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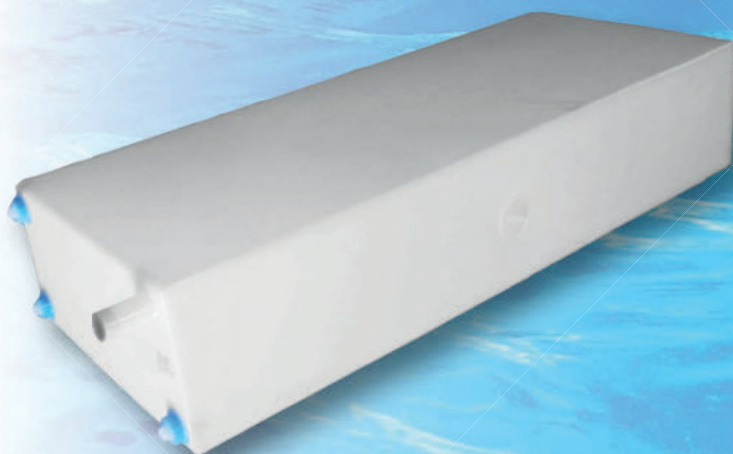
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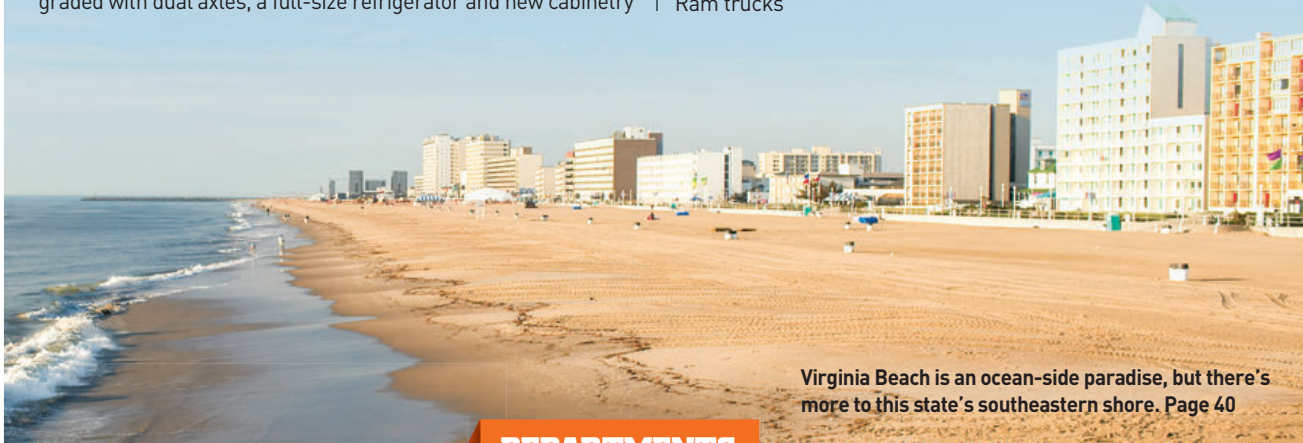
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The Big and the Small of It

As winter approaches, RVers will make travel or storage plans, while newbies ponder the extensive selection of models



The old cliché “Different strokes for different folks” could not be more evident than by the diversity of the two trailers featured in this issue. On the one hand, there’s a 43-foot fifth-wheel (page 20) that offers tremendous living space and room to take toys, and on the other is a 20-foot travel trailer (page 35) that’s lightweight and basic. In between are hundreds of models for RV enthusiasts to ponder.

With the plethora of sizes, floorplans, amenities and price points available in today’s market, choosing the right RV can be a daunting experience. Although it seems rudimentary, those people who have not been immersed in the lifestyle will have to start with travel interests and how much time they plan on spending in their RV. If you’re a social butterfly and enjoy the luxuries of full-service campgrounds, then a larger trailer or fifth-wheel could certainly be on the horizon — although that’s not a hard-and-fast rule. Full-timers tend to gravitate toward big fifth-wheels because they offer great livability and feel more like a small home. Travel trailers can work here also, especially those in the 30- to 34-foot-length range.

If nature is more your style, excess length can limit access to public and primitive camping locations. It’s pretty amazing how much livability can be packed into small trailers these days. Hats off to those who full-time successfully in moderately sized trailers and have discovered the freedom from being bogged down with possessions.

Consideration of where you go is important. As we transition into winter, the exodus from the cold North to milder climes takes winterization out of the picture. For those who store their RVs in cold regions, we’ve presented the latest procedures for circumventing winter-weather damage, starting on page 27.

Not everyone follows the snowbirds, so we’ve also provided advice on protecting the systems when traveling to areas where temperatures plummet below freezing. My family has always enjoyed trips to snow country, and our favorite cold-weather sojourns were during Thanksgiving when we plowed through the snow in dispersed camping areas and pulled out the full-size Weber charcoal grill for cooking our turkey. It took a little creativity to keep everything working without hookups, so let’s just say most of these trips were adventurous — and the turkey always delectable.

One thing is for sure: The selection of RVs has never been bigger, and this year you’ll see the greatest number of rigs being delivered to dealers’ lots since 1977. With that kind of choice, pursuing the RV lifestyle has never been more enticing. 🚐

— Bob Livingston, publisher

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LET’S TALK TURKEY

If Thanksgiving puts you to sleep, you’re not alone. Turkey contains tryptophan, a natural sedative. Combined with wine and carbohydrate-rich stuffing, sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie, this seasonal feast can induce slumber.

**TRAILER
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All Wet in Wisconsin

Thank you for "The State of Water," Bill Graves' September column on the Dells of the Wisconsin River. It brought back memories of when my dad took the whole family there. We paid 15 cents to go through Fat Man's Misery and hike along the river. Some 50 years later, my wife, Dolores, and I took our RV and camped in the Dells. It was quite a shock to see how much the area has been built up commercially.

We have been RVing for more than 25 years and enjoy every minute.

Art Bliese, Port Charlotte, Florida

I always enjoy reading America's Outback. Bill Graves' September article was interesting, particularly the suggestion for piping water from Wisconsin's lakes to drought areas in California.

Fran Boruff, Loveland, Colorado

Bill Graves replies: *Although the idea is totally unrealistic, I have heard from a couple of people who are really upset that I even suggested it.*

Chock Treatment

On the cover of the September issue, the New Horizons Summit is parked at a campsite by a lake. I do not see

any chock blocks by the wheels. I love your magazine, but this is not a good practice to convey to the public.

Ray Stephan, Peosta, Iowa

You make a good point, Ray. Chocks should always be used. In this case, however, all four hydraulic jacks would have to fail for the Summit to move. The author, Chris Hemer, actually endured a night of 60-MPH winds and 70-MPH gusts in the Summit, and although the fifth-wheel rocked a little, rolling into the lake was the last thing on his mind. — Editors



Three Generations of Happy Campers

As we read *Trailer Life's* 75th-anniversary articles, we are reflecting on our own camping experiences. For many years, we camped in a tent and had a camper shell on our Ford F-150. We had some interesting nights escaping storms in the back of that truck with two adults, three kids and a black lab! Camping got our kids out of the house and away from the TV and game box to enjoy the outdoors. Even as adults, they still talk about it.

Last year we bought a new K-Z Sportsmen Classic 200 and are now making memories with our grandchildren. Yes, the Sportsmen is smaller than some of the trailers you see today, but we love it! Everything has a place, and we have all the comforts we need. We like the fact that we can set up the trailer quickly and move on to being outdoors, taking walks and enjoying our camping trips.

Teresa and Carl Rogers, Centertown, Missouri



Better Backup Plan

Regarding September's "Ready to Roll" gear guide, we used to use two-way radios to back our trailer into campsites, as you mentioned. They were very helpful, especially after dark. On one trip we found that the batteries were dead, so we turned to our cell phones, and they actually work better. I can set mine on the console with the speaker on, and it's more like my wife, Dee, and I are having a conversation. We still use our two-way radios to communicate between campsites with friends.

Joe Clark, Mansfield, Ohio

10-Minute-Tech Talk

Jeffery Dore's "Compact Leveling Blocks" tip in September's 10-Minute Tech seems like a clever idea. However, two nesting boxes and two blocks, constructed as described, take up nowhere near "about half the space" of four individual blocks. Using thinner lumber could reduce the volume, but the boxes would not be as structurally sound.

Carl Beckwith, Modesto, California

"Hold the Door," Mike Nick's 10-Minute Tech tip in the August

issue, is a great idea, but there was no mention of where the "magnetic-catch doorstep" could be purchased.

Glenn McClymont, Kemptville, Ontario

Most home-improvement and hardware stores stock magnetic doorstops. A keyword search for "magnetic doorstep" or "magnetic door catch" in your web browser should also come up with a number of products that will do the job. — Editors

More to Pay for Triple Play

My husband and I enjoyed reading the September issue, but your "Triple-Play Antenna" description of the PDQ Connect OneSource antenna on the Products page implied that the \$169 antenna would provide more than just HDTV reception. In fact, we would need to purchase the full system to get boosted voice and data service at a cost of more than \$1,200.

Linda Woldring, Hamilton, Michigan

TALK TO US!

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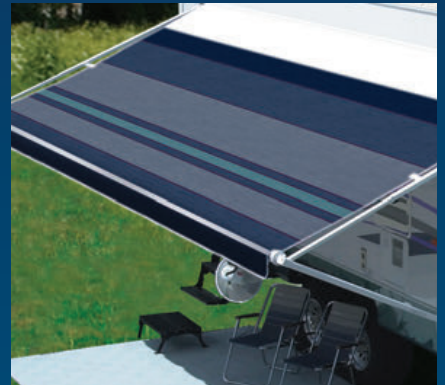
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Florida's Hidden Gem

Discover 5 miles of undeveloped white sandy beaches at Little Talbot Island State Park

article and photos by Kim Dinan

There are few places left in the continental United States that remain as they have been for hundreds of years. And yet, located less than 30 miles from Jacksonville on Florida's north-eastern shore, Little Talbot Island maintains its pristine past as one of the few undeveloped barrier islands in the state.

Native Americans originally hunted and fished Little Talbot Island. The French arrived in the 1500s, and in the following centuries the English and Spanish also occupied the island. In 1951, the deed to the island was transferred to the state's board of parks, and visitors have been enjoying the untouched beaches and tree-canopied campsites ever since.

Little Talbot Island State Park now occupies the entire 2,500-acre island and boasts 5 miles of undeveloped coastal beaches, a 4-mile hiking trail and a paved bike path with bike rentals available at the ranger station. A full-service campground is settled among the ancient dunes. Live oaks dripping in

(Clockwise from top) Live oaks draped in moss shade a campsite on Little Talbot Island. Author Kim Dinan relaxes on the island's pristine beach. Her tiny trailer is primed for adventure at the campground.

Spanish moss provide RVers with shade as well as an otherworldly atmosphere that serves as the perfect backdrop for lazy beach days.

From the campground, visitors can walk to the salt marshes of the Intracoastal Waterway, where elusive manatees, also known as sea cows, have been said to swim, and an array of not-so-elusive native and migratory birds can be spotted. Cast a reel from the campground dock or launch a kayak, canoe or paddleboard into the water. If you don't have a boat of your own, there's a small rental service less than half a mile north of the campground that also offers guided tours and can provide firsthand knowledge of paddling routes and hotspots for wildlife sightings.

Amelia Island, a popular vacation



destination, is only a 20-minute drive to the north and great for a day trip or dinner date. But many visitors to Little Talbot Island are too drawn to the natural beauty of the park to venture farther than its borders. Thanks to the abundant beachcombing, bike-riding, hiking and paddling opportunities, it can be hard to find a reason to leave.

Little Talbot Island State Park has 40 campsites with 20- and 30-amp electricity, freshwater, fire rings and picnic tables. There is a dump station, a laundry facility and two bathhouses with hot showers. Maximum RV length is 30 feet. 904-251-2320 www.floridastateparks.org/park/little-talbot-island

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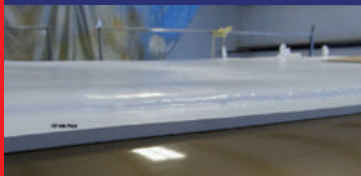
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AROUND
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Dutchmen Kodiak

Variety is the spice of life, they say, and Dutchmen has taken that to heart by offering 24 floorplans in its Kodiak travel-trailer line. The 2017 Kodiak comes in three price points — Ultimate, Express and Express Expandable — in variations with no slideouts to up to three of the expandable rooms. Models range from floorplans that sleep two to those that can accommodate a large family plus guests. Buyers can choose from expandable and bunkhouse models with queen beds, amidships or rear lavatories, kitchen islands and outdoor kitchens.

The Kodiak reflects a residential feel with radius custom cabinets and light-colored solid-surface countertops backlit with LEDs. All models feature light and bright interiors with large windows and skylights, 6-foot-8-inch ceilings, stainless-steel appliances, bedrooms with pocket doors and a variety of interior-decor options. Also standard are solar prep, an outside sprayer, magnetic baggage door catches, a black-tank flush, and a heated and enclosed underbelly. Dutchmen says its Kodiak lineup offers the largest pass-through storage compartments and doors in this segment.

Construction details include laminated walls covering an aluminum frame, which the company claims gives the Kodiak high structural integrity while making it one of the lightest in the industry,

with weights ranging from 3,200 to 7,700 pounds. Lengths range from 18 feet 6 inches on the 172E, to 37 feet 3 inches on the 330BHSL (52-gallon freshwater tank), with base MSRP's ranging from \$16,000 to \$39,000.

Dutchmen, 574-537-0600
www.dutchmen.com



291RESL (Ultimate series)



330BHSL (Ultimate series)

Flying High

Hoover Dam, about 30 miles from Las Vegas, rises 726 feet from the Colorado River and provides power to the neon lights of the Las Vegas Strip and beyond. To let sightseers view this engineering marvel from the air, along with Lake Mead (one of the world's largest manmade lakes), Papillon Grand Canyon Helicopter Tours has expanded its flight lineup with the opening of the Hoover Dam Heliport. The company, which also offers tours of the Grand Canyon, has seven bases in Nevada and Arizona and claims that it has approval to fly closer to Hoover Dam than any other tour operator. Flights depart as early as 9 a.m. and continue until sunset.



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Document Your NPS Visit

To commemorate the centennial of the National Park Service (NPS) and allow travelers to document their visits, author and RVer Frederick Fichman has created My National Park Journal. Fichman has also designed journals for the top-10 national parks, each with a distinct wrap-around cover. The 6x9-inch journals include a brief history of the NPS, a description of the high-lighted national park, a space to include photographs and a list of items Fichman says every traveler should have. Each journal includes pages for events, companions, thoughts and a scene that caught the traveler's attention. The 60-page journals sell for about \$10 each with shipping and handling. My RV Travel Journal is also available.

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The GO Goes Sunny Side Up

SylvanSport, maker of GO and GO Easy travel and utility trailers that the company calls "the Swiss Army knife of camping trailers," has partnered with Goal Zero, manufacturer of solar kits, lights and accessories.

The two companies developed the Sunny Side Up, a solar-powered kit for the GO camping trailer that allows off-the-grid mobile power. The kit includes Goal Zero's Yeti 400 solar generator, Boulder 30 solar panels and Light-A-Life 350 LEDs. The solar panels mount to the GO's upper-rack system, while the Yeti 400 battery pack mounts to a tray in the GO's waterproof and lockable front storage pod, and charges during travel.

When you get to your campsite, set up the GO in camping mode, bring the Yeti 400 inside and plug in your devices. The rack-mounted solar panels can be plugged back into the Yeti and will continue to charge. The Sunny Side Up kit is a \$1,299 option on the \$8,995-priced GO.

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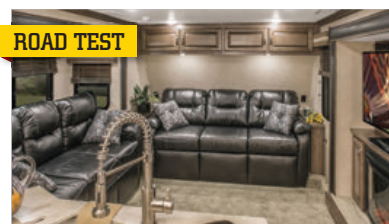
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K-Z and Lippert Collaboration

K-Z recently put its Venom 4020DQ fifth-wheel toy hauler to the test at the Navistar Proving Grounds near South Bend, Indiana. With areas that simulate real-life driving conditions, the facility pushes vehicles to their limits to evaluate fuel economy, durability and how well brakes function in wet conditions.

K-Z and Lippert Components partnered to test the 43-foot 5-inch luxury Venom, which features a 20-foot garage and a front living room that rests on a fully welded Lippert chassis. Assessments were conducted on 1,000 miles of extreme obstacles (replicating 40,000 actual highway miles) consisting of staggered rolling bumps, large cobblestones, long stretches that rapidly load and unload each axle, figure-eight side impact and emergency stops. Tests took place using three cargo-load setups: normal, extreme rear and full capacity. The result: The 4020DQ passed the test without any chassis failures.

K-Z, 866-472-5460, www.kz-rv.com



Winnebago and King Partnership

King, a Minnesota manufacturer of mobile-satellite and digital over-the-air (OTA) TV antenna systems for the RV industry, has partnered with Iowa-based RV manufacturer Winnebago Industries. The King Jack is now standard as the exclusive OTA digital-HDTV antenna on all new Winnebago fifth-wheels, travel trailers and toy haulers.

The King Jack offers RVers a wide reception range, consistent UHF reception, easy antenna rotation and a compact, aerodynamic design that the company claims is 70 percent smaller and requires less roof space than traditional RV antennas.

Winnebago Industries, 574-825-5250, www.winnebagotowables.com

King, 952-922-6889, www.kingconnect.com



Improvements at Phoenix RV Parks

Three RV parks in the greater Phoenix area have made improvements to their resorts for snowbirds flocking to Arizona. ViewPoint RV and Golf Resort in Mesa has completed a second fitness center, Countryside RV Resort in Apache Junction rebuilt its pool and deck area and adjacent restrooms, and Sunrise Heights RV Resort in Phoenix replaced its tennis courts with four pickleball courts. The three RV parks are affiliated with the Arizona Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds and have a 55-and-over age policy.

ViewPoint has more than 300 RV sites and amenities that include an 18-hole golf course, four swimming pools, seven hot tubs, outdoor music events and tailgate parties. Countryside RV Resort, with 254 RV sites, has planned activities, a dance hall with a stage, jam sessions, arts and crafts classes, and a computer club. Sunrise Heights, with 199 RV sites, offers weekly activities and organized trips to nearby attractions. Said Natalie Daniels, community manager for Sunrise, "Pickleball is the new craze ... and our RVers have been asking for courts."

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Leading the Weigh

Trailer Life has helped readers know their tow limits since 1984



From World War II to the Great Recession, a lot has happened in *Trailer Life*'s 75-year history, but few events made a more lasting impression on the state of RVing than the energy crises of the 1970s. While the government's reaction to fuel shortages spurred some healthy weight-reducing innovations in RVs, the new gas-saving standards also decreased the towing power of passenger vehicles, leaving readers wondering what to drive next. Rising to the occasion, the magazine published its first guide to tow vehicles in 1984.

That initial seven-page resource shared trailer-weight maximums for a wide range of new models and equipment with emphasis on engine size, axle ratio and optional tow packages. Although the manufacturers supplied this information, it was often difficult for RVers to come by and had never been collected in a single reference. Not surprisingly, the 1984 tow guide was a favorite with readers and has been an annual feature ever since.

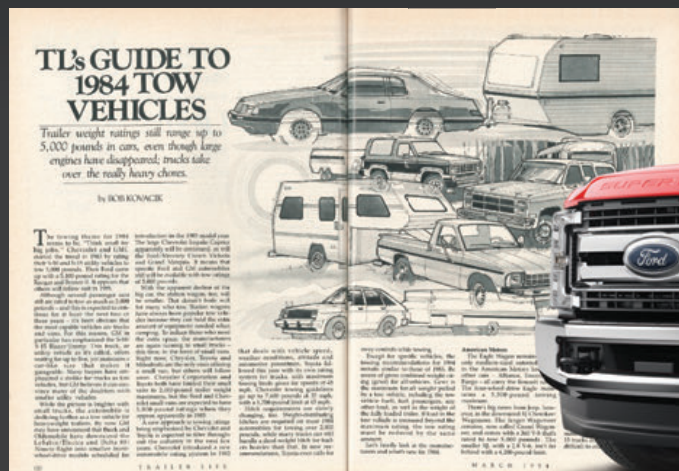
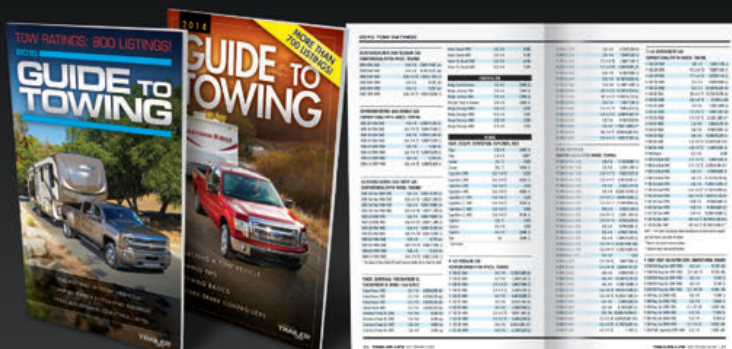
With new emissions regulations rolling out, the *Trailer Life* staff wondered if there would be fewer tow vehicles to choose from in the coming years. But the outlook brightened as automotive technology advanced and manufacturers introduced increasingly sophisticated vehicles that were not only lightweight and fuel-efficient but packed a more powerful punch. Truck manufacturers in particular vied for the highest tow ratings in a battle

that has gotten more competitive every year (see Chris Hemer's "Light-Heavyweight Champ" in the October issue for the 2017 title-holder).

Over the years, the tow guide has alternated between a bound-in section and a freestanding supplement, and listed official limits for as many as 800 new models, but the original mission remains the same: to provide readers with a single, reliable source of maximum trailer-weight ratings to help them make informed decisions among a broad array of cars, trucks, vans and SUVs. The 34th-annual guide, now in the works, will continue the tradition of helping readers know what they can safely tow. 🚚

33 Years of TL Tow Guides

Combining manufacturer-assigned ratings in a single resource, *Trailer Life* published its first annual tow guide in 1984 (below), helping readers match new tow vehicles and trailers. With the current fleet of cars, trucks, vans and SUVs capable of towing decent-size trailers, the guide has grown to include 800 listings, starting with the 2015 edition (right). Truck builders continue to leapfrog each other in terms of towing prowess, with 2017 bragging rights going to the behemoth pictured on the lower right.





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Troublesome Tires

A Mississippi reader sought RV Resolutions' help when he had to replace the tires on this fifth-wheel after towing it less than 1,000 miles:

► We purchased a new Forest River Rockwood from Paw Paw's Camper City in Picayune, Mississippi, and noticed that the tires leaked. We took the fifth-wheel back to the dealership several times for other problems and always told the service person that the tires leaked. The dealership never found the problem.

We then took the tires to David Poulus Tire and Auto Center in Biloxi, and the shop found defects in all four tires, which had less than 1,000 miles on them. We replaced the tires at a cost of \$406.60.

We took the receipt to Paw Paw's, but they didn't offer to help with the cost. We then decided to contact RV Resolutions to see if you could help us get reimbursed.

Milton C. Pearson, Poplarville, Mississippi

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

After RV Resolutions contacted Forest River to see if the manufacturer would help cover the cost of replacing the tires, we received the following positive response:

We received your letter regarding Mr. Pearson's concerns with how his dealer handled a tire issue. We immediately VIN-noted his concerns and authorized a retail reimbursement.

Here at Forest River, we understand that service after the sell is vital to retaining our customers and having those customers promote our brand to family, friends and fellow campers. In this case, as in many others, the unit was out of warranty, but we recognize that extending some goodwill can go a long way in strengthening relationships.

As further evidence of our efforts to promote customer service, we hold an annual FROG (Forest River Owners Group) Rally where owners can register and bring their units to Indiana's Elkhart County 4-H Fairgrounds with a list of items they would like us to look at and repair, whether in warranty or not. Our service and warranty staff is available for the entire week. More details are available at www.forestriverfrog.com.

Thank you for reaching out on behalf of Mr. Pearson. Had you not shared his situation, we may never have known.

**Chuck Pederson, Rockwood Warranty Division
Forest River Manufacturing, Elkhart, Indiana**

A Simple Yes or No

When an Oregon reader's question to the distributor of a towing accessory he purchased went unanswered, he asked RV Resolutions to ask again:

► In November 2015, Curtis Trailers in Portland, Oregon, outfitted my 2015 Ford F-350 with a Reese Elite fifth-wheel rail-kit mounting adapter. After the installation, I took a 10,000-mile trip towing a 34-foot Keystone Cougar fifth-wheel with a 12,000-pound GVWR. Looking at the adapter this year, I noticed that the holes for the fifth-wheel hitch are now elongated. I also noticed more movement between the trailer and the truck. There is no wear showing on the mounting pins.

Reese's documentation says that the part is guaranteed for life, but I am having difficulty getting an answer from Reese's parent company, the Cequent Group, as to whether this would be considered a warranty replacement. After repeated emails and

phone follow-ups with no response, I'm thinking Cequent needs to take a hard look at its response time to warranty issues.

If RV Resolutions can help resolve this issue, it would be greatly appreciated. All I want is an answer, yes or no, if this is a valid warranty claim.

Robert Fowler, Portland, Oregon

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

RV Resolutions petitioned Cequent Performance Products on Robert Fowler's behalf and heard from the company's Technical Services department:

Thank you for the letter reminding us that we had not addressed Mr.

Fowler's concerns. The holes in the unit that the hitch pins go through are elongated, rather than circular, and are larger than the hitch pins, with the intent that the customer can easily insert all four pins with various hitches of ours, as well as with other manufacturers' hitches.

Because we didn't address this with the customer initially, we felt the best solution was to replace the product with a new one. The new unit was shipped to Curtis Trailer, and they swapped it out for Mr. Fowler.

We thank you for your time.
**John Azzopardi, Technical Services Group
Cequent Performance Products
Plymouth, Michigan**

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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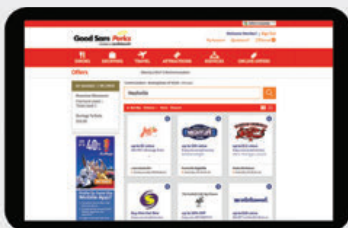
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► For details, call 866-799-4092 or go to www.goodsam.com/perks.



REV IT UP IN ARIZONA

Good Sam picks up the pace in Phoenix this February

Good Sam Club members and RV enthusiasts will roll into Arizona's Phoenix International Raceway, February 23 through 26, 2017, to shop for RVs, browse the latest RV gear and mingle with fellow RVers at the inaugural Good Sam RV Super Show.



For those shopping for an RV, a fleet of new and used motorhomes, travel trailers and fifth-wheels will open their doors for walk-throughs. Merchandise displays will showcase the latest RV equipment and camping supplies.

Families can keep the young ones busy with a variety of activities from carnival rides and a petting zoo to a scavenger hunt. After dark, the Swing Tips and RealTones will perform nostalgic hits. Friday winds down with a movie under the stars, and Saturday ends with a bang at the fireworks show.

"While the Good Sam RV Super Show is not on the scale of a national Camping World/Good Sam Rally, it will incorporate many Rally elements," said Good Sam Club President Mike Siemens. "Good Sam members enjoy community as part of club membership,

and we are trying to preserve that benefit with events that combine a regional RV show with overnight camping, youth activities, educational seminars and entertainment for all. Our hope is for the Phoenix RV show to become an annual event and to recreate it at RV shows across the country."

Considering the bucket list of Southwestern attractions, the comfortable February temperatures, and the slate of activities and entertainment, there may never be a better time or place to shop for RVs and RV gear than February's Good Sam RV Super Show.

► Good Sam Club members get special deals on registration, dry camping and day passes. For details and to reserve a spot, call 866-838-5299 or visit www.goodsamrvshow.com.

IN THE BEGINNING The 50-year-old Good Sam Club and Camping World aren't the only companies commemorating major milestones this year. Beyond the centennial of the National Park System, two of the oldest RV brands still in business, Shasta (right) and Airstream, celebrate their 75th and 85th anniversaries, respectively.





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Amped Up in Vermont

Dutchmen's Voltage Epic V3990 combines luxury, practicality and excitement in a fifth-wheel SURV

The evening is cool, the sky clear. Occasionally, a frog chirps on the pond, as we listen to the water dribble over the dam a few hundred feet away while sipping a beverage on the rear deck of the 2017 Dutchmen Voltage Epic V3990. We're enjoying this serene atmosphere at Greenwood Lodge and Campsites in Woodford, Vermont, a great little campground and hostel owned by the Shea family in the Green Mountain National Forest.

Most folks look at this type of fifth-wheel and see a toy hauler, but it's much more. The more appropriate designation is sport-utility recreational vehicle or SURV. The reason is that these RVs do a lot more than hauling ATVs or motorcycles; they have convertible space that contributes greatly to the enjoyment of the RV lifestyle.

The Voltage Epic series is Dutchmen's top-of-the-line SURV offering, a mix of luxury, utility and high-energy excitement. This fifth-wheel is at home in Vermont's Green Mountains or a regional fairgrounds like the Big E in

Massachusetts. It's a great match for a family of motocross racers, a couple of full-timers looking for more convertible living space, or folks who travel with a small business or hobby.

The first thing that comes to mind when looking at the V3990 is the wow factor. Our test unit came with upgraded exterior graphics, hitch-illuminating docking lights and a fully painted front fiberglass cap with inset blue LEDs. Gel-coat fiberglass and full-body paint are also available, as is the Limited Black Label edition, which adds a tidy \$15,662 to the sticker price. Custom aluminum-

alloy 16-inch wheels with raised-letter "Voltage" on one of the spokes is a sharp touch, and blue ground-effect lighting creates a neat atmosphere at night. All of the exterior lighting is LED, and there's plenty of it, including floodlights and awning lighting.

From the outside, this is a well-put-together fifth-wheel. The V3990 has a frame with a 20,000-pound gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) and three 7,000-pound-rated axles, which, mated with the MORryde LRE-3000 suspension system, should contribute to a long, trouble-free life. Speaking of MORryde, the company's rubber pin box is designed to control chucking, and it didn't disappoint. Heading out on some of the region's scenic byways from Springfield, Massachusetts, the V3990 was a delight to tow, despite being almost 44 feet long.

Owners will need to be aware of the trailer's cargo capacity to avoid overloading and exceeding the GVWR. That 1,697-pound cargo-carrying capacity can disappear in a hurry, given how much general gear can be loaded in a 44-foot trailer, let alone the weight of any toys carried in the garage space. It

Paired with the 2016 Ford F-450 Lariat Platinum Crew Cab with a 6.7-liter diesel, the 2017 Dutchmen Voltage Epic V3990 is right at home on the pond at Greenwood Lodge and Campsites in Woodford, Vermont.



would be helpful if a toy-hauler trailer of this type had enough payload capacity to honestly handle its intended load.

Baggage doors on the front sides feature slam-latch handles and gas props to hold them open. On this model, exterior storage is restricted to a single cross-trailer compartment, as the front compartment is taken up by the Cummins Onan 5.5-kilowatt gasoline generator and battery, although a creative person could insulate the genset box and utilize some of this space for storage.

Equipped with the all-weather package, the V3990 has storage and holding tanks with electric heaters. Frameless, tinted windows allow a lot of light in and provide good ventilation. However, on a hot day, the two front-zone air conditioners — one of which is a 15,000-Btu model — could not keep up with the heat. To combat this, the optional dual-pane windows are a good idea (\$2,691).

On the street side, the utility bay, accessed as part of the cross-trailer storage, is complete and well laid out. The utility panel features the usual suspects including water, cable-TV input and the front holding-tank valve handles. This is also where you'll find the winterizing valve and antifreeze pickup connection, the water-heater bypass valve, the front black-tank rinser, a 120-volt AC receptacle, and a wash station with hot and cold water. The V3990 is set up with satellite-TV wiring, which is also accessed here.

This is a bath-and-a-half floorplan,



(Above, from left) The Voltage has a well-appointed living area and kitchen that feature a fireplace, an LED TV, a quartz countertop and an 18-cubic-foot refrigerator. The rear multiuse room combines a garage, a bedroom, a dining area and utility space. The room has a sliding screen door that opens onto the rear deck, which doubles as the ramp door.

so there is a single black holding tank in the rear. The termination valve is under the RV on the street side in the rear, and the black-tank flush is on the curb side in line with the bathroom. Another gray tank is mounted in the middle of the trailer with a separate handle in the same area underneath but still utilizes the front sewer connection.

On the street side in the rear are the dual fuel fills for gasoline, one for the genset and one for the fuel station. For those who are unfamiliar, SURVs often come with their own portable "gas station" to fuel up the motorized toys, or chainsaws, if you're a bear carver. While this may be superfluous for those who don't have motorcycles or ATVs, the gas-powered generator is a great feature, and the fuel station will allow it to be used for much longer than relying on the dual 7-gallon LP-gas cylinders.

One well-thought-out feature of this fifth-wheel has MORryde's name on it yet again, and that's the Park 'n' Play patio system with its zero-gravity rear door. The big ramp door is equipped with an electric key lock; turn the key and listen for the locks to disengage, then gently pull down the door. The door is equipped with a cable-and-spring mechanism integrated into the jamb and header, making operation almost effortless. MORryde has two hinged gates that fold and telescope out to become railings for the patio.

This design allows the patio to be completely set up in about a minute and 40 seconds, if you know what you're doing, and that's about half the time of typical systems used on toy haulers. It's also much easier to get toys in and out, because the railings are hinged on the end and open simply. There are no ramp



or deck setup directions included with the RV, but MORryde's website links to a good video to show how it's done, if it isn't demonstrated by the dealer. In addition to the railings, an included staircase connects to the end for additional access, if you want it. When properly deployed, the deck supports 1,000 pounds.

Just inside the doorjamb is a set of sliding-screen doors, which allow the deck to be kept open all the time while keeping the bugs out. The telescoping pocket-door panels have hook-and-loop-fastened tinted-plastic panels that affix in place over the screens, similar to those in a boat or an awning screen room. Great idea, although a little weak in its application; the doors don't slide well, and the slides don't hold the door straight, causing them to bind. The door transom blocks access to the manual override for the electric door locks for the back door. Depending on what position the rear beds and seats are in, this could present a difficult and expensive problem in the event of a failure.



(Above, from left) The master bedroom features a memory-foam king mattress with a padded headboard, windows that allow for a nice cross breeze and shelves beneath them. Five recliners line up across from the kitchen island, two with integrated heat and massage. The room opens to the rear multiuse space via a sliding-glass door. Above is a compact twin bed.



Besides telescoping open, the screen doors are also on hinges and can be unlocked and swung open to about 85 degrees or so but are partially blocked by the railing system. Still, this door is a better, more usable option than a pull-down screen, but it may take a bit of fine-tuning.

The doors are common RV-entry doors, and both are equipped with gas props. The front one has a single-hung window in the middle that opens, which

is rare and appreciated. Entry is via dual aluminum quad steps by Lippert Components, which work well; the steps are easy to lift and deploy, and have a clean, high-end appearance.

The V3990 is equipped with three awnings with vinyl fabric. A pair of articulating-arm awnings on the curb side ensure lots of sun-shielded outdoor space. The other awning, a manually cranked lateral-arm model, helps shade the rear deck.

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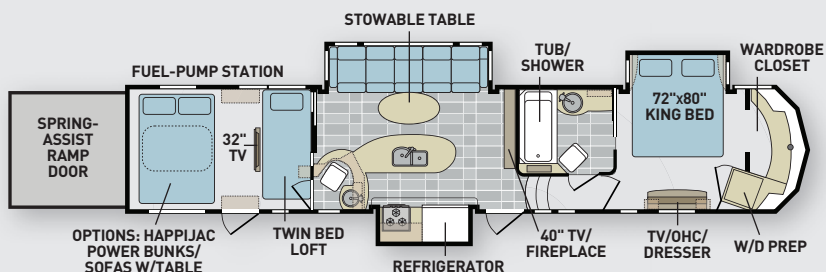
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A fifth-wheel SURV should come with an exterior entertainment center, and the Voltage Epic has one. A built-in Furion TV and Kenwood speakers are housed in this compartment, and the control for the Kenwood stereo is about 10 feet away from the entertainment center. The TV is on a fixed wall mount that is a bit sloppy, as are the bedroom and garage TV mounts.

To make backing and hauling easier, Dutchmen included a Garmin BC 30 wireless backup camera designed for, and mated to, a Garmin Nuvi 68LM GPS. This GPS is Garmin's budget model that works with the wireless camera. While the camera is a nice touch, and a \$1,080 option, the GPS is frankly dangerous to use with an RV of this size, especially up in New England where low-clearance bridges are common (we had to make a U-turn to avoid one in Amherst, Massachusetts). Fortunately, the camera is compatible with the more suitable Garmin RV660LMT RV GPS, so upgrading is easy and recommended.

DUTCHMEN VOLTAGE EPIC V3990



Inside, the V3990 is classy and comfortable. Entering from the front door leads to the kitchen with a large island and a living area with opposing slides that contain seating on one side and kitchen appliances on the other. The Voltage Epic has three decor options: Raven (black), Stone (gray) and Hazel (brown). The Hazel decor in the test unit had a warm, comfortable feel with earth tones and chocolate browns throughout.

While a bit tight, the kitchen has numerous cabinets and drawers, and is

well equipped with a Norcold 18-cubic-foot four-door refrigerator-freezer, a range and a convection-microwave, all clad in stainless steel. Countertops are quartz — yes, quartz — with a huge under-mount stainless sink and a gooseneck faucet with a pull-out sprayer. We would like to have seen more shelving and better door hardware, particularly in the aluminum-and-glass-panel doors above the living room TV that wouldn't stay open because they were too heavy for the hardware.

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The television is a huge Furrion LED flat-screen set off by an entertainment center with cubbies and cabinets above and along one side. The TV is on an articulating arm that aims the screen toward the seating, but viewers still must turn their heads to the left to see it. Below the TV, the cozy faux-stone fireplace has the typical electric heater and remote control.

The entire streetside slideout has five recliners set up like theater seating, with heat and massage features, and touch-activated controls by the cup holders. Even though there is an electric lock on the keypad to lock out the controls, the lock is a raised button that is easy to activate inadvertently, which we did. The resulting heated seat was a surprise on a 90-degree day.

The living room leads into the rear multiuse space, or garage, as many would call it. It's important to note that this room is not just a garage but serves as the dinette for the whole unit, as well as additional sleeping space. A large table is included with three tube legs that insert into floor pockets, with a fold-down gaucho on each side and a portable Euro-style chair/recliner for one end, if needed. The V3990 also comes with a nice fold-up table, stored under the king bed, which can be used anywhere.

This multiuse space has its own air conditioner and is the third zone on the Dometic thermostat. The room has a ceiling-level TV, and the Kenwood stereo system that feeds the whole fifth-wheel is here as well. Seating and beds

are part of a HappiJac lift system, and are quite comfortable and easy to use. The half bath is on the curb side and is more than adequate for the task.

Toward the front, a staircase leads to the large side-aisle bedroom-and-bathroom suite with a king bed, a front closet and a closet with washer-dryer prep. A well-equipped bureau stands at the foot of the bed with another HDTV above it. The front closet has sliding wood doors with mirrored inserts, but the weak hardware was broken and torn out of the particleboard stiles by the time the test unit got to us.

The bathroom is large and features a quartz countertop with a glass-bowl sink atop the vanity, a large mirror and an ample medicine cabinet. A Dometic porcelain short-bowl toilet is standard. The adult-sized bathtub is inset slightly below floor level with a solid fiberglass surround and a bow-style shower curtain, both of which are nice touches. The only problems we could see were that the V3990 has a 10-gallon water heater, and there is no tub faucet or closeable drain.

The entertainment system includes a Kenwood DDX-373BT stereo, a great video-and-audio head with a DVD player, Bluetooth wireless phone access, a backup camera, Apple's Siri Eyes Free and SiriusXM Radio access. The system has a hardwired remote unit that is attached to the exterior side wall under the front awning.

Overall, the Voltage Epic V3990 is a spacious SURV that is comfortable while

SPECIFICATIONS

2017 DUTCHMEN VOLTAGE EPIC V3990

Exterior Length	43' 10"
Exterior Width	8' 5"
Exterior Height	13' 4"
Interior Width	8'
Interior Height	8' 5"
Construction	Steel I-beam frame, aluminum framing, pressure-laminated walls, TPO roof
Freshwater Cap.	160 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	90 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	90 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	15 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	10 gal.
Refrigerator	18 cu. ft.
Furnace	40,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	(2) 13,500 Btu, (1) 15,000 Btu
Tires	ST235/80R16 LRE
Suspension	MORryde CRE/3000
Weight (freshwater, water heater and LP-gas full; no cargo)	17,773 lbs.
Hitch Weight	3,080 lbs.
Axle Weight	(3) 14,693 lbs.
GVWR	20,000 lbs.
GAWR	21,000 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	2,227 lbs.
Base MSRP	\$89,262
As-Tested MSRP	\$151,633
Warranty	1 year

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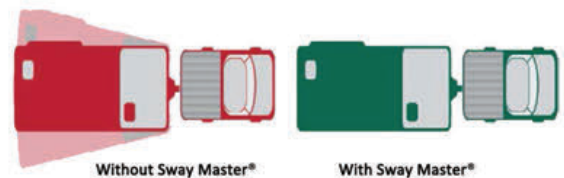


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TAKE THE CHILL OFF



Whether you camp in your RV year-round or store it for the season, take time to prep it for the cold weather to come

Before you know it, old Jack Frost will be getting his grip around the Northern Hemisphere, and RV owners will either flock south or prepare their rigs for winter. Regardless of whether you use your RV or not this season, there are some steps to take to prepare and protect it.

The majority of RV owners who stay in the northern climes from November to April put their RVs in storage for at least part of the winter, which means it must be protected from freezing, leaking, snow loads and pests. No matter what kind of RV you own, it's a significant investment that requires care and protection, not to mention the fact that you want it available and usable when you're ready to hit the road.

Plumbing Protection

The first and most obvious thing to do is to protect the plumbing system. This includes the entire freshwater and sanitation systems. Failure to prepare these systems, even for a brief period of freezing temperatures, can lead to extensive damage.

Most, if not all, RVs manufactured today have PEX piping, which can withstand some exposure to freezing without damage, but the connections, terminations, valves and fixtures are likely to suffer some damage if water in them is allowed to freeze. Some older RVs have gray poly-

butylene piping, which will easily fracture if frozen.

The best way to winterize the plumbing system is to blow out the water using compressed air, followed by running RV antifreeze through the system. This is a pretty straightforward process, made easier with the right equipment, including a water-heater bypass kit and a water-pump winterizing kit. Many RVs built today come with these already installed, but if yours doesn't, don't worry; the kits are available in the aftermarket from companies like Camco, and are easy to install.

The water-heater bypass kit is a valve or set of valves, tubing and a backflow preventer that is installed on the back of the water heater, creating a loop in the plumbing system from the cold side to the hot side. Since most RV water heaters have a capacity of 6 to 12 gallons, filling the tank with antifreeze would be expensive. Also, filling the water heater — not to mention the freshwater tank — with antifreeze leaves a residue that can be smelled and tasted for some time afterward.

The water-pump kit installs inline at the inlet side of the pump, and consists of a valve with a hose to draw from gallon bottles of antifreeze. This makes it possible to switch the valve so the pump either draws from the water tank or the antifreeze hose, ensuring that the pump is protected without putting excess antifreeze in the tank and eliminating residual odor and taste.



THE FIRST STEP IN WINTERIZING AN RV'S PLUMBING IS TO MAKE SURE THE WATER SOURCE IS DISCONNECTED AND THE DEMAND PUMP IS OFF.

For winterizing the plumbing, you will need:

- An air compressor set to 40 PSI, with a male garden-hose/Schrader valve adapter to connect to the city-water inlet.
- At least 3 gallons of RV/marine antifreeze. Do not use automotive antifreeze! Note that RV antifreeze comes in two levels of protection, minus-50 degrees Fahrenheit and minus-100 F.
- A drain wrench or socket wrench with an extension to remove the water-heater drain plug or anode rod.

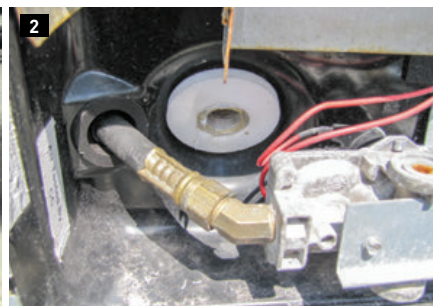
• A screw gun with a square-tip bit or a square-tip screwdriver to access the back of the water heater if it is behind a panel.

The first step in winterizing an RV's plumbing is to make sure the water source is disconnected and the demand pump is off, and to release any pressure in the system by opening a faucet, then closing it. After opening the pressure/temperature-relief valve on the front, bypass the water heater and drain it, then drain the freshwater tank. Leave the water heater's drain plug out for the winter and leave the

freshwater tank's drain open. If there is a little water left in the bottom of each of these, that's OK. The concern is with burst protection, not freeze protection.

Next, screw on the Schrader valve to the city-water inlet and connect a compressed air hose to it, again, with no more than 40 PSI of air pressure. While you can technically winterize without blowing out the system, I prefer doing this first. An alternative would be to also pump antifreeze through the city-water inlet to make sure that section of piping is protected, or to insert a small tool into the

(1) Drain the freshwater tank using the petcock or other type of valve. Many trailers will have one like this. Higher-end trailers and fifth-wheels may have one in the utility compartment. Check your RV owner's manual. **(2)** Drain the water heater by removing the plug or anode rod, depending on the brand, unless you have a specialty or on-demand water heater. Make sure the pressure is released from the system before removing the plug. **(3)** Opening the water heater's pressure/temperature-relief valve will release the pressure and let air into the tank, allowing it to drain faster. **(4)** The water heater may have a bypass like this one, which has three valves. When the handle is across the pipe, the valve is closed. This one is in bypass mode; the top and bottom valves are closed, and the interconnecting pipe valve is open, which connects the hot and cold plumbing before the tank.



[5] The RV may be equipped with a winterizing kit from the factory like this one. Follow the instructions in your RV owner's manual on which valves to turn, routing the pump suction from the freshwater tank to the winterizing kit.

city-water inlet valve to allow antifreeze to backflow out of the inlet, expunging any water that might be trapped.

Once the air is connected, start your rounds. Go to each faucet in the system and open it until air comes out. Don't forget the toilet, exterior showers, low-point drains and water-using appliances like washers, icemakers and so on.

Next, disconnect the air and recap the city-water inlet. Go to the water pump and switch the winterizing kit to the antifreeze pickup tube, open a gallon of antifreeze and insert the tube to the bottom. Turn on the pump and repeat the rounds, and leave each outlet open until you see pink at each one. If you don't have a winterizing kit, a flexible clear hose and 1/2-inch female PEX fitting will work, screwed onto the inlet side of the pump.

Then turn to any special appliances you have, including the icemaker, washer or dishwasher. Once that is done, shut the pump off and pour at least 1 pint of RV antifreeze down each sink and tub/shower trap. You may have to open a new bottle of antifreeze during this process.

The last step is to dump any remaining water in the holding tanks. As long as they are completely drained,



it is not necessary to put antifreeze in these tanks. The tanks should have been rinsed thoroughly at the end of your last camping trip.

Long-Term Storage

To make sure your RV is ready to go the next time you want to take it out, there are some steps to take before putting it in storage.

Nothing attracts pests like food, so start by removing all edible items. Clear out the refrigerator and cabinets, and any crumbs or spills on the floor, counters and cabinet shelves. Remember, the base cabinets sit just on top of the flooring, so anything spilled on the floor can run into the cabinets, which is where mice prefer to play. Be sure to clean the appliances, paying special attention to the range top and around the burners, if the top opens. Leave the refrigerator open using the storage-lock position or the little storage locks that were included

ALL ANTIFREEZE IS NOT CREATED EQUAL

Most automotive varieties of antifreeze are made from ethylene glycol, which is toxic to people, animals and the environment, and should never be used in a potable water system or in the holding tanks of an RV. RV/marine antifreeze is made from propylene glycol and is considered safe. In fact, propylene glycol is even used as a food additive.

It's important to know that RV antifreeze will freeze, and in fact, the minus-50-rated version will freeze at 10 degrees F. The difference is that RV antifreeze will not expand the way frozen water does, so it typically provides burst protection rather than freeze protection. It will expand at about minus-50 F. If temperatures where the RV will be stored will drop below that, the more potent minus-100-rated RV antifreeze should be used. Camco offers a concentrated antifreeze that comes in a partially filled jug and is mixed with water prior to use.



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with it, depending on the make or model. Refrigerator-door props can also be purchased at Camping World, Walmart and other retailers.

Remove items that could be used for pest nesting or secure them in totes that are difficult for pests to get into. These include sheets, pillows, blankets, towels and clothing. It's usually harder for pests to get into wall cabinets, so if you have to store these items, this may be the best place.

Thoroughly clean inside the RV, and vacuum the carpets, if you have them. Check in and around seats to make sure there's no food left around them. Pest deterrents can be put in the RV if you think you're likely to have a problem or want to be extra-cautious.

Clean the entire exterior, including the roof. It is imperative to check the sealants on the roof, which should be done three to four times a year, and reseal as necessary. Also do a visual check around the rest of the hardware and seals on the sides of the trailer for damage, and repair as needed.

Storage compartments should also be cleaned. If you have a barbecue grill, take it out for the winter. Mice love the smell of a grill, just like we do, and they'll make a mess if they get into a barbecue. Check underneath the RV, if you can, for any large holes or openings, and reseal them. Spray-foam



(6) If your RV is equipped with a clothes washer, be sure to winterize it properly. Antifreeze must be run through the machine, the hot and cold connections and the drain pump. (7) Many RVs have icemakers that operate on 120-volt AC power only. While the ice tray itself doesn't need to be winterized with RV antifreeze, the icemaker valve must be protected with RV antifreeze to prevent freezing and cracking from any water remaining in the bowl of the valve.

WINTERIZING SPECIAL APPLIANCES

Many late-model RVs are equipped with icemakers, clothes washers, dishwashers and instantaneous water heaters that require special handling when winterizing. The most common of these is the icemaker. In the 1970s and '80s, many higher-end RVs came with built-in U-line standalone icemakers. Today, many refrigerators installed in RVs come with icemakers in the freezer.

Most RVs with residential-type refrigerators will require the waiting-and-running method, which means winterizing the RV, and then running the refrigerator-freezer until it makes ice and the antifreeze is passed through the system into the ice tray. If the winterizing process is started when the refrigerator has been off, it can take 24 hours or longer to complete this cycle with the RV plugged in and the refrigerator running.

This same process will work with an RV-style refrigerator; just remember that the RV still needs 120-volt AC power for the icemaker to operate. In the case of RV-style appliances, it is possible to apply 120-volt AC power to the icemaker valve to make it open out of sequence to winterize it, but this requires making a special cord set and is not recommended for those who aren't familiar with the appliance and electricity.

In all cases, be sure to refer to the owner's manual for each appliance or check with the component or appliance manufacturers for more specific instructions on winterizing.





insulation from your local home center works well for this.

Batteries are best removed and stored in a cool (but not freezing) location, unless you plan to keep them connected to a charger. Temperatures need to dip down to a frigid minus-76 F for fully charged batteries to freeze.

Covering the RV is strongly recommended for long-term storage. Environmental exposure is very hard on any RV, and spending a few hundred bucks to save the exterior is a good investment. Using tarps is not recommended, as the waterproof material traps moisture and the coarse texture can cause wear. Commercially available RV covers do a better job, and those with Tyvek tops or adequate ventilation openings allow moisture to escape, which prevents mold and mildew from forming underneath.

Tires should be cleaned and covered while in storage, properly inflated and parked on a surface other than the ground, such as wood or plastic leveling blocks.

Winter Camping

It is not uncommon for owners to shutter their RVs during winter out

[8] When there is no winterizing kit, the hose can be disconnected from the inlet side of the pump's inline filter, and a 3-foot suction hose with a ½-inch NPT female PEX fitting clamped on the end can be attached. These parts are available at most home centers and hardware stores. An alternative is to install Camco's Pump Converter Winterizing Kit.

of habit, thinking there's no practical option for traveling in cold weather when temperatures and road conditions can change at a moment's notice. But with proper planning, winter RVing can be a great adventure, even when the snow is flying.

Some RVs have plumbing that is built to withstand the rigors of frigid weather, and there are those that can be modified to protect the water system and be comfortable inside. Many new RVs are even marketed as four-season ready, which means the factory took additional steps such as improving insulation, installing dual-pane windows and routing heated air to certain areas. Other considerations include a good-size battery bank for off-the-grid adventures and legal traction devices for icy roads.

When you return and put the RV back into storage, be sure to rewinterize it following the above steps. The process becomes easier after doing it a number of times, and you can rest assured that you won't have repair bills as a result of freezing or improper storage. Best of all, your RV will be ready to go for another travel season. 🚐

COLD COMFORT

To prevent cold-weather damage, Camco supplies a wide range of products including the Winterizing Hand Pump, the permanently installed Quick Turn By-Pass Kit and the permanent Pump Converter Winterizing Kit. The all-in-one RV Winter Readiness Kit (right) contains a bucket and a winterizing guide, along with antifreeze concentrate, a blowout plug, a hand pump, a mini dehumidifier, an odor eliminator and a fridge-door prop.

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BIRDS OF A FEATHER

NEW MEXICO'S 57,000-ACRE BOSQUE DEL APACHE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE IS A SEASONAL HOME TO SANDHILL CRANES AND SNOW GEESE THAT TAKE OFF EN MASSE IN THE EARLY HOURS OF DAYLIGHT

It is a chilly November morning at New Mexico's Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge where a friend and I have joined dozens of ardent wildlife photographers, lined up tripod-to-tripod, ready and waiting for the action to begin. We're standing on an observation platform called Flight Deck overlooking a network of fields and marshes teeming with thousands of sandhill cranes and snow geese that pause here to feed and rest during their annual migration south along the Central Flyway.

Situated on the Rio Grande just a few miles off Interstate 25 south of Socorro (between Albuquerque and Las Cruces) in the tiny town of San Antonio, New Mexico, the 57,000-acre refuge was established in the 1930s to protect the sandhill crane. The majestic 4-foot-tall crane had nearly vanished

along the Intermountain West Corridor, a vital north-south flyway for migratory waterfowl and many other birds.

Bosque del Apache NWR stands out as one of the country's most accessible and popular preserves — for wildlife and human visitors alike — providing a seasonal home, November through

March, for up to 12,000 sandhill cranes, 32,000 snow geese, nearly 40,000 ducks and even a few bald eagles. Many thousands of bird watchers, photographers and nature lovers from around the nation and beyond follow them here.

"They could go any minute now," says the photographer next to us, his breath propelling puffs of vapor from somewhere behind a fleece-lined hood. Brian is an amateur wildlife photographer from Florida, here as a member of a photo tour group. "They take off all at once...thousands of them," he adds, "and it's really unbelievable."

For instinctive reasons known only to the birds, a sunrise "fly out" en masse is a daily routine. As is a "fly in" at sunset when the flocks return to the shallow marshes after a day of feeding on corn and grain crops farmed on more than 1,300 acres, mostly at the northern end of the refuge.

We watch and wait, nervously fidgeting with camera settings, as the sun inches above the horizon, illuminating a wispy fog rising from the marsh a couple of hundred yards distant. Then, without any discernible signal, it happens. In unison, thousands of snow geese erupt in a noisy blur, flashing and swirling skyward. They are trailed by the larger cranes, which lift off more slowly and gracefully.

Nothing we've ever seen in nature can compare to it — except, perhaps, the great wildebeest migration across

When thousands of snow geese erupt into flight, flapping and squawking wing-to-wing from the feeding fields at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge near Socorro, New Mexico, it is one of nature's most sensational displays.





(Above, from left) RVs are welcome on the 12-mile vehicular loop route that offers unlimited opportunities to view the nearly 300 species of birds that flock to Bosque del Apache. Standing up to 4 feet tall and with a wingspan of 6 feet or more, the sandhill crane is most impressive.

Kenya's Maasai Mara National Reserve — and it takes our breath away. It is a scene so stunning that we nearly forget to man our cameras.

The spectacular sunrise has also made us forget for a time the near-freezing chill on this abnormally brisk morning, and we retreat to the warmth of our RVs. A 12-mile gravel road loops through the heart of the refuge, affording infinite viewing possibilities.

Bosque del Apache is Spanish for “forest of the Apache,” and there’s ample historical evidence that this area of lush riparian forest flanking the Rio Grande was a popular campsite among roaming bands of Apaches during much of the 19th century. Even prior to that, archaeologists say, Pueblo people occupied the area for centuries before Spanish explorers established the Camino Real, the Royal Road from Mexico City to Santa Fe. The Camino Real ran right through the present-day refuge.

In 1862, both Union and Confederate troops marched through the area during engagement in the little-known Battle of Valverde, which took place just a few miles south of the refuge. We find it extremely interesting that a wildlife

preserve would also attest to so much human history.

Once warmed up, we continue around the loop road, which is divided into marsh and farm sections. From the Farm Deck, another of the seven observation platforms strategically located around the loop, we watch with some amusement as a wily coyote, literally crawling on its haunches, tries to sneak up on a flock of snow geese foraging among some corn stalks. Wise the whole while to its presence, the geese waddle nonchalantly away from the predator, carefully maintaining a safe distance and visibly frustrating the hungry but hapless coyote.


Near Chupadera Deck on the farm loop, a row of stately cottonwoods has gained the title of Eagle Row. Sure enough, we spot a couple of bald eagles roosting high up in the trees and attentively eyeing the scene below. We take up positions here for the sunset fly in.

The birds approach from the north — cranes trumpeting and geese honking — filling the dusk sky. They swoop down to field and marsh, gliding like fighter jets landing on a carrier deck. It is not so much breathtaking as



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 **Kiva RV Park and Horse Motel** has 36 full-hookup RV sites about 40 miles north of Bosque del Apache. 505-861-0698 www.kivarvparkandhorsemotel.com

SAN ANTONIO

The closest campground is appropriately named **Bosque Birdwatchers RV Park** with 36 full-hookup sites. 575-835-1366

SOCORRO

 **Casey's Socorro RV Park** has 100-plus sites with various hookups about 10 miles north of San Antonio. 888-674-2234

Escondida Lake RV and Campsites offers 16 full-hookup sites and three dry sites in a Socorro County park. 575-835-0589, www.socorrocounty.net/culture-recreation/escondida-lake

it is ethereal. We are in a trance.

During a visit to the Bosque many Novembers ago, the late, great CBS newsman Charles Kuralt was similarly stirred by the scene. Following a flight of cranes gliding south on a thermal above the Rio Grande, Kuralt noted, “Their effortless flight and their brassy music got into my soul.” 📺

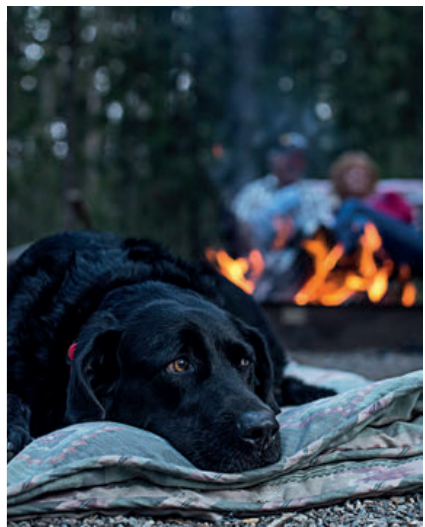


FESTIVAL OF THE CRANES

Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge is open year-round from one hour before sunrise until one hour after sunset. The one-day entry fee is \$5 per vehicle including all occupants. Golden Age and other federal passes are accepted. The refuge hosts a number of special events, including the annual Festival of the Cranes, staged during the height of the fall migration. The 2016 event, which features tours, lectures and special exhibits, is set for November 15 through 20.

Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge
575-835-1828, www.fws.gov/refuge/bosque_del_apache

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Light Makes Right

Travel Lite's Idea 2.0 i18 has been upgraded for 2017 with dual axles, a full-size refrigerator and new cabinetry



While large and extravagant travel trailers and fifth-wheels are top-notch for high-end living, many RVers enjoy comfort and convenience in a more petite package. Plus there's more flexibility on where you can roam and spend the night. Travel Lite specializes in small travel trailers ranging from 14 to 21 feet that weigh no more than 3,500 pounds (dry), which means they can be towed by most small trucks and SUVs. To put one of its 2017 trailers to the test, we outfitted a Chevy TrailBlazer with a Reese hitch and Prodigy brake controller to pull a 3,215-pound (base weight), 20-foot 5-inch Idea 2.0 model i18.

Our first impression was that the Idea i18 is unpretentious with its practical size, high-gloss gel-coat white exterior (with a mix of sunny-yellow and muted-color graphics to jazz it up), and an aerodynamic, grooved front cap that conceals the LP-gas cylinder. The clean exterior look extends to the dark-glass frameless windows and chrome bezel LED lights.

Stepping inside, we were greeted with a surprisingly roomy and practical layout. A rounded wall leads to the bathroom, a 6-cubic-foot two-way refrigerator graces the galley, tasteful wood-plank-style linoleum covers a plywood floor, a queen-size bed is outfitted with a stylish comforter, and cabinets in Concord Cherry tie everything together.

We made big plans with the small

i18, which included a visit to Big Bear Lake in the San Bernardino Mountains of Southern California. In the winter Big Bear is a popular ski resort, and in the summer it's lovely with mild temperatures, hiking and biking trails, and tons of pine trees. The TrailBlazer rolled down the highway towing the trailer and climbed steep hills, including a 6 percent grade to an elevation of 8,400 feet.

Equipped with 13-inch wheels, the Idea didn't sway and would have been largely unnoticeable except that I had to downshift to second gear at times to keep the engine RPM up when climbing grades. We easily backed into a spacious site in a national forest campground to immerse ourselves in ponderosa, sugar and Jeffrey pines.



This second-generation i18 dual-axle version (an upgrade from the previous single-axle model) makes backing up easier. With the dual axles came more ground clearance, and to accommodate the extra height, the i18's single step was traded in for a two-step foldaway. Wrestling with the stubborn step was annoying, but the sturdy grab handle to the left of the door puts many others to shame.

Getting to the electrical cord, water hose, jack handle and blocks of wood was easy through an exterior curbside compartment door. Larger items must be loaded from the inside because the access door was small and this space is part of a voluminous under-bed storage area. From the inside, the stor-

age is easy to get to (assuming the bed isn't piled up with items), and it's held up with gas struts, though reaching for certain items that move during travel can be a challenge.

Another upgrade for 2017 is a larger, 6-cubic-foot Dometic refrigerator/freezer (programmed for temperature control so it's not adjustable). The downside is that countertop space was sacrificed, since previous models had a half-size, under-counter refrigerator. Possibly to add back a few inches of countertop, the two-burner Atwood range (no igniter) was rotated so the burners are stacked front to back. The large oval-shaped back burner accommodated a 3-quart frying pan, no problem.

The Granicote countertop is made by Travel Lite in-house and ties in beautifully with the textured backsplash. Total counter space between the range and single-basin sink is 7½ inches, with a couple of inches at each end. This doesn't leave much workspace for food preparation, so if dinner plans include more than opening a can of soup, you'll need backup. Fortunately, help is there with the freestanding table just 15 inches and a half turn away, which adds 34¼ x 17¼ inches of prep space, though it wobbles when chopping with gusto. The table was also in a perfect location to load up our plates to take dinner outside, since we preferred dining under the pines.

The table is very easy to set up

and take down, and complements the jackknife sofa option (less than \$200) that replaces the two-seat dinette. The 60x40-inch leatherette sofa was comfortable, easy on the backside and offered good support. The sofa lies flat and looks like it can sleep a couple of small kids, but not anyone much bigger.

For the ultimate in laziness, we discovered that, when sitting on the left end of the sofa (with or without the table set up), we didn't have to get up to reach into the refrigerator to grab a cold drink or snack from the fridge door. We'd prefer to have the galley flipped, though: While seated side by side at the table, we found ourselves staring at the kitchen appliances rather than out the window, which was at our backs. In the standard model with the dinette, this wouldn't be an issue.

And here's where our biggest beef with the i18 comes in: The base of the table leg is not flush with the floor — in fact, it sticks up a couple of inches — so when the table was not set up, we tripped over it a number of times before tossing a thick rug over it to keep from stubbing our toes.

The galley makes efficient use of space with four drawers on glides, deep cabinets below the refrigerator and under the sink, a wardrobe and overhead cabinets with picture-frame doors. However, it could use a shelf to park a tissue box or frequently needed items without having to open a drawer or cabinet.



The i18's neo-angle shower opens up floor space in front of the sink and around the toilet. The lavatory features a large medicine cabinet (not shown) and a Granicote counter.



(From far left) Overhead cabinets in Concord Cherry with Glacier Glass fronts and LED backlighting add a homey, inviting feel at night. The headboard tips slightly forward to follow the contour of the front cap, accenting a comfortable 60-by-74-inch pillow-top mattress. The 6-cubic-foot refrigerator/freezer is double in size from the previous under-counter refrigerator. A freestanding table is easily set up and removed and adds 34½ by 17½ inches of food-preparation space.

small trailer is that it warmed up and cooled down quickly, thanks to the Atwood furnace and Dometic air conditioner.

The functional bathroom has enough space to get the job done. At its largest point, the neo-angle shower pan is 15x15 inches, so space is tight width-wise. In comparison, with the skylight over the shower, there's 6 feet 3 inches of headroom. The shower curtain allows elbow room, but curiously, it is mounted outside the shower-stall walls, plus the shower wall does not go all the way to the ceiling, so water got on the walls and on the floor. Also, the sofa prevents the bathroom door from opening all the way, so you need to enter the bathroom from the galley.

It was delightful sitting outside under the electric awning that runs pretty much the entire length of the side wall. The awning rolled out smoothly and quietly, and with the single halogen porch light casting a golden glow, it created a lovely ambience. There's not enough light to read by, so we listened to howling coyotes and other night sounds, or to the stereo, set on low through two outdoor speakers.

For those who visit moderately cold areas, an optional Polar Package (\$895) is available with heated pads on the holding tanks, dual-pane windows (single-pane are standard) and thermal-foil wrap flooring. The i18 has outside electrical outlets, and the test unit had the optional (\$145) outdoor shower.

Our last night was spent at Lighthouse Trailer Resort on the north shore of Big Bear Lake and a short walk to the solar observatory. After spending the day exploring miles of shoreline, it was back to camp to enjoy the entertainment, which consisted of full-timers flitting around in their golf carts waving greetings and carting stuff to a potluck. The best one had a happy dog and a popcorn machine sharing the back seat. When the sun was almost out of sight and the gnats were drinking more wine than I was, I finally gave up and went inside to prepare dinner.

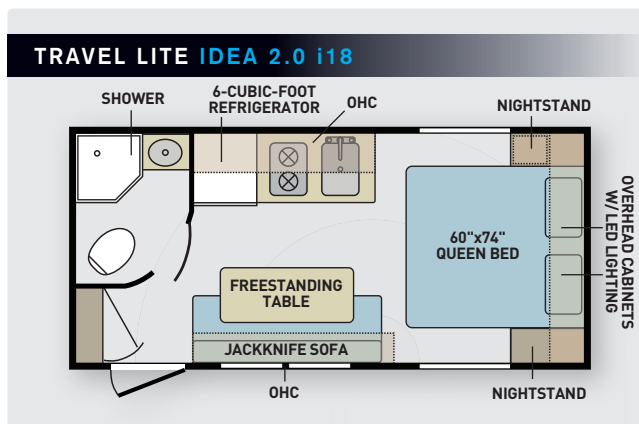
I liked that I could tow the Idea with an everyday vehicle,

With the flip of a switch by the entry door, LED back-lighting glows warmly through four overhead cabinets with Glacier Glass fronts. It's an inviting touch that adds a high-end feel to the RV, with just enough light to inspire relaxation when the other lights are off. Another of our favorites was the toekick lighting in the galley that left the right amount of illumination to find our way to the bathroom in the wee hours before daylight.

The galley's ceiling vent does not have a fan, though the fan over the range did a good job of drawing out cooking steam. Mounted over the range and hood is a microwave positioned at the perfect height for my 5-foot 9-inch frame. Attached to the side of the cabinet over the sink was a 19-inch LED HDTV/DVD combo (optional \$592.50 and part of the Entertainment Package that includes a TV antenna, a swiveling bracket and a CD/AM/FM/MP3 stereo). The articulating mount places the TV at the foot of the bed and can be turned so the screen is viewable from the galley.

Even though interior height is 6 feet 3 inches, the i18 is best suited for people 6 feet and under (maybe 6-foot 1-inch), since ceiling-mounted lights and open cabinet doors can be hazardous to folks who are over that height, plus the doorway into the bathroom is half an inch shy of 6 feet. The ceiling-mounted air conditioner is centered over the foot of the queen bed and technically out of the way, but my 6-foot 4-inch husband, in a peaceful mood while setting his sights on the comfy 60x74-inch pillow-top mattress, hit his head on the A/C while climbing into bed. Nightstands with drawers on either side provided room for smaller items, while the teensy bit of walk-around space gave us room to store big items, such as backpacks and the table/post, on the floor.

A stylish cherrywood-look headboard is attached to the wall of the trailer and follows the contour of the i18's front cap. This makes for an interesting setup because the top of the headboard is tipped forward, maximizing bed length while lying down. However, when sitting up in bed and leaning back against the headboard to read, we had to pile pillows at our lower backs for support. We also positioned the overhead halogen reading lights before they heated up; otherwise, we'd burn our fingers. Speaking of heat, a big advantage of this





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TRAILER
LIFE**TEST****SPECIFICATIONS****TRAVEL LITE IDEA 2.0 i18**

Exterior Length	20' 5"
Exterior Width	7'
Exterior Height	9' 7" with A/C
Interior Width	6' 10"
Interior Height	6' 3"
Construction	1x2" and 1x4" wood framing, hung gel-coat fiberglass side walls, R7 insulation, tongue-and-groove grade-A plywood floor, TPO roof
Freshwater Cap.	37 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	27/27 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	5 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	6 cu. ft.
Furnace	18,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	5,000 Btu
Converter	40-amp
Battery	12-volt
Tires	ST175/80R13
Suspension	Leaf spring
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full; no cargo)	3,750 lbs.
Hitch Weight	260 lbs.
Axle Weight	3,490 lbs.
GVWR	7,260 lbs.
GAWR (2)	3,500 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	3,510 lbs.
Base MSRP	\$21,210
As-Tested MSRP	\$24,532.50
Basic Warranty	2-year limited

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it was not overwhelming, and less than half an hour after rolling into our campsites, we were set up and relaxing under the awning. The i18 offers a good floorplan for two, with enough space that we weren't constantly bumping into each other. It was easy to maneuver, and we didn't even have to disconnect the first two nights since the TrailBlazer-and-Idea combo didn't overhang the campsite. We felt like we were living large in this small trailer and could see spending longer periods of time on the road. 🚐

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SEASIDE IN VIRGINIA

MARITIME HISTORY, A MASSIVE STONE FORTRESS AND MILES OF SCENIC WATERFRONT
LURE RVERS TO FOUR CITIES ON THE FRINGES OF THE OLD DOMINION STATE

Midway between New York and Florida, a full spectrum of sights and activities keeps RVers engaged as they roll through the waterfront towns of Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Hampton and Newport News. From aquariums, sandy beaches and a seaside boardwalk to maritime museums and a moat-encircled stone fortress, Virginia's southeastern boundary shines every season of the year.

VIRGINIA BEACH

The commonwealth's biggest city, Virginia Beach draws visitors to miles of sandy Atlantic coastline. If you like to walk, skate or pedal, the recently renovated boardwalk is your kind of place. Fringed by hotels, eclectic shops and trendy restaurants, it's the perfect paved venue for pedestrians and has a parallel path for cyclists and skaters. Don't miss the Virginia Legends Walk honoring famous state natives from Thomas Jefferson to Ella Fitzgerald.

While strolling or rolling on the boardwalk, you can grab a bite to eat and gaze up at the 34-foot-tall bronze rendering of King Neptune petting a sea turtle. Come summer, Beach-Street USA hosts all styles of live performances on boardwalk stages, from musicians to magicians and jugglers.

Reserve a chunk of your visit to experience the underwater world at the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center, a mile inland from the beach. Harbor seals greet you at the entrance, followed by a captivating array of

ocean and marsh critters ranging from lobsters to jellyfish and crocodiles. Together, they occupy a whopping 800,000 gallons of aquarium space. The luminous giant shark tank is a must-see. You can even sign up for a training session with the seals or sea turtles.

From December through mid-March, the aquarium's guided boat trips take visitors to see migrating humpback and fin whales. Year-round, the six-story IMAX theater shows eye-popping 3D movies, and the outdoor Adventure Park lets you navigate the top of the forest on supervised zip lines designed for all ages and ability levels.

NORFOLK

Another round of seaside amusements awaits in neighboring Norfolk, Virginia's second largest city.

Begin with a stop at Nauticus, a maritime-science center that introduces visitors to such natural wonders as barreling tsunamis and horseshoe crabs scuttling around tidepools. Through true-to-life simulators, you can navigate a tugboat, pilot a submersible vehicle or keep track of the comings and goings of cargo ships. Dive into close encounters with white-spotted bamboo sharks and coral catsharks, collect undersea specimens with a robotic arm, or even operate a remote camera to explore the USS *Monitor* Civil War vessel at the National Marine Sanctuary wreck site. Interactive opportunities and giant 3D theater presentations bring applied science



(Far left) Fort Monroe's Casemate Museum in Hampton chronicles the military history of the massive stone fortress and the prisoners confined within its walls. (Left) In Newport News, the Mariner's Museum presents the compelling saga of the ironclad USS *Monitor* battleship. (Below) Virginia Beach's sandy oceanfront captivates swimmers, surfers and sandcastle builders.





While in Norfolk, take time for a leisurely stroll along the Elizabeth River or hop aboard a ferry for a different view of the waterfront.

into the realm of fun, games and terrific entertainment.

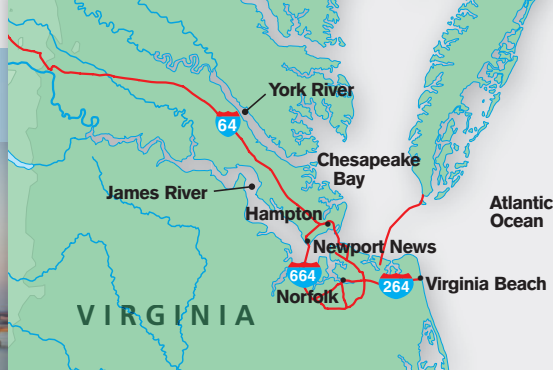
Nauticus shares the second floor of its expansive facility with the Hampton Roads Naval Museum, one of 10 museums operated by the U.S. Navy. The museum is dedicated to preserving and interpreting more than two centuries of naval history on Virginia's southeastern coast, from the Revolutionary and Civil wars to the present day, as exemplified by a model of the USS *America* aircraft carrier. The museum's collection of model ships also includes replicas of the USS *Norfolk* submarine and the USS *Winslow* torpedo boat.

A Nauticus admission ticket includes a walk aboard the USS *Wisconsin*, anchored just outside. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the battleship measures 887 feet in length, weighs more than 40,000 tons and participated in three wars.

HAMPTON

Fort Monroe, the largest stone fortress ever constructed in the United States, stands on 63 acres at the tip of the Virginia Peninsula in historic Hampton. Completed in 1834 and now a national monument, the stalwart fort has a back story that includes legendary figures from Captain John Smith to Abraham Lincoln and Robert E. Lee, the last of whom resided here as a young engineer during his pre-Civil War military service. After the war, Confederate President Jefferson Davis was held prisoner at the fort.

Originally designed as a strategic point for coastal defense of Chesapeake Bay, Fort Monroe gained notoriety during the Civil War as Freedom's Fortress after the Union Army's Major



WHERE TO CAMP ON THE VIRGINIA COAST

RVers can find plenty of places to stay in the southeastern corner of Virginia. Here's a sample, including a pair of Good Sam Parks and a popular municipal campground.

NEWPORT NEWS

Newport News Park, one of the largest city parks east of the Mississippi River, maintains 188 spacious RV campsites with water and electric hookups in a tranquil forested setting. The 7,711-acre park has ample opportunities for hiking, biking, boating and fishing. 757-926-1400, www.nnparks.com



PHOTO BY PAULA LOHR

VIRGINIA BEACH

Holiday Trav-L-Park of Virginia Beach features more than 700 campsites in wooded surroundings, including full-hookup sites with Wi-Fi and cable, all within 2 miles of the lively boardwalk and oceanfront attractions. 757-425-0249, www.campingvb.com

North Landing Beach RV Resort and Cottages offers 150 RV sites with 30- and 50-amp hookups and free Wi-Fi. Amenities include an outdoor pool and sport courts, a riverfront beach, and kayak and canoe rentals. 888-283-2725, www.northlandingbeach.com

Virginia Beach KOA has a full range of RV sites accommodating rigs up to 45 feet in length plus family-friendly seasonal perks including two swimming pools, a waterslide and convenient beach shuttles. 800-562-4150, www.koavirginiabeach.com

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SEASIDE IN VIRGINIA

General Benjamin Butler declared it a safe haven for thousands of slaves seeking independence.

A casemate is defined as a room within the walls of a fort, and Fort Monroe's Casemate Museum occupies many such rooms, all recreating scenes from the fortress' lively history. Each casemate is skillfully reconstructed, from Jefferson Davis' postwar prison cell to a canon-firing station and an officer's homey piano parlor. The Casemate Museum is well worth visiting at a leisurely, thoughtful pace.

For those in search of blue skies, green trees and sea breezes, Fort Monroe's surroundings feature 8 miles of Chesapeake Bay waterfront with 3 miles of sandy beach, a fishing pier built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1818, and a delightful array of birds, blossoms and trees.

Also located on the Hampton waterfront, the Virginia Air and Space Center is the official visitor hub for NASA's Langley Research Center and

Langley Air Force Base. The *Apollo 12* command module, a Mercury capsule, a moon rock and a meteorite from Mars are just a few of the artifacts on display. At the center you can see what it's like to be an International Space Station crewmember, step inside a WWII bomber and embark on a simulated flight to Mars. More than 30 authentic aircraft, from an F-4E Phantom II with a sharky grin to a red-and-white Pitts Special aerobatic biplane, are suspended from the center's lofty ceiling, looking as if they are flying through the sky.

NEWPORT NEWS

On the eastern side of the Virginia Peninsula, Newport News is home to the Mariners' Museum and Park where 500 years of seafaring history are summarized under one roof. Details about old-time sailors' shipboard lifestyles and a full-size reproduction of the ironclad USS *Monitor* are among the museum's offerings. There's a refractive



lens from the Cape Charles Lighthouse, a rare hand-carved miniature-ship collection and 150 seafaring vessels from 43 countries, including a Micronesian outrigger, a Native American dugout canoe, a graceful gondola from Venice and a tattered getaway boat constructed hastily by Cuban refugees.

At the adjacent 550-acre wooded park, you can rent a paddleboat that looks like a sea dragon or a pirate ship for a self-propelled spin around Lake Maury. Walk the 5-mile Noland Trail that traces the lake's shoreline and

PHOTOS BY NEWPORT NEWS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT; VISIT NORFOLK; PAUL ALDEHR

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take in sweeping views of the James River from the Lions Bridge, named for its four stone sculptures. The fresh air, bright flowers and trail network at the privately maintained public-access park are refreshing complements to a self-paced tour.

Also in Newport News, the Virginia Living Museum provides remarkable encounters with loggerhead turtles, sea stars, otters and flying squirrels. Animals living in Virginia's mountains, swamps, plains, bays and seas are all represented at this museum-zoo-

(Above, from left) At Newport News Park, you can paddle a canoe to get away from it all on Lee Hall Reservoir. The engaging Nauticus complex in Norfolk features a winning trio: a maritime-science center, the Hampton Roads Naval Museum and the USS Wisconsin battleship. The big shark tank at the Virginia Aquarium in Virginia Beach is a visual masterpiece.

planetarium-theater-and-garden hybrid. You can browse through conservation-oriented gardens devoted to butterflies and native plants, then stroll down a series of boardwalks for close views of nesting shorebirds, elegant bald eagles and endangered red wolves. Visit with owls and tree frogs in the darkness gallery, hear songbirds in

the Appalachian zone and head for the underground gallery to see pack rats (the furry kind) and blind cave fish.

An RV trip to Virginia's southeastern shoreline will wow your senses, feed your soul, expand your mind, exercise your body, challenge your memory and delight your heart, no matter what time of year you visit. 🚐

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SPIN CONTROL

Installing a stacking washer and dryer by Splendide lightens the load on laundry days

Traveling in an RV gives us the sense that we're getting away from the daily routine, leaving behind many of the responsibilities and chores that diverted us to the RV lifestyle. In reality, some things just can't be left behind, like washing clothes. While some people consider their trips to the laundry facility an extension of their social life, lugging the clothes, soap and spot removers to and from is not a pleasurable experience for everyone. And it's expensive, to boot; we spent \$6 a load (wash and dry) at the last RV park we visited.

A great alternative is an onboard washer and dryer, and Splendide Laundry Centers offers a number of products designed for RV installations, including its latest, a stacking system that incorporates new technology to enhance performance while taking the chore out of washing and drying clothes.

Unlike the combo units, which technically get the job done but require lots of patience, the new stackers more closely emulate home units, with the exception of the ultimate capacity found in residential models.

Newer RVs are often outfitted with the water faucets, drain plumbing and power in a closet where space is allocated for a stacking washer and dryer. Older models may have space reserved for only a combo, which is exactly what we encountered when a friend wanted to add a stacking washer and dryer to his rig. We decided to take the plunge and modify the closet, which meant giving up some storage space, but the owner was willing to make the sacrifice for the added convenience.

We chose the Ariston by Splendide front-loading washer and matching electric dryer for this project because of the company's sterling reputation in the industry,



(1) The closet in the test rig was prepped by the factory to accept a combo washer/dryer. It was previously used as a storage area. **(2)** After removing the two lower drawers (not shown), additional framing is screwed into the sides to support a new floor. **(3)** Retained wood from the original structure was used to build the new floor.

and we knew these units are designed specifically for RVs and thus can take the pounding on the road. Features like stainless-steel drums supported by heavy-duty springs, shock absorbers and a reinforced housing help ensure against damage. We also considered the units' nice looks, modern controls and, of course, the fact that they do a good job washing and drying clothes.

The washer weighs 147 pounds and measures 32 $\frac{7}{8}$ -by-23 $\frac{1}{2}$ -by-22 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches; the dryer weighs 67 pounds and has virtually the same dimensions. Although the washer and dryer are rather bulky, and fitting them into a confined space may initially seem difficult, the opposite is true. Since the width is just shy of 24 inches, we had enough room in the closet, where the allocated space was slightly wider to accommodate the combo unit.

We started the installation by making the necessary modifications to the assigned closet. Shelves and drawers were removed, and the space reconfigured to make way for the stacking washer and dryer. Once

the wall are very important.

An optional drain-pan kit was employed as additional insurance in case of a leak or washer overflow, which is almost always traceable to user error. The pan is screwed into the floor in the closet, and a hose is then routed to a drainpipe that leads to the gray-water holding tank. After mounting the brackets that attach to the dryer, the washer is lifted into the closet, which took three guys to maneuver without damaging the adjacent woodwork.

The water and drain hoses were then hooked up and the dryer placed on top of the washer. Eight-foot hot- and cold-water hoses and a 5-foot drain hose are provided with the washer. For this installation, access to the hot- and cold-water faucets was pretty tight. To facilitate easy access to these valves, we cut an opening in an adjacent cabinet and added a piece of Plexiglas to cover the hole but still give a view of the connections.

The final step, configuring the closet door, proved to be a lot more problematic than predicted. That's because

(4) A section of the back wall is cut out to provide better access to the hot and cold faucets and drainpipe. **(5)** The drain-pan kit was prepared before attaching to the floor. Here a fitting is threaded into the edge of the pan and a hose is connected using a clamp. **(6)** The hose is routed through a hole drilled in the floor and tied into a gray-water drainpipe using a "Rube Goldberg" method of connecting and plenty of sealant.



(7) During unpacking, four protective screws used for transporting the washer are removed with a socket wrench. **(8)** When loose, the long screws are simply pulled out and discarded. **(9)** The holes are closed off using plastic plugs that just snap in place.

the way was cleared in the closet, the vent kit was installed, which required drilling a 4-inch hole in the side wall. You get only one shot at getting it right, so measuring accurately and making sure there are no obstructions inside

after modifying the closet, the original door was too small. Another factor was providing adequate ventilation when using the machines. Most RVs are fitted with louvered doors when the washer/dryer-prep option is elected. In this

case, the door was solid, and installing custom louvered doors would have boosted the project cost substantially.

To solve both issues, we had a local cabinet shop cut a matching piece of wood to serve as a single door. Hinges



(10) Hot- and cold-water hoses are attached to their respective locations in the back of the washer before moving to the closet. Eight-foot hoses are provided with the washer. The drainpipe (not shown) is attached to the washer from the factory. **(11)** Installation of the vent requires finding a spot in the back wall that will clear the dryer and other obstructions. A small hole is drilled through the inside and outside wall to locate the vent. **(12)** A 4-inch hole is drilled through the outside wall using a common hole saw. Don't scrimp here; the use of a cheap hole saw can easily result in a very untidy installation.

were added, and a sealer and lacquer were used to protect and enhance the wood surface. The only caveat is the need to keep the door ajar when using the washer and dryer, which proved to be no problem.

Installing a washer and dryer in a closet that's ready for the stacking system is a pretty simple affair for do-it-yourselfers. If modifications are needed, the process can be more complicated and time-consuming, as it was in our case; we devoted a number of hours over two days. If the RV was not prepped for a washer and dryer, then the job is much more difficult and should be left to the professionals.

Unlike the older laundry systems that shook the interior like a vibrating bed in motels of yesteryear (without having to add quarters), appliances from Splendide Laundry Centers are a lot less invasive to your senses. You can tell it's running, but the system is relatively quiet and smooth, thanks to

a proprietary vibration-damping and noise-reduction system. An Automatic Balance System detects an out-of-balance situation, which causes the motor to adjust speed or stop the drum completely so that the load can readjust as necessary.

A number of features packed into the washer and dryer are similar to those found in some of the better home units. For example, there are 13 wash cycles with specific instructions for handling all clothes, from everyday wear to delicates and towels and sheets. The washer spins from 600 to 1,200 RPM, which provides cleaning versatility, including a drain cycle for silk. Maximum load is 15 pounds, which is a good amount of clothing and/or towels. Bulk is also a consideration; we found that one set of king-size sheets, for example, makes one full load.

Wash time depends on the cycle, but the washer can be set for 15 minutes for a few slightly soiled pieces of

clothing, 30 minutes for a smaller load (up to around 6 pounds), or whatever time is necessary to wash a full load. We found that it takes about 103 minutes to handle a typical full load (cycle No. 2, warm water and 1,200 RPM to wring out really well). Full-load washing times range from 114 to 135 minutes, depending on soiling and fabric. Everything comes out nicely because the rinse cycle is so efficient. There's even a delayed start that can be programmed for up to 24 hours. The washer is Class A-rated and has an Energy Star listing. Water usage is between 7.5 and 16 gallons.

We were intrigued by the Splendide Foam Removal system that measures the amount of soap during the rinse cycle and removes the excess to protect the internal parts from being damaged. That point led to our experimentation with the company's laundry detergent, which turned out to be much better than expected. Not only did it do a good

(13) Vent-pipe flange is lined with butyl tape before it is pushed through the hole in the wall. **(14)** Once in place, the vent is attached to the wall using stainless-steel screws. **(15)** Excess butyl tape is carefully trimmed using a putty knife. Metal putty knives can easily scratch the gelcoat, so use caution here. **(16)** Plastic shroud is used to cover the vent pipe and attached to the wall using stainless-steel screws. This shroud can be painted to match exterior graphics. **(17)** Inside, a plate is mounted on the wall around the vent pipe for a clean look. **(18)** A template is used to determine the correct locations for the installation brackets.





(19) After taping the template to the top of the washer, a hole-punch is used to dimple the locations for drilling pilot holes for the bracket screws. (20) A piece of electrical tape is used to mark the depth of the drill bit to prevent damaging the washer. Once the pilot holes are drilled, the brackets are attached. (21) These brackets are used to position and stabilize the dryer when it's placed on top of the washer.

heat or fluff clothes and limit wrinkles for easy ironing.

We were impressed with how nicely the clothes came out of the dryer, and most were ready to wear. An Auto Dry cycle stops the dryer automatically when the load is dry. Both machines

feature a safety lock that prevents the doors from being opened during inopportune times, and a self-diagnosis system should anything go wrong.

Obviously, the convenience of an onboard washer and dryer is best served in a campground with hookups.



job of cleaning the clothing and towels, it controls the suds. The auto foam removal will come in handy for those who mistakenly use too much detergent or a liquid product.

A self-cleaning, recirculating pump eliminates the need to clean a filter; the small amount of lint passes through the pump. If you happen to forget to remove items from pockets, like keys and coins, they will be trapped in a pre-chamber that is easy to access.

The dryer has an extra-wide front door that leads to a 4-cubic-foot stainless-steel drum that provides enough space around the load to promote faster drying times without creasing the contents. Maximum dryer capacity is 13 pounds, so it's best to limit the amount of clothing in the washer to match the rating of the dryer. A nice feature is the air timer, which can be set to dry at low

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SPIN CONTROL

And while you might miss the camaraderie of hanging out in a laundry room, you won't miss lugging bundles of clothing to those public machines or the cost of using these facilities.

The Ariston by Splendide stackable washer (ARWXF129W) and matching dryer (TVM63X) retail for \$897 and \$719, respectively. 🚚

Splendide Laundry Centers

800-356-0766, www.splendide.com



(22) After the prep work is done, the washer is placed in the plastic drain pan, and sealant is applied to the edge before attaching the front lip. This makes it easier to slide the washer into position without lifting, which can be difficult in such a confined compartment. **(23)** The front lip is secured with stainless-steel screws. **(24)** Before the washer is pushed into its final place in the closet, the water hoses, drainpipe and power plug are connected.



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(25) Flexible ducting is attached to the vent pipe just before lifting the dryer into position. A large hose clamp keeps the ducting in place. **(26)** The other end is attached to the dryer before mounting on the washer, using the installation brackets that were attached to the washer. **(27)** The stacking washer and dryer fit snugly into the modified compartment and can be concealed by the custom-made door.

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EASY HITCHING

PullRite's simple SuperLite ball-and-coupler hitch refines the art of hooking a fifth-wheel to a truck

Hitching a fifth-wheel to a truck is normally a fairly easy process and one of the key reasons owners elect this type of combination for their RV travels. But there are times when undulating terrain on RV sites and severe angles can create some distress when trying to position a kingpin in the hitch saddle so that the latching mechanism can be closed properly.

Articulating saddles can help, but depending on the hitch, getting everything lined up perfectly can sometimes still be daunting. PullRite, a manufacturer of fifth-wheel hitches that has built a reputation for making high-quality products, has recently introduced a hitch that is a departure from the rest of its line. The IRS Series SuperLite hitch uses a ball that locks into a funnel-shaped coupler to make hitching a fifth-wheel about as easy as it can get.

By clamping on an adapter to the kingpin box, the SuperLite, in effect, moves its hitch plate, rocker arm and cross member from the hardware mounted in the truck bed to the fifth-wheel. This makes two important changes to the way fifth-wheel owners deal with the necessary

PullRite's new SuperLite hitch uses a simple-to-install adapter plate that adds a ball to the kingpin box.

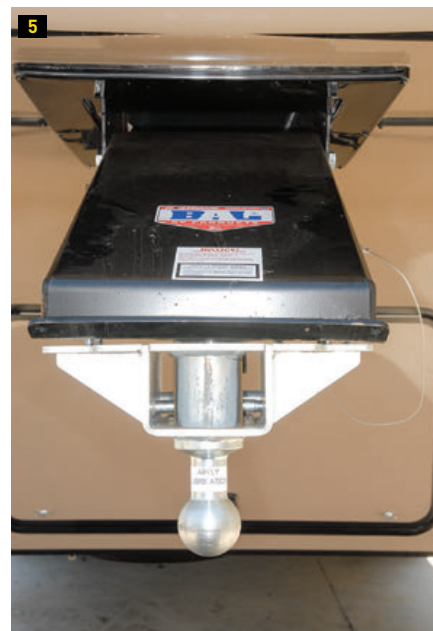
equipment to hitch up.

First off, it allows for a much smaller and lighter base, and, when connected to the company's Clean Bed Technology (CBT) system, leaves the bed completely free by simply lifting out the 52-pound base. The base can also be mounted to any standard rail system designed for other hitches on the market.



(1) The adapter plate is slipped over the kingpin with the ball oriented in front or back, depending on the desired setup. Locating the ball in front of the kingpin allows for additional clearance between the fifth-wheel and the back of the truck cab. **(2)** Once the adapter is in place, the first bolt is put through the smaller of the two holes and hand-tightened using the flange nut. **(3)** The bolt reinforcement tube is placed in the larger hole (left side of the adapter plate), followed by the other bolt and flange nut, which is hand-tightened at this time.

(4) Four setscrews are used to level the adapter plate in relation to the kingpin box and are tightened using a torque wrench to 20 ft-lb once orientation is complete. Long bolts are then torqued to 75 ft-lb, which will keep the plate connected solidly to the kingpin. **(5)** The clean appearance of the installed adapter plate looks like a natural extension of the kingpin box. **(6)** The coupler tube resembles a large funnel with a round channel inside. The design is very simple but effective. **(7)** The coupler tube can be adjusted to three heights from the bed level (15.7, 17.2 or 18.7 inches) by loosening three jam nuts and bolts (two are shown here with a finger and an arrow), and removing the clevis pin.



Secondly, the adapter, which can be installed in about 30 minutes with no modifications, has a low-profile design and functions like a gooseneck hitch, without the additional leverage on the front structure of the fifth-wheel.

For the installation, the adapter plate is simply positioned over the stock kingpin, once it has been cleaned and any burrs are removed with a flat file. Two bolts hold the adapter to the kingpin; the one on the right goes in first and is held in place with a ½-inch flange nut, which is only hand-tightened at first. After sliding the reinforcement tube through the larger hole on the left, the second bolt follows, and the flange nut is snugged by hand.

At this point, the adapter will stay put so four setscrews can be manipulated to keep the adapter level and snug against the kingpin box. The ball can be offset to the front or rear of the kingpin,

but most owners will likely go for the former to allow for additional clearance between the front of the fifth-wheel and back of the cab. After aligning the adapter plate, the bolts and setscrews are torqued to specifications.

Hitch height can be set at three levels to make sure there's adequate clearance between the top of the bed

and the bottom of the front section of the fifth-wheel. PullRite recommends that at least 8 inches of clearance be maintained, and the coupler (the part with the funnel) can be adjusted at 15.7, 17.2 or 18.7 inches from the top of the bed to get there. Making the adjustments requires loosening three jam nuts and backing out the bolts until the coupler is loose from the base. Then the clevis pin is removed, and the coupler can be set to line up one of three holes with the one in the base. It's important not to overtighten these bolts, and the jam nuts must be torqued to 45 ft-lb.

When it comes time to hitch the fifth-wheel to the truck, the process will bring an instant smile to your face.



(8) The hitch can be pinned into standard rails or PullRite's removable SuperRails, which are part of the company's Clean Bed Technology (CBT) products. **(9)** Not only is the base compact, it's light enough, at 52 pounds, to be hoisted overhead, as demonstrated here.

EASY HITCHING



All you have to do is back the truck so the ball can be lowered on any part of the funnel surface and retract the landing jacks when the ball is seated into the coupler. If the ball is seated properly, the latch handle can be closed to lock it in place. An extra-long rod with a T-handle is used to reach the latch from anyplace outside the bed. The landing jacks are then retracted all the way, and you're ready to tow. It's almost impossible to miss the target zone when hitching, and unhitching is just as easy.

We found the ball to have a tight fit, and when towing the fifth-wheel over rough roads and on the freeway, we experienced no annoying banging, clunking or chucking. And, as expected, there was no acclimation time when it came to hitching and unhitching the fifth-wheel.

(10 through 13) Once the tailgate is dropped, the truck is backed toward the funnel, which can be seen easily from the driver's seat. Here the ball was positioned dead on, but as long as it's on the diameter of the funnel, the landing jacks can be lowered, and the ball will seek its proper position in the coupler tube.

The hitch system will allow 90-degree turns as long as there is adequate clearance, as was the case with the rounded corners of the test Winnebago's front cap. In many situations, fifth-wheels that have the rounded cap also have a bit of a forward extension of the kingpin box, and when combined with the forward placement of the SuperLite adapter plate ball, we actually were able to make sharp turns with the shortbed truck we used for the test.

There's not a great amount of maintenance required, but PullRite has specific instructions for keeping the adapter ball, the coupler tube and

the latch lubricated before starting a trip. Dry lube is recommended, although WD-40 can be used instead; WD-40 should be applied to areas between the hitch base and rails to prevent rust during storage. It's best to keep the entire hitch covered when not in use.

The SuperLite hitch system is rated to tow fifth-wheels up to 20,000 pounds and has a \$670 retail price tag. One thing's for sure — hitching a fifth-wheel doesn't get any easier. 🚚

PullRite/Pulliam Enterprises
800-443-2307
www.pullrite.com/superlite



(14) A long rod is provided for closing the latch and locking the ball into the coupler tube. **(15)** It's long enough to reach the latch from just about anywhere outside the bed and can be easily gripped by the T-handle. **(16 and 17)** The connection point for this fifth-wheel and shortbed truck allowed for tight turning, partially due to the curved front cap and front-oriented ball. Sharp turns cleared the back of the truck cab, but users must experiment with this on an open lot before attempting to back into tight spaces.

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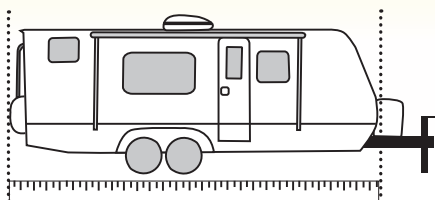
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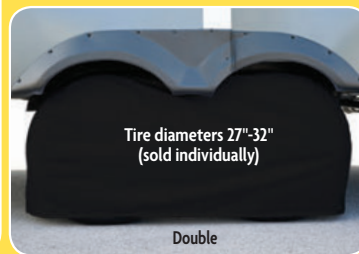
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TIGHT STEERING

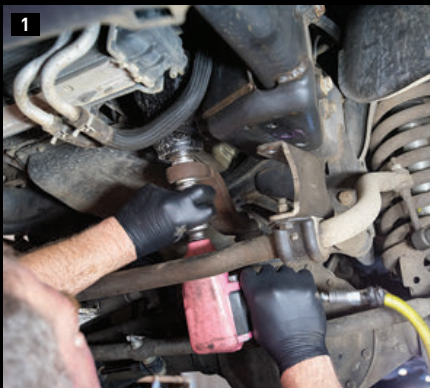
BD DIESEL'S STABILIZER KIT REDUCES WOBBLE ON HEAVY-DUTY RAM TRUCKS

Tight steering and a truck that tracks straight and true down the road make towing a lot more pleasurable than driving a truck with sloppy steering. The latter is what brought a 2008 Ram 2500 4x4 owner to Richard McFarland's alignment rack at Dunks Performance in Springfield, Oregon. The owner, an avid trailerist, was complaining about steering wobble that had been getting worse over the past few months.

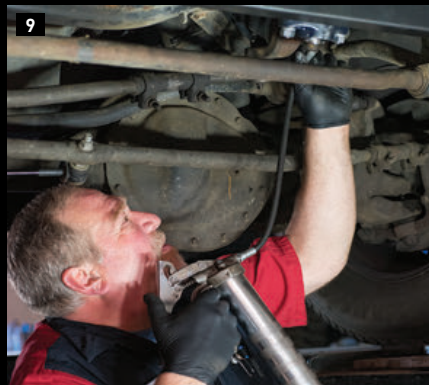
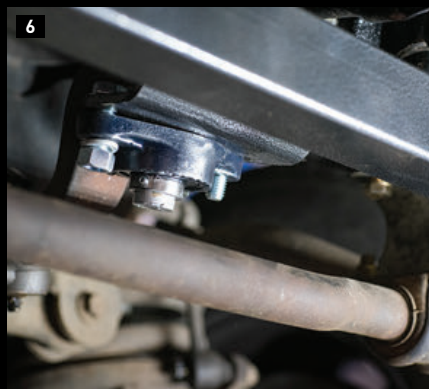
McFarland's eyes went right to the suspected culprit: the steering box, or more specifically, the Ram's pitman arm and sector shaft. What he found was that the retaining nut holding the steering system's pitman arm to the shaft had worked itself loose, and there were signs of flexing in the steering box from the way it was mounted at the factory.

Fortunately, McFarland didn't see any damage to the sector shaft or the steering box, which the veteran service technician had seen a number of other times on four-wheel-drive 2500/3500 Rams that had come in for similar steering-related issues. Other owners' problems have ranged from loose or missing pitman-arm nuts, like McFarland found, to cracked pitman arms and broken sector shafts, all stemming from excessive flex in the steering-box components.

BD Diesel Performance, a British Columbia company specializing in performance products for diesel vehicles, noted the same issues and designed a Steering Box Stabilizer kit that acts as insurance against such potential steering concerns on Ram trucks. The kit's box-tube



[1] Use an impact gun or socket wrench with a 1¹¹/₁₆-inch socket (1¹³/₁₆-inch for 2009 and newer models) to remove the sector-shaft retaining nut and lock washer. Keep the lock washer handy. **[2]** Install the supplied sector-shaft bolt with a 1¹/₂-inch-deep socket and torque to 180 lb.-ft. This special bolt serves as the new support-bearing shaft. **[3]** Remove the four 15mm front sway-bar retaining bolts. Let the sway bar rotate down so the BD support bar can be slid between the sway-bar brackets and the frame rails. The bar's bearing-plate tab should be centered on the sector-shaft nut.



[4] Reattach the sway-bar brackets over the bar to the frame rail using the 17mm bolts supplied with the kit. Don't torque until after the sector-shaft support bearing is in place. **[5]** The sector-shaft support bearing uses $\frac{1}{32}$ -inch Allen setscrews to lock it to the sector shaft. The heavy-duty bearing assembly has a grease fitting to keep it well lubricated. Place a little anti-seize lubricant on the shaft and in the bearing to make future removal easier. **[6]** Drop the bearing's two 19mm mounting bolts in from above the support-bracket tab, then place the lock washers and nuts on the bolts. **[7]** Make sure the pitman arm rotates without any binding, then tighten the bearing assembly's mounting bolts and torque the sway-bar bracket bolts to 40 lb-ft, per Ram specs. **[8]** Remove the bearing assembly's setscrews, apply the supplied thread-locker, then reinstall and tighten. Be sure to check the setscrews and all mounting bolts again after 100 miles. **[9]** The last step is to lube the bearing assembly using a multipurpose grease, such as Prolong EP 2.

support bar mounts between the frame rails and the truck's front stabilizer-bar brackets. It has a steel tab that fits around the steering-sector shaft where a special bearing keeps the steering box anchored while allowing the sector shaft to turn freely.

"Installing the steering-box stabilizer gives a better steering feel, replaces the retaining nut with a bolted-in bearing support, and eliminates steering wobble and wander," says McFarland. "When this is in place, you know the steering system will keep its integrity."

BD makes Steering Box Stabilizer kits to fit most 2003 and later Ram 2500/3500 trucks. Kits retail for \$195 and include a powder-coated support bar with four-bolt, six-bolt or Borgeson mounts, a sector-shaft bolt, bearing assembly and heavy-duty mounting hardware. The kit takes less than

an hour to install without special tools.

When the Ram 2500 owner returned to the shop a couple of days later towing his trailer, his comments to McFarland were typical of what others who'd had the BD Steering Box Stabilizer kit installed had told him: that the Ram's steering was now more responsive and the truck drives better than when it was new. The long-term benefits can't be felt because they relate to keeping those finicky moving steering parts from premature failure. 🚚

BD Diesel Performance

800-887-5030, www.dieselperformance.com

Dunks Performance

541-726-1006, www.dunksperformance.com



The BD Steering Box Stabilizer kit includes a powder-coated box-tube support bar, a sector-shaft bolt and bearing assembly, and high-strength mounting hardware.

Under Pressure

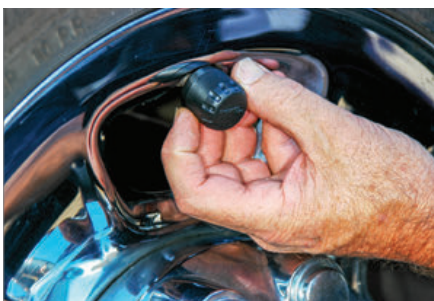
The Pulse TPMS offers a big screen, easy-to-navigate buttons and a host of new features

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

The importance of checking tire condition and pressure cannot be understated, especially when there's 10 tons of metal and fiberglass tooling down the highway at 65 MPH. Most experts will tell you to keep an eye on all the tires, before and during travel. Constant tire monitoring is the best way to keep tabs on tire pressure.

Fortunately, there are a number of aftermarket tire-pressure monitoring systems (TPMS) available today — and even several factory ones — that will keep you apprised of tire pressures at all times. One of the latest is a new model from PressurePro, the Pulse, which shares many of the same features as other systems but stands out from the crowd in a few areas.

The Pulse offers all of the features you'd expect in a contemporary TPMS, such as multiple-vehicle and -tire combinations, low- and high-pressure warnings and temperature alerts. It even utilizes the same type of wheel sensors commonly found in other systems. The areas that really stand out with the Pulse are the large, easy-to-view screen, the sufficiently sized



Sensors simply screw onto the ends of the Schrader valve in the tire rim. This is a common type of sensor used for aftermarket tire-pressure monitoring systems. The heavy-duty RAM suction-cup mount really clings to the windshield. It is easy to attach to any window or other smooth surface and provides a good amount of articulation.

buttons with clear labeling and the seriously rugged RAM suction-cup mount.

Besides assembling the suction mount and running the antenna and power wires, installation of the Pulse requires very little time and effort. After finding a suitable windshield location to affix the suction-cup bracket and monitor, install the antenna by simply routing the antenna wire out of the way (usually along the headliner) and sticking it to a section of the windshield or window that's not close to metal, using the supplied double-sided tape. The instructions suggest placing the antenna near the center of the windshield, but I found this to be slightly obtrusive. I easily relocated it to the driver's side of the rear slider window in the pickup. This had no bearing on the reception of the signals, which never failed. The power cable was run out of harm's way to a 12-volt DC receptacle in the dash.

From this point, it was a matter of following screen prompts, such as inputting current time and date, to begin the initial setup. After this step, following the on-screen and written instructions, the sensors were installed on the valve stems on each tire. The sensors can be programmed for two low-pressure alert levels, a high-

pressure alert level and to let the driver know when the temperature reaches 194 degrees F. There is also a notification in the event of a quick leak, and the data can be stored on an SD card for downloading into a computer.

Once all of your ideal settings are programmed, the power button is pressed twice, and it's in monitoring mode, ready for travel. The Pulse is capable of reading pressures up to 250 PSI, and although not critical to most trailer owners, the system can monitor up to 80 tires and up to five stored vehicles.

The Pulse performed flawlessly, but we found the monitor's large size to be both a plus and a minus. While it proved to be accurate, and the big screen and buttons are easy to see and use, we found it somewhat difficult to find a location for the monitor that was to our liking, but the robust RAM mount helped mitigate that problem. The PressurePro Pulse retails for \$340. 🚚

PressurePro

800-959-3505, www.pressurepro.us

ON THE BIG SCREEN » The monitor for the new PressurePro Pulse may be a bit on the large side for finding a suitable mounting location, but the screen is easy to read, and the buttons are large enough for big fingers.



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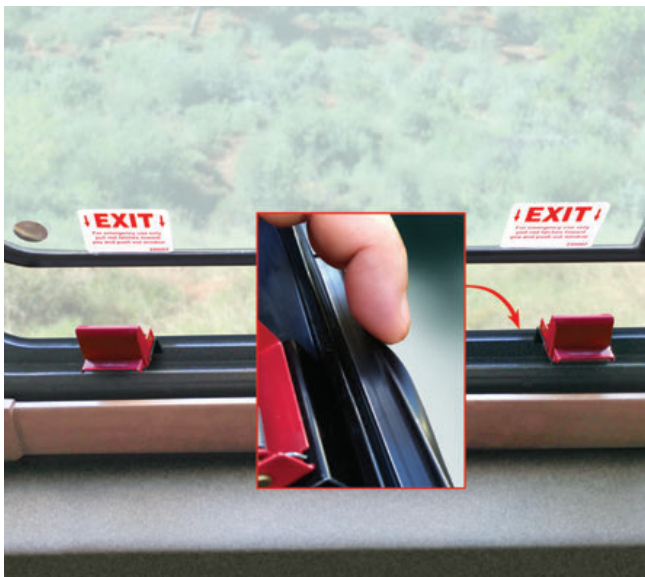
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Make a Clean Break

There has never been a reason to use the emergency-exit window in my 2001 McKenzie Lakota fifth-wheel, but after reading an article about RV smoke detectors, I decided to test the exit. I found that it would not budge until I hit it hard enough to almost break the glass. This would have been a bad situation in a real fire, especially for my wife if she happened to be alone in the RV.

As it turns out, the Arizona heat had dried out the window's foam seal and adhered it to the frame. After removing the original seal and replacing it with material from a local hardware store, the emergency exit now opens easily.

This simple check and inexpensive fix could save lives.

Bryan Berlin, Tucson, Arizona



When the Cat's Away...

Mice inside your RV are not only messy but destructive as well. One of the most common entry points for mice is where the water hose comes into the basement through a standard 4-inch hole.

To block this entry, I bought a cover that is designed to fit the hole. After hacksawing out a section just large enough to accommodate the hose, I cut a piece of SOS steel-wool soap pad large enough to stuff in and fill the hole around the hose. Mice will chew on cheese, electrical wires and plastic water lines, but not on soapy steel wool.

You can sleep tight in your RV because not a creature will be stirring — not even a mouse!

Larry MacDonald, Victoria, British Columbia



Stick a Sock Over It

I purchased acrylic beverage cups for use in our RV. While unbreakable, they can get scratch marks where they rub against other cups or the cabinet walls.

To protect them when traveling, I slip an inexpensive knee-high stocking over each one. The nylon stockings stretch over most cup sizes and shapes. I use the same method to keep our glass wine goblets from breaking. The stockings even fit over coffee mugs and flower vases.

I bought a box of 10 pairs of knee-high stockings — 20 individual stockings — for about \$8. That's cheap protection for about 40 cents per cup.

Helen Campbell, Sedona, Arizona 🚐

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On-the-Road Sun Blocker

With the risk of skin cancer on the rise, sunburn on the left arm and neck of drivers and the right side of front-seat passengers isn't a matter to be taken lightly. Xpel Technologies claims its new Prime XR window film blocks 99 percent of the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays. The film, guaranteed for the life of the vehicle, is also said to block more than 80 percent of solar heat and infrared radiation, keeping the interior cooler. Unlike dyed or metallized window treatments, Prime XR has no adverse effect on cellular or Bluetooth connectivity, and the company claims the tinted film doesn't violate state vehicle or traffic laws for visibility. The Xpel website lists trained installers and where to find them.

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Side-by-sides have taken over the recreational ATV world. Adventuresome RVers shopping for the perfect model to stow in the back of their toy haulers should take a test spin in the Polaris General. Available in Base, Premium, Deluxe and 4-Seat models, the General is built for exploring designated off-highway-vehicle areas far beyond the confines of camp. Its 1,000cc four-stroke engine, automatic all-wheel-drive system and class-leading suspension handle the toughest terrain with ease, while comfy high-back bucket seats and tight-turning power steering make the journey pleasurable. A very long list of upgrades, from onboard navigation systems to heated and cooled cabs, adds to the fun.

MSRP: Starting at \$15,999
888-704-5290

www.polaris.com/en-us/general-utv
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Rock-Steady Reese

Cequent Performance Products has taken integrated sway control on weight-distributing hitches to a new level with the Reese Steadi-Flex system. The heavy-duty Steadi-Flex has wide, tapered spring bars and a simple pin-and-clip assembly to reduce wear on the cast head and built-in sway-control friction pads, which are outfitted with state-of-the-art pad material sourced from the automotive industry. Installing the new Steadi-Flex system doesn't require drilling, and setup is easy, according to Reese. Steadi-Flex is available in 1,000/10,000-, 1,200/12,000- and 1,400/14,000-pound hitch-weight/gross-trailer-weight combinations and comes with a limited lifetime warranty. Assembly hardware and chains are included.

MSRP: \$824
800-632-3290

www.reeseprod.com/products
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Waste Management

At some point an RV owner could face a situation that requires replacement of a gray- or black-water holding tank — not a fun job. But when it has to be addressed, Icon Technologies makes the task simpler with an array of original-equipment-style replacement tanks in tough ABS plastic. In all, 19 new sizes ranging from 6 to 76 gallons

are available, with 10 more tanks coming soon to fill any application gaps. Icon tanks have a variety of drain configurations with the standard RV 3-inch outlet spigot and four level-sensing probes preinstalled. The new models all match commonly used OEM gray- and black-water tanks, making replacement easier for RV-repair shops as well as do-it-yourselfers. ABS adhesive and fittings are also available.

MSRP: \$135 to \$450. 888-362-4266

www.icondirect.com/categories/rv-exterior-parts/holding-tanks
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61840/61207
68146

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Customer Rating
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61969/61970

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Customer Rating
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TORQUE WRENCHES PITTSBURGH PRO

Customer Rating
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1/4"	2696/61277
3/8"	807/61276
1/2"	62431/239

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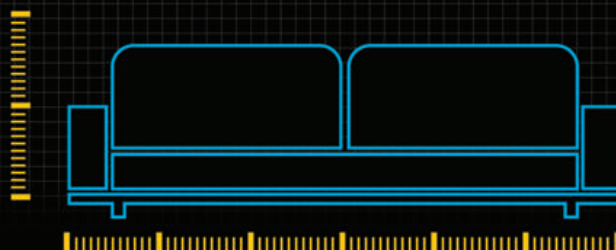
SWAPPING THE SOFA

Q We have a 2011 Keystone Montana Mountaineer rear-kitchen 28-foot fifth-wheel. I would like to replace the sofa with a new regular sofa. Is it possible, and how would I go about it? Can I get it through the door, or will I have to go through a big window?

Diane Jackson, Mill Spring, North Carolina

A Well, Diane, it depends. Some RV furniture can be disassembled to a point that it will fit through the trailer's entry door. If it can't, then, yes, removing a window is the next best option — if there is one big enough. Measure carefully.

As far as replacing the sofa with a "regular" sofa is concerned, if the new couch you have selected will fit in the same space, it should be OK. I would consider a couple of things, though, before making a choice. First, does the new sofa weigh a lot more than the old one? Some



residential furniture can weigh quite a bit more than the original pieces. Second, is the residential sofa actually better than an upgraded RV model?

We recently replaced a sofa and two rockers in a 2013 travel trailer with a new trifold sofa and theater seating from Lippert Components' Thomas Payne Collection and are very happy with the results (look for details in a future issue). A number of other providers also offer great selections of upgraded yet lightweight RV furniture. — **Chris Dougherty**

BRAKE-PEDAL PULSING

Q We just returned from a vacation in Rocky Mountain National Park. Now there is a slight pulsing in my 2013 Ford Expedition's brake pedal. I tow a 5,000-pound Lance 1995 travel trailer with the Expedition. The Expedition has the full factory tow package, plus I've upgraded the rear sway bar with a Hellwig sway bar. Looking through the wheels, I can see one front rotor is darker than the other three. I think I may have overheated and warped it.

I have seen heavy-duty rotors that are drilled and slotted in advertisements that claim they run cooler. Will a new stock replacement rotor be enough for the future? These rotors are sold in sets with upgraded pads being front-set and back-set; should all four be slotted and drilled?

The Expedition is tow rated at 9,200

pounds from the factory. We are looking at a new travel trailer that weighs 7,100 pounds.

Other than this pulsing brake pedal, we had no problems coming across the plains and going up the passes to camp at Grand Lake in Colorado.

Pat Short, Chicago Ridge, Illinois

A A pulsing brake pedal is usually a sign of warped rotors, so you're right on target with that assessment. Race-car drivers use drilled and slotted rotors because they cool more effectively, and using them on your Expedition would also work the same way. As long as you need to replace a warped rotor, and it's usually best to replace rotors in pairs, you may as well go with the slotted and drilled models.

More to the point, take a look at your driving habits or equipment to see what went wrong that caused the ro-

tors to warp. If your trailer brake control is set too lightly, the trailer won't be doing its share of braking, and that causes extra strain on the tow vehicle's brakes, possibly causing overheating and warping.

When driving downhill, try shifting to a lower transmission gear to have engine compression braking help maintain a safe road speed. If you head down a long grade in overdrive gear, for example, you'll be laying on those brakes a lot, with the resulting overheating and warping. Shift out of overdrive at the very least, and shift down farther, also reducing your speed, to maintain a safe speed down a long grade. Better to take a couple more minutes to descend the grade and arrive safely, with all of your equipment intact. — **Jeff Johnston**

RAM BRAKE-CONTROLLER SETTINGS

Q Regarding the ongoing saga of Ram brake-controller settings that started with Bob Smith's "Can't Stop" letter in the November 2015 issue, I have a 2013 Ram 2500 turbo-diesel. I've gone through all the menu settings

THE TECH TEAM



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



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

that were mentioned by Dave Thompson in July's "Settings for Ram Brake Controller" letter, and I still can't properly stopping my 32-foot, 16,000-pound Northwood Arctic Fox fifth-wheel. The controller is set on Heavy Trailers, with the gain set at its maximum of 10. I have been dealing with this issue for months with no remedy.

Both Ram dealers in my area are clueless. I've heard that replacing the drum brakes with disc brakes would help, but that's too expensive for me. My tire man says he may be able to adjust the drum brakes, which will be the next thing to try.

Ron Brandolino, Tehachapi, California

A There's no reason to think you need to install a trailer disc-brake system. Those electric-over-hydraulic disc systems do a fantastic job with braking power, but they're strictly optional. The electric drum brakes on your trailer are perfectly suited for stopping the trailer, provided, of course, they're working right. The first step is a thorough inspection of the brakes to make sure they're in good working order and not caked with escaped bearing grease, for example, and a check of the power being delivered to the brakes. With the manual brake application lever applied in the truck, each brake magnet should be receiving a healthy 2.5 amps of current.

If the amperage is low or nonexistent, you need to trace some wiring to find the cause. Look for corroded ground connections or broken or corroded power-wire joints. If the brake power wires are routed inside the axle (a common practice for trailer-axle manufacturers), the wire could be worn, shorting out or even broken inside the axle. Replacing those wires with external wires, visible for easier inspection, is not a bad idea. This inspection should go all the way to the trailer-wiring plug and the truck's receptacle, as there could be a break in the circuit there, too. You didn't state your trailer's age, but it's possible you may have one or more bad magnets as they, too, wear out and fail. A complete trailer wire and brake inspection will likely solve the braking problem. — **J.J.**

DOUBLE-TOWING LEGALITY

Q We would like to tow a boat or snowmobile trailer behind a 25-foot fifth-wheel. In Oregon, that is illegal. How do we go about changing this law?

Lloyd F. Jones, Klamath Falls, Oregon

A It would be a tough row to hoe to change that kind of motor vehicle law, Lloyd, without a person being tied in closely to a state's legislative process.

Each state's motor vehicle department has its own specialists and engineers that believe their state is doing it right and other states maybe not so much. That's why we have such widely varying speed-limit laws on virtually identical types of highways, with different or the same speed limits for cars, vehicles towing trailers and cars, SUVs or trucks, and so on. Each set of experts has its opinion on double towing two trailers



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behind a privately operated noncommercial tow rig like a family pickup.

You could go through the signature-gathering and fact-finding process and get your local representative to lobby for the change, but realistically, you may need to find a different towing hardware arrangement to pack along the extra gear you have planned. — J.J.

GENERATOR AND AIR CONDITIONER USE

Q Questions about running air conditioners from solar panels or small generators abound. I'm one of the many RVers struggling with the compatibility gap between the generator and the air conditioner. After much studying and experimentation, I would like to get your input on an observation I have made.

A typical 13,500-Btu roof A/C unit draws around 13.5 running amps with approximately 70 locked rotor amps (within the first second). This is what

prevents its ability to run on a small 2,000-watt generator.

With the newer inverter technology available in residential A/C units, there is no locked rotor amp surge, since the compressor ramps up to speed and the running amps are also significantly reduced. For example, the SuperAir 12,000-Btu unit starts up at 1 amp and ramps to a peak of 6.9! As the temp comes down to the set point, the compressor gradually reduces its speed and amp draw, rather than shutting off, allowing it more stable control and eliminating any restart problems.

Using air conditioning with inverter technology, it would seem that a small 2,000-watt generator could easily cool off an RV with power to spare. Do you know of any companies looking into or planning to offer a rooftop inverter air conditioner?

Jim McConn, via email

A To answer your easy question, Jim, no, we don't know of any such

A/C models coming down the road. You could contact the A/C manufacturers directly and pose this question to them for further updated information. There may not be any such models coming out for RVs due to cost, the economy of scale or both.

If you design an A/C for residential use, you have millions of potential customers. An A/C aimed at the RV market has a much smaller potential customer base, and that means fewer unit sales for spreading around the cost of development and the like. Appliance cost is all-important in the RV industry, so that may prevent this technology from entering the RV marketplace.

The best way to run one of today's air conditioners with a small generator is by using two of them. Honda has a coupling kit available for its 2,000-watt inverter model that combines the generator output and cranks out enough juice to power an A/C. — J.J.

GENSET SHUTDOWN

Q Regarding Steve Amen's "Genset Quits" question in the August issue, all modern Onan gensets have diagnostic features. Depending on the age and model, you need to know which button to push and for how long, and record the flashing light or readout. A secret code will then tell you what the last shutdown was. This isn't a cure-all, but at least you can give the information to the servicepeople to help with the issue.

If you have the owner's manual, or can find it on the internet, it usually describes the process of getting the trouble code. A little info like this can go a long way in getting the problem taken care of quickly.

Tim Stoecker, Richfield, Wisconsin

A Thank you for the suggestion, Tim. In this case, it all sort of boils down to reading the owner's manual or digging deeper into what you can learn about a product. Signal-light trouble-code readouts are available on a variety of products, and it's just a matter of knowing how to interpret those codes. — J.J.

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STILL SMOOTHING OUT THE BUMPS

Q After reading "Smoothing Out the Bumps" by Bill and Jenn Gehr in the September 2014 issue, I purchased the Joy Rider shock system in 2015. This was installed on my Keystone Cougar fifth-wheel. Recently, while on vacation in Colorado, it came to my attention that one of the shocks had broken loose. Upon inspection, I found that two of the brackets that fasten the shocks to the axle had stress cracks, and one had completely fractured.

I contacted the manufacturer, RV Improvement Systems, and they said the problem was due to the fact that the bracket extensions were too short. This did not allow for adequate travel of the shock's piston, causing the shock absorber to bottom out and stress the brackets to the point of fracturing. New, longer extensions are now available, and RVIS sent replacements, in addition to new tie-plate brackets.

Please inform your readers so they can inspect their trailers if they had this system installed.

Curtis Paulson, Crystal Lake, Illinois

A Thank you for bringing up this issue, Curtis. Sometimes things are missed in fabrication that come to light in real-world use. We hope any readers who have the Joy Rider system will see your letter and check their installation. — **C.D.**

WRENCH WARNING LIGHT

Q I drove to Alaska in 2005 in a new Ford F-350 carrying a 9-foot Alpen-lite truck camper. During this trip of 11,500 miles, the truck rarely shifted out of overdrive. Early on, I found that if I used my foot in hilly country, the drop in speed was negligible, and the truck would not downshift, whereas with cruise control engaged, it would, usually two gears, and then it would shift up one gear until it topped the hill, when it would go back to overdrive.

I now have about 85,000 miles on that truck, most of them carrying a 9.5-foot Lance truck camper or pulling a 30-foot Avion

(continued on page 71)

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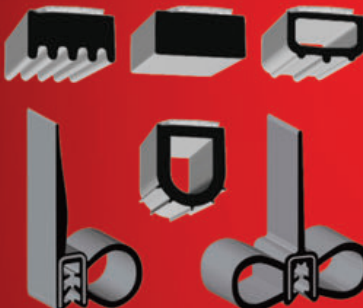
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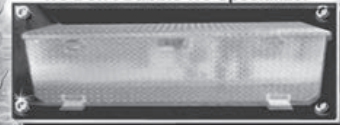


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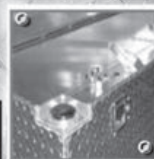
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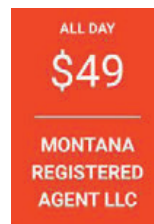
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(continued from page 67)

trailer. About four or five times when I wasn't paying attention while driving with cruise control engaged, the truck shifted down two or three gears, and the wrench warning light appeared on the instrument panel. After stopping and checking the oil, etc., I restarted the truck. The warning light was gone, and I proceeded as normal.

My question is, should I invest the several hundred dollars that my Ford service manager says it will cost to check out this situation? His contention is that an over-boost situation could blow up the engine. I am skeptical, because that is exactly what all of performance chips do intentionally, and my truck is completely stock.

Frank A. Turner Jr., Temple, Texas

A If the wrench light comes on, it can be a serious issue, Frank, and I would get it looked at. There should be codes in the computer that will give an indication of why the light came on. (And this should not cost you "several hundred dollars.")

While you are correct that some performance chips may increase turbo boost, most are designed to prevent an over-boost situation. The light could be coming on due to excessive boost that is high enough to cause severe damage, but the technician can't know that unless he uses a scan tool to determine what code (or codes) the ECU or transmission control is throwing. — **C.D.**

TRAILER-TIRE SPEED RATINGS

Q I drive 60 to 65 MPH on the interstate towing our Rockwood Mini Lite trailer with my Ford F-150 and constantly am having the doors blown off by fifth-wheelers, travel trailers and anything else considered an RV. (My wife says that is no exaggeration because she thinks we are the slowest RV on the road.) Is there any way to measure or estimate the effect that speed alone has on tire failures?

Ken Freund's "RV Tires 101" article in the December 2015 issue mentioned speed and increasing tire inflation, and Bob Livingston's "Maxxis ST Tires"



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in the September 2016 issue said the tires are rated to 65 MPH. Am I continuing to beat a not-so-dead-horse?

Bert Farnell, Burleson, Texas

A Actually, Bert, that's a really important point you make about trailer speed and tire ratings.

Speed ratings on tires are an indication of what the tire is tested at and therefore should be manufactured to withstand. From an owner's standpoint, the only way to gauge whether a tire can truly handle a certain speed is to ensure that it has been tested at the speed you want to drive. Exceeding the tire's rating can theoretically cause a reduction in its lifespan or, worse, lead to a tire failure.

With Special Trailer (ST) tires, the sidewall is thicker to withstand sideways dragging, which happens particularly on tight turns. If a tire is overloaded, it can cause heat to build up more in that type of tire, which can lead to a failure, especially if the tire is underinflated. This is why knowing the weight of your RV (weighed by wheel position, if possible, or if not, on a truck scale) and maintaining the correct pressure in all the tires are so important.

For instance, Carlisle Tire has increased some of its trailer tire ratings to N (87 MPH) or L (75 MPH), but still recommends towing a trailer at no more than 60 MPH. Another brand of trailer tires has a speed rating of M (81 MPH) on at least one of its ST tires.

As a general rule, ST tires are assumed to be rated to run no faster than 62 or 65 MPH, unless rated otherwise, which can be determined on the tire's sidewall. To prevent tire failure and potential damage to your trailer caused by a blowout, that speed should not be exceeded. — **C.D.**

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Betting the Farm

When raising cattle in the Smoky Mountains didn't work out, this couple created an idyllic zip-line haven and soared to new heights



Marc Postlewaite always wanted to live on a farm, so when he sold his computer-chip business, he and his wife, Marion, bought one. It's on 150 acres in east Tennessee among the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains. I was surprised when he told me that they once raised prize Hereford cattle here, since I was looking at rugged, mountainous terrain — not exactly what I associate with cattle.

"Our cattle were clever. They adapted. Their legs on one side were longer than the other two, so they had no problem grazing on a slope," he told me. "Kidding aside, we have 50 acres of pastureland. We had about 25 head. Per acre, cattle do better here than out West because we have plenty of grass. We get more rain. In the winter, of course, I brought in hay."

Life was good on the farm, but Marc and Marion got lonely. The kids were gone, and it was just the two of them and a couple of dogs.

In 2009, Mother Nature hit them pretty hard. Later, however, she must have felt some remorse, because she showed Marc how to recover from it.

After a serious drought, hay and feed prices climbed so high that Marc and Marion couldn't afford to keep the cattle, so they decided to put the farm up for sale and move to town. But before they moved, they joined friends on a long-planned cruise to Alaska.

Alaska was a new experience. Still, the mountains reminded Marc of home. On a port visit, he rode a zip line — more than a few times, actually.

"I got to thinking," Marc told me. "I could put some of these zip lines in my mountains. If folks can make it work in Alaska, where they shut down all winter, I can make it work in Tennessee. So I called the realtor and took the farm off the market."

That's the short of how the Postlewaite farm became Foxfire Mountain Adventure Park. Marc now has 10 zip lines. Some, he says, are the highest, longest and most scenic in the South.

"How high?" I asked.

"Well, the Statue of Liberty is 305 feet tall," he said. "On our new Goliath, you are at 475 feet above the ground. It's the second highest in the country."



(Top) The Foxfire Mountain Museum has a three-dimensional map of the property that gives an idea of the depth of the valleys that the 10 zip lines pass over. **(Above)** At an elevation of 475 feet, Foxfire's Goliath zip line is the highest in the Smoky Mountains.

Their son, Matthew, and his wife, Stephanie, now run the place. Matthew is studying cider-making, and next year they are putting in a cidery. Last year they built what Marc believes is the longest swinging bridge in the country.

When I met Stephanie, she was taking out a group of beginners on the zip lines. She handed me a harness, a trolley bar and a helmet, and said, "You're going zip-lining." She was very convincing.

We started on a short zip line that was a few feet off of the ground. After that, each one got higher, longer and more addictive. I did have one problem. It was taking that step off the platform, which is like a short, sloping, diving board where the drop is 25 feet. Taking that step conflicted with years of acquiring skills on how to live a long life. At the end of the platform, however, the harness tightened around me, and I knew that from then on nothing was up to me. The laws of gravity took over, and I was in for a great ride.

Foxfire Mountain Adventure Park also offers climbing walls, a 60-foot controlled free fall, an aerial-ropes course, a kids' obstacle course, an 8-wheel-drive ATV ride on rugged off-road trails and hiking trails.

The Postlewaites have 30 to 50 people working here, depending on the season. Tourists, mostly families, come in all day. Marc's kids and grandkids are around most of the time, and he is definitely not lonely. "I've got my farm, and life has never been better," he says.

Welcome to America's Outback. 📧

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