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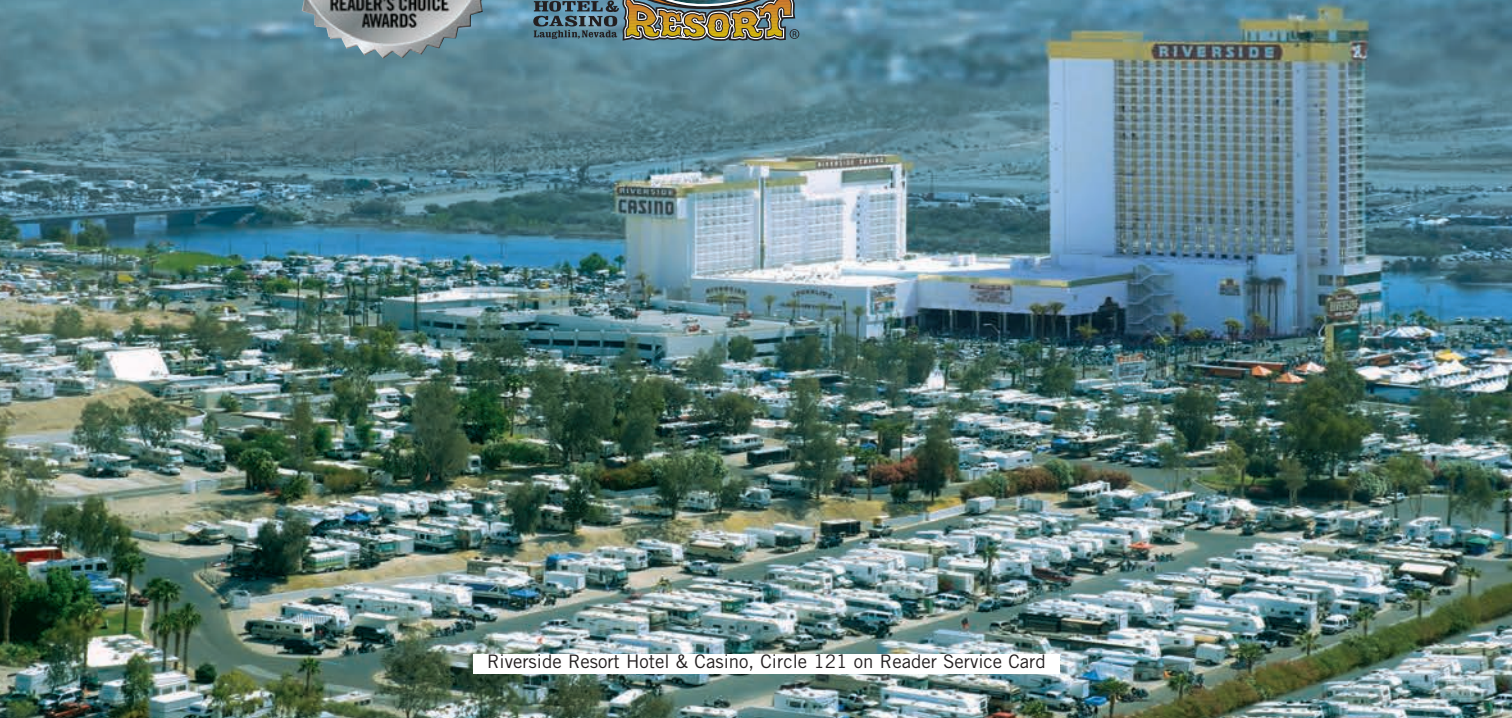
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➤ The bunkhouse Shadow Cruiser 277BHS has an outdoor kitchen and a walk-in pantry. Page 10

On the cover: Relaxing outside at Pala RV Resort near Temecula, California, with the Northwood Fox Mountain 235RLS. Photo by Scott Hirko

Testapalooza

Editors, contributors and our publisher emeritus spent two weeks in America's RV capital



One of the most popular features in *Trailer Life* and our sister publication, *MotorHome*, is the RV tests. A lot of planning and effort goes into each test, including time spent at RV shows, trips to meet manufacturers and the tests themselves that can take up to two weeks to complete between the preparation, evaluation, trips to the scales, photo shoots and cleanup. Our staff and contributors frequently travel to obtain the RVs and drive them to and from camping destinations as part of the evaluation process.

Each August the editors and contributors meet in Elkhart, Indiana, the heart of the RV industry, to conduct a number of tests over the course of two weeks. This has numerous benefits, including being able to train new team members, visit the factories where the RVs are built and complete a number of tests all at once. It also encourages participation by some manufacturers that may be reluctant to ship an RV across the country for a test.

This year participants traveled from both sides of the continent for our two-week Testapalooza, as I like to call it. During the event, we evaluated nine RVs and drove hundreds of miles to test the vehicles and visit a variety of locations for photo shoots. This is not to say that we didn't have fun, too. Resident chefs Lynne Livingston and Mary Bohinc kept the crew well fed with meals that included goodies from Sweet Corn Charlie's, a Millersburg farm that sells the best corn-on-the-cob you can imagine, and Rise'n Roll Bakery, an Amish institution in Middlebury.

We'll roll out the first of the Elkhart tests, the Grand Design Momentum, in the December issue. In this edition we focus attention on the Northwood Fox Mountain 235RLS, a comfortable all-weather fifth-wheel that Donya Carlson towed to Southern



Testapalooza 2017 crew at Elkhart Campground with Amish baked goods for breakfast (left to right): Kevin Livingston, Donya Carlson, Lynne Livingston, Gary Bohinc, Mary Bohinc, Bob Livingston, Chris Dougherty and Shawn Spence. Absent: Barb Riley.

California's San Bernardino Mountains, then to Pala RV Resort near Temecula (page 18). We also install and review Demco's lightweight Recon 21K fifth-wheel hitch (page 40) and Torklift's StableLoad suspension stabilizers (page 46).

RVing is a community activity, and, as such, our travels and stays in campgrounds are much more enjoyable if we all abide by a few common-sense rules. Stephanie and Jeremy Puglisi offer a campground etiquette primer on page 32.

In this season of thanks, I want to thank our loyal readers, subscribers and advertisers. I'm thankful to be part of this great publication. Happy Thanksgiving, and we'll see you down the road! 🚚

— Chris Dougherty, Technical Editor

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52242	22'1"-24'	52247	34'1"-37'



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52251	Up to 23'	52255*	31'1"-34'
52252	23'1"-25'6"	52256*	34'1"-37'
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64839	15'1"-18'	64844	26'1"-28'6"
64840	18'1"-20'	64845	28'7"-31'6"
64841	20'1"-22'	64846	31'7"-34'
64842	22'1"-24'		



5TH WHEEL

Part #:	Length:	Part #:	Length:
64852	23'1"-25'6"	64855	31'1"-34'
64853	25'7"-28'	64856	34'1"-37'
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36042	30'1" - 36'
36049	36'1" - 40'



⚠ Measure the length of your roof, NOT the length of your trailer ⚠



Know Your Tow Rating

I am new to the RV world and just started receiving *Trailer Life*, and it will be a lifetime subscription. This magazine has a lot of valuable information that I greatly appreciate. September's "Half-Ton Towables" by Stephanie and Jeremy Puglisi hit the nail on the head. It was as if it had been written for and about us.

My wife and I purchased a 23-foot 2016 Keystone Outback Ultra-Lite 210. We fell in love with the floorplan after renting RVs for two years to determine what we wanted. There were only three of these units for sale in the country with the decor we wanted, and one was right around the corner from us at a Las Vegas dealership. The salesman saw our 2010 Chevy Tahoe LTZ and said, yes, that will tow this trailer "without a problem." I should have done my research.

On our second trip out, we went over the hills of Utah toward Colorado at 15 miles per hour with white knuckles and 5,500 screaming RPM, and ran out of gas on a lonely road 12 miles from the next small town. That Tahoe was nowhere near capable of towing the trailer safely, let alone without seriously struggling on hills. I felt like a failure as a good husband and a man. Why didn't I have a *Trailer Life* subscription yet?

We traded in the Tahoe for a 2017 Chevy Silverado High Country half-ton truck with a 6.2-liter engine, six-speed transmission and the tow package, and a 12,000-pound tow rating. The difference in towing was like night and day. Driving to Reno and the California beach with the cruise control set, it was like the trailer wasn't even there.

I urge anyone who reads this to do your tow-vehicle research through the manufacturer, read the owner's manual and check the options sticker in the glove box. Don't be fooled by Mr.-Know-It-All salesman trying to make a sale when you're not properly equipped to pull the RV of your dreams.

David Campbell, Las Vegas, Nevada

Best Trip Ever

We've just returned from a 5,200-mile trip from Michigan to Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks, and I wanted to let you know about the performance of our new Goodyear Endurance made-in-the-USA radials. After a frustrating search for American-made trailer tires, I received the August *Trailer Life* with the "Made in America" write-up on these tires and went right out and bought four for the trip.

While I was installing the tires on our 2006 Keystone Laredo fifth-wheel, I noticed that one of the shackles on the leaf springs had broken. I had wanted to upgrade the suspension parts for a while, having read about doing so in past issues, so I installed the Dexter E-Z Flex kit with heavy-duty shackles, bolts and equalizers. It took about four hours in my driveway, and all was done.

The trip was one of the best ever, including pulling my 32-foot fiver over Beartooth Pass. Thanks for the information, and thanks to Goodyear for finally making a trailer tire in the USA.

Michael Brohl, Belleville, Michigan



September's "Half-Ton Towables" touched on the fact that some RV salespeople rely on "magical thinking" to sell a trailer. I know of two instances, including one at an RV show where I spoke up and challenged the salesman. He had told a lady that her Hyundai Santa Fe would tow a 31-foot trailer. I just could not let that stand.

I tried staying with a half-ton truck to pull my trailer but wound up with a Ram 2500 diesel. My half-ton truck had struggled on hills, even with a 20 percent buffer after all the numbers were deducted. I can understand trying to stay with a daily-use half-ton, but I was urged, rightfully, to go super duty.

Martin Meaders, Jefferson, Georgia

Television for Two

Whoever designed the TV-watching area in the Outback trailer featured in September's "Adventure Ahead" should be required to binge-watch *Breaking Bad* and see how his or her neck feels. How could anyone enjoy watching TV in the theater seating at a right angle to the TV?

Chris Horst, Arvada, Colorado

Chris Dougherty responds: *The TV in the Keystone Outback 332FK is on a mount that brings the screen out so it can turn to be viewed from either the couch or the theater seating. If you have more than two people sitting in the living room trying to watch TV, then you have an issue, but since this floorplan is designed as a couple's trailer, I don't think it's a problem. There are pros and cons to every RV, and it's up to each RVer to decide which features are deal breakers.* 🚐

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Believing she was haunted by the spirits of those who died at the hands of a Winchester rifle, Sarah Winchester, heir to the firearms company that bore her husband's family name, kept the home in a perpetual state of construction.

San Jose's Curious Creation

Winchester Mystery House, an eight-room-home-turned-seven-story-mansion in Northern California, has passageways to nowhere, stairs leading to ceilings, doors that open to blank walls and supernatural fun

article by **Pauline Milner**

Amid the high-tech companies in Northern California's Silicon Valley sits an architectural masterpiece dating back to 1884. San Jose's Winchester Mystery House boasts a myriad of anomalies for visitors to explore.

Sarah Winchester, heir to the firearms company that bore her husband's family name, purportedly felt haunted by the spirits of those who perished at the hand of the famous repeating rifle. After purchasing an eight-room farmhouse, Winchester kept the home in a perpetual state of expansion in an apparent effort to confuse, or perhaps appease, the restless souls who plagued her life. Construction continued 24 hours a day until her death in 1922. At that time, workers had created a menagerie of peculiar elements known today as the Winchester Mystery House.

Tours lead guests into a labyrinth of curiosities that include stairs leading to a ceiling, hidden passages, doors that open to more doors or drop-offs, rooms within rooms,

and skylights in floors. The house has certainly earned its place as a National Historic Landmark, as it's also equipped with modern conveniences that were rare at the time, including button-controlled gas lights and elevators, in addition to stunning Tiffany stained-glass windows.

Next year will be a big one for the popular tourist attraction with the release of *Winchester*, a movie starring Helen Mirren as the eccentric heiress. For a limited time, the estate will offer the Explore More Tour as an extension of its Mansion Tour, taking guests to the South Turret Witch's Cap, the only circular room in the home, in addition to other restored areas including the basement and the Crystal Bedroom with mica-embedded wallpaper.

"This tour takes you into sections that have never before been seen by the public," said General Manager Walter Magnuson. "Visitors are able to enter through the front door, which was forbidden when Sarah lived in the home. A winding tour awaits."

Building materials that were stockpiled by Winchester are still being used in the maintenance and restoration of her home. A portion of the house was boarded up after being damaged in the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, leaving much still to be discovered.

Exterior elements of the mansion can be enjoyed free of charge. Impeccable gardens surround the estate. Guests can also visit the gift shop and Winchester Café, and try their luck in Sarah's Attic Shooting Gallery where aiming a rifle will discharge some supernatural fun.

"Our Vintage Products Museum showcases the diversity of the Winchester Company," Magnuson added. "They produced products from tents to roller skates."

Winchester Mystery House is open daily except Christmas and offers ample parking for RVs in a large lot across the street. Tour prices start at \$37.

Winchester Mystery House

408-247-2000

www.winchestermysteryhouse.com

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866-376-5500, www.coyotevalleyresort.com

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San Jose (6 miles away)

408-453-3535, www.trailertel.net

Shadow Cruiser

For 2018, Cruiser RV has added a new floorplan to its light-weight Shadow Cruiser travel trailer line that's targeted at families. The 32-foot 10-inch 277BHS makes 13 in the lineup, and all Shadow Cruisers have been redesigned inside and out with a fresh logo and graphics, a two-tone painted front cap with stone guard, and Ashlyn interior wood and 3-inch hardwood shaker-style doors. To create a more formal feeling in each model, wood accent trim around the ceiling and corners has been added, and cabinet doors feature hidden hinges.

Housed in the 277BHS's 37-inch-deep single slide are a jackknife sofa and a 42x68-inch dinette that convert into beds. Across from the dinette, an L-shaped counter holds the kitchen's large stainless single-basin sink with pullout



sprayer, recessed Furrion range with glass cover and oven, with the 6-cubic-foot refrigerator next to the range and a walk-in pantry around the corner.

The 3/4-inch tongue-and-groove plywood floor covered with linoleum is designed for easy cleaning, and residential-grade carpet is in the slide. As you walk in from the outside, double-bed bunks with substantial storage underneath are on the left, separated by a privacy curtain. The 6-foot 9-inch-high arched ceiling continues into the front bedroom with accent lighting. Nightstands are on each side of a 60x80-inch queen walk-around bed, and USB ports and overhead cabinets are within easy reach.

Gross vehicle weight rating is 9,380 pounds. Fresh- and black-water capacities are 44 and 30 gallons, respectively, and the trailer has two gray-water tanks with 57- and 30-gallon capacities. Base MSRP for the 277BHS is \$27,113. Cruiser RV, 260-562-3500, www.cruiserrv.com

Designed for fun, family and friends: The 2018 277BHS has a walk-in pantry with a built-in coat rack. USB ports are located throughout, and across from the jackknife sofa and dinette is a 39-inch LED HDTV.



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Veterans' Wishes Come True

A Warrior's Wish, a program established by Hope For The Warriors, honors the goals and desires of severely wounded U.S. service members, veterans and their families. Through this program, Bryant Jacobs and Tristan Brown received Jayco Jay Flight travel trailers earlier this year after injuries sustained in combat left them unable to tent camp.

Jacobs, the father of two, plans to explore Utah's state parks with his family in their new SLX 174BH. "Thanks to Hope For The Warriors, this trailer is going to change my family's lives," said Jacobs. "This trailer means that we don't have to sit around dreaming of going camping and weighing the pros and cons of camping in a tent. Being an amputee, it's sometimes difficult to see the outdoors as an option for any period of time."

Brown says he is thankful to be able to enjoy the outdoors again with his family: "I am more at peace in the wilderness. The flexibility the 264BHW provides will help with the never-ending memories of war that haunt me when I am trapped inside my home."

www.hopeforthewarriors.org



Bryant Jacobs



Tristan Brown



Sail, Stay and Play

The Cape May-Lewes Ferry offers a unique way for RVers and other motorists to make their way across 17-mile Delaware Bay between Cape May, New Jersey, and the Delaware beaches. From November 2017 to March 2018, the ferry has seasonal rates that drop the price \$18 and more. The ferry can accommodate RVs up to 13 feet 6 inches in height, and prices for one way

start at \$32 for towables 21 to 24 feet.

Delaware Bay is a bird-watcher's paradise. Lewes, Delaware, has beautiful beaches, tasty culinary specialties and a shopping district with boutique shops. As a bonus, there's no sales tax in Delaware. **Cape May-Lewes Ferry**, www.cmlf.com
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Enchanted RV Park

Timeless enchantment stretches across the painted cliffs at Ghost Ranch in Abiquiú, New Mexico. It's easy to be captivated by the raw beauty of the red, purple, yellow and brown landscapes that inspired artist Georgia O'Keeffe to say, "As soon as I saw it, that was my country. I'd never seen anything like it before, but it fitted to me exactly."

O'Keeffe visited Ghost Ranch for 50 years, gaining inspiration for her iconic canvases of the desert. With a fabled history, Ghost Ranch was originally inhabited by the Navajo and various Native American tribes. Cattle rustlers named it Rancho de los Brujos (Ranch of the Witches), and it evolved into a dude ranch before becoming an artistic and spiritual center.

Now, visitors bring their RVs to

the campground, enjoying the many offerings at the ranch. Guided tours explore O'Keeffe's landscapes, local archaeology and paleontology (dinosaur quarries are on the grounds), and movies filmed on-site (*Cowboys and Aliens*, *City Slickers* and *Wyatt Earp*).

Ghost Ranch is a place where the past and present sit in harmony among the brush-stroked canyons. In talking about it, O'Keeffe said, "There's something that's in the air. It's just different. The sky is different. The stars are different. The wind is different."

Ghost Ranch is open year-round (the bathhouse is closed from October through May) and has full-hookup, partial-hookup and boondocking RV campsites that can be reserved in advance or are first-come, first-served. Pets are allowed for day visitors only. — **Gayvin Powers**
Ghost Ranch Education and Retreat Center
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Jayco's Indiana Expansion

Jayco, manufacturer of travel trailers, fifth-wheels, toy haulers, and Class A and C motorhomes, is adding a 237,000-square-foot facility on its Middlebury, Indiana, campus. Earlier this year, the company expanded its production facilities with two 128,000-square-foot buildings for Eagle brand travel trailers and fifth-wheels. Said Matt Thompson, Jayco's chief operating officer, "We're seeing unprecedented growth in the RV industry. Jayco is actively seeking ways to meet consumer demand." The new mega-facility will add approximately 300 jobs. 800-283-8267, www.jayco.com

ENTREPRENEUR



Vintage Trailer Bar

Scott Mosteller turned a 12-foot 1946 Mobilglide Globetrotter travel trailer into a mobile bar for rental in Southern California. The vintage Hello Penny Bar, with onboard power, a solar system, two 65-quart coolers and serving sinks that hold 100 bottled drinks, is skillfully restored and adds a touch of recreation to cocktail hour at birthdays, weddings and corporate events or just for fun. The company will deliver and pick up the Penny Bar and supply staffers, if requested. Hello Penny can also be used as a smoothie stand, doughnut counter or coffee bar. 760-519-7093, www.hellopenny.com

RV SERVICE



Truma Opens Florida Center

Truma, manufacturer of heating, water and LP-gas systems for RVs, has opened its first RV service center in Lakeland, Florida. The company has been providing service in Europe for 65 years and is continuing the tradition in the United States and Canada. The Lakeland center will service Truma products at RVers' homes and nearby campgrounds. Additionally, technicians will install, upgrade and service the Truma AquaGo instant water heater and its other products such as the Truma Combi, a combined forced-air furnace and water heater. www.truma.com/us/en/home

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BitterSweet in Bitterroot

The hills are alive with the sound of music in Montana's Bitterroot Valley where custom guitar builder Ken Rumbaugh handcrafts exquisite guitars in a solar-powered workshop. During our RV travels through the Bitterroot, we visited Rumbaugh's workshop, BitterSweet Guitars, in Hamilton.

Tucked in a small building behind an enormous (and playable) guitar out front, Rumbaugh's shop is filled with exotic woods, tools of every variety, and workbenches covered with guitars, mandolins and other stringed instruments in various stages of construction.

As the sweet smell of wood wafted over us, Rumbaugh showed us each step of building a guitar, from selecting and shaping the wood, to creating the neck and headstock, to attaching the front and back. He learned his craft as a young man from the famous luthiers at Martin Guitar. Today, iridescent abalone and matching rich wood grains make his instruments artistic masterpieces, and he designs each one to meet customers' specific requests.

Rumbaugh is an avid RVer and spends many weekends in his 1993 Empire travel trailer. Lucky neighboring campers listen to pretty melodies coming from one of his small and specially designed travel guitars as he strums in the evening beside his campfire. — *Emily Fagan*

BitterSweet Guitars, 406-363-5211



► Nearby RV Camping

At an elevation of 3,572 feet in southwestern Montana, the small town of Hamilton (population, 4,674) is nevertheless the largest community in the Bitterroot Valley. Its location on the Bitterroot River in the shadow of the Bitterroot Range makes the town a popular destination for fishing, hunting, hiking, mountain biking and other outdoor pursuits.

Hamilton may be small, but it lays claim not only to Ken Rumbaugh's guitar shop but to a Good Sam Park as well. Black Rabbit RV Park offers full hookups, cable TV, Wi-Fi, laundry facilities and hot showers. Open year-round, the park is easily accessible from U.S. Route 93 about 50 miles south of Missoula.

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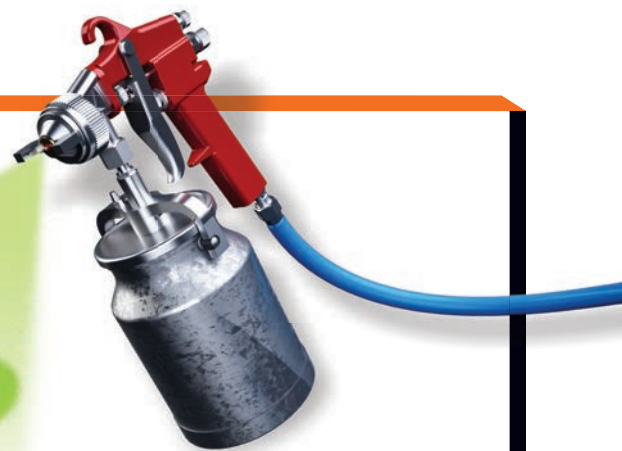


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Geico, Circle 108 on Reader Service Card



Front-Cap Fading

After paying to touch up the paint on his toy hauler, a Florida reader sought help with reimbursement:

► I bought a new 2014 Prime Time Spartan in February 2015. In September 2015, I noticed the paint on top of the front cap was fading where it meets the roof. This was not visible from the ground, and I did not notice it right away.

I contacted Prime Time's warranty division to explain the situation and sent photos. I told them that, as long as the fading didn't get any worse, we would be OK with it. I was assured this communication would be noted in my file so that, if more of the front cap faded, it would be handled under the warranty.

The fading did spread, and this past February after it got down to the middle of the cap, I contacted the warranty division but was told that, without any communication after September 2015 and no documentation prior to the warranty's end, Prime Time could not do anything for us except to supply new decals. I believe my September 2015 email and photos should be considered documentation.

We wound up taking the RV to Indiana to a repair shop that Prime Time's service department recommended for cap repainting. The cost was \$1,536. While at the shop, we noticed at least nine faded Spartan caps in the yard that had been replaced.

On that trip we also went to the Prime Time plant and spoke to James in the service department. He said Prime Time had gotten a batch of bad caps from a supplier, and the same thing was happening to a lot of those caps.

Why did Prime Time not do a recall on the caps, knowing it was a bad product, or at least repair mine when it was brought to the company's attention? Any help you can give would be greatly appreciated.

Ron Ciceri, New Port Richey, Florida

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

RV Resolutions contacted Prime Time Manufacturing on Ron Ciceri's behalf and received the following reply:

We are happy to inform you that, shortly before we received the letter from RV Resolutions, our vendor agreed to cover \$1,500 of this concern. We notified Mr. Ciceri, and a refund check has been sent to him in the amount of \$1,500.

Although we were able to get this taken care of, we want to make sure it is understood that recalls are issued only for safety issues. The paint that is fading is considered a cosmetic issue, and a recall will not be issued.

Nesa Wilson, Retail Manager

Prime Time Manufacturing, Wakarusa, Indiana

Trading Up on Trailer Tires

Concerned that the original tires weren't robust enough to support his travel trailer, a Tennessee reader asked for help getting them replaced:

► I have a 2015 Winnebago Ultralite 30RESS with a 10,000-pound gross vehicle weight rating that I purchased new in June 2015. The tandem-axle trailer came with eight-ply Trail Express ST225/75R15 load range D tires. They have a max load of only 2,350 pounds at 65 PSI — no wonder they are cracked along the edge of the rim. The trailer is always under cover and has tire covers when at RV parks.

Winnebago has a one-year warranty on these tires, but I find them inadequate for the weight of the trailer and believe the company

should reimburse me at least partially for the tires I plan to purchase as replacements. I called the Winnebago Towables division and left several messages that were not returned.

Hubert Mahoney

White House, Tennessee

After RV Resolutions reached out to Winnebago, Hubert Mahoney received a call from his RV dealer and let us know the issue had been resolved to his satisfaction:

Bud Maxey at Cullum and Maxey Camping Center in Nashville called to inform me that Tony Chupp, director of parts and service for Winnebago Towables, agreed to reimburse \$400 of the cost of purchasing new tires for our Ultralite travel trailer.

Thanks to Winnebago for the cooperation and to RV Resolutions for your help in settling this issue. Keep up the good work.

H.M. 📧

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.



FALL 2017 & 2018 RV SHOW LINEUP

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Map#	Event Name	Dates**	Venue
01	Great American RV Show - CO Springs	9/28/17 - 9/30/17	Norris Penrose Events Center
02	Colorado RV Adventure Travel Show	1/4/18 - 1/6/18	Colorado Convention Center
03	Wisconsin RV Show	1/5/18 - 1/7/18	Wisconsin Center District
04	Knoxville RV Show	1/5/18 - 1/7/18	Sevierville Convention Center
05	Savannah RV Show	1/5/18 - 1/7/18	Savannah Int'l Trade & Convention Center
06	Greater Atlanta RV Show	1/5/18 - 1/7/18	Georgia Int'l Convention Center
07	South Carolina RV & Camping Show - Greenville	1/5/18 - 1/7/18	TD Convention Center
08	Mid America RV Show	1/11/18 - 1/14/18	Kansas City Convention Center - Bartle Hall
09	Washington Camping RV Expo	1/12/18 - 1/14/18	Dulles Expo Center
10	Greater Chicago RV Show	1/12/18 - 1/14/18	Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center
11	New Jersey RV & Camping Show - Edison	1/19/18 - 1/21/18	New Jersey Convention & Exposition Center
12	Lexington RV Show	1/19/18 - 1/21/18	Kentucky Horse Park
13	Cincinnati - Dayton RV Show	1/25/18 - 1/28/18	Dayton Convention Center
14	Greater Phoenix RV Show	1/26/18 - 1/28/18	Phoenix Convention Center
15	Minneapolis/St. Paul RV, Vacation & Camping Show	2/9/18 - 2/11/18	Minneapolis Convention Center
16	Richmond Camping RV Expo	2/9/18 - 2/11/18	Richmond International Raceway Complex
17	Chattanooga RV Show	2/16/18 - 2/18/18	Chattanooga Convention Center
18	Atlantic City RV & Camping Show	2/16/18 - 2/18/18	Atlantic City Convention Center
19	Gulf Coast RV Show - Mobile	2/16/18 - 2/18/18	Mobile Convention Center
20	Harrisburg RV & Camping Show - Pennsylvania	2/22/18 - 2/25/18	PA Farm Show Complex & Event Center
21	Columbus RV Show	2/23/18 - 2/25/18	Greater Columbus Convention Center
22	Colorado RV, Sports & Travel Show	3/1/18 - 3/4/18	National Western Complex
23	Central Illinois RV Show - Peoria	3/2/18 - 3/4/18	Peoria Civic Center
24	Rhode Island RV & Camping Show	3/2/18 - 3/4/18	Rhode Island Convention Center
25	Virginia RV Show - Hampton	3/9/18 - 3/11/18	Hampton Roads Convention Center
26	Springfield RV & Camping Show	3/16/18 - 3/18/18	BOS Convention Center
27	Greater Tucson RV Show	3/23/18 - 3/25/18	Tucson Convention Center
28	Good Sam RV Super Show - Indianapolis	4/12/18 - 4/15/18	Indianapolis Motor Speedway

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Northwood Inn

From the high country to the desert, the Fox Mountain 235RLS fifth-wheel is at home in primitive campgrounds and RV resorts

When *Trailer Life's* test dates for the Northwood Fox Mountain 235RLS fifth-wheel were nailed down in the beginning of June, I called to make campground reservations in the Big Bear area of Southern California for the Fourth of July weekend, without much luck. "Was that for the Fourth of July weekend this year or next?" was one woman's smart-aleck reply. "We've been booked for months!"

When a site for a single night became available, I grabbed it — and my husband, Bill, and I headed out in hopes of cancellations. By happy chance, we got sites for several more nights, mov-

ing to a new location each day. We had no trouble maneuvering the 27-foot 10-inch 235RLS into a tight-angled corner site at a full-service RV park one day and a dry campsite sandwiched between large pine trees the next.

After we were done playing in the mountains, I headed to the desert the following weekend with my sister, niece, a friend and her daughter — five girls in a fifth-wheel — to Pala RV Resort in San Diego County. So I had the good fortune to experience the Fox Mountain in the company of one, then four, in both dry campsites and luxury RV resorts, to evaluate the livability of this fifth-wheel.

Okay, so the trailer: For 2018, the satellite-ready 235RLS gets a 12-volt DC battery disconnect and is prewired for solar with a standard 20-watt roof panel. A 60-watt portable unit that plugs into the side of the RV is a \$750 option. Interior colors include Stone in brown tones, and Bronze in black, tan and silver colors.

Most fifth-wheels (with the exception of toy haulers) aren't designed for off-pavement use, but the 235RLS comes standard with some pretty robust equipment for more rugged travels.



Goodyear Marathon tires are paired with heavier-rated axles and bigger brakes. Ground clearance is impressive, too — the lowest point under the trailer offered a generous 11½ inches of ground clearance. Not so generous was the clearance between the trailer's 12-foot, 7-inch roof and the ceiling of some gas-station bays in the small town of Big Bear — in fact, some stations couldn't accommodate us at all, although they were older facilities.

As we arrived at an RV park on the shores of Big Bear Lake in early afternoon, a chili cookoff was already in full swing, with chili stops set up at various RV sites and people spilling out

into the road. Folks in golf carts adorned with patriotic streamers, garlands and American flags, and kids of all ages on bicycles were enjoying a perfect July day.

Settling in, we opened the single slideout that houses the booth dinette, expanding the galley's width by 3 feet, and admired the Fox Mountain logo, paw prints and mountains carved overhead into the wood framing of the slide. The Stone decor with warm brown tones creates a pleasant ambience, and a big 70x38-inch rear window provides sweep-

ing views of the outdoors. Above it, a roomy cabinet with four glass-fronted doors is set in a solid-wood frame.

The galley, with a cathedral arched ceiling that stretches more than 8 feet, is home to a three-speed fan and light fixture that we found difficult to reach. All appliances, including the two-way, 9.5-cubic-foot refrigerator, oven and microwave are stainless steel and stationed close together for convenience. The cabinets stairstep down, leaving space on top (up high) for more storage,





if needed. Some cabinets are hard to reach without a chair or stepladder.

The trailer's control panels are grouped on the end cabinet near the entry door. A 120-volt AC outlet is located next to the entry, so that portion of the counter became a charging station for cell phones. Across the way, the small counter between the door and rear jackknife sofa (two lounge chairs are optional) was a handy drop-off and pickup point for keys, wallets, sunglasses and hats.

The 235RLS is set up well for enjoying the company of others with its combination of elegant and homey touches. Seating for seven is possible with the comfortable leatherette jackknife sofa and booth dinette. Abundant counter space in the kitchen is accessible from both sides.

Across from the streetside dinette, a solid-surface peninsula countertop is the centerpiece for the kitchen and, as I found out later, was useful when three of us were putting together dinner at the same time. My sister chopped up the makings for a salad on one side of the counter, while my niece mashed potatoes across the way, and

I cooked at the three-burner range. Sink covers add even more space to the large countertop, so even as the other two guests popped in to help, the area didn't feel crowded.

Cut into the counter near the entry door is a trash drop that we three used without having to sidestep each other. Housed at the end of the counter is a well-hidden swing-out cabinet for spices and such. Our only complaint was a floor vent parked close to the two-basin sink and counter; our salad ended up short a couple of zucchini slices after they cartwheeled off the counter onto the floor and disappeared into the vent. Moving the vent register closer to the base of the cabinet would be a welcome change in future models.

In total, the living area offers seating for seven, and we found the overall layout ideal for hanging out and enjoying the company of others. Northwood claims that the 235RLS can sleep six,

NORTHWOOD FOX MOUNTAIN 235RLS

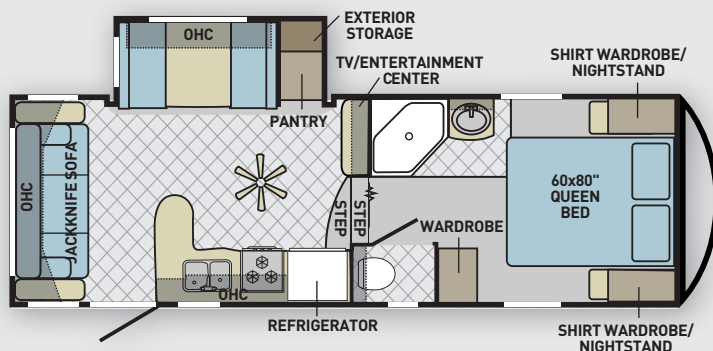


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The vanity, sink and spacious glass-enclosed shower are positioned for good moving-about room, while the toilet is across the aisle behind a door.

which it could if four are of small stature, and kid-size if sharing the sofa. When the dinette was laid flat to make a 74x40-inch bed, it became a favorite lounging place for 6-foot 4-inch Mr. Up-and-Functioning-at-the-Crack-of-Dawn (I don't get it) Bill, who propped pillows against the wall and tucked his feet under him to read the paper and enjoy the view of birds hopping among pines in search of breakfast.

Pleated day/night shades are used throughout the RV, and although they are a good compromise, we had trouble with a few of them sticking. Another thing worth noting is that the slide will meet the kitchen counter in travel mode, blocking access to the refrigerator and bathroom. It will need to be opened, at least partially, if you require access to these areas while on the road.

For a really good night's sleep, we headed up the three carpeted steps to

the walk-around (albeit tight) queen bed. A thoughtful touch is that the cabinets to the left of the stairs are rounded so there are no sharp edges to bump into. Lying in the comfortable bed, the soft headboard was swell to lean our heads against, though we couldn't sit all the way up because of limited headroom.

Reading in bed one morning, I noted the good airflow when Bill opened the entry door and the scent of the outdoors floated back to the bedroom. Overhead is a Fan-Tastic Vent fan with three settings, which can be controlled by a remote without getting out of bed. The remote has a wall cradle so you can keep track of it.

Each side of the bed has its own overhead cabinet, nightstand with drawer, USB port, 120-volt AC outlet and very bright reading lights that got a bit hot to the touch. There are plenty of places to stow things in the wardrobe, sliding drawers and under the bed. Plus, with the attached bathroom, there's the benefit of the vanity and medicine cabinet. A sliding curtain separates the bed from the bath area but doesn't cut the sound of someone washing up at the sink or taking a shower.

The bathroom — with a spot of linoleum flooring by the sink and in the toilet room mingling with carpet — is roomy and set up like a workout circuit. The porcelain toilet is behind a door on the curb side of the room (there's also an overhead cabinet and a ceiling fan), and the sink and large glass-enclosed shower with a seat are out in the open on the opposite side, so you can move from one to the next with plenty of dressing space. A heavier accordion-style door separates the entire bedroom area from the galley below.

After reveling in Big Bear's perfect temperatures, the Fox Mountain's single Airxcel 13,500-Btu ducted air conditioner (a 15,000-Btu unit is optional) got a workout when we set up camp at Pala with 100-plus-degree days. In the morning, as temps started to rise, we could almost feel the trailer stretching with various ticks and expanding creaks as it warmed up.

I sure had a knack for showing up in a party environment with the Fox

SPECIFICATIONS

2018 NORTHWOOD FOX MOUNTAIN 235RLS

Exterior Length	27' 10"
Exterior Width	8'
Exterior Height	12' 7"
Interior Width	7' 9"
Interior Height	8' 2"/galley 6' 9"/bedroom
Construction	Aluminum-frame side walls, steel chassis, one-piece roof membrane on bonded truss system, one-piece fiberglass exterior siding, tongue-and-groove plywood floor. Four-season insulation with R-18 ceiling, R-15 reflective foil insulation in roof and slide
Freshwater Cap.	59 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	36 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	42 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	9.5 cu. ft.
Furnace	30,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu (15,000 Btu optional)
Generator	3.6 Onan LP
Converter	55 amp
Battery	Dealer supplied
Tires	ST225/75R15
Suspension	Leaf spring with Equa-Flex
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full; no cargo)	9,320 lbs.
Hitch Weight	2,200 lbs.
Axle Weight (2)	7,100 lbs.
GVWR	11,500 lbs.
GAWR	5,200 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	2,180 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$42,966
MSRP, As Tested	\$50,130
Warranty	1 year

Northwood

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Mountain, which seemed apropos, since Northwood is celebrating its 25th anniversary through July of next year. At Pala, which hosts a themed weekend each month, we joined a *Survivor* party that started out with designing team flags. In between the outdoor games, we headed back to cool down in the RV.

With the A/C unit and fan in full swing, and thanks in part to four-season insulation, the interior stayed won-

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(Above) An entertainment center with a 32-inch HDTV and Jensen stereo is incorporated into cabinetry with abundant storage and counter space. The kitchen is set up well for folks who like to cook and entertain. (Right) Above the comfortable queen bed is a remoted-controlled Fan-Tastic Vent (not pictured) that works extremely well.



derfully cool, as long as there weren't a lot of comings and goings (a challenge with two teenagers). From the inside, opening the screen door was a breeze, courtesy of a round plastic push-down knob so the screen can be opened without sliding the plastic first.

Outside, the aerodynamic front cap and eye-catching graphics drew attention to the Fox Mountain's curb appeal. A weatherproof King RV Media Bluetooth music-streaming speaker and light over the entry door grabbed the attention of several people almost immediately. We paired a cell phone to the fixture to enjoy a music and light show outdoors. The electric Carefree Travel'r awning with adjustable pitch and up-high-and-out-of-the-way arms covered our favorite spot to park ourselves. And we were the envy of our neighbors after the husband bopped his wife on the head with their RV's manual awning while setting up camp.

Cavernous exterior pass-through storage measures 41x19 inches at the smallest opening, so five camp chairs, several folding tables, wheel chocks and cases of Diet Coke didn't come close to filling the space. The compartment is lighted at both sides, and magnetic catches hold the doors up out of the way. There is additional storage in the slideout's exterior, provided by a 6-foot-high cabinet with hardware for shelving. The cabinet, at 17 inches deep and wide, was a good place to stow stuff like a long-handled broom and mop out of the way. A slide topper is a \$415 option.

The Fox Mountain has standard-type landing jacks up front and manual stabilizers in back. Due to the trailer's relatively short proportions, we found that the entry steps need to be folded out of the way when cranking the jacks up and down by hand; otherwise, my hand banged into the step. As for the trifold grated entry steps, they were ideal for

Wild Five

For more on Donya Carlson's stay at Pala RV Park near Temecula, California, with the Fox Mountain 235RLS, see "Five Girls in a Fifth-Wheel" on www.trailerlife.com.

dislodging dirt and rocks from shoes so it wasn't tracked inside, but boy, they sure were uncomfortable on bare feet, which is how we spent much of our time at Pala.

The Fox Mountain incorporates a number of thoughtful exterior details that include lights over the kingpin box and dump valves for setting up or breaking camp in the dark, as well as a spare tire and ladder out back. And I've never been so thankful for an outside sprayer as I was when we were in Big Bear. Even though my German shepherd slept under the stars and not in the RV, there was still the matter of getting her home in our truck after a leisurely lakeside stroll turned into a game of rolling in rotting fish carcasses. *Ugh.* Thanks to the exterior spray wand and a lot of shampoo, she was good as new.

The Cummins Onan RV QG 3600 LP generator, housed in a three-sided insulated box under the front cap, was pretty quiet when pressed into service. There's storage on either side of the generator, but its exhaust pipe looks goofy sticking out 6 inches from the side of the RV, making it the widest point on the Fox Mountain. Two 7-gallon LP-gas cylinders are housed inside a cabinet on the driver's side, and about halfway into our trip that door would not stay closed while under way. Finally, we wrapped duct tape around the latch to keep it from turning, and that worked as a temporary fix.

Winding up an evening outdoors at Pala, we moved inside to watch a movie. Popcorn bowls in hand, two were seated at the dinette and three piled comfortably onto the jackknife sofa facing the 32-inch LED HDTV. Below it is a Jensen AM/FM/DVD/CD/USB Bluetooth stereo with app control. The surround sound was excellent, and the TV swivels out to position as needed.

Reflecting on our time with the Fox Mountain 235RLS, we agreed that the galley and kitchen were a delight, not only because of the warm tones and welcoming feel but also because of the practicality and roominess. Team that with thoughtful features, looking-for-adventure graphics, an aerodynamic front cap and more than 2,000 pounds of cargo carrying capacity, and Northwood's got a winner. 🏆

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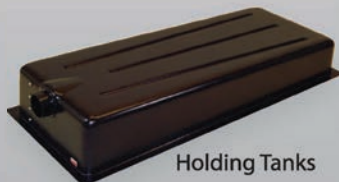
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CALLED THE GRAND CANYON OF PENNSYLVANIA, THE 47-MILE PINE CREEK GORGE CARVES

T Tyler Grim had the chance to leave and didn't: Such is the power of Pennsylvania's Grand Canyon. He grew up in the tiny town of Wellsboro, on the edge of the canyon in Tioga County, in the rugged hills of what's known as the "Pennsylvania Wilds." That's the name marketers have given to the north-central portion of the state dominated by huge chunks of public land.

Later Grim attended Mansfield University, just a 20-minute drive away. Then he went to work for his parents, owners of Stony Fork Creek Campground.

And then? Well, he decided to go out on his own and run his own campground. He could have gone anywhere, even

Florida, where he spends a few months each winter, "like a schoolteacher in reverse."

Instead, he bought Canyon Country Campground, almost on the lip of the canyon and in the same woods where he grew up and has lived his whole life.

"It's just such a beautiful area," Grim said by way of explanation. "There's just lots to see and do. And, this is funny, but the cell-phone service is not that good, and that's a plus. So you can really get out and explore and disconnect.

"I like that myself," he added, "so I decided there was nowhere really better to be."

Lots of folks who visit Pennsylvania's Grand Canyon come



Pennsylvania's Grand Canyon is a land of rugged beauty with large tracts of state forest and state parks.

TATE'S WILD SIDE

OUT A RECREATIONAL PARADISE FOR PADDLING, HIKING, BIKING AND WORLD-CLASS FISHING

away thinking the same thing. The canyon, a National Natural Landmark, stretches 47 miles. It's 2 miles wide and 1,000 feet deep in spots, carved by lovely Pine Creek through the Allegheny Plateau.

The surrounding countryside — nearly 200,000 acres worth of state parks and forests — offers as great a chance to see black bears, white-tailed deer and bald eagles as people.

"One of the things I love about it up here is that I can go out my front door, get in my Jeep and drive 70 miles in a day's time, and never leave a dirt road," said Tom Finkbiner, who has operated Slate Run Tackle Shop at the south end of the canyon for 40 years.

What really gets people excited is the canyon's remote heart, the 16 miles between Ansonia and Blackwell. It's shallower there, maxing out at about 800 feet, but also narrower, sometimes less than half that wide.

At the bottom sit a handful of permanent camps and a few places to pitch a tent. But otherwise, for miles-long stretches, there's nothing but trees, water, wildlife and, at night, stars. This area is the darkest on the East Coast, with Cherry Springs State Park, the world's second International Dark Sky Park, nearby.

"For basically 16 miles, it's about as primitive as you can get in Pennsylvania," said Chris Gastrock, district forester



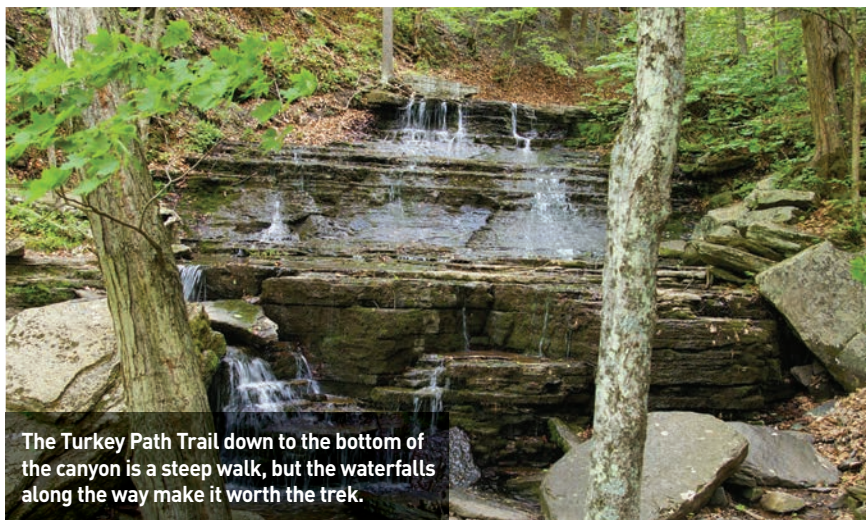
of Tioga State Forest, who manages a portion of it. "It's more rugged than people imagine. There are quite a few bald eagles here. We've got black bears, otters, timber rattlesnakes, white-tailed deer, all in a setting that's unique.

"There's really nothing else like, at least not in this state,"

People come to experience the canyon in different ways. For many, that's via the Pine Creek Rail Trail. Running 62 miles and mostly flat, with just a 3 percent grade, it's a favorite of hikers and bikers. It's been rated one of the top 10 such trails in the country in terms of scenery.

Some do day trips, and others camp along the way at designated sites maintained by the bureau of forestry. Others use local outfitters to shuttle them and their bikes around.

Either way, it pays to be prepared. From Ansonia downstream for 8 miles, there are a couple of primitive restrooms, but the next 8 miles have no amenities at all. And the weather can



The Turkey Path Trail down to the bottom of the canyon is a steep walk, but the waterfalls along the way make it worth the trek.

be surprisingly challenging.

"You wouldn't think it with the stream right there, but it does get hot," Gastrock said. "With the canyon walls and no breeze and the trail surface, it can get tough. That's why we always tell people to take lots of water."

The effort is worth it. History buffs like forest ranger Jim Losinger know

that. His family has lived in the area for generations, and a couple of hollows off the canyon bear relatives' names. Losinger can walk the trail and point to evidence of the area's past.

One example is the remnants of the Darling Run Camp that was operated by the Civilian Conservation Corps from 1935 to 1941. Members

PHOTOS BY BOBBY FRYE

IF YOU GO

RAFTING

Guided rafting trips through Pennsylvania's Grand Canyon are available through Pine Creek Outfitters. The Ansonia store also offers kayak, canoe, raft and bike rentals, fishing and backpacking gear, maps and guidebooks. 570-724-3003, www.pinecrk.com

FISHING

Fly-fishing tours and information on the Brown Trout Club are available at Slate Run Tackle Shop, an Orvis dealership in Slate Run. The store stocks sporting goods, and the adjacent Wolfe's General Store offers grocery and deli items and a gift shop. 570-753-8551, www.slaterun.com

CAMPING

When it comes to RV camping, there are several options, from public parks to privately owned campgrounds. Some state parks, like Leonard Harrison, offer modern facilities and electric hookups, while others, like Colton Point, are more rustic. Full-service campgrounds, such as Tyler Grim's Canyon Country in Wellsboro, have more amenities.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Potter-Tioga Visitors Bureau

888-846-4228, www.visitpottertioga.com/explore/attractions/pa-grand-canyon

COVINGTON

Tanglewood Camping

570-549-8299, www.tanglewoodcamping.com

MORRIS

Twin Streams Campground

570-353-7251, www.twinstreamscampground.com

WATERVILLE

Little Pine State Park

570-753-6000, www.dcnr.pa.gov/stateparks/findapark/littlepinestatepark

WELLSBORO

Canyon Country Campground

570-724-3818
www.canyoncountrycampground.com

Colton Point State Park

570-724-3061, www.dcnr.pa.gov/stateparks/findapark/coltonpointstatepark

Leonard Harrison State Park

570-724-3061, www.dcnr.pa.gov/stateparks/findapark/leonardharrisonstatepark

Stony Fork Creek Campground

570-724-3096, www.stonyforkcamp.com



of the camp and other young men put to work building the infrastructure of state parks and forests during the Great Depression are memorialized in displays at Leonard Harrison State Park, one of two state parks that sit on the rim of the canyon. It's on the east rim, and Colton Point State Park is on the west.

Along the trail, visitors can see and feel where those men actually lived. Some carved their initials and the date they were there in the rocks. Elsewhere, bits of their handiwork survive.

"If you know where to look, or ask, there's a lot more history in the canyon than people expect or understand," Losinger said. "Some of it's hidden, and nature's slowly taking over, but it's there."

Others visit the canyon for its unique and often wonderful fishing. Jason Detar, chief of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's fisheries management division, calls Pine Creek "a destination fishery."

"In terms of the scenic nature of things, it's hard to beat," he said. "But that's not to say the scenery is the only thing, or even the main attraction. There's some pretty good angling to be had, for trout early and late in the year, and for warm-water species like smallmouth bass in between. It's definitely got potential."

The commission stocks trout in 55 miles of Pine Creek, with only a few gaps between the Genesee Forks and

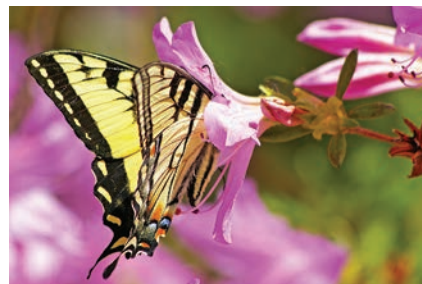
Slate Run. The fishing is often surprisingly uncrowded, too.

Opening day of trout season, which falls in mid-April, brings crowds, but they last only a few weeks, said Don Kelly, owner of Wellsboro Tackle Shack. "Once the spring trout fishermen thin out, the stream isn't very crowded. It doesn't get too much pressure," he said.

Bob Childs, owner of Big Meadows Fly Shop in Ansonia, agreed. He often fishes with his Labrador retriever, Sir Odie of Ansonia, out of his tiny fly shop, which sits in a couple of rooms off a corner of his home. He said it's not uncommon to catch dozens of fish in an outing, with the only competition the occasional black bear.

"The fishing on Pine is fantastic, more so than people realize," Childs said. "I know we don't have a lot of people who live around here full-time, but every time I'm on the stream and I have it all to myself, I can't believe it. If more people knew about just how good the fishing is, and knew that it wasn't just a few weeks in the spring type of thing, we'd have more people here, no doubt. Or at least we should."

Two stream sections in particular rate as must-sees, if for different reasons. One, for scenic purposes, is the Ansonia-to-Blackwell stretch. The



(Top) Timber rattlesnakes show themselves occasionally on the Pine Creek Rail Trail. They're not aggressive, but it's wise to keep your distance. **(Above)** Butterflies and flowers give Pennsylvania's Leonard Harrison State Park a splash of color, too.

northernmost 8 miles gets stocked with adult-size, catchable trout. They provide action in spring and fall, as well as in summers when enough rain falls consistently to keep water temperatures cool.

When the trout aren't cooperative, there's always smallmouth bass. Plenty

THE PENNSYLVANIA FISH AND BOAT COMMISSION STOCKS TROUT IN 55 MILES OF PINE CREEK. THE FISHING IS OFTEN SURPRISINGLY UNCROWDED, TOO.

(Below) Anglers who cast their lines into Pine Creek can expect to catch brown trout like this, as well as smallmouth bass. **(Right)** Bob Childs of Big Meadows Fly Shop fishes Pine Creek with his trusty companion, a black Labrador known as Sir Odie of Ansonia.





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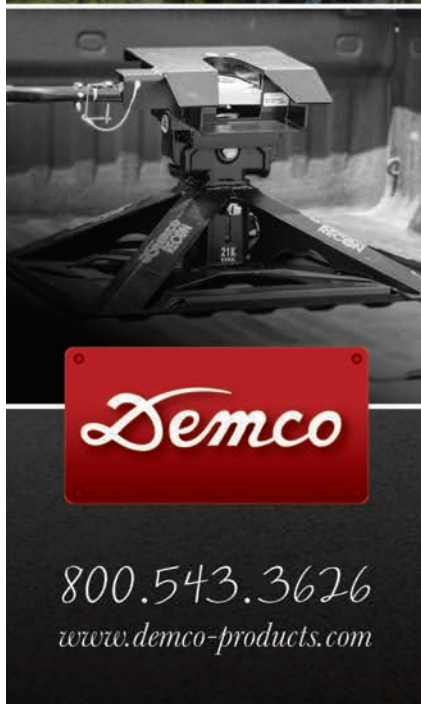
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The forest that surrounds the Grand Canyon of Pennsylvania includes about 3,300 acres that have been set aside as wild and natural areas.

of fish up to 15 inches can be caught, Detar said, and Childs has seen and caught 3- and 4-pounders.

"Anything that matches the creek's little chubs, its minnows, its smaller fish, they all work for them," Childs said. "Crayfish patterns are good, too. I never saw so many crayfish in a stream until I moved here. Or I fish a hellgrammite pattern up to 6 inches long, and they just attack it."

The other hot spot is the 2.8 miles of Pine Creek from Slate Run downstream to Bonnell Run. That's where the Brown Trout Club, a group supported by donations and run out of Finkbiner's shop, stocks almost \$20,000 worth of browns in the creek annually.

These aren't just any trout. Most run 14 to 15 inches long, with some reaching 20 or even 30 inches. They hit the stream as some of the most pampered fish on the planet. Finkbiner buys them from only two suppliers who grow them in cold-water earthen ponds, ensuring that they enter the water fat, colorful and free of the scars common on trout raised in concrete raceways.

"These are exceptionally high-quality trout grown in a low-density

environment," Finkbiner said. "When you catch these fish, they look like absolutely wild trout you might find in a spring creek or a Western river." The result is what he calls a "world-class fishing experience," the opportunity to catch large trout on public water in a gorgeous setting.

The season is year-round for all types of tackle, but the fishing is catch and release. Finkbiner said he encourages anglers to leave the trout unmolested between mid-June and September for fear the stress of being caught when water temperatures hit their summer peak might prove fatal.

In warm weather it's better to fish for the creek's many smallmouth bass, walleyes and channel cats. In spring, fall and even winter, though, the trout



Leonard Harrison State Park has a well-developed viewing area, a small visitor center and a gift shop.

fishing can be fantastic, he said.

"If you're on the water when there's a good hatch going on, you can get a half-dozen fish a day from the upper teens into the 20 inches," Finkbinder said. "And I know guys who have done better than that."

A number of tributaries to Pine Creek hold native brook trout. "Really, people can't go wrong anywhere on Pine Creek," Detar said. "There's a lifetime of water to fish."

Other outdoor enthusiasts visit the area for the boating. In most years Pine Creek can be floated from March until about Memorial Day. Then, unless there's been sufficient rain, water levels get too low.

Pine Creek is mostly calm water in the Class I category, with one Class III section known as Owasssee Rapids, but outfitters can guide almost any paddler through the whitewater in a kayak or raft.

There's hiking to be had, too. A lot of visitors start at Colton Point State Park, which features overlooks, a visitor center with displays and a movie detailing the area's history, a Civilian Conservation Corps memorial and a gift shop. Hiking from the rim of the canyon to the creek along the Lost Turkey Trail — a steep switchback of a path, to be sure — leads past several waterfalls.

Others hike 4 miles along the rail trail from the Darling Run access, home to one of the most visible bald eagle nests on the creek, then climb to the top of Turkey Path Trail.

Still more trails, most offering breathtaking scenery, follow the rim of the canyon. Many start at Colton Point and in the surrounding state forest. No matter how they explore the canyon, visitors tend to come away impressed.

"We can keep you busy for three or four days, easily," Grim said. "The hiking, the biking, the fishing, that's all fun. There are covered wagon rides through the canyon, too, and they sometimes let the kids drive. That makes it a lot of fun. Families love that."

"Usually, people come, they spend a long weekend, and they leave wanting to come back and do more." 🚗

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RV ER'S GUIDE TO GOOD MANNERS

CAMPGROUND ETIQUETTE IS NOT JUST ABOUT FOLLOWING THE RULES. IT'S ABOUT CREATING A THOUGHTFUL, FRIENDLY AND POLITE ENVIRONMENT WHERE EVERYONE ENJOYS THEIR STAY



Camping is supposed to be relaxing and fun, right? For us, and for most RV enthusiasts, it usually is. Over the years, our family has stayed at hundreds of campgrounds, met countless new friends and made amazing memories.

We tell everyone we know that RVers are a friendly and polite group of people and, for the most part, it's true. But there are always exceptions to the rule. Every once in a while, a camper doesn't follow the traditional guidelines for campground etiquette, and a peaceful retreat turns into a stressful experience we'd rather forget.

The golden rule works well for a lot of situations in life, but not necessarily in the case of campground etiquette. RVers are a diverse group of people with different camping styles and preferences, so it's important to understand the basic guidelines that apply at all campgrounds, whether public or private, rustic or resort.

PERSONAL GUIDELINES

Before diving into the ins and outs of etiquette, it's worth remembering that, if we want campgrounds to be well-mannered communities, we should start by making sure we are well-mannered campers.

Expect good things. We pull into every new campground wearing rose-colored glasses. Attitude goes a long way toward creating happy campers. If you search out the negative, you will probably find it.

Let the little things go. Don't allow small annoyances to ruin your entire stay. If your temporary next-door neighbor wakes you before quiet hours



For dog owners, keeping our furry friends from barking and picking up after them are musts.

are over, try not to stew about it. Pop in some earplugs and go back to sleep.

Take it to the top. If someone or something is negatively affecting the quality of your camping experience, ask the right people to help solve the problem. Expressing your concerns to the campground management will often yield better results than individual confrontations or social-media rants.

Now onto the nitty-gritty. If you're a newbie RVer, consider this your primer on campground etiquette. If you're a seasoned camper, think of it as a refresher course.

CAMPGROUND COURTESY

Campgrounds take a lot of strangers and put them into a relatively small amount of space, so it's important for everyone to be on their best behavior. Here are some tips for enjoying the communal areas of the campground.

Follow the rules. When you make a reservation at a particular campground, you are agreeing to abide by its rules during your stay. Some places have specific policies about golf carts, curfews, campfires and the use of local firewood versus bringing your own. If you don't like the rules, stay somewhere else.



READ THE SIGNS

Each RV park provides rules for acceptable behavior. From speed limits to quiet zones, they're often posted throughout the campground. While speed limits may seem sluggish, keep in mind that they protect pedestrians, bicyclists and children at play, and make everyone feel safer.



Obey traffic signs. Nothing gets campers on edge more than folks who treat campground roads like speedways. People are walking dogs, riding bikes and tossing Frisbees, and there are children playing in most campgrounds. In addition to driving slowly and observing posted speed limits, always obey the one-way signs, whether they make sense to you or not. No one wants to end up in a game of chicken with a fifth-wheel trailer on a single-lane road.

Respect shared spaces. Playgrounds and pools can be hot spots for controversy at the campground. Don't reserve tables or chairs for the entire day if you are not physically present at the pool. If you're camping with a group, make sure your cannonball contest doesn't keep others from enjoying a nice swim.

Monitor children. No matter how safe a campground is, don't allow your kids to roam unattended. When there are

issues at the playground or the jumping pillow and no parent can be found, other adults get frustrated.

Discard trash properly. Every RV park has different garbage and recycling policies, so make sure you are properly informed upon check-in. Some campgrounds offer garbage pickup at the campsite. However, leaving food scraps out overnight can lead to undesirable wildlife encounters. We keep bags of garbage closed up tight in the back of our truck until we are able to dispose of them properly.

CAMPSITE MANNERS

Even though you may be staying for only a short time, it's important to be a good neighbor at the campground. Respect the fact that people are camping nearby and other folks will be using the campsite once you're gone.

Observe campsite boundaries. One of the most common complaints on RV forums and social media is people cutting through campsites. Never use a campsite as a shortcut, and stay on clearly marked paths and roads whenever walking around the campground. Make sure you pass this wisdom on to your children as well.

Be conscious of noise. Heavy metal might be your jam at the campground, but not everybody shares your taste in music. With the abundance of outdoor speakers and televisions on RVs, it's important to remember that noise shouldn't travel far beyond your own slice of real estate. Test the volume by taking a walk to a neighboring site. If you can still hear Def Leppard or ESPN, it's time to turn it down a few notches. In addition, quiet hours are observed religiously at many campgrounds. Know the policy where you are camping and keep it down during that time.

Be a responsible dog owner. We love traveling with our dog, but irresponsible pet owners are another one of the most common campground-etiquette complaints. Always keep dogs on a 6-foot or shorter leash when walking,

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(Far left) Being courteous extends to keeping your campsite neat and hanging hammocks without putting nails in trees. As a rule, leave the site as you would like to find it yourself. (Left) RV park staff and management are on hand to help. If something negatively affects your stay, let them know about it, and keep smiling.

and make sure they are properly restrained at the campsite via a tether or expandable pen. Carry bags to dispose of pet waste properly or use ones provided by the campground. Perhaps most importantly, no one — not even the most ardent dog lover — appreciates incessant barking. If your pups yap nonstop at the campground, you might consider leaving them with a sitter during campground stays.

Empty the tanks discreetly. It's not anyone's favorite task, but dumping the black and gray holding tanks is a fact of life for every RV owner and should be done courteously. If the sewer hookup is close to another camper's site, be considerate and empty the tanks when they are not relaxing nearby, and particularly not when they are enjoying a meal at the picnic table. Even if you do everything right, dumping the tanks can emit unpleasant odors. Consider tackling that chore early in the day or late in the evening when many campers are inside their rigs.

If you use the campground's dump station, move quickly when other RVers are waiting in line with their RVs and take care of the black-tank flush at your next stop.

Safely enjoy your campfire. When it comes to the campfire, take a cue from the Boy Scouts and put safety first. Build fires only in approved rings or pits, and never leave a campfire unattended. Put it out completely with water before retiring for the night. Other no-no's? Never burn trash or place glass in a campground fire pit. That just leaves a big mess for the next campsite resident.

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Turn off outside lights. As much as you love those cool LED awning lights, your neighbor in the pop-up camper might not appreciate them so much. A good rule of thumb is to treat quiet hours as dark hours. Double check to make sure your exterior lights are turned off before turning in for the night.

Leave the campsite as you found it. Remember that the campsite is on loan to you, and it's important not to make any permanent changes. Don't move boundary stones or fire rings, and if you move the picnic table, return it before you leave. Never cut down branches, and don't put nails in trees for clotheslines or hammocks. Before departing, make a quick sweep of the site to check for personal items or debris.

SOCIAL ETIQUETTE

Make friends. Most of us spend a lot of time in front of screens these days, interacting in texts and on social media more than in person. Dust off your communication skills at the campground and look for opportunities to be friendly, just like the good ol' days.



Lend a hand. We'll never forget the time when three seasoned campers helped us get our LP-gas furnace lit on a cold autumn night. They saved us from a disaster, and we have heard many similar stories over the years. Passing on expertise is a truly wonderful tradition in RV culture. On the other hand, let fellow campers focus when parking, hitching and unhitching their

RVs. Talking to campers when they are trying to back in a trailer or hitch up to leave is not only distracting, it can be downright dangerous. Give people their space, even if you think you could help them get into that difficult campsite in a flash. And try not to stare — we were all rookies once.

As you enjoy the camping experience, don't lose sight of how you and your family's actions may affect others. Keep an eye on your kids, whether they're at the jumping pillow (left) or the swimming pool (above), and teach them to follow walkways and roads (top), even if the shortest distance is through someone else's campsite.

Pay it forward. Our day has been brightened many times by the thoughtfulness of other folks at the campground, and we appreciate the opportunity to pay it forward when we travel. Leaving behind unused firewood for the next camper or walking it over to the neighbor at the next site before leaving is a nice gesture. We have also lent folks an extra hose to reach their hookups and given neighbors a fuse when they had one blow. It's often these little things that make the campground experience such a special thing.



SPREAD THE WORD

We always take note when we receive exceptional customer service and look to pass compliments on to the management and staff in person. Leaving positive reviews online has the added benefit of helping other campers find locations where they can expect great service and a friendly atmosphere.

The Good Sam Club website offers a way for RVers to share their campground experiences with a wide audience. Start by searching for the RV park's information page with the Find a Campground tool, then go to the Review tab and key in your comments.

www.goodsam.com/rvparkreviews

Enjoy your stay. Time at the RV park is precious. We go to relax, have fun and enjoy the company of our family and friends. Let's make sure we don't ruin that for anyone else! 📞

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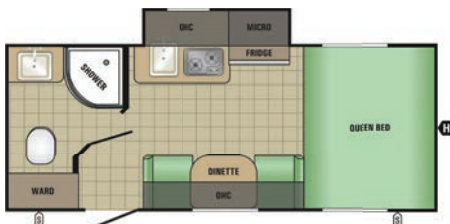
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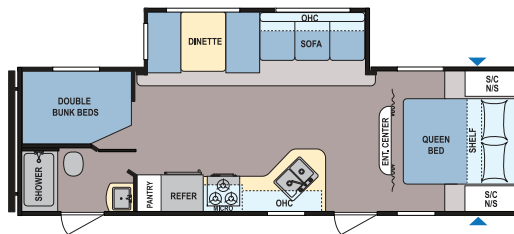
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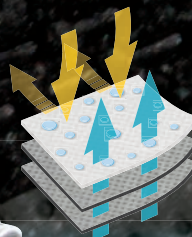
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RECON MISS

DEMCO'S LIGHTWEIGHT FIFTH-WHEEL HITCH IS COMPACT AND EASY TO HANDLE YET CAPABLE OF

For those choosing to wander with a fifth-wheel, the right hitch is a key ingredient. No matter the choice of tow vehicle, it's inevitable that you're going to have to spend a few bucks on a decent fifth-wheel hitch, so spending wisely on quality, safety and confidence should be the first priority.

Finding the right hitch can send you into sensory overload after perusing the internet and heaps of information provided by various suppliers. Add in options for specific towing needs, and the list gets even longer. Since most fifth-wheel hitches occupy a big portion of the truck-bed space, owners

who also need to use the truck for more utilitarian purposes generally remove the hitch when not towing — or at least, they would like to do so. Hitches that are too bulky and heavy to maneuver by one person typically stay put, limiting the use of the bed.

Demco's RV Towing division has

a solution, the new Recon 21K lightweight hitch, which is designed for easy removal while still providing a solid connection for towing fifth-wheel trailers up to 21,000 pounds.

Demco dates back to 1950 when it started manufacturing agricultural equipment under the Dethmers name. Today the company is engaged in dinghy and trailer towing products, and the Recon fifth-wheel hitch is its latest endeavor. The Recon 21K hitch we installed and tested isn't one of those

The dual-articulating head made it easy to hitch up at an angle. The locking arm is smooth, and the operator feels confident that the jaws have secured the kingpin.



SION

TOWING UP TO 21,000 POUNDS

hefty sliding models that pushes the weight envelope; its 95-pound weight can be handled by most owners.

The Recon 21K is made of a quadruple-sided, triangulated series of specially bent and welded steel plates, which are completely connected at the bottom, creating a solid A-frame-style structure. Building the hitch in this manner allows for increased strength and rigidity while decreasing weight.

Although the Recon 21K is somewhat simplistic in design, its claim to fame, so to speak, lies in the dual-articulating head assembly and the ability to easily separate the head and base for removal. The hidden gem is the super-smooth wraparound latching mechanism that operates with a lever that has a hairlike "trigger." The hitch components and necessary bed-mounted frame rails have a glossy black, powder-coated wrinkle finish.

We mounted the Recon in a 2015 GMC Sierra Denali pickup that pulls a 38-foot fifth-wheel. The procedure involves mounting industry-standard bed rails that are used for virtually all fifth-wheel hitches on the market.



The A-frame design of the Recon hitch is relatively lightweight but has the ability to handle fifth-wheels up to 21,000 pounds.

The installation requires positioning the rails according to the manufacturer's instructions, then fastening the vehicle-specific frame brackets, which usually takes four bolts through the bed and rails, along with two bolts for each frame bracket going directly into the frame. The brackets are bolted through existing holes in the frame.

If you've never installed base rails, be advised that the four frame brackets must line up with the holes in the rail, and that takes some finesse. Don't count on getting too much advice from the rather basic instructions.

Installing the rails is like assembling a puzzle. Although RV technicians have their own ways of accomplishing this, no matter what technique is employed, the measuring process must be precise and follow the instructions provided with the kit. To avoid damaging your truck bed, be sure to take extra time here — measure at least twice and drill once. The hitch point needs to range from directly over to 3 inches ahead of the rear axle.

The hole diameter for the rail bolts is $\frac{5}{8}$ inch, and while you could try to throttle through the bed with a drill

- 1) The Recon 21K kit can be purchased with the hitch base, head assembly, universal truck-bed rails and necessary hardware.**
- 2) RV technicians develop their own methods for taking measurements for bed-rail placement. For optimum positioning, one choice is to pin the base assembly to the rails before measuring and drilling the front holes.**
- 3) After pilot holes are drilled to confirm frame-bracket positioning, a few step drills are used to get to the final $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch hole size.**



RECON MISSION



bit that size, it's best to start with pilot holes to confirm lineup with the frame brackets, then use a couple of smaller bits and work up to the $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch final hole. It's likely that if you use the largest drill bit first, it will try to walk sideways because of the corrugations in the bed floor, throwing the hole locations off and skewing the entire installation. A step bit also works well for this.

4) Carriage bolts are placed through the bed rails to line up the frame brackets, **5)** which are then clamped in place. **6)** Fish wire is needed to route the bolts and bolt plates through the brackets and truck frame. Be patient; it may take some maneuvering.

rails can be bolted to the brackets, put the appropriate slotted spacers between the bed floor and the frame brackets, eliminating empty pockets in the corrugations and creating a solid metal sandwich.

For the under-bed process, having

Depending on the specific truck and its frame brackets, you could be facing an uphill battle trying to find access for all nuts, bolts and associated hardware. For this installation, it was necessary to route the 2-inch carriage bolts and bolt plates

WE WERE IMPRESSED WITH THE SIMPLICITY OF THE DESIGN, ESPECIALLY WHEN CONSIDERING THE RECON 2IK CAN HANDLE SIZEABLE FIFTH-WHEELS.

Once the two rear holes are drilled, two carriage bolts are run through the rail and bed using washers and nuts. At this point, the hitch base can be assembled and temporarily pinned to the rails so it can be used as a template for drilling the holes in the other rail.

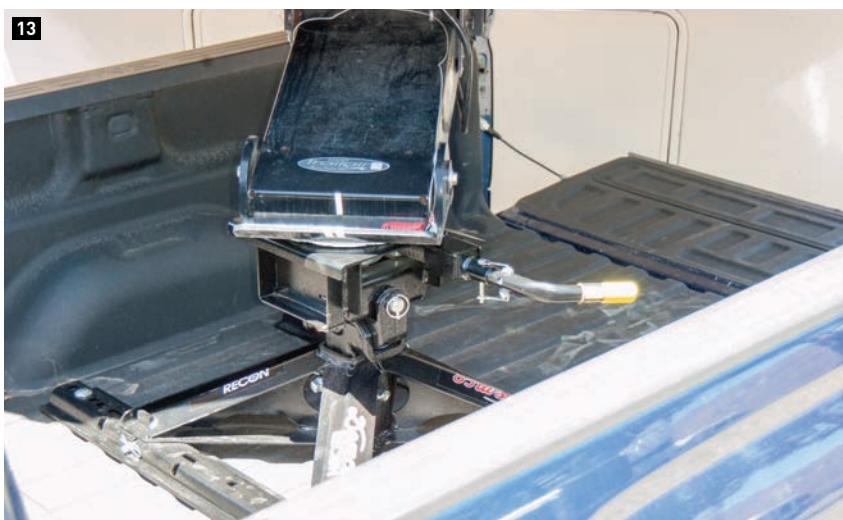
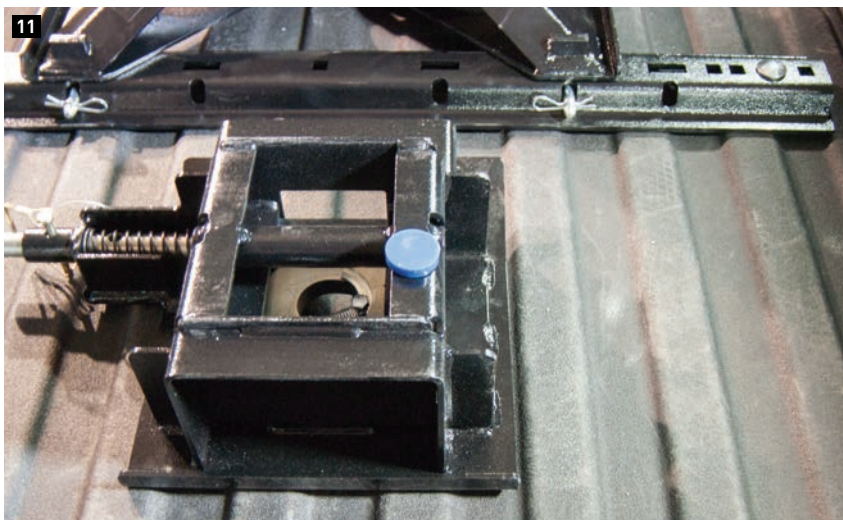
After all four holes have been drilled, the bolts from the rails can be used to confirm that the locations of the frame brackets are right. If your measurements are on target, the brackets will line up with the holes in the bed; if not, you'll have to make slight adjustments. Right before the

a car lift or a friend with one will be worth its weight in gold. If not, get the back of the truck as high as you can and stabilized with jack stands.

through larger inner-frame holes via the supplied fish wire. All the nuts are then torqued according to the chart in the instructions.



7) Once the frame brackets are bolted in place, the bed rails can be mounted using the four carriage bolts, and the nuts torqued to specifications provided in the instructions. **8)** Installing the hitch components starts with pinning the base assembly to the base rails. **9)** The upright casting is pinned to the base assembly, **10)** followed by the head yoke.



11) Before mounting the hitch head to the saddle assembly, a urethane damper is press-fit into the specified location. **12)** The latching handle can be mounted facing front or rear to meet the needs of the owner. **13)** The articulating head made it easy to hitch and unhitch on undulating terrain.

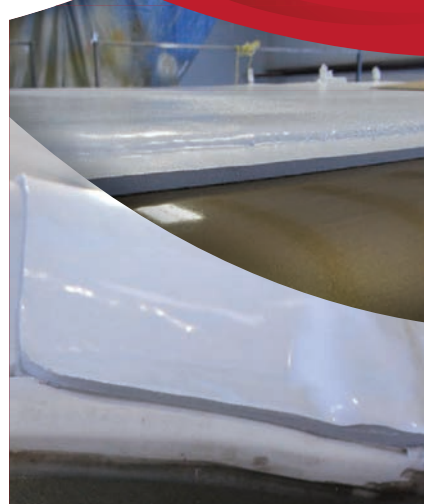
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EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

RECON MISSION

From here, the only thing left is to determine the ideal height and pin location for the head mount, followed by securing the setscrew and locknut. Three height adjustments, from 15½ to 18 inches, make it possible to accommodate just about any fifth-wheel. The final large pin is inserted through the upright casting (head mount), the head assembly is installed, and you're ready to tow.

The dual-articulating head made it quite comfortable to hitch up the fifth-wheel on uneven terrain and at various angles, and as previously noted, using the locking arm is smooth and secure. We were impressed with the simplicity of the design, especially when considering the Recon 21K can handle sizable fifth-wheels.

The USA-made hitch is backed by high-quality components that should provide trouble-free service for many years. Maintenance is fairly simple using WD-40 or light oil on the locking arm, and grease is used for the pins. Fasteners should be checked every 2,000 miles of towing, and grease applied to the saddle surface, unless a Teflon fifth-wheel lube plate is mounted around the kingpin.

For those who also employ their truck for ranch, farm or business use and have a gooseneck ball already mounted in the bed, Demco will be offering an application of the Recon hitch in January 2018 that will drop on to any 2⅝-inch gooseneck ball and convert it to a fifth-wheel hitch. It will be unique to the marketplace in that it is compatible with any gooseneck ball while maintaining the traditional fifth-wheel head that is on the current Recon. The Recon Gooseneck will have an MSRP of \$695.

Retail price for the Recon 21K kit that includes the hitch base, head assembly and bed rails is \$774; the frame brackets have a \$176 MSRP. Other than the aforementioned instructions, which could be improved, the Recon 21K turned out to be rock solid and a super-easy hitch to handle. 🚚

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BALANCING ACT

TORKLIFT'S STABLELOAD IMPROVES THE RIDE AND HANDLING IN VEHICLES EQUIPPED WITH STOCK OVERLOAD SPRINGS, WITHOUT COSTLIER SUSPENSION UPGRADES

Leam-spring suspensions on trucks must be capable of hauling a maximum payload and still provide a comfortable ride under no-load conditions. To accommodate varying loads, the suspensions have a main leaf spring that connects to the vehicle's frame and progressively shorter leaf springs bolted in place underneath. Suspensions designed to carry heavier loads, including truck campers, travel trailers and fifth-wheels, are usually equipped with overload springs added to the leaf-spring pack.

Torklift's StableLoad suspension stabilizers eliminate the necessity for the rear of the truck to squat before the overload springs begin to work. StableLoad upper stabilizers use a thick bump stop to put the upper overload in contact with the frame at or near normal ride height. StableLoad lower stabilizers are placed between the leaf pack and the lower overload, eliminating the gap and engaging the overload spring with little or no suspension drop. By preloading the springs, ride comfort can be improved while still providing the

necessary support for hitch or camper weight and supplies carried in the bed of the truck.

As with any aftermarket suspension upgrade, the StableLoad system will not increase the gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) or tow capacity. When towing or hauling an RV, the truck must be properly sized and equipped for the load.

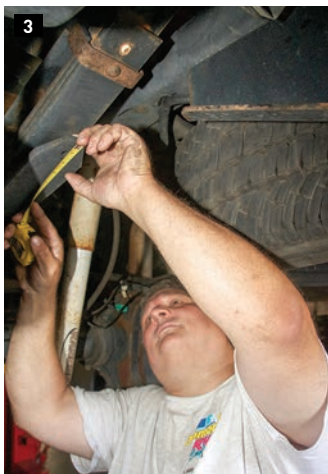
We installed StableLoad Quick Disconnect lower stabilizers on a 2012 Ford F-350 regular-cab pickup with single rear wheels. To make installation easier, we utilized the vehicle lift

at Diamond RV Centre in West Hatfield, Massachusetts.

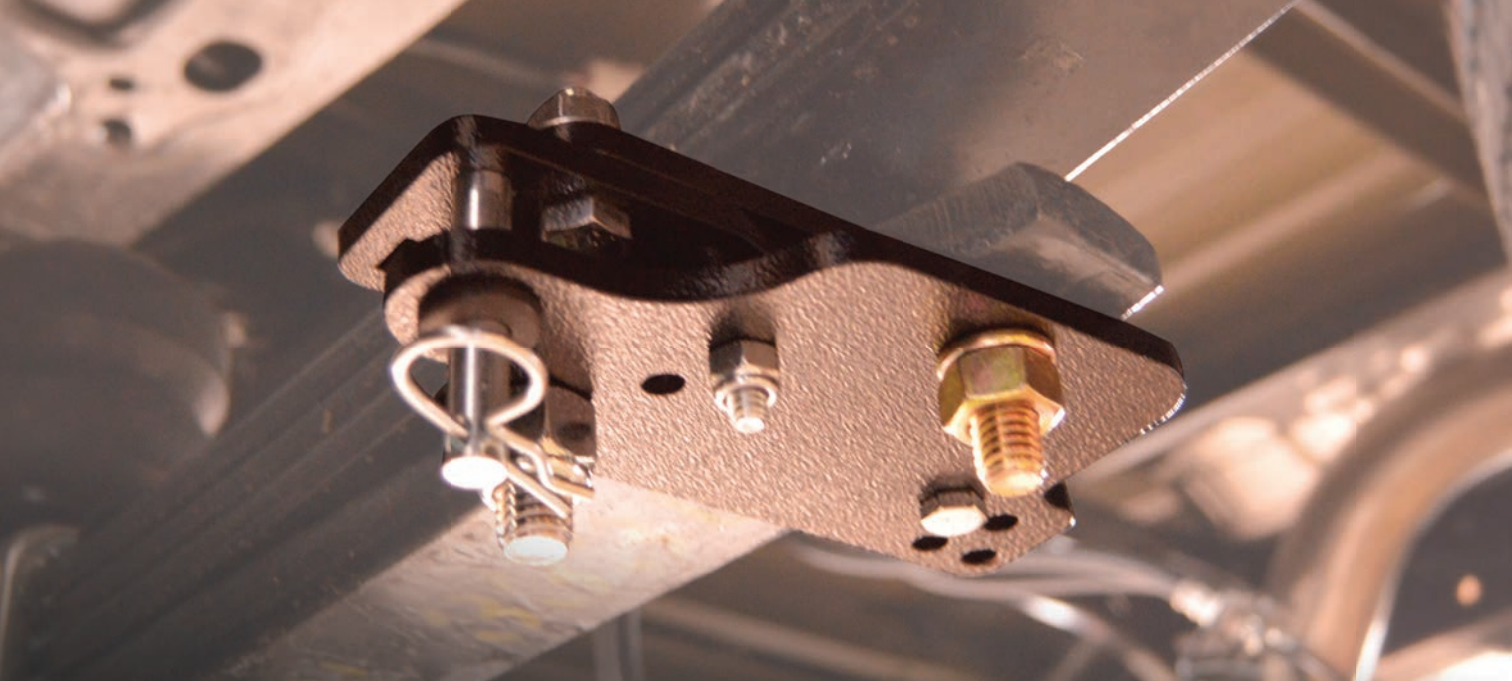
The F-350 was used as a mobile-service truck and was already equipped with the upper StableLoad kit, which helped prevent sagging and handling issues. However, installing the upper stabilizers first is contrary to Torklift's current recommendations. The company suggests installing the lower StableLoad Quick Disconnects first, then adding the upper StableLoads if needed. According to Torklift, 90 percent of suspension issues will be resolved with just the lower StableLoads.

Two StableLoad Quick Disconnect kits are available: A7310 for trucks that have holes in the ends of the lower overload spring, and A7311, which includes four 7/16-inch cobalt bits for drilling the necessary holes in the leaf.

Before beginning the job, it is best



- 1)** Heavy-duty pickups like the F-350 have a standard leaf spring, with an upper overload spring separated by a bushing, and another overload spring on the bottom where the lower StableLoad Quick Disconnect stabilizer was installed.
- 2)** Many trucks come with a 1/2-inch hole drilled in the lower overload spring. The plastic plug is removed from the hole in this Ford F-350.
- 3)** The lower overload spring is marked 3 inches from its end. Additional measurements are taken at the mark.

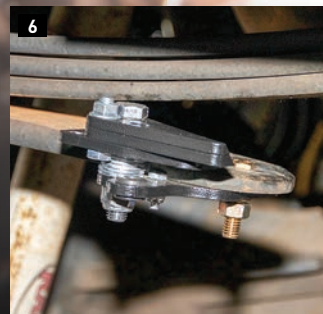


to read through the entire installation manual, paying careful attention to the figures showing how the StableLoad stabilizers are assembled.

The first step is to raise the rear of the truck using a floor jack placed under the hitch. This will increase the gap between the lower overload and the main spring pack. The front wheels should be chocked to prevent rolling, and jack stands should be placed under the rear frame on both sides.

The F-350's lower overload already had holes, but if drilling is necessary, the process begins with marking the location of the holes 1 inch in from the end of the spring. Torklift recommends the use of a low-speed 18-volt or larger cordless drill spinning at 200 to 300 RPM. Slow RPM while pressing the drill bit against the spring with significant force will produce the best results. Cutting fluid or motor oil should be added to the end of the drill bit every 5 to 10 seconds to cool and lubricate it.

Once the drill bit begins to dimple the top of the spring, start drilling the next hole. When all four holes have been drilled to the point of dimpling, go back and complete the drilling. The drill bits tend to grab when they exit through the top, which could damage the spring; final drilling should be done with lighter pressure to minimize grabbing and breaking. Torklift rents a tool that



4) The StableLoad Quick Disconnect stabilizers are assembled with three wedges to fit the gap between the lower overload spring and the main leaf springs. 5) A 7/16-inch bolt secures the wedge pack to the overload spring. The bolt is torqued to 35 lb-ft. 6) The wedge pack is set in the disengaged position.

cradles the cordless drill to make drilling through the spring easier (see "StableLoad Drill Tool" on page 48).

To install the parts, marks are made 3 inches from the front and rear of the lower overload. Two measurements are taken at this location, including the thickness of the overload spring and the size of the gap between the overload and the main spring pack.

The lower StableLoads use a bolt as a pivot point to engage and disengage. Washers serve as spacers between the bottom plate and the Quick Disconnect wedge pack. The size of the gap will dictate how many wedges to include in the pack, and the thickness of the spring determines the number of washers to use on the pivot bolts. The kit includes three 1/4-inch-thick wedges

for each StableLoad.

The gap on the F-350 measured between 7/8 inch and 1 1/4 inches, so all three wedges were stacked, making the wedge pack 3/4-inch thick. If the measurement had been between 1/2 inch and 3/4 inch, only two wedges would be required. One wedge would be used for a gap of 1/4 inch or less.

Assembling the StableLoads isn't difficult, but there is a learning curve. Once you figure out how to assemble the first one, installation of the other three goes quickly. One or two bolts (depending on the width of the spring) are attached to the bottom plate.

Once assembled, the StableLoads are ready to bolt to the overload spring with the wedge pack placed on the inside or outside of the spring. On the

(Top) Shown is a Torklift StableLoad Quick Disconnect in the engaged position. Rotating the stabilizer 90 degrees disengages it.

BALANCING ACT



7) A $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch ratchet and extension are used to engage the Quick Disconnect stabilizer. **8)** A clip and pin keep it in place in the engaged position.

F-350 we positioned the wedge pack on the outside to make engagement and disengagement easier. One inch of clearance is required between the wedge pack and obstacles such as the frame, exhaust system and brake lines.

To prevent the StableLoad from moving, a pin is inserted through holes in the bottom plate and the wedge pack, and a clip keeps the pin in place. Engaging and disengaging the wedge pack is simple. The clip and pin are removed, and a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch drive ratchet with a short extension is inserted into a square opening in the bottom wedge. The wedge pack is rotated 90 degrees, and the pin and clip are reinserted.

We needed to load the F-350 to

evaluate the stabilizers, so we drove it to Truck Camper Warehouse in West Chesterfield, New Hampshire, and mounted a 2017 Northstar 9.5 Igloo U truck camper with a dry weight of 2,670 pounds. The F-350 squatted $1\frac{1}{8}$ inches, measured at the rear wheels. This is less than we would normally expect, but the truck had upper StableLoads, helping to decrease squatting.

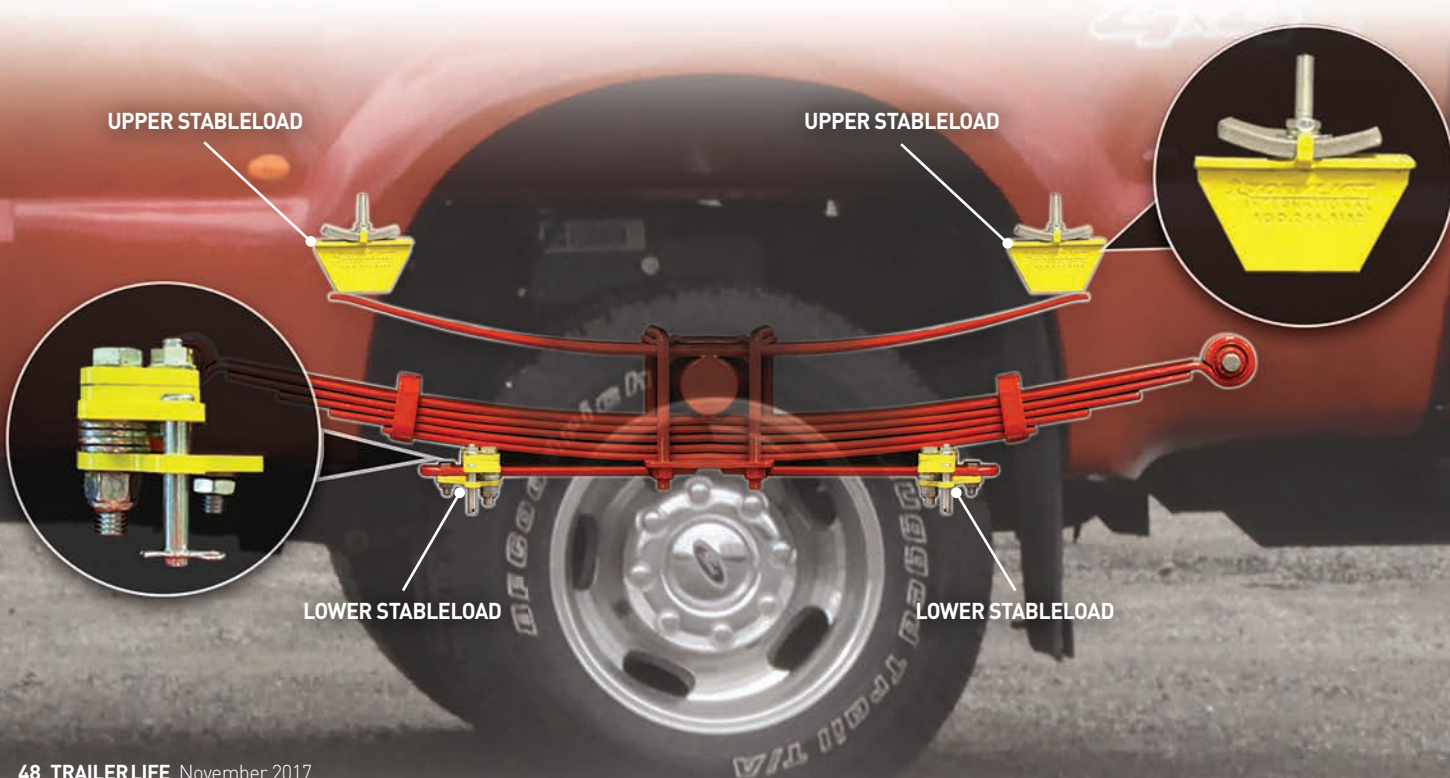
Driving a predetermined test route with the newly installed lower StableLoads disconnected revealed the suspension handled the weight of the camper well with only slight bouncing on smooth roads and minor body roll while cornering. However, when driving on a rough road with potholes



STABLELOAD DRILL TOOL

Torklift's rental tool makes fast work of drilling through the lower overload spring on vehicles that don't come from the factory with the holes. Turning a bolt in the bottom of the tool applies upward pressure on the cradle, pressing the cobalt drill bit into the spring with the needed force and requiring little effort by the installer. A ratchet wrench and socket are used to turn the bolt. The tool is free to rent but requires a \$150 refundable deposit and shipping fees in both directions.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER



and bumps, bouncing and body roll increased noticeably, as they often do when transitioning from smooth to rough roads.

After engaging the two lower StableLoads, the sag at the rear axle decreased to just ½ inch. The change in attitude of the truck, although small, could be felt in the driver's seat. A trip down the same rough road resulted in a considerable decrease in bouncing and body roll. Even on smooth surfaces, the stabilizers improved the F-350's handling noticeably.

While engaging and disengaging the Quick Disconnects is normally a simple procedure, the gap needed to rotate the wedge pack on the test truck was too small, requiring the rear of the pickup to be jacked up to create enough space. Although the F-350 appears not to sag when unloaded, the springs have

flattened enough over time to prevent the wedge pack from turning all the way into position.

The solution was to remove one wedge from the rear StableLoads, reducing the thickness to ½ inch and allowing the springs to preload without the need to jack up the truck. With the Quick Disconnects engaged and no load on the F-350, the ride was very stiff and uncomfortable, but once they were disconnected, the ride returned to normal.

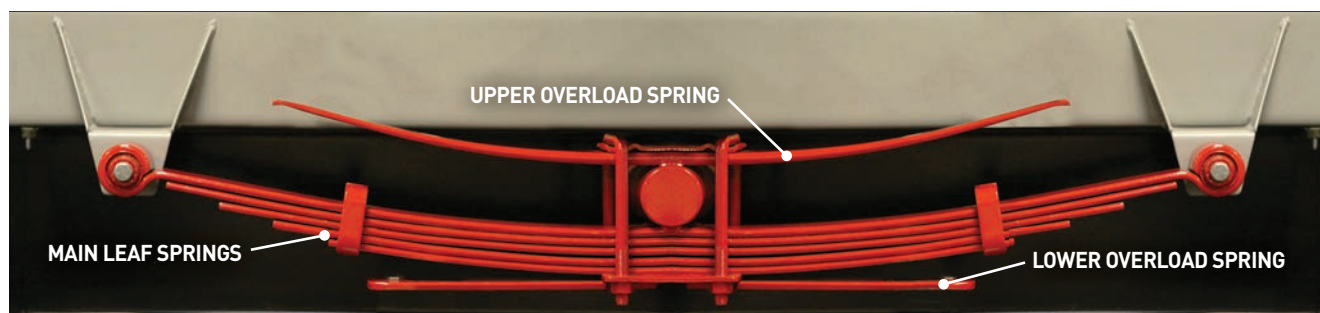
We also tested the lower StableLoads while towing several fifth-wheels and travel trailers. As expected, the stabilizers made a clear improvement in handling and controlling suspension bounce and body roll when towing heavy fifth-wheels. Sag was decreased, and the headlights maintained proper alignment. Initially, we thought towing a trailer using a weight-distributing hitch

and less weight on the F-350 would result in only a minor, if any, difference. Surprisingly, handling was much better with the Quick Disconnects engaged, and bouncing was reduced.

The StableLoad system installed easily in a little more than an hour and is an inexpensive solution to common handling problems. The lower Quick Disconnect kit works on trucks, vans, SUVs, commercial vehicles and motorhomes with leaf springs up to 3½ inches wide. The upper StableLoad kit and the lower Quick Disconnect no-drill kit each have an MSRP of \$319.99; the lower Quick Disconnect kit for vehicles that require drilling sells for \$342.99. The product is covered by a lifetime warranty. 🚚

Torklift International

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ANATOMY OF A LEAF-SPRING PACK

Leaf springs, commonly found on full-size pickup trucks, have been around since the days of horse-drawn carriages and wagons. While the design is simple, understanding how leaf springs work can help owners decide on the best type of suspension-assist system to fit their needs when towing a heavy trailer or hauling a truck camper.

Today's precision leaf springs are computer-designed and -engineered. The springs are arched and will flatten when weight is added to the truck. As the main leaf is compressed and straightened, it engages the shorter leaf underneath it. Adding more weight to the truck causes the additional leaves below to become engaged. The result is a suspension system that becomes stiffer as the weight of the load is increased.

With the need for trucks to carry heavy payloads, overload springs are often added to the leaf-spring pack. Overload springs

come in two types: upper and lower. Some trucks are equipped with just one type of overload spring, while others utilize both.

The upper overload is positioned above the main leaf spring. Two brackets with rubber bump stops are installed on the truck's frame and contact the ends of the upper overload when a significant load is placed on the truck. Because of the distance between the rubber bump stops and the overload spring, the rear of the truck must squat several inches before the upper overload comes into play.

The lower overload is flat, so there are gaps between both ends and the arched spring pack above it. Again, the truck must squat before the lower overload engages.

Rear squatting can lead to drivability problems, even when the truck's tow-capacity rating is properly matched to the trailer or the payload capacity is not exceeded. A sagging rear end causes the front of the truck to rise, resulting

in elevated headlight aiming that won't illuminate the road properly and could also affect the vision of oncoming drivers.

Another serious consequence of rear-end sag is loss of steering control because front-end weight is decreased. This can be especially dangerous on wet surfaces. And since a vehicle's front brakes provide up to 75 percent of its braking power, stopping distance can be increased. Sway and suspension bouncing (known as porpoising) can also be amplified.

A logical solution is to keep the springs engaged at all times, but the ride and handling would be extremely hard and unpleasant when driving an unloaded vehicle. Therefore, the springs activate in stages based on varying anticipated loads, factoring in that the truck probably won't be heavily loaded 100 percent of the time. To improve drivability, an adjustable or disengageable suspension-assist system can be considered.

Life Line

Spartan Power's new multifunctional jump starter provides off-grid charging and emergency power

Just about everyone has experienced that sinking feeling when turning the key and getting a *click-click-click* sound or nothing at all. It usually means making a call to a roadside-assistance service or looking around for someone to provide a jump start.

Now there's a fix, and it's an especially good one for RVers. Spartan Power has released its SP-JS20K multifunctional jump starter, a compact kit that, beyond being able to jump-start vehicles, can also be a power source for electronic devices. This makes the SP-JS20K valuable for RVers who like to dry camp.

Out of the box, the device and the provided cables and chargers are contained in a neat zippered pouch, with pockets and straps for accessories and the main battery unit. Included with the battery unit are a 120-volt AC charger, a 12-volt DC cigarette-lighter-style charger, a USB cable (with adapters for micro- and mini-USB and Apple Lightning connections), a set of eight charging adapters for things like laptops and TVs, and a special clamp unit for jump-starting vehicles.

ONE JUMP AHEAD » The SP-JS20K kit comes in a convenient zippered case with everything needed for emergency power without plugging in to the grid.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER

More than a pocket-size jump starter, the SP-JS20K is a portable power bank that charges cell phones, tablets, laptops and other electronics with its lithium-polymer battery.

The main power pack is a 20,000-milliampere-hour, 74-watt-hour lithium-polymer (LiPo) battery with intelligent technology and built-in safety mechanisms, a battery gauge to show how much charge the unit's internal battery has, an LED flashlight with strobe and blinking-SOS modes, and USB charging ports.

LiPo batteries, like those used in radio-controlled devices, have much higher capacities and discharge rates than other types of rechargeable batteries, but they also have shorter lifespans, averaging about 300 to 400 charge/discharge cycles, according to Spartan Power. Additionally, they require special care when using, storing, charging and discharging to

maximize battery life and prevent a runaway discharge.

To answer these concerns, Spartan Power has incorporated a number of safety mechanisms into the SP-JS20K to protect against current-return charging, an overload, short-circuit, over-discharge and more, according to the company. To minimize heat issues, the cells have been tested in a 149-degree Fahrenheit high-temperature vacuum environment a week before assembling. The quality of the SP-JS20K is underwritten by Allianz Property and Casualty, but Spartan Power cautions that the unit should not be stored, charged or used near combustibles.

The device has a



current of 450 amps, with a peak current of 950 amps, so it can start up to a 6.5-liter gasoline engine or up to a 5.2-liter diesel engine. Owners of some full-size trucks may not be able to jump-start their vehicles with the SP-JS20K, but they will be able to use the other functions and can jump-start smaller engines.

Another use for a unit like the SP-JS20K is that, in the event of a power failure in the RV, it can be used to bring in the slideouts, provided the slideout mechanism, motor and circuitry are still OK. This should be done only in an emergency, however. Be sure to follow the advice of a certified RV technician or the manufacturer's instructions.

The Spartan Power SP-JS20K has an MSRP of \$119 and is available from Amazon, Inverters R Us, Sears, Walmart and Jet. 📞

Spartan Power

775-800-1725

www.spartanpower.com/product/spjs20k



1



2



3



4

1) The SP-JS20K has two USB charging ports on one end. 2) The other end has a bright LED flashlight that also functions as a strobe and can be set to flash the SOS distress signal. 3) Turning on the sliding power switch activates the SP-JS20K; the battery gauge will illuminate, indicating the charge level. After the power switch is activated, the round power button turns on the unit from standby and can also turn the flashlight on and off. This side of the unit has a standard 12-volt DC jack and a micro-USB port. 4) The SP-JS20K has a special device with jump-start clamps for connecting to a battery and is capable of jump-starting up to a 6.5-liter gasoline engine and up to a 5.2-liter diesel engine.

NEWLY REDESIGNED FOR 2017



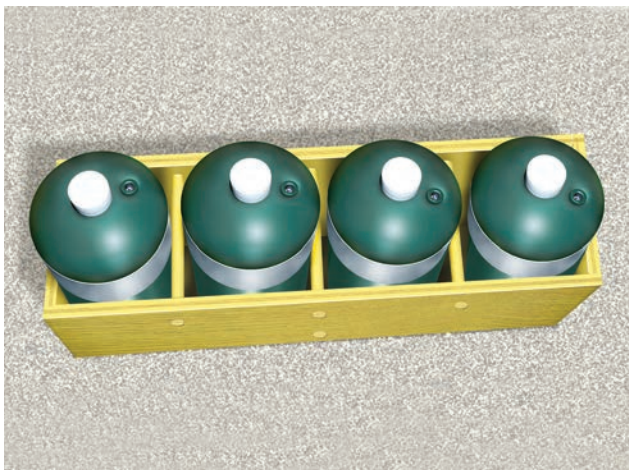
Check out our website for current pricing, options and standard features for the **NEWLY REDESIGNED 2017 ESCAPE** Travel Trailer in 17', 19' & 21' lengths. Also a 21' tandem axle fifth wheel (Escape 5.0TA).



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Traveling LP-Gas

I made a simple and versatile support to protect small, portable 1-pound propane cylinders while we're traveling. It is constructed from scrap wood and dowel rods to make four sections with an internal width to fit each cylinder. The box length can vary, based on the number of cylinders you want it to hold.

I inserted two dowel rods across the bottom to hold up the cylinders and a dowel rod or two between each one to keep them from banging together. For vertical storage, put a strap across the top to hold the cylinders in place or position two offset dowels between the bottles to provide a slope sufficient to keep them from sliding out.

Bryan Berlin, Tucson, Arizona



Theft-Resistant Cylinders

After hearing a fellow RVer's tale of having the LP-gas cylinders stolen while his trailer was in storage, I decided to secure my trailer's twin cylinders. I simply drilled matching holes in the large wing nut and the notched crossbar that holds the cylinders. After inserting a padlock through both holes, the cylinders are secure. I used a lock I had on hand for my garden shed, but the 3½-inch-long (89 millimeter) Trailer Coupler Latch Lock (1471DAT) from Master Lock would work well.

Dann Yeager, Vestal, New York



Sputter-Free Spouts

I have been RVing most of my adult life, and we now have a 35-foot 2006 Komfort trailer with almost 100,000 miles on it. As an avid reader of *Trailer Life* for 30-some years, I always enjoy reading the 10-Minute Tech column because of the good, useful information. I liked Bob Stanley's "No-Sputter Spouts" in the June issue.

I solved the air-in-the-line problem by hooking up a second water faucet with a 90-degree hose fitting (Camco part number 22463) at the freshwater connection on the trailer. I hook up the hose and turn on the park water, then open the faucet to flush out the line to remove all the air. This also provides a water tap at the side of the rig and makes a great hose connection to flush the black-water tank and drain the hose.

Hal Reinhart, Heber City, Utah

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

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- 576 in. lbs. of torque
- 2.5 amp hour battery
- Weighs 3.6 lbs.

\$99.99 **Customer Rating** **★★★★★** **SAVE \$79**

Compare \$179 **ITEM 63381**

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30", 5 DRAWER TOOL CART

- 8100 cu. in. of storage
- 704 lb. capacity
- Weighs 120 lbs.

Customer Rating **★★★★★** **SAVE \$990**

\$159.99 **Compare \$1150**

\$179.99 **ITEM 61427/63308/69397/95272 shown**

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LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

SUPER COUPON

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PITTSBURGH

1" x 25 FT. TAPE MEASURE

\$6.99 **VALUE**

ITEM 69030/69031 shown

41120918

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HaulMaster **SUPER COUPON**

TRIPLE BALL TRAILER HITCH

Customer Rating **★★★★★** **SAVE 53%**

\$19.99 **Compare \$42.98**

\$31.99 **ITEM 61914**

41125148

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

CENTRAL PNEUMATIC **SUPER COUPON**

6 GALLON, 1.5 HP, 150 PSI PROFESSIONAL AIR COMPRESSOR

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

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

SAVE \$47 **\$99.99**

\$124.99 **Compare \$147.29**

ITEM 62511/62894/62380/68149/67696 shown

41127549

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

SUPER COUPON

HEAVY DUTY FOLDABLE ALUMINUM SPORTS CHAIR

SAVE 50% **Customer Rating** **★★★★★**

\$19.99 **Compare \$39.99**

\$29.99 **ITEM 62314**

63066/66383 shown

41140078

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

CENTECH **SUPER COUPON**

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

Customer Rating **★★★★★** **SAVE 57%**

\$29.99 **Compare \$69.99**

\$49.99 **ITEM 60581/60653 shown**

41142351

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

CHICAGO ELECTRIC POWER TOOLS **SUPER COUPON**

12" SLIDING COMPOUND DOUBLE-BEVEL MITER SAW

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

- Powerful 15 amp motor
- Makes precision cross, bevel and miter cuts
- Laser guide

Blade sold separately.

\$129.99 **Compare \$299**

\$109.99 **ITEM 61969/61970/69684 shown**

41152192

LIMIT 8 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

HaulMaster **SUPER COUPON**

12 VOLT MAGNETIC TOWING LIGHT KIT

Customer Rating **★★★★★** **SAVE 71%**

\$9.99 **Compare \$34.95**

\$18.99 **ITEM 63100**

41159414

LIMIT 9 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

PITTSBURGH **SUPER COUPON**

RAPID PUMP® 1.5 TON ALUMINUM RACING JACK

SAVE \$50 **Customer Rating** **★★★★★**

- 3-1/2 Pumps Lifts Most Vehicles
- Lifts from 3-1/2" to 14-1/8"
- Lightweight 34 lbs.

\$59.99 **Compare \$109.99**

\$79.99 **ITEM 68053/62160**

62496/62516/60569 shown

41160143

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

PREDATOR **SUPER COUPON**

6.5 HP (212 CC) OHV HORIZONTAL SHAFT GAS ENGINE

Customer Rating **★★★★★** **SAVE \$230**

\$99.99 **Compare \$329.99**

\$119.99 **ITEM 60363/69730**

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41163185

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

PORTLAND **SUPER COUPON**

1750 PSI PRESSURE WASHER

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

- 1.3 GPM
- Adjustable spray nozzle

\$79.99 **Compare \$179.33**

\$99.99 **ITEM 63255/63254 shown**

41173542

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

SUPER COUPON

TWO TIER COLLAPSIBLE EASY-STORE STEP LADDER

Customer Rating **★★★★★** **SAVE 50%**

\$19.99 **Compare \$39.99**

\$29.99 **ITEM 67514**

41177642

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

WARRIOR **SUPER COUPON**

29 PIECE TITANIUM DRILL BIT SET

Customer Rating **★★★★★** **SAVE 83%**

\$9.99 **Compare \$60**

\$17.99 **ITEM 62281**

61637 shown

41179397

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

CENTRAL PNEUMATIC **SUPER COUPON**

3/8" x 50 FT. RETRACTABLE AIR HOSE REEL

Customer Rating **★★★★★** **SAVE \$170**

\$59.99 **Compare \$229.99**

\$79.99 **ITEM 69265/62344/93897 shown**

41183558

LIMIT 3 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

PITTSBURGH **SUPER COUPON**

ATV/LAWN MOWER LIFT

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

- 300 lb. capacity

\$79.99 **Compare \$179.99**

\$104.99 **ITEM 60395/62325/62493/61523 shown**

41194772

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

HaulMaster **SUPER COUPON**

3/8" x 14 FT., GRADE 43 TOWING CHAIN

Customer Rating **★★★★★** **SAVE 67%**

\$19.99 **Compare \$60.95**

\$30.99 **ITEM 60658/97711 shown**

41220047

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

PREDATOR **SUPER COUPON**

4000 PEAK/3200 RUNNING WATTS 6.5 HP (212 CC) GAS GENERATOR

Customer Rating **★★★★★** **SAVE \$1709**

\$289.99 **Compare \$1999**

\$329.99 **ITEM 69676/69729/63080/63079 shown**

CALIFORNIA ONLY

41220645

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

PITTSBURGH **SUPER COUPON**

32 PIECE SCREWDRIVER SET

Customer Rating **★★★★★** **SAVE 56%**

\$5.99 **Compare \$13.67**

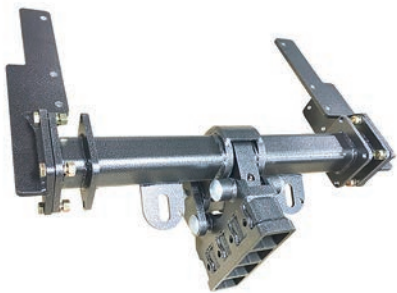
\$7.99 **ITEM 61259/90764 shown**

41222900

LIMIT 6 - Coupon valid through 2/10/18*

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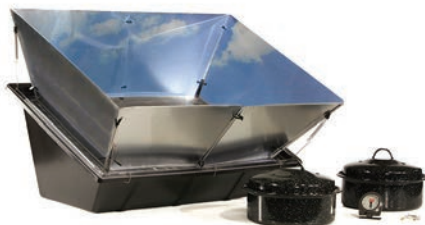
Game-Changing Hitch

A new trail in the RV-towing industry is being blazed by what Gen-Y Hitch claims is the first frame-mounted, bolt-on torsion-suspension Class V trailer hitch. Gen-Y's Torsion Suspension Hitch removes up to 90 percent of the inertia between the tow vehicle and trailer, greatly decreasing wear and tear on both while improving ride quality, according to the manufacturer. The drop hitch, which has a capacity of up to 21,000 pounds, functions like torsion axles on trailers, with a rubber insert that absorbs shock and allows rotational movement. It fits most 2002 and newer Ford, GM and Ram trucks. Gen-Y also offers weight-distributing kits that fit any of its hitches, including the torsion hitch.

MSRP: From \$1,299

574-218-6363, www.genyhitch.com

Circle 136 on Reader Service Card



Sunny Side Up

Outdoor cooking goes off the grill and off the grid with the Solavore Sport Solar Oven and TR-86 Reflector where the only energy needed to whip up tasty meals is sunshine. The lightweight oven is made from thick recycled plastic and has a double-layer Lexan lid that traps solar heat. The detachable reflector helps magnify the sun's radiation and focus it on what's for dinner, from meats, grains and vegetables to baked goods. Food cooks slowly, with no boiling, flames or smoke. As long as the sun's out, the Solavore works, even in freezing temperatures, according to the manufacturer. The oven comes with two three-quart graniteware pots with lids, a thermometer and recipes.

MSRP: \$287 (shipping included)

651-797-2514, www.solavore.com

Circle 137 on Reader Service Card



Grill Thriller

Grilling is more than what sears on the grate — it's a lifestyle for many RV enthusiasts who love to share time around the barbecue with family and friends. A key to perfection on the grill is keeping the temperature where it's supposed to be, and the high-tech Weber iGrill2 digital Bluetooth meat thermometer helps the cook do just that. It comes with two meat probes and can handle up to four probes at once, ensuring accurate monitoring of what's cooking, even from 150 feet away when using the Weber iGrill app on a smart device. The magnetic-mounted thermometer's LED readout has preset and custom alarms, temperature graphing and a 200-hour battery life.

MSRP: \$99.99

800-446-1071, www.weber.com

Circle 138 on Reader Service Card



Meals on Wheels

No table? No problem. RVers can turn any of the tires on their trailer or tow vehicle into an impromptu place to serve meals, set up a bar or work on a laptop outdoors with the Tailgater Tire Table. An innovative bracket hooks over the tire to provide a stable 23x29-inch platform, regardless of ground conditions. A retractable center leg offers additional support if needed. Made of durable powder-coated steel, the Tailgater Tire Table weighs less than 12 pounds and fits a wide range of RV and automotive tires on 14-inch and larger rims, including the spare, so there's always a table within easy reach.

MSRP: \$139.95

775-622-8048, www.tailgatertiretable.com

Circle 139 on Reader Service Card

**PRODUCT
SPOTLIGHT**

Handy, Hardy Wipes

Hardy Wipes disposable towels from E-Zoil come in handy for wiping down areas and tidying up things in and around RVs and tow vehicles. Each 9x12-inch towel is soaked in an environmentally friendly, high-performance cleaner that is said to remove grease, oil, tar and dirt from hands, tools and most surfaces. One side of the towel is abrasive to cut through grime, and the other is smooth to wipe surfaces clean. A sealed lid on the 70-towel dispenser ensures that the wipes remain moist and retain their fresh citrus scent.

MSRP: \$18

855-693-9645, www.ezoil.com

Circle 140 on Reader Service Card



Under-Cover Tires

Installing and removing tire covers on RVs and other vehicles can be a real pain because the attaching devices are often hard to reach. Not so with Zip-Tight Tire Covers. The marine-grade vinyl covers are designed to slip easily over tires, then zip closed — there's no need to get on hands and knees to secure straps or cables. The covers can be used on front and rear tires (even duallies), and are said to conform to the tires for a snug fit so they stay put, even in strong winds. The covers come in four colors and two types of vinyl, and the company claims it can make any size you need.

MSRP: From \$47/pair

661-480-5955

www.zip-tighttirecovers.com

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- Programming for as little as \$34.99 per month!
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*Distant Network Service: Add ABC, CBS, NBC and FOX from Los Angeles to your account to get network stations in HD wherever you roam! May be received only with a satellite antenna that is permanently attached to an RV or commercial truck. Additional restrictions apply. Proof of vehicle registration and other verification requirements apply.

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†After 3 months you will be billed \$15/mo unless you call to cancel. HBO® and related channels and service marks are the property of Home Box Office, Inc.

Installation/Equipment Requirements: Monthly fees and limits on number and type of receivers will apply. All charges, including monthly programming, pay-per-view and equipment upgrades, must be paid in advance; failure to pay by due date will lead to service disconnection within 24 hours. Miscellaneous: Offers available for new and qualified former customers. Offers subject to terms of applicable Promotional and Residential Customer agreements. Taxes or reimbursement charges for state gross earnings taxes may apply. Additional restrictions may apply.

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TIRE-TO-TIRE GAP

Q I have a question regarding the safe distance (gap) between fifth-wheel RV tires. I've looked at various tandem-axle trailers, and the distance between the tires varies. The distance between our fifth-wheel tires is about 1½ inches, and that seems to be too close together.

Our RV is a 2015 Redwood 38RL that we purchased in February 2016. It is a beautiful, spacious trailer that my wife and I enjoy very much. We had an issue last December when a bolt came out of the undercarriage, causing extensive damage that required the replacement of the rear axle, a portion of the frame and all four tires.

I don't recall how close together the tires were prior to the repairs, but now they seem too close. Should I be concerned?

Robert Lorbeer, Prescott, Arizona

A "A miss is as good as a mile," Robert, and as long as your RV's tires don't show any evidence of contact-related damage, you're good. There are different tire-to-tire spacings because there are many different tire sizes

and suspension configurations in use on different size and model trailers.

A trailer suspension primarily allows a tire to move vertically with the suspension travel, but there's also a small amount of fore-and-aft movement that takes place. However, there's not enough fore-and-aft movement to cause tires to rub when they're 1½ inches apart at rest. If a suspension were so worn out that it allowed that much flopping around, it would need some serious repair, and it's likely the tires would be failing because they'd be seriously out of alignment.

Make sure the shackles and other components are in good shape, and your setup is probably fine.

MORE TIRE CLEARANCE

Q I have a 34-foot Keystone Tailgator toy hauler with only 2 to 3 inches of clearance between the fifth-wheel's tires and the top of the fender well. The tires were rubbing the top, and the factory had left a screw above the rear tires on both sides. On the right side, the screw punctured the tire, and the tire shredded on a recent trip.

When I figured this out, I had my springs put on top of the axles instead of under them. This raised the trailer about 5½ inches. The sewer dump was also very low, and the front of the trailer was high when hooked to my truck. This fixed all of that.

What is your opinion on having this done? It cost me only \$432.

Roger Meacham, San Angelo, Texas

A That seems like a pretty good pricing deal, Roger, and the clearance-problem solution should

work well. Doing a spring and axle flip is a solid, reliable way to raise the trailer a few inches. Some people express concern that this may make a trailer less stable, but in fact it would take a much greater lift to adversely affect handling. A few inches will raise the rig's center of gravity a bit, but not enough to cause any harm, unless you're in the habit of speeding around corners, for example.

EXTERIOR POLISH

I read Marlyn Demeter's "Fiberglass Cleanup Redux" letter in July's RV Clinic about repairing the finish on the front end of a trailer. My brother-in-law used a product on the sides of his motorhome. It looked great, so I tried some on the front of our fifth-wheel, which is exposed to the sun from dawn to 3 p.m. daily. Wow, it looks like new. It was designed for boats but works

on fiberglass RVs. The product is Poli Glow, and it can be ordered at 800-922-5013 or on www.poliglow-int.com. I hope this helps.

David Rayles, Vevay, Indiana

Thank you for the recommendation, David. There are a number of good products for restoring an RV's fiberglass finish on the market, and it's good to hear that Poli Glow worked for you. We're passing this on to our readers, as some may find it very useful.

HALF-TON TOWING BY THE NUMBERS

Q I read September's "Half-Ton Towables" article on fifth-wheel towing with a full-size pickup. I have a 2014 Toyota Tundra and tow a 2013 28-foot Palomino Puma.

I have had the truck and trailer weighed with my wife and me in the truck and the trailer loaded for a trip. The truck weighs 5,220 pounds, and the trailer was weighed separately at 8,460 pounds. Dry weight on the sticker for the trailer is 6,922 pounds,

TECH EXPERT



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

and cargo capacity is 2,871 pounds. If I add the empty weight of the trailer and the cargo weight, that comes to 9,793 pounds. According to Toyota's owner's guide, the truck will pull 12,300 pounds in the bed.

Is the weight of the truck included in that total towing capacity from the manufacturer, or is it just the weight of the trailer? The tongue weighs 1,086 pounds.

This has nothing to do with tow-

ing weight, but the brakes Toyota put on the Tundra did not hold up, even though I have the towing package. Toyota replaced two sets of front brake pads under warranty. I have since changed all four wheels to Power Stop rotors and pads.

Bill Allender, North Hills, California

A We address the matter of how to use the gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR), gross axle weight rating

(GAWR), gross combination weight rating (GCWR) and other figures relating to setting up or analyzing a tow rig and trailer combination on a regular basis in these pages and on our website. The question keeps arising, so we'll take another shot at it here.

First, you didn't provide body style, engine, axle ratio and other pertinent towing information, so some of our figures will be approximate, based on Toyota's 2014 Tundra published information. Your truck is rated for a maximum tow rating of 10,400 pounds and ranges down to 9,000 pounds, based on the variables mentioned above.

To determine the true towing capacity for your truck, you'll need to deduct the weight of the truck, passengers, accessories, fuel and cargo from the GCWR, which could be as much as 16,000 pounds, depending on factory equipment. If your truck has the highest GCWR, you should be in good shape regarding your trailer's 8,460-pound weight.

Regarding your frequent brake-pad replacement, we haven't heard any other reader reports of this situation, so it doesn't seem to be a significant problem with Tundra trucks. If the brake control is not adjusted properly, the trailer will not do its share of braking and that could cause premature pad wear. This is also dangerous, because in an emergency you won't have the full potential trailer braking to stop the combo.

I'd recommend taking the truck and trailer to a service center to check the brake-control adjustment and inspect the trailer brakes for proper operation. This may well eliminate or significantly reduce premature brake wear.

MANUAL AUTOMATIC SHIFT DOWN

Q I have a 1999 F-350 truck with the 7.3-liter diesel engine and automatic transmission. For years you have suggested that, if the transmission is shifting up and down frequently, you should shift into the lower gear until you're past the need for it.



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What about the newer diesels with six to eight speeds — won't it create the same problem of overheating the transmission?

By the way, is there any way I can get a six-speed transmission? It sure would be handy when cresting Siskiyou Pass at the Oregon-California border or Tehachapi Pass between Bakersfield and Mohave in California.

Bob Richardson, Kent, Washington

ATo answer the last question first, yes, you probably could replace the transmission with a six-speed model, but it's going to be a very expensive process, and it may be difficult to make the newer transmission's electronics work with your truck. This falls in the it-can-be-done-but-it's-impractical category.

Another option may be to use a lower rear-axle ratio, then fit your existing transmission with an over-drive system such as those that are available from Gear Vendors (www.gearvendors.com). This would give the truck lower gearing for pulling the hills without sacrificing the ability to drive comfortably at highway speeds. Again, this can be expensive.

In the meantime, yes, even the newer trucks with more gearshift selections should be manually downshifted to avoid transmission overheating or damage due to gear hunting under load. Even the newer transmissions can be subject to overheating due to some gear hunting, but the availability of more gear selections means the transmission can more readily find a proper gear for a given driving situation.

Those transmissions include manual shift controls, so in tow/haul mode you have a lot of control over shifting down. The same controls help lock the automatic in gear when driving downhill to provide more engine-compression braking.

TIRE PRESSURES BEING EQUAL?

Q This question concerns front and rear tire pressures. I have been RVing for some 40 years in trucks with

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campers and now travel trailers. I run the same pressure in all my trailer's tires. I watch the middle and edges of the tires for wear. With running today's hitch setups, the equalizer hitch puts some weight on the tires, but is it the same pressure on all four tires? Should there be more pressure in the back tires and less in the front? I get lots of varying answers. Even tire pressures are debated.

I run BFGoodrich T/As for a stiffer sidewall. The T/As are now E-rated tires. My other set of T/A tires were D-rated. These tires will go up to 80 PSI. I have run 55 PSI for years, and that seems to work well on my 22-foot Northwood Nash trailer. So, to air or not to air is the question.

Craig Foxgord, Independence, Oregon

A That's an interesting question, Craig. We had not considered the need to use different tire pressures on the front and back of a trailer. However, you should always set the tires to the same pressure, as the equalizing component of the leaf-spring suspension (as the name suggests) equalizes the load on the tires at both axles. Likewise, it never hurts to run the tires at their maximum-rated pressure, but you should watch tire wear closely. Just be sure that the additional pressure does not exceed the wheel rating.

If you are using tires that are dramatically overrated for the load, you may want to consult the load rating and pressure chart available for every tire. If the tire is significantly overinflated for the load, it may be running on too small a tire-tread patch, which can result in uneven tread wear. You also need to be aware of carrying-capacity changes. Having individual tire weights and comparing the numbers against the tire manufacturer's load rating and pressure charts will allow you to make proper adjustments, if necessary.

An 80-PSI tire that's operated at 55 PSI will have a significant load capacity, and the chart will show you how much each tire can carry at any given pressure. You didn't mention the size of your trailer's new tires, but, for ex-

ample, an LT235/70R15 tire rated to carry 2,600 pounds at 80 PSI is rated to carry 2,010 pounds when inflated to 55 PSI. It's worth knowing your numbers when towing, and be sure to keep those tires balanced to help keep them in good shape.



FIFTH-WHEEL WIRING MELTDOWN

Q I am writing to let you know about my experience with the wiring in my 2012 Keystone Laredo fifth-wheel. Without warning, the 15-amp 120-volt AC breaker in the main power panel tripped.

We were watching TV at the time, and it was a comfortably warm day in northern Florida. The air conditioner was not on, and when the TV went off, we thought we had a power failure. We soon discovered that only some of the power was down in the trailer and only the one 15-amp breaker was involved. I tried to reset it, but it immediately tripped again.

I then discovered that eight receptacles were involved throughout the trailer, and the 120-volt AC supply to the refrigerator had reset to LP-gas. All of these were connected to the one 15-amp breaker. The fridge alone was almost enough by itself to trip the breaker.

After a two-and-a-half-hour inspection, we finally found the problem, which was a connector in the rear bottom of the trailer. It then took another two hours to do the repair. The plastic connector was completely melted and could easily have caused a fire. We decided that it was best to hardwire the connection. I recommend that trailer owners check the breakers in the power panel to ensure they do not have the same fire hazard.

One more problem I would like to mention is that the power panel labels

were incorrect, which caused me to get a shock when I replaced the power switch on the Dometic hot-water tank.

Rene Roscher, Kingston, Ontario

A We're sorry to hear about that issue, Rene. It's always a good idea to disconnect the power source when working with 120-volt AC power, and your mislabeled circuit breaker is a good example why.

Depending on your RV refrigerator's size, rating and so on, it draws only about 5 to 8 amps of power when operating on 120 volts AC, so it's not nearly enough to overload a 15-amp circuit. A digital TV is only about 1 or 2 amps, so that's not a deal breaker either. If there's a GFCI receptacle in that circuit, it can fail and cause a circuit breaker to trip. I've replaced those in brand-new units, so it's worth checking that detail as well.

Your discovery that eight receptacles were involved is typical, as each breaker is usually wired to a group of receptacles or load sources. If you didn't have a mystery load on at the same time as your TV and fridge, it's possible there may also have been a defective circuit breaker, which happens sometimes.

And while your photo clearly shows some melting damage to the component, we can't quite tell exactly what this component is or where it fits into the wiring schematic. That kind of melting can occur in a faulty component, or poor wiring connections can lead to overheating due to increased resistance, for example. I'm glad that hard-wiring around it helped solve the problem.

BEARING BUDDY MAINTENANCE

Q I bought a 2005 Jayco 28-foot fifth-wheel, and it has Bearing Buddy wheel-bearing protectors instead of sealed bearings. How often do I need to pump grease into the bearings? I don't want to over-grease, nor do I want to not grease enough. Is there a normal?

John Eggenberger, Saunemin, Illinois

A The Bearing Buddy product very rarely requires attention, but the company offers specific information on maintenance in the FAQ section of its website, www.bearingbuddy.com. There, it recommends inspecting the bearings once every five years as long as you properly maintain the grease level in the hubs. Reading more on the website will detail exactly how this is done. Be aware, though, that regardless of the five-year suggestion, you should inspect the bearings annually when using any bearing-maintenance device or material such as synthetic lubricant.

Even a small RV refrigerator operated on 12 volts DC will draw more current than one battery can reliably supply, even when charged with a solar panel.

SOLAR-PANEL SIZE

Q I was wondering how big a solar panel I would need to keep an Interstate SRM-24 550-CCA battery charged to run a water pump, small refrigerator and lights in a Jayco Jay Feather 17C hybrid travel trailer.

Robert Schanz, Middleburgh, New York

A Robert, the Interstate SRM-24 is a modest-size battery, and given your planned power usage, you'll need a fairly hefty solar-panel array and probably at least one more 12-volt battery wired in a parallel. Even a small RV refrigerator operated on 12 volts DC will draw more current than one battery can reliably supply, and you'll need something along the lines of 400 watts of solar panels to keep up with that power demand.

For people who live in less-sunny climates, such as the Pacific Northwest or New England, the system's ability to recharge the batteries by day will be more limited.

When it comes to solar-battery charging, the more the merrier, as they say, and you'll almost never hear



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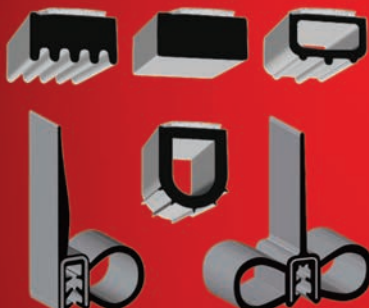
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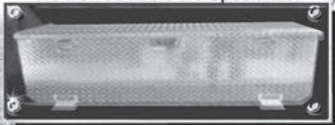
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While every effort is made to maintain accuracy and completeness, last-minute changes may occasionally result in omissions or errors.

someone say, "Gosh, I put too many solar panels on my RV, and they keep the batteries too well charged for my use." Your RV refrigerator operates very efficiently on LP-gas, and that would be a better option for longer-term camping trips off the grid.

SLIDE WON'T SLIDE

Q I have a 2012 Redwood 36RL with a recurring problem that has me baffled. The bedroom slide is electric, utilizing the Schwintek mechanism, and is short 3 to 10 inches of coming in all the way. My best results are when I am pushing it in with all my might while a companion holds the retract switch. Camping World has replaced the entire drive mechanism and added 1x6-inch planks to the bedroom floor so the carpet does not interfere with movement. We have examined all the contacts, wiring and plumbing lines for interference, with no solution.

I travel extensively and am always on the hunt for other Redwoods so I can quiz the owners. I finally found another 2012 owner with the same problem. He told me the factory used wire that was too light until the 2013 model year, and that I needed to re-wire the electric feed line. He had no idea what size wire to use or what size fuse. I am ready to try anything. Can you please tell me how feasible this fix sounds and what wire should be used?

Jim Stoll, Searchlight, Nevada

A This is a tough question to answer, Jim. The status lights in the controller should provide some diagnostic information.

We spoke with engineers at Lippert Components, manufacturer of the In-Wall Slide-Out system, to get their take. And while we don't actually have our hands on your RV, we can narrow down what's going on with the slide-out. We are in agreement that this is likely a mechanical issue, not an electrical one. The slideout motor is rated at 20 amps, which should be able to move the room with no problem, unless there is an obstruction or a physical problem with the slide box, the

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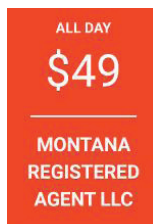


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mechanism or the opening in the wall.

A visual inspection is required to fully diagnose this problem, starting with checking for any obstructions and jamming of the wiper seals or floor rollers, etc. Then measurements need to be taken of the slide box, from corner to corner, to make sure it is square, and of the slide mechanism to see if the gear rack is misaligned or the H-column on the wall is mounted incorrectly.

If this were an issue with the wiring, you would get an error code on the LED status lights on the control board. This is worth checking the next time the slideout fails. Lippert claims it hasn't had a wiring issue to the controller, and the RV manufacturers are doing a good job of providing adequate power to the system. A wire-harness issue between the motors and the controller would throw an error code, and the system probably wouldn't work at all.

If the 12-volt DC supply to the system dropped, the system would stop, and there would be an error code for loss of 12 volts DC, but the system will operate from 8 to 18 volts DC. If it is losing power, try troubleshooting the RV's power system, making sure that you have a fully charged battery in the RV. Ten-gauge wire feeding the controller is the minimum size required for an In-Wall slide, fused to 30 amps, according to Lippert. The LED status codes are printed on the face of the controller. A multimeter with a DC amp-clamp will help diagnose wiring and power-supply problems.

Lippert would be happy to help you. You can use the new Chat Now feature on the company's MyLCI mobile app, and someone will call you back. The same goes for the company's website, www.lci1.com. You can also call 574-537-8900 for assistance. ☎

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From early October through late May, the 8-mile road to Moraine Lake closes to motorized traffic.

My husband, Mark, and I took advantage of our shoulder-season stay to bicycle to the lake without having to worry about tourist buses and other passing vehicles. Leaving our truck and fifth-wheel at the nicely wooded Lake Louise Campground, we felt as though we were pedaling through the pages of a vacation brochure. As we crested the last hill, a perfect row of sawtooth summits flanked the glistening turquoise lake before us. The vivid color was a shock to our senses, and we flew down the final descent.

At the water's edge, we leaned our bikes against a tree and wandered along the shoreline, peacefully alone in this private corner of heaven except for the scampering wildlife. We had to smile when we noticed that even the chipmunks paused now and then to stare at the sublime view.

When the road opened to motor vehicles, we returned to Moraine Lake in our truck, making a point to arrive before daybreak when the parking lot was nearly empty. Breathing deeply in the crisp alpine air, we watched in awe as the mountains turned pink from the

top down with the rising sun. The scenery is something we'll never forget.

Banff National Park is an easy day's drive from the U.S. border. In celebration of Canada's 150th birthday this year, entrance to all of the country's national parks is free with a Parks Canada Discovery Pass. Passes are available in provincial and regional visitor centers and on the Parks Canada website, and are good through the end of 2017. 📱



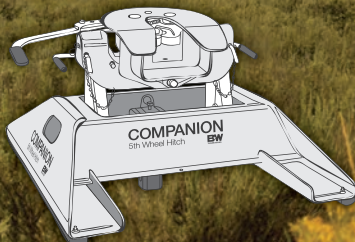
Alberta's Crown Jewel

In the Valley of the Ten Peaks, a row of snow-streaked pinnacles towers behind astonishingly turquoise Moraine Lake.

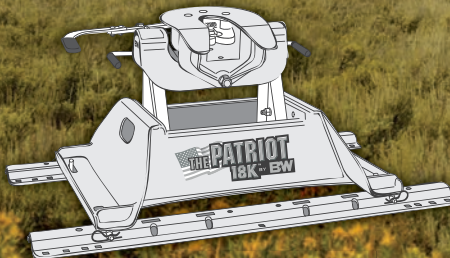
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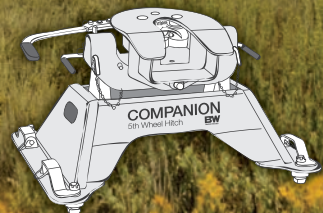
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