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TRAVEL

13 Atlantic Coast Getaway

On the shores of Maine, Acadia National Park's Schoodic Woods Campground blends spruce, surf and scenery. Donated by an anonymous "angel," the year-and-a-half-old campground sets a high standard with roomy RV sites, paved roads, an amphitheater and recreational access on its namesake peninsula

53 Sarasota's Three-Ring Circus

Miles of soft-sand beaches, a vibrant arts community and a weekly farmer's market come together along the boardwalks and under the big top on Florida's Gulf Coast. Once home to "the Greatest Show on Earth," this colorful waterfront paradise now hosts the state's official art museum on the former Ringling estate

72 Back on the Road in the Far North

Continuing a two-part celebration of the Alaska Highway's 75th anniversary that started in Fairbanks in the February issue, the second chapter of the author's epic journey travels south from Yukon's Kluane National Park and Reserve through the northern Rockies before stepping on the brakes at Milepost Zero in British Columbia



The mountains of the Kluane Ranges provide a dramatic backdrop for Kathleen Lake. The no-utilities campground at the lake is part of Kluane National Park and Reserve and offers bargain camping and numerous hiking trails. Page 72

DEPARTMENTS

6 Driver's Seat

Skechers, Crocs and Flip-Flops

8 Letters

Readers respond loud and clear

13 Around the Bend

News, events, places and trends

18 RV Resolutions

Trailer Life is your referee

100 Hands On

E-Z Over Grill

102 10-Minute Tech

Now why didn't I think of that?

104 New Products

Goodies to improve the RV lifestyle

107 RV Clinic

Answers from the *Trailer Life* tech team

118 Roads to Adventure

Bryce Canyon, Utah



Pacific Coachworks' Blaze'n toy hauler was developed by avid off-roaders for avid off-roaders. Page 14

On the cover: The 2017 Grand Design Solitude 360RL at Ocean Mesa Campground in Santa Barbara, California. Photo by Scott Hirko

continued on page 4 ▶



39



83



93

TRAILERS & TECHNICAL

23 Grand Design Solitude

The 39-foot 360RL fifth-wheel puts an interesting spin on tradition with unexpected features and long-term value

35 Eclipse RV Attitude

The Pro-Lite 25FS toy hauler combines lightweight construction and versatility to suit the demands of the motorsport crowd

39 Show and Sell

From leading trends to the latest technical innovations, the Louisville trade show is where the industry reveals to the world what's new in RVs

61 Spring Opener

For a winning season this year, make sure the RV is ready to roll by doing a thorough inspection and cleaning

69 Fridge Fix

A nonfunctioning LP-gas refrigerator can suck the enthusiasm out of your travel plans. The solution is probably easier than you think

83 Smooth Sailing

MORryde's SRE4000 suspension system levels the playing field when towing a travel trailer or fifth-wheel and extends the lifespan of components

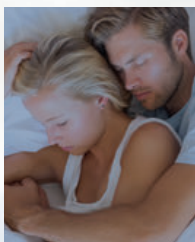
93 Recreation to Go

Carrying a kayak, canoe or other big items while towing a fifth-wheel is now possible with a bolt-on apparatus from U.S. Rack

.....
The Attitude's combination of old and new body styling works in harmony with fiberglass caps and generous floor space. Page 35



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Skechers, Crocs and Flip-Flops

As we enter the next chapter of our lives, the RV lifestyle will continue to be our passion



I have always believed that things happen for a reason, and that my chance meeting with the then-publisher and owner of this magazine, Art Rouse, in 1971 was no accident. He gave me the opportunity to work in a field that I quickly became infatuated with after seeing my cousin's pickup camper, the first RV I had ever laid my eyes on.

As RV enthusiasts in our 20s, we were unique. Since the lifestyle catered to mostly older folks, we often traveled with people who assumed the roles of surrogate parents. Fast-forward 45 years, and we're now just like those "old" people who once took my wife, Lynne, and me under their wings, giving us the advice and friendship that cemented our love for RVs. Today, young RVers are no longer an anomaly, with the lifestyle becoming more appealing to millennials and Gen Xers every day. As an RV photojournalist, it's been a privilege to have shared my stories and advice, and promote this amazing lifestyle with so many people — young and mature. Every day I pinch myself to confirm that, indeed, I have been lucky enough to pursue a passion as a career, but now it's time to step down as publisher of this great magazine and experience the RV lifestyle as a retiree rather than an employee.

So what will the next chapter of our lives look like? If we can wear Skechers, Crocs and flip-flops, we'll be there in an RV. Lynne and I have been discussing the possibility of going full time, and we will likely take that path. I will continue my role with this magazine as a consultant, and a few of my articles will show up in these pages throughout the year. I will also take on special projects for various RV entities, keeping my hand in product development and promotion. The RV industry has been our extended family, and for that we are deeply grateful.

I could easily devote most of this magazine to acknowledge and thank everyone who has made it possible for me to have such an incredible publishing career. It's been fun and an honor to work with so many great editors, artists and salespeople over the years, who have been more than just colleagues but friends for life. Ann Emerson will be taking over the reins as publisher, and Technical Editor Chris Dougherty will pen this column. I'm confident that *Trailer Life* will continue to be your trusted source for information that enhances ownership and the RV lifestyle.

As readers of this magazine and our sister publication, *MotorHome*, and members of the Good Sam Club, you have been my ears and eyes, and have always been gracious. Whether you've encouraged me or disagreed with me, you've been loyal readers, and for that I am forever indebted.

It's going to be hard to get into a groove without pushing deadlines, but the memories of guiding and assembling this magazine, working rallies, giving seminars, creating a TV show, producing videos and testing hundreds of RVs will be implanted in my heart forever.

Thanks for the ride; it's been a good one, indeed. As for Lynne and me, we'll see you in the RV park. 🚐

— **Bob Livingston, publisher**

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Tune in for Toy Haulers

I really enjoy the magazine and look forward to the annual Readers' Choice Awards in the January issue. Each year I am hoping you will include Toy Hauler as a category, but I have yet to see it.

Jill Trebil, De Smet, South Dakota

Stay tuned, Jill. The Toy Hauler category makes its debut in the sixth-annual Readers' Choice Awards. Online voting in this year's poll of RV products and places starts in June at www.trailerlife.com. — Editors

Fearless Hitches

In January's RV Clinic, I read with interest the "Fear of Wind" letter from Kay Poston. My wife and I had a similar experience when towing our Komfort travel trailer with our Chevy Tahoe. While I agree with everything the *Trailer Life* tech team suggested for correcting the sway problem, sometimes you simply have bad geometry with a towing combination.

We were to the point of selling our tow vehicle and trailer and trying a fifth-wheel when I stumbled upon an ad for the Hensley Arrow hitch system. I purchased and installed it 10 years ago and have had no sway since. We have moved on to a Chevy Silverado half-ton pickup and a larger trailer, but the Hensley stayed with us. I can't imagine ever towing a travel trailer again without this hitch system.

Chuck Lenberg, Yakima, Washington

We, too, have experienced "Fear of Wind." We drive a 2013 Ford F-150 Super Cab longbed with the EcoBoost engine, maximum tow package and a listed towing capacity of 11,300 pounds, and pull a 2014 Rockwood Signature Ultra Lite 34-foot trailer. After a severe side-wind episode on Southern California's Tehachapi Pass and regular buffeting when being passed by 18-wheelers, we upgraded the hitch to the ProPride 3P. We now have more than 15,000 miles with the new setup and have found it to

Sunrise? Sunset?

The image in January's Roads to Adventure column, "One Good Turn," is a beautiful photo, but it seems to show a new World Wonder. Having gone from Lees Ferry up to the Carl Hayden Visitor Center at Glen Canyon Dam a number of times, I'm pretty familiar with northern Arizona's Horseshoe Bend. We call it the 9-mile mark. My wife and I used to stop at a beach around the curve to the right for a snack and hot chocolate. The new World Wonder is that this is the only place I know of where the sun rises in the west.

Stan Ciminski, Eagar, Arizona

Emily Fagan replies: *The sun definitely rises in the east at Horseshoe Bend, and sets in the west, as the photo shows, and we witnessed both. At daybreak, the sun rose at our backs and lit the canyon beautifully, as the shadows magically receded down the rock walls.*

My point in accentuating sunrise in the column was that the crowds are thick at sunset, with dozens of photographers lined up, tripod-to-tripod, so if you have to choose a time of day to see the famous bend in the Colorado River, sunset may not be the best. At sunrise, it's likely you'll be there with just a handful of people.



be much more satisfactory — no more white knuckles. The increased sense of safety and security, as well as driving comfort, have made the expense worthwhile.

We have never had a problem pulling the trailer with the F-150, but we did have to get the first set of front rotors turned twice, and then replaced at about 33,000 miles. I hadn't noticed before buying the truck that the tow package did not include an upgrade on the brakes. We are now seriously considering retrofitting the trailer with disc brakes, as illustrated in Bill and Jenn Gehr's August 2016 article, "Stop It!"

Vernon Matzen, Raleigh, North Carolina

Speaking of Disc Brakes...

I asked a trucker friend what would be the best thing we could do to improve our fifth-wheel trailer. He said two words: "Disc brakes." We brought the fifth-wheel to MCT Trailers in Ventura, California, and they said disc brakes were a good idea. They also said that they had heard customers say that the

disc brakes on the trailer stopped the truck and trailer together better than the truck could stop by itself. I thought, "Yeah, right."

MCT installed two new axles because the axles we had did not have the clearance to the frame that would allow installation of a disc-brake kit. Though it was pricier to install the axles, I'm glad it was done. Everything between the trailer and the road was renewed. We had had enough "adventures" with the running gear supplied by the trailer manufacturer, including spring failures and equalizer failures, not to mention tire failures, all of which left us on the side of the road.

After the installation, we were driving through the twists and turns Route 101 makes through Santa Barbara. Everything seemed to be going just fine until we rounded a curve and all I saw was a sea of red brakelights. To add to the drama, it was at this unfortunate moment that the brake vacuum-assist system failed, which means the brake pedal

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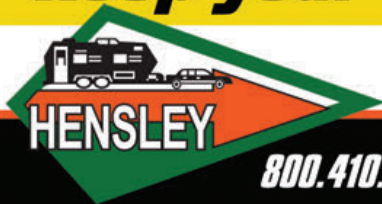
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LETTERS

felt like I was standing on a wooden post. We were the bowling ball, and all those cars up ahead were the pins.

And then a beautiful thing happened. The disc brakes on the trailer kicked in. They stopped the truck and trailer with room to spare and with very little help from the truck's brakes. I would say that, yes, they did stop the truck and trailer quicker than the truck could have stopped by itself.

You do need to become accustomed to the feel of hydraulic disc brakes. There is a pause between applying the brakes in the truck and activation of the trailer brakes because of the hydraulic pump that applies the brakes. Once I knew how to work with them, they became indispensable. When I'm slowing down for a stop or on a downhill run, I use the brake controller first before I even step on the truck brakes.

Leonard Peterson, Camarillo, California

Still Waiting for a Higher Rating

I read the January letter from Larry Krainson, "All Trailers, Great and Small," with interest since I'm a big fan of the 2017 Honda Ridgeline.

We currently pull with an F-150 with a tow rating of 9,500 pounds. The maximum tow rating on the new Ridgeline is 5,000 pounds. Krainson's Rockwood Mini Lite 2109S weighs in around 4,100 pounds dry, and my Keystone Passport weighs a few hundred pounds less. Considering the strain of pulling — and stopping — my trailer with a truck with nearly twice the towing capacity, I respectfully question the towing ability of a vehicle with a 5,000-pound tow rating hooked up to a trailer that, when loaded, will probably exceed that rating.

Although I'm itching for a reason to trade for the beautiful new Ridgeline, after doing the research on ratings and weights, I'll have to keep waiting for Honda to increase its towing capacity.

John Singleton, Livingston, Louisiana 🚚

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Ravens Nest on the Schoodic Peninsula offers spectacular views across Frenchman Bay, but take great caution when venturing out. (Right) Spacious pull-through sites at Schoodic Woods Campground allow for privacy.

Atlantic Coast Getaway

On the shores of Maine, Acadia National Park's Schoodic Woods Campground blends spruce, surf and scenery

article and photos by Jeremy and Stephanie Puglisi

Pulling into Schoodic Woods Campground on the Maine coast, we faced an interesting dilemma. The RV site was so huge that we couldn't decide where precisely to park our travel trailer. After settling in, we marveled at the thick and towering fragrant spruce and pine trees that surrounded us, making the campground feel like a magical storybook forest.

Opened in September of 2015, Schoodic Woods is the newest campground in the National Park System (NPS) and sets a high standard for what a modern RV-friendly NPS campground should look like. The land upon which the campground sits, directly west of the Schoodic Peninsula section of Acadia National Park, was almost developed into condos and golf courses. Thankfully, an anonymous "angel" donor stepped in to preserve it. This philanthropist purchased the property and then built the campground, bike trails, an amphitheater and a ranger station before

donating it all to the NPS.

Roads inside the campground are wide and freshly paved, ideal for navigating big rigs and riding bikes. On the peninsula are 8 miles of bicycle paths and the bike-friendly Schoodic Loop Road, plus another 8 miles of hiking trails. RV sites have 30- and 50-amp service and water but no sewer hookups. Currently, the campground has restrooms with flush toilets but no showers. Sites are by reservation-only, and generators are not permitted.

The beautiful outdoor amphitheater offers various ranger-led programs. Our children earned Junior Ranger badges while we were there, and we attended five talks, including ones titled "Mountain Lions, Moose and Bears" and "Rocky Summits to Icy Coastlines." Our kids did not miss the swimming pools and playgrounds that many private RV parks offer.

Schoodic Woods Campground abuts the Schoodic Peninsula, the only



section of Acadia National Park on the mainland of Maine. A good way to start your visit is the 6-mile, one-way loop road, which offers a variety of stunning views. The highlight is Schoodic Point, where you can take in the pounding surf. Take caution if you walk down onto the rocks, as the waves can surge and crash onto the point very unexpectedly. It's a spectacular sight, but we kept our kids far back from the ocean for their safety. For less dramatic — and safer — views of the ocean, try Frazer Point.

Schoodic Woods offered our family more than we expected. The campground, 2 miles southeast of Winter Harbor, opens for the season on May 24 this year. Reservations can be made up to six months in advance. The highway leading to the campground is a single-lane country road and suitable for RVs up to 40 feet.

Schoodic Woods Campground
877-444-6777, www.recreation.gov

Blaze of Glory

Pacific Coachworks' Blaze'n toy-hauler line was developed by avid off-roaders. From the floorplan layouts to construction, the seven trailers and eight fifth-wheels were planned around the toys that go in them. The shortest floorplan, the 20FS trailer, will fit a Polaris RZR XP 4 four-seater side-by-side vehicle — as will every unit — and the larger toy haulers have even more garage space. With an I-beam chassis, aluminum-framed side walls with wood backers for extra support, full-weld outriggers and drive-on wheel wells, the Blaze'n is built to be taken off the beaten path.

In the travel trailer floorplans, flush-floor tie-downs are standard, as are 5,200-pound-rated axles, a 20-gallon fuel station, 100-gallon fresh-water tank and keyless entry. Ranging from 25 feet 10 inches to 38 feet, Blaze'n trailers can sleep from six to eight-plus people. All floorplans have wood cabinet frames, solid-



25FBXL travel trailer

Blaze'n 29FBXL



surface counters, stainless-steel sinks, in-floor heat ducting, thick automotive foam in the sofas and chairs, high-end soft roll blackout shades, a touch-screen stereo with DVD player, and what the company claims are taller cabinets than the competition. Of the eight floorplans available in the fifth-wheel version, the longest extends 44 feet 11 inches.

Keeping the entertainment going after a day of riding, a drop-down 40-inch TV is designed for viewing from the entire living area and folds up to the ceiling when not in use. Every unit is solar-ready, and a 160-watt solar panel with an inverter can be installed as an option.

Base MSRP for Blaze'n toy-hauler trailers is \$28,833 and \$53,193 for the fifth-wheels.
Pacific Coachworks, 951-686-7294, www.pacificcoachworks.com

NEWSWIRE

CONSERVATION



Tucson Village Goes Green

Far Horizons Tucson Village RV Resort received the 2016 Green Mega Park of the Year Award from the National Association of RV Resorts and Campgrounds. The 55-plus Arizona community is one of the most environmentally responsible RV resorts in the country, according to the association, and was recognized for its extensive water and energy conservation and recycling initiatives. The 10/10*/10 Good Sam-rated resort uses only native Sonoran Desert plants and recycles water for landscape irrigation. Guests are encouraged to grow their own fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers in the park's community garden. Energy-saving appliances are used throughout the resort, and solar-powered and low-voltage lighting illuminates walkways and patios. Recycled products are used for park printing, trash bags and fabric/fiber combinations for windbreaks and plant covers.
www.tucsonvillage.com

INNOVATION



Curt Real-World Testing

Curt, manufacturer of towing products and truck accessories, developed new testing capabilities at its engineering facility in Wixom, Michigan. The test, based on methods developed by European manufacturers and called the Carlos TC (Car Loading Standard, Trailer Coupling), is designed to mimic towing in real driving conditions. With Carlos TC, Curt is able to simulate pushing, pulling, lifting and pressing at the coupling point, in addition to load pressure up and down. The company claims that this multifaceted, three-axis test sets a new standard in the towing industry in North America. Robert Krouse, research and development director at the Wixom facility, stated, "It is important that we are testing our products to the state of the art, and the Carlos TC test and our latest North American industry work are important steps in furthering that goal."
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Jekyll Island, Georgia, is the site of the inaugural Caffeine and Octane at the Beach, March 17 to 19. More than 500 muscle, classic and exotic cars and motorcycles from a variety of eras will be on display during the three-day event. Educational workshops, kids' activities and a custom-motorcycle show are planned. Organizers invite the public to come to the island to celebrate all things motorized and cool among sand and sunshine.

Caffeine and Octane at the Beach, 404-824-4509, www.candojekyll.com

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Home Plate

Andrew Chafin, pitcher for the Arizona Diamondbacks, lives in his 42-foot Keystone Fuzion fifth-wheel toy hauler throughout baseball season. The 26-year-old Major League Baseball (MLB) player was inspired by one of the team's coaches who was living in an RV at the time. That appealed far more to Chafin than the high-rise apartment next to Chase Field he was renting when in Phoenix.

Chafin wanted to be able to get away, have a place to stash his toys — especially his boat, which he transports in the 12-foot garage — and enjoy his hobbies surrounded by the outdoors. The MLB player is toying with selling the boat and getting a golf cart. He's particularly enamored with the Fuzion's enormous residential-size refrigerator that he says is bigger than the one in his house when he was growing up. During the season, after grueling days on the baseball field, he enjoys spending downtime in the fifth-wheel and doing leatherworking.

Last year, after baseball season ended, Chafin hauled the Fuzion back home to Ohio. From there, he took various road trips, staying in campgrounds in Georgia, Florida and South Carolina, and meeting up with a fellow D-back player in Nashville.

Celebrating Orchids

One of the country's longest-running orchid celebrations takes place in Santa Barbara, California, March 17 to 19. The 72nd annual show at the Earl Warren Showgrounds highlights horticultural evolution and innovations represented by more than 50 orchid exhibitors from around the world. This year's theme is "Orchid Mystique," and show-goers will see beautiful exhibits of orchid art, photography, floral arrangements and thousands of blooms in many colors, shapes and patterns, and can purchase the vividly colored plants.

Santa Barbara International Orchid Show, 805-403-1533, www.sborchidshow.com

Ocean Mesa at El Capitan, 866-410-5783, www.oceanmesa.com



Vintage Trailers and Vines

For a unique experience, wine enthusiasts can stay in a vintage travel trailer on the property at Alta Colina Vineyard and Winery in Paso Robles, California. The winery partnered with Tinker Tin Trailer Company to offer camping in nostalgic vintage trailers at the pond on the 130-acre estate vineyard. Rental trailers include a 1956 Jewel, a 1958 Kenskill, a 1959 Terry and a 1962 Aristocrat that have been gussied up inside and out.

Upon check-in, guests receive a complimentary wine tasting. Campers are free to roam the grounds, enjoy the private campground and watch the sunset from the winery's deck. The area offers miles of hiking opportunities and other wineries to visit. Dedicated to organic farming practices, Alta Colina produces Rhône varieties.

Tinker Tin Trailer Company
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www.tinkertin.com/trailer-pond

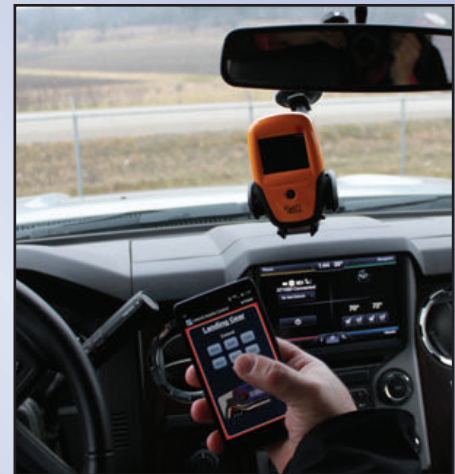


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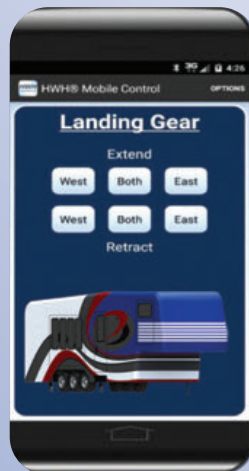
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Double Standard for Decals

When the exterior decals on a Southern California couple's fifth-wheel started fading and peeling, and they couldn't work things out with the manufacturer, they sought RV Resolutions' help:

▶ We own a 2008 Keystone Raptor 3600RL. Our friend owns a 2008 Keystone Cougar. We camp together, help each other and give advice on trailer problems. A couple of years ago, we talked about how the decals on both of our trailers were starting to fade and peel.

Later, our friend told us that he had contacted Keystone about his decal problems, and the company requested photos, which he provided. He told us how thrilled he was when Keystone agreed to send a new set of decals.

He encouraged us to contact the company and request replacement decals ourselves, and to use him as a reference, so we did. However, our experience was totally different. We received a reply from Keystone's owner relations department telling us that the warranty on our Raptor had expired and the company would not send new decals.



Why the double standard? This is poor customer service. We see these decals as rolling advertisements for Keystone.

Any assistance regarding this matter would be appreciated.

Bill and Debra Rundell, Lake Isabella, California

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

RV Resolutions reached out to the manufacturer on the Rundells' behalf and received a positive response:

Keystone has contacted Mr. and Mrs. Rundell, and they have agreed to work with us to resolve this complaint. Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention.

Michelle Diaz, Owner Relations

Keystone RV Company, Goshen, Indiana

Fitting Conclusion

A New York reader asked RV Resolutions to intercede when his new fifth-wheel didn't match the description in the manufacturer's brochure:

▶ On May 23, 2016, my wife and I purchased a new Forest River Salem Hemisphere Lite 286RL. We chose this model based on our needs, the information stated in the sales brochure and the salesman at Great Outdoors RV Superstore in Fulton, New York. One of the selling points stated in the brochure was the fifth-wheel's Ultra-Lube axles. These were very important to us because of the zerk fittings, as we plan to travel extensively with this fifth-wheel.

I asked the mechanic to pull a wheel so I could make sure these were installed on the trailer, but he refused my request twice. He stated that, if it's in the brochure, they're on the trailer. I informed him that I would be back at the dealership if

I got home and found they were not installed, which turned out to be the case. I returned the trailer on May 31 but picked it up six days later because the dealership refused to install them.

Great Outdoors RV put me in touch with Forest River's service and warranty manager, Todd Jones, who explained that the change in parts was made after the brochure had been produced. He pointed out that the last page of the brochure states that it may be necessary to make changes to components without notice and that Forest River cannot be held accountable.

If Forest River is not going to put on the part that it advertises, then

the price needs to be adjusted. I expect nothing less than what I paid for in the purchase price.

Earl Drasher, Cleveland, New York

After RV Resolutions contacted the manufacturer and the dealership about this issue, we received the following thank-you note from Earl Drasher:

▶ I want to thank you for resolving the problem with Forest River and Great Outdoors RV Superstore. The fittings have been installed to my satisfaction. Thank you very much for your work and support in resolving this issue.

E.D. 📧

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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EXCELLENT ADVENTURES

Fantasy RV Tours gets Good Sam members up close to Florida beaches, bucking broncos and polar bears

For many Good Sam members, the purchase of a recreational vehicle is the fulfillment of a dream, the opportunity to experience the thrill of the open road in a home-on-wheels and check off bucket-list destinations. But the time and energy spent on planning routes, making campground reservations and buying tickets in advance, particularly on more elaborate road trips, can take some of the fun out of the experience. That's where professionally run RV trips can help. These organized group outings simplify planning by creating travel itineraries and booking RV parks and attractions so participants can make the most of their leisure time without the hassle.

With a new benefit launched last year, Good Sam members are entitled to substantial savings on caravan tours and rallies provided by Fantasy RV Tours, America's largest and most recognized RV-vacation operator. One of the great things about these trips is that, once travelers arrive at the rendezvous RV park, almost everything is already planned: campsites, events, show tickets, some meals and local transportation to and from events. Another advantage is that turn-by-turn driving

instructions are provided on all caravan tours, including interesting stops along the way and gas stations that are easy-in and easy-out. And, whether it's an RV-caravan tour or an event rally, participants have the safety and leadership of experienced guides along the way.

Here's a snapshot of three upcoming RV vacations from the Fantasy lineup — a world-class rodeo, a beach-hopping caravan and an unforgettable subarctic wildlife adventure.

Known for its Western pageantry and good old-fashioned fun, the annual **Calgary Stampede** is billed as the Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth. Alberta's largest city has created an exciting rodeo and grandstand event that attracts more than a million people every year. Elite cowboys and cowgirls from around the world compete for prizes, while hundreds of entertainers from across Canada put on a dazzling show. Good Sam members save up to \$75 on Fantasy's week of activities and area tours, including a trip to Banff.

Many RV snowbirds flock south to Florida for mild winters, warm coastal waters and sandy beaches that are perfect for strolling and gathering shells.



Fantasy has created a new **Florida Sunshine Getaway** that follows the gulf shore south to the Florida Keys and returns north along the Atlantic coast. It's a relaxing way to explore the different regions and enjoy the beautiful vistas, fresh seafood and great finds of the Sunshine State. Members save up to \$150 on the 35-day tour.

Fantasy's 15-day **Polar Bear Migration** is a thrilling RV caravan that has been compared to a *National Geographic* photo expedition. Tour takers travel north to Manitoba in their RVs to visit villages atop the tundra before hopping a train or plane to the town of Churchill and then boarding a specially designed Tundra Buggy to traverse the shores of Hudson Bay in search of polar bears in the wild. Returning south, the tour visits the provincial capital of Winnipeg. Members save up to \$250 on this RV trip of a lifetime.

► More information about these and other Fantasy RV tours is available at www.fantasyrvtours.com/goodsam. Fantasy also has a toll-free number, 800-453-9511, for answering Good Sam members' questions.

GOING PLACES WITH GOOD SAM

RV EVENTS

Throughout the year, the Good Sam Club brings members together at regional festivals, special events and organized camping outings from coast to coast. Don't miss the chance to connect with fellow members at the following RV-friendly club-sponsored gatherings:

FunFest

May 8 through 11

Washington Land Yacht Harbor RV Park
Lacey, Washington

Good Sam Fun Weekend

June 2 through 4

The Villages RV Park
Turning Stone Resort and Casino
Verona, New York

Rock, Ribs and Ridges Festival

June 24 through 25

Sussex County Fairgrounds
Augusta, New Jersey

Remington Ryde Bluegrass Festival

July 5 through 9

Centre County Grange Fairgrounds
Centre Hall, Pennsylvania

Montana Folk Festival

July 7 through 9

Butte Civic Center
Butte, Montana

Southern Oregon Kite Festival

July 14 through 16

Port of Brookings
Brookings, Oregon

Jenny Brook Bluegrass Festival

August 11 through 13

Tunbridge World's Fairgrounds
Tunbridge, Vermont

Maryland Children and Family Campout

August 11 through 13

Walkersville VFD Carnival Grounds
Walkersville, Maryland

► For the full schedule of Good Sam regional events, go to www.goodsamclub.com/events. The website also lists upcoming Good Sam State/Provincial Rallies where chapters and members get together for several days of camping fun, friendship and philanthropy.

RV SHOWS

Members save 50 percent on up to two admission tickets to all Good Sam-sponsored RV shows:

Good Sam RV Super Show

February 23 through 26

Phoenix International Raceway
Phoenix, Arizona

Harrisburg RV and Camping Show

February 23 through 26

Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex
and Expo Center
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Colorado RV, Sports and Travel Show

March 2 through 5

National Western Complex
Denver, Colorado

Rhode Island RV and Camping Show and Sale

March 3 through 5

Rhode Island Convention Center
Providence, Rhode Island

Virginia RV Show

March 10 through 12

Hampton Roads Convention Center
Hampton, Virginia

► To find out more and purchase half-price tickets online, go to www.gsevents.com.

RV TOURS

Members experience world-class events and must-see destinations on guided RV tours and rallies, sponsored by Fantasy RV Tours. Here's a sample of this summer's trips:

Alaska Your Way

June 26 through August 26

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

Calgary Stampede

July 5 through 11

McMahon Stadium, Calgary, Alberta

Best of the Canadian Maritimes

July 21 through August 16

Start: Bar Harbor, Maine
End: St. John, New Brunswick

► For details about Good Sam RV tours, visit www.fantasyrvtours.com/goodsam or call 800-453-9511.



Good Sam Days

Camping World invites Good Sam members to visit any of its more than 120 retail locations to celebrate Good Sam Days, April 6 through 9. During this four-day sales event, members can save money with exclusive discounts on popular RV supplies and outdoor accessories. Members who spend \$75 or more will receive a free umbrella, while supplies last.

► Visit www.campingworld.com to find Camping World SuperCenter locations and shop online. To take advantage of members-only offers on Good Sam Days, show a valid membership card to the cashier or enter the membership number when making a purchase on the website.

Good Sam *Perks*

A new money-stretching program rewards Good Sam members for renewing their club membership. Called Good Sam Perks, the program thanks members for their loyalty by providing access to one-time deep discounts, two-for-one deals and frequent-value savings from a variety of big national brands, small-town shops and everything in between. The Good Sam Perks website lists participating merchants and discounts, and a smartphone app makes it easy to access mobile-redeemable coupons. Good Sam Life and Elite members gain immediate access to Good Sam Perks.

► To find participating merchants, go to www.goodsamclub.com/perks.



🎉 **HAPPY CAMPERS** As the 50th anniversary celebration for Camping World and Good Sam came to an end last year, one lucky couple drove into the sunset in a new \$140,000 motorhome. Elwood and Janet Grabenbauer of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, were the grand-prize winners of a Thor Hurricane in the Golden Giveaway.

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More comfort on the move



Staycation Getaway

The Grand Design Solitude 360RL puts an interesting spin on tradition with unexpected features and long-term value

“**E**xtended stay.” Sounds nice, doesn’t it? No plans, no reservations, no concerns. Maybe we’ll get there, maybe we won’t. Maybe our journey will lead us on a path to discovery no one expected. New places, new faces, a chance to start anew. These are the aspirations of the next generation of RVers, the ones who embrace change and are driven by wanderlust

but aren’t ready for retirement or full-timing just yet. They love staying at a lake property all summer long or spending autumn on the Eastern Seaboard, watching the leaves turn from brilliant green to glowing gold.

They’re the customers that Grand Design (GD) hopes to court with its Solitude, a line of fifth-wheels designed for that gray area between weekend travel and full-time living.



Tradition runs deep with fifth-wheel design, and manufacturers have to be careful where, and how, they choose to differentiate themselves. This is where Grand Design has always excelled — delivering the familiar in a thoughtful, elegant fashion — and the Solitude 360RL is exemplary of this ethos. Walking up to this trailer, you'll notice the high-gloss gel-coat exterior walls with tan-and-black graphics that are indicative of GD products, along with enough details to make a statement of quality.

For example, the mandatory Peace of Mind package includes a Trailair Rota-Flex pin box, Equa-Flex suspension and Correct Track suspension alignment, while the Max Built Construction Package includes slam-latch baggage doors, frameless tinted windows and 16-inch aluminum wheels. Dig a little deeper, and you'll find other desirable features, like 50-amp service for the two 15,000-Btu air conditioners, 7,000-pound axles and a TPO roof with an impressive 12-year warranty. The

The kitchen looks like it was plucked from a contemporary condo, with stainless-steel appliances and lots of solid-surface counter space for food prep. At the end of the island, a small table with a blackboard backsplash provides a country feel.

Weather-Tek package, meanwhile, equips the Solitude for cold-weather livability with a fully enclosed underbelly and heated tanks, heated storage compartments, extra insulation and other details.

Hold on, there's more. The fourth and final bundling of equipment is found in the Residential Living package, which includes most everything we're going to talk about inside, but starts at the front door with Torklift aluminum quad steps (awkward to set up and stow initially but functional in use and very well made) and a feature we'd like to see more of: Keyed Alike. That's right, folks, just one key operates the entry door and all baggage doors, which greatly reduces frustration during setup. Speaking of which, the 360RL also comes standard with a Lippert electronic leveling system with auto level, and the controls for it

are just inside the street-side baggage door, where they should be.

Once inside, you'll find the floor-plan features a typical rear-living-room and front-bedroom layout, but to keep things interesting, the traditional seating and entertainment roles have been swapped: theater seating is on the street side, and the LED television and fireplace are in the opposing slideout. Aside from being a little different, we imagine it makes adding the standard exterior entertainment center (LED television, refrigerator and storage cabinets) a little easier during the manufacturing process, since it's just on the opposite side of the wall from its living room counterpart.

The overall interior design is one that has become somewhat of a GD trademark found across all of the company's products, with dark furniture and cabinetry, cream-colored solid-surface



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SPECIFICATIONS

GRAND DESIGN SOLITUDE 360RL

Exterior Length	39' 4"
Exterior Width	8' 5"
Exterior Height	13' 3"
Interior Width	8' 1"
Interior Height	8'
Construction	Aluminum cage, laminated side walls, TPO roof with fiberglass/thermofoil insulation (R40 equivalent), 12-inch I-beam frame, triple insulated main floor (R45 equivalent)
Freshwater Cap.	54 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	100 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	50 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	12 gal.
Refrigerator	18 cu. ft.
Furnace	35,000 Btu
Air Conditioner (2)	15,000 Btu
Converter	65 amp
Battery	Dealer supplied
Tires	ST235/80R16
Suspension	Leaf springs, Equa-Flex
Weight (water and LP-gas full, no supplies)	14,132 lbs.
Hitch Weight	2,920 lbs.
Axle Weight	11,212 lbs.
GVWR	16,000 lbs.
GAWR (2)	7,000 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	1,868 lbs.
Base MSRP	\$89,120
As-Tested MSRP	\$89,240
Warranty	1-year limited/basic, 3-year limited/structural

Grand Design RV

574-825-8000, www.granddesignrv.com
Circle 156 on Reader Service Card

The handsome black-and-tan color scheme has become a Grand Design trademark. Exterior speakers and a power awning make for a patio area that's perfect for relaxing on a sunny afternoon.

countertops, stainless-steel appliances and vinyl flooring that mimics bleached hardwood. It still looks good, but it would be great to see GD create a new and inspiring interior design, even as only an extra-cost option. And, while we appreciate GD's attempt to keep the interior sleek and modern, we found the hidden switch placement to be maddening. Instead of being near the entry door, the switches were located underneath the forward cabinet, forcing the user to employ the Braille method to determine which switch is which, and turning other lights on and off in the process. That part isn't so elegant.

The rest of the controls, for things like the tank heaters, monitor panel and slideout switches, are located inside a cabinet above the front steps, and while they're on the small side, everything is clearly labeled and easy to read. The rocker switch labeled Slideout 1 actually opens all four living-area slideouts in succession, and Slideout 2 opens just the bedroom slide. While

opening all rooms with just one switch may be fast and convenient, we always prefer to have individual control over each slideout. Depending on the campground or parking lot, you may not be able to open all of them, or some only partially. Having independent control of each slide makes it easier to compensate for exterior obstacles and other issues. Of course, we wouldn't mind an "all-in/out" master switch in addition to individual switches — that would be the best of both worlds.

Once we leveled the trailer and deployed the slideouts, we unpacked the large, nicely finished pass-through front storage compartment and began to relax. Grand Design is very good at making an interior feel warm and welcoming — the small aforementioned annoyances notwithstanding. In addition to the electric fireplace on the curb side, there is sconce lighting on either side of the rear couch, mood lighting underneath the rear cabinets, and an interesting design element overhead:

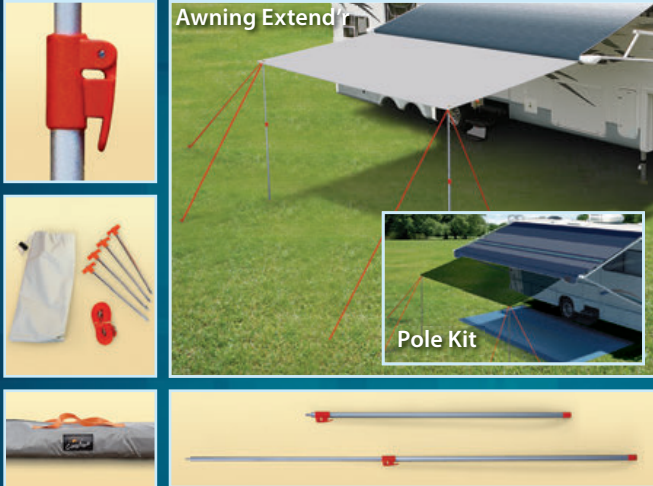


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a simulated wooden truss. Though the inside of the truss is hollow and has no structural benefit, it contains LED lighting so it can be shown off for dramatic effect. Leaving this light on when we left the trailer, as well as the sconce and mood lighting, was our

choice for returning to a cozy home.

Above the fireplace and TCL flat-screen television is an AM/FM/DVD player that was easy to operate and provided decent sound quality, courtesy of the overhead speakers. We enjoyed the two heated theater seats located

directly opposite, which offer remotes to control the heat but are manually reclined using a cable-operated handle on the inside of the arm. Most of the time, they're comfortable, but even with the air conditioning on, they felt warm on a hot afternoon.

Plenty of storage is afforded by cabinets on both sides of the entertainment center, and the frosted-plastic inserts look nice, but the doors were a little flimsy feeling and shuddered after opening. At the rear of the trailer, the large couch converts into a bed and has shelves on either side for placing drinks, phones, remotes or whatever. There is also plenty of storage above the couch for extra blankets, pillows or anything else you'd like to keep handy.

As the day gave way to night, our thoughts turned toward preparing

Clint Eastwood may look angry, but we enjoyed the Solitude's entertainment center with flat-screen TV, electric fireplace, audio system and loads of storage.

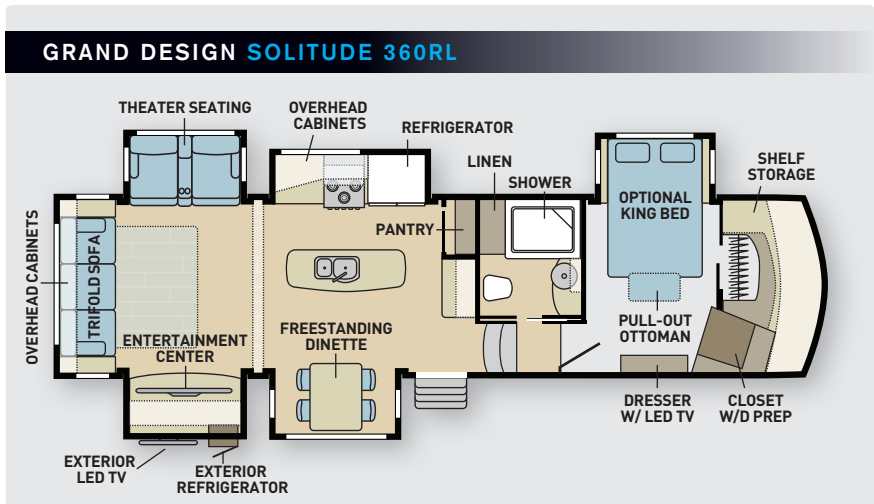


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TIRES



dinner in the Solitude's clean and well-organized kitchen. Solid-surface counters are used throughout, and the center island has lots of prep space and a large double-bowl stainless-steel sink featuring a high-rise residential faucet with a sprayer. There is a large, deep cabinet at the forward end of the island, plus additional drawers at the aft end and under-counter storage (with a trash can!) in the center.

On the street side, there is even more counter space to the left of the Suburban stainless "gas-on-glass" three-burner stove, which features a standard oven and a marble-look subway-tile backsplash. The stainless-steel residential-size High Pointe microwave with integrated lights and vent has more than enough room to heat full-size plates of food, and we found the small cabinet above the microwave perfect for storing extra paper plates and cups. Underneath the counter, two drawers and a cabinet with shelving are perfect for pots and pans. A



drawer underneath the oven houses plastic pet bowls, which is a nice idea, but as we noted on a previous GD test, the drawer needs to be lined to make cleaning up spills easier and prevent bacteria buildup.

The Norcold refrigerator should keep even ambitious chefs satisfied. This unit has more space in the main

box and freezer than many residential appliances we've seen. And, as is customary in GD floorplans, it is accompanied by a walk-in pantry that is large enough for a family of four or more. To its right is an overhead cabinet that would be a perfect spot for serving plates and platters, as there is a small table underneath that is ideal for

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- ST205 / 75R14 - 4PR
- ST205 / 75R14 - 6PR
- ST215 / 75R14 - 6PR
- ST205 / 75R15 - 6PR
- ST205 / 75R15 - 8PR
- ST225 / 75R15 - 8PR
- ST225 / 75R15 - 10PR
- ST235 / 80R16 - 10PR*

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placing prepared foods. A nice design touch is that the table appears like it is freestanding, and its backsplash is a black-framed panel that looks like a chalkboard (for the evening menu, perhaps?). Overall, we found the area perfect for entertaining, and we rounded out the evening enjoying dinner at the freestanding dinette in the small curbside slideout. The table had plenty of room for the two of us and, with the extensions deployed, would have adequate room for four.

Up the forward stairs and to the left is the nicely appointed bathroom, which can be accessed only via the pocket door in the hallway. We preferred this, as there's no need to step back down the stairs or scoot down the hallway to enter, as with an ordinary door, and we don't think walking to the hallway (instead of through a second door in the bedroom) to use the bathroom is an inconvenience.

Once inside, the first thing to get your attention is a large shower with a molded seat and shelves, a sliding-glass door and a residential-style stainless-look detachable shower-head that works well. The vanity offers plenty of counter space, and the large glass-vessel sink with a contemporary brushed-stainless faucet is another nice touch. There is lots



The 360RL's residential-style bath features a large shower with a sliding-glass door, glass-vessel sink and generously proportioned linen closet. A cabinet and drawers underneath the vanity provide more storage options.

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The cozy living area offers plenty of room for entertaining guests, and if two decide to stay, the rear couch converts into a bed. Cushy theater seating reclines and offers heat for chilly evenings.

of storage as well, courtesy of three good size drawers and an open cabinet, a medicine cabinet with a mirror and a generous linen closet next to the porcelain toilet with foot-flush.

The bedroom feels very roomy, thanks to a deep street-side slideout, and even though the optional king bed is a tight fit, there are still shelves on which to put your phone, book or glasses. The platform lifts to reveal storage space for extra blankets or pillows, and another nice surprise is found at the foot of the bed: a pull-out ottoman that is the perfect place to sit and put your shoes on in the morning.

On the curb side is a good size chest of drawers with a window and TV above, and a washer-dryer-prepped cabinet to its left that has



shelves and room for hanging clothes, if not used for its intended purpose. There is also a smallish but usable closet at the front, with more shelves and room for hanging clothes. It isn't cedar-lined, but this would be an easy fix for any DIY RVer.

Finding a fifth-wheel that will suit weekend plans as well as long-term travel can pose a challenge for many RVers, but the Grand Design Solitude is a solid choice for livability, build quality and budget. It may just turn your extended stay into a permanent one. 🚐

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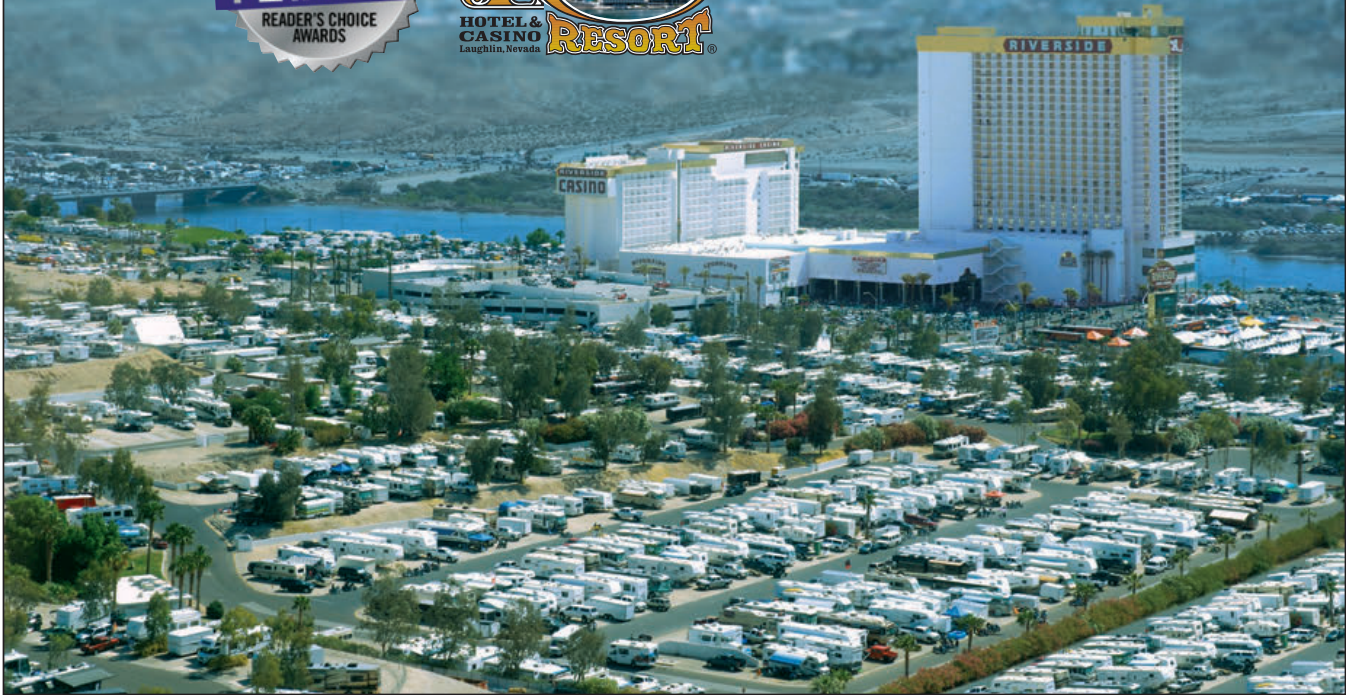
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WALK-THROUGH: ECLIPSE RV ATTITUDE PRO-LITE 25FS

Attitude Adjustment

The Pro-Lite 25FS toy hauler combines lightweight construction and versatility to suit the demands of the motorsport crowd



Once upon a time, toy haulers were a relatively new concept with only a few manufacturers dabbling in trailers with garages. Today, toy haulers are extremely popular with motorsports enthusiasts who want to be comfortable while pursuing their interests. They are so popular, in fact, that builders not producing toy haulers are almost considered behind the times.

For Southern California-based Eclipse RV, toy haulers have become a specialty product, and the Attitude Pro-Lite travel trailer is a prime example of what can be accomplished when a company focuses on this type of RV. We took a close look at the

2017 Attitude Pro-Lite 25FS, a trailer that reaches almost 31 feet and has a fair amount of sizzle. Designed to be functional, the Attitude 25FS is moderately equipped with standard features and can be dolled up a bit with optional upgrades, but don't expect a long list of high-tech features or copious storage space.

Starting from ground level are the 15-inch Mod Black steel-wheel and tire combinations, mounted on dual 6,000-pound-rated axles containing zerk grease fittings at the mounting points and self-adjusting brakes. The suspension is attached to a fairly standard black-powder-coated I-beam frame. Making up the toy-hauler por-

While the galley may seem small, it's fully equipped with a microwave, a three-burner range and double stainless-steel sinks.

tion of the frame is the Rhino-lined 7-foot ramp door with a healthy 3,000-pound rating, which allows access and storage of most motorized toys. The remaining portion of the chassis houses an optional fully enclosed, insulated, heated and tucked-up-high water and sewer system, providing easy access for cleanup and maintenance. At the low-lying belt line is a pass-through storage compartment and the onboard 40-gallon fuel station for servicing toys.

The exterior is clad in classic gray



The Attitude's standard exterior uses hung aluminum panels with a lighter touch of graphics. Fiberglass siding is optional.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER



corrugated aluminum siding, and an interesting combination of old and new body styling and graphics works in harmony with the front and rear fiberglass caps. When the optional Glass Package is ordered, gray or white fiberglass side walls are framed in aluminum, and you get a flip-over electric lounge, a carpet kit and graphics that blend gray, black and a touch of red.

Once aboard the 25FS, it's clear that the floorplan, while not extravagant, is in-line with most toy haulers of this size. There's a nice array of componentry and a well-laid-out floorplan to make occupants feel cozy. The first

(Above left) The garage and living room share the back portion of the trailer. Opposing chairs and a couch, with tables, offer plenty of room for occupants. **(Center)** Optimal space for toys is provided with the two electric beds in their stored position and one table removed. **(Right)** The retractable queen beds and convertible sofa provide abundant sleeping space.

thing to catch the eye is the abundance of cabinets placed just where they're needed. The garage starts at the end of two opposing rows of overhead cabinetry and provides room for toy transport as well as space for sleeping and relaxing with convertible seating and two electric queen-bed platforms. Just beyond the lengthy living room is the galley. Although it may seem small, the kitchen is fully equipped with solid-sur-

face counters and twin stainless-steel sinks with counter-matching covers. Within easy reach are plenty of storage cabinets, an overhead microwave and a three-burner range-and-oven combo separated by a faux-tile backsplash. Positioned on the opposite side adjacent to the entry door are a pull-out pantry and a double-door refrigerator with a cabinet-matching front panel.

Butting up to the refrigerator and



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pantry is the lavatory sink, which takes up one side of the narrow aisle leading to the front bedroom. The enclosed bathroom, on the other side of the aisle, is fitted with a porcelain toilet and shower. There is lots of legroom, and the simple yet sufficient shower pan relies on a shower curtain but doesn't crowd movement. For this layout, having the bathroom sink in the hall is a perfect use of space and allows for washing up when the toilet room is occupied.

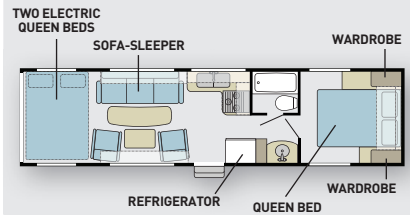
The front of the trailer is devoted to the bedroom, which features a queen bed with a pillow-top mattress positioned against the front wall. In symmetrical fashion, there's a wardrobe closet on both sides of the bed and an overhead cabinet in between. Windows on both sides help with ventilation and light, while the rest of the trailer is equipped with a decent array of overhead lighting. Theoretically, the 25FS model can sleep a small army of people, factoring in the master queen

bed and the garage's convertible couch and pair of retracting queen beds.

An optional 4-kilowatt generator with a transfer switch and a 160-watt solar-charging system help keep the electrical accessories operating in primitive locations, which is the type of camping many toy-hauler enthusiasts do regularly. The ducted 13,500-Btu air conditioner, 18,000-Btu furnace and 6-gallon DSI water heater handle creature comforts. For entertainment, the Jensen AM/FM Bluetooth stereo can be heard inside or outside.

Although the Attitude Pro-Lite 25FS may seem only moderately well-equipped when outfitted with standard features, options like a power A-frame jack, a rear screen wall, a patio cable kit for the ramp and a 28-inch TV enhance livability. The toy hauler has generous floor space for a trailer with a gross vehicle weight rating of 9,900 pounds, yet it can be handled by a wide variety of tow vehicles. 🚗

QUICK INFO



Exterior Length	30' 8"
Exterior Width	8' 6"
Interior Height	7' 6"/6' 6"
Exterior Height	11' 8"
Freshwater Cap.	100 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	50 gal./50 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	10 gal.
UVW	7,010 lbs.
Hitch Weight	1,010 lbs.
GVWR	9,900 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$40,000

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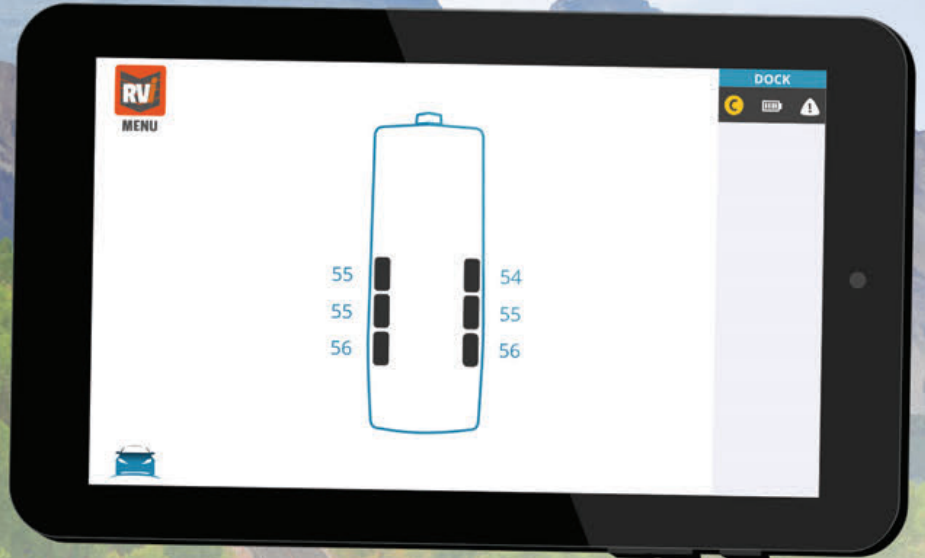
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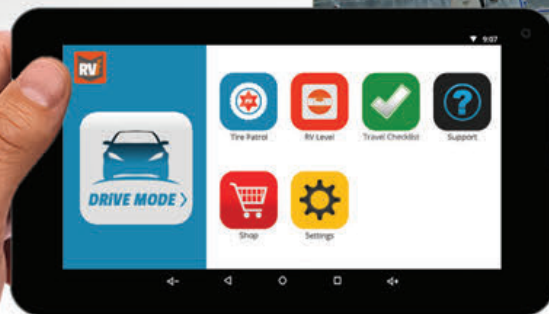
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SHOW AND SELL



From leading trends to the latest technical innovations, the Louisville trade show is where the RV industry reveals to the world what's new in recreational vehicles

For those working in the RV industry, the National RV Trade Show is a rite of passage and a spectacle to behold. This is the show where manufacturers take center stage — component manufacturers show and sell to RV manufacturers, and RV manufacturers show and sell to RV dealers. Held the week after Thanksgiving each year at Louisville's Kentucky Exposition Center, the four-day event covers about 760,000 square feet of exhibit space and hosts more than 7,500 industry insiders and members of the media. It's a major undertaking, but this is where the RV industry really shines.

The 54th-annual show presented a vast array of new RVs and associated products, and we couldn't possibly

review it all here. Some manufacturers introduced completely redesigned lines, others offered new floorplans for existing brands, and others freshened up previous models. Some trends that you'll see in campgrounds and on dealer lots are worth mentioning. Front windshields started appearing last year and are now available across several brands. Appliances and furnishings that are super-residential in style and function continue to be popular. So do retro designs. And computerized systems that allow control of most RV functions from a smart device have spread across many makes and model lines.

Here's a glimpse of what's in store this year, listed in alphabetical order by manufacturer.



Aliner

Aliner has been manufacturing its highly recognizable expandable A-frame pop-up trailers for more than 40 years. But with a growing conventional travel-trailer market, the company found it was time to expand its horizons beyond the chalet-type configuration.

"By offering the Aliner **Ascape**, with a base weight of approximately 1,350 pounds and 6 feet 4 inches of headroom, we definitely hit a nice sweet spot," said Brett Randall, Aliner's president and CEO.

The Ascape features upgraded cabinetry, a solar panel and a 3-cubic-foot refrigerator. A cassette toilet is optional. When folded down for sleeping, the bed is a bit larger than a queen. With its low dry weight, 13-foot length and 7½-foot exterior height, the Ascape is designed for easy towing behind many suitably equipped family vehicles, according to Randall. MSRP ranges from \$16,000 to \$19,000.



Coachmen

As Ray Found, Coachmen's West Coast

sales manager, explained it, lightweight travel trailers are built one of two ways: "Unlike other ultralights, where it seems like builders just take stuff out to make them lighter weight, we put special components in and use improved materials."

Coachmen builds the Apex line with Azdel composite in the side walls "to save weight but also to make a higher-quality product," said Found. "We do a vacuum-bond laminated ceiling with an aluminum truss. Again, it's much higher-quality construction that also lets us save weight."

Apex Nano trailers, the lightest in the Apex lineup, run from a 15-foot hybrid expandable up to the 25-foot **Apex Nano 213RDS**. The 213RDS has a 3,806-pound unloaded vehicle weight (UWV), a 6,000-pound gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) and a price point around \$19,000.



Coachmen's Catalina division hangs its hat on manufacturing affordable travel trailers but until the recent Louisville show, was missing a key component. "In this price point, [dealers] are getting serious demand for a toy hauler," said Mike Gaeddert, Catalina's Northeast sales rep. Enter the new Catalina Trailblazer toy-hauler line.

According to Gaeddert, the **Catalina Trailblazer 26TH** shines in the details, many of which are surprising in a toy hauler in the \$20,000 to \$21,000 range. The trailer, with its 7,900-pound GVWR, has a pair of freestanding swivel chairs in the living area, opposing fold-down sofas and a removable dining table in the garage, and the option for a party deck. The 90-by-74-inch ramp door can support "a couple thousand pounds," Gaeddert noted.



Coachmen also upped its fifth-wheel game with the **Chaparral 392BL**, a midprofile, aluminum-framed trailer with Azdel-backed, vacuum-bonded side walls and four-season livability, according to Fred Hershberger, general manager for Coachmen fifth-wheels.

The floorplan offers a midtrailer room below the loft that can be used as a second bedroom or entertainment space. The main living space and kitchen showcase an island with a recessed sink with different size basins to allow for larger items. The entertainment center houses a large HDTV and a fireplace, and the living space is

rounded out with a trifold sleeper-sofa and theater seating next to the free-standing dining table. The 392BL has a GVWR of 14,500 pounds and a starting price of \$52,193.



Cruiser RV

According to Cruiser RV General Manager Jay Mohamed, it's the "little touches" that stand out on the ultra-light **Shadow Cruiser SC-263RLS**, such as the large pantry, the good-size bathroom and the placement of the TV at an angle so it's easily viewed from any seat in the living area. The SC-263RLS is the first Shadow Cruiser with a king bed, which occupies the front of the trailer.

"We really needed a rear-living Shadow Cruiser," Mohamed said. "Historically, we've been fairly bunk heavy." The SC-263RLS has a GVWR of 9,000 pounds, and Mohamed said it is towable by properly equipped half-ton pickups. Overall length is 31½ feet, and MSRP starts at \$32,200.



Mohamed also previewed the 27-foot **Stryker ST-2313**, the shortest of seven Stryker toy haulers, despite having the second-largest garage. "We wanted to make sure it can handle the biggest, baddest four-seat RZR," Mohamed said. "We took oversize helmets and built the [garage] cabinets around them to make sure the helmets fit. Plus, we use 5,000-pound tie-downs, standard."

The aluminum-framed trailer has

a king bed up front and a drop-down queen bed in back. It also comes with 16-inch tires on aluminum wheels, a 100-plus-gallon freshwater tank, a 10-gallon water heater and a 30-gallon fuel station. "It's truly geared toward the off-road enthusiast," Mohamed noted. The ST-2313 has a \$46,676 MSRP and a 11,060-pound GVWR.



DRV

DRV's Aire line introduced the Aire MSA 38, a 38½-foot fifth-wheel companion to the 40-foot **Aire MSA 40**, which debuted at last September's RV Open House in Elkhart, Indiana. Sales Manager Kyle Adams said the goal is to bring DRV luxury into a more mainstream market by offering a lighter model that maintains the company's signature style.

"It's three-quarter-ton towable and built on a platform with an I-beam frame and laminated walls," Adams said. Both Aire models have hand-laid plank flooring and the same cherry cabinets and heat and water systems installed in DRV's high-end Mobile Suites fifth-wheels.

Adams said more floorplans will be added to the Aire line, but the MSA 40 is likely to be the largest. MSRP starts in the \$120,000 range, and GVWR is 17,500 pounds.



Dutchmen

For 2017, Dutchmen introduced a new Aerolite segment on a lighter, less-ex-

pensive platform. The 31-foot **Aerolite 2520RKS**, with 7,200-pound GVWR, is a case in point.

“It’s a rear-kitchen-slide model with a weight of about 5,100 pounds on a laminate build,” explained Brian Hyde, general manager of Dutchmen’s Aerolite, Coleman and Denali divisions. “Everything is foam and aluminum — side walls, rear wall, and the roof is the same structure to make it fully walkable. But with all that, it still doesn’t weigh any more than the competition in that lightweight platform.”



While the company’s Voltage line ranks among the most popular fifth-wheel toy haulers, Dutchmen executives understand that it occupies a price point at the higher end. To appeal to a broader audience, including first-time fifth-wheel buyers, the company introduced the Triton by Voltage for 2017.

“The toy-hauler market has gotten much more diverse,” said Michael Herdrich, Voltage product manager. “Now we’re getting a lot more families [and] a lot more sportsmen getting into toy haulers because they’ve seen the versatility there. The Triton is designed around that.”

The longest floorplan in the 32- to 39-foot lineup, the **Triton by Voltage 3551** is a double-axle, triple-slide, bath-and-a-half toy hauler. The fifth-wheel has an island galley and plenty of sleeping options, including a forward queen master suite, a two-bed loft, and sofas and a HappiJac powered-lift bunk in back. The Triton flagship has a 16,500-pound GVWR and comes with two air-conditioning units, an 18-cubic-foot refrigerator and the Jensen In-Command operating system.

MSRP for the Triton line ranges from \$55,000 to the low \$60,000s.

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Forest River

Forest River showcased its new **Riverstone 39FK** five-slide fifth-wheel, which continues the division's tradition of catering to full-time and extended-stay RVers. With an exterior profile of 13 feet 4 inches, the 39FK quite literally towered above many of the surrounding trailers sharing exhibit space.

"The 39K is unique in that it has opposing front slides to open up the space," said Curtis Gunderson, general manager of the Riverstone division. "The whole upper deck is the kitchen, a departure from the traditional models that feature a bedroom or a living room up front." Features include solid-surface countertops, stainless-steel appliances, a Samsung residential refrigerator, an induction cooktop and a dual-basin sink with a gooseneck faucet in an attractive kitchen island.

With a GVWR of 18,665 pounds and a starting price around \$95,000, the Riverstone is built for the long haul. "We use 3-inch side walls, which you don't usually see," said Gunderson. "Plus, the whole upper deck is built on an all-steel frame, offering plenty of support for years to come."



While Forest River's Sabre has been a mainstay for 11 years now, frequent updates keep the line of 27- to 40-foot fifth-wheels current. For 2017 Sabre has come out with a new Cobalt

Package of 16 special items, starting with a high-gloss exterior, according to Jeff Cripes, sales and product manager. "We call it True Sheen," he said, while previewing the 40-foot **Sabre 36BHQ**.

Standard theater seating in the bunkhouse comes with heat, light and massage, and the bedroom features a mechanized queen bed. "It's a bed for reading, and converts up so you can be comfortable," Cripes said. "We run friction-hinge entry doors, tire-pressure monitoring systems, an exterior entertainment system, solar prep, a utility center and a rear rack for exterior big-ticket items," he added.

The 36BHQ, which sleeps up to 12, has an MSRP of "right around \$50,000," according to Cripes.



When selecting a towable toy hauler, many buyers are faced with the expensive proposition of purchasing a heavier-duty truck or settling for a smaller, less-appointed trailer without all the bells and whistles. Recognizing this gap in the market, Forest River introduced the **Work and Play 21SE**, with a UVW of 5,990 pounds and a GVWR of 11,375 pounds. Combine that with a 15-foot 10-inch cargo length, and there's plenty of room for toys without skimping on niceties.

The company designed the new toy hauler to be half-ton towable. "You can tow the 21SE with an F-150," affirmed Adam Cates, Northwest regional sales manager. With a starting price of \$19,990, the floorplan includes some elegant livability touches, such as residential backsplashes, solid-surface countertops and a Thetford refrigerator. As with all Work and Play trailers, the 21SE is built on a powder-coated chassis and features a seamless one-piece aluminum roof.



Highland Ridge

Just under 38 feet, the new **Open Range Roamer RT 328BHS** offers an unusual twist in bunkhouse design. The way the rear bunk room is set up with its own slideout, couch and half-bath access, it's almost like having two separate RVs in one.

"It has four slides and two campsite-side awnings, which is pretty rare for a travel trailer," said Ben Johnson, national sales, marketing and product-development manager for the company. "We're building on this concept of fifth-wheel amenities in a travel trailer."

The living space has a 50-inch TV, the bedroom features a wardrobe slide and a king bed, the rear bunk room could easily be used as an office, and there's a full outside kitchen. "There's just a lot of versatility here," Johnson said. The 328BHS has a GVWR of 11,680 pounds and a starting price of \$54,865.



When Highland Ridge came out with its Ultra Lite line in 2015, it became a quick success. The latest addition is the rear-kitchen **Open Range Ultra Lite UT2804 RK**. "Obviously, it gives you the rear kitchen, but it also gives you theater seating across from the TV, a nice big window from the kitchen to the campsite, and an outside kitchen — all that in a trailer that's about 6,000 pounds dry weight," Johnson said.

"With rear-kitchen floorplans, you get tons of countertop space and storage," he explained. "But what you

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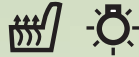
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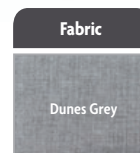
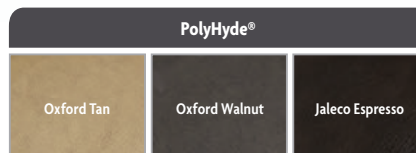
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oftentimes have in a rear-kitchen unit that isn't as desirable is living room and TV placement. We've come up with a unique floorplan that puts the theater seating across from a 39-inch TV that swings out and has plenty of storage space behind it. This unit also has a fireplace, which in this segment is pretty rare," according to Johnson.

The UT2804 RK is 31 feet 9 inches long and has a GVWR of 7,450 pounds. MSRP is \$36,600.



Jayco

Launched last spring, Jayco's ultralight Hummingbird line joined the niche market of contemporary travel trailers reminiscent of the old "canned-ham" style. One of five floorplans for 2017, the 20-foot **Hummingbird 17BH** is a bunkhouse with Jayco's exclusive residential-style Simmons mattresses, a U-shaped dinette, a convection microwave and a folding table that sets up outside.

The 17BH offers a remote-powered awning with multicolored LED lights, a feature that differentiates it from the competition, said John Fisher, senior product director for Jayco lightweight trailers. There's also a Bluetooth stereo and the Keyed Alike single-key system, as well as an optional electric A-frame jack, a bike rack, and an insulated and covered underbelly. The 17BH has a 3,750-pound GVWR and a base price of \$22,900.



Extending 44 feet, the **Seismic 4113** fifth-wheel toy hauler also has elements

that set it apart, according to Jayco's product manager, Brent Hammond. Instead of the usual steps going to the upper deck on the right, the stairs are on the opposite side and lead to the elevated kitchen. The kitchen has a 23-cubic-foot refrigerator and not only looks out over the living room but also offers a view of the campsite.

"One of the great things about the raised kitchen is it doubles our pass-through storage space on the outside," Hammond said. A loft is situated between the living room and the 12½-foot garage, and there's also a large side patio with an exterior TV that opens into the rear half-bath. The 4113 has a 20,000-pound GVWR and an MSRP of \$107,000.



Keystone

According to Keystone executives, within hours of posting photos of the **Alpine 3650** on the company's Facebook page, the new floorplan already had nearly 20,000 views. The idea was to design a kitchen and bedroom that were atypical, said Jeff Wagner, product manager for the manufacturer.

To accomplish that, the cabinet prepped for a clothes washer and dryer in the 39-foot 4-inch fifth-wheel was relocated from the front bedroom wardrobe to the main living area. Wagner said that for the 90 percent of RVers who don't opt for the stackable washer and dryer, the available space becomes a welcome storage area right off the main entry.

As for the kitchen, instead of mounting the convection oven above the stove, as is customary, Keystone designers placed it to the left of it, beneath a wine rack and above a pantry cabinet and an appliance garage. An attractive copper range hood caps the stove, and a center island with a dishwasher completes the kitchen.

The 3650 has a uvw of about 12,775 pounds and a base price of \$67,813.



"It's a tried-and-tested floorplan," said Keystone RV President Jeff Runels, as he walked through the **Cougar XLite 29BHS** 34-foot bunkhouse. "But what Cougar did this year is add the outside kitchen." The exterior kitchen features an innovative grill/cooktop that was designed exclusively for the Cougar line and is said to provide a hotter cooking surface while reducing flare-ups.

According to Runels, Cougar designers also kept the exterior door to the bathroom in the back — "which most bunks don't have" — and utilized 32-inch-wide double-over-double bunks. The front features a king bed, and the living room can have a trifold sleeper-sofa or theater seating. The standard dinette can be swapped for a freestanding table and chairs.

"The other big thing for Cougar is it has the trailer leveler now," Runels said, referring to the new Ground Control automatic leveling system from Lippert. "Most of the lightweights that this is going to compete against don't have the door into the back, don't have the wide bunks and definitely don't have the leveler." The new floorplan has a GVWR of 8,200 pounds and a starting price of \$32,086.



Runels also previewed the new **Raptor 428SP**, a 44-foot-long, two-patio fifth-wheel that repositions the customary rear bath. "That way you



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have that 11½-foot garage — the full width, which is a big deal,” Runels said. “The side patio comes off your living area. Other models have it coming off the kitchen, so we flipped that. That changes where we put our entertainment center — we did it a little bit differently and put it at the front.”

Inside, the 428SP features a darker interior, “but they lightened up some of the trim, changed the countertops and changed the floors,” Runels noted. The kitchen has an 18-cubic-foot refrigerator, the master bedroom on the upper deck includes a king bed, and the living area has an optional 131-inch sofa with recliners. The garage sports an electric bed and dual 30-gallon fuel tanks for the optional generator and motorized toys, and there’s a loft with a twin bed over the front of the garage. Base MSRP is \$110,005, and GVWR is 19,000 pounds.



Lance

Named a Top RV Debut by *RVBusiness* and awarded Best of Show by *RV Pro*, the rear-lounge **Lance 2375** has a lot to offer in a trailer with a 6,500-pound GVWR, according to Gary Conley, national sales manager for Lance. Owners don’t need a powerful truck or SUV to tow the lightweight trailer, which is fully aluminum framed and features Azdel side-wall interior panels.

Accommodating four for sleeping, the dual-entry 2375 has a front master bedroom and a fold-down dinette. Although only 27 feet from bumper to coupler, the trailer is equipped with dual rockers, a 36-inch shower and a porcelain toilet. The kitchen has stainless-steel appliances, an attractive dark-gray laminated countertop and a black-matte undermount single-bowl sink with a gooseneck faucet.

On the outside, the 2375 can be outfitted with a 20-foot power awning

with LED lighting, electric stabilizer jacks, keyless entry and an exterior ladder, all as options. The front wall has a tall, dark-tinted windshield for stargazing at night when the shade isn’t drawn. Base price is \$38,816.



Riverside RV

With the introduction of the **Retro 265BH**, Riverside RV added a full-size bunkhouse to its lineup of vintage-inspired trailers. With a \$27,500 MSRP and a uvw topping out at 4,820 pounds, the 26½-foot trailer features a front bedroom, a curbside kitchen, a U-shaped dinette tucked into a slideout, and bunk beds and a bathroom in the rear. Black-and-white tile flooring, bold red dinette seating and natural wood finish on the inside combine with the Retro’s classic exterior styling to create a vintage look throughout.

“Our first bunkhouse was great, but you had to fold down the dinette to get a queen bed,” said Jenny Volatile, Riverside RV’s West Coast factory representative. “With the 265, you get a dedicated walk-around queen bed in a private bedroom. With the rear bunks and dinette, it comfortably sleeps up to six, so it’s perfect for families who want classic style but modern amenities.”



Riverside Travel Trailer

When it comes to testing toy haulers before production, Riverside Travel Trailers has a leg up on the competition. “I grew up camping, and I have

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done this my whole life," said Jerry Sell, Riverside's vice president and general manager. The company's president, Ken Licklider, takes a toy hauler to the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally every year. "He owns 15 Harleys and a side-by-side," Sell added. This type of hands-on testing has helped Riverside become respected among the toy-hauler crowd, producing seven floorplans under its RPM marque.

Riverside introduced the line's first fifth-wheel, the **RPM 335R17**. "This fiver allows enough room for a side-by-side to pull in," Sell said. "That was the first thing we had to do. The other thing was to have a fifth-wheel that has amenities Mom will like. Dad wants his toys, but Mom wants it to be a trailer she can be comfortable in."

To that end, the 335R17 features raised-panel cabinets, high-quality appliances, abundant storage and plenty of stand-up room in the bedroom. All this comes on a 13,400-pound-rated platform that features rugged grid-work construction with welded steel plates and tie-downs rated for 5,000 pounds. MSRP is \$34,500.



Riverside Travel Trailer also used the Louisville stage to introduce the new Dream. With a starting price of \$26,250, the Dream line aims to tap into the market of more-affordable towables to appeal to a wider segment of the population. Despite the price, the trailers feature the same construction methods as Riverside's more-expensive models. "It's an all wood-core product, screwed together and done the right way," Sell said.

Initially, the trailers will be offered in six floorplans. The **Dream D270RLS** is a couples' trailer with a single slide, comfortable seating in the living area, a walk-around queen bed and a 7,900-pound GVWR.



Starcraft

Starcraft's new Mercury Super Lite line of travel trailers is a direct response to what dealers asked for, according to Nick Eppert, the company's general manager. "The Mercury Super Lite line is our new value-priced product aimed at the half-ton fiberglass lightweight market," he said.

One of two initial floorplans with an outside bathroom door, the 33-foot 3-inch **Mercury SuperLite 27BHU** has a GVWR of 7,750 pounds and a starting price around \$31,000.



Travel Lite

According to Dustin Johns, president of Travel Lite, the new Falcon trailer was based on one overriding concept: "Could we make the lightest travel trailer per square foot on the market?" What the company came up with is a line of stylish trailers from 20 to 24 feet with dry weights from 2,480 to 3,215 pounds.

Travel Lite didn't skimp on things that make RV camping more enjoyable. "For example, most manufacturers use a 3-cubic-foot refrigerator in a unit of this size — we went with a 5-cubic-foot model," Johns said. "We also went with dual 20-pound propane tanks, room for a second battery and larger holding tanks." The Falcon line features 18- or 20-inch wheels wrapped in 10-inch-wide Goodyear or Michelin tires.

The smallest, the **Falcon F20**, is a rear-dinette floorplan. Like the

others, it has solid-surface countertops, aluminum cabinet doors and a queen-size bed beneath the aerodynamic front end. "There are no wood drawer or cabinet fronts in the entire unit," Johns said. "Everything is aluminum."

Travel Lite makes each floorplan available in a special Eclipse model where the rolled-aluminum exterior side walls, awning cover, fenders and wheels are black and accented with blue lighting. The Eclipse Package adds a few hundred dollars to starting MSRPs from \$14,670 to \$19,900.



Venture RV

While popular floorplans debuting in more expensive fifth-wheel lines do sometimes "trickle down" to more affordable travel trailers, cost and space still limit what designers can do. That's not the case with Venture RV's **SportTrek Touring Edition 333VFL**.

"It's a fifth-wheel-inspired floorplan with a front living room, so the sofa's up front," explained Dave Boggs, general manager of K-Z RV's Venture RV division. "A lot of fifth-wheels do extremely well with front living rooms, so we decided to take it to the travel-trailer market."

The 333VFL, with its 9,995-pound GVWR, features a rear bedroom with a king-size bed, and a midcabin bath and galley. Beyond the sofa that lines the front cap, the front living room has street-side theater seating opposite an entertainment center with an electric fireplace in the curbside slideout. The outside kitchen includes a refrigerator and a two-burner stove.

The SportTrek utilizes StepAbove entry steps developed by MORryde that go all the way to the ground for stability and fold up when not in use. "We're the only ones in travel trailers



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to use it," Boggs said. Starting price for the 38-foot 11-inch fifth-wheel is about \$38,000.



Winnebago

With side and rear patios, the new 44-foot 11-inch Winnebago **Scorpion 4027** represents the largest footprint in the company's fleet of fifth-wheel toy haulers. The rear patio serves as the ramp door for loading toys into the 13-foot-deep garage. The side patio is unique in that, in addition to the steps leading to the ground, it has two entries from the trailer itself, one from the garage and the other from the midlevel living room.

Both slideouts are on the street side,

with the living-room slide housing a sofa and a refrigerator. The second slide, featuring wardrobe storage, is located up front. A curved loft overlooks the living area. In the garage, opposing sofas, a half-bath and an optional powered-lift queen bed complete the fifth-wheel.

The triple-axle, one-and-a-half-bath 4027 has a starting price of \$99,500, a 16,320-pound uvw and a GVWR of 20,800 pounds. Freshwater capacity is 137 gallons, and the gray and black tanks are each capable of holding 92 gallons.



Winnebago's Spyder line of toy-hauler trailers debuted a new floorplan, the **Spyder 29KS**, featuring a kitchen

slideout and plenty of curves. The 29KS measures 32 feet 2 inches — including a 16-foot garage — and has a GVWR of 12,400 pounds, so there's plenty of capacity for toys. Speaking of capacity, the 29KS comes with 100-, 41- and 41-gallon tanks for fresh, black and gray water, respectively.

A private bedroom up front includes a walk-around queen bed flanked by closets. A three-piece bathroom separates the bedroom from the living room, with entry doors from both areas. The hallway from the bedroom past the bathroom leads to the L-shaped galley, housed in a slideout.

From there, the rest of the trailer is the living area and garage, featuring two chairs opposite a fold-up sofa, a mammoth flat-screen TV with storage behind it, and additional storage areas tucked above curved, back-lit shelving. Opposing-slide sofas as well as an optional powered-lift queen bed are in the rear, just in front of the ramp door. Base MSRP for the Spyder line is \$47,256. 🚐

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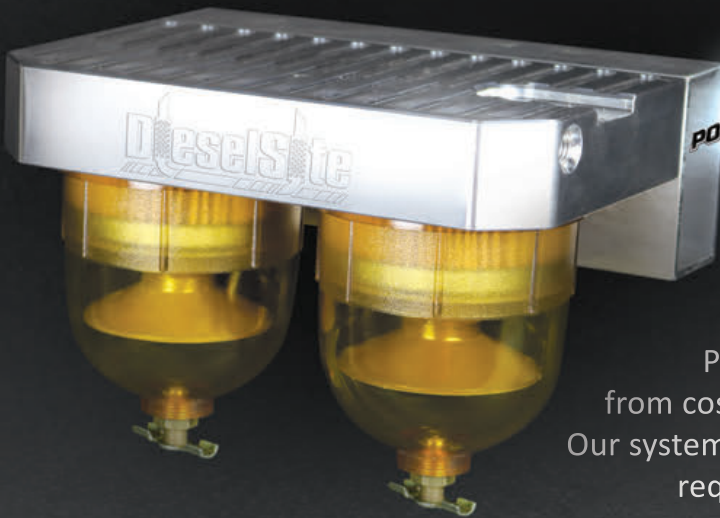


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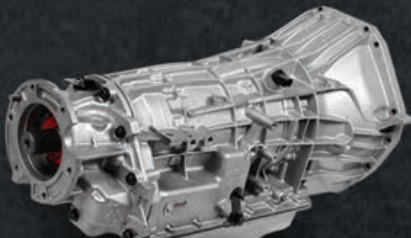
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SARASOTA'S THREE-RING CIRCUS

Miles of soft-sand beaches, a vibrant arts community and a weekly farmer's market come together along the boardwalks and under the big top on Florida's Gulf Coast

Sarasota is a colorful waterfront paradise halfway down the Gulf Coast of Florida where the beach sand feels like powdered sugar between your toes and the waves splash playfully on the edges of the turquoise water. As soon as we arrived, my husband, Mark, and I were swept up in the summery spirit of this friendly, outdoorsy town.

Tucked behind several barrier peninsulas, or keys, that protect the city from the open ocean, Sarasota offers endless opportunities for enjoying gentle breezes and sunshine, whether in an upscale, urban setting or in a quieter place where nature abounds.

We began our explorations on the lovely Marina Jack Trail that circles Bayfront Park on the edge of Sarasota Bay. Beginning at the marina, we admired a wide variety of yachts.

From luxury powerboats to nimble sailboats, the marina oozed a vacation atmosphere, as owners kicked back in their cockpits or worked on their boats while enjoying a fun waterfront life with one foot firmly planted in this pretty city.

The Marina Jack Trail wanders past palm-tree-studded tiki bars and tiny beaches, and the city skyline of high-rises rose behind us, as we took in the views of boats in the bay. We were surprised when we turned a corner and found an enormous statue of a World War II sailor kissing a nurse. Called *Unconditional Surrender*, we knew this image well, not only from the famous photo taken in New York's Times Square on the day of the Allied victory over Japan but from an identical 25-foot sculpture that stands near the USS Midway Museum in San Diego.



Sailboats and powerboats ply the turquoise bay waters off Centennial Park in the heart of Sarasota.

SARASOTA'S THREE-RING CIRCUS

Just a few streets in from the bay, we visited Sarasota's Saturday Farmer's Market and found endless fruits and veggies. This is a huge weekly market, right in the heart of the city. Surprisingly, for all the towering glass-walled skyscrapers that make up downtown Sarasota, this vast yet intimate market brings the community together. Nearby, charming boutiques line historic streets, and we enjoyed a morning cup of coffee sitting outside at the Pastry Art Bakery.

As we walked and drove around town, we kept noticing an unusual sculpture that popped up in storefronts, on house lawns and by the front doors of local businesses. It was a bigger-than-life-size, brightly colored metal stick figure that was always waving and grinning. We saw him wearing a baker's hat at a bakery, carrying a toothbrush at a dentist's office, holding a mailbox under his arm in the front yard of a house and even sitting in a kayak

(Right, top and middle) A stroll or bike ride on the paved Marina Jack Trail takes in urban waterfront views and passes by small beaches and tiki bars. (Below) Hot sun, soft sand and warm, sparkling blue water bring happy crowds to Venice Beach, 20 miles south of Sarasota.





(Above, from left) Magnificent artwork by Baroque master Peter Paul Rubens fills the walls of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. Blending art and nature, the European-style courtyard at the Ringling is meticulously manicured and surrounded by the museum's columned walls and statues.

at an outdoor sporting-goods store. I finally asked a shop owner what it was all about, and she cheerfully said, "It's the Tube Dude!"

It turned out that the Tube Dude is the brainchild of sculptor Scott Gerber who has been welding his very tall buddy in all kinds of poses and selling the sculptures to shop owners and residents since 2010. The Tube Dude has become so popular around town, he is now something of Sarasota's unofficial greeter and mascot. We got a kick out of looking for him, pointing whenever we found him and calling out, "Tube Dude!"

The arts are huge in Sarasota, and that also came as a surprise. The central Gulf Coast of Florida is such a beach-lover's paradise that we never expected to see much beyond a wide expanse of pure white sand, dazzling blue waves and hundreds of sun worshippers in skimpy bathing suits. However, while walking a waterfront path through Centennial Park, which looks out on boaters zipping across the bay, we found the huge Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall where Ringo Starr and other top performers were on tap for upcoming performances. We didn't catch the former Beatles' drummer in concert, but we were impressed by the big patio that extends off the back of the concert hall where patrons can enjoy a drink and a view of the bay during intermission. What a wonderful juxtaposition of the high-arts scene and the simple waterfront pleasures of this unique city.

Far more astonishing, though, was our unexpected discovery of the

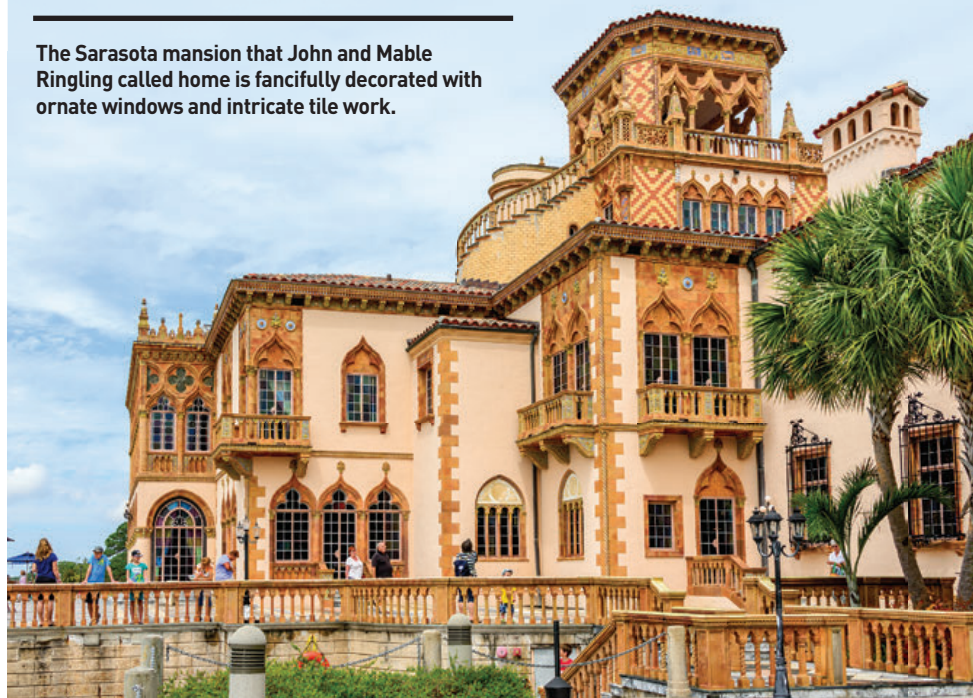
Ringling estate and museums. Back in 1884, five of the seven Ringling brothers created a circus that came to be known as World's Greatest Shows, and later merged with Barnum and Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth. The Ringling circus was the first to travel the country by rail, and at one time its train had 100 cars and housed animals and performers all season long. Sarasota was just a small fishing village then, and John and Charles Ringling began buying up property to

create a home base. At one point they owned 25 percent of the town.

Most of the circus performers lived in Sarasota when they weren't touring. A local friend introduced us to an elderly resident who not only remembered waving hello and good-bye to the train each year when it arrived and departed, but also recalled the neighborhood where the circus dwarfs lived in pint-size houses.

John Ringling's fortunes soared for decades, and his investments ranged

The Sarasota mansion that John and Mable Ringling called home is fancifully decorated with ornate windows and intricate tile work.





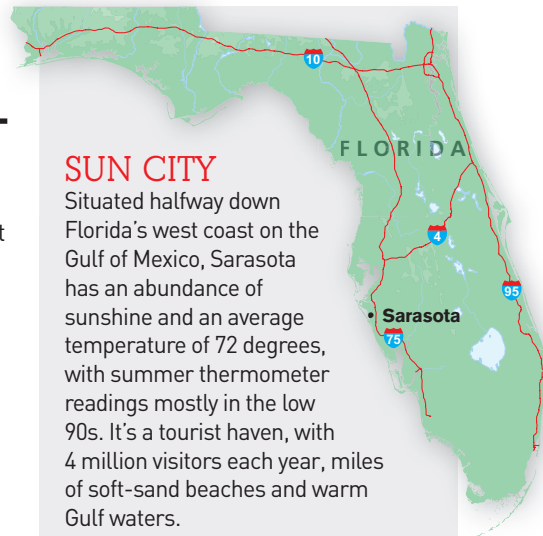
(Above, from left) The Saturday Farmer's Market brings the Sarasota community together each weekend. A sandhill crane checks on its newly hatched chick. At Sarasota Jungle Gardens, flamingos eat from visitors' hands. The attraction opened to the public in 1939. (Bottom) It's no secret that Sarasota and the rest of the Sunshine State are popular with RVers.

from railroads and fine art to Madison Square Garden. Then it all fell apart during the Great Depression. Shortly before his death in 1936, just as he was poised to lose everything, he donated his grand mansion and impressive collection of European art to the city of Sarasota. His home, a veritable palace, and his art collection are now part of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, the state's official art museum, known as the Ringling. Every Monday the entrance fee to portions of the museum is waived.

Walking into the ornate art museum, which is decorated to the hilt in a fanciful way that only a circus man would think to do, we were blown away by the series of 8-foot-tall paintings that greeted us. Created by Flemish Baroque master

Peter Paul Rubens in the 1620s, these sensational paintings are a fittingly jaw-dropping opening act for this magnificent collection. We wandered from room to room admiring beautiful artwork that seemed to represent every great painter prior to 1900.

The grounds of the museum are equally sensational. A massive courtyard surrounded by the endless pink-columned facade of the museum is filled with meticulously pruned landscaping and statuary. At the head of these immense gardens stands a replica of Michelangelo's *David*, poised with his rock on his shoulder between a row of palm trees, gazing at the gardens below. We watched a tiny bird land on top of one of the garden's many statues, and he sang his heart out for a while,



SUN CITY

Situated halfway down Florida's west coast on the Gulf of Mexico, Sarasota has an abundance of sunshine and an average temperature of 72 degrees, with summer thermometer readings mostly in the low 90s. It's a tourist haven, with 4 million visitors each year, miles of soft-sand beaches and warm Gulf waters.

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The Ringling mansion itself is a palatial building that overlooks Sarasota Bay. It is a virtual castle, embellished with fairy-tale turrets and colorful decorations. A massive patterned marble patio enclosed by stone railings extends to a boat dock on the bay. Out back we found Mable Ringling's Rose Garden where roses of all kinds were in bloom.

The Ringling is made up of several museums, including the Circus Museum, and the interior of the mansion is also open for tours. We did not purchase the three-day all-inclusive ticket, but there's no doubt it would take that long to see the entire estate and all of its grounds and museums.

After this marvelously highbrow immersion in the arts and wealth, we were ready for some simple beach time. Siesta Beach is Sarasota's most famous stretch of shoreline, and it was rated the Number One Beach in America by TripAdvisor in 2015, so there are proud Number One Beach signs everywhere. Walking on powder-soft sand that felt like flour to the touch and squealed with every footstep, we were delighted by the beautiful shades of blue and turquoise rippling across the water as the waves gently lapped the shore.

It would have been easy during our stay in Sarasota not to seek out another beach, but we drove a little south to spend the day on popular Venice Beach. Families and couples, young and old, strolled along the water's edge and spread out on beach blankets in the sun. The glistening water was thick with bobbing heads and kids jumping in the waves. Beach grasses form a natural border between the white sand and the developed areas, and a series of boardwalks and shaded wooden picnic areas provided a memorable place to enjoy lunch with a view. The Venice Fishing Pier allows walkers to get far out on the ocean without dipping a toe in the water, and the entire pier was lined with people tending fishing rods that hung over the railings.

Back in Sarasota, it was easy to enjoy the nearly tropical surroundings, on or off the beach. The city is home

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SARASOTA'S THREE-RING CIRCUS

to several beautiful parks that attract a wide variety of birds. At tiny Payne Park in the middle of the city, we were captivated by some very exotic geese swimming between the lily pads and waddling on shore under the shade of big trees. Just outside of town, the Celery Fields are fabulous for bird watching. Long-legged herons and other waterfowl fished along the shoreline, and a large wooden viewing platform jutting out into the ponds made it easy for us to spot birds as they flew from shore to shore.

But we were most surprised when we found a throng of photographers set up with tripods aimed at a spot next to a manmade pond behind a Bob Evans restaurant in a strip mall. When we stopped to see what the commotion was, we learned that two sandhill crane eggs were hatching in a nest by the water. Training our own long lenses on the redheaded birds, we were thrilled when a tiny pip hole in one egg expanded and cracked to reveal a nestling. You couldn't ask for more excitement in a zoo, yet here in the middle of the urban rush, a gaggle of excited bystanders watched two wet baby birds push away their shells and transform into adorable fluffy chicks over a 12-hour period.

With birdwatching on our minds, we took a day trip to Sarasota Jungle Gardens, rated one of the best children's animal parks in the area. Despite being a little past childhood ourselves, we became kids again as we played with the flamingos. One took a liking to Mark and lovingly rubbed his beak all over his back and head, making us both giggle. Taking in the wonderful bird show, we were smitten with a 79-year-old cockatoo named Snowflake who rode a bicycle on a tightrope while counterbalanced by a macaw sitting below him on a swing, like a pendulum. I was so impressed that this bird had appeared on the *Ed Sullivan Show* before I was even born, I just had to line up with all the 10-year-old kids to get a photo with Snowflake perched on my arm.

Sarasota was an utter delight for us, and we heartily encourage fellow RVers to spend some time savoring its many charms. 🐦

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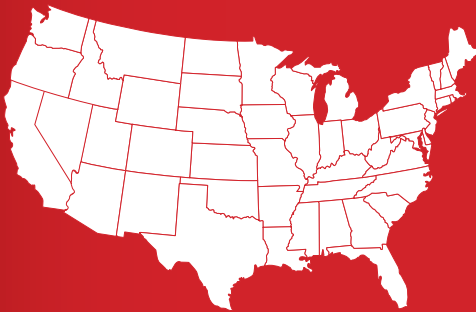
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SPRING OPENER



For a winning season this year, make sure the RV is ready to roll by doing a thorough inspection and cleaning

Now that spring is almost here, preparing your RV for travel and performing necessary — and preventive — maintenance will pay dividends all year long.

For those who stored their RV under a cover during the winter, the first step, obviously, is removing it. RV covers are expensive, so try to do this on a dry day. If the cover is damp, let it dry in the sun before storing it. If the cover is damaged, most manufacturers have patch kits that can be used to make repairs.

This is a good time for a thorough examination and cleaning of the RV roof. Make sure there hasn't been any damage during storage. Check the seals for signs of wear and deterioration, and reseal as needed. Be sure to use the correct sealant for the type and brand of roof. Several good rubber-roof cleaners and treatments on the market make this chore easier and more effective, including products from Dicor, Protect-All and Thetford.

If you have a fiberglass or aluminum roof, wash it and wax it, as you would the sides of the trailer. Waxing is a bit of a job, but you can make a family project out of it — just be sure to let your helpers know which surfaces not to wax, such as plastic (fenders), diamond plate and so on. The commercial one-step wash-and-wax concentrates don't replace a good hand waxing, which deep-cleans the surface and helps keep RVs looking new for years, but they work well for maintaining wax on the surface throughout the season.

Seals on the sides of the RV should be examined for gaps and wear, and repaired as needed. Again, try to match the sealant used on the RV from the factory. Sealing around doors and windows can be done with a good window-and-door caulk such as GE Silicone II and acrylic sealants like those from Geocel and Sika. Follow the instructions carefully. Consider using a tooling fluid (soapy water in a spray bottle) to make the caulk beads look professional. To do this, once you have

applied a bead from the caulk gun, lightly spray (fog) the bead and the surrounding area with the tooling fluid, then use a caulk tool to remove the excess. This way, the caulk sticks where it is supposed to and is easily removed where it is not.

Open all the exterior compartments and check for signs of leaks and rodents or other pests, and deal with any issues. Spring is a great time to empty out the exterior compartments, and clean and rearrange things for the season.

Tires and running gear are what keep RVs on the road, and careful examination and service are essential. Check the tires for proper inflation, signs of damage or degradation, and to make sure the tread isn't wearing unevenly. Modern special trailer (ST) tires tend to have a shorter life than regular automotive tires, lasting only three to five years in some cases, according to some industry experts and RVers, so check the date of manufacture. This is especially important for off-brand tires that are manufactured in China.

If the tires are timing out or need replacing for other reasons, new tires should be the same size, weight and speed rating as the originals, although you can move up in rating to give the tires a little more beef. Just remember that increasing tire ratings does not increase the gross vehicle weight rating of the trailer.

Brakes and bearings also require service. Most manufacturers have a recommended maintenance schedule. Dexter Axle, for example, recommends repacking bearings every 12 months or 12,000 miles. Brakes (if not automatically adjusting) should be adjusted every three months or 3,000 miles, and linings should be visually inspected every 12 months or 12,000 miles. This annual service should include inspecting the running gear, including suspension components, wiring and so on.

Take a good look at the suspension for signs of wear. If you have greaseable shackle bolts, give them a shot of grease

SPRING OPENER

to start the season. While you're underneath the RV, take a quick glance at the wiring for signs of snagging and to make sure the wires haven't become a midnight snack for rodents.

Many RVers remove the batteries in winter to protect them, and spring is a good time to inspect them and check for proper water level during reinstallation. It's also time to plug in the RV to 120-volt AC power so the batteries can charge. After inspecting the hookup wires for damage or wear and tear, be sure to spray battery sealant on the terminals to help deter corrosion. Hook the trailer's electrical connector to the tow vehicle, check the exterior DOT lights and replace any bulbs that are burned out. Don't forget to reseal around the light fixtures, if needed.

Do a visual inspection of the LP-gas hardware before turning on the system. Squirrels and other critters like the taste of rubber hoses and will chew on them. Look for cracks and other signs of wear, and check for leaks when you first pressurize the system. If you're not sure that the system is sound, have it tested by a certified RV technician or LP-gas professional.

Hot-Water System

Trailers with more basic water systems, which include a standard LP-gas water heater, should be dewinterized as follows, assuming that nontoxic antifreeze has been used to protect the plumbing. The goal is to prevent antifreeze from getting into the water-heater tank. Once antifreeze is in there, you'll be smelling and tasting it, and seeing foaming for a long time. It's harmless but annoying.

First, make sure the water-heater bypass is still in winterize mode. There are different types of bypass kits, so check the owner's manual or contact the manufacturer if you're not sure which kind you have or how to operate it. Next, hook up the freshwater supply to the trailer and turn it on. This will pressurize the system. Make sure to flush the system thoroughly for best results. This includes faucets, low-point drains, toilets, the washing machine and icemaker. Once clean water is flowing through all the faucets, and there are no leaks or other problems, it's time to move on to the water heater.

The outside drain plug is probably not installed in the tank after draining and winterizing. A good method is to reverse the bypass



(Above) One of the most important things to do on an RV is maintain the roof seals. For warranty compliance, some manufacturers require that they be inspected every 90 days and resealed as needed. **(Top)** Be sure to use the proper sealant for the brand and type of roof. Failure to do so can result in hidden leaks that can cause considerable damage over time.



(Above left) Checking window and door seals for signs of wear is equally important. Reseal, if needed, trying to match the original sealant as closely as possible and following instructions carefully. **(Center)** In addition to looking for cracks and wear, check the DOT date of manufacture on each tire to make sure the tires haven't exceeded the manufacturer's recommended life span. **(Right)** Checking for rodent infestation is another essential part of preparing a stored RV for travel. Often, because of food spills, pests will migrate to the kitchen range and nest there, or at least leave their calling card. Line this area with aluminum foil to catch spills but don't block vent holes.



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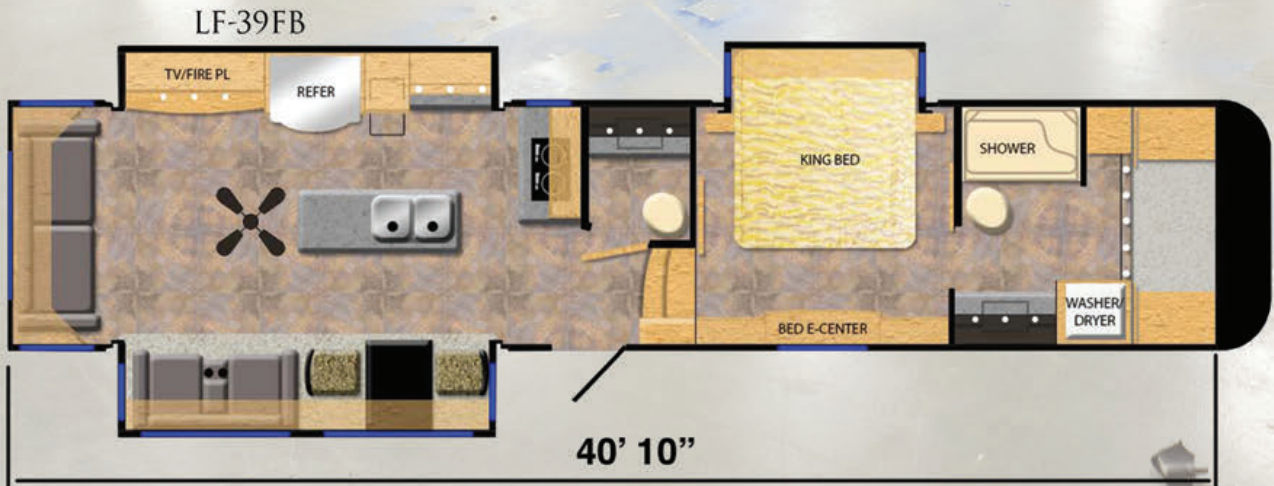
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The RV Factory-Augusta RV, Circle 103 on Reader Service Card

SPRING OPENER

kit and let some freshwater flow out of the drain, then shut off the water and install the plug or anode rod back in the tank. This flushes out stale water and collected minerals from the bottom of the water-heater tank. You can also use one of the flush-out wand tools available from RV-accessory dealers.

Reinstall the drain plug, turn the water on and open the relief valve using the spring-loaded lever. When the water comes out, release it to close the valve. Check for flow through the hot-water system, then test-fire the water heater. If you have a three-valve bypass kit, make certain the middle valve is closed. RV-service centers get many calls about tepid water from the water heater, only to find out this valve was left in the open position.

Make certain to flow water from every discharge point, including outside showers and low-point drains. If the RV has washer/dryer prep but no washer, hook up a hose to each of these valves and flow water into a sink, the washer

drain or outside the RV. Stale water and antifreeze can remain in these lines and taint the freshwater.

Dewinterizing an RV with a Truma tankless hot-water system takes less effort because there is no tank to flush. Just follow the procedure in the owner's manual for flushing the system. Once everything is buttoned up and water is flowing throughout the plumbing, the system can be test-fired.

Freshwater System

I am a stickler about keeping the freshwater as clean as possible. To do this, two things must happen. First, the incoming source of water must be filtered and clean, whether the water is coming from the city-water connection or the freshwater holding tank. Second, the water system must be sanitized at the beginning of the season.

There are a couple of ways to sanitize the system. The old-school way is to make a chlorine solution and run it through the water system. The other is

to use a commercial RV water freshener available at Camping World and other RV-accessory suppliers.

The chlorine solution is simple, safe and works like a champ. Simply mix ¼ cup of plain household bleach and 1 gallon of water. If your RV's water system is dirty (for instance, the hot water gives off a rotten-egg smell), you can increase the bleach to ½ cup per gallon of water. Add one gallon of solution to an empty, preferably flushed, freshwater tank for every 15 gallons of tank capacity. For example, if you have a 30-gallon tank, you would add 2 gallons of the chlorine mix.

Then fill the tank to the top, turn on the water pump and run the solution through the plumbing system until you can smell chlorine from each faucet. Allow the solution to sit in the system for at least four hours (one hour if using the ½-cup solution). Then drain the freshwater tank completely and flush the entire system with water. Draining the water-heater tank using the drain

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Lippert Components, Circle 129 on Reader Service Card



plug will speed things up a bit.

Flushing the system will remove most of the chlorine. Water-freshening solutions are available in liquid and tablet form to get the remainder out, if you wish, but the chlorine will dissipate quickly and is harmless after the system has been flushed.

Baking soda can also be used to remove the chlorine taste and smell. Simply empty a box of baking soda in a bucket of water, pour it in the tank, fill the tank with water and, again, run the solution through the system. Allow the baking soda to work overnight, drain the tank and flush with water. The plumbing

(Above left) The hitch requires a thorough inspection. On fifth-wheels, make sure to have a lube plate on the kingpin and grease the pin itself. Lube the hitch according to the manufacturer's instructions. **(Center)** Flush the plumbing system, including low-point drains and washing-machine lines. Otherwise, traces of the potable RV antifreeze remain and can taint the freshwater. **(Right)** Leave the water heater in bypass mode while flushing the water system, then reverse the valves and run water through the water heater, allowing it to run out of the drain opening. This is not required on Truma tankless hot-water systems.

system is now clean and sanitized for the season.

Inside the RV

To prep the RV's interior, start by checking for signs of rodents and removing any nests and debris left behind. This is a good time to see if you can find where

the pests came in and seal these areas from the outside. Do a thorough cleaning of the RV, including inside and under cabinets, windows and so on.

Clean and check the operation of all appliances. If you have a gas range, lift the top to check for rodent debris, and clean thoroughly. Lining the area

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under the burners with aluminum foil is an easy way to help with cleaning; just cover the bottom, and do not cover any of the holes in the sides of the pan.

Make sure the refrigerator is clean and mildew-free. Clorox and similar commercial wipes are great for this. Power up the refrigerator and let it run for a day or two, switching power-source modes to make certain they function properly. If you have a residential refrigerator, there's nothing special to do; just clean it and turn it on.

Test the trailer's safety systems and check the LP-gas, carbon-monoxide and smoke detectors for expiration dates. Battery-powered detectors must get new batteries at the beginning of the season. Make sure the emergency exits operate properly.

Look at each fire extinguisher to make sure there is no damage, invert it for a few seconds, and test the valve by pushing in the small pressure-test plunger, if so equipped, or checking the gauge for proper pressure (follow the

extinguisher's instructions). Then check the interior lights and test the various onboard gadgets.

Be sure to check the owner's packet for special instructions, especially if it's a higher-end or more technologically equipped RV. Always use caution when working on ladders or on the roof, and if you're uncomfortable with the height — or with any of the procedures outlined here — have a certified RV technician take care of it.

Lastly, when you hook up the RV to the tow vehicle, give the hitch equipment a thorough inspection. For trailers, this means checking the hitch, the ball, the seven-way connector and sway equipment.

For fifth-wheels, look at the hitch for proper lubrication and movement of all the parts. Check the kingpin for abnormal wear, cracks or bending, and apply grease. A lube disc placed over the kingpin will eliminate the need to grease the whole pad surface, but be sure to remove the disc when you drop

off the trailer at an RV dealership or service center, as many of them use a forklift with a cup to move trailers around the lot, which will destroy the disc. Make sure the mounting system is secure, and follow the hitch manufacturer's directions for any special service and lubrication requirements for that model.

For truck campers, make sure each of the mounting eyebolts is secure. Check the tie-down system (turnbuckles, chain mounts, body and frame mounts) for wear, rust and operation, and clean up and lube as needed. Plug in the seven-way connector and check all the lights, just as you would with a trailer. Also, take a good look at the corner jacks and service them as needed. The owner's manual or manufacturer's website should provide some guidance.

Spending a day inspecting and servicing your RV at the beginning of the season will help make every trip a home run. 🚐



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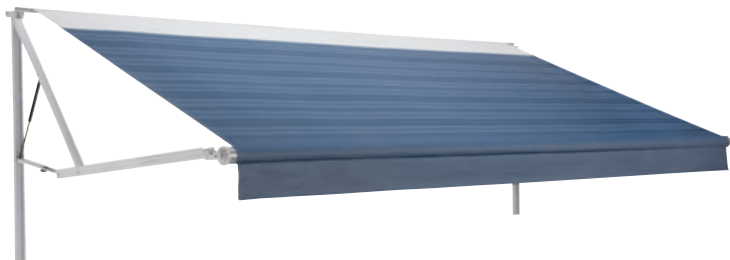


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FRIDGE FIX

A nonfunctioning LP-gas refrigerator can suck the enthusiasm right out of your travel plans. But the solution is probably a lot easier than you think

When spring rolls around, we all look forward to the ritual of preparing our RVs for the coming travel season. *Ahh*, the scent that greets you when you open the door. To some, it just smells like wood and plastic, but to you, it smells like fond memories. You break out the tire-pressure gauge and check the tires. Fill the fresh tank with water and make sure the plumbing system is working correctly. Turn on the LP-gas and verify that the appliances are working. And that's

when you notice a problem.

The refrigerator, which seemed to be working perfectly when you put the rig away, isn't working now. Maybe you can't hear that familiar "tick, tick tick...woof!" that signifies all is well, or maybe you just turned it on the customary eight or more hours ahead of packing and returned to that glowing yellow light and a warm refrigerator. In any case, a nonfunctioning refrigerator can cancel, or at least inconvenience, your travel plans — but there is hope. Unless your fridge is getting up there



1) We hope you take better care of your refrigerator than this owner did, but in fairness, off-site storage in windy or dusty areas can make dirt accumulate quickly. In a compartment like this, wipe or sweep the area with a broom and dustpan first. Then, if you have access to a tank of compressed air, blow the area clean. If you don't, a can of compressed air that is commonly used to clean office equipment can also work.

2) This late-model Dometic refrigerator has a shroud around the burner assembly that prevents the flame from blowing out in windy conditions. Use a small socket to remove the screw that secures it. Note that this unit does not have the Dometic recall kit installed, which makes disassembly easier. If your refrigerator has the recall kit installed, disassembly will take a little more time. If it doesn't, contact Dometic or do an online key-word search for "Dometic recall" to see if your RV's refrigerator requires a modification.



3

in years, the problem is very likely fixable in your own driveway in half an hour or less.

It may sound obvious, but the two essentials an LP-gas refrigerator needs to operate correctly are ignition and fuel. First, verify that the battery or batteries are sufficiently charged. A few months in a storage yard can drain them, even if you've disconnected the cables. Then, after verifying that the cylinder(s) or tank have sufficient propane, open the valve(s) and go back inside the RV. Because the stove uses far more LP-gas than the refrigerator, it's a good place to purge air out of the lines and confirm LP-gas flow. If the stove lights, then you can switch on the refrigerator.



4

When you push that "On" button, you begin a chain of events. The propane begins to flow to the burner tube, and the igniter receives 12-volt DC current and creates a spark that lights the flame, which isn't much bigger than the one from a cigarette lighter. But, if the igniter doesn't spark, the problem is usually attributed to a faulty circuit board, bad wiring, low power or an igniter that is so covered in carbon that it can't make contact and create a spark anymore. If the flame cannot be ignited, nothing will get cold. Another common problem is blockage of the burner tube by an insect's home or debris.



5

If the refrigerator does light but after a few hours there's no cooling of the floor plate in the freezer, you smell ammonia and/or hear a gurgling sound from the back of the refrigerator, turn off the unit immediately and seek the assistance of a certified RV technician or factory appliance service center. In most cases, however, the following steps will help get your refrigerator running on LP-gas again and start keeping its contents cool in no time. 🚚

RESOURCE

C&S RV Service Center, Oxnard, California
805-983-1673, www.candsrv.com

3) Later-model Dometic refrigerators are equipped with a drip tray that is held in place with a single screw.

6

4) With the shroud removed, you can see the accumulation of dust and dirt beneath the flue. Give the side of the flue a couple of gentle taps with the handle of a screwdriver to release dirt or rust that may be inside. The technicians at C&S RV Service Center claim that spiders, mud daubers and other insects rarely build nests inside the flue; they are more commonly found in the igniter/burner area, which is in plain sight.

5) Another screw secures the igniter. Once it's out, inspect it closely for built-up carbon on the tip.

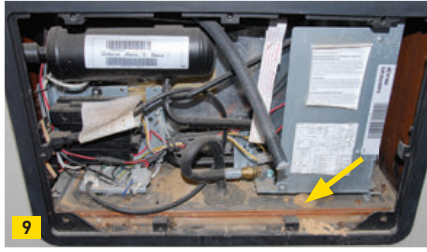
6) The igniter is like a spark plug — when it's dirty, it doesn't function well. But, also like a spark plug, its function can easily be restored by using a piece of sandpaper or emery cloth to remove the carbon buildup.

7) Before reinstalling the igniter, blow the area beneath the flue clean and shoot some air down the burner tube.



8) The burner assembly is now clean and functional.

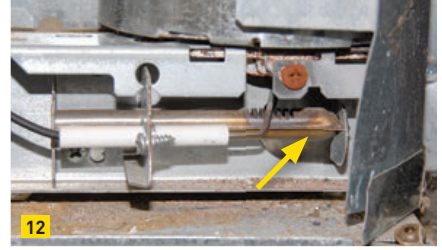
9) Norcold refrigerators look different, but the maintenance process is similar. What looks like a dirt clod underneath the burner shroud (arrow) indicates that insects have built a home in the area at one time or another.



10) Remove the screw or screws that secure the shroud to the burner area.

11) Remove the secondary shroud inside.

12) Here, you can clearly see the burner tube (arrow), and that it is clean and free of cobwebs and other signs of insect intrusion.



13) As on the Dometic refrigerator, one screw holds the Norcold igniter in place.

14) Blow the area clean of dirt and debris with compressed air.

15) Inspect the igniter for signs of oxidation and carbon buildup, as seen here. Again, a quick scuff with a piece of sandpaper or emery cloth will bring it back to life.

16) On the inside, inspect the refrigerator seal to make sure it is still soft and pliable, and that there are no cracks or splits. If the seal is hard or damaged, a replacement seal may be available from the manufacturer or an RV-repair center. For many models, however, the only way to obtain a replacement seal is to order a replacement door.

BACK ON THE ROAD IN **THE FAR NORTH**

PART TWO OF AN EPIC ALASKA HIGHWAY TRIP TRAVELS SOUTH FROM KLUANE NATIONAL PARK TO THE NORTHERN ROCKIES BEFORE STEPPING ON THE BRAKES AT MILEPOST ZERO

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the legendary Alaska Highway, making it the perfect time to explore the World War II engineering wonder. Like many RVers, traveling the legendary highway had been high on our bucket list. Driving from the highway's northern end in Fairbanks, Alaska, we're now halfway to its southern terminus in Dawson Creek, British Columbia.

HAINES JUNCTION TO WHITEHORSE

Just south of Haines Junction, Yukon, we spend a night in the shadow of the imposing King's Throne at Kathleen Lake Campground. Part of Kluane National Park and Reserve, the no-utilities campground is one of many in Canada's national and provincial park system offering bargain camping.

Arriving in Haines Junction, we visit Da Ku Cultural Centre, a wonderful exhibit that tells the story of Kluane National Park and the St. Elias Icefield, the largest nonpolar icefield in the world. We're surprised to learn that

glaciers and icefields cover 80 percent of the park, and the St. Elias Mountains are the youngest, fastest-growing and most seismically active on earth.

Leaving town, we spot Our Lady of the Way, an unusual Catholic church fashioned out of a Quonset hut used by the U.S. Army when building the Alaska Highway in 1942 in response to Japanese threats to the West Coast. A church member tells us, "This is the most photographed church in the Yukon."

As we cruise toward Whitehorse, we stop at the Canyon Creek rest area at the log bridge over the Aishihik

River. This historic span, rebuilt by American soldiers during the highway's construction, is typical of bridges on the original route.

Just outside Whitehorse, the road's elevation drops, and the land stretches into valleys and ranching country. We pull into Hi Country RV Park, a Good Sam Park in Whitehorse that offers 130 full- and partial-hookup sites, picnic tables and hot showers. We're thrilled to see the park's collection of old vehicles — road graders, and a military Jeep and ambulance — from building the Alaska Highway.

Despite having fewer than 30,000 residents, Whitehorse is Yukon's largest community, and we spend the day shopping for souvenirs for friends and family. Then we stuff ourselves silly with juicy lamb slouvaki, creamy seafood fettuccini and silky tiramisu at Giorgio's Cuccina, the capital city's dis-



(Above, from left) Alaska Highway travelers find warm relief at Liard River Hot Springs in northern British Columbia. Wood bison cross the 75-year-old highway near Muncho Lake, halfway between Whitehorse, Yukon, and Fort St. John, British Columbia.

tinguished Mediterranean restaurant.

After a restful night, gray skies and sputtering rain make it a great museum day. We head to Yukon Beringia, a museum that illustrates the story of the ancient Bering land bridge linking Russia and Canada. A 17-minute video tells us this landmass allowed prehistoric people and animals to cross from Asia to North America, including Ice Age mammoths and giant bison.

Beringia's interactive paleo lab attracts plenty of kids, and the taxidermy and skeletal displays of muskox, sloths, Arctic ground squirrels, giant short-faced bears, woolly mammoths and saber-toothed cats are fascinating.

Our next stop is the Yukon Transportation Museum that displays how goods and people historically moved around Canada's far north. The surprisingly large museum shows off old railcars, mail sleds, horse-drawn sleighs and early airplanes, including the *Queen of the Yukon* dramatically suspended from the ceiling. There's also an Alaska Highway exhibit with vintage military trucks and machinery. Janna Swanks, the museum's executive director and president of the Alaska Highway Heritage Society, says, "When the highway was built, it was difficult for many Native tribes. But today, it's the Yukon's Main Street, connecting all our communities."

Following a quick lunch downtown, we head to the *S.S. Klondike II*, a riverboat launched in 1937 that hauled people and goods between Whitehorse and Dawson City on the Yukon River. The boat served until the 1950s and was moved here in 1966 with the help of 8 tons of Palmolive soap flakes to lubricate the skids.

We take the free self-guided tour and wander the *Klondike II*'s narrow hold-and-climb stairs to its upper decks. Structural damage prevents us from entering, but we peer into the galley and dining room for a glimpse of past elegance.

JOHNSONS CROSSING TO MUNCHO LAKE

The next morning, after stocking up on fuel and groceries, we drive southeast along the Yukon River under low clouds. As we gain elevation, the forest becomes thicker, lakes dot the landscape, and the Big Salmon Range and Cassiar Mountains rise like Titans

on either side of the road.

A small "Get Your Buns in Here" sign catches our attention at Johnsons Crossing Lodge, a modest café, motel and campground on the Teslin River. This is the junction of the Alaska Highway and the historic Canol Road, an oil-supply route through the wilderness built at the same time as the Alaska Highway. We're here for the giant cinnamon buns, gooey swirls we decide are the best on the highway.

After crossing the river, we travel along 78-mile-long Teslin Lake and pull in at the Teslin Tlingit Heritage Centre, an art gallery and community center that celebrates the area's native population. The carved wood ceremonial masks painted in bright blue, red and black by renowned artists like Alex Dickson are stunning. There's also impressive beadwork, fur mukluks, handcrafted snowshoes and a caribou-skin jacket. I purchase a carved metal salmon bracelet, and Anne buys a sweatshirt embroidered

Curving 9 degrees along its 534-foot timber span, the Kiskatinaw Bridge is the only original Alaska Highway bridge still in use. (Opposite page) Kathleen Lake in Kluane National Park and Reserve hosts a no-frills public campground.



with a beautiful red wolf.

Just down the road, we stop at the George Johnston Museum. Johnston, a Tlingit photographer, was renowned for driving his 1928 Chevy in the then-roadless village. He painted the car white to use it for hunting and shuttled tribe members across frozen Teslin Lake. The museum features Johnston's restored car and his photographs of village life.

The day turns soggy, and howling wind rocks the rig, a reminder that weather can be fierce in this lonely country. We pass stands of fire-blackened forest and enjoy peekaboo glimpses of the silvery Swift River. We also encounter moose signs but, alas, no moose.

Our nighttime berth is Nugget City, a complex that includes the Wolf It Down café, cabins, a gift shop, a 24-hour gas station and a large Good Sam Park called Baby Nugget. Most of the gravel sites are pull-throughs with 20- or 30-amp hookups, although a few have 50-amp service. We snag one with free Wi-Fi.

For dinner, we dine at Wolf It Down on barbecue ribs and flaky fish and chips. As we stroll back to the rig, a small bobcat scurries across the campground. While gassing up before leaving the next morning, we avoid filling the freshwater tanks with the iron-flavored water.

We cross Liard River Bridge, one of 233 built by the U.S. Army on the original highway, then stop at the Watson Lake Visitor Information Centre where we're astounded by a forest of more than 82,000 signs. The practice of posting signs started in 1942 when a lonely soldier tacked up a direction and mileage placard for his Illinois home. Since then, visitors have

An RVer follows the shoreline of 7.5-mile-long Muncho Lake, a favorite stop for travelers on the Alaska Highway.



FAR-NORTH FAVORITES

RV parks and public campgrounds pepper the Alaska Highway, including the following Canadian destinations where the author camped on the second half of her journey. For more places to stay, visit www.goodsamcamping.com.

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250-782-2590, www.mile0park.ca/campground

FORT NELSON

Triple G Hideaway RV Park and Campground

250-774-2340, www.tripleghideaway.com

FORT ST. JOHN

Ross H. McClean Rotary Park RV

250-785-1700, www.rotaryrvparkfsj.com

MUNCHO LAKE

Northern Rockies Lodge RV Park

800-663-5269, www.northernrockieslodge.com/rvpark

MUNCHO LAKE PROVINCIAL PARK

Strawberry Flats Campground

250-776-7000, www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore

Yukon

KLUANE NATIONAL PARK AND RESERVE

Kathleen Lake Campground

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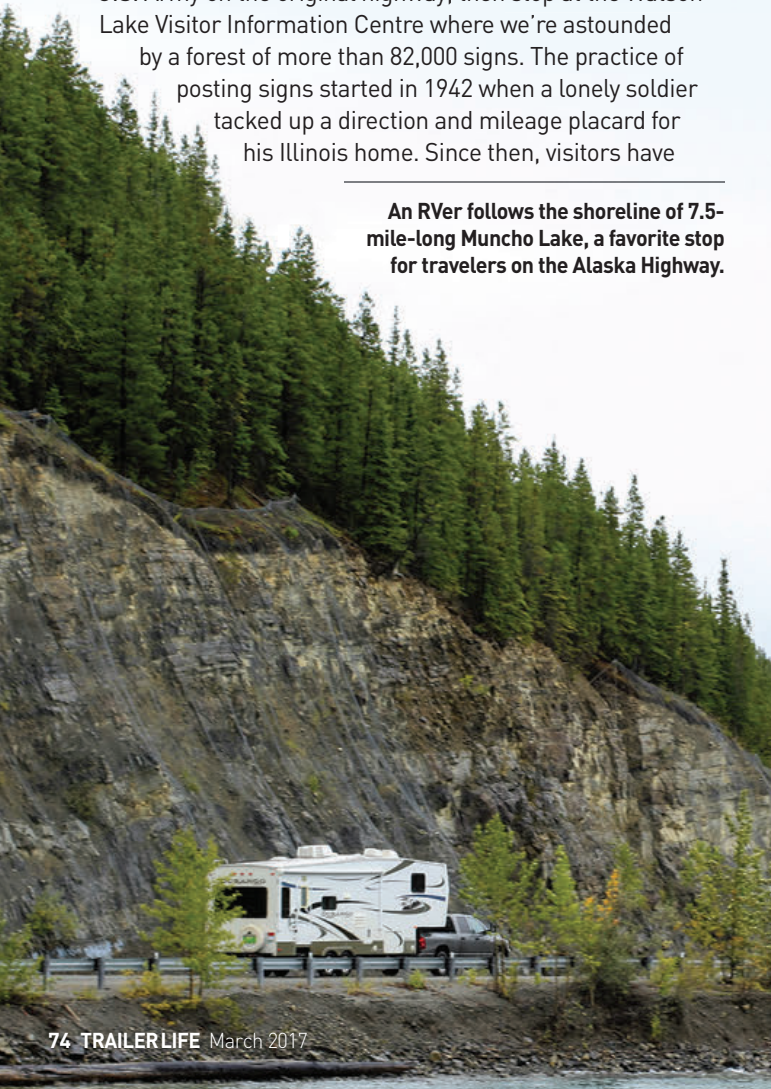
Baby Nugget RV Park

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(Above, from left) A young visitor sizes up a fossilized giant short-faced bear at the Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre in Whitehorse. At British Columbia's Muncho Lake Provincial Park, RVers lay claim to a lakeside site at Strawberry Flats Campground.

posted metal, wood and plastic signs with names of friends, family, towns, states and provinces, countries and businesses. Inside the visitor center, we watch an informative video about the highway's construction and check out the collection of historic photos.

It's afternoon when we reach the British Columbia border and spot a lone wood bison grazing contentedly along the road. Wood bison, a separate and larger subspecies of plains bison, have been successfully reintroduced

into northern boreal forests. We also pass the pullout and interpretive sign for Contact Creek where the two crews working from the north and south met to complete the Alaska Highway.

We trundle down a 9 percent grade, then cross the Liard and Coal rivers, encountering a large herd of bison that includes several mothers and babies.

After pulling in at Liard River Hot Springs Provincial Park, a campground and natural hot springs, we discover that it's a favorite among locals as

SESQUICENTENNIAL SAVINGS

In honor of Canada's 150th anniversary this year, admission is free at all Parks Canada locations including Kluane National Park and Reserve, and the S.S. Klondike National Historic Site along the Alaska Highway. To take advantage of the deal, order a free Discovery Pass on the Parks Canada website. Regular fees still apply at Parks Canada campgrounds.

Parks Canada
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(Top) *Hunter with Frogman* by Tlingit carver Alex Dickson at the George Johnston Museum in Teslin, Yukon.

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Launched in 1937, the S.S. Klondike II now docks permanently on the Yukon River in Whitehorse. A national historic site, the riverboat is a showpiece of the region's history.

well as Alaska Highway travelers. The forested campground has no utilities but offers picnic tables, fire rings and pit toilets. We walk the 1/3-mile boardwalk and, after using the changing rooms, slip into warm, waist-high water that melts the road kinks. *Ahhhh.*

Back on the road, we climb higher, and the temperature drops. When the clouds lift, we glimpse the massive Canadian Rockies, their tops frosted with snow. After pulling into Northern Rockies Lodge, we occupy an RV site overlooking gray-green, 7.5-long Muncho Lake.

Northern Rockies Lodge is favored by hunters and fishermen who fly in from distant lakes, and we have reservations for a flight-seeing tour. However, over a Swiss-style dinner of thinly sliced pork with crispy spaetzle noodles, we learn the weather likely won't improve. "I've got 16 hunters out there, and I can't get them out," the lodge's pilot and owner, Urs Schildknecht, laments.

We lay over at the lodge, reading, napping and doing laundry. When Urs' son, Daniel, the lodge's chef, invites us to join him for a rather damp canoe paddle, Anne leaps at the chance. I opt for my novel.

Well rested by the time we leave the lodge, we head to Muncho Lake Provincial Park. At Strawberry Flats, a treed campground snuggled against the lake, a hiking trail follows the original

track of the Alaska Highway.

We drive higher into the heart of the Rockies and traverse the Toad and MacDonald rivers through boreal forest, the white bark of poplars stark against the spruces' deep green. At 3,400 feet, snow gathers on the roadsides, and the rain turns to wet snow. At 3,800 feet, the snow is 4 inches deep on the road. At 4,264-foot-high Summit Lake, we pause for a lakeshore lunch.

We're on the eastern side of the Rockies now, and as we descend, steady rain replaces snow. Along the Tetsa River, we spot two large beaver dams. Then we stop to watch two large great horned owls on a snag. Soaked, the birds look like they, too, wish the rain would retreat.

FORT NELSON TO DAWSON CREEK

In Fort Nelson, we camp at Triple G Hideaway Campground. Our full-hookup gravel site nestles under poplars. Road-weary, we sleep deeply, then wake to blissful sunshine.

At the Fort Nelson Heritage Museum, we meet 80-plus-year-old founder and curator Marl Brown. After showing us the collection of old guns, household goods, timber equipment and taxidermy grizzlies and bobcats, Marl displays his pride and joy, a large garage filled with antique cars and trucks. He points out the 1926 Model T

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he drove 354 miles to Fort Simpson in the winter of 1975 to illustrate the need for paving the road. "Eleven years later, I drove that car through the opening to the newly paved highway," he tells us proudly.

Sunbursts follow showers. The magnificent Rockies, their towering peaks in deep snow, continue to tease us before retreating behind clouds. We round a corner, and a small cinnamon-colored bear cub dashes across the highway to join its mother and two siblings. We don't get a photo, but it's a treasured moment.

We pull over at Sikanni River Bridge. Black soldiers built the original bridge in record time, and their performance was instrumental in integrating the Army.

We reach Fort St. John, an oil and gas town that's booming. Fort St. John is the largest community on this stretch of the highway and a great place to dine out and stock up on fuel, groceries and other supplies. At Spicy Fusion, we enjoy wonderfully authentic east Indian dishes with deep, complex sauces and crispy naan flatbread.

We camp at Ross H. Maclean Rotary RV Park near Charlie Lake. This big lake was the site of a tragic Alaska Highway building accident where 12 soldiers drowned.

On our last day on the highway, the weather is cool, sunny and spectacular. Fifteen miles north of Dawson Creek, we turn and follow the original highway to the historic Kiskatinaw River Bridge. This curved wooden span is the only World War II timber bridge left along the highway. We stop and walk its truss-and-plank structure, gazing at the rushing water 100 feet below.

From the bridge, it's a short drive to Dawson Creek. We park at Eighth Street and Alaska Avenue by the famous "Entering the Alaska Highway" sign and check out the visitor center's rail-depot and natural-history museums. Then we walk a couple of blocks to the Alaska Highway House, a terrific museum that chronicles the building of the highway.

Finally, we stand in the center of the street at Milepost Zero for the requisite photo. We made it! It's definitely an adventure we'll remember. 📷



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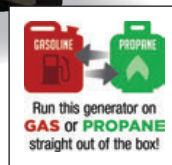
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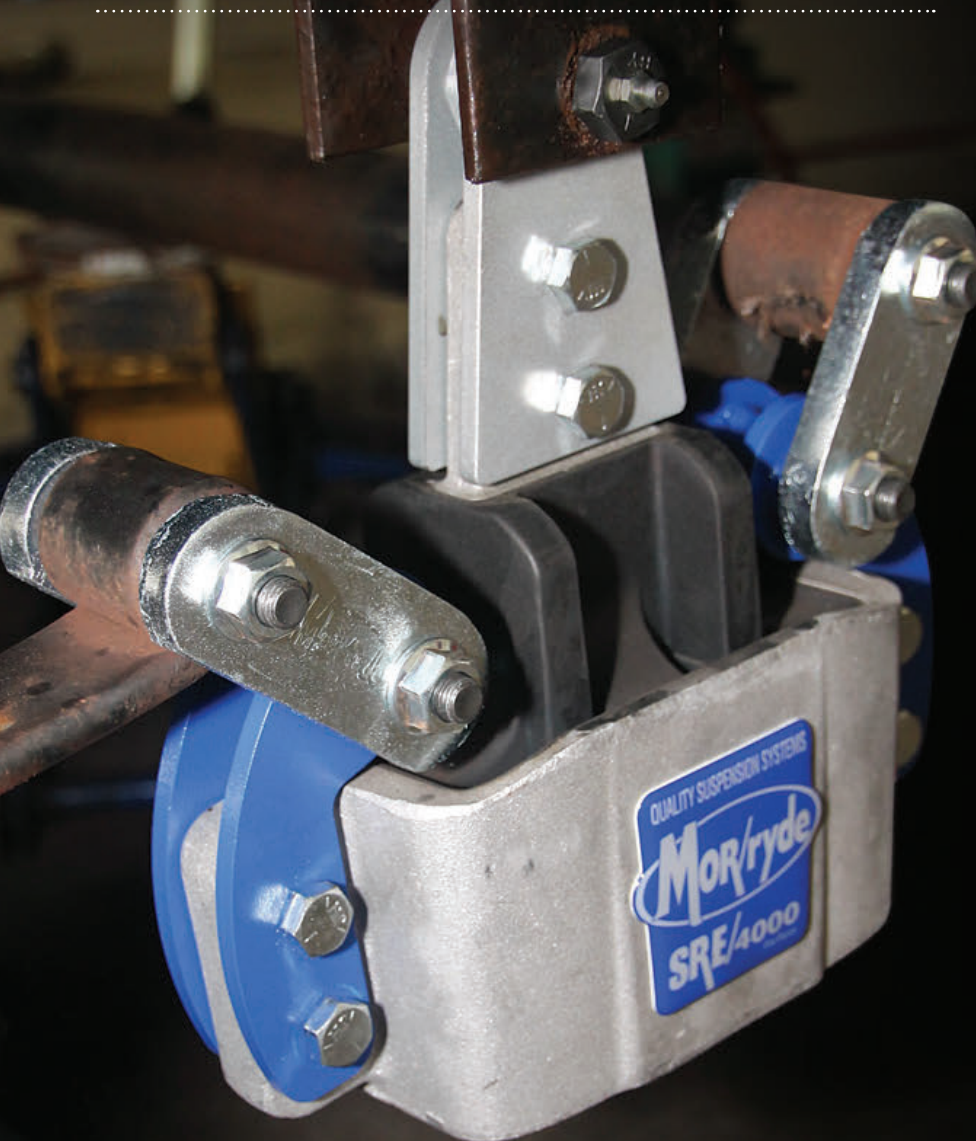
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SMOOTH SAILING

MORryde's SRE4000 suspension system levels the playing field when towing a trailer or fifth-wheel and extends the lifespan of components



One thing about towing a trailer is that it's easy to ignore what the suspension is doing to the structure and components. Most owners don't realize that the typical trailer chassis suspension is an antiquated and, in many cases, unforgiving system. In fact, the suspension installed on most towables not only gives a harsh ride, but if not properly monitored, can lead to tire wear and failure, and in rare cases, even to suspension separation from the chassis.

In the old days, a standard trailer suspension was an all-metal affair. Spring shackles and shackle bolts were greaseable and consisted of thick steel plates and bolts with bronze bushings that would last for a long time. Most of these components have been replaced with thinner plates and inferior nylon bushings that barely last beyond the common one-year warranty on towable RVs. The result is that, after a couple of years and only a few thousand miles with inadequate lubrication, the bushings are destroyed, the shackle plates are severely worn, and the bolt holes are elongated, throwing the suspension out of alignment. Eventually, bolt-hole elongation can wear all the way through the thin shackle plates, resulting in a separation of the springs from the hangers and/or the shackle plates.

If you have a new RV that has an upgraded suspension, you're one of the lucky ones, and you probably paid a premium. If not, you're still in luck, because upgrading a trailer's suspension is a relatively simple and inexpensive affair. I say relatively, because the labor to change the parts is almost the same as replacing the defective shackles and bolts, which can fail every few thousand miles and need to be replaced, and the upgraded components aren't as expensive as you

Available as an aftermarket upgrade or original equipment on some new models, the MORryde SRE4000 with added wet-bolt shackles gives trailers and fifth-wheels a smoother ride and better towing experience.

SMOOTH SAILING

might think. Providing adequate lubrication will prolong the life of the stock shackle parts, but they can still wear prematurely.

Trailer Life has covered MORryde suspensions before, including the August 2010 installation of an SRE system on a fifth-wheel. This time, we installed the SRE4000 on a 2013 travel trailer. For a thorough back-to-back test, we towed the trailer from Massachusetts to Indiana on the old suspension, then installed the new suspension and reversed the route.

MORryde offers different suspension systems based on the size of the trailer and the customer's goals, but the basic tenet of the systems is the same: improving the ride to help preserve the trailer structure and prevent the contents from shifting inside, and replacing worn, inferior components with heavier-duty, more serviceable counterparts.

The test trailer for this installation was a 33-foot Dutchmen Coleman CTS330RL with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 11,000 pounds, built on a Lippert Components standard chassis. While less than four years old, the trailer had made trips to Indiana and Pennsylvania and taken a few outings around New England. While we didn't keep exact track of the mileage, we estimate it probably had 8,000 to 10,000 miles on it.

The trip to Indiana was a hair-raising mix of bouncing, swaying and even a tire blowout. New tires on the truck had raised the front of the trailer to such an extent that handling was affected. The bouncing was normal, but the blowout remains unexplained, as the trailer was not heavily loaded. So, before we even attempted the

suspension switch, the tires were replaced with new Westlake ST tires, upgraded to load range E and a 75-MPH speed rating, and a new SwayPro hitch system from Blue Ox was installed. This settled the trailer from a sway standpoint, although the suspension was still noisy with a lot of bounce.

Suspension Systems

For this project, we took advantage of the installation and repair facility at the MORryde plant in Elkhart where the company designs and builds its CRE and SRE suspension systems. This state-of-the-art facility provides several concrete-paved RV sites with hookups for service customers to use the night before their scheduled appointment. In typical Indiana "RV country" fashion, the plant opens around 5:30 a.m. and the trailer rolled into the bay before 6.

The selection of the suspension system is somewhat complex, but MORryde's technical-assistance folks are available to ensure that the best one is installed on the trailer. The company has a qualification guide on its website to help determine if a system will work on a specific trailer.

The CRE3000 (\$225 to \$250 MSRP, depending on the application) is MORryde's simpler system that replaces the 3-inch equalizer that comes standard on most trailers but uses rubber to help cushion shock and increases the equalizer travel to 3 inches. This system is ideal for trailers with a 3,500 to 8,000 gross axle weight rating (GAWR). While the CRE3000 can easily be bolted on as a direct replacement for the original equalizer, it is better to replace all the shackles and bolts with a new wet-bolt kit, or heavy-duty shackle kit, which is not included with the system. The CRE3000 comes with a two-year

warranty.

The SRE4000 (\$500 to \$590 MSRP) is the company's premium suspension upgrade for trailers with a GAWR from 5,200 to 7,000 pounds, and it has been showing up as standard equipment on a growing number of new trailers and fifth-wheels. The SRE4000 increases suspension to 4 inches of travel, provided by rubber shear springs, resulting in improved road-shock absorption and greater equalization, according to the company.

In addition to the equalizer kit, the SRE4000 includes a proprietary X-Factor cross member, which is installed across the chassis between the equalizers and spring hangers. This cross member provides additional lateral strength, reducing frame stresses common when a trailer makes a tight turn. By stabilizing the interconnection between the two spring systems, there is a minor benefit of reduced sway, although the company doesn't market that point. Up to three of the cross members can be installed on a two-axle setup.

MORryde's heavy-duty shackle kit (\$100 to \$120 MSRP) was also installed on all points of the suspension. The kit, or something similar, should come standard on every trailer. As we mentioned, suspension wear manifests in destroyed bushings and bolt wear through the thin shackle plates, which can't be lubed, and the fixed original equalizer plate. The shackle kit provides hardened 1/2-inch-thick shackle plates, bronze bushings instead of nylon and, most importantly, zerk fittings on each bolt, allowing them to be greased, which substantially reduces wear.

Both the CRE3000 and SRE4000 systems are available for tandem- and triple-axle applications with 33- and 35-inch wheelbase separations.



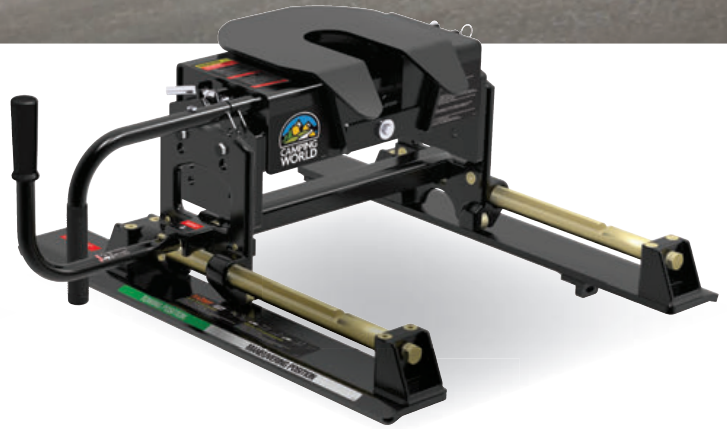
Thin shackle plates and nylon bushings can deteriorate over time, allowing the bolt holes to elongate and eventually wear all the way through (far left). MORryde's heavy-duty upgrade (left) includes thicker plates, bronze bushings and zerk fittings. The kit, or similar components, should be standard equipment.

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Feature dual pivot head with 10° lateral movement, four height adjustments, single handle operation and auto locking mechanism. Anti-rattle skid plate ensures a quieter tow. Mfr. 5 year limited warranty.

SMOOTH SAILING

Installation

Installing the SRE4000 is a straightforward process that took the professionals about five hours, partly because we had to go hunting for replacement wheel lug nuts, which had been destroyed by the tire dealer while changing the tires. (Note: If you have aluminum wheels, keep a thin-walled, deep-well socket of the appropriate size in your trailer for use when removing or torquing the lug nuts to prevent damage.)

Most of the installation could be handled by one person, but two people are required for a portion of it. The entire trailer needs to be lifted off the ground and supported for this installation, and safety is always key. MORryde has a four-point pneumatic lift system with safety locks to elevate the trailer, but if you're doing the installation without the benefit of a lift, heavy-duty jack stands rated for the weight of the trailer will work. Do not use any of the trailer's jacks to raise or support the trailer for this job. To prevent damage, jack the trailer only by the frame and not by the axles. However, it is OK to use a jack to help lift the disconnected axle into place to install bolts and bushings.

Removal of the wheels is the first step and exposes the suspension system. (If you haven't serviced the brakes and bearings in a while, this would be a good time to get that chore done.) Double check the parts and make sure you have the tools necessary to complete the job before proceeding. You will need a couple of additional floor jacks to help support and adjust the axles during the installation.

This is a bolt-on job, but as we found out, even a less-than-four-year-old RV can have some seriously rusted and degraded parts, and some of the bolts were even seized in place and took some convincing to break loose. PB B'laster penetrant is an excellent product for breaking loose these parts. The pros at MORryde also used a drill-mounted wire bore to clean up the spring-mounting holes and score the bronze bushings for better grease flow later.



1) All work at MORryde's service facility in Elkhart, Indiana, begins at 6 a.m. **2)** Not only does rust attack the suspension, it can also corrode the equalizer and shackles. The top shackle bolt has moved here, and there is a gap at the top because the plastic bushing has disintegrated. The drilled-out holes in the thinner plates have rounded out, causing the entire suspension to become loose. This wear represents four years and about 8,000 to 10,000 miles of mostly light travel with the trailer loaded for weekends. **3)** MORryde's SRE4000 equalizer (right) and heavy-duty greaseable parts replace the worn and rusted original equalizer, bolts and shackles (left). Note that installing the new system will result in a slightly higher suspension profile, so hitch adjustments will be needed after the job is complete. **4)** Jacks are used to manipulate the axles to remove and install the new hardware, not to support the weight of the trailer. The frame of the trailer should be raised and supported with the correct size jack stands prior to this point. **5)** Removing the old hardware, even on this relatively new trailer, took a lot of effort, even after soaking it with PB B'laster penetrant. Some of the bolts were seized in place. **6)** Wet bolts, as they're called, include a bolt with a zerk fitting and a bronze bushing that allows for a stronger connection that is properly lubricated, as long as grease is added regularly.

The next step involves removing and replacing the stock equalizer with the SRE4000; the kit comes with replacement wet bolts for this step. For the SRE4000 shoulder bolt, the zerk fitting must point out. However, for the remaining bolts, the zerk fittings need to point in to the underside of the trailer so they can be accessed for lubrication without removing the wheels and tires.

Before securing the equalizer, the X-Factor cross member is installed. The cross member bolts to the top bolt of

the equalizer, which is why it's installed at this point. This is a complete bolt-on part, with no welding required, but installing it requires close attention and a bit of patience so the bolts go in the right holes. In all circumstances, make certain to torque all bolts to the required specs.

Once the entire system is installed, be sure to grease the new wet bolts. MORryde's technicians use Master GreaseMaster Moly Grease, but they say any equivalent extreme-pressure lithium-based grease will work. The wet

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SMOOTH SAILING



7) Once the old hardware is off, the new hardware can be installed. Here, the bronze bushings are carefully seated in the spring eyelets using a hammer. **8)** To aid in grease flow, the insides of the bushings are lightly scored using a drill bore. **9)** The X-Factor cross member helps minimize torsional stress and movement on the suspension, which assists with handling and, to a lesser degree, trailer sway. Up to three can be installed on a tandem-axle trailer, one per spring mount.

bolts should be inspected every 8,000 miles, and grease should be added until some of it starts to ooze out.

The MORryde suspension system is also compatible with Lippert's Correct Track alignment system.

Results

When comparing the two systems,

Jack Enfield, MORryde's sales and marketing manager, claims the CRE3000 will provide about a 30 percent improvement in trailer ride, which may not be noticeable to the driver but will help stabilize the trailer. Enfield says the SRE4000 will provide a noticeable difference all the way up to the driver's seat.

Our comparison drive was nearly 800 miles each way, and we could sense the difference within a mile of the MORryde plant. Before the change, the trailer was bouncy and prone to sway, and made cacophonous noises from the suspension on turns and any time the suspension moved.

Right out of the plant, it was clear that the ride had improved with a quieter suspension on turns. Traveling over bumpy roads and several sets of railroad tracks, the trailer virtually floated, instead of bouncing. We set a few items out on the counters in the trailer as a test, including a pump

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SMOOTH SAILING

bottle of hand soap and a paper-towel roll, and neither moved or fell on the drive through Elkhart. Items in the rear cabinets also shifted less than before the installation.

That is not to say that bouncing was eliminated entirely. When driving on roads where the pavement hits both sides of the axle at the same time, the trailer will still bounce some, but the 4-inch travel and rubber bumper, in addition to the springs, soften the ride substantially. You could also add shock absorbers to further civilize the trailer's ride, but the MORryde components are a huge step in the right direction.

All in all, the MORryde SRE4000 made driving the 800 miles back to Massachusetts much more enjoyable. Installing this system on any trailer, or buying a new trailer with the system already installed, is well worth the investment. 🚚



10) The X-Factor cross member is mounted to the spring hanger, and the equalizer is fully mounted with the thicker shackles. **11)** The SRE4000 system is completely installed. Note that the only zerK fitting facing out is the one at the top of the equalizer. The other fittings face in, so they can be accessed and greased without removing the tires and wheels.

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RECREATION TO GO

CARRYING A KAYAK, CANOE OR OTHER BIG ITEMS WHILE TOWING A FIFTH-WHEEL IS NOW POSSIBLE WITH A BOLT-ON APPARATUS FROM U.S. RACK

It is pretty much inevitable that at some point RV owners will wish for more storage space and end up looking for alternatives outside the normal compartments in the trailer and cubbyholes in the tow vehicle. It's not uncommon to see storage devices begin to migrate outside the trailer, as indoor stow-away spots diminish — think racks and boxes that are hung on the ladder, bumper or in a hitch receiver mounted to the frame. This is especially true when wanting to take along kayaks, canoes, crates or coolers and much of the truck's bed space is occupied by a fifth-wheel hitch.

At times like this, thoughts of a roof rack come to mind, but obviously, the top of the trailer is simply too tall and difficult to access. Racks can be mounted on the truck, but because the bed must be free to facilitate turning a fifth-wheel, there are size and configuration limitations. For those who want to carry a portable boat or other big outdoor gear, an impressive fifth-wheel-friendly solution is offered by U.S. Rack, a company known for its specialty racks for trucks.

U.S. Rack's appropriately titled Fifth-Wheel Heavy-Duty Truck Rack is a well-engineered bed-mounted rack that takes advantage of the space above the cab. The steel rack is black powder-coated for a clean appearance and can hold 200 pounds of gear while keeping the bed free for the hitch and the front portion of the fifth-wheel trailer. The rack is U.S.-made, and the fit and finish show no shortcuts.

By the number of parts in the

kit and the large size of the rack, it was hard to believe the whole thing could be quickly and easily bolted into position without drilling holes or using special tools. After assembling a small selection of hand tools consisting of a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch ratchet, a $\frac{7}{32}$ -inch Allen socket (preferred, if available), and $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch and $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch sockets or ratcheting wrenches, it was time to bolt the rack together. An Allen wrench is included with the kit, but the job will be much simpler with a socket.

After completing the parts inventory, Teflon grease was applied to the beginning threads of each bolt needed for the assembly, as depicted in the instructions. The grease is included in the bags of high-end stainless-steel hardware, along with some clear silicone for the final stage.



RECREATION TO GO

The main support components, the leg frames, are a base and stanchion in a mirrored pair. The leg frames ride on the clamp rails, which are mounted under the truck's bed rails, and are much easier to position with a helper. The clamp rails are also a mirrored set, but the tail section points to the rear, so it's hard to install these in the wrong place. Once the proper positioning is verified, the left and right leg frames can be attached to their respective clamp rails via the $\frac{3}{8}$ - by $1\frac{1}{4}$ -inch button-head bolts and matching stainless washers.

With the first major step out of the way, the rear crossbar can be temporarily installed using two metal washers and two of the nylon lock nuts, securing them only finger-tight at first. The next step involves positioning the side rails, which sit immediately over the cab. If your truck has four doors, like the Ram 2500 used for the

install, it's likely your kit will include two cab cushions. Not only do I highly recommend using the cushions to protect the roof of the cab when the rack is loaded, but it's best to install them at the time the side rails are mounted, circumventing any difficulty with mounting later in the project.

With the side rails in their new homes, they can be locked into position using two more of the $\frac{3}{8}$ - by $1\frac{1}{4}$ -inch bolts with black nylon washers and two $\frac{1}{2}$ - by $1\frac{1}{4}$ -inch bolts up top. Make sure to tighten the lower bolts first, since the larger top bolts need to be adjusted against them, essentially setting preload by raising or lowering the front of the rail. With both side rails secured, the front crossbar (with a spoiler, in this case) can be installed and snugged down with the two $\frac{3}{8}$ - by 1-inch button-head bolts and a couple more nylon washers.

Remember those finger-tight

nuts holding the rear crossbar? They need to be removed so the steel-mesh deck panels can be slid into their respective spots. The three mesh panels are part of the 2010-4ADCD kit but are optional with other kits. Once the deck panels are in place, the rear crossbar can be installed for the final time, using all six nuts and washers. This completes the structure, which will hold the deck panels securely in place and prevent movement.

The only components remaining to complete the install are the dual crossbars and the associated quick-change retaining posts. For this step, the retaining posts are simply dropped through the looped ends of the front and rear crossbars, followed by the locking pins. The dual crossbars are constructed using a round and rectangle steel tube, which makes them interchangeable for use with Yakima and Thule rack components



1) The U.S. Rack Fifth-Wheel Heavy-Duty Truck Rack kit comes with all the components for assembly on a pickup truck. The 2010-4ADCD kit includes three deck panels, which are optional with other kits. The rack is designed for Ram, GM and Ford pickups with conventional fleet-side bed rails. **2)** Before the assembly, all bolt threads are coated with the provided Teflon-fortified grease. This prevents seizing when disassembling. **3)** Clamp rails in a mirrored pair are attached to the bed rails without the need to drill holes. These are the base for the rack, and they can be installed

only one way. **4)** Leg frames, also in a mirrored set, are bolted to the clamp rails on both sides. It's best to have a helper hold the pieces when bolting them together. **5)** The rear crossbar is positioned on the leg frames. If deck panels are used, the bolts are secured only finger-tight at first, because the rear crossbar will need to be removed to facilitate the installation. **6)** Once the rear crossbar is in place, the side rails can be bolted to the leg frames. Precision fabrication makes it easy to assemble the pieces without having to elongate holes or bend the rails.

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RECREATION TO GO

7) The bolts have Allen heads, and the company provides a wrench that can be used to tighten them. We preferred to use a ratchet wrench and an Allen socket, which made the job easier and faster. **8)** After removing the rear crossbar, the three deck panels are put in position and are locked in place when the crossbar nuts and bolts are tightened. Torque specs are not provided, so the installer needs to use good judgment when tightening the bolts.



by simply flipping them over. Also, the front crossbar may have the aforementioned spoiler, which makes it suitable for use on extended and four-door truck cabs.

Running a small bead of silicone around the slip joints used for connecting the tubing completes the job. This prevents water from entering the tubing and causing rust, which could impact later removal and reinstallation.

Although the rack with the deck has a \$1,300 MSRP, it becomes an

invaluable tool for those who want to carry a canoe or kayak. For years, friends have stuffed their kayaks inside the fifth-wheel, where it managed to damage the dinette structure and the surrounding furniture. The rack's cost can easily be amortized by preventing inevitable damage, and let's not forget the convenience factor.

Aside from its many uses out of the box, the rack can be equipped with a variety of add-ons, including loading and tie-down systems for kayaks and

canoes. The Fifth-Wheel Heavy-Duty Truck Rack does not interfere with bed space or visibility, but it does add weight to the truck, especially with two kayakers onboard. The simplicity of the rack's design and installation is its biggest selling point. Its utilitarian nature makes it practical when there's just not enough space to carry all those essential outdoor-recreation items. 🚚

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9) Retaining posts are put through the dual rear crossbar, which is aligned with the short vertical tubes on the front and rear crossbars. Another option (inset photo) is to first align the short tubes of the front and rear crossbars and drop the posts into both. **10)** The rack fits close to the rear of the cab but may create a problem when turning with a shortbed truck, in which case an automatic sliding hitch should be used. **11)** With deck panels in place, the rack extends past the front of the cab and provides space for items without inhibiting the area behind the cab. A front crossbar with a spoiler is used here to accommodate the four-door cab. **12)** Cushions are bolted to the side rails to protect

the truck cab when the rack is heavily loaded. We found it easier to install these at the time the side rails were bolted in place. **13)** Silicone, provided with the kit, is applied around the slip joints to seal gaps between the connected rack pieces. This prevents water intrusion, which can lead to rust and difficulty removing the pieces when desired. **14)** A kayak mounts easily on the rack. In this case the front dual crossbar was removed, and the kayak's flat bottom was placed on the deck panels and strapped down. Kits for carrying canoes and kayaks are available from U.S. Rack, and the front and rear dual crossbars are designed to accept cradles and straps from Yakima and Thule.

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RAPID PUMP 1.5 TON ALUMINUM RACING JACK
ITEM 69252/68053/62160
62496/62516/60569 shown

Customer Rating ★★★★★

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- Weighs 34 lbs.

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CHICAGO ELECTRIC POWER TOOLS **SUPER COUPON**

12" SLIDING COMPOUND DOUBLE-BEVEL MITER SAW WITH LASER GUIDE
ITEM 69684 shown
61969/61970

Customer Rating ★★★★★

SAVE \$204

SUPER COUPON \$134.99 ~~\$199.99~~ comp at \$339

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drillmaster **SUPER COUPON**

18 VOLT CORDLESS 3/8" DRILL/DRIVER WITH KEYSUCK CHUCK
ITEM 69651/62868
62873/68239 shown

Customer Rating ★★★★★

SAVE 65%

SUPER COUPON \$16.99 ~~\$19.99~~ comp at \$49

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PITTSBURGH AUTOMOTIVE **SUPER COUPON**

42" OFF-ROAD/FARM JACK
ITEM 60668/6530 shown

- 3-1/2 ton capacity

Customer Rating ★★★★★

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SUPER COUPON

12" SLIDING COMPOUND DOUBLE-BEVEL MITER SAW WITH LASER GUIDE
ITEM 69684 shown
61969/61970

Customer Rating ★★★★★

SAVE \$204

SUPER COUPON \$134.99 ~~\$199.99~~ comp at \$339

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Flip and Cook

A unique barbecue grill uses modern materials and a creative design to fire up outdoor cooking

DIFFICULTY 1 2 3 4 5

TIME TO COMPLETE 10 MINUTES

TOOLS NEEDED NONE

Like metal to a magnet, many of us tend to get sucked in by interesting or unique cooking accessories. Most of us love to eat, after all, and it's nearly a national sport among RV owners. Not only are we drawn to food, but also many of our social plans revolve around cooking and eating, and big deals are made of potlucks and holiday feasts. Cooking outdoors is always high on the list of favorite ways to prepare meals, and who doesn't love the flavors and smells associated with grilling over an open fire?

With the introduction of the E-Z Over Grill, preparing food over a firepit retains its rustic-camping romanticism without giving up on convenience. The novel outdoor-cooking apparatus consists of a rotating and spinning ring surrounding dual 18-inch stainless-steel grills that actually squeeze the food into position using a giant wing nut, spacer and threaded stud. The grill can be flipped vertically by hand and spins horizontally on its own. It hangs from a steel cable in a tepee-looking tripod, which can be set up and broken down easily for storage and transport. To top it off — literally — the grill comes with



(Above, from left) The 18-inch grill (tested) is large enough to cook meals that will feed a group of hungry RVers. Covering the grill with the provided lid that resembles a wok retains the heat for more efficient cooking.

a large lid that resembles that of a wok and can be used to seal in heat and retain a smoky flavor.

Setting up the grill couldn't be easier. It takes just minutes to remove the parts from the provided tote bags, assemble the tripod and connect the grill. The parts are mostly assembled, and only the male and female threaded ends that make up the tripod need to be lined up and tightened by hand. While the grill's creators set it up in places where open fires are legal, most RVers will use campsite firepits or their own portable pits.

To suspend the grill just prior to cooking, take the two S-hooks hanging from the cable and pulley on the tripod and latch them onto the two welded

loops on the grill's bale-type handle. A stainless-steel knob on the side of the grill ring twists to loosen or tighten the handle and allow the grill to move or remain in a fixed position. Once the edges are aligned and the knob is tight, the entire assembly can be toted to a desired location.

To position the grill over the firepit, firmly grip the leg-mounted handle to which the pulley-system cable is affixed and raise or lower the grill to an appropriate cooking height. The only other prep, beyond getting the heat source started, is to apply cooking spray to the grill surfaces where there's going to be food contact.

The E-Z Over Grill is one of the most interesting and enjoyable outdoor cook-

ROUGHING IT EASY » The E-Z Over Grill is one of the most versatile grills ever invented for cooking over coals or an open fire. Numbers etched on the side allow the food to be timed at different intervals. TIG-welded stainless steel is very durable.



ing devices I've ever tried. The key to success is the ability to flip all the food at the same time without using a spatula. Even numbers etched into the side of the ring let you keep track of food that cooks at different time intervals and line up the food over hotter or colder spots in the fire ring. To serve the barbecued food, simply remove the top grill.

With virtually endless cooking positions and the ability to quickly and easily view both sides of the food, barbecue perfection really can be achieved with this unique grill. Provided with the kit are the TIG-welded stainless-steel grills, tripod, lid, chain accessory for hanging the lid and cookware, and two carrying cases, along with a cookbook with interesting recipes. The 18-inch-diameter grill, which is the most practical size for storing in an RV, retails for \$279. The larger 24-inch grill sells for \$310. 📞

E-Z Over Grill

717-450-6081, www.e-zovergrill.com



1) All the components of the E-Z Over Grill can be packed into two carrying cases that are durable and easy to transport and store. In most cases, RVers will need to use a portable firepit with wood or charcoal to remain in compliance at campgrounds. **2)** A unique 18-inch spinning and rotating ring allows food to be sandwiched between two grills using a specially designed spacer and wing nut to keep the food compressed during cooking. A bale-type handle is loosened by the large knob on one side of the ring to flip food without a spatula. **3, 4)** The tripod can be set up in minutes, along with the pulley cable that easily moves the grill up and down. The mechanism is simple with little chance of failure in the field.

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Next Generation Power Tongue Jack



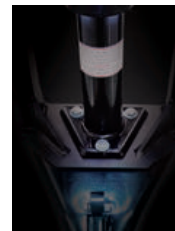
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INDUSTRY FIRST XL 9" FOOTPAD



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NEW backlit buttons illuminate when any button is hit, and turn off automatically to reduce battery drain

Lippert Components, Circle 130 on Reader Service Card



lippertcomponents.com

Birds Flew the Coop

Ever since becoming the owner of a fifth-wheel trailer, I have had to contend with birds building nests in the kingpin box. I first closed the inside of the box with plastic-coated cardboard that I cut down from an old campaign sign and painted black. This worked until the birds got wise and starting building nests on top of the cardboard.

I then looked around the house to see what would completely close the openings. That's when I spotted a large swimming pool noodle. I measured the openings for length, cut several pieces a little longer to ensure a tight fit and shoved them in place. I have since painted them black to match the kingpin box.

The pool noodles work great, and it was an inexpensive fix.

Keith Simmons, Claremont, North Carolina



Cylinder Swap Made Easy

If your RV has dual LP-gas cylinders, you know how difficult it is to remove and replace them when the regulator keeps falling. You have to hold the regulator and bracket with one hand while wrestling with the cylinder with the other.

To make things easier, I put a nut and a wide washer on the all-thread rod below the bracket but above the lower side of the U-mount for the regulator. When I want to fill the cylinders, I loosen the top wing nut, raise the bracket to free the cylinders, and secure the bracket to the rod using the nut and washer. I can then use both hands to remove and replace the cylinders. Just reverse the process when the full cylinders are back in place.

One more thing: I use a plastic-bag twist tie to hold the LP-gas hoses together and out of the way.

Richard Gamel, Norfolk, Nebraska

Insulation for Hybrid Trailer

I am an indoor air-quality and energy engineer who is always trying to find ways to improve the environment, and now that extends to my camping experience. As the owners of a 2011 Jayco hybrid travel trailer, we have found that hot summers can be quite a load on the rooftop air conditioner, especially when parked in a campground with little or no shade trees. Unlike conventional travel trailers with insulated rigid walls, a hybrid's fabric tenting is the cause of additional heat load on the A/C. When the A/C is running, we keep the liners over the screened windows zipped.

To beat the heat, I cut a ¾-inch-thick polystyrene-foam board (the kind used to insulate exterior walls of a home) to match the shape of each window opening. Then I sandwiched the cut boards between the screens and windows. *Presto!* Instant R-value improvement.

The tent roof still takes on heat, but now three of the four exposed sides are insulated, which is a noticeable improvement. This also works for holding in the heat during cold-weather camping. When the trailer is in transit with the bunk ends folded up, the foam boards are stored with the bedding.

Don Cade, Mount Airy, Maryland



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

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Nissan Titan XD diesel owners looking to nearly double their driving range will find Transfer Flow's new 50-gallon midship replacement fuel tank an easy way to make fewer stops at the pumps. According to the manufacturer, it takes just a couple hours for the do-it-yourselfer or qualified mechanic to swap out the Titan's original 26-gallon plastic tank for Transfer Flow's 50-gallon aluminized steel upgrade. The high-capacity tank carries a six-year unlimited-mileage warranty and comes with everything needed for installation. Transfer Flow also offers replacement tanks for heavy-duty domestic diesel-powered trucks and non-California Toyota Tundra gas pickups.

MSRP: \$1,654

800-826-5776, www.transferflow.com/fuel-tanks/replacement-tanks

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Monitoring battery condition doesn't get much easier than using the German-engineered Battery-Guard, an innovative Bluetooth device that can be connected to batteries to enable remote monitoring via smartphones. With a range of up to 20 feet, the new Battery-Guard transmitter and its free mobile app turn an Apple or Android smartphone into an accurate voltmeter, according to the manufacturer. Simply attach the transmitter to the battery terminals, activate Bluetooth on the phone, launch the app and start monitoring battery state of charge remotely — no PIN is needed. The Battery-Guard app can keep tabs on multiple transmitters and is compatible with Apple iOS 8, Android 4.3 and later versions.

MSRP: \$49.99

905-636-9865, www.battery-guard.net/en

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Weigh-Farer

The new weight-sensing HaulGauge computes gross combined weight (gcw) within seconds of the driver pressing the accelerator pedal. Connected to the OBD-II diagnostic port under the dash, the device utilizes accelerometers and signals from the vehicle's onboard computers to sense how much the weight changes when a trailer is attached. Designed for use on late-model full-size Ford, GM and Ram pickups with automatic transmission, the HaulGauge 20 displays up to 20,000 pounds and requires no extra wiring or tools to install. Also plug-and-play, the HaulGauge 50 displays up to 50,000 pounds and works on newer heavy-duty domestic pickups.

MSRP: \$299

248-802-7774, www.haulgauge.com

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Raising the Bars

Staying connected to the internet while on the road is just as important to many RVers as having a mobile phone. To them, no bars is no good. With the new long-range, high-performance Winegard Connect Wi-Fi extender, anyone seeking internet connectivity from public or private Wi-Fi hotspots can have it when others don't, according to the company. Designed for mobile use, the powerful extender utilizes three high-gain antennas to boost range at RV parks and other Wi-Fi-access locations. Custom-software guides make setup easy on mobile devices, and when that's done, users have a secure personal connection that allows internet access with the maximum possible speed. The Connect is available in white or black and carries a two-year limited warranty. The three roof-top antennas can be removed for storage.

MSRP: \$549, 800-288-8094, www.winegard.com/connect

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RE 18

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- 14" to 18" vertical adjustment

Installing a slider with a fifth wheel hitch, especially in a short bed or extended cab short bed pickup truck, allows additional turning clearance and reduces opportunities for truck/trailer damage.

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COLD SHOWER BLAST

Q There are five of us families who travel together. While the women are *ooohing* and *ahhing*, the guys sit around with cups of coffee and discuss RV issues, which we call “tech day.” One issue that we have never come up with an answer for is: When you get the water temp regulated in the shower and you shut off the valve head to conserve water, why do you get a blast of cold water when you turn the flow back on? Each of us has experienced this in a multitude of different RVs and styles. It’s not the end of the earth, but we scratch our heads on this one.

Ernie, Rio Rancho, New Mexico

A Your tech day discussion seems like a great idea! This is a common problem, Ernie, and I’m sure just about every one of our readers has had this experience, too. I know I have, and in a wide variety of RV brands and styles.

The showerhead, even when shut off, lets a small amount of water leak from the fixture. That tiny flow allows the plumbing system to push a small volume of water through the handheld unit. In theory, it should be pushing the mixed flow of hot and cold water equally. However — and it makes no sense from a logical perspective — it appears the cold-water pressure pushes back against the hot water, so some of the cold water gets into the hot-water line near the shower. Both water sources are pressurized by the same pump, so the above makes

no technical sense, but it happens. When you open up the showerhead again, that short blast of cold water comes out before it’s replaced by the hot-water mix.

The best cure is to install a check valve in each line, near the mixing hardware, to prevent any water pressure from pushing water back through the lines. RV plumbing is often inaccessible, so instead, you could also install one check valve on the fixture end of the shower-wand hose. Visually, that’s not a great solution, but it should work. You can also replace the shower plumbing with a residential-style shower fixture with the built-in pressure-balancing mixing valve — but the space available, and access to the plumbing, may not accommodate the larger fittings. — **Jeff Johnston**

LITHIUM BATTERIES AND SOLAR POWER

Q Our 2014 Sprinter cargo van has been set up for dry camping. We ordered the van from the factory with all the heavy-duty suspension options and the auxiliary under-hood battery. The outfitting includes a diesel-fired stove and furnace, LED lights and an efficient electric refrigerator; no LP-gas. I have two concerns.

First, the only voltage information originally available for the house batteries was via a digital display. One

time it conked out temporarily and left a blank, unresponsive screen. We depend on those batteries quite a bit and carefully watch the voltage. We managed to find an excellent shop, Murray Auto Electric, east of Pittsburgh. Among other nonsolar work, they installed an analog voltage gauge that reads directly from the house batteries, regardless of what goes on with the solar electronics.

My wife and I are in the process of moving to Eugene, Oregon, and are too busy to think much about dry camping

for a while. We will probably ask AM Solar in Springfield, Oregon, to look at our system before we go camping again, and they can perform any needed maintenance and upgrades. For now, we simply want to have a safe and comfortable experience driving to Eugene, relying on the alternator to charge the batteries.

Second, I have been reading about lithium-battery systems in *Trailer Life* and on the AM Solar website. However, the Murray Auto Electric folks told me that lithium batteries cannot be charged by the service alternator. Alternator charging has been very important to us while using backcountry RVs in the past. The three solar panels on our Sprinter will be most effective when we arrive at boondock campsites with all batteries fully charged. And while driving cross-country, we will de-

THE TECH TEAM



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



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

pend mostly on alternator charging. So it may be best for us to stick with AGM batteries in spite of their limitations.

Does that make sense?
Hank Snell, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

A The analog-gauge readout you added seems like a solid piece of gear, Hank, and it seems to have solved that problem with the digital-readout failure.

The AM Solar guys are an excellent source of information about lithium-battery systems, as well as their main solar-charging business. The alternator in your Sprinter can be used to charge a lithium battery, but you can't just install a lithium battery in place of your current battery. Lithium batteries require specific control of the charging current, and they must also be isolated from the vehicle's chassis battery-charging system

in the event you choose to go lithium for the house battery alone.

Very specific hardware is required for any lithium-battery conversion. And there are no two ways around it; it's going to be expensive. The AM Solar guys can supply all the details. — J.J.

TANK-FLUSH CLEANOUT

Q My 2013 K-Z Spree came with a cleanout fitting on the rear of the trailer. It worked great for a while, but the last time, the water going in slowed to a trickle. I fear it is clogged at the end of the cleanout in the tank. Is there any way to clean out the cleanout? How hard is it to get out of the tank?

Wayne Quick, Dunn, North Carolina

A The cleanout sprayer in the tank is a pressure fitting, and it pushes water into the tank, so any debris that can accumulate on the fitting generally gets blown off with each use. If the flow has dropped to a trickle, I'd be more inclined to look for kinks or binds in the supply line between the city-water hose inlet, any valving in the system and the tank. There is an anti-backflow valve in the system that is designed to prevent any black-tank fluids from backing up into the flush-out line, and that valve could be defective or blocked.

As for removal of the fittings and ease of access, that depends entirely on how hard it is to gain access to the holding tanks. If they're enclosed and insulated in an underbelly space, you need to remove any belly-pan structure before you can see the tank. The fitting is probably a simple screw-in fitting in a threaded tank receptacle and would be easy to remove as needed once you can reach it. Check for the hose blockage first and perhaps save yourself some work. — J.J.

LED-BULB UPGRADE

Q I have a Jayco 35-foot fifth-wheel and am wondering if I can replace the existing lightbulbs with LEDs without replacing whole fixtures?

Artie Falksen, Inez, Texas

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A Replacing a trailer's incandescent bulbs with low-amp-draw, low-heat LEDs is a popular upgrade, Artie. There are many different LED options available. Some are small bulblike units that simply plug into the existing sockets. Others are more like a small circuit board festooned with LEDs and a short connecting cable and plug that goes into the socket, while the board fastens to the fixture with double-sided tape. Your local RV-accessory store may have a variety of the LEDs in stock, and an internet search will turn up more options than you can imagine. Good luck with the project! — J.J.

WATER PUMP DRAWING AIR SOLUTION

Q I recently experienced another possible cause for the water pump problem Nat Wade's asked about in "Water Pump Quits" in the October 2016 RV Clinic. Like many of the newer models, my 2014 Coachmen Brookstone fifth-wheel has a utility cabinet that houses the water connections, and that's where a selector valve is located to choose city and holding-tank potable water, filling the freshwater tank and drawing RV antifreeze. There is also a connection point for a supplied hose for drawing the RV's antifreeze into the plumbing lines when winterizing. That hose must be removed and the fitting capped when using city or the freshwater-tank supply.

In my case, the cap was on but wasn't tight, and it was drawing enough air to prevent adequate suction to bring water into the pump. If Wade has a similar setup, he may want to check the cap and verify that there is a gasket in place, and then tighten it securely.

Ken Olsen, Poplar Grove, Illinois

A We're a bit puzzled by this, Ken. If you have the selector valve that chooses between filling the fresh tank, using the freshwater from the tank or drawing potable RV antifreeze through the supplied hose, you should not need to cap off the designated antifreeze hose. The selector valve is designed to route only the water through one of the


three selections at a time, with the others being blocked off. There are thousands of RVs on the road with an uncapped antifreeze hose rattling around in the utility bay with no problems.

It's possible your selector valve is defective, and its internal gaskets may be allowing the air/vacuum leak that caused the pump to malfunction. We're glad you found a relatively easy way to solve the problem, though, as it was

probably far less work than getting access to and swapping out a bad selector valve. — J.J.

PLUGGED-IN TOW-VEHICLE CHARGING


Q If I have my trailer plugged into shorepower and connect my truck to the trailer, can that cause any damage to either the truck or the trailer?



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Also, if there was a low battery in my vehicle and it was connected to the trailer with shorepower connected, would it charge the vehicle battery?

Russ Crawford
 South Lake Tahoe, California

A If you leave your tow vehicle plugged into your trailer while the trailer is plugged into shorepower, yes, the tow vehicle's battery will also be charged by the trailer's converter that's charging its battery, as long as the system does not have a battery isolator.

This could work in an emergency situation but should otherwise be avoided. The trailer probably has a deep-cycle battery, and the tow vehicle has a starting battery, which require different charging characteristics. If one of the batteries is significantly discharged and one is not, the charger will crank out the voltage to charge the drained battery, and that could overcharge and damage the other battery.

You're better off to unplug the tow vehicle from the trailer and use a separate charger, if your tow vehicle has battery-charging problems, then get the repairs made to ensure this isn't a problem in the future. — **J.J.**

RV-ROOF REPLACEMENT

Q I have a 40-foot Fleetwood Gearbox toy hauler with a rubber roof that I am tired of maintaining. I would like to put a protective coating on the roof. The three that I have looked at are RV Flex-Armor, RV Armor and Rhino Linings. What would you recommend?

Bob Schneider, Anderson, California

A We don't have any objective details or comparisons on those systems. More important would be choosing an installer with RV experience and a shop team that knows how to properly install the product. A quick search of the product or system on internet RV forums should give a good idea of what works, and, perhaps, what doesn't. — **J.J.**

SAE J2807 STANDARDS

Ken Freund's "SAE J2807 Towing Stan-

dards" article in the August 2016 issue was a great explanation of the uniform towing tests and the importance they play when purchasing a tow vehicle. I have known about these standards for several years and used them in deciding what 2016 dually tow vehicle to buy. In my research of Ford, Chevy and Ram, I could find only one manufacturer that published towing standards for three-quarter- and one-ton pickups that were marked as SAE J2807 compliant. I contacted the other two manufacturers, and they were unable to confirm that their vehicles were tested to the standard.

Raymond Orr, Livingston, Texas

It is unfortunate that the other manufacturers couldn't confirm that for you, Raymond, because all three, as well as Toyota, are now J2807 compliant. I applaud you for doing your research before selecting a tow vehicle. You are assured that the vehicle you have chosen will work for your needs for many years. — **Chris Dougherty**

CROOKED TONGUE

Q I have a 2003 Dutchmen Lite 27-foot trailer. I recently noticed the bottom of the front exterior is damaged where the two beams from the hitch pass under it. The beams now intrude into the siding about 1/2 inch. Measuring as closely as I can, I think the tongue is bent upward about 3/4 to 1 inch from back to front. I can't visually detect any warping. I have checked all the welds on the frame, and none are cracked. Is it obvious that this will get worse? Is there a solution to keep it from getting worse?

One other bit of information. I tow the trailer with a 2007 Toyota Tundra with a standard weight-distributing Reese hitch. I have the hitch as high as it will go, but the trailer is still slightly nose down when I'm driving. Could this be part of the problem?

Boyd Walden, Richmond Hill, Georgia

A It's hard to diagnose the exact cause and resultant damage without physically inspecting the trailer, Boyd. There are a few possibilities, es-

pecially based on the age of the trailer. From the images you sent, there does appear to be a downward bend in the front-wall siding where it has been hitting the A-frame.

Towing with a slightly nose-down attitude is an unlikely cause of the problem. The frame bending upward is also unlikely, based on your description and pictures. The problem may be caused by the front wall (and possibly the front floor structure) being loose, allowing the wall to drop down and occasionally bang on the A-frame rails. It may also be caused by rot in the front wall (and possibly the floor structure), which compromised the bottom sill and allowed the wall to move.

Further inspection of the front section of the body, inside and out, might reveal some more clues. I would find someone in your area who specializes in RV-body repair to help determine the cause, and if the trailer needs a repair, do so before towing it much farther. — C.D.

INCREASED PRESSURE

Q I have a 34-foot Keystone Sprinter travel trailer. Original tires are eight-ply 225/75R15 with a maximum 65 PSI. Can I safely install 10-ply tires with a maximum pressure of 80 PSI for added strength? I realize this will not increase carrying capacity. I know rims also have ratings.

Mike Helfrich, High Ridge, Missouri

A You're probably OK, Mike, but this depends on the rating for the particular wheels. The best way to determine that is to look for the information stamped into the metal on the back of the wheel. A tire retailer should be able to help.

Ply ratings and calling tires eight-ply or 10-ply, for example, are obsolete terms seldom used by the tire and wheel industry nowadays. Generally, today's tires are classified as Load Range D, Load Range E and so on, to describe tires of a particular load-carrying capacity. — C.D.

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TIRE-WEAR PROBLEM

Q I have a 2015 Jayco 31-foot White Hawk. The trailer tires show extreme wear in spots on the outside edge. This is not due to low pressure, as I am good about inflating them to 50 PSI, as specified. The tires have less than 8,500 miles on them. All the tires show wear, but the right front was the worst. I replaced the tires on the front axle. The tire shop owner of 30 years said he had seen much worse wear. I had the wheels balanced, hoping that may be the cause of the problem.

What do you think caused the unusual wear?

Richard Kaiser, Lakeland, Florida

A Tire wear can be caused by any number of things, Richard. Outside tire wear is frequently caused by a positive-camber issue, and this can be the result of bent axles. If the wear pattern shows spot damage, the trailer brakes may be locking up. I would check all the running gear, the brake controller, the brakes and bearings.

With that said, an RV or commercial trailer shop that performs axle alignments should be able to help. This type of shop can use the equipment needed to correct the alignment through axle bending and other repairs.

Other factors can cause abnormal tire wear on a trailer, including, as you mentioned, low or high tire pressure, as well as road-hazard damage, overloading, and an unbalanced RV, which can lead to overloaded individual wheel positions. — **C.D.**

NEW TRUCK TOO HIGH?

Q I ordered a Ford 2017 F-350 Crew Cab longbox to replace my 2012 F-350. My fifth-wheel is a 2002 Holiday Rambler Presidential 36-footer. I use a Trailair pin box, and the clearance between the fifth-wheel and the old truck's box rails/sides is 5½ to 6 inches. The RV appeared level with the old tow vehicle, and I never had any issues with uneven terrain, hills or dips causing contact between the truck and RV. The old truck handled the RV without any issues — an excellent combination.

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My RV went into storage in early October. The 2017 F-350 arrived at my dealer around late October and appeared much higher than the 2012 truck. To address my concerns, I placed a straight edge on the box rails/sides centered over the rear wheels and measured from the straight edge to the box floor and to the ground, and took the same measurement on the 2017 vehicle.

From box rail to box floor, the 2017 truck is 1 1/8 inch deeper than the old truck. One side's box rail to the ground is 3 inches higher (55 7/8 inches to 58 7/8 inches), and the other side's is 2 3/8 inches higher (56 inches to 58 3/8 inches). I can drop the Trailair pin box to make up the 1/8-inch difference, but it appears that the RV front will be substantially higher than with the 2012 truck and may overload the RV's rear axle. Additionally, the 2017 truck's weight capacity is more than the 2012's, and I assume the truck's rear springs will not compress as much with the same hitch weight, adding to the problem.

Can spacers be added to trailer springs to level the truck-and-trailer combination?

Jim Hopeck, Mechanicville, New York

A First, Jim, it's good that you are concerned about overloading one of the axles on your trailer. I have seen many RVs towed nose or tail down, and not only does that cause handling issues, but it potentially overloads one axle. It's unlikely that a modest forward or backward slope in the trailer body will shift enough weight to overload an axle, unless that axle was already close to an overload, but a trip to a public scale would answer that question.

A few things can cause the distance to the ground to be different on the new truck, including the weight of a fifth-wheel hitch and the fact that the older truck's springs may have sagged a bit over time. Also, the rail difference would be a constant, so you'd need to adjust that difference. Don't forget that you can adjust most fifth-wheel hitches and pin boxes up and down while keeping the recommended 5 1/2-inch **(continued on page 117)**

READER SERVICE

ADVERTISERS' INDEX

RS#	ADVERTISER	PAGE#
102	AP Products	46
101	Alaska Marine Highway System	58
	Alpha Systems	25
104	B&W Trailer Hitches	7
105	Ball Power Equipment	41
114	Banks Power	16
106	Blue Ox	45
	Camco	87
	Camping World	98-99
	Camping World Sales	68
107	Carefree of Colorado	27
	Cequent/Reese	106
	Champion	82
	Classifieds	116-117
	Curt Manufacturing	85
155	DampRid Moisture Absorbers	30
109	Dethmers Manufacturing	111
110	DieselSite	51
141	DISH Network	15
	Dometic	67
	Dometic	91
111	Fast Master Products	41
113	Firestone Industrial Products Co.	57
115	Geico	11
116	Giraffe G4 Systems	58
	Good Sam Extended Service Plan	60
	Good Sam RV Loans	89
	Good Sam RV Travel Guide	95
	Good Sam Roadside Assistance	49
	Good Sam Travel Assist	80
	Good Sam VIP Provided by GMAC Insurance	79
	Good Sam Visa	92
122	HWH Corporation	17
	HWH Corporation	76
	Harbor Freight Tools	97
112	Hatchlift LLC	108
117	Heartland Recreational Vehicles, LLC	9
118	Hensley Manufacturing Inc.	10
119	Hensley Manufacturing Inc.	112
120	Highland Ridge RV, Inc.	75
121	Hopkins	66
136	iBall Hitch Cam	108
123	Icon Technologies	109
124	Instagone	30

ADVERTISERS' INDEX

RS#	ADVERTISER	PAGE#
126	King	32
	King	52
128	LaVanture Products Company	110
127	Lance Campers	120
	Lippert Components	43
129	Lippert Components	64
130	Lippert Components	101
131	Little Guy Trailers	111
133	MOR/ryde	37
	Maxxair	77
132	Maxxis International	28-29
	Members Life Insurance	58
134	Northwood Mfg.	88
135	Oliver Travel Trailers	10
143	Opus Travel Trailer	41
137	Park It 360	36
138	Progress Manufacturing, Inc.	81
139	Progress Manufacturing, Inc.	81
140	Progressive Insurance	34
142	Pull-Rite	2
146	RV Armor, Inc.	78
	RV Buyer's Guide	90
147	RVroof.com	115
	RV Marketplace	113-114
108	RVibrake by Danko Mfg.	38
144	Rear View Safety	65
145	Riverside Resort & Casino	33
148	Sea Eagle	112
103	The RV Factory, Augusta RV	63
	Thetford	105
149	Torklift International	50
150	Transfer Flow Inc.	47
151	Travel Lite Truck Campers	19
152	Truma AquaGo	22
	US Money Reserve	103
	Valterra	31
125	Venture RV	119
	Winegard	12
153	Winnebago Industries	5
154	Winnebago Towables	59

EDITORIAL PRODUCT INDEX

RS#	ADVERTISER	PAGE#
159	Battery Guard	104
157	Eclipse RV	35
156	Grand Design RV	23
160	HaulGuage	104
158	Transfer Flow	104
161	Winegard	104

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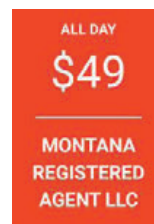
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(continued from page 114)

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minimum clearance between the trailer and the sides of the bed.

In some cases, the bed is higher simply because that's how the factory engineers designed it, although it's puzzling to understand why those engineers ignore their customers' needs and related equipment specifications. Truck-bed heights have been creeping up year after year with each new model change, and despite the problems this can cause for pickup owners, the truck companies keep doing it. They leave it to the end user to adapt to the new truck size.

The best way to determine what must be done is to install the hitch and hook up the trailer. Once the trailer is connected, it is easier to figure out how it is sitting and determine if adjustments need to be made. Having a level pin-height measurement on the trailer is great, but it's hard to measure that exactly on the truck; the pin weight of the trailer will push the truck down, which will skew your numbers.

If you find that the trailer is too low for the truck, there are a couple of things you can do. First, check to see if any height adjustments can be made on the trailer suspension. A company called Trailer Blocks (www.trailerblocks.com) manufactures custom lifting and lowering blocks for trailer suspensions.

Second, you may be able to flip the axles on your trailer to gain clearance. Many trailers are built with the axle attached above the springs. With the use of a flip kit or a custom-installation job done by a qualified frame and chassis shop, the axles can be mounted below the springs, adding a few inches of height.

Lastly, a suspension-system upgrade, like those from LCI or MORryde, will add height to the trailer, which may erase that difference. — **C.D.**

HAVE A QUESTION? » Email our experts at 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.

Seeing Stars

After dark, the skies above Utah's Bryce Canyon stage a celestial show

With some of the darkest skies in America, Utah's Bryce Canyon National Park is as breathtaking at night as it is by day. During a recent visit, the moon was absent, making the stars especially brilliant. Bundling up and tiptoeing out of our cozy fifth-wheel trailer in the wee hours, we looked up to see the Milky Way jumping out of the heavens, begging us to hit the canyon's trails for an even better view.

Our first after-midnight foray was on the Fairyland Loop, a popular day hike that's an equally spectacular night hike. We gingerly ventured onto the trail with flashlights in hand and two-way radios ready. The stars glittered in the black-velvet sky from horizon to horizon.

A towering red-rock pinnacle gave me a fright as my flashlight lit it up in the inky blackness.

On another night, we walked a few paces along the Mossy Cave Trail where the most beautiful part of the Milky Way showered a spray of luminous diamonds onto the rock formations in the distance. We stood still for a long time, in awe, smitten by the gossamer veil of stars.

The Milky Way is most visible between May and September, and RVers are fortunate that Bryce Canyon's North and Sunset campgrounds are by the canyon's rim. Next time you visit, sneak away from camp in the darkest hours for a peek at the stars. 🚐

Hoodoo You Do?

A late-night hike along Bryce Canyon's Mossy Cave Trail showcases the Milky Way above red-rock spires and hoodoos. Uneven erosion distinguishes surreal-looking hoodoos from other, smoother pinnacles.



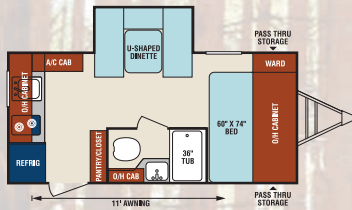
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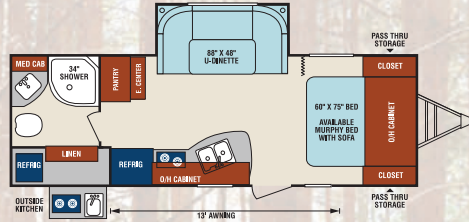
Venture RV's lightweight travel trailers were created from the ground up using a rather unique philosophy in this industry; design units the way you'd want to camp in them! They were designed by campers *for* campers. Our product managers, engineers and sales staff and families all actively enjoy the great outdoors and constantly use our products, thus making them the best, most practical, affordable, most funnest choice in RVing, bar none! All in all, we believe you'll find the perfect Venture floorplan to suit your family's needs. See you at the campsite!

Sonic Lite



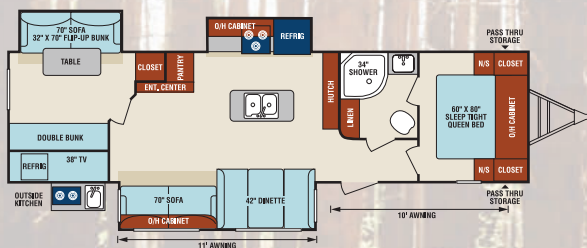
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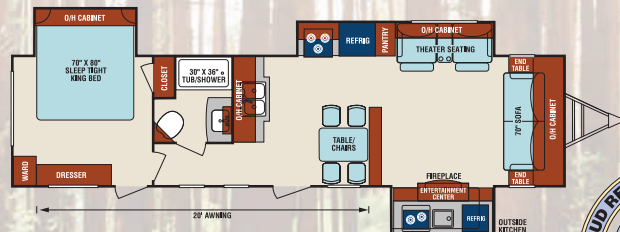
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Ginormous U-dinette easily converts into additional 48" x 88" sleeping area!
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SportTrek



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