipped with a Winegard Carryout G2+ satellite system (\$1,299) with a tripod.

The aforementioned generator tray (\$599) is adjacent to an additional Furion shoreline connection on the front of the trailer with an integrated transfer switch (\$499), allowing a generator

mounted in the tray to be plugged in up front using the same shoreline cable. If the generator is not needed, the tray can be used as a storage basket.

Equipped with an RV Lock keypad and wireless remote lock (\$395), the entry door opens to a bright and airy living space. First impressions of the exterior suggested that the inside would be cold, white and sterile, but quite the opposite was true. The interior, which had been custom-decorated by the company for the test was warm and attractive in a modern fashion. The positive ions that flow from this trailer can't help but put a smile on your face.

Lighting is extremely well thought out and plentiful. The LED fixtures, including the recessed ceiling, floor/under-cabinet task and in-cabinet lighting behind frosted-glass doors, are on individual circuits, so the owner can turn on whatever lights he or she wishes. LED reading lamps, which can be aimed at will, are located at each bed

**(Below, from left) Overhead storage is ample but has no dividers, so owners may want to create some to keep items in place. The bedside table features a large drawer with a lock, and the counter lifts off to reveal a hidden storage basket and charging outlets. Access to plumbing, electronics and more storage is easy under the twin beds.**





and seating position. The storage compartment, bathroom and closet are also well illuminated.

Counters and tabletops are covered with a fiber-granite material that is strong and attractive. Some of the panels are held in place with hook-and-loop fasteners, concealing hidden storage compartments. The compartment between the twin beds features a removable solid-wood basket. All the drawers are solid hardwood with glued dovetail joints and full-extension soft-close slides. The fronts are matching fiber-glass, of course, with the same quarter-turn marine latches.

Overhead cabinets are molded into the hull with rubber sheeting on the bottoms. There are no dividers, so using small baskets and other storage containers would be in order. These cabinets feature recessed LED lighting and frosted-glass doors with quarter-turn marine latches, so access and visibility are excellent. A nice pantry behind the two-person dinette has wire shelves and plenty of space for foodstuffs.

This is a two-person trailer, and while the dinette can fold down into a small extra bed, there's nowhere for that extra person to sit. That's OK. After all, that's what outdoor picnic tables are for. The dinette is pretty comfortable, and one seat has storage beneath it, while the other encloses the converter, inverter and fuse panel.

This floorplan has two single beds, a rare layout in the RV industry. The custom-size KTT mattresses (\$1,600) are quite comfortable, with a unique nightstand between the beds that features additional hidden storage. The bedside stand has a locking pull-out drawer and a hatch to access the underside storage (\$175). Under the beds are more hatches for the storage compartment and access to the utility areas.

Watching the fold-away Furrion 22-inch LCD TV above the beds is almost impossible, except for the person sitting in the rear-facing dinette seat. Above the TV is a cabinet for a satellite-TV receiver. A Furrion DV-330 entertainment system is mounted on the driver's side near the pantry and must be operated from the dinette by the Furrion app

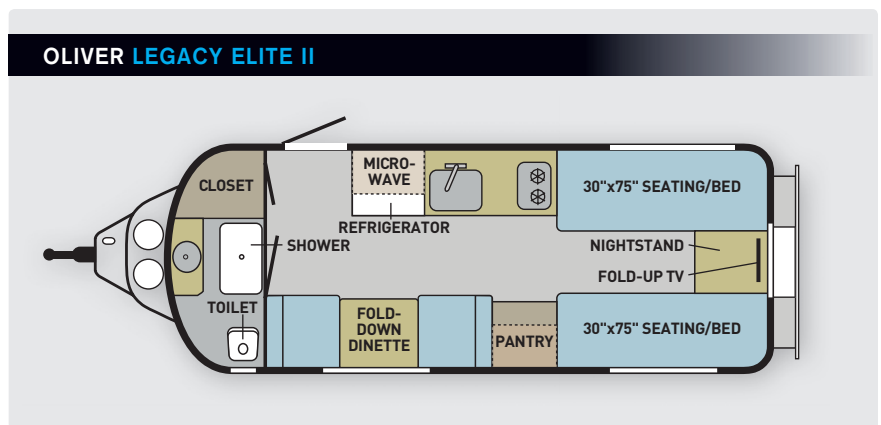


ILLUSTRATION BY BILL TIPTON

in a smart device since the included remotes require line-of-sight control. The Furrion TV and stereo match up well with the HDMI Audio Return Channel feature. Both will operate from the same multifunction Furrion remote.

The well-thought-out galley has a surprising amount of counter space, even if it is broken up a bit. The main counter includes a residential stainless single-bowl sink with a gooseneck faucet and pull-out sprayer. The Dometic two-

burner LP-gas cooktop has a fold-down tinted-glass cover, which adds to the counter space when not in use. The standard microwave is built into the cabinet to the left, with more counter space in front of it. Across the aisle is a removable counter in front of the pantry with storage underneath and the dinette table, all topped in the fiber-granite color of your choice. A 4-cubic-foot Dometic three-way refrigerator-freezer is standard.

Bathroom duties aren't as easy in

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the Oliver as in some travel trailers, but all said and done, everything works just fine. The forward-mounted wet bath has enough room for a 6-footer. The porcelain RV toilet has plenty of space around it, and the stainless sink, while small, gets the job done. The faucet handle pulls out and doubles as the showerhead with a bracket on the wall. The adjoining lighted closet with shelves is ample.

Utilities in the Legacy Elite II are a thing of beauty to an RV techie. Everything from the piping to the wiring to the components is assembled with the best materials in the business and is thoughtfully laid out and accessible. Oliver uses 5-inch marine twist-off hatches in otherwise inaccessible areas, so everything can be reached and worked on, if necessary.

The test trailer was equipped with every bit of technology an owner could want. Complementing the Carryout G2+ antenna, the trailer had a Winegard omnidirectional boosted antenna, a WeBoost 4G-M cellular booster (\$625), a WiFi Ranger SkyPro pack repeater system (\$699), a Voyager wireless backup camera (\$799), a 320-watt Zamp Solar package (\$2,800), a Truma AquaGo Comfort instant water heater (\$1,299), and multiple USB and 12-volt DC charging stations throughout the trailer.

The plumbing system is exceptionally well designed and executed. All of the fittings and pipes are in a heated

space, supporting the trailer's extreme-temperature capability. The demand water pump and various valves are under the passenger's-side bed and include freshwater fill, winterizing and even a water-drafting position with a dedicated outside fitting to pump from an external static water source or tank and fill the onboard tank without using an external pump. You can run on city water, turn a valve and fill the freshwater tank from that hookup or connect a pressurized source to the dedicated tank-fill port on the driver's side. The tank overflow dumps under the trailer by the entry door to let the user know when the tank is full, even if you don't pay attention to the accurate Garnet See-Level II tank-monitor system.

The gray-water tank is close to the floor and shower-pan drain to keep it enclosed and warm. The result is that the gray tank can slosh into the shower when the trailer is in motion. Oliver's fix is to install a gray-tank shut-off valve next to the toilet, which needs to be opened anytime the gray-water system will be used and closed before travel. It's a small item to remember, but given the functionality of the trailer, it's a minor inconvenience.

Towing the Legacy Elite II with our F-350 diesel was overkill. We had almost no idea the trailer was even there and towed it without weight-distribution hardware. With a gross

**Oliver color-matches the exterior graphics to the purchaser's tow vehicle. Towing the Legacy Elite II through Walt Disney World and the Orlando area was effortless.**



## SPECIFICATIONS

### 2018 OLIVER LEGACY ELITE II

Exterior Length	26'
Exterior Width	7'
Exterior Height	9' 7"
Interior Width	6' 7"
Interior Height	6' 6"
Construction	Four-piece formed-fiberglass hull with gelcoat and Prodex R-16 insulation
Freshwater Cap.	32 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	18/35 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
Water-Heater	Truma AquaGo Comfort
Refrigerator	4 cu. ft.
Furnace	20,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	15,000 Btu
Converter	60 amp
Batteries (4)	12-volt AGM
Tires	225/75R16 LRE
Suspension	Leaf springs with shock absorbers
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full; no cargo)	5,760 lbs.
Hitch Weight	680 lbs.
Axle Weight	5,080 lbs.
GVWR	7,000 lbs.
GAWR (2)	3,500 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	1,240 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$53,900
MSRP, As Tested	\$70,785
Basic Warranty	2 years

#### Oliver Travel Trailers

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vehicle weight rating of 7,000 pounds, the fully loaded Oliver tipped the scales at only 5,760 pounds wet with water, batteries and LP-gas full. This left a respectable 1,240 pounds of carrying capacity, which is plenty adequate for a trailer this size. The wet hitch weight was 680 pounds, so once the trailer is loaded with gear, that should equate to an almost perfectly balanced trailer. Any properly equipped pickup or SUV with a tow rating of 7,000 pounds or more would easily tow this trailer.

Given its size and the factory-direct price of \$70,785, the Oliver Legacy Elite II may not be for everybody, but for those looking to spend a bit more for a customized four-season trailer that can be handed down from one generation to the next, it should be at the top of the list. 🚐

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**WALK-THROUGH:** LITTLE GUY MAX

# Maximum Joy

Little Guy Trailers goes big with its best-equipped teardrop yet



The well-lit living area features Euro-style influences and an abundance of windows.

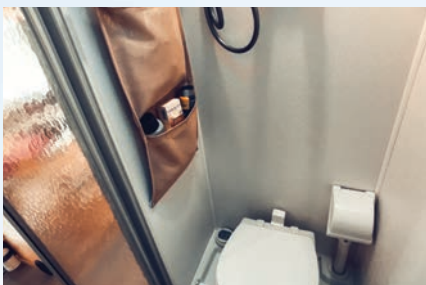
In today's society, the word "little" rarely has positive connotations. We're often reminded that "bigger is better" and to "go big or go home." We like big trucks, big houses and big dreams, so there usually isn't much love for little, unless we're talking about consequences, or kids. There are, however, those who pride themselves on getting by with little and making the absolute most of it. If you consider yourself among this

outer fringe, then you will no doubt appreciate the new Max from Little Guy Trailers.

We know, using the words "little" and "max" alongside each other makes about as much sense as "giant" and "shrimp," but this small Ohio-based company has managed to pack some great features, and high quality, into its 21-foot teardrop. Even as you approach the Max, you can tell right away that it's not your

ordinary mass-produced child of the RV industry. Aluminum wheels with 15-inch Kenda tires, a Thule awning with an LED-strip light, Furrion exterior speakers and an aluminum entry step are all clues that this is a premium product.

That feeling continues when you open the door and step inside.



(Far left) When it comes to storage, the Max is well named. The galley offers large drawers, plus a floor-to-ceiling pantry (not pictured). (Left) The wet bath is equipped with a shower caddy, waterproof TP holder and a marine-style toilet.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER

## WALK-THROUGH: LITTLE GUY MAX

The first thing you'll notice is that it's not necessary to slam the door behind you, as with most trailers; it closes with a gentle click. The environment is light and bright, due in part to the 100 percent hardwood Light Maple cabinetry (Walnut is optional), but also to the abundance of Euro-style tinted acrylic windows.

Little Guy clearly understands that the whole point of a small trailer is

to feel closer to nature, and all these windows (seven total) work to great effect in that regard. Each window, even the one on the entry door, tilts out and features integrated screens and shades. Though it was a rainy day when we viewed the Max, we daydreamed of camping in a spring meadow with all the windows open and the warm floral breeze blowing through (sigh...).



(From top) The rear bedroom is a cozy retreat with a queen bed. In addition to an entertainment center, the room offers extraordinary window space. Up front, the dining area has room enough for a small family, plus storage cubbies and more windows.

To the right of the entryway is a stand-alone table with a faux-marble top. It's tight for four, but considering this trailer is designed for up to three (Mom, Dad and child), it works fine and is comfortable. The table collapses with the pull of a pin underneath and meets the two dinette benches to form a 32-by-76-inch bed. The fact that the table is stand-alone also means that it could be moved outside and used as a picnic table, a nice option.

Storage cubbies on both sides of the dining area are joined by a front shelf, supplying plenty of room for smaller items, and there's a speaker and reading light above each diner. For larger items, the curbside dinette bench offers a pull-out storage drawer. A table-level console below the front

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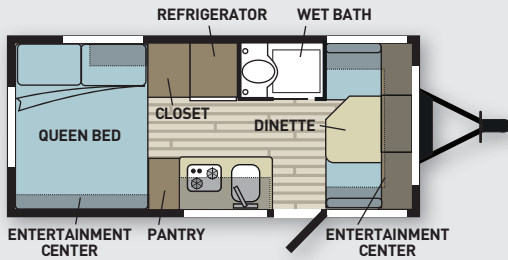
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## QUICK INFO



Exterior Length	21'	Gray-Water Cap.	14 gal.
Exterior Width	7'	LP-Gas Cap.	10 gal.
Interior Height	6' 7"	UVW	3,140 lbs.
Exterior Height	9' 1"	Hitch Weight	330 lbs.
Freshwater Cap.	20 gal.	GVWR	3,800 lbs.
Black-Water Cap.	9 gal.	MSRP, Base	\$31,742


Little Guy Trailers, 877-545-4897, [www.golittleguy.com/lg-max](http://www.golittleguy.com/lg-max)  
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ILLUSTRATION BY ROBB ROY

window provides more storage nooks, plus an unexpected surprise: a 24-inch Furrion television that rises on an electric lift for viewing from the dinette or kitchen.

Most trailers this small don't have a toilet at all, much less a full wet bath, but the Max does. Situated on the street side next to the dinette, the space has enough headroom for 6-footers, and is large enough to handle bathroom visits and showers in relative comfort. Toilet paper is housed in a water-proof dispenser, and there is a cloth shower caddy to hold shampoo, body wash and the like. A Fan-Tastic Vent directly overhead should remove steam in a jiffy. About the only thing we'd wish for here is a different door option; the opaque-glass door didn't feel right to us.

The streetside kitchen is compact but well equipped and has tons of storage, thanks to three large drawers beneath the two-burner Dometic cooktop and one underneath the Dometic stainless-steel refrigerator, plus a floor-to-ceiling pantry with adjustable shelves. The rear sleeping space is a cozy retreat equipped with a 60-by-80-inch pillow-top queen bed, an entertainment center with a 24-inch Furrion TV and soundbar, and more storage cubbies. A huge window that arcs across the top of the bed provides a grand view of the treetops or evening stars.

There is more to say about this little trailer with a lot of features, but really, you need to see one to experience its big personality. 

Special thanks to B. Young RV in Portland, Oregon, a Little Guy dealer.  
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“If some is good, more is better, and too much is just right!” Most of us recognize this as the mantra for an extreme lifestyle, but there is some truth to it. With the exceptions of alcohol, pork fat and high explosives (especially when used in combination), having too much of a good thing is, well, *good* — especially when it comes to tow rigs.

Having more tow vehicle than you need means you'll always have plenty of towing capacity, horsepower, payload and braking to ensure a safe journey, and the bigger the trailer, the more important the tow rig becomes. After all, there are those of us who aren't satisfied with readily available fifth-wheel trailers and want something custom that fulfills every desire. Part and parcel to this “no compromises” attitude is bringing everything along for the ride, from motorcycles to golf carts to small cars. If you count yourself among this elite few, then a truck from the lot of your

local dealership probably isn't going to cut it. You'll need to go custom.

Lucky for you, a number of companies can handle your needs, from building a personalized Ford F-350 to a medium-duty Freightliner originally intended for commercial use. Each company has its own offerings and methodology for providing dream trucks for RVers, from customizing what you already have to starting from scratch with an order form. To make the shopping experience easier, we're high-

lighting some of the more popular truck-conversion companies that have been in business for 20 years or more and have a long track record of high-quality work. Let's go extreme shopping!



## CLASSY CHASSIS

You could say that Valparaiso, Indiana-based Classy Chassis Custom Truck Conversions is as much a consulting

(Top) SportChassis' OEM Freightliner. (Above right) Classy Chassis' Ram 5500 conversion with air-ride rear suspension, aluminum Haul-It-All bed, auxiliary fuel tank and fifth-wheel hitch.

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business as it is a truck upfitter. "What we do, and the reason we exist, really, is to help mid to large fifth-wheel-trailer customers," explains Classy Chassis owner Tom Martin. "By help, we mean advise them on buying the right truck — the safest one possible."

"With so many issues to consider, from bed-to-trailer clearance to misleading tow ratings and inaccurate trailer weights, RVers can end up with a truck that's not big and strong enough for their application," Martin explains. "It can get really confusing for the first-time buyer, and they can easily make a lot of mistakes."

Established in 1975, Classy Chassis uses a simple "good, better, best"

scenario to help customers find the right truck in terms of load ratings and tow capacity. With this in mind, the most popular models are the Chevy 3500 dually, Ford F-450 and Ram 5500, the latter of which begins life as a cab and chassis and is then upfitted in-house.

"The Ram 5500 is the top of the line in terms of towing and weight-carrying capacity," Martin says. "There aren't many trailers that it can't tow, and it will carry up to 7,500 pounds of pin weight and cargo. I feel safe towing up to 26,000 pounds with that one," Martin adds, though he acknowledges that the factory rating is higher than that.

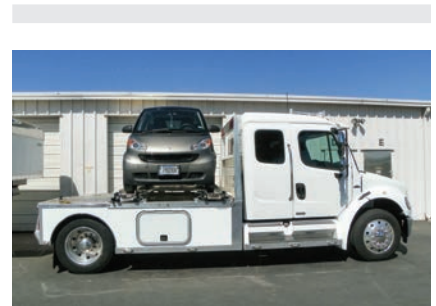
To this platform, Martin and his team add a Kelderman air-ride rear

suspension, a Classy Chassis aluminum Haul-It-All bed, an auxiliary fuel tank, a Hensley or Comfort Ride fifth-wheel hitch and other details. With a body shop on site, the company can provide custom or matching paint but leaves the interior pretty much as is. "We start with a Ram 5500 Laramie, which is loaded to begin with — leather seating, climate control, power everything. There's really not much to add except for some auxiliary switches."

The ordering process is likewise painless. Martin tries to keep a few of the most popular models and color combinations on his lot, and usually has others on order. If you choose to start from scratch, expect to wait six weeks for the truck to be delivered and another six for the upfitting. Classy Chassis can also upfit an existing truck and accepts trades.

800-223-4330

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



## MOUNTAIN MASTER

The name pretty much says it all. When you have serious mountain grades to conquer on your cross-country journey, Phoenix, Arizona-based Mountain Master has the serious equipment needed to get the job done, regardless of the trailer and gear you plan to tow. Mountain Master skips right past the

**(Above, from top) Mountain Master can equip a Class 5 Freightliner to haul pretty much anything, up to and including a Smart car. The company also converts full-size Class 8 trucks like this Volvo for RV-hauling duty.**

## HIGHWAY PRODUCTS

Located in southern Oregon, just 37 miles from the California border, Highway Products is a family-owned business that has been producing custom truck beds and accessories since 1980. Its business model is fairly simple — you bring them your Chevy, Ford, Ram, Freightliner or other truck, and they build a bed to fit your specs and install it at their 100,000-square-foot facility.

The weather-resistant, marine-grade aluminum bodies start with 1/8-inch diamond-plate decking, 3/16-inch painted body panels and a Zolatone-coated bed. Then Highway Products incorporates popular features, like a 30,000-pound combo fifth-wheel and gooseneck ball hitch,

flow-through tailgate, Class 5 hitch receiver, seven-pin receptacle and a body-paint-matched headache rack with LED directional and load lights.

A center hatch behind the rear window can be fitted with an optional Transfer Flow 60-gallon fuel tank with a lockable fuel door. And because Highway Products knows that RVers need easy access to tools, hoses and other gear, each body has 70 cubic feet of lighted storage, accessible through slam-latch doors with hydraulic struts.

Can't get to southern Oregon? Highway Products can direct you to the nearest dealer or ship to an upfitter, body shop or fabricator of your choice.

877-690-4679, [www.highwayproducts.com](http://www.highwayproducts.com)



**The Highwayman features 70 cubic feet of lighted storage, a paint-matched headache rack with LED directional and load lights, and an optional Transfer Flow 60-gallon fuel tank.**

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run-of-the-mill dually, kicking things off with a Ford F-550 or a Ram 5500 and moving up from there to a Ford F-650 or its flagship Freightliners.

With the latter, it all starts by perusing the company's website, then deciding on extended-cab two door or crew cab, one of three different engine-and-transmission combos (including a 450-horsepower Detroit Diesel with 1,650 lb-ft of torque), storage configuration (top, side, or top and side), side steps and body style. Then Mountain Master will go through 11 pages of Freightliner specs to make sure the correct truck is ordered before any custom work begins.

"There is a knowledge gap between dealers who sell for commercial use and RVers who don't know the difference between commercial and RV use or specification," explains Gerry Piercey, Mountain Master's RV manager. "So they'll buy a used commercial truck and proceed to disassemble their fifth-wheel with it. We build Class 5 through Class 8 [semi-tractor] specifically for RV use."

Key differences between its trucks and readily available commercial models include a softer rear suspension, more sound-deadening material, taller (numerically lower) gearing and location of the rear axle (cab-to-axle dimension). This last point

is where a lot of buyers get into trouble when buying a commercial truck. "The rear axle and hitch are too close to the cab, which eliminates storage space for motorcycles, golf carts or anything else you'd like to carry," he says.

Mountain Master also fits its trucks with an air-ride hitch and offers Gen-Box silent generator toolboxes to accommodate 4,500-, 5,500- or 6,500-watt power systems. And, of course, a multitude of custom interior and electronics options are available to make your time on the road effortless and enjoyable. "The number-one thing we keep in mind is that our truck will serve as the family car, so we do whatever it takes to make sure it is civilized," Piercey adds.

888-686-6278, [www.mountainmaster.net](http://www.mountainmaster.net)

### SPORTCHASSIS

Established in 1994 as an ambulance and emergency-vehicle manufacturing company, Clinton, Oklahoma-based SportChassis entered the RV segment in 1996 to address the growing trend toward larger, heavier and more luxuriously equipped fifth-wheel trailers. Using Freightliner products exclusively, SportChassis prides itself on being an original-equipment manufacturer, not a converter.

"That holds several advantages," explains Chris Brinkley, advertising and marketing manager for SportChassis.



SportChassis trucks begin life as bare Freightliner M2 Business Class Chassis and are modified to suit the needs of RVers, with softer suspension, more sound-deadening material, a taller gear ratio and cosmetic improvements that make them unique.



SportChassis builds each truck with a custom interior and luxury features that make it easy to tour the country in comfort and style.

"Once the truck is complete, anyone that looks up that VIN code will know how the truck was equipped from our factory. With a vehicle converter, it will just show the bare truck that they started with, not the value of everything in it. So having our own VIN code helps with financing, insurance and resale value. And if anything ever goes wrong with one of our trucks, the customer can have it serviced at any Freightliner dealership — it's built into the warranty."

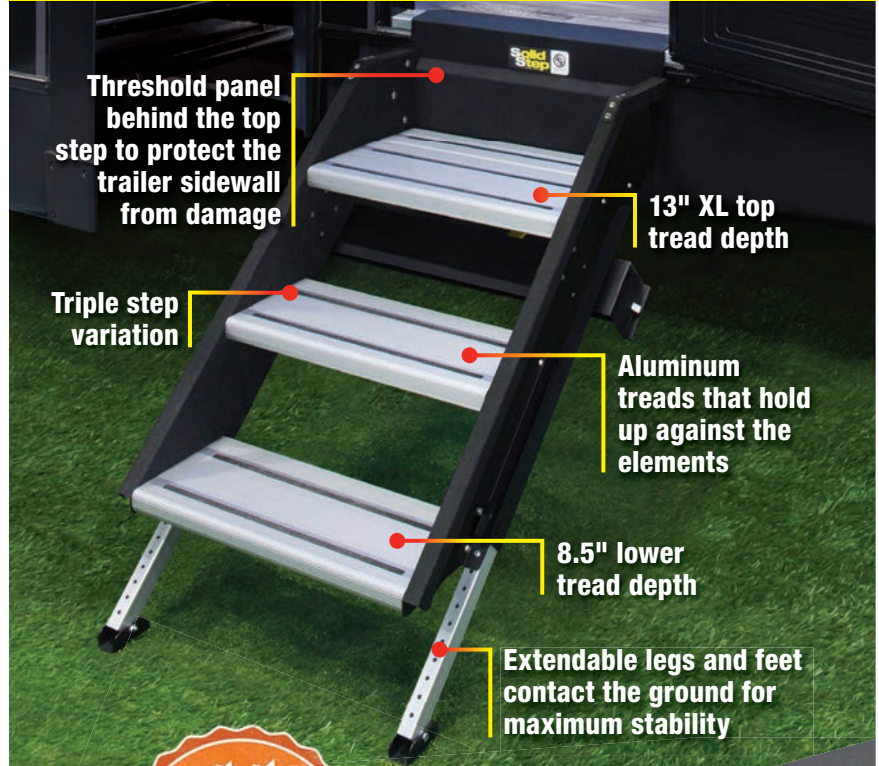
The process starts with a Freightliner M2 Business Class Chassis with no interior (except a driver's seat), and a VIN code that designates the truck as a SportChassis from the beginning. The trucks are then revised for RV use, meaning the suspension is softened, sound-deadening material is added, and a taller gear ratio is specified. As a side note, this process "derates" the chassis from a 38,500-pound gross vehicle weight rating to a 19,500-pound GWR, and as a result, no commercial driver's license is required in most cases.

SportChassis then adds its own body subframe and side skins made from .125-thick CNC-machined aluminum, maintaining a consistent tolerance of 0.004-inch throughout. This way, if the vehicle is ever damaged, any blemished aluminum part can be replaced with its exact replica. The once-bare cabin undergoes 20 hours of labor to emerge as a luxuriously appointed interior, fitted with the electronics and options of the customer's choosing.

SportChassis trucks are available through the company's dealer network in four models: RHA-350, RHA-450, P2-350 and P2/P4-XL. 580-323-4100, [www.sportchassis.com](http://www.sportchassis.com)

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# AMERICA'S RHINE

EXPLORING NEW YORK'S HUDSON RIVER VALLEY WHERE HISTORIC EVENTS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION COLLIDE IN A BURST OF

New York's Hudson River Valley has long been described as America's Rhine. With its scenic splendor, rolling farmland, picturesque villages and historic mansions, it deserves that name. Atop Bear Mountain, there's a 360-degree panorama of the mighty, meandering Hudson River and the surrounding mountains. On clear days, the tops of New York City's skyscrapers more than 40 miles away are visible as they rise above the mountains like rockets ready to blast into the heavens.

Not far from Bear Mountain State Park is the United States Military Academy at West Point where some of America's most famous and infamous generals graduated — Lee, Custer, Eisenhower, Patton and MacArthur among them. My father fought under "Old Blood and Guts" Patton in World War

II and considered him a great general; however, he said in real life he was even more outrageous than George C. Scott's portrayal in the 1970 film *Patton*.

In Hyde Park the former estates of 19th- and 20th-century Hudson Valley aristocrats are now historic sites. Some of the most impressive are the Roosevelt

and Vanderbilt estates, and the Persian-style home of Frederic Edwin Church, famed artist of the Hudson River School of American landscape painters. All of this, along with camping, boating, hiking, biking and more, makes the Hudson River Valley a fascinating region for RVers to visit.

## BEAR MOUNTAIN AND WEST POINT

Exploring the valley is best done after setting up camp. The region has many campgrounds, but my wife, Linda, and I prefer North-South Lake State Campground in Haines Falls. Sitting 2,250 feet on the escarpment above the valley



# FINE

## RV SITES, CULTURAL NATURAL SPLENDOR

floor, the campground overlooks the valley, and on clear days five states can be seen. With two lakes, hiking trails, waterfalls and wooded sites, this is a popular spot, and reservations are highly recommended.

A good place to begin an excursion through the Hudson Valley is in the south at Bear Mountain State Park, which combines with Harriman and Sterling Forest state parks to encompass more than 70,000 acres filled with miles of hiking trails and roads for bicycling. Scenic Perkins Memorial Drive leads to the summit of Bear Mountain.



**With its scenic vistas and recreational and sightseeing options, it's no wonder the Hudson River Valley has plenty of RV campgrounds, but peak-season reservations are recommended.**

An observation tower open during the summer months gives a 360-degree view of the countryside spreading out like a massive quilt created by Mother Nature. The expansive Bear Mountain Inn was used for an episode in the CBS series *The Good Wife*.

West Point Military Academy is another gem of the Hudson Valley. Steeped in history and with an extensive war museum, the grounds offer much from statues of famous generals such as Eisenhower and Patton to fortress-like buildings, sporting events and scenic views. Eisenhower served under MacArthur in the Philippines. Referring to that tour of duty, MacArthur said Eisenhower was "the best clerk I ever had." Recalling that same time, Eisenhower said of MacArthur, "I studied dramatics under him." When you enter, it's required to show identification and have both your person and your vehicle searched. Taking a guided West Point tour makes it easier.

### COLD SPRING AND POUGHKEEPSIE

Leaving Bear Mountain, we crossed the spectacular Bear Mountain Bridge spanning the Hudson River to its eastern shore. The river runs 315 miles from its source, Lake Tear of the Clouds in the Adirondack Mountains, to New York City where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean. Taking State Route 9D north leads to Cold Spring Historic District with notable 19th-century buildings and great views of the river. Restaurants and unique stores abound, and kayak and paddleboard tours on the Hudson are available. Nearby Clarence Fahnestock State Park offers campsites along with swimming, boat rentals and hiking trails on its 14,000-plus acres.

North of Cold Spring is Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park in Poughkeepsie. Once a railroad bridge, the walkway is 1.28 miles long and 212 feet above the water with a bird's-eye view of the silky river flowing silently below. Enter via Parker Avenue, or, if

Opened to the public in 1924, Bear Mountain Bridge stretches 2,255 feet across New York's Hudson River. (Right) The Shawangunk Mountains rise up behind a Hudson River Valley farm. (Far right) Olana is the Persian-style home of Hudson River School landscape painter Frederic Edwin Church.





**Springwood, the Hyde Park home of Franklin D. Roosevelt, sits on 200 acres above the river.**

you want to dine first, visit River Station Restaurant.

River Station is the oldest continually operating restaurant and bar in Poughkeepsie. Indoor and outdoor seating overlook the river and the Mid-Hudson Bridge. A chowder bar offers free samples of soup, and the meals are tasty. A toy train occasionally circulates around the dining area on wall-mounted rails, adding to the funky, rustic ambience. For customers, a free shuttle to the walkway is provided.

**HYDE PARK AND STAATSBURG**

Hyde Park is home to the Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites. Franklin D. Roosevelt's Springwood estate embodies the grace and elegance of the 20th-century Hudson Valley aristocratic lifestyle. This is the four-term president's birthplace, and the home and final resting place of Franklin and his wife, Eleanor. The mansion, presidential library and museum are on 200 acres above the river. The 1826 Victorian home was purchased by FDR's father in 1867 and enlarged in neo-Georgian style in 1915, and tours are now offered. The

**VISITING THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY**

Designated a National Heritage Area, New York's Hudson River Valley runs north to south along the eastern edge of the state. The region stages festivals for every occasion — from fruit and wine to film and music — along with farmers markets, and art and cultural events, all with breathtaking views of the Catskill Mountains as a backdrop.



**RV CAMPING**

**North-South Lake Campground**

Located in Haines Falls, this state campground has RV sites (no hookups), hot showers, a dump station, two lakes, a beach, boat rentals and hiking trails. 518-589-5058 [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/24487.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/24487.html)

**New York State Parks Camping Reservation System**

800-456-2267 [www.newyorkstateparks.reserveamerica.com](http://www.newyorkstateparks.reserveamerica.com)

**Good Sam Campground Database**

[www.goodsam.com/campgrounds-rv-parks](http://www.goodsam.com/campgrounds-rv-parks)

**MORE SIGHTS AND SITES**

**Bear Mountain State Park**

845-786-2701, [www.parks.ny.gov/parks/13](http://www.parks.ny.gov/parks/13)

**Clarence Fahnestock State Park**

845 225-7207, [www.parks.ny.gov/parks/133](http://www.parks.ny.gov/parks/133) [www.nystateparkstours.com/fahnestock](http://www.nystateparkstours.com/fahnestock)

**Clermont State Historic Site**

518-537-4240, [www.parks.ny.gov/historic-sites/16/details.aspx](http://www.parks.ny.gov/historic-sites/16/details.aspx)

**Cold Spring Historic District**

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

**Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area**  
518-473-3835, [www.hudsonrivervalley.com](http://www.hudsonrivervalley.com)

**Hudson Valley Tourism**  
800-232-4782, [www.travelhudsonvalley.com](http://www.travelhudsonvalley.com)

**Mills Norrie State Park**  
845-889-4200, [www.parks.ny.gov/parks/171](http://www.parks.ny.gov/parks/171)

**Minnewaska State Park Preserve**  
845-255-0752, [www.parks.ny.gov/parks/127](http://www.parks.ny.gov/parks/127)

**Ogden Mills and Ruth Livingston Mills State Park**  
845-889-4646, [www.parks.ny.gov/parks/33](http://www.parks.ny.gov/parks/33)

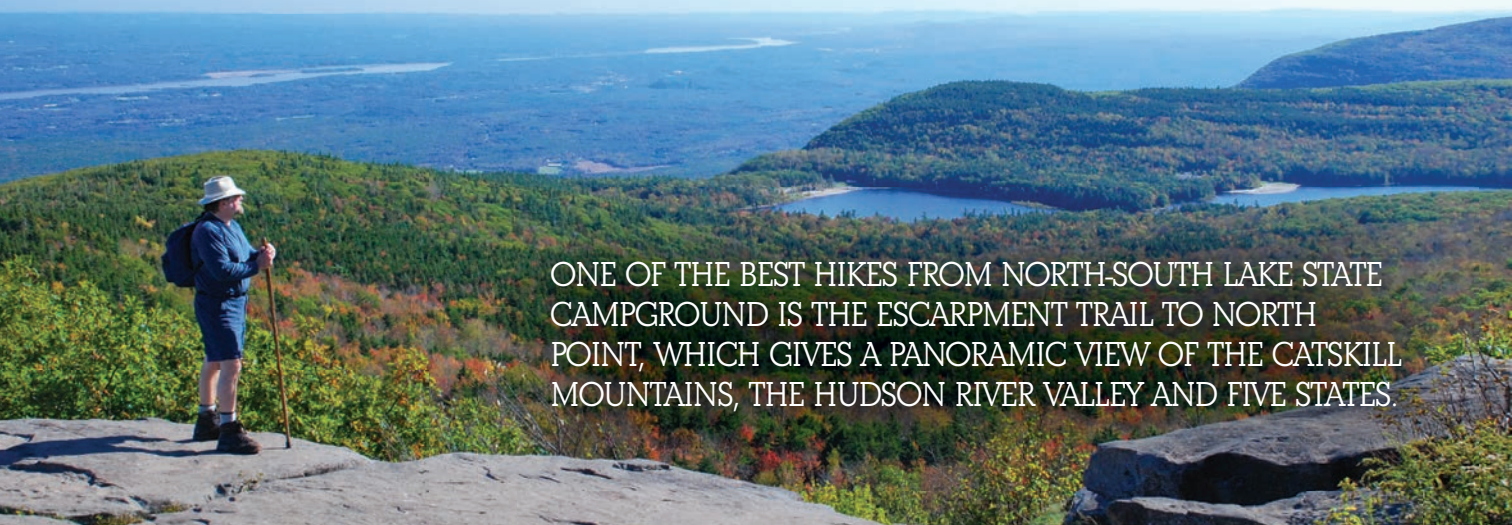
**Olana State Historic Site**  
518-828-0135, [www.parks.ny.gov/historic-sites/23/details.aspx](http://www.parks.ny.gov/historic-sites/23/details.aspx)

**Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome**  
845-752-3200, [www.oldrhinebeck.org](http://www.oldrhinebeck.org)

**Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites**  
845-229-9115, [www.nps.gov/hofr/roosevelt-vanderbilt-national-historic-sites.htm](http://www.nps.gov/hofr/roosevelt-vanderbilt-national-historic-sites.htm)

**Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park**  
845-834-2867, [www.parks.ny.gov/parks/178](http://www.parks.ny.gov/parks/178)

**West Point United States Military Academy**  
845-446-4724 (tours), [www.usma.edu/visiting](http://www.usma.edu/visiting)



ONE OF THE BEST HIKES FROM NORTH-SOUTH LAKE STATE CAMPGROUND IS THE ESCARPMENT TRAIL TO NORTH POINT, WHICH GIVES A PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE CATSKILL MOUNTAINS, THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY AND FIVE STATES.



structure is basically the same as it was when FDR died in 1945.

Here, on June 20, 1942, FDR and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill signed the agreement to manufacture the first atomic bomb. An outdoor exhibit consists of busts of both men and a sculpture made from remnants of the Berlin Wall. The West Berlin side of the sculpture is graffiti-covered, while the East Berlin side is clean because anyone who tried to get near the wall in the Communist east was shot on sight.

Today, there is still controversy over FDR's policies, but there's no dispute that he extensively transformed the country. Because of his efforts to help the less fortunate and restructure society, his fellow patricians condemned him as a "traitor to his class." However, his New Deal is credited with elevating the working poor and planting the seeds for the rise of the middle class after World War II.

Nearby is Eleanor Roosevelt

### A popular trail through the Catskills takes hikers to the two-tiered Kaaterskill Falls.

National Historic Site where the first lady retreated from public life and lived after FDR's death. You can explore the grounds on walking trails and view the home. Its simplicity is refreshing in contrast to FDR's grand home and the Gilded Age opulence of the Vanderbilt Mansion.

Built for \$2.25 million in 1898, when workers made a dollar a day, the Italian Renaissance-style Vanderbilt structure sits on an estate of 211 acres overlooking the Hudson and was referred to as "Uncle Freddy's little cottage on the Hudson" by younger members of the wealthy Vanderbilt clan. For decades, the estate had a full-time staff of 60 and was completely self-sufficient.

Entering the reception hall, you stand under 20-foot ceilings and a three-story skylight. The dining room is 30 by 50 feet, and the table seats 30. It is no wonder that for years after



taking our daughter, Shannon, there as a child, whenever I asked where she wanted to go camping, she'd say, "To the big house, Daddy." Not a roughing-it kind of kid, my daughter; no pop-up camper for her.

To the north in Staatsburg are the contiguous Ogden Mills and Ruth Livingston Mills Memorial State Park and Margaret Lewis Mills Norrie State Park, which comprise more than 1,000 acres and are home to the Mills

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## AMERICA'S RHINE

Mansion, which is similar in style and grandeur to the Vanderbilt estate. These lush, green parks offer golfing, camping, a marina, nature trails, picnic areas, kayak tours and other amenities.

### RHINEBECK, GERMANTOWN AND HUDSON

Visiting the Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome in Rhinebeck is like taking a step back in time. The museum has "one of the largest collections of early aeroplanes in the world, as well as automobiles, motorcycles and memorabilia spanning the period 1900 to 1939."

The museum is open daily from June through October, and air shows are performed weekends from mid-June through mid-October. Open-cockpit biplane rides are available weekends from June through October on a first-come, first-served basis, and weekday plane rides can be arranged. Watching the biplanes roaring closely overhead in a mock World War I battle is quite an adrenaline rush, even if at

times the narration gets a bit corny.

Just north of the airfield are two more historic homes: the Livingston Mansion in Germantown's Clermont State Park and the Frederic Edwin Church estate at Olana State Historic Site in Hudson. Both are worth a look-see, but Olana is the most interesting. The artist's Persian-style home is a colorful multilevel structure with towers and complex exterior designs that make it a work of art in itself. Gazing upon its unique beauty encourages one to utter a 1960s expression: "That's really far-out!"

### VIEWS, VIEWS AND MORE VIEWS

After Olana, we crossed to the western side of the Hudson Valley to return to our campsite. One of the best hikes from the campground is the Escarpment Trail to North Point, which gives a panoramic view of the Catskill Mountains, the Hudson River Valley and five states. A nearby trailhead off Route 23A leads past impressive Bastion Falls to the two-tiered, 231-foot Kaaterskill Falls, the highest in the state.

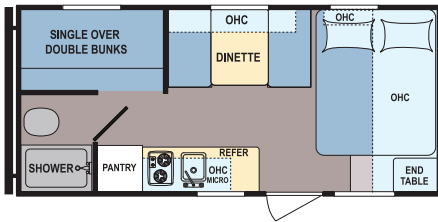
South of the campground is the 12-mile-long Ashokan Reservoir, covering more than 8,300 acres and ringed by mountains. Walking or bicycling across the dam is impressive. Biking on State Route 28 and 28A, which encircle the reservoir, is enjoyable as well. Another great biking and hiking area is Minnewaska State Park Preserve.

The 21,106-acre preserve in the Shawangunk Mountain Range rises 2,000 feet above sea level and has 35 miles of carriage roads and 20 miles of footpaths. Some are cut along the cliffs, providing spectacular views of the valley and mountains. A great circular hike or bike ride is to the pristine and secluded 2-mile-long Lake Awosting. The water is so clear, with visibility more than 10 feet down. Lake Minnewaska beach is a short stroll from the parking area, but it is not as expansive as Awosting beach.

From Minnewaska State Park, we headed back to Bear Mountain, but there is still much more to explore: wineries, farms, parks and villages. That is why the Hudson River Valley will call you to return to America's Rhine for years to come. 🚗

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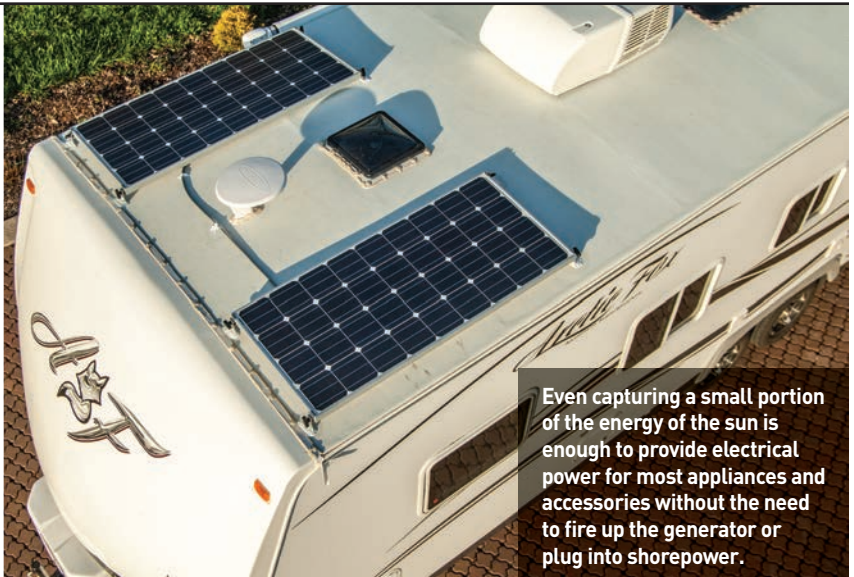
HARNESSING THE SUN WITH SOLAR PANELS KEEPS THE POWER FLOWING WHEN HOOKUPS ARE NOT AVAILABLE

**D**id you know that an area the size of a 32-foot travel trailer's roof receives enough energy from the sun during six hours in the middle of the day to power the typical American home for five days? It's true. Studies show the energy from the sun shining on an area approximately 516 square feet is equivalent to 288 kilowatt hours (kWh) of electricity, and the average household uses about 30 kWh per day.

Hence the reason an ever-increasing number of RVers are looking skyward as a way to capitalize on the sun as a source of energy to supplement their existing dependency on shorepower and generators. New, more efficient technology helps further that desire to put solar power to work.

"Solar power is freedom. Freedom to camp wherever they want, regardless of if there are hookups or not," says Garret Towne, president of AM Solar in Springfield, Oregon, one of the leading RV-oriented solar companies in the country. "We have customers in here every day having us install solar systems on everything from pickup campers and off-road tent trailers to goosenecks and fifth-wheels."

"A lot of people have the misconception that using solar power is a political statement, which is trying to be 'green' or 'environmentally friendly,'" says Towne. "And while that's a nice benefit, installing a solar system really just comes down to having all the electrical comforts of home in your RV,



Even capturing a small portion of the energy of the sun is enough to provide electrical power for most appliances and accessories without the need to fire up the generator or plug into shorepower.

using the most efficient, economical and silent way to do it."

## Taking that First Step

Getting to that point of having freedom from always being connected to shorepower or cranking up a generator for hours at a time when boondocking requires taking a close look at one's energy needs. The first step toward installing solar power is doing a power-consumption survey of your RV, and figuring out how much electricity is being used during a typical outing or over a period of time.

With that information, one can then decide on how best to build a system that accommodates those electrical needs — as well as possible future needs.

The most accurate and easiest

method to measure daily power consumption is employing a kilowatt meter for the 120-volt AC appliances and accessories, and a battery monitor to record the DC loads. Kilowatt meters come in a variety of types, including inexpensive ones that monitor the kilowatt hours of whatever appliance is plugged into the device. They are readily available on Amazon and through some of the sources listed on page 43. Smart battery monitors, like the one from

Monocrystalline solar panels are a good choice for RV use. Standard mono panels show all the wire traces on the front. Back-contact mono panels (far right) have clean black squares and are slightly more efficient, and thus have a smaller footprint for the equivalent output.





Thornwave Labs, will transmit your battery-usage data to a smartphone, and are particularly useful with lithium batteries that have a nominal change in voltage across the discharge cycle.

If you don't have a kilowatt meter or want to invest in one, you can go the old-fashioned route: call a solar RV expert (again, see our source list) or figure it out yourself. Take the watts rating listed on each appliance/accessory you use and divide that by 120 (volts) to get the load in amps. Then do the math to determine the usage in 12-volt DC amp-hours (Ah) for any given day. For example, a single-cup coffeemaker powered by an inverter might be rated at 1,420 watts, so dividing by 120 (volts) equals about 11.8 amps. If the coffeemaker is used only 20 minutes a day, that would equate to about 4 Ah per day.

A typical RV refrigerator running on LP-gas uses about 19 Ah per day to operate the 12-volt DC electronics, while a 40-inch LED TV that is rated at 150 watts and watched four hours a day consumes 5 Ah. Be sure to include items such as the water pump, stereo,

**(Above, from left) Monitoring the operation of your RV's solar and battery system is critical. Remote monitors come in a variety of sizes and prices, depending on the charge controller that you choose. Cutting out cardboard templates and positioning them on the RV's roof makes it easy to determine how many solar panels can be accommodated and how large they can be. Here, an employee of AM Solar gets ready to install a system on a customer's travel trailer.**

lights and fans, and power to operate the inverter and even chargers for phones, tablets and laptops. Anything that consumes electricity needs to be in the tally. This will give the numbers you need to build an adequate battery bank and solar array. Keep in mind that AC loads powered by an inverter need to be multiplied by a factor of 10 to determine the current in 12-volt DC.

### Batteries: The Heart of the System

There are three types of batteries used in RV solar systems: flooded, absorbed glass mat (AGM) and lithium. Flooded batteries have wet cells, which have to be maintained with distilled water on a regular basis. AGM batteries are sealed, and unlike flooded-cell counterparts, do not gas, which makes them safer to use in unventilated environments. Of the two, AGMs are better because they are able to withstand

more charge/discharge cycles and generally have a longer lifespan than wet-cell batteries.

Lithium batteries are the best. They are considerably more expensive than the best AGMs. The upside is lithium batteries last up to three times as long as AGMs and their output level stays constant through the entire discharge cycle, whereas AGM and flooded batteries begin falling off even before they are at 50 percent charge. If money isn't a deciding factor, go lithium. Keep in mind that several peripheral electronic devices might be needed in addition to the cost of the batteries themselves.

Battery type aside, amp-hours, not cranking amps, is the important number. Then it comes down to how many batteries in the bank are needed to supply the demand. That's because batteries power everything



### Matching Solar to Your RV

When selecting batteries and a solar-charging system, it's important to know your daily power requirements in amp-hours and then do the math. Remember that for best longevity, flooded lead acid and AGM batteries should not be discharged below 50 percent of capacity, so a 200-Ah battery bank will yield, at most, 100 Ah before needing a recharge. Lithium batteries are lighter and can be discharged to approximately 80 percent before recharging. Your solar array must be capable of conditioning the batteries on a daily basis, and therefore the output of the panels should be matched carefully to provide adequate charging amperage during the expected hours of sunlight in a 24-hour period.

Selecting the proper batteries for the battery bank is the key to the entire solar-charging system. Either flooded, AGM or lithium-iron-phosphate batteries can be used, with the latter the most efficient. Here, AM Solar installed two Lifeline 300-Ah AGM batteries to store the power from three 100-watt solar panels.

that operates on 12 volts DC. And the amp-hour capacity determines how long those items can run without the battery bank needing a recharge. Batteries are the heart of the system. Don't skimp.

## Solar Panels: The Truth

Despite what solar snobs might say, the truth is, there's not much difference in solar-panel efficiency, as far as the RV owner is concerned. Polycrystalline

solar panels are not quite as efficient as monocrystalline solar panels because they use a less-pure silicone in the manufacturing process. But experts at companies that specialize in manufacturing solar components and installing them on RVs say variances in weather far outweigh the 5 percent difference in the per-square-foot of energy production between the two.

On monocrystalline panels, the difference is between conventional



Single- and multiport roof caps allow for a single-point connection for solar panels, with ports in place for later expansion. No rewiring required.



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Model shown (Force) supports: Tag-Along and Pintle  
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panels, which show all the little wires in the front, and back-contact panels, where the front looks like clean black squares. Back-contact mono panels are slightly more efficient and slightly more expensive, and have a slightly smaller footprint for the same watt rating as conventional counterparts. For example, a 100-watt back-contact panel measures 20 by 40 inches, whereas a

## The Roof Puzzle

When deciding on solar-panel array, get up on the roof and scope out the layout. Take cardboard cutouts the same size and shape as the solar panels you are contemplating. Leave at least 2 inches between the panel edges and any obstructions, and allow room to walk around when the panels are in position. Once templates are set, record the number of cutouts and their sizes to make it easy when price shopping.

Solar panels can be mounted by drilling into the roof and using screws and/or industrial-strength adhesive tape on flat, smooth surfaces. Most panels for RV use come with mounting hardware and cabling to the combiner box.



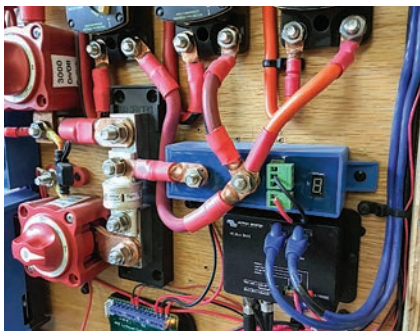


conventional version will measure 22 by 48 inches and cost about \$100 less.

### Charge Controller: The Core of the Matter

Once the power needs and storage issues have been figured out, the next part is the system core — the charge controller. The charge controller regulates the voltage and current to the batteries.

Solar-charge controllers come in two varieties: pulse width modulation (PWM) and maximum power point tracking (MPPT). PWM is a post-direct connection from the panels to the battery. MPPT, the high-end state-of-the-art technology, has a transformer in it that allows the panels to operate at the voltage they perform most efficiently for the temperature, and then it steps that voltage down and boosts the



(Above, from top) Wiring is a big factor in solar systems. The key is to use as heavy-gauge wiring as practical to keep voltage drop between the roof-mounted panels and the batteries at less than 5 percent. Clean wiring from top to bottom reflects the professionalism of an installation. Note: The complex system shown is part of the AM Solar test and demonstration hardware at its headquarters and does not reflect a typical RV installation. Heavy-gauge cabling leading to and from the charge controller is critical for optimum performance of any solar wiring system. The charge controller should be sized to accommodate future expansion.

current to safely feed it to the battery bank. The downside is, while MPPT controllers are about 20 percent more efficient at power conversion, they can cost twice as much as a PWM controller of the same rating.

According to Towne, AM Solar recommends customers on a tight budget go with PWM controllers if the system is less than 200 watts, and step up to MPPT technology when the system exceeds 400 watts. "I personally

prefer, even on small systems, the MPPT, just because of the quality and Bluetooth connectivity," says Towne. "It's a high end, it's going to last a lot longer, and it gives you precision programming to match the charging profiles of your batteries."

Selecting the right charge controller for the system is relatively easy, as suppliers are usually very clear on what the products can handle, based on the design of your system and your needs.

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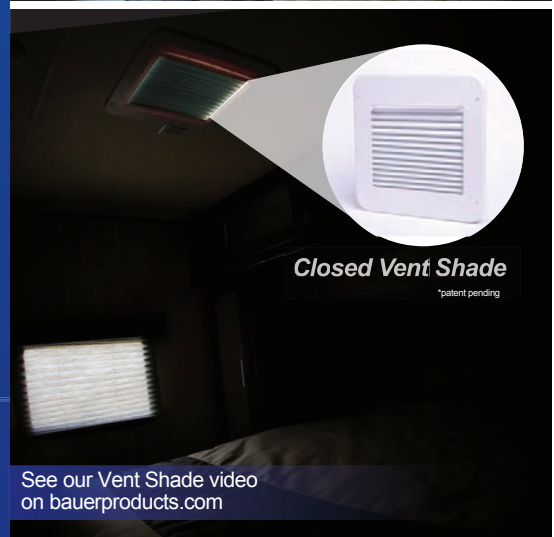
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## Wire Matters...a Lot

The last element of an RV solar-charging system is wiring. It's a critical element, and the one thing Towne and other solar-installation experts say the DIY crowd messes up on the most. If you are contemplating doing a solar installation yourself, be aware that routing the cabling from the combiner box on the roof to the controller and battery bay can be quite complicated, unless there's already a conduit to use for

such purposes. Holes need to be bored through the RV's roof and cabinetry, and wiring routed through all kinds of weird angles. Expert installers have seen it all and know the tricks and techniques to make a solar installation work.

The next biggest challenge is keeping the voltage drop between the panels and the charge controller minimized, so using the proper size cabling is very important. Voltage drop is proportional to the gauge of wire

and distance of the run. "Total voltage drop should be limited to a maximum of 5 percent (calculated from panels to battery)," says Steve Bouton, technical manager of Grape Solar.

Ideally, installers try to keep the reading around 2 percent. If there's more than a 5 percent voltage drop, then there won't be enough voltage differential between the charge-controller input, the solar array and the charge-controller output to the battery array to push current from the panels to the batteries.

That's why solar installers recommend using at least 10-gauge

## Stop the bounce, jounce and rock and roll!

Have you ever opened the door to your trailer after a road trip and looked into your own personal earthquake zone? Cabinet drawers wide open with their contents scattered over the floor? Furniture that's 'walked'? Well, you're not alone. The solution? Comfort Ride Shock Absorber and Slipper Spring Systems, **NEW** from Roadmaster!

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Comfort Ride Shock Absorber and Slipper Spring kits are available separately but when installed together, offer a more significant improvement in ride quality.



### Choosing an Inverter

If you are going to be using any AC-powered appliances, electronics or power tools, an inverter will be necessary to convert 12-volt DC from the battery bank to 120-volt AC. What size power inverter you choose depends on how many watts are consumed by the item(s) you need to power. Total those numbers up, add 15 percent for a safety margin and choose the inverter that has that rating or a little larger.

Power inverters come in two basic types: modified sine wave and pure sine wave. Without getting into the details, modified-sine-wave inverters are less expensive, but pure-sine-wave inverters, such as Xantrex's Freedom X Series, are the ones to buy if you are going to be powering appliances, TVs, computers or other sensitive electronic devices. Compare inverters' power consumption to see which one is the most efficient, and pay attention to peak capacity, which is needed for operating items such as microwaves, refrigerators and power tools.

Other must-have features for an RV-solar application include automatic overload and shutoff, thermal protection, multiple AC outlets, short-circuit and low-voltage protection, and built-in AC-to-DC battery charging, including lithium-ion, which cannot be connected to a charger designed for typical lead-acid batteries.

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wire to connect the solar panels to the combiner box, and heavier (8-, 6-, 4- or even 2-gauge) to connect the controller and batteries. AM Solar's website has some handy tools to help figure out such things. There's nothing wrong with going too big on cabling; it's just more expensive and a little bit more difficult to work with.

Many readers ask if having an RV "prewired" for solar from the factory helps cut down installation costs. Surprisingly, no, according to solar installers. "It's a waste of money if you're installing more than a 200-watt solar unit," Towne says. "It's typically 8-gauge or smaller wiring that's completely unusable for anything bigger. It has to be pulled out and

replaced with at least 4-gauge cabling."

Speaking of costs, solar-charging systems run the gamut in pricing. A simple DIY single-battery, single-panel 100-watt system can run as little as \$500. On the other end of the solar spectrum, a top-tier installation on a big quad-slide fifth-wheel can cost from \$12,000 to \$50,000 with lithium batteries, the best cabling and a proper inverter, Towne said. Cost depends on what you need and whether or not you do

the install or have it professionally done.

Big system or little, taking advantage of the sun's free energy shining down makes a lot of sense. It's silent technology hard at work, even on overcast days. Such a system extends battery life when the RV is parked for long periods outdoors, it's nearly maintenance-free, and it reduces expenses when camping because you don't need to use fuel or pay electrical-hookup fees to keep the lights on. That's freedom. 🚐

## Solar Sources

- AM Solar  
541-726-1091, [www.amsolar.com](http://www.amsolar.com)
- ArkPak  
630-723-0072, [www.arkportablepower.com](http://www.arkportablepower.com)
- Eco-Worthy  
415-376-0826, [www.eco-worthy.com](http://www.eco-worthy.com)
- EEZ RV Products  
510-910-5397, [www.eezrvproducts.com](http://www.eezrvproducts.com)
- Goal Zero  
888-794-6250, [www.goalzero.com](http://www.goalzero.com)
- Go Power  
866-247-6527, [www.gpelectric.com](http://www.gpelectric.com)
- Grape Solar  
877-264-1014, [www.grapesolar.com](http://www.grapesolar.com)
- Lifeline Batteries  
909-599-7816, [www.lifelinebatteries.com](http://www.lifelinebatteries.com)
- Nature Power  
800-588-0590, [www.naturepowerproducts.com](http://www.naturepowerproducts.com)
- Nature's Generator  
805-383-0003, [www.naturesgenerator.com](http://www.naturesgenerator.com)
- Renogy  
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- Xantrex  
800-670-0707, [www.xantrex.com](http://www.xantrex.com)
- Zamp Solar  
541-728-0924, [www.zampsolar.com](http://www.zampsolar.com)

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## THEFT-PREVENTION PRODUCTS AND SECURITY STRATEGIES TO PROTECT YOUR RV AND PERSONAL PROPERTY

**T**here's nothing like hitting the road to leave all of life's worries behind for a while. But some of those worries follow you wherever you go, like the possibility of break-ins and thefts of your RV and its contents. Fortunately, you don't need to fear every stopover in a new place or every encounter with strangers. Most RV folks are good, honest people. It's the other ones you have to be aware of — and taking a few sensible precautions can help you avoid meeting them.

### **Before You Go**

Before even turning a wheel toward your vacation destination, make sure your nailed-down house is secure. If you regularly park your RV near your house and one sunny morning it's gone, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to guess you might be on the road for a while.

Parking a car in the driveway instead of the garage can make the place look occupied.

Stop the mail and ask a neighbor or the local police to drive by occasionally to make sure everything is all right. Solicitations left on the porch are a sure sign that no one is home. Ask a neighbor to remove and trash unwanted materials.

Light timers inside the house might not fool anyone into thinking you're home — a few nights watching their exact regularity is the tip-off — but then again, they might. If you're gone long enough, it might be worth signing up with a home-security company.

Before you leave home, let someone know where you're going, your route and how long you'll be gone. Make sure your roadside-assistance policy is up to date and your RV is in good condition to avoid getting stranded in the middle

of nowhere with no cell coverage to summon help. Check in with friends or email to let them know everything is going according to schedule, and have a backup plan in place if you fall off the radar or have to change your itinerary significantly.

### **On the Road**

On the way to your destination, you'll probably slip into a rest stop for a bathroom break or a nap. A short stop is fine, but try not to overnight in rest stops, especially those along interstate highways. Remote places with a lot of traffic coming and going are prime locations for thieves who strike fast and get away faster. Park near light poles at night, and alongside other vehicles anytime — witnesses discourage bad guys.

Do whatever needs to be done outside the RV in shifts so someone stays in the rig at all times. If you can't wait, lock the doors when you leave the RV, and don't leave anything valuable in the tow vehicle or visible through the RV's windows where passersby can see it. All of this applies at pit stops, too. Even the short time it takes to go inside and pay for your fuel and a snack is long enough for someone to sneak into your rig and grab something.

Plan stops for fuel, shopping and ATM withdrawals during daylight hours, and don't be shy about waiting until the next town if the vibe where you are isn't right. Not having cell-phone coverage for an emergency call is a valid reason for moving on, too.

Walmart parking lots are favorite overnight spots, but not all Walmarts are in the best part of town. Check out the surrounding area for graffiti, barred shop windows, vacant storefronts or trash in the gutters. If the neighborhood passes muster, park under a light pole with the entry door of your RV facing other overnighters, so anyone coming into or out of your rig is visible to fellow campers.

### In the Campground

Once you've settled into your spot at the RV park, find out the emergency numbers for the park and area, and in public parks enter the numbers for the ranger or campground host into your phone. Ask the people in charge if there are nightly patrols and how easy it is for outsiders to come and go. Is the facility gated? Are there security cameras? How well lit is the campground at night? Where's the nearest town? Urban RV parks are more often targeted by thieves than ones out in the boondocks.

## EVEN THE SHORT TIME IT TAKES TO GO INSIDE AND PAY FOR YOUR FUEL AND A SNACK IS LONG ENOUGH FOR SOMEONE TO SNEAK INTO YOUR RIG AND GRAB SOMETHING.

While most people in the average RV park are just like you, out for a relaxing time, you can't assume that in every case. Pay attention to who you are opening your door to when there's a knock, and don't be fooled if they ask for you by name, especially if you have a sign on your rig that says something like "Bob and Sally Brown's Rollin' Rancho." Ask unexpected visitors to stand in front of a window so you can get a look at them, and keep your phone handy in case it's a face you don't recognize.

One of the best parts of RVing is meeting new people. Introduce yourself and your family to your neighbors so they know who should be hanging around your campsite and who shouldn't. Offer to keep an eye on their site if they'll do the same for you. All the same, if you leave your site for shopping or sightseeing, secure your outdoor furniture, bikes and other valuables with cable locks to prevent walk-off thefts, or put them inside and pull down all the window shades to prevent strangers from eyeballing your valuables.

### At the Campsite and in Storage

A portable wireless security system like the LarryAlert can keep you in contact with what's happening at your campsite and notify you remotely via your phone. If you're using an audible alarm, just don't be That Guy whose alarm is adjusted to such high sensitivity that it's set off by every breeze

and annoys the entire campground. Motion-sensitive outside lights are less annoying but are still an effective deterrent.

RV dealers and service centers have master keys to the latch locks on many models of RVs in case the owner leaves the rig for service but not the keys. Those masters sometimes find their way to less savory places, which is why many RVers change out the factory locks for aftermarket ones that use just one key for all doors and outside-compartment lids. Also, the compartment doors on most trailers use a CH-751 key, which means anyone can open them. If you can't change the main entry lock, that's OK. Just make sure you deadbolt the door every time you leave, as the master keys can't open the deadbolt side of the lock. Keep a spare key in your wallet or someplace accessible but safe.

Theft of the contents of RVs is far more common than outright stealing the RV itself — imagine the seriocomic spectacle of thieves towing a fully loaded fifth-wheel and trying to elude pursuing cops — but you don't want yours to be one of the exceptions. Coupler, pin and wheel locks prevent tow-away thefts, and are also a good idea if you put your RV in long-term storage at a remote location.

With the basic security strategies in mind, there are plenty of products to help you stay safe on the road and protect your gear. Here's a roundup of some of them.



### LIPPERT COMPONENTS

Lippert's **ToyLok** cable lock mounts to your RV, truck bed or hitch receiver with different mounting adapters. The shorter nylon-bodied version (\$64.95) comes with a 15-foot coated cable to thread through bicycles, furniture or grills to secure them while you're away from your site; the 18-foot model (\$89.95) comes with a steel body. The cable is self-retracting and secured with a specialty padlock.

[www.lci1.com/toylok](http://www.lci1.com/toylok)

## BAUER PRODUCTS

Made for travel trailer applications, the **Bauer NE Keyless Entry System** (\$209.99) lets you program in a four-digit PIN for security and convenience. The battery-powered touch pad fits most RV-entry doors. Buttons are activated by touch and don't require pressing them to enter the code.

The **LP Tank Lock** (\$9.99) consists of two stamped-steel, zinc-coated hasps for securing LP-gas cylinders. The lower hasp has mounting holes for the LP-gas regulator and rests on the crossbar so the wing nut can be tightened down. The upper hasp rests on the wing nut while engaging the lower hasp. Sold separately, a keyed-alike padlock (\$24.99) can be used on the upper hasp.

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



## DEADBOLT

The **Blockhead Trailer Coupler Lock** (\$34.95) provides maximum security for unattended trailers. The extruded and tempered aluminum body has a high strength-to-weight ratio and a simple, rugged push-button lock system. It uses a double-sided automotive-style key for easy insertion and removal. A shuttered key opening keeps the weather out. The lock fits all 1 7/8-inch and 2-inch couplers.

A versatile lock assortment for towing and storage, the **Hitch and Trailer Anti-Theft Lock Kit** (\$69.95) comes with a Blockhead Trailer Coupler Lock, an RC1 Adjustable Trailer Coupler Latch Lock, an RH3 Receiver Hitch Lock that fits all Class III and IV ball mounts, and two keys. It's available for 1 7/8-inch and 2-inch couplers (TSK1-AS), and 2-inch and 2 5/16-inch couplers (TSK3-AS).

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

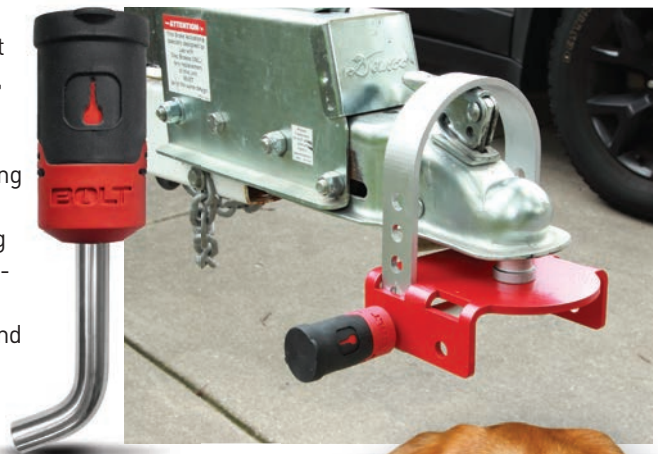
## BOLT LOCK

Bolt's **Off-Vehicle Coupler Lock** (\$74.99) prevents trailer theft by securing the coupler with a weatherproof, hardened-steel, corrosion-resistant cover. The red powder-coated finish acts as a visible theft deterrent, and the plate-tumbler sidebar prevents picking and bumping. The double ball-bearing locking mechanism opens with the vehicle's ignition key.

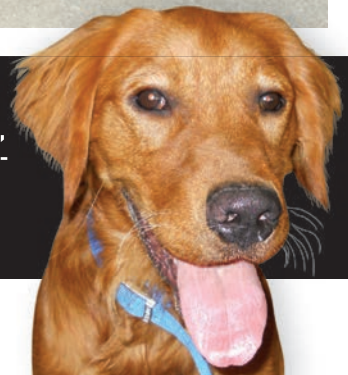
The **Receiver Lock** (\$31.99) features an auto-return spring mechanism that locks when the key is removed. A double ball-bearing locking mechanism and a plate-tumbler sidebar are standard. The weatherproof Receiver Lock comes in 5/8-inch and 1/2-inch sizes and is easily keyed to your vehicle's ignition key.

Both locks come with a limited lifetime warranty.

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



**DOG Alert** 🐕 The Diligently on Guard (DOG) Alert from Canis Familiaris, Inc. is powered by protein, carbohydrates, water and belly rubs. The DOG comes with an audible alarm triggered by exciting smells, odd noises or strangers at the door, and a silent alarm indicated by vigorous wagging of a long, conspicuous tail. Operational status indicated by a bright pink tongue. The Dickens model (the author's golden retriever, shown here) weighs 80 pounds, though various sizes can be purchased. Available from rescue groups and animal shelters nationwide. Prices vary but worth every penny. [www.aspc.org](http://www.aspc.org)





### MINDER RESEARCH

Two LED lights in one, the **Motion-Activated Emergency Light and Flashlight** (\$29.95) stays on as long as there is motion within range and automatically shuts off after 15 seconds of no activity. The light has a sensor range of 10 feet and a selectable on/off/auto switch. The rechargeable unit lights up automatically if the power fails and doubles as a 6-LED flashlight.

[www.minderresearch.com/nightminder](http://www.minderresearch.com/nightminder)



### LARRYALERT

Paired with a downloadable smartphone app, the LarryAlert portable wireless security system works in paired or standalone mode, and attaches via a suction cup and a hook-and-loop-strap tie-down. When activated, it creates an invisible shield around your toys or equipment, and is triggered if the shield is broken by a person or object. Fifteen sequential photos are taken to show the triggering events. You can use the voice speaker to communicate, giving a warning to intruders or a hello to friends. Two models are available: the standard **LarryAlert** with an active pairing range of 100 feet (\$149), and the **Extended Range** version with active pairing of 450 feet (\$179).

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



### RJ LOCKS

The **Nut Cover and Lock** (\$69.99) prevents thieves from unscrewing the nut under the hitch ball. Built from anodized solid billet-aluminum housing and a carbon-steel fitting, the replacement nut for a trailer ball will not rust and is designed to stay attached, whether or not something is being towed. It's made to fit existing ball mounts with a 1-inch-diameter shank, which typically have a 2- or 2½-inch ball.

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

### ROSS RV INNOVATIONS

Many RVs have a frosted-glass window in the entry door, making it hard to see who's outside. One solution is the **Clear View Entry Door Window Kit** (\$149.99), a black-tinted tempered-glass RV-door window replacement that allows you to see out. Add a Zarcor CloZures shade for privacy (see the Hands On product review on page 57).

[www.rossrvinnovations.info/window-kit](http://www.rossrvinnovations.info/window-kit)

[www.campingworld.com/clear-view-entry-door-window-kit](http://www.campingworld.com/clear-view-entry-door-window-kit)



### AP PRODUCTS

Another tinted tempered-glass replacement window for entry doors, the **Slim Shade** (\$119.95) allows you to see outside while reducing the sun's glare. An integrated pleated shade pulls down for complete privacy. Available through RV dealers and at Camping World.

[www.approducts.net](http://www.approducts.net)

[www.campingworld.com/slim-shade-rv-door-window-with-built-in-shade-black](http://www.campingworld.com/slim-shade-rv-door-window-with-built-in-shade-black) 📞



# LIVING THE DREAM



A SPUR-OF-THE-MOMENT ROAD TRIP TURNED INTO A LIFE-CHANGER FOR AN ALABAMA COUPLE WHEN THEY DISCOVERED A VINTAGE TRAILER TO RENOVATE

**F**ive years ago Robert Fouts and his girlfriend, Pat Grumm, hopped in the car for an adventure. The day's plan changed, however, when they happened upon an old travel trailer sitting at the side of the road with a "For Sale" sign on it. On a whim, they stopped to take a look.

"We really didn't wake up in the morning and say we were going to buy a vintage camper," Fouts says. "But we ended up buying it for \$700 — and didn't know what we were getting into."





Robert Fouts and Pat Grumm (below left) renovated this 21-foot 1968 Cree Balboa Deluxe, demonstrating how a small trailer can serve as a comfortable permanent home that overflows with charm.

## SERRO SCOTTY REMODEL

Almost immediately, they began researching how best to renovate their 15-foot 1977 Serro Scotty HiLander. Over the next three years, they worked on the trailer, totally remodeling it. Since both love to garden, they chose a gardening theme for decorating and nicknamed the trailer Garden Party.

Soon afterward, Fouts and Grumm attended their first vintage-camper rally at Chewacla State Park in Auburn, Alabama. They quickly struck up friendships with other vintage-camper enthusiasts, sharing remodeling stories and talking about old times.

"After the first rally, we looked at each other and said, 'This was so much fun. When's the next one?'" Fouts says. The couple now proudly talks about their camper family, a large group of people who live within two hours of them. They frequently camp together, and anywhere from two to 30 people may show up.

## HOBBY OR LIFESTYLE?

At this point Fouts and Grumm were hooked on vintage camping as a way of life. They purchased a second vintage trailer in need of renovation — a 21-foot 1968 Cree Balboa Deluxe — for \$495.

"We learned a lot from our experiences with the first camper, and with the second camper, we knew it was all about the bed," Fouts says.

He elaborates by explaining that they cook outside and live outside, so most of what they do inside is sleep. With that in mind, the first thing they did on the Cree remodel was fix up the bed with room on each side to walk around, making it a comfortable and functional space.

This time, the couple chose a Native American theme to decorate the trailer and named it Wiki Up. *Wikiup* is the nomadic Indian word for a temporary shelter. Coincidentally, Cree is also the name of one of the largest groups of Native Americans, and it all just seemed to fit, particularly since Grumm is part Native American.

Fast-forward to 2016, when Chewacla State Park had a vacancy for its campground-host position. The park ranger, a friend of Grumm's, offered the position to her, as she had recently retired from nursing. She jumped at the chance to make the switch to work-camping.

"I love it," she says. "We sold everything in my house — including the house." Grimm moved into Wiki Up, which is now permanently located at Chewacla State Park. "It takes me 15 minutes to clean my house. I don't miss the stuff at all. Things aren't necessary to make you happy."

As a full-time camp host at the state park, Grumm works part time, usually 10 to 20 hours per week, which she splits with Fouts. Grumm loves cutting the grass, while Fouts often helps the park with special projects. In return, they receive a free campsite and electricity, sewer, water and cable hookups.

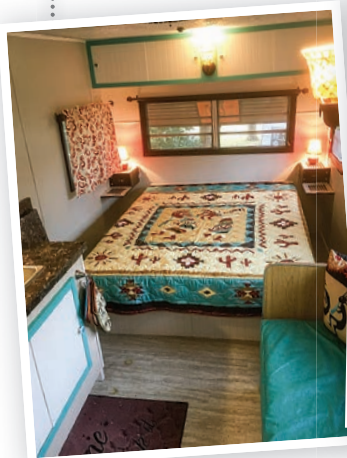
## FLAMINGO-THEMED CAMPSITE

The two have worked hard to make their host campsite into a colorful, quirky, fun place. The campground's former host had started by adding a pink flamingo to the outdoor decor. It became so popular that Grumm and Fouts have drastically expanded the flamingo family with enough birds to populate a whimsical Flamingo Park and Flamingo Rescue Center (pictured above). Campers often gift flamingos to the campsite, personalizing them with their names and taking photos to make it official. "They're quite a hit," Fouts says.

Additionally, the entire campsite is filled with interesting knickknacks, seating areas and an outdoor tent-covered kitchen, and the couple has landscaped extensively with large rocks. A happy and welcoming orange, red and teal pattern ties it all together, inside and out.



## LIVING THE DREAM



Wiki Up's renovated interior oozes 1960s charm and Native American influence. Even though the owners cook most of their meals outdoors, the well-thought-out kitchen is a functional and comfortable layout for year-round living and matches the look of the rest of the trailer. Making sure they had walking space on both sides of the bed was the first item on the couple's remodeling list.

### COST OF RENOVATION

Fouts estimates that he has spent about \$5,000 on the renovation of Wiki Up, with a large portion of that going to new appliances including a refrigerator, an induction oven, a water heater, a shower, sinks and a toilet. He also added a deck off the front side.

According to Fouts, the package wouldn't be complete if the towing vehicle weren't also vintage, so he purchased a 1966 Ford F100 pickup, "like the one I had in high school," and spent three years fixing it up. He's done an eye-popping job on it, down to the gleaming blue paint with red accents on the tires and chrome.

Ultimately, what really comes across is how vintage camping has changed their lives for the better. Fouts and Grumm have fallen in love with Chewacla Park, camp-hosting

and their camper family. They enjoy having new neighbors every night, and they find Wiki Up is often the center of attention at the campground.

In addition, Fouts pointed out that the dynamic of camping is such a de-stressing experience that people will often take time to socialize, unlike at home where neighbors often are too time-crunched to talk to each other.

"It's nothing to get into an hour conversation with a stranger," Fouts says. "It's like a mini-retirement for people."

### FOLLOWING A DREAM

This couple has found that vintage-trailer living agrees with them immensely. Since Wiki Up is permanently located at Chewacla, they use Garden Party for their own camping trips. Work-camping has allowed them to retire in a way they never

dreamed possible.

"You can retire at home and try and keep up with the mortgage and the bills and all that, or retire at a campground and have different neighbors every night and social activities and no bills," Fouts says. He jokingly refers to it as his "gated community." He adds, "The only time I spend money is when I leave the gates, so I try to stay inside!"

Grumm agrees and offers these words of advice to others: "Don't be afraid to live your dream. And do it while you have time." 🏠

**Wiki Up attracts visitors with its colorful motif, vintage appeal and fun-happens-here ambience. Made for relaxing, the inviting front porch is surrounded by beautiful landscape.**



## WORKING and CAMPING

The following websites provide information on job opportunities for RVers looking for seasonal and temporary work.

**CoolWorks**  
[www.coolworks.com](http://www.coolworks.com)

**Recreation Resource Management**  
[www.work-camping.com](http://www.work-camping.com)

**Workamper News**  
[www.workamper.com](http://www.workamper.com)  
The longtime service for matching RVers and employers is hosting the Workamper Rendezvous job fair in Heber Springs, Arkansas, October 15 to 19 this year.  
[www.workamperevent.com](http://www.workamperevent.com)

**Workamping Jobs**  
[www.workampingjobs.com](http://www.workampingjobs.com)

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



# KEEP PASSING THE PUMPS

PIT STOPS ARE FEWER AND FARTHER BETWEEN WITH TRANSFER FLOW'S NEW 60-GALLON REPLACEMENT FUEL TANK FOR F-250 AND F-350 DIESEL TRUCKS

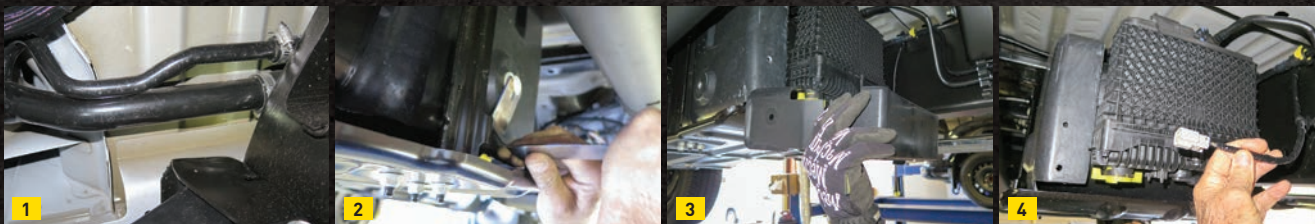


The following is a true story. Names and places have been changed to protect the innocent. John and Mary were headed for the mountains for the weekend. Trailer hooked up. Water filled. Toys all packed. Dog and kids loaded. Final check of the tires. All good. They got an early start to grab their favorite campsite. Fuel was at about three quarters of a tank. Plenty to get there. They were off.

Climbing out of Sacramento into the Sierra range pulling a heavy trailer takes a toll on fuel mileage. By the time they

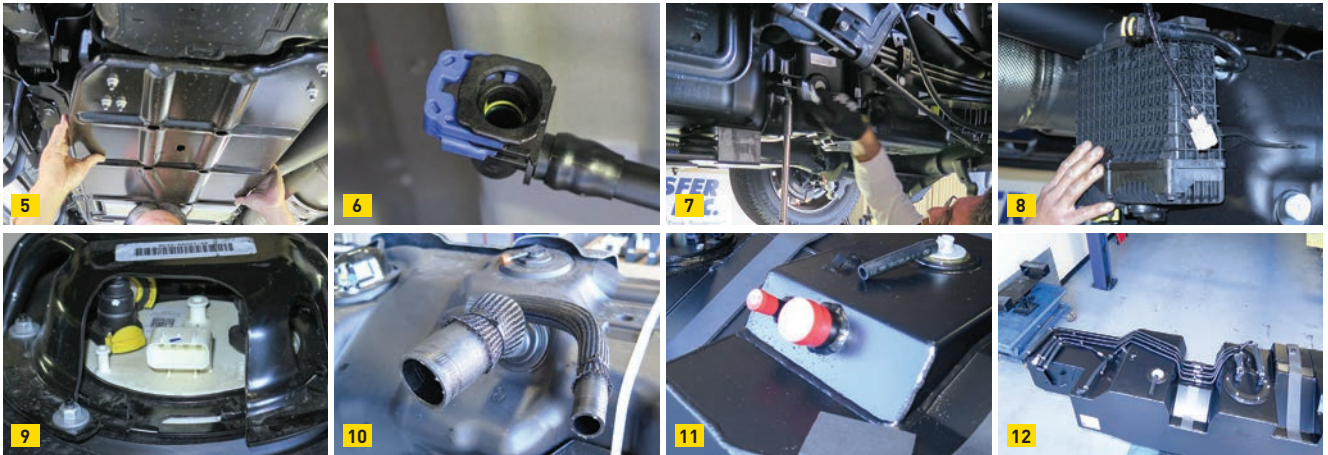
got over Donner Pass to Truckee, the low-fuel light was blinking annoyingly. The last time they had filled up, diesel was \$3.19. At Lake Tahoe, it would be \$3.89. That's \$21 more for 30 gallons. Oh, if they just had a bigger tank on their new 2018 Ford F-350.

An easy solution is Transfer Flow's new 60-gallon replacement tank, which would nearly double John and Mary's range. We stopped by the Transfer Flow facilities in Chico, California, to see how their engineers managed to fit twice



1) The original fuel and vent hoses were disconnected. 2) Small pushpins were removed from the fuel-water separator cover. 3) The plastic cover on the fuel-water separator would not be reused on the new tank. 4) The electrical connection for the fuel-water separator was long enough to be reused on the new tank if one of the push-in wire clips from the frame is removed.

## KEEP PASSING THE PUMPS



5) The factory fuel tank's skid plate was removed and discarded. 6) Plastic color-coded clips made it easy to reinstall hoses on the new tank. 7) Bolts holding the retaining straps on the factory tank were removed. 8) The plug for the water separator was disconnected as the factory tank was lowered. 9) With the tank slightly lowered, the hoses and sending-unit plug could be disconnected. 10) OEM fill and vent hoses would be reused on the new tank. 11) Fuel or vent ports on the new tank were positioned for the OEM hoses during final installation. 12) Carefully engineered steel lines were preinstalled for installation on fuel and return ports. Two new rollover vents can be seen.

the capacity into a stock truck.

With the big Ford on the rack, the first step was to remove the factory skid plate. It was no longer needed because Transfer Flow tanks are built of 12-gauge aluminized steel. A flat-blade screwdriver or fork tool was used to pop off the push-in fasteners on the fuel-water separator protective shield, which was also no longer needed.

Plugs and hoses were disconnected. A Torx screwdriver was needed to remove the retaining screw on the bottom of the fuel-water separator. The unit would be reinstalled on the new tank. Color-coded clips make for easy quick-disconnect of the hoses. Factory-fill and breather hoses were disconnected and would be reused on the new tank. The two rollover hoses were replaced by two new ones already installed on

the tank. Retaining bolts and straps were removed, and the original tank was lowered slightly with a special jack. Now the sending-unit plug and other hoses from the top of the tank could be disconnected.

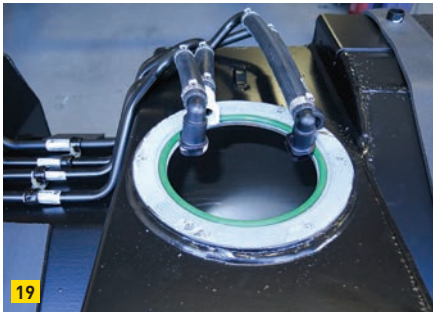
An assembly of hoses and steel lines on the new tank have been engineered and preinstalled, ready to plug and play. The fuel-water separator was reinstalled in the new tank's V-shaped bracket, and hoses were reconnected.

The fuel sender with its submersible pump was carefully extracted from the OEM tank. Its float level was checked with an ohmmeter for the new tank. After it was installed, it was pressure-checked for possible leaks. Correct positioning is aided by a locating tab on the Transfer Flow sender ring.

Two heavy-duty mounting brackets were bolted to the



13) The factory fuel-water separator was removed from the original tank and reinstalled into the V-bracket on the front of the new tank. All hoses were reconnected. 14) Transfer Flow hoses were precisely aligned to plug into the fuel-water separator. 15) A Torx wrench was used to secure the fuel-water separator to its bracket. 16) This factory strap bracket was removed to make room for the new tank. 17) OEM hoses were disconnected from the sending unit in preparation for removing it from the factory tank. 18) A cover plate on the hole for the sending unit and submersible pump kept contamination out during assembly.



19) With the protective cover plate removed, the hole for the sending unit could be seen. 20) The factory sending unit with its submersible fuel pump was carefully lifted out. 21) The float level on the sending unit was checked for proper operation using an ohmmeter. 22) While holding hoses out of the way, the OEM sending unit and pump were lowered into the new tank. 23) Correct positioning was aided by a locating tab on the Transfer Flow sender ring. 24) New fuel lines were reconnected to the OEM sending unit and submersible pump.

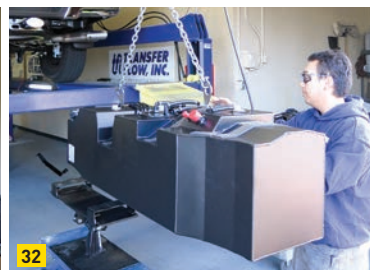
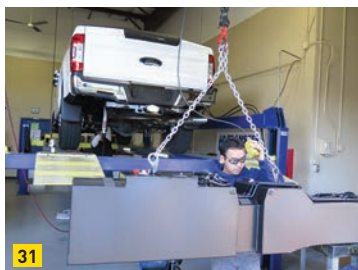
frame using OEM holes on the driver's side. They were left slightly loose to facilitate installation of the new straps. We could see the locating post protruding from the top of the tank that would exactly fit a hole in the factory frame, designed to stabilize any side-to-side motion. Both front and rear tank straps were attached using OEM bolts and clip-nuts. No new holes were needed.

An air crossover hose was installed and aligned. This hose would run over the cross-member mount and equalize

the pressure from the back to the front of the big tank. OEM fill and vent hoses were aligned and reinstalled using factory clamps. Sending-unit and all electrical plugs were reconnected.

As a final step, we moved over to the Transfer Flow fueling station to fill up the tank, 5 gallons at a time, to check the accuracy of the sender. If you are lucky to get the average of 13 MPG, for example, you would have a range of 780 miles. The difference between 60 gallons at \$3.19 and

25) Pressurizing the new tank with air allowed the installer to check for leaks around the sending unit. 26) Fill or vent hoses were removed from the OEM tank and repositioned on the Transfer Flow tank, taking care to align them correctly for the external factory tubes. 27) Threaded fittings on the side of the tank were used to connect the vapor-balancing tube to equalize pressure from the front to the rear of the big tank during filling. 28) Heavy-duty Transfer Flow strap brackets were installed on the driver's side and left slightly loose to facilitate installation of the new tank. 29) The tank-locating hole could be seen in the cross member. 30) The location pin on the top of the new Transfer Flow tank fit into an appropriate hole in the cross member to stop side-to-side motion. 31) With all necessary hoses reconnected to the fuel-water separator and the sending unit, the new 60-gallon tank was carefully lowered onto the hydraulic lift. 32) As the big tank was loaded onto the lift, care was taken not to snag or crush any existing wires or hoses.



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## KEEP PASSING THE PUMPS



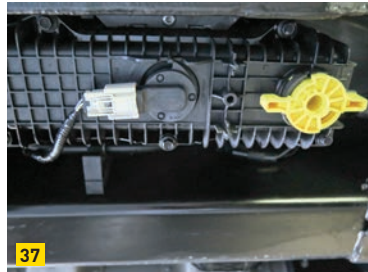
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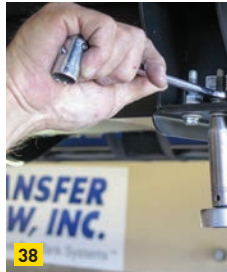
34



35



37



38

33) As the tank was raised, we could see the factory fill and vent tubes were lining up and not getting pinched. 34) Having been prealigned, the OEM hoses from the new tank were easily connected to the outside vent or fill tubes. 35) The small vapor-balancing tube wrapped over the cross member and was reconnected to the front part of the tank to equalize pressure when filling. 36) The new tank was raised into place, lining the bolts up through the holes in the lower brackets, and was secured. The electrical plug to the sending unit was reconnected (not shown). 37) The electrical plug for the fuel-water separator was also reconnected. 38) All bolts were checked using factory torque specifications. 39) The final step was to refill the tank, 5 gallons at a time, to make sure the fuel-level sensor was reading correctly.

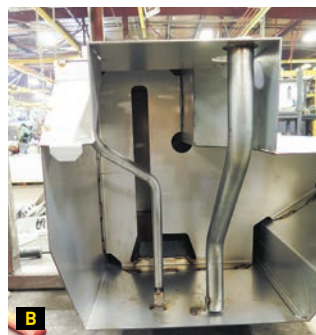
the same amount at \$3.89 is \$42, not to mention time lost at fuel stops.

We had time to take a quick tour of the manufacturing side of Transfer Flow, an impressive operation with quality as its main goal. As technology

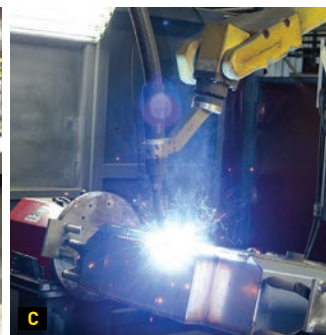
creeps in, most welding is done by robots, and even 3D printing is being used during the design process. There was plenty of hands-on bending, welding, grinding and inspections before the tanks went into a final full-



A



B



C



D



E



F



submersion water bath to check for leaks and then on to the powder-coating room.

This 60-gallon replacement fuel system will fit 2017 and 2018 F-250/350 diesel shortbed Crew Cab pickups and longbed Extended Cab trucks, 2x4 or 4x4. It includes excellent detailed instructions with photos and a list of tools needed. MSRP is \$1,579.74. The tank can be installed by any of Transfer Flow's 325 qualified fuel-tank installers throughout the United States and Canada or at the Chico facilities for \$250. Transfer Flow tanks are protected by a six-year, unlimited-mile warranty. 🚛

#### Transfer Flow

800-442-0056, [www.transferflow.com/fuel-tanks/replacement-tanks](http://www.transferflow.com/fuel-tanks/replacement-tanks)

#### « HOW IT'S MADE

**A)** Skilled technicians using computerized sheet-metal brake form the initial aluminized steel for all Transfer Flow tanks. **B)** Baffles were engineered into the tanks to keep fuel from sloshing back and forth. **C)** As technology moved into the manufacturing process, robot welders do some of the work. **D)** As a final test, tanks were pressurized and tested in a full-submersion water bath to check for possible leaks. **E)** A thorough application of baked-on powder coat gives the fuel tanks extra protection against corrosion. **F)** Technicians installed the complex system of hoses that connected to the sending unit and the fuel-water separator.

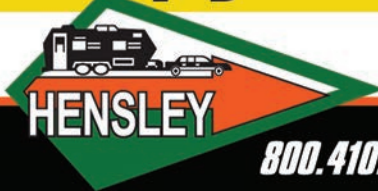
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# Now You See It. Now You Don't

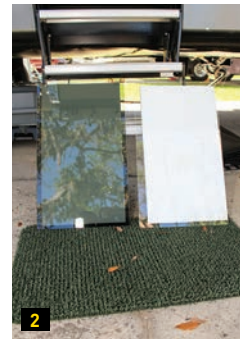
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<b>DIFFICULTY</b>	1 2 3 4 5
<b>TIME TO COMPLETE</b>	30 MINUTES
<b>TOOLS NEEDED</b>	PHILLIPS SCREWDRIVER OR GUN, NON-MARRING SCRAPER, CAULKING GUN, CAULK TOOL

**K**nock-knock. Who's there? For many trailer owners, seeing out the entry-door window is impossible because the frosted glass lets light in but doesn't allow occupants to see out. This can be a security issue if you don't know who's knocking on the door, not to mention that light streaming through the window can be annoying for those who sleep late. Adding a roller shade above the door is an option, but it doesn't always do a great job providing privacy, and it has to be retracted before



**1)** The CloZures RV Door Window Shade kit comes with an opaque beige shade (left) or a chocolate blackout shade (right), a handle and screws. **2)** Zarcor's complete window-replacement kit comes with a clear tempered-glass window (right), but for this installation we installed a tinted window by Ross RV Interiors (left). Zarcor plans to offer a tinted window in the future. **3)** The standard window has 16 screws that need to be removed to free the clamshell window frame. As you remove the last of them, have a helper gently hold the glass from the outside.



entering or exiting the trailer. Zarcor Solutions has been making its patented CloZures shutters for the marine industry since 2004 and has redesigned its flagship product, calling it the RV Door Window Shade. These shades, which are made for Lippert Components entry doors, are available in two colors and two main kits. The complete kit (part number DWK101; \$129 MSRP) includes a replacement window. The other kit (DWK102; \$99.99 MSRP) comes without a window for those who are happy with the original frosted glass.

A remarkably simple idea, the Zarcor shutter is one of those things you wish you had invented and patented yourself. It is two sheets of Lexan polycarbonate, silkscreened with light beige or chocolate stripes. The sheets are attached to each other with plastic rivets and elongated holes that allow them to be slid back and forth with a handle that

extends down at an oblique angle into the screen-door opening. In one position, the shade is open and the window can be seen through; in the other, the window is fully obscured. The chocolate version is a room-darkening shade,

**4)** Once the inner clamshell is removed, the original glass can be taken out by pulling inward carefully. It is held to the outer clamshell with sealer or, in this case, foam adhesive tape.



**« FULL DIS-CLOZURE** In the open position (far left), the shade allows a view to the outside. When closed (left), it keeps light from entering through the window. Sliding the handle opens the shade.



and the beige version allows some light through, creating a soft glow.

Both kits fit standard RV-door windows with a 12-by-21-inch inner opening, and Zarcor has been adding other sizes and designs to its product line (check the website for options). If your door doesn't have a window, you may be able to cut one in with the right tools and a steady hand.

The complete kit comes with a tempered-glass window, and Zarcor President John Halter says a tinted version is forthcoming. In the meantime,

**5)** With the outer clamshell frame removed, scrape any remaining sealer or tape from the door and clamshells with a non-marring scraper. If you break the clamshell or it is sun-faded, replacements are inexpensive and readily available at RV dealerships, Camping World and online sources. **6)** The included butyl sealer is put on the cleaned outside (non-screw-hole) clamshell, both in the window track and on the flange that will touch the door. If you don't have rope sealant (pictured), regular butyl putty tape can be formed or a liquid-caulk sealer can be used. **7)** The glass sits down onto the butyl sealer within the small tabs that align the glass. Pressing down around the glass compresses the butyl.

Camping World carries a tinted safety-glass window kit from Ross RV Interiors (\$159.95 MSRP; [www.campingworld.com/clear-view-entry-door-window-kit](http://www.campingworld.com/clear-view-entry-door-window-kit)), which we installed for this evaluation.

Replacing the window is straightfor-

ward, and butyl sealant is included. We recommend using a clear window and door silicone or polyurethane sealer, or a product like Lexel clear sealant ([www.sashco.com/products/lexel](http://www.sashco.com/products/lexel)) around the installed window frame and

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glass for an extra layer of protection against the elements.

Attaching the shade is quite simple. The kit comes with small self-adhesive 3M Dual Lock tabs on the corners to attach the shade to the window glass and the handle to the shade. Simply remove the backing on the tabs, line up the shade on the glass and attach it by pressing on the tabs to activate the adhesive. This makes removal for cleaning as easy as it gets. And since the shade sits against the recessed glass, light coming in from around the unit is almost eliminated.

**8)** Once the complete window is reinstalled, the outer butyl compresses. Be careful not to overtighten the screws, as they go into plastic, which can break. **9)** The tinted window is fully installed and sealed with Lexel clear sealant. Window and door silicone or polyurethane sealant can also be used. **10)** Small 3M Dual Lock self-adhesive tabs are used to attach the shade to the glass. **11)** Two of the clamshell screws are replaced with longer screws to attach the handle to the door. 3M Dual Lock tabs mate the handle to the sliding shade.

The handle has two screws and spacers, which replace two of the window-frame screws. Store the original screws in the owner's packet, so if you ever want to remove the shade and transfer it to a new RV, you'll have them.

The CloZures RV Door Window Shade is a simple, compact and effective way

of covering the entry-door window while still allowing visibility. We love having the ability to see through the window for security and to check out the view. 🚐

**Zarcor Solutions**

800-877-4797, [www.zarcor.com/rv\\_products/rv-door-window-kit](http://www.zarcor.com/rv_products/rv-door-window-kit)

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Escape Trailer, Circle 103 on Reader Service Card



## In a Good Light

After having my wife complain about the light shining in her eyes while she worked in the kitchen in our Keystone Bullet travel trailer, I came up with a solution to keep her happy. I created a shade using some wood I had from an earlier project. I cut a length of 90-degree outside corner molding and glued a piece of flat wood to the inside of one side. Once the glue was dry, I attached the makeshift shade to the base of the cabinet in front of the light.

The length and depth of the wood pieces depends on how large a shade you want. We installed it to be right at eye level when working at the sink and counter. Now when my wife stands at the counter, the light is no longer right in her eyes.

**Bob Edmondson, Hendersonville, North Carolina**

Technical editor's note: *If you're going to attach anything to the base of cabinets in your RV, it's recommended not to use glue or double-sided tape, as those could damage the lamination if they are later removed. Staples, screws or brads are less damaging, as holes can be filled with putty.*

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.



## Not Gone With the Wind

In our RV's outside kitchen, we have a hanging roll of paper towels that would unroll in the wind. We fixed that by spending less than \$1 on a plastic headband that has teeth on the inside of it. We place the headband over the roll of paper towels, which grips it — and problem solved! Once the roll gets small, the headband sits right on top of the roll. Between the weight of the headband and the teeth, it still keeps it from unrolling.

**Marilyn Sticek and Jeffrey Furash, South Dayton, New York**

## QUICK FIX

### The Lowdown on CPAP Setups

After reading "CPAP Setup" in April's 10-Minute Tech, it should be noted that if your CPAP machine includes a humidifier it cannot be used in an above-the-head position. It should be mounted either level or, ideally, below the sleeping-head position. If the CPAP machine is mounted too high, it will cause water to enter the supply hose and then flow into the user's nose. Instructions warn against setting them up this way.

**Stephen Matweyou, Pioneer, California**

Editors' note: *Philips Respironics, manufacturer of sleep and respiratory products, provides the following instructions: "Place the device on a firm, flat surface somewhere within easy reach of where you will use it at a level lower than your sleeping position. Make sure the filter area on the back of the device is not blocked by bedding, curtains, or other items. Air must flow freely around the device for the system to work properly. Make sure the device is away from any heating or cooling equipment."* 📧

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Dish Network, Circle 136 on Reader Service Card



### Streaming-Media Combo

Most RVers like being digitally connected, and PDQ's combination of a computer, media server, and Wi-Fi signal booster and hotspot does it all in a compact footprint. Powered by 12-volt DC or 120-volt AC, the TriplePlay system starts with a palm-size processor running Windows 10, a wireless keyboard and a mouse. Add to that an AC Wi-Fi range extender, plus Connectify Hotspot Max and Plex Media Server software. Plug it into your TV or monitor to get long-range, fast internet speeds for running computer programs, streaming movies and music, and playing online games. The system has an HDMI port for connecting to an HDTV or other home-theater component.

**MSRP: \$649**

858-598-5001, [www.pdqconnect.com](http://www.pdqconnect.com)

Circle 142 on Reader Service Card



### Multipurpose TV Mount

Five years ago PAW International introduced a TV-mounting system that was lighter and less expensive than steel brackets and impervious to rust. Today, the company's high-density-polymer brackets are standard on many Forest River RVs and are available in the aftermarket on Amazon and eBay. The system starts with a bracket that screws into the back of most flat-screen TVs. Compatible brackets can be mounted inside and outside the RV for moving the TV from one viewing location to another. When a wall mount isn't supporting a TV, it can cradle one of PAW's new accessories — from utility hooks and plant hangers to flag holders and oscillating fans.

**MSRP: 28.95/two-piece bracket set**

**\$19.95/additional wall bracket**

260-432-4183, [www.pawinternational.com](http://www.pawinternational.com)

Circle 143 on Reader Service Card



### Campfire Cooking on a Stick

For those who love cooking over an open fire with family and friends, the GrubStick Master Kit takes that simple pleasure to a new gastronomic level, making it easy to whip up everything outdoors from golden-brown marshmallows to savory mushroom burgers. The foundation of the 21-piece kit is four telescoping GrubStick grips that extend up to 30 inches, so dinner gets toasted instead of your arm. These heat-resistant handles connect to accessories designed for melting s'mores, roasting hot dogs and a wide range of other cooking duties. Everything in the kit is dishwasher safe and cleans easily, and the rugged canvas carrying tote stows just as easily.

**MSRP: \$139.95**

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

Circle 144 on Reader Service Card

## Big-Rig Tires

A leading supplier of wheels for heavy-duty towing, Boar Wheel Company has recently reengineered its entry-level Rancher steel wheel for use on fifth-wheels and travel trailers. The Rancher wheel-and-tire package comes with load range G commercial-grade truck tires. Upgrading to the 19.5-inch wheel assemblies can reduce sidewall flex seen in 16-inch tires when cornering or maneuvering into tight campsites, and that, in turn, can reduce the chance of tire failure, according to the company. The low-profile wheels are designed for trailers that run on 235/80R16 or 235/85R16 tires and have an eight-lug, 6.5-inch bolt pattern. The 32-inch outer diameter fits most trailers, but make sure to check the dimensions of all wheel wells before purchasing. Changing the diameter of the wheels

and tires will require readjusting your hitch height and may require suspension modification to increase wheel-well clearance, thus increasing overall trailer height.

**MSRP: \$187.95/wheel only; \$389.95/wheel and tire**

888-619-5622, [www.boarwheel.com](http://www.boarwheel.com)

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ITEM 68525/63087/63088, CALIFORNIA ONLY

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**4-1/2" ANGLE GRINDER**

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**80 PIECE ROTARY TOOL KIT**

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## DOWNHILL BRAKING

I read February's "Tundra Brake Problems?" letter from David Chapman and your reply about truck and trailer brakes. Neither your reply nor Chapman talked about downshifting the transmission, which is an important part of driving down long or steep hills, particularly with a trailer. Some newer truck automatic transmissions downshift themselves on a downhill grade.

My opinion is that the engine and transmission should provide most of the retarding, and that the brakes should be used only to help hold the speed down. If Chapman's truck wasn't downshifted to help retard the unit, then that might be the cause of the overheated brakes. The owner's manual should provide information about towing and descending grades.

**Rick Stuchell, Centennial, Colorado**

You're right, Rick. Using downshifting and engine compression to help control speed down a grade should always be part of the discussion. Some of the people who report consistent brake problems when others have great towing success with the same vehicles are likely among those who don't downshift to help maintain speed and experience brake fade, adverse wear and/or warped rotors due to heat. That wouldn't apply to all of those with brake problems, but certainly the majority.



## DISC-BRAKE SELECTION

**Q** My wife and I are planning a cross-country trip in about two years. After reading various articles about disc brakes, I am considering changing my fifth-wheel drum brakes over to disc brakes. We own a 2013 Keystone Montana 3582RL. I believe the axles have a 7,000-pound gross axle weight rating (GAWR), and dry weight is 12,600 pounds. Can you recommend a brand of disc brakes that has performed better than the others?

**Art Frament, Clifton Park, New York**

**A** The use of disc brakes will make a big difference in stopping ability. Titan is a well-known brand, and there's also Kodiak, and both offer parts and kits to fit today's trailers.

You might want to make sure that you'll own the trailer you want to convert for a while, as the kits aren't cheap, and you're unlikely to recover the full investment cost at resale. Even at a price, it's one of the best safety-related accessories you can add to your trailer.

## HITCH EXTENSION

**Q** I have a 2014 Toyota Tundra with Aljo which I towed a 26-foot Aljo trailer. Aljo had trailer models many years ago, but its Skyline brand was built until fairly recently. We traded it in on a 2018 26-foot Keystone Cougar. I am using the same hitch with the new trailer, but I can no longer lower the tailgate while hooked up. It contacts the electric jack, which makes it difficult to get our dog into and out of the bed shell.

I searched for hitch extensions but found that they generally are not recommended for towing trailers. I did find that the Roadmaster Anti-Rattle Hitch Extender for Tow Bars (item number RM-071-1075) can be used for trailer towing, if the tongue weight is less than half the extender rating.

Do you have any suggestions?  
**David Tyler, Las Vegas, New Mexico**

**A** The use of a hitch extender can go overboard when people use one that's too long. This places an undue amount of leverage on the receiver,

and that's where the problem arises.

The extension you identified (which is listed at 7½ inches) is fairly modest. Roadmaster posted a 10,000-pound trailer weight and 400-pound hitch weight for that extension, and as long as you observe the hitch-weight limitations, you should be OK.

The use of a weight-distribution hitch also helps because it redistributes some of that dead-weight torque on the receiver, so that's also in your favor.



## RV-COVER SUNBURN

**Q** My next-door neighbor recently purchased an ADCO RV cover for his travel trailer that he parks beside his house, which is about 30 feet away from our two-story home. A few weeks ago, I noticed what appeared to be a long "burn" in a 12-foot arc on his cover on the side that faces our house. After taking a closer look and experi-

### TECH EXPERT



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



encing a couple sunny days here in the Pacific Northwest, we determined that the burned and melted arc was caused by sunlight reflecting off our upstairs window onto the cover.

My neighbor called ADCO, whose customer service told him they had never heard of such a thing and that it was not covered under the warranty. They suggested that he park his RV in a different location and somehow block the reflected light or purchase another cover made from a different fabric. Of course, the fabric that might be immune to reflected light was well over \$1,000.

**Larry Lucas, Portland, Oregon**

**A** The chance that an RV cover could be burned by a sun reflection seems unlikely, especially in Oregon's not-always-sunny Willamette Valley, where I live as well. There would need to be something reflecting the light that focused and concentrated it enough to make the burn, and that wouldn't happen with straight, flat windows.

The reflection image you sent shows an irregular section of reflected sunlight, and the center where it's brightest could be some type of focused spot. You'd need to track that back to one of the windows on the house by alternately covering each window until you find which one is creating the reflection. If there's something inside your house that's reflecting, it may need to be moved. If the window glass has some type of flaw that causes the focused reflection, you may need to replace the glass or add something like a couple layers of window screen to diffuse the light enough to avoid future problems.

Drop another note and let us know what you discover.

## TRAILER LEVEL AND TIRE WEAR

**Q** Last year I purchased a 2017 Ram 2500 4x4 truck to pull my 31-foot 2016 Dutchmen Denali 262RLX fifth-wheel. The mounting-surface plate of the fifth-wheel hitch on the new truck is 7 inches higher than it was on my old

1995 Ram. The nose of the fifth-wheel is up, and the trailer does not travel parallel to the road surface by less than 2 degrees, measured from the kingpin to the center of the tandem axle.

On our last trip, there were two blowouts on the rear axle. The trailer has an Equa-Flex leaf-spring suspension and had the original ST225/75 R15 load range D tires. I kept the air pressure up to 65 PSI max and was well within the gross vehicle weight rating

(GVWR) and GAWR.

Is it possible that when the trailer travels nose up there is more weight on the rear axle? I replaced all four tires with Goodyear Endurance ST225/75 R15 load range E and hope that I don't have to go through that nightmare again.

**Klaus Krolik, Fallbrook, California**

**A** Although the equalizing suspension part of a dual-axle trailer is supposed to provide **(continued on page 69)**



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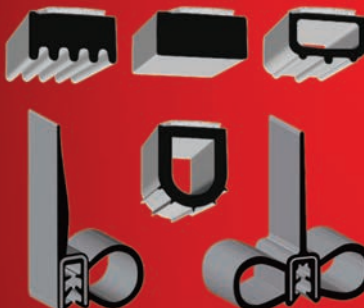
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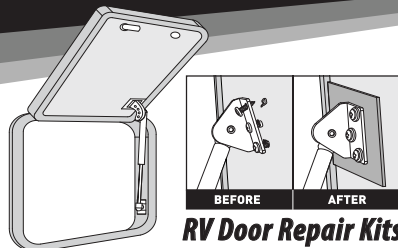


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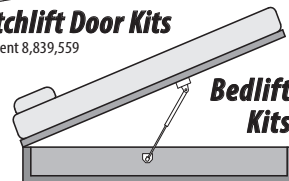
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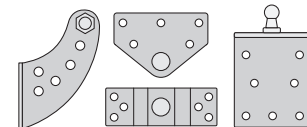
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(continued from page 65)

more or less equal weight on the axles, that's not 100 percent of the case. If the trailer body is angled back somewhat, there's going to be a weight transfer toward the rear axle, but how much weight is transferred depends on a lot of trailer-body design factors and the suspension configuration. It also depends on how much weight is carried on the axles and tire carrying capacity. The weight transfer would need to be pretty significant to have an effect like overloading and blowing out two tires.

You can use a commercial scale to determine the trailer's axle weights. Park the trailer so both axles are on the scale and note that figure. This is also a good time to compare the trailer's posted GAWR to those scale results, as this will tell you where the RV stands on being overloaded or not.

Now, with the help of a spotter, roll ahead until one axle is off and one is still on the scale. Note that figure and deduct it from the total for both axles to determine how much weight is being carried at each axle. If there is a significant difference in weight, that could aggravate the blowout situation. It would also affect the tires during a sharp turn, which will scrub sideways, placing a lot of stress on the sidewalls.

It's best to figure out a way to get the trailer riding level. This can be done by lowering the fifth-wheel hitch saddle, if there's still enough bed-rail clearance for trailer movement, or raising the suspension somewhat using the techniques we discuss in this column on a regular basis. A level ride will help with the axle-loading situation.

**LEVELING THE COUCH**

**Q** I purchased a 2018 Forest River Surveyor 264RKS in June 2017 and have made five trips with it so far. We are extremely happy with the trailer but have realized that the couch leans in toward the middle of the trailer. I called the dealer, and they want eight weeks to look at the problem.

I have looked at the couch and don't see any adjustments. Could it be the slideout not being level with the trailer? Have you heard of this type of

problem before and provided some guidance? I don't want to leave my trailer at the dealer for two months for a simple adjustment.

**Neil Baker, West Columbia, South Carolina**

**A** I know that effect, Neil. You lie there and think you might fall off the edge of the couch. There probably aren't any level adjustments, but the factory installed the couch, probably using bolts through the frame and into the floor, so there are adjustment options.

Remove the front kick panel, if so equipped, or partially open the sofa bed so you can see the mounting points. It may take some time to find the mounts, but the factory guys used them to install it, so you can also access them.

Place some spacers under the front mounts (even something like a piece of 3/4-inch plywood with a hole for the bolt may do the job) and use longer bolts as needed to secure the frame. Trial and error on how much spacer you need should take care of the problem.

### CLEAN RV COVER

**Q** One of the challenges I'm facing is how to clean and dry the behemoth of a cover that we bought to protect our trailer. What ideas do you have?

**Rick Jones, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho**

**A** There's no real trick to cleaning an RV cover, Rick. The specifics on which type of soap to use will be spelled out in your owner's manual. If you don't have it on hand, you can find it at your cover manufacturer's website. About all you can do is clean it, and perhaps scrub with a small soft-bristled push broom, with the cover spread out on a nonabrasive surface such as a grass lawn. Then rinse it and let it air-dry as best you can when you have a clear day or two. Be sure it's dry before storing it so it doesn't become moldy.

### TRAILER-TIRE ROTATION

**Q** I have a 27-foot dual-axle travel trailer with a GVWR of 6,300 pounds.

One year and 4,000 miles ago, I replaced all four tires plus two spares with Goodyear Endurance ST tires. My question is, is it a good idea to rotate travel trailer tires, including the spares, to keep the tread wear on all six tires roughly equal?

There is very conflicting advice on the internet. Goodyear says, "Consult your vehicle manual." My trailer manual does not address tire rotation. I am concerned about having spares sitting for years with zero use, then if I did need to use one or both, the other tires would have significantly more miles on them.

**Tony Megliola, San Diego, California**

**A** Trailer-tire rotation has seldom been addressed by manufacturers or end users, Tony, but that doesn't mean it's not a good thing to do. Your idea to rotate the tires, including the spares (as long as they're the same vintage, size and so forth as the main tires), is a smart one for getting maxi-

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mum use out of all of your investments. Even if the local tire dealer seems puzzled as to why, go ahead and get them rotated.

While you're at it, have them balanced as well, because very few tire shops or RV manufacturers balance trailer tires. It's a good idea to do so for the same reasons that you keep your tow-rig tires balanced.

## NO TANK-LEVEL MONITOR

**Q** We have purchased a 2001 Dutchmen 26-foot travel trailer and plan to glam it up. We have one important question to get answered first. There is not an indicator panel to show when the black- and gray-water tanks are full.

What is the "old school" way to know when the tanks are almost full? Can some kind of indicators or probes be added to the tanks?

**Barbara Still, Rincon, Georgia**

**A** This is something of a surprising letter, Barbara, because we've never seen a late-model RV with fresh- and waste-water holding tanks that does not include a tank-level monitor system. It's possible the monitors are integrated with another control panel and you've just missed them, and your local dealer will be able to point it out and explain how it works.

Failing that, which would be almost unbelievable, there are after-market options that can be installed on existing RVs. They generally work using induction-sensing circuitry and sensors that are applied to the tank exterior or by way of probes installed through the wall of the tank. An internet search can show what's available, and your local RV dealer's parts and service department can also help. In any case, because this will require adding some wiring, a monitor panel and the sensors, this is a good job for a dealer to handle, unless you're very familiar with this type of project.

Regarding any trick to know the tank levels without sensors, more frequent emptying based on trial-and-error experience is all we can suggest.

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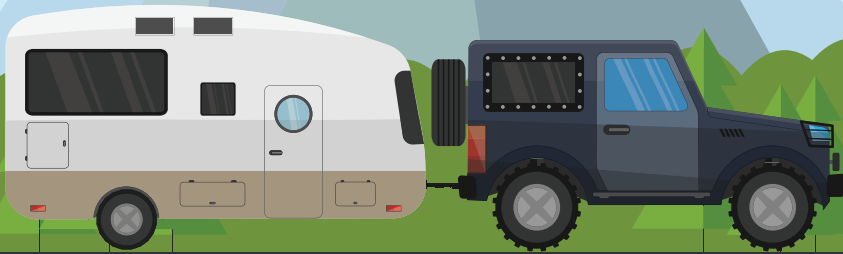
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\*Estimated APR (Annual Percentage Rate) based on 7 year loan term; individual rate may vary by loan amount, loan term, vehicle use, model year and type of RV. Subject to consumer loan program requirements and credit approval. Certain fees, closing costs, and restrictions may apply. Rates and terms may vary with market conditions and are subject to change without notice. APR applied to the loan is the APR in effect on the date the application is received and is valid until 30 days after the loan is approved. RV must be 2007 model year or newer; for RV model year 2007 to 2008, add .25% to above rates. Maximum loan term is based on loan amount. Maximum loan amount is calculated using an advance percentage determined by FICO score. For RV, collateral value established using NADA wholesale value (without adds) including mileage adjustment (+/-); multiplied by 110%. Example of a recreational use RV loan: A \$55,000 loan for 7 years with an APR of 5.09% has 84 monthly payments of \$779.69 each.

†Processing fee of \$399 waived for refinance applications submitted by June 30, 2018. Official fees such as state title, state registration, FL doc stamp fee and/or UCC filing fees will apply.

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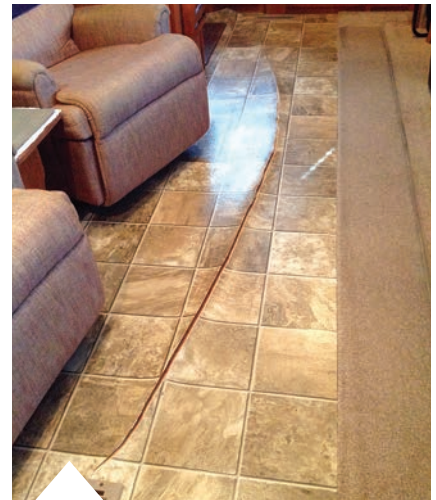
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**REPLACEMENT SHOCKS**

**Q** I have a 2015 GMC 3500 Duramax dually. I'm thinking that the original shocks with 40,000 miles on them are done. You have said that Bilstein is your choice. My question is, what model, 5100 or 4600, works best for a good solo ride and a 3,200-pound fifth-wheel payload (pin weight) when loaded?

**Mike Gaver, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania**

**A** Bilstein promotes the 5100 series for lifted trucks or those frequently used off-pavement, so we'd suggest the 4600 series might be a better idea for a truck mostly driven on pavement and for which you desire civilized solo-ride characteristics. In general, you can't go wrong with Bilsteins as upgrade replacement shocks.

**MAJOR FLOOR CRACK**

**Q** We went out to check on our trailer this winter and found the floor looking like someone had taken a knife and sliced it from one end of the front living quarters to the other. It looked like the parting of the Red Sea.

Let me start from the beginning. We took our trailer to Mid-State Camper Sales in Vandalia, Illinois, to have the roof sealed and the outside detailed. We brought it home, placed it under our carport and let the two slides out so I could finalize my winter-ready cleaning. Then it turned bitter cold, so we left the slides out, afraid to bring them in because it might crack the awnings over the slides. When a





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day above freezing came, we went to put in the slides and found the front living quarters as the photo shows.

Have you had reports of this happening to anybody else? We have stored our fifth-wheel previously during the winter just like this with no problems.

We know we have to replace the floor. What type of flooring do you recommend to prevent this in the future, and where can we get the supplies?

**Kathy Kretzer, Salem, Illinois**

**A** Yours isn't the first letter like this we've received, Karen, and unfortunately, it probably won't be the last. There's no easy way to sugarcoat this for the sake of the manufacturers because it's due to the use of inferior-quality flooring material. The vinyl flooring is glued down to the wood subfloor. When the temperatures drop, the wood subfloor and the vinyl contract, but at different rates.

Good-quality name-brand flooring simply contracts, stretches and flexes a bit, stays that way until things warm up, then expands back along with the wood. Poor-quality flooring gets cold, contracts and shrinks, which places strain on the material, then it can split open due to the shrinkage and the material being somewhat thinner and perhaps more brittle.

There are many RVs out there that don't have this problem, and as long as you select a good grade of replacement flooring, that should help eliminate the problem for you. A shop that specializes in RV interiors would be particularly useful in helping you select the right floor covering for your environment. If there isn't one nearby, you could try calling for the advice of a reputable RV-interior shop like Dave and LJ's RV Interior Design in Woodland, Washington ([www.daveandljs.com](http://www.daveandljs.com)). 📞

**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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# Tee Time in Tennessee

Gatlinburg's hillside miniature-golf course offers a reprieve from the crowds

I'm not xenophobic, but when I unexpectedly find myself amid hordes of strangers, I get a little panicky. It happened to me in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, on our way into Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP).

I love large-landscape national parks. My husband, Jack, and I live near Yellowstone and often pick a national park as a travel-to destination. The Smokies were atop my wish list due to their reputation for fantastic hiking through wild rhododendron forests and the exceptional diversity of flora and fauna.

Straddling the Tennessee-North Carolina border and encompassing an area of 800 square miles, GSMNP is the most biodiverse national park in the United States.

Scientists have cataloged 19,000 organisms and believe there may be another 100,000 more. And elk have been successfully reintroduced. *Eastern elk!* Now that was something we longed to see.

We weren't the only ones. GSMNP is the most visited national park in the country, with about 11 million visitors annually, twice the number who tour Yellowstone. And they were all there the day we arrived!

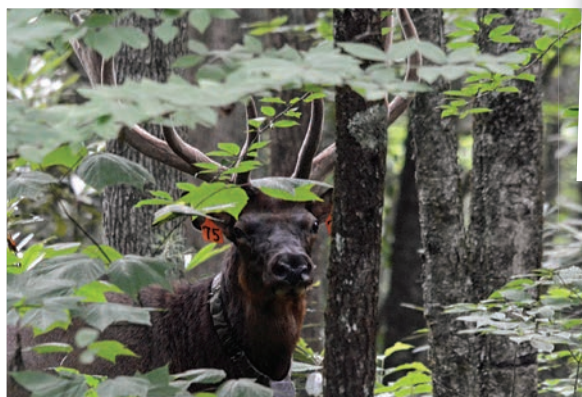
As we sat in bumper-to-bumper traffic between Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg, slowly making our way past Dollywood, water parks, arcades and various Ripley's attractions, I could feel my throat closing up.

"Relax," I silently reminded myself, but I gripped the armrests of my seat so hard, my fingers turned white.

Jack sensed my condition. He veered out of the endless traffic line and into the parking lot for Hillbilly Golf, a mini-golf course built on the side of a steep hillside that smacked of moonshine and Ma and Pa Kettle.

I feared the worst, but Hillbilly Golf turned out to be the best! After riding 300 feet skyward on the incline trolley, we putted our way past whiskey barrels, enormous trees and wobbly wagons. Tiger Woods I was not, but with each miss, I laughed so hard my sides hurt.

After an hour, we were back at street level. The crowds were still there, but they seemed less oppressive. If you can't beat the tourists, join them. After all, we're all tourists in one sense or another when we travel. 🗽



## Hillbilly Golf and Elk Habitat

(Clockwise from top left) The author's husband, Jack, putts toward a maze of moonshine barrels at one of Gatlinburg's oldest attractions. A meadow provides habitat for wildlife inside Great Smoky Mountains National Park. A reintroduced bull elk peers through the lush forest.

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