

FOUR-SEASON FREEDOM: PREPPING FOR OLD MAN WINTER

TRAILER LIFE

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NOVEMBER 2015

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and Methods

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Surviving the Yukon
in an R-pod

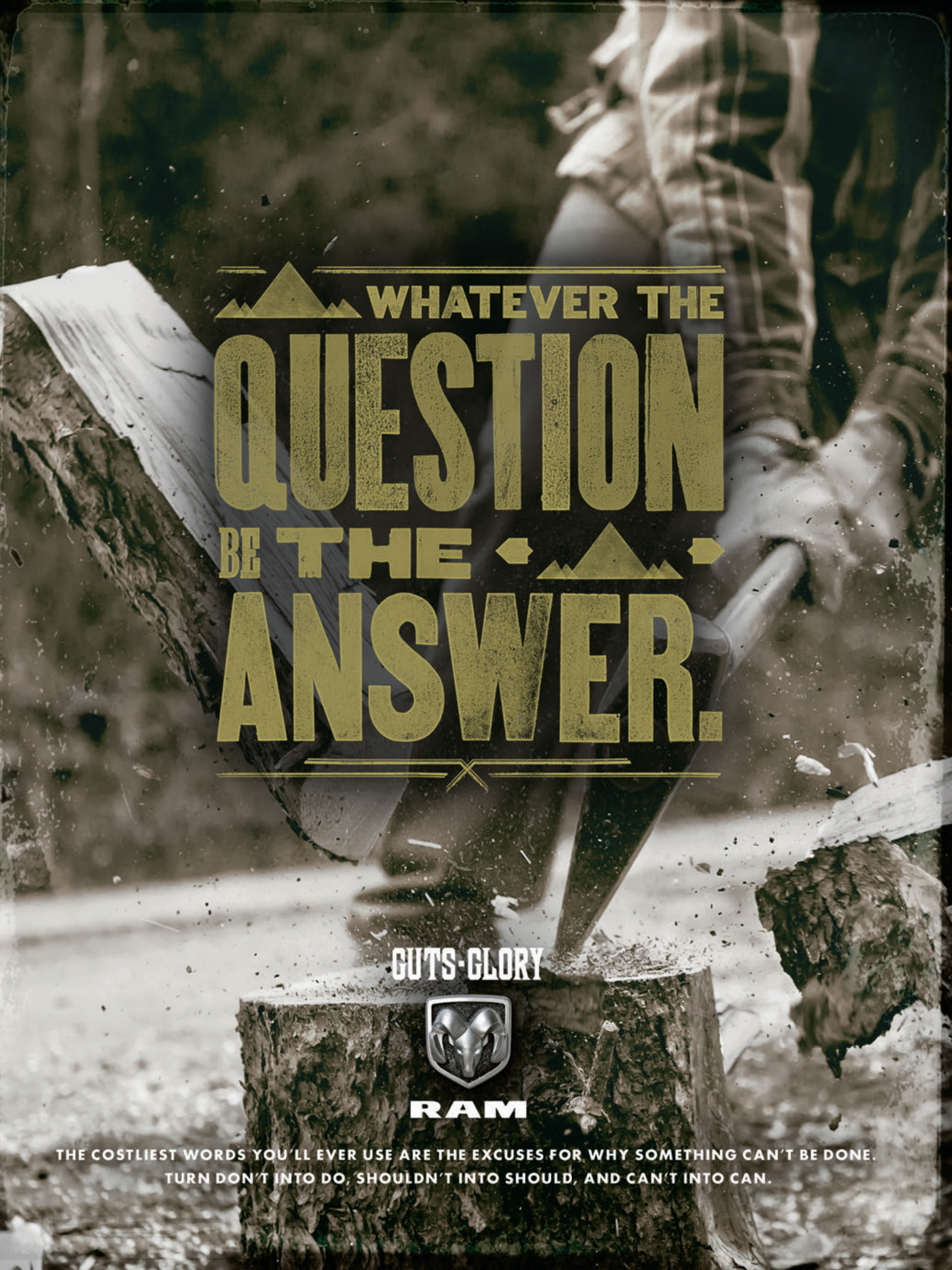
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Easy-Towing
Opus Pop-Up



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Southern Indiana

On the cover: How can the current crop of trucks get any better? They just did for 2016 with new engines and some all-new models.



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Taking the Cold in Stride

Extreme winter RV travel is not for everyone, but it does make for good storytelling



When Doug Sack sent me an email introducing himself as a retired sports-writer who had just spent the winter in the Yukon in a tiny R-pod trailer, I at first laughed out loud (LOL, for all you acronym users). But Sack's description of his frigid winter experience really piqued my interest. Surely, I thought, since he lived to tell about his adventure, there must be a good story behind spending the winter in such a small trailer that's definitely not designed for extreme weather.

Sack's story, on page 42, is whimsical, off-the-wall and frankly worthy of one of those reality shows that flood cable TV these days. I almost feel we were remiss in leaving out a warning for attempting such a camping trip.

My wife, Lynne, and I are no strangers to winter RV travel, and over the years have spent many nights in freezing weather. Although our resistance to cold weather (i.e. snow on the ground) has waned somewhat over the years, we still enjoy winter sports, even when unexpected storms test our skills. We would often feel sorry for motorists stranded because of road closures who didn't have the advantage of a warm couch, a fully stocked kitchen, a bathroom and a comfortable bed.

Getting to a place where an RV can survive extreme weather takes some doing. Not everyone can convert an R-pod into a quasi igloo, as Sack did. Taking necessary precautions to ensure the interior stays comfortable and the plumbing doesn't freeze can make or break a winter sojourn. The article on page 48 about preparing an RV for winter helps make cold-weather travel possible.

Every RV we've owned was made winter-ready by rerouting water lines, wrapping pipes, installing heat blankets, routing heat ducts, adding storm windows and increasing battery capacity, but I have to admit, the Lance truck camper was the crown jewel for our junkets to cold country. Parking a roomy camper on a four-wheel-drive truck provides unmatched access to beautiful places.

Winter travel is not for everyone, and I don't think Sack is going back for an encore adventure, but it does offer an element of solitude not found during the more popular travel seasons and, of course, eye-popping scenery. The glistening landscape following a snowstorm, for example, is a wonderful visual experience, especially when viewed out the window from an RV dinette.

Maybe the snowbirds will disagree, but I think winter travel to cold country can be exhilarating. 🗣️

— Bob Livingston, publisher

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DID YOU KNOW?

Many pumpkin pies will be baked in celebration of Thanksgiving. According to Guinness World Records, the largest pumpkin pie was made in September 2010 and weighed 3,669 pounds with a diameter of 20 feet.

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Why I Cover my RV with ADCO's Designer Series Tyvek® + Wind

Currently I own a Heartland Wilderness Travel Trailer. I've previously owned two Class A RVs and within the last few years I've downsized to the trailer. One thing has always remained the same, regardless of what type of RV was next to the house:

My ADCO RV Cover.

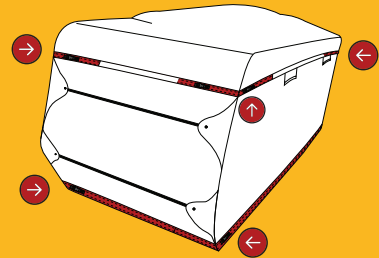
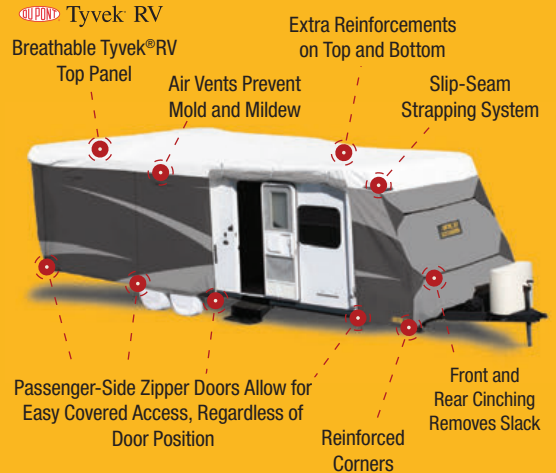
Sure, I've had to buy a new cover every three or four years, especially when I bought and sold my RVs. I can tell you one thing though, RV Covers are worth their price. I've had no problem selling my older RVs for top dollar because they honestly looked brand new. Plus, I've seen a dramatic reduction in maintenance expenses when using a cover. RV Covers are a no-brainer for me.

This season I upgraded to ADCO's newest model called **Designer Series Tyvek® + Wind**. It not only looks fantastic next to the house, but fits better than any cover I have owned in the past. ADCO built-in what they call a **Slip-Seam Strapping System** and when tightened, it forces the cover to conform to the shape of the trailer, preventing wind from getting inside and moving the cover around. It comes with a longer warranty and even several pairs of free wheel covers.

There are no more excuses for leaving your RV exposed to the elements. Take it from this RVer, your investment in a cover will absolutely pay off in the long run.



Steve Webster,
RV Owner Since 1988



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Steve's Top 5 Tips For Using ADCO's Designer Series Tyvek® + Wind Covers:

- 1 Always cover a clean RV.
- 2 Prep the RV Cover on the ground prior to installation. It will save you a lot of time and there are several great videos on ADCOprod.com to show you how.
- 3 Pad sharp edges on your RV. While this cover is very reinforced in all the right spots, I have some sharp edges that require a little attention before covering.
- 4 Leave the cover in place when stocking up your RV for the next trip. I utilize the cover's zipper doors to come and go from the coach and I don't remove the cover until the morning of departure.
- 5 Store the cover by rolling it back up so that it's ready to be installed for next time. I used to pull the cover off and stuff it in the storage bag, but I realized if I spent 5 extra minutes rolling the cover, I would save myself a lot of time.

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Part #:	Length:	Part #:	Length:
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34839	15'1"-18'	34844	26'1"-28'6"
34840	18'1"-20'	34845	28'7"-31'6"
34841	20'1"-22'	34846	31'7"-34'
34842	22'1"-24'	34847	34'1"-37'

5TH WHEEL

Part #:	Length:	Part #:	Length:
34851	Up to 23'	34856*	34'1"-37'
34852	23'1"-25'6"	34857*	37'1"-40'
34853	25'7"-28'	34858*	40'1"-43'6"
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64840	18'1"-20'	64845	28'7"-31'6"
64841	20'1"-22'	64846	31'7"-34'
64842	22'1"-24'		

5TH WHEEL

Part #:	Length:	Part #:	Length:
64852	23'1"-25'6"	64855	31'1"-34'
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34852	23'1"-25'6"	34856*	34'1"-37'
34853	25'7"-28'	34857*	37'1"-40'
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Leave It to Lance

Regarding "Sport Trailing," Bob Carpenter's September article about the Lance 1985 trailer, we'd like to share our experience with our new Lance 2295. On our first long trip last June, we got into Dunsmuir, California, in a heat wave. By the time we got to our campsite, the temperature was 103. The air conditioner felt good for about 20 minutes and then popped an inside breaker. I reset it, and it popped again in 15 to 20 minutes. The campground checked their electric system, with everything being fine. I found that the A/C would run full on, but not with the wall thermostat.

I made a call to my RV dealer, who recommended contacting a Lance dealer for warranty service. We were heading to Bend, Oregon, so I called the local dealer and was told, "We can't see you till September." I tried to explain that we were in the Bend area for only 10 days and got the same result. At this point, we were sorry we had a Lance.

Our next phone call, to Lance customer service, changed that. Lance looked into the problem and called back in about two hours with what we feel was above-and-beyond customer service. They had found a mobile-repair service and made an appointment for when we reached Bend, plus arranged for the repair bill to be sent directly to them. Accurate RV mobile repair came to our campsite, found the problem and ordered the needed parts. Jason, the owner, then made another trip to our site and installed the new parts. Both Lance and Accurate RV made a bad situation good.

Marty and Candy Aschle
Paso Robles, California

Your September magazine had a great *Trailer Life* test of the Lance 1985. I noticed that the trailer has partitioned slideout drawers that hold supplies. I wonder if any of your readers know of

Seeing Stars in Michigan

I snapped this picture while visiting my parents and sister at Yankee Springs State Park in Middleville, Michigan. The night was clear with a full moon coming over the horizon, creating a beautiful scene that belongs on every camping adventure.

Jeff Bours, Delton, Michigan



an aftermarket company that modifies travel trailers to install similar exterior slideout drawers.

John Taylor, Lexington, Kentucky

Going Under

In the September issue, I enjoyed reading Chris Hemer's "Underworld" article about replacing suspension system components and repacking wheel bearings. I have a 2006 Keystone Copper Canyon travel trailer that we bought about three years ago, and I've been planning to repack the bearings and check the brakes since we got the RV. The article inspired me to check under the trailer and look at the suspension components. One of the shackles of the suspension system was worn to the point that only about 1/8 inch of metal was left. Since we were going on a trip in a few days, we could have had a serious failure.

I bought the Dexter Axle components to replace what I had. Their shackles are twice as thick as the originals, and the bronze bushings are much better than the plastic originals. All of their bushings are greasable, so I'm sure the components will last for the life of my trailer. Thanks again for the article and for saving me from a potentially serious failure.

Gary Mechler
College Station, Texas

We just received the September issue with Chris Hemer's excellent "Underworld" article about maintaining axle bearings and brakes. As recommended, we had our bearings packed before leaving on a trip to the Northwest. Heading into California's wine country, I noticed that some of the wheels were losing grease that streaked the wheels, so I wiped them off. When we stopped for another rest break, I checked the wheels again. The right rear spindle was off-center, and I realized we were about to lose a wheel.

We limped into Petaluma, and I called 911 for assistance. Going above and beyond public service, the police department contacted Diego Truck Repair and Towing, which got us to a KOA without reservations, and we also were put in touch with T&K Truck Repair. Both companies went to great lengths to get us back on the road. If an RVer ever breaks down in Petaluma, rest assured that help is but a phone call away.

Terry and Dolores Johnson
Tucson, Arizona

Foreign Exchange

I have to respond to Scott Irwin's September letter asking *Trailer Life* to confine travel articles to America. My wife and I travel worldwide, and we are always looking for new places and travel ideas. Please

LETTERS

keep publishing articles about both domestic and foreign RV travel.

Charles Borncamp, Tracy, California

My husband and I love *Trailer Life*, but Scott Irwin's letter, "Two Sides of New Zealand," upset me. I loved everything about Bobbie Hasselbring's July article "Camping in Kiwiland," and I'm sure others felt the same.

Terri Hassig, St. Albans, West Virginia

Lightweight Bumper Bummer

I have a 2013 Jayco Jay Feather Ultra Lite that I tow with a 2008 Ford Explorer Sport Trac with the heavy-duty tow package. I wanted to add a bike rack to the back bumper of the trailer, so I consulted a local welding and fabrication shop. They said they would not recommend this, as the bumper, brackets and support beam are not designed to handle the weight and stress that would be put on them from bouncing, vibration and swaying while traveling.

The shop has made repairs to a number of RV bumpers that were damaged by variously attached racks, including one that resulted in an accident involving a vehicle that was behind the RV.

To make lightweight trailers, RV manufacturers have to use new designs and lighter materials. If, like me, you don't want to buy a more powerful vehicle to pull a heavier, sturdier trailer, keep in mind the restrictions of lightweight trailers before you make a purchase. I wound up using my Yankee ingenuity to design an adapter for my bike rack to go onto the post of the receiver/tow hitch when I am towing the trailer. The shop made it for me, and it works great!

Skip Fleming, Rifle, Colorado

In the April 2015 issue, I read "No Bikes on the Back" in the Letters section. This was very interesting, as I had a similar issue with my 34-foot fifth-wheel, except in my case there

was a sticker on the bumper that stated: "Do not exceed 200 pounds plus the weight of the spare tire." I weighed the spare tire and our two 10-speed bikes, and the total was less than 125 pounds. Believing what I read, I mounted a rack on the bumper and headed down the highway, only to wind up with the bumper almost falling off, three of the four weld spots broken, two of the bicycle wheels bent and one of the bicycle tires shredded. Needless to say, I was very upset.

Jim Murphy, Sutherlin, Oregon

Towing with a Grand Cherokee Diesel

In the August Letters, Ed Johnson asked about towing with a Jeep Grand Cherokee and, in particular, a diesel version. We have a 2007 Grand Cherokee diesel and have driven it some 80,000 miles. We pull a 25-foot Airstream Safari, sometimes with the Jeep and sometimes with our 1997 2500 Suburban 4WD with a 454 c.i.d. engine.

We have pulled that trailer about 8,000 miles with the Jeep, including a 3,000-plus-mile trip from Denver to the Oregon coast with side trips. The Jeep performed very well, particularly on mountain grades, both up and down, where the engine compression takes a big load off the brakes. In fact, the original front brakes still have 45 percent life, and the rear will last until the end of this year.

We have more than 70,000 miles on the trailer, including towing with the Suburban. The heavier weight and wheelbase of the GMC is more comfortable on freeway driving with truck traffic and buffeting, but otherwise, there's not much difference. The diesel pulls over the mountain passes with no noticeable strain and at speeds comparable to the GMC.

The Jeep diesel gets 17 to 19 MPG towing and 27 MPG without the trailer. Fuel consumption with the Suburban towing is about 10 MPG. The 2007 Grand Cherokee has a Daimler engine/drivetrain. I believe the new ones use a Fiat-owned VM Motori Italian diesel with slightly more torque.

Joseph Mattson, Lakewood, Colorado



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The Big Sleep

The August 2015 issue had a short piece, "SportTrek Sleeps 11," about Venture RV's SportTrek 327VIK. We wonder what, other than sleep, 11 people could possibly do in this trailer! **Maxine and Peter Diethelm Wallkill, New York**

RV Recalls

I wanted to get some new screws for an FIC trailer latch/lock and discovered that a number of FIC lock/latch sets are the subject of a cylinder recall. Here is the website: www.fastecindustrial.com/recall/default.html.

When getting keys made, I mentioned this to my locksmith, and he recalled having a terrible time with someone getting locked out. The lock tumbler seemed to go too far and would not release, making it a real challenge to pick the lock and free it up. Please share this with *Trailer Life* readers, as there are probably quite a number of them who could have a really bad day without addressing this.

**Don Middleton
Delta, British Columbia**

In the process of looking up a recall for our vehicle, we discovered that RVs can also be researched for recalls. The website is www.safercar.gov. I hope this information can help out a fellow RV enthusiast.

**Brian and Jerry Lynn Maldet
Hooversville, Pennsylvania**

Thanks for Your Support

We were traveling five hours from home in high-temperature weather when our electric awning would not retract. We called a local mobile-repair service, but they were very busy, so we decided to call Forest River, the manufacturer of our RV. Jeff Holmes answered and soon had us on a three-person call with Rita Lightner of Dometic, the awning manufacturer. Jeff remembered a recall on the motor, and Rita set up overnight delivery and a technician to install the new part. We were delayed only one day and were so well treated that we wanted to let others know that support

from RV manufacturers is still there.

J.D. Dickson, Whitesboro, Texas

Readers' Seal of Approval

This summer we went to South Dakota with our brand new Keystone Outback travel trailer. On our second night out, we noticed that the air conditioner was having difficulty cooling the trailer. We attributed it to the extreme heat in Tennessee at the time. Then we noticed the air-conditioning compressor was cycling and not blowing cold air.

It was midmorning and a Saturday, so we started making calls. We phoned Lebanon RV Center in Lebanon, Tennessee, and Greg Nowling, the owner, was very helpful. He was closing at noon but offered to stay open. We hooked up our trailer and took it to his repair center. He was very knowledgeable and diagnosed the problem. Since he was an authorized dealer, he installed a new roof air conditioner and had us back on our

way that afternoon. The service was outstanding. If ever you need repairs, it is well worth the trip to Lebanon RV Center to get the job done quickly and done right.

**Sue Deitz
St. Petersburg, Florida**

Eighteen months ago I purchased a Demco fifth-wheel hitch from Bob's Performance Center in Gardnerville, Nevada. I had some issues that grew into significant problems. Bob's and Demco hit the ball out of the park. They replaced the entire hitch and did so in a timely and professional manner. Thanks to both Bob's and Demco.

**Judy Crawford
South Lake Tahoe, California**

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Geico, Circle 108 on Reader Service Card

Where the Wild Things Are

Lion Country Safari near West Palm Beach, Florida, is an exotic drive-through zoo

article by Paula Loehr

Have you ever considered going on an RV camping safari across the plains of Africa, the forests of India or the grasslands of South America? Well, you can boost your international wildlife-watching skills — without a passport — at Lion Country Safari near West Palm Beach, Florida.

Established in 1967, Lion Country Safari is claimed to be North America's first cageless drive-through zoo, designed to educate and entertain visitors. Much of the 300-acre preserve is maintained in a natural state to allow animals to roam freely, nurture their young and graze just as they would in their native habitats. The conservation-oriented park is home to more than 900 wild animals from several continents.

On Lion Country's 4-mile-long Drive-Through Safari, my husband, Dennis, and I traveled slowly, pausing to view woolly llamas, sprinting antelopes, water buffaloes and playful chimpanzees. At one point, we saw seven giraffes clustered in a jumble of brown spots, gyrating tongues and long legs. Side by side, the giraffes munched leafy branches at a tall pole-shaped feeding station. We stopped to allow three burly rhinoceroses, a baby ostrich and a herd of galloping zebras to cross the road. As we reached the pride of tawny lions, a grumpy male raised his bushy-maned head to roar



(Above) Face to face (well, almost) with a lioness. (Right) The author's husband, Dennis, makes a friend at the giraffe-feeding platform.



fiercely at nothing in particular.

At the close of the self-paced drive, our Lion Country adventure continued at Safari World Amusement Park. Lion Country's walk-through park boasts tropical landscapes, waterfalls and 15 animal exhibits housing everything from monkeys and macaws to porcupines and Burmese pythons. Visitors can paddle a boat around Lake Shanalee, attend narrated shows featuring alligators and flamingos, and hand-feed budgies, lorikeets and giraffes. Lion Country's long list of child-oriented activities includes panning for gems, zooming down a waterslide and riding on a colorful carousel or a live camel.

We climbed up to the wooden giraffe-feeding platform, where my husband earned his nickname, the Giraffe Whisperer. Within seconds of arriving on the observation deck,

a young giraffe ambled over, greeted Dennis face to face, and listened intently to his welcoming words. The giraffe stood motionless over Dennis' shoulder, gazing directly at me while I snapped photos.

Our amazing close-range giraffe encounter was just one of many highlights during a wild and wonderful day at Lion County Safari.

RVers on safari can camp at the Lion Country Safari KOA adjacent the preserve and amusement park. Check the websites for discounts, including KOA specials.

Lion Country Safari
561-793-1084, www.lioncountrysafari.com

Lion Country Safari KOA
800-562-9115, www.lioncountrysafari.com/koa/koa-overview

Unleash the Fury

Prime Time Manufacturing announced a new toy-hauler travel trailer for 2016 that the company claims is easily towed by half-ton pickups. The Fury lineup includes two models, the 31-foot 6-inch 2614X with an open 14-foot 6-inch garage, and the 34-foot 6-inch 2910 with a 10-foot closed garage. It may look aggressive with its wild graphics, but inside you'll be comfortable relaxing on reclining chairs or at the king-size dinette while viewing a 40-inch LED TV. Cherry hardwood cabinet doors and drawers and flush-mounted LED ceiling lights add to the appeal.

"We're excited about this rollout," said Adam Smith, Prime Time's product manager. "We're hitting a price and weight point that is substantially less than other fully laminated fiberglass products today, and we've got an aggressive look and great features set to complement it."

The smaller 2614X sleeps two in the main living area and has a queen-size walk-around bed. The bathroom separates the bedroom from the living area, and reclining chairs sit opposite the kitchen, which features a large four-door storage pantry.

The 2910 sleeps four in the main living area on a queen bed up front and a king-size dinette in the single slideout



(a sofa and stowable table are options). The bathroom separates the living area from the garage. Both floorplans are equipped with two HappiJac lifting sofas in the garage that provide sleeping space for four more.

The Fury features a 15,000-Btu air conditioner, a front storage rack and designer aluminum wheels. Unloaded vehicle weight (uvw) on the 2910 is 7,262 pounds, and hitch weight is listed at 923 pounds. Freshwater capacity is 60 gallons, and black- and gray-water tanks have 39-gallon capacities.

Base MSRP is \$34,000 for the 2614X and \$39,000 for the 2910.

Prime Time Manufacturing
574-862-3032, www.primetimerv.com



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Pace Edwards, Circle 118 on Reader Service Card

Buyer Beware State of Indiana Versus ACC Warranty

The RV Resolutions column in the February 2015 issue stated that *Trailer Life* and our sister publication, *MotorHome*, had received multiple letters from readers asking for help resolving claims with ACC Warranty Group, a supplier of extended RV warranties. We mailed request-for-attention letters to the Indianapolis-based company, and the unopened envelopes came back marked "Return to Sender. Unable to Forward."

At that time, *Trailer Life* learned that the Indiana attorney general's office had filed a complaint against ACC Warranty and its owner, Stephen Burgess, late last year. Recently, we received the following update from Mark Snodgrass from the consumer protection division:

"In 2014, the State of Indiana filed a lawsuit against ACC Warranty Services Company and its owner, Stephen Burgess. The matter was resolved by

entry of a Judgment on July 31, 2015, which ordered ACC Warranty and Mr. Burgess to pay the State of Indiana \$1,325,989. As part of that amount, the judge ordered restitution to be paid to [the complainants].

Unfortunately, a judgment does not guarantee [all complainants] will receive restitution. The Judgment has been transferred to our Collections Division for further action. The Collections Division will be undertaking proceedings to determine if Mr. Burgess currently has any assets, and if so, to collect on our Judgment from those assets. We are aware of Mr. Burgess' location in Florida as well as the current business he is running in Florida.

In the event our Collections Division is able to obtain any funds from Mr. Burgess, those funds will be immediately forwarded to the consumers who are owed consumer restitution."



Show and Tell

See what's new at two RV shows in Florida and one in California

Fall Clean Sweep RV Show

October 30 through November 1
Germain Arena, Estero, Florida
Admission and parking are free.
www.frvta.org

Tampa Bay RV Show

November 5 through 8
Florida State Fairgrounds,
Tampa, Florida
\$6 per car, \$12 per RV
www.frvta.org

Palm Springs Area RV Show and Sale

December 10 through 13
Riverside County Fair and National Date
Festival Grounds, Indio, California
Admission and parking are free.
303-485-9086, www.dankendrickrvshows.com/rv-shows-california

Level your RV in less than 1 minute!

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Fall Festivals

The air is crisp, and the leaves are changing color, a perfect time to enjoy food, festivals and fun

Virginia Thanksgiving Festival

November 1

Berkeley Plantation, Charles City, Virginia

Celebrate American history with a tour of one of the country's first great estates. Berkeley Plantation's Georgian mansion, built in 1726, overlooks 1,000 acres. The daylong event features a traditional Thanksgiving dinner, tribal dancers, crafts and vendors, music and a re-enactment of America's first Thanksgiving.

888-466-6018, www.virginiathanksgivingfestival.com

New Hampshire Open Doors

November 7 through 8

Throughout New Hampshire

This annual statewide touring and shopping event is a fun way to experience the best the Granite State has to offer. Visitors can purchase items made in New Hampshire (tax free), meet and talk with artists and craftspeople in their studios, sample fresh products from farmstands and orchards, and savor fine cuisine and wine at local restaurants. Participants will hold special activities, including craft demonstrations and workshops, horse-and-buggy rides and food sampling.

603-224-3375, www.nhopensdoors.com

Williamsburg Harvest Celebration

November 11 through 15

Williamsburg, Jamestown and Yorktown, Virginia

The harvest event treats visitors to a gastronomic journey while attending 40 culinary-inspired activities highlighting all things Virginia. Eat, drink and learn while benefiting Meals on Wheels, Southern Foodways Alliance and other charities.

800-368-6511, www.williamsburgharvestcelebration.com



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NEWSWIRE

RV MANUFACTURING



Augusta Sells Factory-Direct

Augusta RV (ARV) announced that it is now selling its fifth-wheel trailers factory-direct. ARV President Chris Eppers noted, "We want to talk with our customers directly and design our luxury recreational vehicles to their specific needs. This effort will be best achieved through a factory-direct sales model." While the majority of customer

interactions will be with the ARV staff, some of the existing dealer network will remain.

Production Manager Joe Burr said, "We welcome prospective or current customers to ask us any questions they have about our trailers. Our production team really does enjoy talking with our customers!"

www.augusta-rv.com

RETAIL SALES



Supercenter Opens in Idaho Falls

Camping World Inc. and Good Sam Enterprises LLC opened a new supercenter in Idaho Falls, Idaho, in August. The facility is a relocation of OK Trailer, a 50-year-old RV dealership formerly located in Shelley, Idaho, that was acquired by Camping World in September 2014. Camping World of Idaho Falls offers RV sales of motorhomes and towable RVs,

service, parts and accessories.

"In our ongoing efforts to offer consumers a convenient, one-stop location to serve all their outdoor and RV needs, we acquired space for a new, larger facility that is conveniently located just off Interstate 15," said Marcus Lemonis, CEO and chairman of Camping World and Good Sam Enterprises.

www.campingworld.com



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The dues are \$87.50 per month and include everything except electric and individual lot maintenance and insurance. We are a not-for-profit, member owned co-operative, and therefore offer no formal financing, but do have some deferred payment options. Closing costs are only \$175. Call **520-450-2966** or email desertgardens@cgmailbox.com for sales information.

We're located near Florence, AZ, and have 266 sites on 73 acres with all the amenities you'd expect at a price you can afford. There is still a great selection, but lots are selling fast. Visit www.desertgardensrvpark.com to see what we're all about and what's here for you.

**Tax and electric are extra. Email for restrictions and information. Advance reservations required.*

Down the Tubes

A California reader asked RV Resolutions to plead her case when the manufacturer of her new fifth-wheel didn't cover the costs of fixing a plumbing problem:

▶ I'm writing regarding a construction defect in my 2015 Grand Design Reflections 303RL fifth-wheel. From day one, the toilet never flushed properly and made strange noises.

On our first real trip, I noticed that when I flushed the toilet the water backed up all the way into the bowl. Since there had been very little use, I knew the tank was not full. It was Sunday, and I was unable to contact anyone at the dealership (B&B RV Center in Redding, California), so we had no choice but to hire a pumping service. The service person tried to empty the tank, but it had very little in it, so he suctioned the tank from the toilet and cleared the line.

When the same thing happened again, we hired another pumping service to clear the line so the toilet bowl could drain, and then we took the fifth-wheel to B&B. They found the cause of the problem was that the pipe from the toilet went almost all the way to the bottom of the black tank, leaving room for only liquids to escape into the tank and causing solids to stay in the pipe and back up the toilet.

During the dealer's inspection, it was discovered that one of the pump trucks had used too much suction and cracked the black tank and stressed the gray tank. Even

though the pumping service was necessitated by the faulty construction, I was willing to take responsibility and pay for new tanks. When I picked up the fifth-wheel, I was told

that Grand Design would not cover any of the cost of the repairs. B&B worked with me and discounted the bill to \$4,145.42, but I don't feel I should be stuck with more than \$4,000 in repairs on a new RV.

Terri Stone, Truckee, California



THE COMPANY RESPONDS

RV Resolutions sent a petition to Grand Design RV on Terri Stone's behalf and received the following response from the manufacturer's vice president of service operations:

We are pleased to report that, with the assistance of our dealer partner B&B RV Center, we have successfully addressed Ms. Stone's concerns, and she will be receiving a full refund of the repair costs. Ms. Stone expressed her satisfaction with Grand Design and B&B regarding this action. We appreciate your assistance.

Jerry McCarthy, Grand Design RV, Middlebury, Indiana

Under-the-Hood Overcharge

Suspecting that he was charged too much by a mobile-repair service, a New Mexico reader sought RV Resolutions' help getting a refund:

▶ On my way to the Avi Resort and Casino in Laughlin, Nevada, warning lights came on in my 2003 Chevy pickup, which was towing a fifth-wheel trailer. I was about 2 miles away but was able to make it to the casino's campground.

I called Good Sam Roadside Assistance and arranged for the truck to be towed to Findlay Motor Company in Bullhead, Arizona, the next morning. When the tow truck didn't show up, I called again and was told that a mobile-repair vehicle would be coming to where I was parked.

A van from All About Towing arrived in 20 minutes. Bruce, the repairman, said a major belt and two idler pulleys needed to be replaced.

He left to get parts, while his partner removed the two pulleys. He forgot the power-steering fluid and had to make another trip to the closest parts store to get some. The bill totaled \$796.06, which included payment for the trip back to town to get the fluid.

I called Findlay and was told that, at the most, I would have had to pay \$300 for the parts and installation if the truck had been towed there. Can you help me get a refund?

Dennis Watson, High Rolls, New Mexico

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

After RV Resolutions forwarded Dennis Watson's complaint to the

Good Sam Roadside Assistance office, we heard from one of the program's senior coordinators:

I spoke to Dennis Watson and apologized for any miscommunication or service failures he experienced. I also advised Mr. Watson that we are mailing him a check for \$500 (\$350 for the overcharge and \$150 for goodwill), along with upgrading his policy to Platinum Plus and giving him free enrollment in Good Sam TravelAssist. He confirmed that he was satisfied.

Frank Stofa

**Good Sam Roadside Assistance
Englewood, Colorado**

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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BADLAND

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LOT 62534/69643 shown

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Pop-Up Paradise

Purple Line's Opus folding trailer packs in the amenities and is at home anywhere you roam

When we decided to deviate from the norm and review a pop-up trailer, John Cleese's immortal catchphrase, "And now for something completely different," from the Monty Python series came to mind. The high-end canvas Opus, with a 7-foot 6-inch ceiling height, offers many of the amenities of a hard-walled RV in one that can be towed with pretty much any properly equipped four-wheeled vehicle and go anywhere your vehicle can tow it. And a major advantage of a pop-up is that you don't need to pay for RV storage, as it can take up residence in the corner of a garage.

The Opus is different from the average pop-up, and the British-Australian developer brought the unique Conestoga-wagon-styled trailer to the United States about a year and a half ago. To that end, it's built to endure inclement and soggy weather and is designed to go off-road with its steel chassis supporting an aluminum frame. To top it off — literally — a universal rack for kayaks and bicycles graces the "roof." It's ruggedly constructed, like a Conestoga wagon, complete with canvas stretched over arched hoops. Since rounding up a draft-horse team was unlikely, we used a small SUV to tow it to our primitive testing grounds. The Opus has electric brakes so it can be handled safely by smaller tow vehicles.

It takes some work to get there, but once the Opus is set up, it's pleasingly spacious inside with a cheerful atmosphere. Zippered-flap skylights shed plenty of light and bring in the stars at night, and a contemporary cream-colored leatherette sofa with red piping provides a comfy place to lounge. My first time out, it took about 45 minutes to set up by myself and an hour to take it down. The folks at the factory will show you how it's done, and once you get familiar with the procedure, the claim is that you'll be able to do it in 20 minutes. And I'd say that's doable once you get the hang of it.

In a nutshell, the divided top opens to the left and right, creating individual "bedrooms" at each end — sort of tents

within a tent — so each team of two has private sleeping accommodations. To lower the nonelectric stabilizing jacks at each corner and set up the support legs for the beds, I had to kneel down on the ground. Later it occurred to me that the supplied fold-up step for getting in and out of the Opus would have worked as a nice seat rather than crouching. A locking storage box that offers access from both sides is included which, among other things, we housed a cordless drill and socket with extension to lower the jacks. To raise the roof, so to speak, the arched support poles are extended to exert tension on the tent fabric and the pressure clamps are set. From there, you build up by stacking the cabinets with the sink and faucet and range on top of the base cabinets. I slid in the shelves, pushed in the sofa cushions that stay put with hook-and-loop material, set up the table and was ready to relax camp side.

Except that was about the time my overnight guests conveniently showed up. No worries; preparing a simple snack (and meals later) was easy with prep space on the dining table and a sturdy countertop between the sink and range. Several open shelves make for a straightforward view of their contents and easy access to them. There are storage shelves at the floor level, a cutlery drawer and a 700-watt microwave.

The Italian-made SMEV two-burner

cooktop heated food quickly and is obviously high-end. This particular cooktop uses JetFlow technology, which is claimed to use 33 percent less LP-gas and reach higher temperatures. It took less than a minute to hook it up to LP-gas and attach the clip to the cabinet that keeps it in place. Even better was that, when we wiped the burners down after use, it cleaned up in a snap.

Glass tops cover the cooktop and the Dometic sink that's fitted with a fold-down faucet. Standard is a city-water hookup, water hose and pressure regulator for sites offering water. Optional are water carriers that can be strapped to the front of the Opus for dry camping; a 12-volt DC water pump is standard for drawing water from a water carrier.

At the floor level is a 4,000-Btu Cadet Perfectoe electric heater to keep feet toasty in the winter. The heater draws 1,000 watts of current so users should be aware of that drain when powering up more than one high-wattage accessory at a time. Three LED toe-kick lights have two settings: a blue one for subtle lighting and a brighter setting. Ceiling lights that attach to the support poles are optional.

Included is a Porta-Gaz 37-quart, three-way portable refrigerator that runs on 120-volt AC or 12-volt DC power or LP-gas. The Porta-Gaz sips LP-gas at a rate of half a pound per 24 hours, which means that one of those little 16.4-ounce propane canisters could potentially keep that refrigerator running cold for two days.

There's seating for four — even five — at the dinette (which the company calls a "club lounge"), and the table rotates so



Compact fun: Packed up, the Opus is about 4 feet tall and 14 feet long, including the coupler, and is topped with a universal rack for carrying kayaks and bicycles.

we weren't knocking stuff off the table to have a seat on the comfortable sofa. As mentioned earlier, the cream-colored leatherette sofa is attractive, but it may not stay cream colored for long with certain (read: younger) guests. To get into the bed behind the sofa, you need to step on and over the sofa, plus we can picture kids (and some adults) with dirty feet using the sofa as a springboard to dive into bed. A solution for keeping the sofa clean would be to cover it with a towel or sheet. The club lounge folds down to make into another bed. If you're going to use the lounge as a bed while someone is sleeping in the adjacent "bedroom," it may be beneficial to communicate at which end your head will be so a wayward foot doesn't end up in a body part during nighttime comings and goings.

Getting into bed at the other end is not as exciting; the users simply take one step up into the room. A knee-high cabinet to the left is a good place to keep a suitcase or duffle bag that can easily be reached from bed (when you're not zipped in). Each "bedroom" has a comfortable 75 x 59-inch mattress,

The U-shaped dinette with leatherette sofa is attractive and comfortable, plus you're treated to a nice cross-breeze when windows are opened. The canvas on the right zips all the way down to open up the entire side. Behind the sofa is one of the Opus' "bedrooms," complete with skylights.





and even with the bedroom all zipped up, there's lots of room and we did not feel closed in. Mesh storage pockets hang at both ends of each bed and are wide enough to hold a couple of magazines. Each room has a heavy-duty plastic skylight, which I absolutely loved for nighttime stargazing while lying in bed. We didn't close it before falling asleep, so in the morning the sun was bright and hot.

There are two skylights in the main living area as well and vented "windows."

(Above from left) The Opus' double beds are housed in the pop-up's lids, making for a firm base. Everything you need: a sink, a two-burner cooktop, a microwave, shelves and storage.

Since we were camping on a hot week-end without the benefit of a shade tree, the Opus stayed toasty during the day. Our style is to be outdoors most of the day anyway. Being able to open the skylights via zippers would be welcome, but that might compromise the waterproof aspect. One wall zips all the way down to open up the entire main living area.

Included is a 10 x 6½-foot zip-in awning. Optional is a full awning/room (\$1,499) that creates another living area with two detachable bed pods that will sleep another four people.

One nitpick we had about the Opus is that movement is noticeable, despite the stabilizing jacks, especially when all is relatively quiet. For instance, when friends, who were sleeping in the other bedroom, got up in the wee hours to visit the campground restroom, the motion woke me (I'm a light sleeper). Another point, as we discovered, is that the Opus' heavy canvas retains heat. This is great for camping in cool climates; however, packing up the Opus in the heat of a 90-degree Southern California day was not much fun. The first step to starting the Opus' packing-down process is to zip up all vents, so breaking camp is best done at a cool part of the day.

Three colors for the trailer are standard: Opus Orange, Metallic Grey and Pristine Silver, but the company is happy to custom "vinyl wrap" in pretty much any color you want. If you don't want to mess with backing up or parking, Purple Line, manufacturer of the Opus, offers a remote-control trailer mover (see "Big E-Go" in the May 2015 *Trailer Life*).

The Opus' less-than-4-foot-high door locks, so the trailer can be secured when it's folded down. The only thing the Opus was missing is a bathroom, though an optional cubicle/privacy screen with a portable cartridge toilet is available for \$349.99. Also optional is a portable shower that heats up water using LP-gas

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SPECIFICATIONS

2016 OPUS POP-UP TRAILER

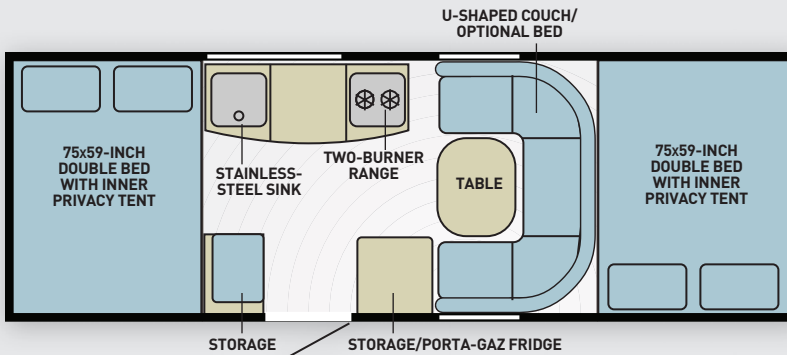
Exterior Length (closed)	13' 8"
Exterior Length (open)	19'
Exterior Width (closed)	6' 4"
Exterior Height (closed)	4'
Interior Width (main body)	6'
Interior Height	7' 6"
Construction	Steel chassis supporting aluminum frame; waterproof and mildew-resistant poly-cotton canvas
Freshwater Cap.	Opt 6-gal. containers
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	Opt 6-gal. containers
LP-gas Cap.	5 gal.
Refrigerator	Porta-Gaz 3-way portable
Floor Heater	4,000 Btu, electric
Converter	55 amp
Battery	Optional
Tires	175/65R14
Weight (claimed, dry)	1,543
Hitch Weight	200 lbs.
GVWR	3,500 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$17,999
MSRP, as tested	\$17,999
Basic Warranty	Two years

Purple Line/Opus

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PURPLE LINE OPUS



or the 120-volt AC volt system. The Opus comes with a 14-inch spare tire.

The company will soon release a Moto model that can tote two motorcycles (up to 1,100 pounds) on top and includes a motorcycle loading system.

The Opus is certainly not mainstream, but we were impressed with how spacious and well-appointed it is. Plus, we like its versatility — here's

the possibility of exploring with an RV that can be towed over the bumps and bounces of peaks and prairies. It's a breeze to maneuver, you can see over the top of it from the rearview mirror, and it can be towed by just about any vehicle. And once you get to where you're going, you'll be far more comfortable than those pioneers battling the elements from their Conestoga wagons. 🚐

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Sweet '16s

Looking for a new pickup? From upgraded features to more powerful engines and added models, 2016 offers something for every truck buyer

Pickup trucks used to be a lot like wheelbarrows — an essential tool for heavy work but not necessarily something you'd want to ride around town in. They had bench seats, heavy steering and a stiff suspension, and if you wanted air conditioning, well, you rolled down the window. If we could have peered through a porthole into the future back then, we'd be amazed to see what the humble pickup has become — not just an immensely capable machine for work or recreation but one so versatile and good looking it could be used as the sole family vehicle. Heavy-duty or midsize, basic or leather-lined, the pickup has gradually morphed from

faithful family friend into a status symbol, and every company that builds a truck is vying for market leadership.

Each model year, almost without fail, we say that the current year is a good one to shop for a new truck. That's because there are so many new offerings, so many improvements, it seems like things really can't get much better for truck buyers. And then they do. For 2016, the story is much the same — additional content, more capability, new engines and even some all-new models. So, is this the best year ever to consider a new truck? Probably. Will they be even better next year? We have little doubt. Here's the latest:

The Ram 3500 ups the ante once again this year with best-in-class power, towing capacity and payload.



RAM

In a sort of model-year mash-up, the Ram 1500 received two midyear 2015 offerings that will continue into the 2016 model year: the Ram 1500 Rebel and the Ram 1500 Limited. The Rebel is an off-road-focused model featuring a new blacked-out grille, skid plate, tow hooks, Bilstein shocks and 33-inch Toyo tires on 17-inch aluminum wheels. Available exclusively as a crew cab model with a 5-foot 7-inch bed length, the Rebel is offered in two- or four-wheel drive with either a 3.6-liter Pentastar V-6 or a 5.7-liter Hemi V-8 engine and an eight-speed automatic transmission.

Billed as a "black tie" luxury alternative to the Southwestern-themed Laramie Longhorn, the Limited offers exterior details like an all-new grille, unique 20-inch wheels, additional chrome accents



The Ram Rebel features off-road styling similar to the Power Wagon but on a lighter-duty 1500 platform. Standard are 33-inch mud terrain tires.

and a chrome Ram tailgate logo. Inside its sumptuous cab, the big Limited features all-black full-leather seating, Black Argento wood inserts and matching Berber carpet inserts.

Ram 2500 and 3500 trucks are also available with the Limited

treatment, but, more importantly, they continue to up the HD ante with a best-in-class tow rating of 32,210 pounds and the most torque at a whopping 900 lb-ft when the high-output 6.7-liter Cummins diesel is specified.

CHEVY/GMC

The biggest news at GM comes from its smallest truck, the recently reintroduced Chevy Colorado, and its sibling, the GMC Canyon. Although the truck is essentially unchanged for 2016 (save for some minor interior details), RVers will likely be interested in the new 2.8-liter Duramax four-cylinder diesel, which should be available by the time you read this. Considering the 2.5-liter gasoline four-cylinder already has an EPA rating of 27 mpg highway, it's not unreasonable to expect 30-plus mpg from the diesel — and with 181 horsepower and 369 lb-ft of



The Chevy Silverado and GMC Sierra benefit from a minor restyle that includes a more contemporary front fascia with LED running lights.

Sweet '16s



Chevy Colorado and GMC Canyon will offer a 2.8-liter Duramax diesel that should top 30 mpg highway and tow at least 7,000 pounds.

torque on tap (100 lb-ft more than the available 3.6-liter gas V-6), it should at least match the truck's current top tow rating of 7,000 pounds.

The half-ton Chevy Silverado and GMC Sierra receive minor exterior updates for 2016, including a more sculpted hood and a contemporary headlight treatment incorporating LED running lights. On the functional

side, expect the expanded use of eight-speed automatic transmissions in an effort to further improve fuel economy. The heavy-duty 2500 and 3500 trucks will likewise receive similar updates to the headlights and grille, as well as a couple of welcome RV-specific details — namely, an available fifth-wheel/gooseneck Trailering Prep Package (available later in the year),

Active Steering Assist (improves steering feel and reduces pull on crowned roads) and the adoption of SAE J2807 trailering standards. Inside the comfy cabin, the Chevy MyLink/GMC IntelliLink system is offered with a 7- or 8-inch touchscreen and a faster processor, plus Apple CarPlay and Android Auto capability.

FORD

With trailer-towing innovations like integrated trailer-brake control, trailer-sway control and dynamic hitch assist, the best-selling F-150 already makes trailering easy — but for 2016, Ford raises the bar yet another notch with its all-new Pro Trailer Backup Assist (PTBA) system. When backing up, the driver simply turns a knob to indicate the direction he or she wishes to go, instead of the often-confusing reverse-steering method we're all familiar with. The

system automatically steers the truck the desired amount and limits vehicle speed to make backing safer and easier. Video demonstrations (search "Pro Trailer Backup Assist" on YouTube) show the driver towing a boat, but it's not hard to imagine how useful this system could be when backing a trailer into a tight campground space. Ford engineers used advanced camera technology to develop the system's trailer tracking system strategy and tested PTBA for nearly



All-new just last year, the Ford F-150 carries on for 2016 essentially unchanged from a design standpoint.



New this year, Ford's Pro Trailer Backup Assist takes the guesswork out of backing your trailer. Just turn this knob the direction you want to go, and the truck does the rest.

a decade before its official introduction this year. Otherwise, the F-150 is essentially unchanged, save for some appearance packages on the XLT and Lariat trim levels.

The Ford Super Duty lineup is likewise carryover, but the top dog F-450 now has a fifth-wheel tow rating of 26,500 pounds and a gross combination weight rating of 40,400 pounds.

NISSAN

You've been hearing about it for years, and now it's finally here: the Nissan Titan XD with an available 5.0-liter Cummins turbodiesel V-8 engine. All new for 2016, the Titan XD starts with a fully boxed ladder frame that has been extensively reinforced and strengthened for added stiffness, vertical/lateral bending and torsional rigidity. The suspension is pretty traditional truck stuff, incorporating a double-wishbone arrangement with a stabilizer bar up front and a straight axle out back with leaf springs and twin-tube shock absorbers.

Nissan is still being coy about capabilities but maintains that the Titan XD will have a payload of more than 2,000 pounds and an SAE J2807-compliant tow rating of more than 12,000 pounds when properly equipped. That's a lot of weight to bring to a stop, so the XD is outfitted with 14.2-inch discs up front and 14.4-inch rear with ABS. Buyers will

have a choice of 17-, 18- or 20-inch aluminum alloy wheels wrapped in LT245/75R17, LT275/65R18 or LT265/60R20 tires, respectively.

Nissan has also been reluctant to release output numbers for the new Cummins powerplant but allows that it is the first commercial application of the new M2 two-stage turbo system, which helps reduce traditional turbo-lag through precision balancing between high-pressure and low-pressure turbos. Utilizing a



For decades, when you heard "Cummins," you thought "Dodge." This year, you'll be able to find a Cummins turbodiesel V-8 powering the new Nissan Titan XD.



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Sweet '16s

compacted graphite iron (CGI) block and aluminum cylinder heads, the double overhead cam engine will reportedly produce about 45 percent more torque at cruising speed than similar-size gasoline V-8 engines and 20 percent better fuel economy when towing heavy loads. The engine will be backed by a six-speed Aisin automatic transmission developed and engineered specifically for the Titan XD. The Titan will also be offered with V-8 and V-6 engines, but details on these were not available at press time.

Of particular interest to RVers are an Integrated Trailer Brake Controller, Trailer Sway Control (TSC), Tow/Haul Mode with Downhill Speed Control and a handy Trailer Light Check system that allows one-person to verify the operation of turn signals, brake lights and running/clearance lights from inside the Titan's cab. The system also includes Moving Object Detection (MOD), designed to help the driver detect moving objects such as vehicles, shopping carts or other large objects when backing out via an on-screen notification and warning chime.

The Titan XD will offer several hitches, including an integrated gooseneck hitch built into the frame, in addition to a suite of available advanced driving aids that include a RearView Monitor and Around View Monitor with Moving Object Detection, Blind Spot Warning (BSW), front and rear sonar parking system and a tire-pressure monitoring system (TPMS).

The Titan XD's controversial exterior styling appears to borrow heavily from Ford and Dodge light-duty trucks, and it cribs a few features from its full-size competitors as well, albeit with some unique tweaks. For example, dual lockable in-bed storage boxes are available, but unlike other similar systems, these can be accessed from inside the bed without



The Nissan Titan XD promises to be one of the most capable half-ton trucks on the market when it finally bows this year.

having to remove a camper shell or tonneau cover. They are also removable when extra bed capacity is required. Other familiar features include a 120-volt AC power outlet in the bed and an easy-lift/lower tailgate, plus Nissan innovations like a factory spray-in bedliner and thoughtful touches like flush-mounted LED bedrail lighting.

TOYOTA

Toyota has always led the midsize-pickup pack with its Tacoma, but when the Ford Ranger, Chevy Colorado/GMC Canyon and Dodge Dakota left the party, it was sitting pretty. Even with dated engines/transmissions and lackluster fuel economy, it easily maintained its number one spot against its sole rival, the Nissan Frontier. However, with the impending return of the Colorado/Canyon, Toyota figured it was time for a much-needed update of the Tacoma to keep it on top.

Developed in part by the Toyota engineering team at the Toyota Technical Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the new



The Toyota Tacoma TRD Off Road grade includes hardcore features like Multi-Terrain Select, Crawl Control and a locking rear differential for extra capability when the pavement ends.

Sweet '16s

truck features a high-strength steel frame to enhance overall rigidity and an all-new 3.5-liter Atkinson-cycle V-6 with VVT-iW (Variable Valve Timing with Intelligent Wider Intake) and Toyota's D-4S technology, which incorporates both direct and port fuel injection. At 278 horsepower, it trails GM's top offering (305 horsepower) but offers an increase of 42 horsepower over the previous V-6 along with 265 lb-ft of torque at 4,600 RPM. The 2.7-liter

four-cylinder carries on essentially unchanged. Both engines will be paired with a new six-speed automatic transmission, and for those that prefer to row their own, the V-6 also offers a new six-speed manual and a carryover five-speed manual. When equipped with the V-6 Tow Package, the new Tacoma can tow up to 6,800 pounds (per the SAE J2807 tow standard), an increase of 300 pounds over the previous V-6.

As before, the Tacoma is all about choice, offering five model grades (SR, SR5, TRD Sport, TRD Off Road and Limited) and 29 configurations in its two cab types, the extended Access Cab and four-door Double Cab. Each cab will be available in 4x2 and 4x4 configurations.

The new exterior is complemented by an all-new, quieter interior that offers an array of available features, including Qi wireless charging, Smart Key with pushbutton start, leather-trimmed seats, power tilt/slide moonroof, dual-zone automatic climate control, touchscreen audio and blind-spot monitoring with Rear Cross Traffic Alert.

All Tacoma 4x4 models are equipped with 4WDemand part-time 4WD with an electronically controlled transfer case and an Automatic Limited Slip Differential (Auto LSD), while Tacoma TRD Sport models are equipped with sport-tuned shocks. But if you really plan to travel off the beaten path, the TRD Off-Road grade adds a number of hard-core features borrowed from the legendary Land Cruiser and 4Runner Trail. The Multi-Terrain Select system (automatic transmission only) allows the driver to optimize traction over a variety of surfaces by selecting loose rock, mud or sand; each input regulates wheelspin by adjusting throttle and brake inputs. Additional off-road features include a locking rear differential, Hill Start Assist Control, Active Traction Control and Crawl Control.

Optional on V-6 models is a Class IV hitch receiver with a transmission oil cooler, 130-amp alternator (manual transmission only), four- and seven-pin connector and Trailer-Sway Control. 🗣️

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AROUND THE WEST

IN 30 DAYS

FIFTEEN TIPS FOR AN EPIC RV TRIP TO NINE NORTH AMERICAN NATIONAL PARKS

Maybe you can relate. You and your partner brainstorm trip ideas and come up with a plan. Pretty soon, details intrude, and the final plan looks nothing like the one you started with. For my wife and me, what began as an RV trip to the Canadian Rockies from our home base in the San Francisco Bay area turned into more, much to our delight.

We squeezed a 4,000-mile loop into 30 days, visiting Grand Teton, Yellowstone and Glacier national parks on the U.S. side of the border, then touring Banff, Jasper, Yoho and Glacier national parks in western Canada, and finishing with Olympic and Redwood national parks back on home soil. A magazine feature can't cover all of these destinations in depth, but it can provide some inspiration and useful tips, should you wish to attempt a similar trek in your RV.

GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK

The main attraction of this relatively small Wyoming national park is the jagged peaks of the Teton Range, and they are definitely worth at least an overnight stop (see "Autumn in the Grand Tetons" in the September 2015

issue for more details).

Tip 1. If your rig is 30 feet or shorter, camp at the park's Signal Mountain Campground on Jenny Lake and take some of the hikes from there. The Jenny Lake Loop Trail is a good one at just over 7 miles.

Tip 2. Vehicles pulled to the side of the road signify a four-legged attraction. Stay at a safe distance when taking photos, and do not leave your vehicle to take a picture of a bear.

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

The much larger Yellowstone is adjacent to Grand Teton. Spreading into Idaho and Montana but located mostly in Wyoming, Yellowstone is famous for its geysers and wildlife, and rightly so. Old Faithful performs as advertised, and those bison we've all seen in photos do saunter down the roads in no particular hurry. To get an overview, drive the Grand Loop Road (actually two loops shaped like a figure eight), then return to some of the trails and sights encountered along the way. Mammoth Hot Springs is a must.

Tip 3. In the park, camp at Madison Campground. It's strategically located between the two loops mentioned



(Far left) Hiking trails abound in Grand Teton National Park. Always carry bear spray, as both grizzlies and black bears call this area home. (Left) Mammoth Hot Springs in Yellowstone National Park has a visitor center, restaurants, the remnants of an old fort, interesting trails and photogenic topography. (Right) Spectacularly blue Moraine Lake ripples across the Valley of the Ten Peaks in Banff National Park.



» WHEN TO GO

We chose June to miss the crowds that descend in July and August. The other warm-weather option is September. But June comes before September, so why wait?

earlier, and at 6,800 feet, it's lower than the others and warmer in cool weather. One day we went from driving in a snowstorm to having dinner in shirtsleeves at Madison. Plus, it's close to the village of West Yellowstone, the site of our exit from the park, and maybe yours.

Tip 4. Anglers rejoice: The park encourages catch-and-eat fishing of nonnative lake trout in Yellowstone Lake.

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK/USA

We visited in early June, and the only road that bisects Montana's Glacier National Park was still closed, so our options were limited. We elected to enter from the east side, as it's more strategic when crossing the border to head to Banff.

Glacier isn't going to make the RV Driver's Hall of Fame, as there are few places you can go while towing a trailer or fifth-wheel. Going-to-the-Sun Road, the route that traverses the park and provides access to most of the marquee



The only excuses for not taking the Banff gondola to the top of Sulphur Mountain are bad weather or fear of heights. Views of the surrounding countryside are not to be missed.

sights, isn't suitable for anything larger than a truck camper or camper van driven by a brave person. Vehicle combinations longer than 21 feet (including bumpers) or wider than 8 feet (including mirrors) are prohibited. If you don't fancy sheer drop-offs and hairpin turns, take advantage of the park's shuttle

system and tours in vintage red buses.

Tip 5. We recommend Many Glacier Campground, accessed via a dead-end road a few miles north of the St. Marys Visitor Center. It's quiet and secluded but doesn't offer RV hookups. Two moose wandered behind our campsite with calves in tow.



(Far left) The Swiftcurrent Nature Trail starts at Many Glacier Campground in Montana's Glacier National Park. You can hike some or all of its 5-plus miles to pretty waterfalls and remote alpine lakes. (Left) In British Columbia's version of Glacier National Park, bighorn sheep aren't just a speck on the horizon glimpsed through binoculars. (Below) A scenic drive through Jasper National Park leads to glistening Maligne Lake, the largest natural lake in the Canadian Rockies.



BANFF NATIONAL PARK

Banff is famous for the Alberta Rockies and Lake Louise, and is also famously popular during high season, which translates to crowded. The town of Banff is a tourist hotspot filled with shops and restaurants. Visit the somewhat unheralded Buffalo Nations Luxton Museum, which documents and pays tribute to what Canadians call First Nations, the native peoples of the region. Lake Louise is a must-see, along with smaller but pretty Moraine Lake. And definitely take the gondola to the top of Sulphur Mountain, with incredible views. Leaving Banff for Jasper, take the Bow Valley Parkway (Highway 1A), rather than the more expeditious Highway 1, the TransCanada Highway, and stop at impossibly blue Peyto Lake.

Tip 6. Camp at Tunnel Mountain Village, the best of the national park's campgrounds. Village I has RV campsites but no hookups, Village II has electric hookups, and Tunnel Mountain Trailer Court has full-hookup sites.

Tip 7. Canadian parks, national and otherwise, are dog-friendly. Dogs need to be leashed, but they can join you. We took ours on almost every trail we hiked.

JASPER NATIONAL PARK

The village of Jasper, Alberta, feels like a real town catering to a local population, not just tourists. The ride up the Bow Valley Parkway is worth the trip in itself, but local attractions include the Columbia Icefield, a significant glacier offering tours on special buses, and lovely Maligne Lake. Mount Edith Cavell makes for a nice day hike to some modest but pretty glacial areas.

Tip 8. Camp at Whistlers Campground. It and nearby Wapiti Campground are generally touted as the best sites relatively close to town.

Tip 9. Most of these parks are in bear country, both black and grizzly. When hiking, carry bear spray, which is pepper spray on steroids and can be discharged from 35 feet away. While we were in Jasper, a cyclist was attacked by a grizzly on a road we had traveled and was probably saved when the

NATIONAL PARKS

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Grand Teton | 6. Yoho |
| 2. Yellowstone | 7. Glacier/
Canada |
| 3. Glacier/U.S. | 8. Olympic |
| 4. Banff | 9. Redwood |
| 5. Jasper | |

bear bit into his backpack containing a bear-spray canister that discharged.

YOHO NATIONAL PARK

Backtracking to Lake Louise, we crossed the Rockies on the Trans-Canada Highway toward Golden, British Columbia. Attractions here include Emerald Lake, Lake O'Hara and 830-foot Takakkaw Falls, Canada's tallest unbroken waterfall. The latter is accessible only on foot or by shuttle bus.

Tip 10. Camping options in this area are limited. Shortly after crossing into British Columbia, you can camp at Kicking Horse Campground, the largest campground in the national park, with flush toilets and showers but no hookups. We chose to move farther along and

stayed at Golden Municipal Campground, with 72 sites and full hookups.

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK/ CANADA

Unlike the U.S. version, this British Columbia park is a series of pull-offs that always lead to something interesting. Signage tells you what to expect.

Continuing along the TransCanada Highway, you leave the mountains and begin a descent into what Canadians call the Thompson Okanagan, their wine country. Where grapes grow, so do other

(Below from left) Just north of Washington's Olympic National Park, Salt Creek Recreation Area perches right on the Pacific Ocean. Down the coast in Northern California, on the outskirts of Redwood National Park, Patrick's Point State Park delivers tall trees and ocean views.



WHERE TO STAY

All nine national parks have public campgrounds that accommodate RVs, and we had no trouble finding sites for our 20-foot Winnebago Travato. Check the individual national park websites for RV-length restrictions, and make reservations in advance when possible, particularly if you have a sizable RV and require a larger campsite.

Commercial campgrounds and resorts that accommodate larger RVs can generally be found close to the national park entrances. For information about RV campgrounds and Good Sam Parks near the national parks, go to www.goodsamcamping.com.

We tend to forget that trains were once an important mode of transport, now greatly diminished. In Idaho, Montana and Canada, the railroads are alive and well. RV parks in these areas are often close to the tracks, and many a night will find you serenaded by a 200-piece orchestra of percussion and horns.

things, like fruit and veggies. Partake.

From Vancouver, take the ferry to Vancouver Island to explore the capital city of Victoria.

Tip 11. On Vancouver Island, we made a side trip to remote Tofino and Ucluelet on the island's far-west coast. The effort to get to these charming seaside villages is great, three or more hours each way on a narrow road. If you're tired of driving or have a large RV, you may want to skip this detour.

OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK

Back in Victoria, we took the ferry to Port Angeles, Washington, and our penultimate national park. Located in the northwestern part of the state on a peninsula of the same name, Olympic is a large and diverse national park, including old-growth rainforest, coastal beaches and snowcapped peaks. If the weather cooperates, it is a fine place to do some hiking. Drive your tow vehicle to Hurricane Ridge for trails with

panoramic views of the snowcapped Olympics — again, weather permitting.

Tip 12. On the ferry to Port Angeles, a full-time RVer suggested a favorite campground not far from the ferry landing, and we took her advice. Salt Creek Recreation Area is 40 minutes from the ferry dock and right on the Pacific Ocean. It's a Clallam County Park with everything from tent sites to 50-amp hookups. We liked it so much that we took an impromptu layover.

Tip 13. Instead of camping in the main part of Olympic National Park, head toward Forks and La Push, and stay at Mora Campground, with campsites for RVs up to 35 feet. It's a quiet place on the Quillayute River and a short hike to the Pacific Ocean and the towering sea stacks of Rialto Beach.

REDWOOD NATIONAL PARK

This Northern California national park is truly unique, as it shares management responsibility with the California Department of Parks and Recreation. Together, they oversee several state parks that are among California's finest. This part of the state is sparsely populated and far enough away from major urban centers that it is not subject to the recreational pressures that plague parks closer to San Francisco. You have it all here: pristine forests of old-growth redwoods, wild and scenic rivers, ocean beaches.

For those who prefer things more rustic, Six Rivers National Forest is at your doorstep. For a more civilized diversion, there's the Victorian village of Ferndale. Don't pass up a day hike into Fern Canyon.

Tip 14. If your RV is shorter than 27 feet, camp at Elk Prairie Campground in Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park, and you may see as many Roosevelt elk as fellow campers.

Tip 15. Cross the bridge to the small island of Samoa (the stateside version), just outside Eureka, for an all-you-can-eat experience at the historic Samoa Cookhouse, a former lumber-camp kitchen where they feed you like you just came out of the woods. Leave your chainsaw in the truck. 🚚

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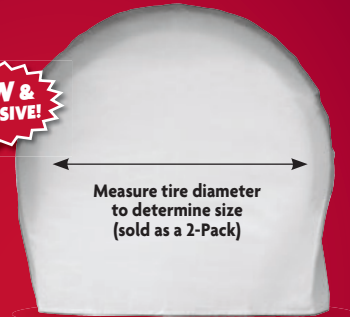
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BRAVING THE YUKON

SPENDING THE WINTER IN AN R-POD TRAILER GAVE THIS RETIRED SPORTSWRITER A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON COLD WEATHER

As a reasonably rational and recently retired sportswriter who blew out 68 candles on his last birthday, I would never have planned a winter camping trip to Canada's Yukon territory and would have scoffed at the mention of it. Retirees are supposed to morph into snowbirds and spend the winters in warm climates such as Arizona, Belize or Machu Picchu but not next door to Alaska in sight of the Arctic Circle where the thermometer plunges to minus-40 degrees Celsius (coincidentally, minus-40 degrees on the Fahrenheit scale) sometime between the equinoxes (September 20 to March 20), possibly for an extended time.

In fact, my only son, a 36-year-old Whitehorse geologist who gave me three good reasons to spend the summer camping in the Yukon — aged 7, 5 and 3 — was of the opinion that it was not possible.

I agreed it wasn't smart, but anything is possible if you set your mind to it and approach it with the right attitude. The more he told me it couldn't be done, the more I wanted to do it, not necessarily to prove him wrong but mostly out of curiosity. I wanted to see if it was possible to outfox Mother Nature. It sounded more interesting than turning into Jimmy Buffet and running for mayor of Margaritaville on some Caribbean beach.

My plan was very simple. The Inuit spent thousands of years defeating the winter forces of nature by building igloos out of ice and snow. All I had to do to win the game was to turn my little R-pod trailer into an igloo, which it sort of resembles anyway. When I told my son my plan, he shook his head sadly, as if he was digesting his dear Daddy's dementia for the first time, and said with a resigned chuckle, "Well, take a lot pictures so we can display them at the funeral."

Plan A was to literally build an igloo out of blocks of snow around the trailer, covering everything but the windows and door and furnace intake/exhaust, but Yukon snow is usually so dry you can't even roll up a decent snowman with the kids. It's more like sugar, which meant I would have to build forms and add water to get a solid building block, and I would be at the mercy of the chinooks all winter, even if I was successful. Chinooks, also called Pineapple Express, are sudden Pacific lows that come from Hawaii several times every winter and warm up all of northern Canada, usually well above freezing. A weeklong chinook would make my igloo/trailer look like a Slurpee in a microwave, so I went to Plan B, which was Styrofoam.

A local Whitehorse building-supply company, Kilrich, had a fire sale on some great insulation called Enviro-Shield that got partly damaged in its yard by a windstorm. I picked up enough to igloo the whole trailer for \$290, including some 3-inch-thick insulation to skirt the bottom all around, which is crucial to keeping out the cold. The

All I had to do to win the game was to turn my little R-pod trailer into an igloo

skirting went so well and made such a difference in the warmth of the floor, it made me wonder if I even needed to bother covering the whole thing, so I postponed putting it on but kept it handy in case I started losing the battle and needed it to get to spring. As the snow increased over the winter, I would just keep piling it up against the outside walls with a shovel at no cost, minimal labor and maximum insulation. Nothing insulates better than snow, and it disappears in the spring when you're done with it.

All of that was the Outside Plan, and it was solid, but the Inside Plan was more important because inside is where I planned to live in comfort for the winter, and my definition of comfort is not complicated: If it's warm enough inside to read, write, sleep and eat dressed in nothing but boxer shorts and a T-shirt, bring on the margaritas. If I have to wear long johns, wool socks and a hoodie inside to stay warm, make some adjustments. It was easy to gauge success or failure on that score without using the Frostbite Factor. I kept meticulous track of how long a 5-gallon propane cylinder lasted.

The goal for the long winter was to make a jug of LP-gas last a month by insulating the outside and taking the pressure off the furnace inside with small ceramic space heaters, which I purchased for \$30 each at Canadian Tire. With those strategically placed, one pointed at the bed, one at

Most of that pile of insulation (below left) ended up in the geologist's backyard waiting for future construction projects. It took only two sheets, 3 inches thick, to skirt around the bottom and hold Mother Nature at bay — with a little help from three space heaters, 10 jugs of propane and a lot of snow.



*There are strange things done
In the midnight sun
By the men who moil for gold.
The Arctic trails
Have their secret tales
That would make your blood run cold....*

-Robert Service, "Bard of the Yukon"

the thermostat and one under the kitchen table, it was just a matter of watching the temperatures drop during autumn and making small adjustments as it got colder.

When the first cold snap arrived the last two weeks of November, dropping the thermometer to minus-26 degrees C (minus-15 degrees F), I started to learn things about my plans and whether I was going to flourish or freeze when minus-40 degrees C came to town surfing the North Wind.

For instance, at minus-10 degrees C (14 degrees F), the space heaters kept the inside of the trailer warm enough, and the furnace was dormant. At minus-15 degrees C (5 degrees F), I got a burn ratio of 30:1, which means the furnace needed to burn for two minutes to keep me warm for an hour; at minus-20 degrees C (minus-4 degrees F), the ratio was 5:1, and at minus-25 degrees C (minus-13 degrees F), it was 2:1 or 30 minutes of furnace burn for an hour of warmth. These numbers, which I calculated with the stopwatch on my iPhone, told me that everything from minus-30 degrees C to minus-40 degrees C was going to require a 1:1 ratio or a full-on furnace burn to stay warm. I was fine with that, as long as we didn't stumble into one of those nine-week brain-shrinkers, which used to happen every winter but don't anymore, thanks to global warming and more chinooks.

The whole secret to surviving a Yukon winter is utilizing the daylight hours when there are six hours of daylight and

(Top) The Northern Lights, or Aurora Borealis, have nothing to do with temperature and everything to do with beauty and serenity.

four hours of sunshine before 18 hours of darkness. Cabin fever, or trailer fever in my case, is far more dangerous than cold temperatures. My solution was to walk 5 kilometers (about 3 miles) around the campground every day between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. and talk to the trees.

Of course, having three energetic little grandkids just 32 kilometers (about 20 miles) away helped. In fact, they made the trailer more of a safe haven than anything else. "Peace and quiet" became my mantra, since there was none of it at their house in Riverdale but plenty at Takhini Hot Springs, which we renamed Walden Pond because, like Thoreau, I was the only inhabitant for most of the winter. My solitude was disturbed only a few times by lost snowbirds from Alaska who wandered through like frozen zombies in search of the sun.

Finally, after the balmy December, the first minus-30-

The stats for LP-gas usage bear this out:

5-Gallon Propane		
Cylinders	Days	Avg.
#1 - 9/28-11/15	48	48
#2 - 11/15-11/29	14	31
#3 - 11/29-12/27	29	30
#4 - 12/27-1/5	10	25
#5 - 1/5-1/21	16	23
#6 - 1/21-2/2	12	21.5
#7 - 2/2-2/6	4	19
#8 - 2/6-2/10	4	17.1
#9 - 2/10-3/2	20	17.4
#10 - 3/2-3/21	19	17.3

While the aging sportswriter snuggled warmly inside his igloo (top right) on New Year's Day, applying heat to his bald spot, not 200 yards away young Yukoners still in possession of their hair competed in the popular annual contest of freezing follicles for cash prizes (bottom right).



PHOTO COURTESY TAKHINI HOT POOLS

degree C morning arrived with the full moon — coincidentally, on my birthday. I was pleased to learn the burn ratio was only 1.5:1, or four minutes of furnace for six minutes of warmth, which projected to 1:1 for minus-35 degrees C and minus-40 degrees C, if it ever got that cold. Temperatures as low as minus-40 degrees C are quite common for the majority of the Yukon but unusual for Whitehorse, which is known as the Banana Belt because it is only 100 miles, as the raven flies, from the Pacific Ocean, which kisses the shore of Skagway, Alaska, and sends warm air over the mountains to the Yukon plateau. It also sends the heaviest snowfalls in North America, but most of that drops out before reaching Whitehorse.

However, at minus-30 degrees C on my birthday morning, I quickly discarded my boxers for long johns, pulled on wool socks and bought a hoodie for my bald spot. The coldest temps always come on clear days because, in northern Canada, winter clouds are a sign of warmth and, usually, snow.

Once past the Solstice, the forces of darkness are no longer much of a threat, as the sun comes back in a hurry in late January and February, and cold snaps are like a bully losing his bluster, but there are still demons out there waiting to ambush the unwary before the freedom of spring and the frivolity of summer.

After the five-day cold snap to open 2015, January laid down like an exhausted old man, and we had what amounted to a 16-day chinook, as temperatures climbed near zero, and the snow held off until January 21 when a good foot of angel dust rolled in from Skagway and blanketed southern Yukon with a wet, heavy dump perfect for building snow sculptures and igloos. Finally, I had enough free insulation to complete the iglooization of the trailer, just in time for the third cold snap of the winter, which arrived like a freight train overnight on January 26 and 27.

But this time I was prepared for it and even felt a bit disdainful and disrespectful after nearly three weeks of balmy temps. The temperature went south of minus-20 degrees C on January 26, peaked at minus-33 degrees C and stayed there until February 11. It lasted 16 days, karmic retribution, but there was some relief in the late afternoons as the sun started climbing higher and higher over the southern mountains. After February 1, the sun started coming back like a tsunami of daylight, the days quickly lengthened, and I started to think I could smell spring, even with a plugged nose and a weak imagination. Some people say beating a Yukon



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winter is just a game of mind over matter, but I'm not that philosophical after three months of darkness.

I think it's all about the sun, or the lack of same. I'm a dedicated sun worshipper, and there just isn't anything to worship on both sides of the Solstice, which is why I love February and loathe November. November sucks the last of the life out of a dying sun, but February gives it back. It might be the shortest and quickest month of the year, but it plays huge every year in the annual battle against the forces of darkness and evil. February wears winter down, then March kicks it in the butt, and April, the joker or fool's month, makes a mess of everything with spring runoff, which is actually just the tears of a dying winter melting away like the Wicked Witch of the North in *The Wizard of Oz*.

Then February warmed up again at the end, and winter died as suddenly as the Seahawks in the Super Bowl. Before the Equinox on March 20, I was pulling off the skirting and preparing the R-pod for spring camping and summer gold mining.

Will I ever do it again? Probably not: Been there, done that, got the T-shirt. This winter I want to be farther south, but I haven't decided yet whether to spend it in Homer, Alaska, or Haida Gwaii, British Columbia. Both are on the ocean, south of the St. Elias Mountains, isolated and frost-free.

I'll either flip a coin to make the call or just follow the radiator cap and see where it leads me.

And, finally, it helped that the winter of 2014 and 2015 was the warmest in the history of recorded Alaskan and Yukon weather...but that's another story. ☺

Furnace Burn Ratio Chart

Temperature		Burn Ratio
-5C	23F	60:0
-10C	14F	60:0
-15C	5F	30:1
-20C	-4F	5:1
-25C	-13F	2:1
-30C	-22F	1:1
-35C	-31F	1:1
-40C	-40F	1:1



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BREAK THE ICE

Getting an RV ready for winter travel will take the frost off the windows, holding tanks and plumbing fixtures

The temperature has dropped dramatically, flakes are falling, and the moisture in the air is far more prevalent. All of these elements point a giant arrow at Old Man Winter and another freezing season for those of us who live in northern communities. For some, the onset of winter signals the end of the travel season and the time to put the RV into hibernation. Those who want to take advantage of winter will need to have an RV that's four-season-ready, but the majority of RVs are not equipped from the factory to handle

extreme temperatures. Fortunately, a number of things can be done to make any RV more capable of handling cold weather.

It all begins with looking at what's insulated from the elements at the factory level. Quite often in a non-four-season-prepped RV, there'll be totally exposed holding tanks and plumbing that can freeze and burst during extra-cold weather. Even when there is some sort of winter protection offered from the factory, there's still room for improvement.

The key elements to cold-climate

protection are insulation, insulation and more insulation in one form or another. The first type of insulation to consider is the use of air, or specifically, dead air. Although cold air is what's being battled against, it can also provide a great amount of insulation when used the right ways. A perfect example of this is to trap a bubble of air between two sealed surfaces, as with dual-pane windows. This can be quite costly, however, if the windows don't currently exist in your RV.

One cost-friendly option is the use of window-insulation products developed for home windows. These kits are available from various makers at most home-improvement stores (more so in northern regions), usually for less than \$10, and in many formats, including a heavy-duty variety. Frost King's heavy-duty Window Insulation Kit consists of three 42 x 62-inch, 1.5-mil-thick polyethylene plastic sheets and extra-heavy-duty double-sided tape for attachment. This special film is claimed to improve an average single pane's R-value by up to 90 percent, so it's like putting that second pane on but a lot more affordable.

Applying Frost King's heavy-duty kit starts with cleaning all frame surfaces using a 50/50 solution of acetone and water (or alcohol). Once everything has been properly cleaned, double-sided tape is placed on surrounding window borders, using firm pressure. While waiting the 15 minutes for the tape to bond, begin cutting the plastic film to size, making sure to leave at least 1 extra inch on all sides for holding on to during installation. Now, starting with the upper corners, affix the sized plastic sheets to the window frames containing the double-sided tape, while working out as many wrinkles as possible and pressing firmly once again. The last step involves a hair dryer or heat gun on low and gently applying heat until the remaining



Dri-Z-Air dehumidifiers utilize special crystals that pull moisture out of the interior air. The system requires no power and is available in Decorator (far left) and Classic (left) designs.

wrinkles pull out and there's clarity.

Adding this type of window insulation cuts down on ventilation possibilities because the windows are sealed tight, so you'll need to make more use of rooftop vents as needed for fresh air. (See page 68 for another way to use window-insulation kits.)

One of the biggest RV enemies to warm interiors is the leaking of cold air from — you guessed it — poor insulation. Some of the areas often overlooked are open-air pathways from outer compartments, roof vents and skylights. To help keep out the cold, companies like Camco offer simple and effective roof-vent covers and insulators. From Camco's four-part vent-liner lineup, the Sunshield RV Vent Cover and DualVent Cover are good options. The other two are insulators: the RV Vent Insulator uses a thick foam pad covered with faux fleece to stuff into the 14 x 14-inch roof vent, and the Sunshield Vent Insulator is lined with foil-bubble insulation on one side.

Installation of the two vent covers is quick and DIY-friendly. The Sunshield Vent Cover, which is no more than a precut piece of foil-bubble insulation, is held into position via hook-and-loop strips. Installing the Dual Vent Cover takes a little more time. Also comprised of precut foil-bubble insulation, it rests in a specially formed plastic housing, utilizing 90-degree clips and longer replacement vent screws. By securing the 90-degree clips onto the vent, the Dual Vent Cover can be placed into one of the two slots to control unwanted cold-air flow.

Another factor when camping is moisture control. Human breath, combined with the use of the shower, LP-gas stove/oven and possibly a catalytic heater can produce a lot of moisture inside an RV. Much of this moisture ends up dripping from roof vent and window frames, especially if they are made of metal. Obviously, the best method of moisture control is elimination.

Dri-Z-Air has been supplying an RV moisture-removal system for many years and for a very good reason: it

works. The Dri-Z-Air system consists of uniquely shaped Classic and Decorator plastic containers and a bag of moisture-attracting and consuming crystals. An optional tray for the Classic design is also available.

After choosing an ideal location for the Dri-Z-Air unit, such as near the kitchen window, the crystals are dumped into the bottom half of the container, followed by reassembling the top. All you do from there is routinely empty the tray of water and refill the container as the crystals disappear. Dri-Z-Air also helps prevent mold and mustiness.

If you have access to shorepower, a small household dehumidifier is also a highly functional and practical solution to eliminate interior humidity.

Outside, you'll have to deal with the plumbing for all incoming and outgoing water and waste. Securing a plumbing line schematic from the manufacturer is very helpful, but don't

from custom-crafted wooden liners to bungee-corded tarps holding in fiberglass insulation (a very bad idea). Others have used homemade underbellies made of multiple pieces of black corrugated plastic sheets, similar to what sign makers use, with some sort of insulation sandwiched between the plastic boards and the tanks, then screwed into place. Building in this fashion looks good and is not too pricey, but uncovered and exposed edges of these corrugated boards can trap water, which can freeze and complicate the situation, so you need to ensure these edges are sealed and protected from the environment.

Another product commonly used by the RV industry is Darco, an incredibly tough, rip-resilient, flexible, waterproof and very lightweight material. This stuff is not exactly the easiest material to find on the shelf, but many dealers can order it, and there are a number of Darco copycats

IF THE MAJORITY OF YOUR RV'S WATER SYSTEM IS COMPLETELY EXPOSED, THEN FIGURING OUT WAYS TO COVER, INSULATE AND HEAT THE TANK AND LINES IS MANDATORY

expect success in obtaining this information. Your first target should be the freshwater tank. We already know the tank is housed underneath the RV, but it may or may not be exposed and protected by insulation and provided with heat from the furnace ducting.

If the majority of your RV's water system is completely exposed, like our test unit, then figuring out ways to cover, insulate and heat the tank and lines is mandatory for any kind of year-round camping capability. Your best defense is creating some kind of liner/elemental barrier for the tanks and the maze of plumbing lines, and there are several ways to do this. Ultimately, the overall design and execution is going to be heavily swayed by your budget. Some products and homemade remedies work well, and some should be avoided.

Over the years we've seen multiple underbelly layouts that have ranged

out there that will suffice.

After selecting the outer material for protecting the underbelly components, an excellent choice of insulation would be to layer foil-bubble insulation and R-15 or higher fiberglass house insulation. To keep things together, use spray adhesive and apply it to one side of the foil-bubble insulation. After waiting a few minutes for the glue to tack up, lay your precut and sized home insulation on the foil-bubble material. This will keep everything easy to deal with and eliminate some contact with the itchy glass fibers as well as provide a good level of insulation. Spun fiberglass home-style insulation also traps and holds water like a sponge, so care must be taken to ensure any such material used on the RV's underside is well protected from road spray and other water sources.

The use of holding-tank heating

BREAK THE ICE

pads is another recommended option to ward off frozen contents. UltraHeat produces an entire array of RV-specific 12-volt DC heating mats, gate-valve heaters, and elbow and pipe heaters that do a good job of regulating temperature. UltraHeat products are made of high-quality materials to provide longevity, and installation can be done by most do-it-yourselfers. Each of the pads chosen for your application will include clearly color-printed and detailed wiring instructions and all the necessary terminals.

Also offered by UltraHeat to optimize the heat mats' performance is a series of switches, switch housings, special relays and even temperature sensors to trigger the relays only when needed. Application relies on the extra-sticky double-sided adhesive (preinstalled), which seems to be quite industrial in strength and certainly won't just fall off, provided it's installed according to the instructions.

Installation of the UltraHeat mats begins with a clean surface for proper adhesion. UltraHeat says to use 90 percent isopropyl alcohol and allow time for drying. However, if the tanks and plumbing are out in the open, they will have a fair amount of road debris to remove before actually going to the alcohol. I found a foaming window cleaner from a local auto-parts store to work well, since it doesn't leave any residue behind. Now the pads can be stuck onto the tanks and associated plumbing.

The next part requires the necessary wiring. Each pad

is preinstalled with a small length of red and white wire appropriately sized for its amperage level. All larger pads, according to the company, should be wired through a series of circuit breakers, relays, switches and optional temperature sensors, while the smaller stature mats need only a fused and switched power source.

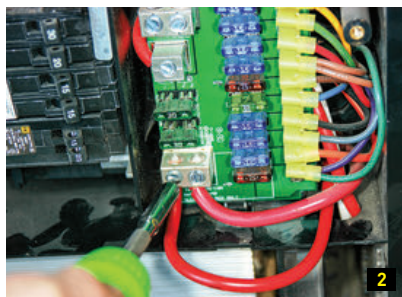
Since these pads and wiring draw a significant amount of amperage, it may be best to add a secondary fuse panel, which is tapped into the power-distribution/breaker/fuse box. This was absolutely necessary in our case, since there was no more room for additional fuses. We used a six-circuit unit available at boating-supply stores like West Marine. After getting the extra fuse panel secured and wired with at least 10-gauge power-supply wires, you'll need to run a minimum 12-gauge hot wire from a 20-amp fuse to the relay, a switch and then on to the pads themselves. If utilizing the external temperature sensor, wire it in to the position on the relay for an optional switch. We opted to run a switch to the sensor, so it's not on continuously.

The gate-valve heaters are intended to be run in 5- to 10-minute increments at the time of dumping, so they get their own fused circuit, minus a relay, but with a switch. Both gate valves can be wired together, as they are not high-amperage pads.

Once all the pads are wired correctly with the temperature sensor, you'll have a holding tank and plumbing heating

FREEZE PROTECTION

(1) UltraHeat kits for holding tanks and pipes come with all the necessary hardware. (2) Power for the separate fuse panel is pulled from the RV's distribution center; 10-gauge wire is used to connect power to the new fuse panel (3) purchased at a boating-supply store. (4 and 5) Routing wire from the heating pads will likely require some cabinet disassembly for proper access. (6) Pads, like this one for the holding tank, are attached using preinstalled double-sided adhesive, which is plenty sticky if the surface is treated properly before installation. (7) Each pad has wire pigtails for hooking up power. (8, 9 and 10) Pads are installed on gray- and black-water pipes in areas susceptible to freezing. (11) The new fuse panel is mounted on a wall inside a cabinet for easy access. (12) Relays for the larger heating pads are installed above the new fuse panel. (13) The switch panel makes controlling pads convenient. (14) All connections were made with butt connectors and protected with shrink tubing. Split loom is used to protect wire.





The Pirit Heated Hose is a high-quality product designed to ward off water freezing and interrupted service to the RV.

The Pirit Heated Hose comes in 12-, 25-, 50- and 100-foot lengths, is thermostatically controlled to turn on when ambient temperatures approach freezing and provides heat throughout the entire length of the hose. To use the hose, simply hook up to the desired water connection and plug it into a GFCI-protected 120-volt AC outlet. Just like the heated tank pads, the Pirit Heated Hose easily reached measured temperatures of 80-plus degrees Fahrenheit within a matter of a couple minutes — the hose was warm from end to end. In lieu of using the Pirit Heated Hose, foam or fiberglass insulation can be used to wrap the hose. It won't protect as well in extreme temperatures, but it does the job in moderately cold country.

Winter RV travel can be rewarding, as long as the inside is toasty and the plumbing system is protected from the cold. Waking up to a toilet that doesn't flush or a tank that cannot be emptied is not fun. Using common elements found in home-improvement stores along with specialized equipment designed for RVs can go a long way toward making an otherwise three-season RV into a true all-weather RV, but be prepared to spend \$1,000 or more for a complete package.

Here's the bottom line on true four-season RV prep: get creative, do some research to find what will suit your winter travel needs, then proceed to insulate, insulate and insulate some more. Your efforts will be rewarded when resting in a warm rolling nest while peering out at crystal-kissed snowflakes. ❄️

system that will turn itself on when ambient temperatures lower to 35 degrees Fahrenheit and off at 45 degrees, so long as the sensor switch is activated. When in use, the pads will quickly climb in temperature, reaching 80-plus degrees Fahrenheit. Heat pads are available for just about all freshwater and holding tanks.

Any such accessory that uses 12 volts DC is going to draw a fair amount of current and will quickly discharge a battery in a dry-camp situation. Unless you have a large solar charging system and/or a large bank of batteries available, these DC-powered heating devices are best used when connected to shorepower. A 12-volt battery that's outside in subfreezing temperatures is going to have its power output diminished by the cold, and that will likewise aggravate the power situation when cold-weather dry camping.

About the only thing left to cover here is the freshwater-supply hose and its impressive ability to quickly freeze while hooked up to city water. A Pirit Heated Hose is probably the best solution to frustrating freeze-ups. Pirit offers a selection of well-built 120-volt AC heated hoses intended to provide water flow in just about any climatic condition.

SOURCES

- Camco, www.camco.net
- Dri-Z-Air, www.drizair.com
- Frost King, www.frostking.com
- Pirit, www.pirithose.com
- UltraHeat, www.ultraheat.com



BONJOUR, QUEBEC

In the small towns and villages along the north shore of the St. Lawrence River, you don't need to speak French to enjoy the scenery and feel the *joie de vivre*



"**S**een from the ferry, a sunrise on the St. Lawrence is an awesome sight," remarked a woman on the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec. Our 5:30 a.m. ferry reservation from Matane would provide that opportunity while delivering us to the easternmost town on the north shore that is accessible by ferry. Parking our rig overnight at the terminal allowed an early boarding. Unfortunately, rain and low clouds shrouded the sunrise, but the picturesque north shore more than made up for it.

In a little more than two hours, my wife, Sandy, and I disembarked, as the sleepy little village of Godbout awakened. A right turn here, onto Route 138, takes you 340 miles along the ragged coast to Natashquan, the end of the road. We turned left toward Quebec City. Over the next eight days, we meandered nearly 300 miles through the tourist regions of Manicouagan,

Charlevoix and Quebec, havens for artists and nature lovers.

BAIE-COMEAU

Driving west to Baie-Comeau, we were treated to majestic views of the St. Lawrence River on the left and steep, verdant mountains on the right. The end of June begins summer vacation for students in Quebec, meaning things get

busier, even in this relatively secluded region of the province. Had we arrived a week earlier, or been more diligent about making a reservation, we could have taken an alternate ferry from Matane directly to Baie-Comeau. But this ferry departs later in the day, which means missing the sunrise.

Our two-day stay in Baie-Comeau wasn't nearly long enough to explore all the attractions the area has to offer, from Jardins des Glaciers (Garden of the Glaciers), an exploration of climate change that features one of the longest zip-lines in North America (1.3 miles), to a couple of world-renowned hydroelectric facilities (Manic 2 and 5) with unique designs and gigantic dimensions. After

The Saguenay River flows into the St. Lawrence next to the village of Tadoussac. To appreciate the area's natural beauty — and possibly glimpse a whale — take a stroll along the boardwalk.

(Left) Each year almost a million people make the pilgrimage to the Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré Shrine. (Right) An artist captures the 1747 Tadoussac Chapel, and grassy fairways compete with watery views in La Malbaie.

a brief stop at the tourist information bureau, we explored the downtown area's historic buildings, art galleries and a particularly fine gourmet shop with regional cheeses and chocolates. Former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney is a native of the town.

Part of Quebec's charm is its distinctive French heritage, spanning 480 years since Jacques Cartier dropped anchor here in 1535. We felt like we were in France with the unique architecture and street signs, menus and everyone speaking *en français*. Even with our very limited vocabulary, we always managed to communicate, using a few words, gestures and laughter. Everyone appreciated our attempt to do so, and we were enriched by the experience. *Vive la différence!*

TADOUSSAC

Departing Baie-Comeau, we continued along the well-constructed coastal highway, aptly named Route des Baleines (Whale Route). This stretch of the St. Lawrence is not a river but an estuary where freshwater from the



Great Lakes mingles with saltwater from the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Beneath the surface is a deep valley extending out to sea that provides a buffet of delicacies for many species of marine mammals, making this area one of the best in the world for seeing whales, especially belugas and minke, in their natural environment. We were surprised to learn that minor tidal changes occur as far upstream as Quebec City, still about 250 miles inland.

Our campsite at Tadoussac provided a panoramic view of the village and its expansive sand-fringed circular bay, described by an international association as one of the most beautiful in the world. A large, elegant hotel with a shiny red roof is the town's most prominent landmark, overshadowing a replica of the first fur-trading post in Canada, established here in 1600.

Tadoussac's Marine

Mammal Interpretation Centre provides information about 13 species of whales through videos, sound recordings, giant skeletons and interesting interactive exhibits. Several operators at the marina provide whale-watching tours on the St. Lawrence and adjoining Saguenay Fjord. Or you can simply stroll along the boardwalk at the confluence of the two rivers and have the whales come to you. A local suggested, "Pack a picnic



PHOTOS BY LARRY MACDONALD, MARC LOISELLE/LE QUEBEC MARITIME, BENOIT CECILE/QUEBEC TOURISM



It's a fluke: On Tadoussac Bay, whale-watchers gather in sea kayaks and along the rocky shore.

lunch with a bottle of *vin* and a generous supply of patience, and you're sure to have a grand time." We did, in spite of not having a magical encounter with a whale.

CHARLEVOIX

A free 10-minute ferry ride across the Saguenay River and a short drive brought us to La Malbaie in the Charlevoix region. Having read about a premier golf course draped atop a mountain, I spent an afternoon admiring stunning vistas while feigning mastery of a little white ball. The prestigious Fairmont Le Manoir Richelieu Hotel and adjacent casino offer a destination for those seeking world-class luxury amid unbridled natural beauty.

President William Howard Taft adored the region and once remarked that the air was "as intoxicating as champagne, yet without the hangover."

Later, we hiked to Chutes Fraser, a waterfall cascading down a rocky escarpment within our campground.

Route 362 to Baie-Saint-Paul is a narrow and occasionally steep road that hugs the shoreline, providing spectacular views at nearly every turn. Renowned as one of the most scenic drives in Canada, this 30-mile road is unsuitable for large RVs, so leave your trailer at the campground. Lovely coastal communities such as Saint-Irénée and Les Éboulements beckoned exploration. Farther along, the road dips down to the village of Saint-Joseph-de-la-Rive, where a maritime museum displays old sailing schooners that played a vital role in the economic development of this region. At one of several viewpoints, a local artist was painting pictures of a hillside, occasionally selling one of his colorful creations

PRESIDENT WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT ADORED THE REGION AND REMARKED THAT THE AIR WAS "AS INTOXICATING AS CHAMPAGNE, YET WITHOUT THE HANGOVER."

Antique cottages, barns and a soaring church steeple define the historically rich village of Les Éboulements in the heart of the Charlevoix region.



CROSSING THE ST. LAWRENCE

Ferries from Matane on the south shore of the St. Lawrence cruise to Godbout and Baie-Comeau on the north shore. Whichever destination you choose, be sure to make ferry reservations for your RV well in advance. www.traversiers.com/en/our-ferries/matane-baie-comeau-godbout-ferry



(Above from left) The ferry from Matane to Godbout links the Gaspé Peninsula to the north shore of the St. Lawrence. At Camping Chutes Fraser, a hike to the namesake waterfall is de rigueur.

to admiring tourists.

Baie-Saint-Paul, one of the oldest towns in Quebec, is an artist's paradise with its traditional French architecture and European ambience. Art galleries, craft boutiques and trendy restaurants line the narrow main street; tourists stroll about eating ice cream cones and French pastries. We lunched on the patio of a microbrewery, sampling a selection of popular beers while relishing a bowl of French onion soup. *Délicieux!* A bronze statue of A.Y. Jackson honors the famous Canadian painter who in the 1920s, after founding the Group of Seven, encouraged many artists to visit and capture the beauty of Charlevoix on canvas.

A nearby dairy museum at Laiterie Charlevoix enlightened us about the cheese-making process. Did you know that Canadian cows have been bred in Charlevoix since the 1600s to produce rich milk especially suited to cheese making? Neither did we, but the cheese curds were outstanding!

Returning along the main highway, we marveled at the mountainous terrain

formed millions of years ago by the impact of a large meteorite, resulting in a crater that extends from Baie-Saint-Paul to La Malbaie. Our bag of curds lasted just long enough to share with our campground neighbors, who reciprocated by offering a trout they had caught in a nearby lake. Fishing, hiking, paddling and other outdoor activities in the majestic countryside are as popular as cultural pursuits.

SAINTE-ANNE-DE-BEAUPRÉ

Our final two days were spent at a government campsite beside the river in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré. Directly across the highway is an impressive Romanesque cathedral dedicated to St. Anne, said to be the grandmother of Jesus. A tour guide pointed out the significance of the magnificent paintings, mosaics, stained-glass windows and sculptures that embellish the basilica. This renowned pilgrimage site is visited annually by nearly a million people seeking reflection and inner peace. Two walls of used crutches attest to the power of faith for some individuals.

The town of Les Éboulements, which means "landslides" or "rock falls" in English, owes its name to a catastrophic 1663 earthquake that caused coastal hills to crumble into the St. Lawrence.

CAMPING IN QUEBEC

On the north shore of the St. Lawrence, we enjoyed the hospitality of French-speaking RV hosts in four small towns:

Baie-Comeau

Camping de la Mer
www.campingdelamer.net/en

La Malbaie

Camping Chutes Fraser
www.campingchutesfraser.com

Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré

Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré
Shrine Camp Site
www.sanctuairesainteanne.org

Tadoussac

Camping Tadoussac
www.vacancesessipit.com/campings/tadoussac

The following websites offer more information about RV campgrounds throughout the province:

Camping Quebec

www.campingquebec.com

Good Sam Camping

www.goodsamcamping.com

The previous year we explored the south shore of the St. Lawrence, and on this trip it was the north shore. Both have plentiful campgrounds, a wealth of history, gracious hospitality and comfortable roads, smooth and reasonably graded. But for picture-perfect scenery, we favor the latter, even without having seen that awesome sunrise or elusive whale. Not to worry — we now have at least two reasons for a return trip. 🚐



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Chock It Up

Products designed to prevent trailer wheels from moving when unhitched lead to safe positioning on campground sites that may not be perfectly level

Preventing a tow vehicle or motorhome from moving on its own when not driven is as simple as putting the transmission in Park (or gear for a manual transmission) and setting the emergency brake. Once you park a travel trailer or fifth-wheel, the wheels must be stabilized after disconnecting from the tow vehicle; there is no parking brake except for a few imported models because overseas a trailer parking brake is commonplace. It's up to the owner to wedge something in front and back of the tires, and in most cases, provisions for this task do not come with the trailer. Some people resort to surrounding rocks to stabilize the wheels, but that's not always possible, and frankly not very reliable or pretty. The answer is to employ one of the many commercially available chocks, and they come in many shapes, sizes and methods for deployment.

Let's begin with a look at the most basic type of chock, the wedge. When dealing with this type of chock, it really comes down to which size and color you prefer. For example, Camco's Wheel Chock and Super Wheel Chock and Valterra's Wheel Chock and Big Chock come in small and large sizes, working and costing about the same, but are differentiated by red or yellow

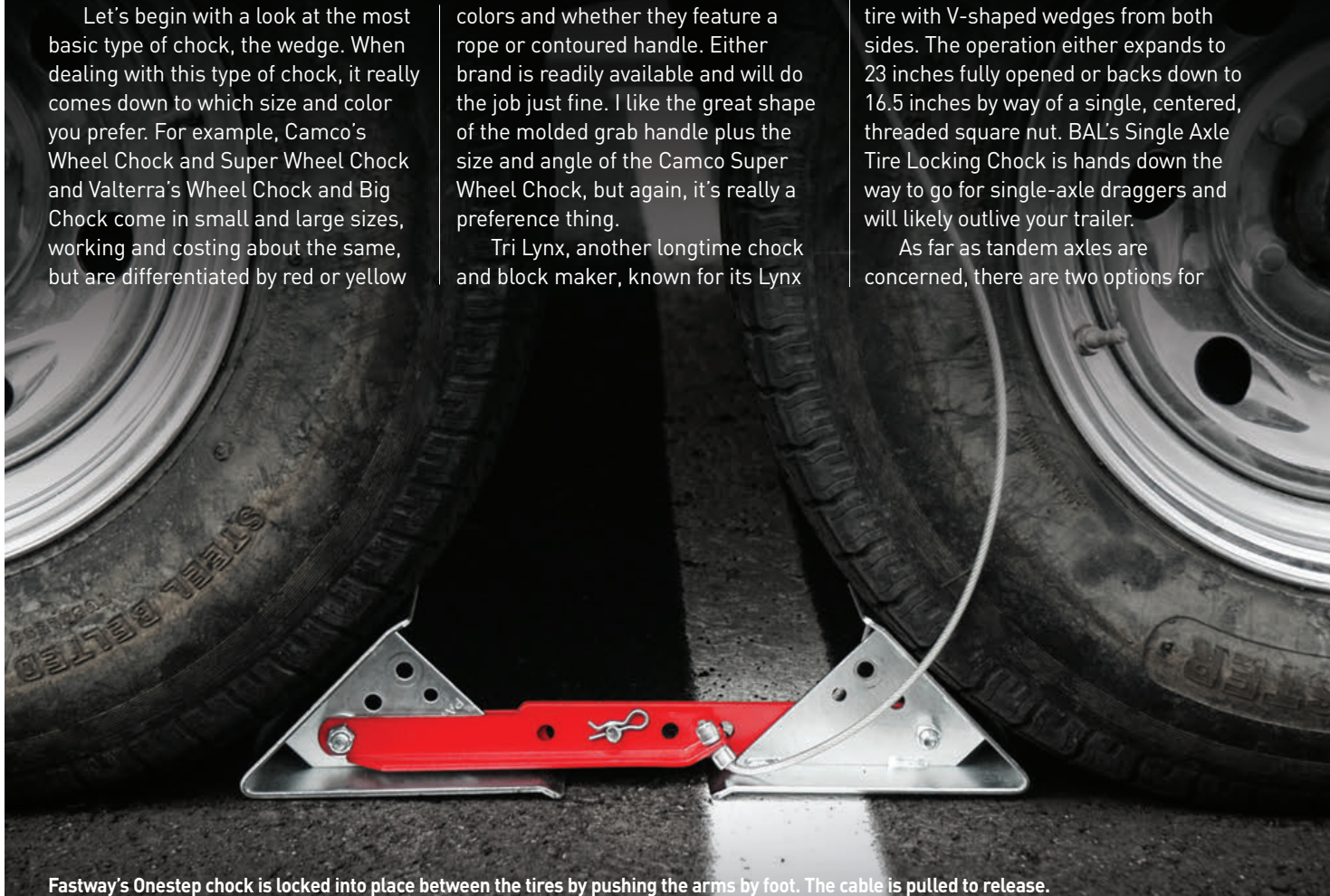
colors and whether they feature a rope or contoured handle. Either brand is readily available and will do the job just fine. I like the great shape of the molded grab handle plus the size and angle of the Camco Super Wheel Chock, but again, it's really a preference thing.

Tri Lynx, another longtime chock and block maker, known for its Lynx

Levelers, also has a version of a wheel chock called the Chock 'R Dock. Again, it's nearly the same shape and size (slightly smaller) as the Super Wheel Chock and Big Chock but differentiated by an orange hue as well as the unique ability to interlink with its Lynx Levelers and double as a dock for A-frame jacks. The Chock 'R Dock has been a convenient go-to chock of mine for some time with no issues to speak of.

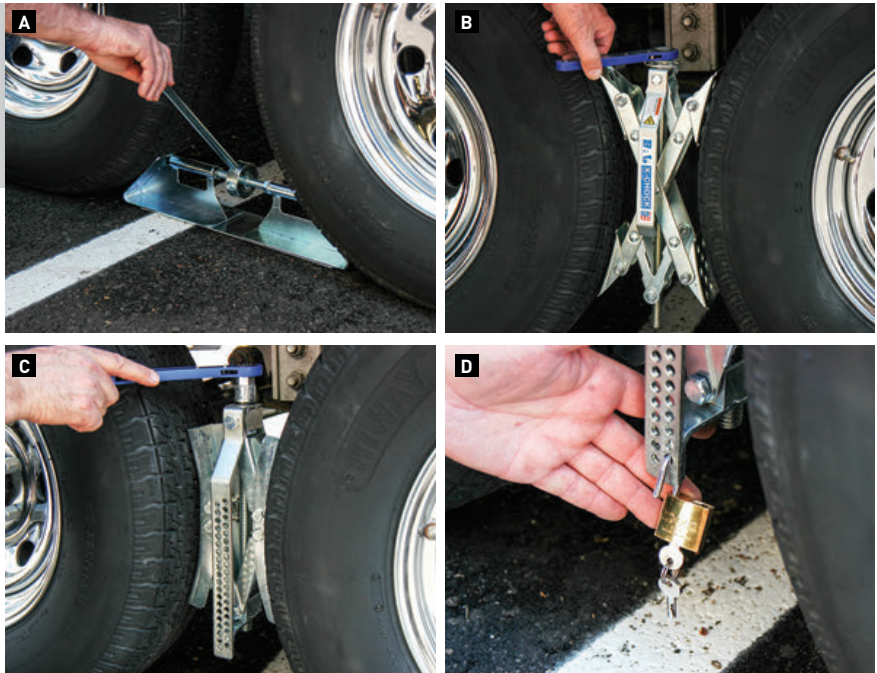
The next step is a slightly more advanced level of wheel chocking, catering to single- and tandem-axle trailers. Basically, these products offer minor mechanical movements for operation and fine-tuning. Addressing the single-wheel market for all you tent-trailer lovers is the virtually bomb-proof BAL Single Axle Tire Locking Chock. This chock is simply an all-steel, adjustable-length chock designed to essentially squeeze the tire with V-shaped wedges from both sides. The operation either expands to 23 inches fully opened or backs down to 16.5 inches by way of a single, centered, threaded square nut. BAL's Single Axle Tire Locking Chock is hands down the way to go for single-axle draggers and will likely outlive your trailer.

As far as tandem axles are concerned, there are two options for



Fastway's Onestep chock is locked into place between the tires by pushing the arms by foot. The cable is pulled to release.

(A) The BAL Standard Tire Locking Chock uses an adjusting wheel. (B) BAL's X-Chock is adjusted using a ratchet wrench. (C) A ratchet wrench is also used to set the Eaz-Lift Premium Metal Wheel Stop, which (D) can be locked in place.



a basic mechanically motivated chock that's worth considering. Once again from BAL is the Standard Tire Locking Chock and the completely different, yet quite similar in function, Fastway Trailer Products Onestep. Both manufacturers provide a product with exactly the same goal of locking a couple of V-shaped wedges between two tires but using totally different mechanics. These chocks have time-proven designs using very strong coated steel for long life and use, however the BAL Standard Tire Locking Chock utilizes an adjusting wheel connected to the opposing threaded wedges and must be reset every time it's moved.

The Fastway Onestep relies on placement of bolts at the wedges and a center pin with multiple holes for adjustability, which is a one-time process. After the pin and bolt locations are chosen, the Onestep uses a long weather-resistant cable loop to disengage the folding wedges that are "locked" between the tires. Setup time is a little longer, but the use of the Onestep is quick and easy from that point on. To set in place, position the device between the tires and use your foot to spread the arms. Both the BAL and Fastway hold the tires securely,

but the Onestep can be used without bending down to lock in place and remove. The BAL works on spacing between tires from 15¹/₄ to 23³/₈ inches; the Onestep is good for 16 to 24 inches, with the XL model going to 30 inches.

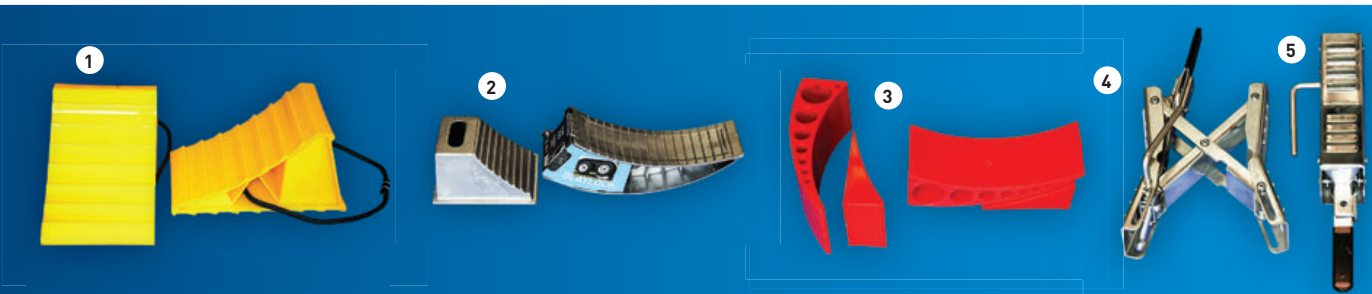
Another type of chock for tandem- or triple-axle trailers uses a scissor mechanism. A handful of companies are in this market and are fairly close in style and operation. BAL, Ultra-Fab and Eaz-Lift are currently supplying weather-resistant coated-steel, adjustable, locking tire chocks in varying sizes. With the exception of Ultra-Fab's Ultra Deluxe Chock & Lock, the BAL X-Chock and Eaz-Lift's Metal Locking

Wheel Chock are driven by a centrally mounted Acme screw that engages the scissor mechanisms to spread two or four points of contact to the side of each opposing tire. Ultra Deluxe Chock & Lock is still part of the scissor family; however, instead of the Acme screw, it takes advantage of what is essentially a handle on an adjustable cam. For this model, the chock has a nut that is adjusted to a point where the device can just squeeze in and out of the tires. Once in place, the handle is popped into an extended straight position, allowing the chock to put pressure on each tire, locking it in place. As an added bonus, the Ultra Deluxe Chock & Lock can be locked through the hole in the handle to keep it from being stolen.

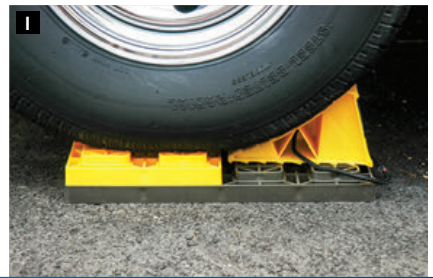
Other models in the Acme-screw and scissor-type category include BAL's Deluxe Tire Locking Chock, Ultra-

Parade of Chocks

(1) Camco Wheel Chock. (2) Blaylock EZ Jack and Chock. (3) Andersen Camper Leveler. (4) Ultra-Fab Super Grip Chock. (5) Ultra-Fab Ultra Chock. (6) BAL X-Chock. (7) BAL Standard Tire Locking Chock. (8) BAL Light Trailer Tire Leveler. (9) BAL Single Axle Tire Locking Chock.



(E, F) Proper spacing is set on the Ultra-Fab Deluxe Chock & Lock before the locking cam is engaged to tighten its grip. (G) Ultra-Fab's Super Grip Chock has a four-point contact area. (H, I) Camco Wheel Chocks snug up against tires and can be used on Camco's yellow 2x2 and gray 4x2 leveling blocks.



Fab's Super Grip Chock and Eaz-Lift's Premium Metal Wheel Stop. Each expands between tandem-axle tires via two or four contact pads, utilizing some sort of protruding grip formed into the metal foot that's designed to dig into the tire. All of these chocks are also capable of being locked into place with a small padlock. Testing these chocks proved they are more than capable of performing their jobs as advertised, providing plenty of rigidity, and the different grip shapes were spot on.

At the end of the day, X-Chock was unquestionably my favorite due to overall quality, function and lack of slop in assembly — and it comes in an X-Tended version that accommodates tire spacing up to 17 inches (versus 10 inches for the standard model). The ratcheting handle on the X-Chock is a cool feature, and it has four wedges to hold the tires.

As far as one of the two-footed scissor pieces goes, it's definitely hats off to Ultra-Fab's Ultra Deluxe Chock & Lock. Aside from the minor one-time nut adjustment, there's a solid feeling of the cam-style engagement backed by a sufficiently sized lock hole with supporting steel surrounding it. I'm a big fan of quick and solid.

Those interested in combining leveling and chocking efforts can look to Valterra, Camco and Tri-Lynx for products. All three manufacturers offer strong plastic leveling blocks that are stackable and optional interlocking wheel chocks.

Bright-orange Lynx Levelers are offered in an ideally sized 10-piece set called FasTen. The matching Stop 'N Chock fits into place as needed with any arrangement of Lynx Levelers, providing a rock-solid stopping and chocking point. Camco's yellow Leveling Blocks and Wheel Chocks and Valterra's red Stackers and Stackers Chock are also offered in packages of 10 blocks with optional corresponding chocks.

The only significant detail setting the three apart goes to Valterra Stackers. Valterra integrated molded handles into part of its interlocking design. The same molded handle is also carried into the Stackers Chock. An added bonus for the Stackers block-ramp design is that it can provide an extra-wide footprint if turned sideways. For me, the molded handles on Stackers seal the deal in the convenience department, but all three products worked as advertised.

In the interesting and unique category of RV leveling and chocking, two competing companies offer designs that are quite similar. The thick red-plastic Andersen Camper Leveler is a fairly decent sized tapered and curved leveler — much like the shape of a giant comma — designed to lift the trailer slowly, thereby leveling as necessary. Making this feat possible and easy is the tapered shape, allowing the trailer to just roll right up. Once stopped at a desirable height of up to 4 inches, the chocking portion is handled by quickly sliding the small matching plastic



(J) The tire is rolled onto Blaylock's EZ Jack before its chock (K) is put in place. (L) Tandem tires are rolled up in the Andersen Camper Levelers. (M) The chock is used to stabilize the lever when the desired height is reached.

chock as far under the smaller end of the taper as possible. By chocking in this manner, the wheel is basically cradled off the ground into a concave surface, making it harder to roll away. The Camper Leveler also doubles as an A-frame jack dock when turned sideways and could potentially be used as a basic type of chock when flipped upside down. However, when we tried that, it ended up more like a ramp and deflected heavily.

In the beastly corner comes the Blaylock EZ Jack and Chock. This is bigger, tougher and more versatile than the Camper Leveler, in my opinion, using virtually an identical "giant comma" concept and design, but it's made from ultra-beefy aluminum stock. It functions the same way as the Andersen piece but has up to 6 inches of industrial-strength lift and is backed by Blaylock's mega cast-aluminum chock. Another area where the EZ Jack outshines the Camper Leveler is in its ability to lift one wheel and allow the other to be off the ground for removal while remaining deflection-free. There's no doubt that both the Andersen and Blaylock chocks have their place among RVs, but I tend to be on the overkill side and prefer the Blaylock.

For tent-trailers and small travel trailers, there's also a segment of lifting/leveling with chocks. BAL's Light Trailer Tire Leveler, intended for use



with its Single Axle Tire Locking Chock, is a toughly constructed steel tubular frame that cradles the tire and lifts by way of an Acme-type screw and the included ratcheting wrench. It's simple, strong and effective, a must-have for small trailer owners.

Each of the products covered in this article will prevent a trailer or fifth-wheel from rolling in a campsite or in storage but should be used only as designed. Caution should be used when blocking wheels on severe inclines. Just be patient and pick a place that's not insanely off-camber or pointing down a steep hill. Using a little common sense and the right combination of levelers, blocks and chocks will make setting up a trailer a pleasant experience.

Prices for products to chock (and level) trailer wheels start at less than

\$10 and go up to around \$100 for each axle. 🚚

American Metal (Blaylock)

www.blaylock.com

Andersen Hitches

www.andersenhitches.com

BAL RV Products Group

www.norcoind.com/bal

Camco/Eaz-Lift

www.camco.net

Fastway Trailer Products

www.fastwaytrailer.com

Tri-Lynx

www.trilynx.com

Ultra-Fab Products

www.ultra-fab.com

Valterra

www.valterra.com

(N) Andersen's Camper Leveler can be used as a block for the A-frame jack. (O) Camco's FasTen 4x2 leveling blocks come in a 10-piece kit. (P) The BAL Single Axle Tire Locking Chock is adjusted so wedges grip both sides of tire. (Q) BAL's Light Trailer Tire Leveler.



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Inflatable Eagle

RVing is all about adventure — and not always on land. Discover new waterways with the Sea Eagle TC16 Travel Canoe, the world's first all-drop-stitch inflatable canoe. At only 60 pounds, it is much lighter than a traditional canoe yet can handle up to three paddlers or 915 pounds, according to the company. Made entirely of 1,000-denier material, the TC16 canoe can be paddled solo or tandem simply by adjusting the two removable, inflatable seats with backrests. An antiskid EVA foam-diamond deck pad provides secure footing when getting into and out of the canoe as well as when paddling. Measuring 16 feet by 38 inches, the TC16 packs neatly in its own carrying bag, and is just 39 x 24 x 12 inches when deflated.

MSRP: From \$2,399
800-748-8066, www.seaeagle.com
Circle 135 on Reader Service Card



Fridge Coasters

If you use the refrigerator in your RV often, you know it's only a matter of time before shelves and bins start to get stained and sticky from miscellaneous food spills and drips. That's where Fridge Coasters come in. Created on the notion that you should spend more time enjoying yourself and less time cleaning, Fridge Coasters are natural, absorbent liners that do the dirty work for you. Not only do they help prevent messes, the breathable material helps fruits and vegetables last longer by keeping them off the plastic surface, allowing air to flow underneath, according to the company. Both recyclable and biodegradable, Fridge Coasters are offered in packs for various areas inside the box, and are available for Norcold and Dometic refrigerators.

MSRP: \$5 to \$18
704-750-1912, www.fridgecoaster.com
Circle 136 on Reader Service Card



Cell-Phone Coverage Booster

You never know where you might travel or how strong the cell-phone signal will be when you get there. Ordinarily, spotty service isn't anything more than a minor inconvenience — until there's an emergency, you need directions or you have to find the nearest fuel station. To keep RVers connected, SureCall has developed the new Fusion2Go cell-phone signal booster to keep both driver and passenger(s) connected by boosting the cell signal in the RV. Fusion2Go is a five-band booster that reportedly improves cell signal for 2G/3G voice and 4G data for all major U.S. carriers, including Verizon, AT&T, Sprint and T-Mobile. The kit includes the booster unit, antenna and power cords and is designed for easy installation in just a few minutes.

MSRP: \$449
888-365-6283, www.surecall.com
Circle 137 on Reader Service Card



A Tool With Impact

Changing a flat tire on the side of the road is no picnic, but having the right tools at your disposal makes all the difference in the world. Instead of muscling those lugs with a wrench, consider Rockwell's 20V MaxLithium Brushless Impact Wrench. It applies the necessary torque to break free, spin and tighten lug nuts in no time. The three-speed digital gearbox of Rockwell's new cordless impact wrench has torque levels of low, medium and high (73, 132 and 220 ft-lbs respectively), which can be selected by pressing the tool's digital indicator button. Of course, the tool's use isn't limited to lug nuts; it can also be used wherever stubborn fasteners are a problem — on the trailer or tow rig. Weighing in at 3.3 pounds, the tool includes two 20-volt MaxLithium 2.0 Ah batteries, a one-hour charger and a carrying bag. Rockwell provides a 10-year warranty on the motor and three years on the tool.

MSRP: \$259, 866-955-4175, www.rockwelltools.com
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Vehicle Lights

Being able to see where you are going at night and having the ability to communicate your intentions while driving and towing are some of the most important and basic safety features you can have. Over the decades, much progress has been made in improving lighting technology, and many of these advancements have shown up in automotive applications.

Some of the earliest motor vehicles used carbide lamps, which were similar to the old miner's lamps, and mixed carbide with water to produce acetylene gas, which was then burned to produce a flame. Later vehicles skipped the carbide and carried Prestolite bottles onboard, often on the running boards, to supply the acetylene to light the headlamps and taillights.

Following that, one of Thomas Edison's most famous inventions was used to light the way: glass bulbs with a filament heated by electrical current. Various permutations of this technology are still with us on many vehicles, first with basic tungsten filaments in a vacuum, and more recently halogen gas was added to improve service life.

The first electric headlamps used tungsten filaments, operating in a vacuum or inert-gas atmosphere inside the bulb. Tungsten filaments

give off small amounts of light relative to the power they consume. Also, during normal operation of such lamps, tungsten boils off the surface of the filament and condenses on the bulb glass, blackening it.

Tungsten-halogen lamps (also called quartz-halogen) increase the effective luminous efficiency of a tungsten filament. When operating at a higher filament temperature, which results in more lumens output per watt input, a tungsten-halogen lamp stays brighter for much longer than similar filaments operating without the halogen regeneration cycle. At equal luminosity, the halogen-cycle bulbs also last longer.

Around 1940, sealed beam headlights were introduced, which employed sealed reflectors to reduce tarnishing and decreased light output. In 1958, quad headlamps were introduced, followed by rectangular headlamps in various sizes; all still using sealed beam designs. Finally, in 1975, the U.S. Department of

Transportation allowed the adoption of light shapes other than dual round 7-inch or quad 5¾-inch sealed beams.

Since then, various original equipment manufacturers and aftermarket companies have tried different color tints for headlights, particularly brighter whites, and a slew of innovative lighting types.

Projector Lamps

Projector (polyellipsoidal) headlamps use a lens at the front of the lamp with an ellipsoidal reflector. The top edge of a shade provides low-beam cutoff. The shape of the shade and its location determine the shape of the light beam. Shades may be lowered by a solenoid for low beams and moved away for high beams. Such systems are known as bi-xenon or bi-halogen projector lamps.

HID Lights

High-intensity discharge (HID) headlamps came on the market next. These use a ballast (transformer) that raises the voltage high enough to jump a gap and strike an arc. These lights use somewhat less power than conventional headlights (typically about 35 watts each, as opposed to 55 to 60 watts), but they are more complex, expensive and require space for ballasts.

Instead of using a filament in a bulb, HID lights use a capsule of xenon gas. Headlamps must provide light very shortly after they are turned on, and xenon gas serves to reduce startup time. Light is given off by an arc discharge across a gap between two electrodes, which are hermetically sealed inside a small quartz-glass capsule. They produce more light than halogen bulbs, use less power and their color is closer to the color of natural daylight.

However, HID bulbs require several seconds to reach full output, and if power is turned off, the arc tube must cool before the arc can be relit and light produced. HID headlamps are more fragile than LEDs and have to warm up, but are brighter than current LED headlights, mainly because their side-emitting light is easier to focus. Front-emitting LEDs don't allow a tightly focused beam, but LED technology is advancing quickly, and



The KC HiLites 1300 4-inch round LZR LED driving light is intended to provide additional width and distance to maximize road and trail coverage.

LEDs may surpass HID lighting performance in the future.

LEDs

The latest lighting technology on the market uses light-emitting diodes (LEDs). Unlike ordinary incandescent bulbs, they don't have a filament. LEDs utilize special diodes that give off light when connected to DC voltage. The heart of an LED is a semiconductor chip at the center of the light source. When sufficient voltage is applied to the chip, electrons move across the junction and produce visible light. LEDs that emit different colors are made of different semiconductor materials, usually a combination of the chemical elements arsenic, gallium and phosphorus.

LEDs have become very popular as automotive lamps. They are lightweight, resistant to vibration, have a long service life and use a fraction of the power that conventional bulbs consume. LEDs often require only about 1/10th as much electrical power (watts) as conventional bulbs, mainly because they don't produce nearly as much waste heat. This makes them an excellent choice for lighting tow vehicles and trailers because their low-current draw allows lighter-weight wiring, and the low draw allows the lights to remain on for hours longer anywhere that lighting is needed, without the batteries going dead.

Many aftermarket lighting kits are available for tow vehicles and trailers, inside and out, and LED replacement bulbs are available to retrofit existing incandescent bulb sockets. Owners who intend to convert their tow vehicle or RV to more modern lighting systems need to know a few things first. Conventional turn-signal flashers require a fairly heavy electrical current to cause them to switch on and off. LED bulbs draw so little current that vehicles that were converted from conventional to LED bulbs often had the problem of not blinking. Special LED-compatible flasher units are required to solve this problem.

When used as brake lights, LEDs have a potential safety benefit, too.

The PlaZma Series 9007 Lumen is a universal-fit replacement LED vehicle bulb.

When voltage is applied, they reach full intensity about a quarter of a second faster than incandescent bulbs. This response time provides following drivers with increased time to react to the brake lights. At 60 MPH, a vehicle travels 22 feet in a quarter of a second. There are kits that convert brake lights to pulse several times rapidly and then light steadily each time the brakes are applied.

Tow-vehicle taillights come in two major categories: those that have separate turn signals and brake lights, and those that combine the two functions into a single lamp. Trailers usually have combined turn and brake lights, so when a tow vehicle with



trailer attached.

In some states, checking headlight aiming is part of the state inspection procedure. Some new vehicles come equipped with a liquid-filled level on the back of each light to facilitate aiming. Others can be adjusted by using knobs or screw adjusters. If the adjusting screws are frozen or you don't want to aim your own lights, take your vehicle to a mechanic.

The aiming process is fairly easy. Locate a level surface adjacent to a

LEDs are lightweight, resistant to vibration, have a long service life and use a fraction of the power that conventional bulbs consume.

separate lamp functions is connected to it, a special electrical adapter is needed. These are fairly inexpensive and readily available from RV- and auto-parts stores but are definitely needed to make the two systems compatible.

Headlight Aiming

Headlight aim varies with load, so when you hitch up a trailer without using a properly adjusted weight-distributing hitch, the headlights usually look skyward, right into oncoming drivers' eyes, and they don't light the road ahead of you well, either. Some vehicles have self-leveling headlights, and others have control switches to aim them while driving. But if your vehicle doesn't have these features, it may be necessary to aim the headlights before a trip, if you can't make the rig ride level with a

light-colored wall or garage door. Park the vehicle perpendicular to the wall at a distance of 25 feet and raise the hood. With the parking brake set, an automatic transmission in Park or manual transmission in Neutral, start the engine and turn on the low beams. Identify the adjusters; they should be shown in the owner's manual. Adjusters at the bottom give up-and-down aiming, while adjusters to the side move the beam left and



An LED dual-intensity replacement vehicle bulb.

right. (Some lights have only vertical adjustment). The focal points (or centers) of the low beams should be aimed just slightly down from the horizon line and to the right of the vertical centerline of the vehicle's headlamps. On composite lenses, the high beams may not be adjustable separately.

Once you're satisfied with the result, close the hood, sit in the driver's seat and double check the adjustments. If the low beams are now properly adjusted, try the high beams. Drive to a dark road to verify results.

Lightweight and highly efficient lighting components allow manufacturers to build lighter, more fuel-efficient vehicles. Generating electricity requires horsepower from the engine, so lower power requirements mean better fuel economy. Less power demand allows alternators to be lighter, along with batteries, wiring, switches and lights. The net result is lighter, more fuel-efficient vehicles.

Headlight-restoration kits like this one from Quixx help restore clarity to polycarbonate headlight lenses, improving both appearance and performance.

However, since those new vehicles also use new material, powertrain and aerodynamic technologies, it would be difficult to quantify how much of any fuel efficiency increase is directly related to the extra-efficient headlights or other lighting components.

Definitions

Lighting uses some terms that may require definitions:

Watts: Electrical power consumption (volts × amps = watts) is often stated in watts, with 746 watts being about equivalent to one horsepower.

Candlepower: An obsolete unit, candlepower is still sometimes used with automotive lighting to express luminous intensity.

Lumen: The SI-derived unit of luminous flux, a measure of the total amount of emitted visible light.



Luminous flux measures the varying sensitivity of the human eye to different wavelengths of light, while radiant flux indicates the power of all electromagnetic waves emitted, regardless of the eye's ability to perceive it. Lumens relate to lux in that one lux is one lumen per square meter.

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3 Pivoting head

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Air Ride Pin Box

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The Future

Advancements in lighting continue at a rapid pace. Several of the new technologies on the horizon promise to reduce accidents and improve future vehicles.

Brake-Force-Dependent Brake Lights

German electrical manufacturer Hella is working on a lighting system designed to reduce rear-end collisions by warning drivers when vehicles ahead are making sudden stops. The rear-lighting system uses several lights, which progressively illuminate based on how much braking pressure is applied. The harder the braking, the brighter the lights become. Emergency stops activate all lights, alerting following drivers to avoid a rear-end collision.

Several companies (including BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Volkswagen and Volvo) have developed vehicles with special lights for when the vehicle brakes rapidly. This is referred to as emergency stop signal (ESS), and UN Regulation 48 calls for the lamps to flash at 4 cycles per second when a passenger vehicle decelerates at greater than about 20 feet per second. Mercedes vehicles flash the stop lamps for the ESS, while vehicles from Volkswagen flash their hazard flashers. Other methods of indicating emergency braking have been experimented with; some BMWs and Volvos brighten their stop lamps under heavy braking.

Single-Source Lighting Systems

Presently in the experimental stage, light is routed from one light source using fiber optics to various lights, including side mirrors that double as headlamps. The light patterns can be easily adapted for optimum visibility over a wide range of driving conditions, and beams can be made to turn left or right, following turns the vehicle makes. Researchers have found that xenon lamps provide sufficient light in such systems to meet all current requirements, so expect single-source lighting on production models in the near future.

White Lasers

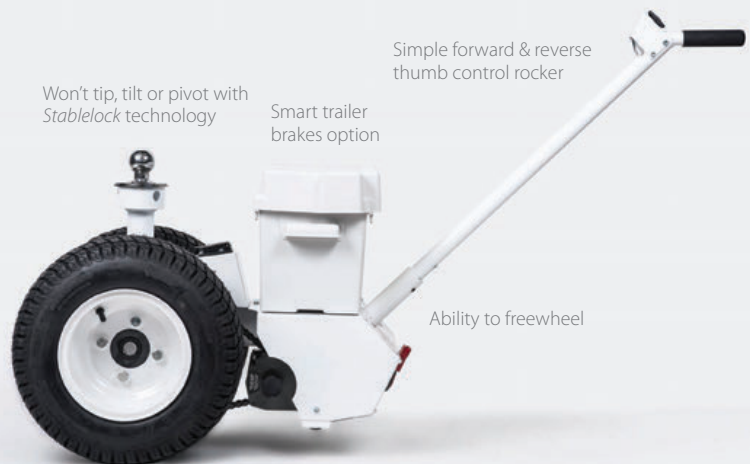
Even as LED headlights are being introduced as a production-line item, possibly the next big technological breakthrough in headlamps is undergoing development. Laser beams have the advantage of carrying for long distances without spreading out, which makes pencil beams quite easy to make. However, lasers don't come in white, and that is one of the

problems being worked on before they can be introduced. Recently, a team of scientists at Arizona State University developed a laser that produces white light that is brighter and more efficient than LEDs. The white laser is currently in experimental form, and there are several challenges to overcome before the system is practical, including making it run from a car battery. 🚗



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Winter Window

Transforming an RV screen door into a shrink-wrapped window for the season keeps the chill out and lets the sunshine in

DIFFICULTY 1 2 3 4 5

TIME TO COMPLETE 1 HOUR

TOOLS NEEDED SCISSORS,
SHARP BLADE, HAIR DRYER

Want to keep winter's cold air out but let the sun stream into your RV? Try shrink-wrapping the screen door. This easy-to-do project lets you keep the outer door open for more natural light and transforms the screen door into a very large window in just an hour or so.

To get started, you need scissors, a sharp blade (a box cutter, razor blade or X-Acto knife work well), a hair dryer and a shrink-film kit for windows. Duck's Crystal Clear Shrink Film Window Kit, Frost King's Window Insulation Kit and 3M's Window Insulator Kit all do the trick. These can be found at home-improvement stores, hardware stores and Walmart in the northern states. If you are taking your RV to the southern states for the winter, buy the shrink-film kit before you leave, as they can be harder to find down south.

The first step is to take a damp cloth and clean the outer edges of the door frame. When the frame is dry, use the kit's alcohol-soaked cleaning pads to remove any oil and residue.

[1] Next, run the double-sided sticky tape that comes with the kit along the outer edges of the door. Cut it in pieces to fit each panel of the door (multiple pieces per side are OK), and remove one



A screen door can be made winter ready with the use of an inexpensive window-insulation kit. The project takes about an hour.

side of each tape strip before pressing it in place along the frame of the door.

[2] Most RV screen doors have an opening around the door handle that allows occupants to open the outer door from inside the RV. Place the tape on the frame around this opening so you will still be able to open the door handle after the shrink film is in place. If you get confused, remember that the shrink film will be covering only the screened areas.

[3] Next, unfold the shrink film and cut it to a few inches bigger than the dimensions of your RV door. Remove the backing from the double-sided

tape running along the top of the door, hold the shrink film up and press it onto the tape on the top of the door. A second pair of hands makes the next steps easier, as you remove the backing from the double-sided tape around the door frame from top to bottom and press the shrink film onto it.

[4] Once the shrink film is in place, use a sharp blade to trim off the outer edges, so the film is flush with the outer edges of the door frame.

[5] Then comes the fun part. Take the hair dryer, aim it at the shrink film and slowly and evenly move it back and forth about an inch or so from the plastic sheeting, watching it shrink up. Work the hair dryer from side to



« **FOUL-WEATHER FRIENDS** Window-insulation kits come in several brands and can be found at many hardware stores and home-improvement centers, particularly those in the colder northern regions.

side and top to bottom. The plastic will slowly tighten, leaving you with a taut film that is transparent but stops the airflow through the screen. You can also start by shrinking just the film around the edges, near the adhesive tape, as this automatically pulls the center film taut as it goes.

[6] Now you can open the outer

door and enjoy winter's sunshine without the cold breeze.

When the weather heats up, the shrink film can be taken down, and your winter window will be a screen door once again. Use WD-40 to remove the gum on the door frame left by the tape, then use isopropyl alcohol to wipe off any remaining residue. 🚗



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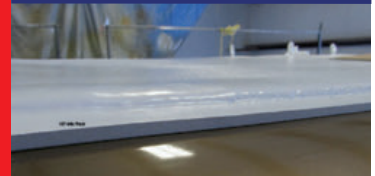
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CAN'T STOP!

Q We have a 2013 Ram 2500 diesel to pull our 2013 35-foot CrossRoads Cruiser, and I must say it tows great. The trouble is stopping. With the built-in brake controller set at 10, the strongest setting offered, we have about 40 percent stopping, and it's not a quick response! There is no sync adjustment offered in the truck.

A shop has had all four wheels off the trailer and tested, and all are new and in perfect working condition. They checked the brakes with the breakaway switch and could not turn the wheels as they all lock up. The dealer checked the wiring in the truck, and all checked out. I've talked to the dealer, customer service and Curt trailer-hitch company, and have been told I cannot put an aftermarket brake controller in the truck because of the "module," which cannot be disconnected.

This is the second fifth-wheel I've towed with this truck, and both have pushed the truck during stops. If I ever need to stop quickly, it won't happen with the setup we now have. Do you have any suggestions, next to changing the brand of truck?

Bob Smith, Lambertville, Michigan

A Some of the recent built-in brake controllers on Ram trucks don't work quite right with a number of the RV setups. It sounds like full voltage to the brakes is not



getting through the controller. You can use an aftermarket unit as a bypass from the factory system. Get your dealer to check it out and see if there's a software update first.

There's quite a discussion among the many RVers on the www.turbodieselregister.com website about this. Rob Kolean of MORryde stated: "We can install a cam module in order to enable the factory controller to work, or you can have an aftermarket controller hooked up. If an aftermarket controller is installed, you can choose to have the factory one still hooked up if you want. That is a good option that some have recently chosen to do. The Tekonsha Prodigy P3 controller is an excellent option because it has great capability. I do not believe that it is terribly expensive, and in my opinion, that is the way to go." — **Ken Freund**

DRY-WEIGHT DILEMMA

Q Is there a standard for dry weight within the RV industry? I recently questioned Jayco and was told the dry weight of their travel trailers does not include propane, battery or water in the freshwater tank. Now this may be a true dry weight, but who pulls a trailer without propane and no battery and no water in the freshwater tank? I would think that the dry weight should represent how much a trailer would weigh without the additional cargo added, such as food and supplies.

In my 30 years of towing trailers and

driving motorhomes, I can never recall a time that I traveled without propane, a battery, or at least half a tank of freshwater in the tank.

Charles Jennings, Aberdeen, Maryland

A Dry weight is essentially how much the trailers weigh when they come off the production line, and in my opinion, it should be used and quoted only internally by the manufacturer and perhaps the companies that transport the trailers to dealers. You can't expect dry weight to include liquids, which of course is why it's called "dry." Owners really should not

concern themselves with dry weight, as no trailer weighs that little once it is outfitted for use. In some cases, some options such as the air conditioner, awning and other accessories, even though they may be installed at the factory, are likewise not included in dry weight because they're options.

The main numbers trailer owners should concern themselves with are gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR), the number you should use when choosing a tow vehicle to ensure you have sufficient tow rating; hitch weight; gross axle weight rating (GAWR), which is how much weight axles can carry; and cargo carrying capacity (CCC), the maximum allowable weight of all cargo, freshwater and full propane tanks.

Regulations adopted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in 2008 require specific RV weight labels. The CCC label for trailers was modified

THE TECH TEAM



KEN FREUND: Ken is a former ASE Certified Master Technician, service manager and shop owner who has authored numerous books on automotive repair.



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.

and is figure calculated by subtracting the unloaded vehicle weight (UVW) and propane weight from the GVWR. — **K.F.**

INFRARED TEMPERATURE GUN

Q We have a 32-foot Wildcat fifth-wheel from Forest River. I have read where those handheld infrared spot-temperature guns are good to use to check tires and wheel bearings each time you stop for gas on a long trip. My question is, how do I know what is too hot, or is it just the extreme difference between one of the four wheels?

Albinas Butler, Pointe-Claire, Quebec

A Yes, you're looking for a significant difference in one wheel hub and bearing or tire temperature compared to the others on the vehicle. First, make sure that the tires are properly inflated for the weight they're carrying, then use the temperature gun to see what temperature the tires reach on an average trip. Generally, I find that if one tire is underinflated, a bearing is burning up or a brake is dragging, the temperature of these items will stand out in comparison to the others. After using a temperature gun for a while, you'll start to see a pattern of what is normal and what is not. — **K.F.**

SWAY PROBLEM

Q I pull a 30-foot Blackstone travel trailer from Outdoors RV (dry weight: 7,500 pounds) with a 2007 Toyota Tundra. I have weight-distributing bars and two friction sway-control bars. Sway becomes a problem only when I tow with the 70-gallon water tank full. My problem is trying to balance the weight, because the water tank is at the rear of the trailer. I have to really tighten the sway bars to eliminate sway, and there is only so much room in the front of the RV to add weight to counter the weight of water at the rear.

I estimate I am pulling around 8,900 pounds fully loaded, which the Tundra handles surprisingly well. When pulling without water it handles very well. Any suggestions?

Tim Dawson, Boise, Idaho

A Having that much water weight, about 580 pounds, at the rear of the trailer is a prescription for sway, and unless the builder compensated for the weight with other component placement, it could be a dubious design decision on the part of the manufacturer. Sloshing makes it worse than other types of cargo, too. I suggest you reconsider how much water you really need and carry less, if possible. It could be a hassle to fill up at the destination, but keeping 20 or so gallons on board is enough to flush the toilet, wash your hands and the like during travel.

Using the proper weight-distributing hitch spring-bar adjustment is just part of the sway-reduction picture. If the trailer sits higher at the front than the back in travel mode, that could also cause sway. Consider lowering the hitch head height a hole or two on the mount, if that's the case. I've made this adjustment on several longer travel trailers in the past, and it can help. — **K.F.**

FREEWAY HOP

Q I have a 4,500-pound double-axle 23-foot hybrid travel trailer. I tow it with a 1997 Dodge Ram 1500 shortbed Club Cab with the Timbren suspension system on the rear axle. When on certain sections of pavement, the truck and trailer rhythmically bounce at speeds from 45 MPH and up. I think this is called porpoising. I'm using the factory-installed hitch, as I didn't think a weight-distributing hitch was needed for a lighter trailer. Any suggestions?

Brengarsky, via email

A What you're describing really isn't porpoising; that is more commonly caused over large bumps in the road that cause the hitch weight to push down on the tow vehicle, forcing the nose up. This motion can repeat itself several times like a porpoise going in and out of the water.

Your problem is what many other RVers experience: certain roads, particularly ones made from concrete, have sections (known as expansion joints) that shift from the weight of heavy trucks. Unfortunately, this rhythmic

bouncing creates a harmonic reaction in some vehicles more than others, partly because the wheelbase is a length that matches the frequency.

WD bars may or may not make a difference. You might consider installing shock absorbers, as most travel trailers don't have them. There are also complete aftermarket solutions like the Joy Rider suspension system (available at Camping World) that can really help control bounce.

Making sure you have the correct tire pressure for the weight you're carrying can also make a difference. Weigh the trailer loaded and ready for travel to determine its true weight, then consult the tire manufacturer's weight/loading tables (or ask at the tire dealer) to see what the pressure should be. You might find it's not necessary to run maximum tire pressure. — **K.F.**

JACKED UP

Q We have a Forest River Rockwood 2704WS travel trailer. I have had two blowouts on the passenger-side rear wheel, both from bits picked up from the side of the road. What is the best way to jack the tire up on this model? It has independent suspension on the wheels, which means, as you jack it up, the wheel stays on the ground. I tried putting a jack under the suspension arm, but it is very close to the wheel, and that requires a lot of effort and lying under the trailer to jack it up. Is there an easier way to do this?

Marius Strydom, New Zealand

A Some carry a small ramp and drive the good tire up on it when the adjacent tire goes flat. Of course, you have to break loose the lug nuts before driving it up. Another way I've seen is to wrap a heavy tie-down strap around the axle just inboard of the brake and then tie it to a frame member or other convenient point above the axle. Then when the frame is jacked up, the wheel will come up too. In a pinch, your trailer owner's manual, or the dealer you bought the trailer from, should also be able to answer the question with the official company procedure. — **K.F.**

LIGHT-FIXTURE STAIN

Q I have a 2012 Jayco Eagle 313RKS that has a white stain directly under the large outside light on the side of the camper. The stain looks to be coming from the putty tape that seals under the light. There are no other stains on the side of the camper, so it is not coming from the roof. At the advice of the dealer, I have tried water, waxes, polishes and streak remover, and it will not come off. I figure the decal under the light is a lost cause to try to clean, but I know there has to be a way to get this off the gelcoat on the side. Do you have any suggestions?

Steve Alliss, via email

A Putty tape can degrade and cause stains over the years, but it usually takes a far older RV than yours to show such effects. The putty sealant used on the light is the same as was used for most of the trailer's other items that need an external seal, so it's surprising that you have stains in only one place.

Other chemicals could possibly break down the old adhesive, including Goo Gone and denatured alcohol. These products may soften the adhesive enough so that it can be scraped off with a plastic putty knife without harming the finish. There are also adhesive removers on the market, but I would contact the manufacturer to make sure the product in question is safe for use on gelcoat fiberglass.

Failing all of this, I'd say your best bet would be to have a professional detail shop do a buff-and-polish job. They can do so without damaging the gelcoat. When finished, you should also replace the putty sealant, just in case it's gone bad somehow. Unscrew the light fixture, scrape the old putty away, reinstall the fixture with new putty, trim the excess, and you're done. — **Jeff Johnston**

REFRIGERATOR TOO COLD

Q We have a Forest River Wildcat 28-foot fifth-wheel trailer with a Dometic RM2652 refrigerator. While parked in Nevada last winter, the refrigerator part worked too well, actually freezing some things (slushy beer!). The only temperature control is a small

plastic piece that slides up and down on one of the cooling fins. The owner's manual is no help, as there isn't anything regarding temperature control. The only time we have trouble is when its running on electricity.

Mike Wendt, Irma, Wisconsin

A That plastic tab fastened to the cooling fin is the thermistor that regulates the unit's interior temperature. If the thermistor were bad, the refrigera-

tor would shift into high gear all the time. Use an ohmmeter to test the thermistor, and if you see an open circuit, it's probably defective and needs to be replaced. The cord and connectors could likewise be damaged or corroded, so those are worth checking as well. If the thermistor checks out OK, move it to the center of the fin, or try a different spot on the cooling unit, like a different fin, and that should change the unit's desired cooling setting. — **J.J.** (continued on page 77)

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AXLE LUBE MAINTENANCE

In the September RV Clinic, we ran a letter titled "Greaseable Hubs" that has drawn a lot of reader response. There is clearly a good deal of misinformation out there about the proper maintenance of these types of hubs, as the following letters indicate. — J.J.

Gerald Everts wrote to you about greasing trailer axles with grease Zerks. Clearly, he had overgreased his bearings, but you supplied some bad information, too. I think you are confusing Dexter E-Z Lube axles with Bearing Buddy wheel-bearing protectors.

Bearing Buddy was manufactured and sold for use on boat trailers to keep a positive pressure using grease in the hub assembly and seals to keep water from entering the bearings. This is accomplished with a spring-loaded follower plate.

Dexter E-Z Lube axles were specifically designed for the RV industry to simplify axle maintenance. They work on an entirely different concept. The only way grease could get into the brake area is via defective seals. In normal use, excess grease is expelled through the outside of the cap near the grease Zerk fitting and is simply wiped away before the rubber plug is reinstalled.

Dexter recommends lubing this type of axle once a year or every 12,000 miles. The proper procedure is to jack up the wheel and grease it while rotating it, and then remove the excess grease from around the end of the hub cap and reinsert the rubber cap.

I have an RV trailer with the E-Z Lube feature and a boat trailer with the Bearing Buddy, so I have experience with both.

Richard Van Dyke, McMinnville, Oregon

I read Gerald Everts' comments with interest. We upgraded to a 2014 Forest River Wildcat in June 2014, and one of the must-have items on our list was E-Z Lube axles. Our old trailer, a 2004 Wilderness, was the first trailer we'd had with E-Z Lube axles, and the maintenance directions were similar to what

Gerald wrote: Periodically remove the rubber cap, pump grease in until it comes out from the outer ring of the bearing, and every 12,000 miles pump grease in until you see the new grease coming out. Kind of messy, but a procedure I've also been doing since we purchased our new trailer, as it has the grease fitting under the chrome and rubber caps.

When I checked the maintenance procedure for our new trailer, which also has E-Z Lube axles, there is no mention of the bearings being E-Z Lube, just the old bearing lube procedures (remove, clean, inspect, repack bearings and reassemble) every 12,000 miles.

Larry O'Shaughnessy, Fallon, Nevada

Jeff Johnston replies: Both the Dexter E-Z Lube and Bearing Buddy products are designed by their manufacturers to improve bearing reliability and lifespan when used on trailers that are frequently immersed in water, boat trailers being the obvious example. The use or need for such bearings on an RV

trailer is strictly optional, although they also work on RVs.

The information we stated in our answer to Gerald Everts' letter came directly from the technical department at Dexter Axle, so we believe it's accurate. As Dexter told us, E-Z Lube axles were designed for the marine industry, so their use on RVs is a secondary market to their original design. Dexter says you do not need to add grease to its E-Z Lube hubs as long as you follow its recommended annual inspection and maintenance schedule.

The Bearing Buddy is different in configuration and use, and the manufacturer has a specific recommendation for maintenance, as stated on its website: "We don't recommend inspecting your bearings more frequently than once every five years, provided you properly maintain the grease level in the hubs and your bearings and seals are in new condition when you install the genuine Bearing Buddy."

Larry's E-Z Lube information that

dates back to his 2004 instructions has apparently been changed by the manufacturer, which happens with components now and then.

Both products have a Zerk fitting in the hub, and for maintenance-oriented do-it-yourselfers, it's hard to resist giving them a squirt of grease now and then. However, it's good to observe the manufacturers' maintenance recommendations regarding this hardware.

If in doubt, the bottom line is that nothing can replace the reliability and peace of mind that comes from annual disassembly and inspection of your bearings. It's cheap insurance against bearing failure and all that it entails out on the road.

END-CAP OXIDIZING

Q I have a 2014 35-foot Premier travel trailer by Keystone. The front cap is oxidizing. Is this a problem others are experiencing, and what can I do about it?
Lewis Blackstone, Augusta, Georgia

Q We have a 2013 26-foot Keystone Outback Super-Lite. The entire front, which appears to be plastic, is dark brown and has faded so badly that it looks a lot older than it is. It had started at the top and has slowly moved down. The fading is chalky in appearance. What can we do to bring back the shine? Washing and waxing does not help. Would this be something that is covered under the warranty?

**John and Shannon Rafferty
Pine City, New York**

Q We purchased a 2013 Keystone High Country Montana fifth-wheel. We have found that the front cap and the rear of the unit are becoming discolored rapidly, and we have tried several different waxes, to no avail. We find that whatever material they have used seems to be porous, and it is creeping down the cap so it looks like white streaks.

We have seen and spoken to other High Country owners who are experiencing the same problem.

**Terri and Jim Faubert-Calverley
Geraldton, Ontario**

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A First, John and Shannon, your Keystone dealer is the place to learn about any potential warranty coverage. This type of detail may also be covered in your owner's manual or the paperwork that came with the trailer when you bought it.

The gelcoat fiberglass finish on those end caps is very durable, so it's unusual for it to fade and appear streaked and aged on trailers as new as 2013 and 2014 models. It can become dull or fade as it weathers, which is a natural process, but not usually this fast.

Keystone's owner's manual includes detailed instructions about care and maintenance of a gelcoat finish. Here's a quote from that manual that seems pertinent:

"Polishing compound (fine abrasive) or rubbing compound (coarser abrasive) is recommended for use on fiberglass RVs to remove scratches, stains or a severely weathered surface. Polishing or rubbing compound can be applied by hand or by mechanical means, such as an electrical or pneumatic buffer. After the scratched, stained or weathered surface has been removed, it should be waxed to enhance the gloss and color while providing a seal to retard staining or new soil accumulation."

And another:

"Discoloration of the gelcoated fiberglass surface may occur if regular washing and waxing have been neglected. Discolored areas are very shallow in depth and, in fact, are on the surface. They can be removed by gently wet-sanding only the affected areas with 600-grit "wet or dry" sandpaper to remove the blemishes. Always sand in one direction, using plenty of water. After sanding, dry the areas and ensure all the discoloration has been removed. If not, repeat the process. Once all discoloration has been removed, the affected surface area will need to be buffed. Buffing, using an electric or pneumatically operated buffer at low speed (1,750 RPM to 2,250 RPM) will restore the luster to the sanded surface. Use a soft wool pad and apply a generous amount of rubbing compound using a circular motion. When the buffing has been completed, wash off the rubbing

compound with clean water. Dry the surface. Wax your RV with a high-grade automotive wax."

If you've tried the compound and buffing route and still don't have the results you want, it may be time to visit a body shop familiar with work on fiberglass surfaces. Use of an aggressive buffing compound, and applying it too heavily with a powered buffer can damage the surface and finish, so a skilled touch is helpful with this. If all else fails, you may need to have the cap painted.

If questions linger about the age of the RV versus the reasonably projected lifespan of the end-cap finish, and any costs associated with repairing that finish, you may need to take that up with your selling dealer. — J.J. 🚚

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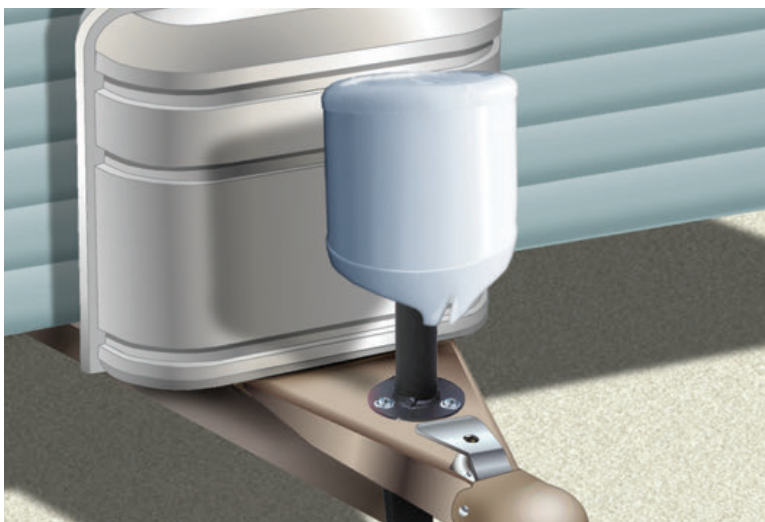
Sea Eagle, Circle 124 on Reader Service Card



Hang in There ... Again

I saw Wayne Smith's "fix" in the June issue for keeping hangers on the rod so clothes don't fall off during travel. Here's another idea: I've been using a tension curtain rod in our RV's wardrobe closet for years. It's a quick fix and cost me less than \$5. Buy a rod that is a bit longer than the existing rod and roll it out so that it fits snugly above the rod that's already in the closet. The hangers are pinned between the rods so clothes stay in place. Close the closet doors, and away you go!

Nancy Bradshaw, Irmo, South Carolina

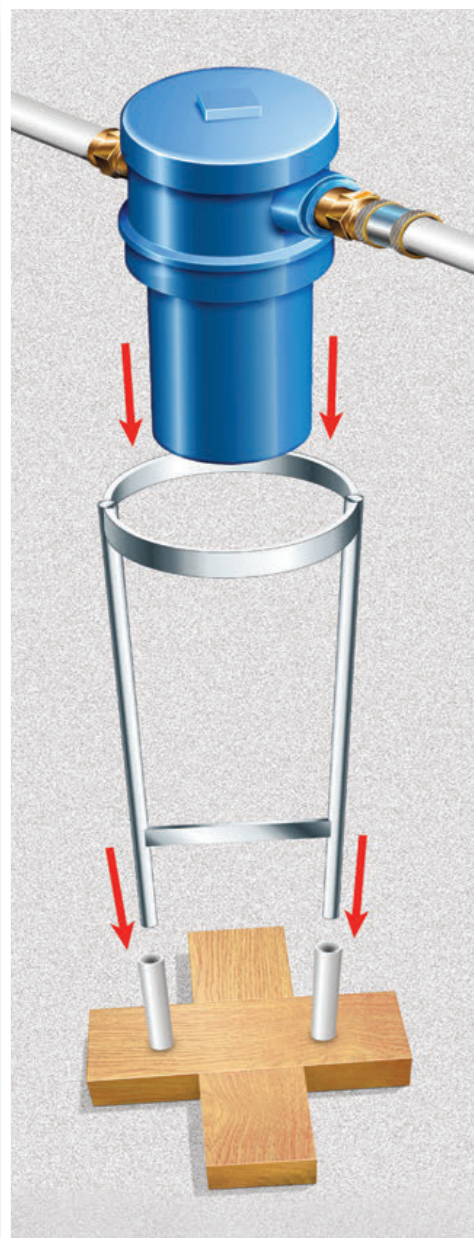


Cheap Coverage

I have a 19-foot travel trailer with an Ultra-Fab 3002 electric A-frame jack. To protect the electric motor, I use a thoroughly cleaned 182-ounce Clorox plastic jug. I measured about 11 inches from the bottom of the jug and cut the handle and cap portion off. I then slit from the bottom about 1 inch to the top and slipped it over the motor. It works great!

Joseph Bryce, Burlington, New Jersey 🇺🇸

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.



Make a Stand

I made a simple stand to hold the filter I use for the water entering the RV using some scrap 2x4-inch lumber and PVC conduit. This comes in handy at paved and concrete campsites where I can't get the original stand to stick in the ground. Simply take two short pieces of 1/2-inch PVC conduit and hammer them into holes that are drilled slightly undersized in a wooden stand made from the scrap lumber.

Scott Eggers, Villas, North Carolina



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Snowy Morning in Indiana

Enjoying the peace and beauty of a picture-postcard daybreak at a century-old farmhouse



It snowed last night. Looking out the window, just before dawn, I would guess we got maybe 5 inches. Seeing it was a surprise, really. It came without a sound: no blustery wind that rattles windows, sweeps the ridges bare and piles snow into drifts. Whatever can support a snowflake now has — rooftops, fences, branches, even rough tree bark and power lines.

Trees that last month were green, and later showing all the colors of fall, are now white, draped in nature's rendition of lace. And no two lace-patterned snowflakes are alike.

As the sun lights the morning, wispy hoofprints of deer are showing up in the snow, along with the exploratory trails of four feral cats that live here at the farm. Trees stretch out into long, gray shadows. Even the sky is gray, like the ashes of a cold campfire.

Artists make scenes like this in miniature for Christmas cards and landscape paintings. Here it is offered in dimensions on which nature has an exclusive, rolling it out at every window as if by a new artist.

This is southern Indiana in mid-November. I am here with friends and family for Thanksgiving. The snow has come early, making conditions perfect for the traditional ride "over the river and through the wood."

Yesterday morning, the pipes to the kitchen faucet were frozen. I was told that happens in this century-old farmhouse when the outside temperature drops into the teens. To keep those pipes from freezing, the trick is to get up really early and run the hot water and then leave it dripping. Nobody did that. But the faucet in the adjacent bathroom was working, so making coffee was no problem.

East of here, about 75 miles, is Santa Claus, Indiana, where they say, "Every morning is Christmas morning." I'm sure this snow suits them fine, since the town is decorated for Christmas year-round. I was there last summer and remember that in the Kringle Place Shopping Center the centerpiece is a 50-foot cone called Santa's Great Big LED Christmas Tree of Lights.



(Top) Pioneers coming to Indiana in the early 1800s built a barn for their livestock before they built a shelter for themselves. This barn, circa 1815, is built of logs with board siding. Few are left in Indiana. **(Above)** Unlike in the northern states, snow falling in southern Indiana does not stay long.

It becomes a choreographed light show set to Christmas music every night at 9. During the holidays, the 15-minute show runs hourly.

The post office there handles about half-a-million pieces of Christmas mail every year. Most of it gets hand-canceled with their "picture postmark." People send Christmas cards and gift packages there from all over the country just so they can be remailed with the Santa Claus postmark.

Then there are the letters to Santa that show up in Santa Claus — most of them are addressed to Santa at the North Pole. A group of local volunteers works on those, and they answer every one.

Thanksgiving and Christmas have a kinship aside from the holidays that brings families together. They are close on the calendar; both are associated with snow and feasts that include turkey, cranberries and pumpkin pie. Thanksgiving, however, is the one national holiday where gluttony approaches being a patriotic duty, which I honor.

The politically correct crowd has a lot of us saying "happy holidays" to each other when we really mean "merry Christmas." If some group is getting undone about how we express our good wishes for Thanksgiving, I have not heard it — not that it would change what I do, if I had.

So from the snowy outback of Indiana, I wish you a wonderful Thanksgiving. 📧

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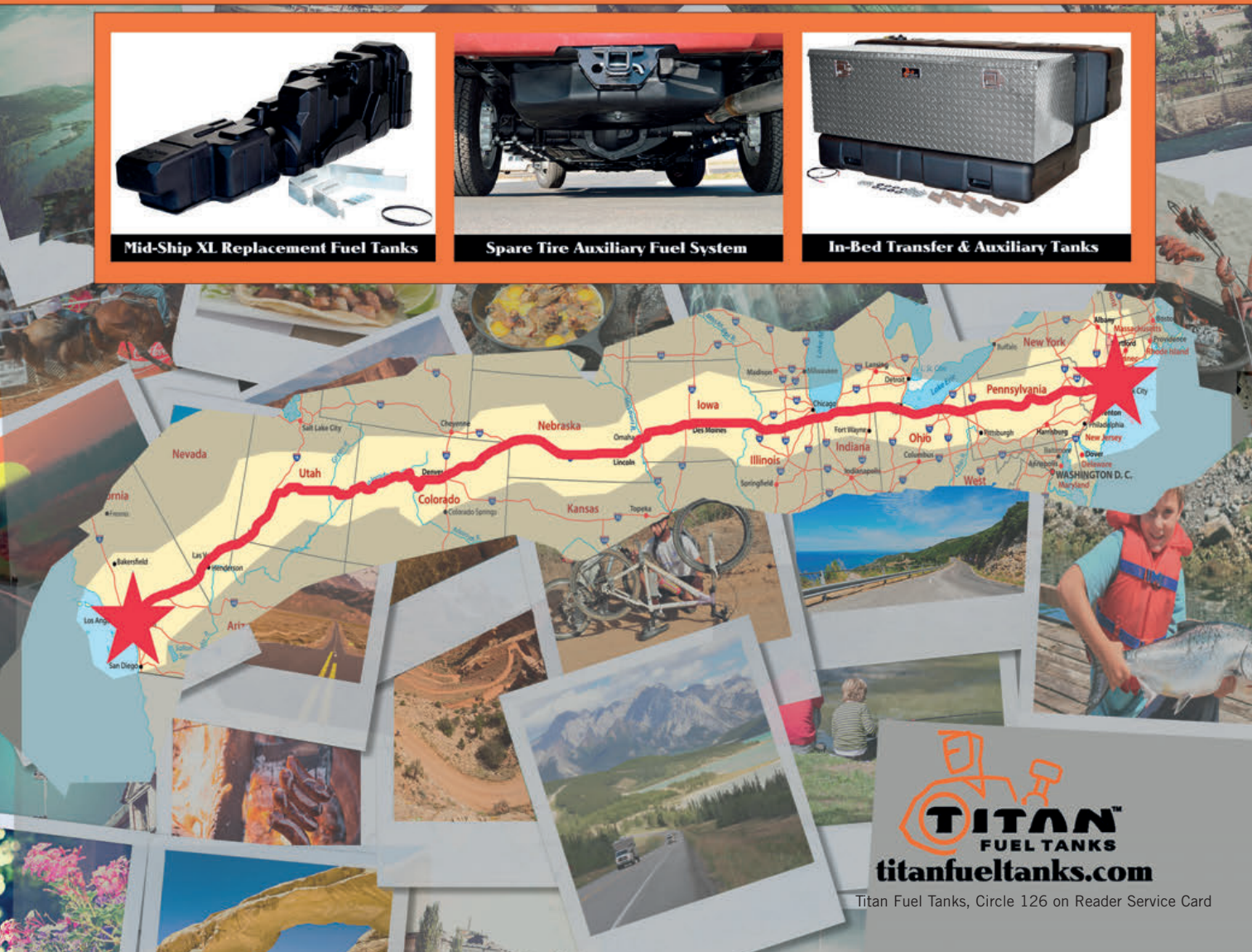
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