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PULLING POWER
35 ENGINE PRODUCTS
TO REV UP THE
PONIES Page 40



TESTED

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THE 2019 **RAM 1500** MAKES
LIGHT WORK OF TOWING THE
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WHAT'S THE PLAN?

Spontaneity is great, but when it comes to RV trips, preparing in advance can pay off with a splashy campsite at a desirable destination. Page 35





Before You Go

Whether you're heading south for the winter or just getting away for the weekend, it pays to plan ahead

October is a great time to travel with an RV, whether seeking out autumn fairs and festivals or, for snowbirds, beginning the migration south to escape winter's chill. For all of you sun-seekers preparing for the journey — and for any RV owner, for that matter — here are a few things to keep in mind.

First, get your RV serviced prior to leaving. Many RV service centers are taxed to the max these days, so facilitating repairs can be a challenge. If your rig will need work done in the Sunbelt this winter, consider making an appointment now.

Second, load your RV carefully. We get many letters from RVers about tire failures

Parking lots at Walmart and Pilot Flying J are fine for a night or two, but I wouldn't want to spend my vacation there.

and other weight-related issues. While nothing can prevent problems from happening, staying within the design limitations of your equipment is the best way to hedge against inopportune issues. After packing your RV, weigh it, preferably by wheel position, and adjust for balance.

Third, plan ahead for places to stay. Preferred campsites — or any sites — in the Sunbelt in winter will be hard to come by at the last minute. Parking lots at Walmart and Pilot Flying J are fine for a night or two, but I wouldn't want to spend my vacation there.

Fourth, explore new ways to make RVing easier and more enjoyable. There are lots of great add-on accessories and systems for RVs these days. Why not try a DIY project? In addition to this issue's 10-Minute Tech ideas (page 48), there's an easy two-part project, the Hopkins Endurance Heavy-Duty Leveling System and RV Smart-Level (page 46). Building the leveling boards and installing the LED level take about an hour and, combined, they make setting up on a campsite easier.

This issue is also packed with new RVs, starting with the Little Guy Max, a great looking teardrop trailer decked out with all the options (page 12). Chris Hemer had no trouble towing the Max to a forested campground in Oregon with the 2019 Ram 1500 Crew Cab.

I got a chance to check out the Keystone Cougar 368MBI, a comfortable fifth-wheel with four slides and a fully enclosed mid-trailer room that works as a secluded living area, den or mobile

office by day and a private bedroom by night (page 19).

Wrapping things up, Stephanie and Jeremy Puglisi report on a wide range of 2019 travel trailers that offer the comforts of home and are priced between \$25,000 and \$50,000 (page 23).

Wherever the road takes you this fall, plan ahead, take your time and, above all, have fun. **TL**

— Chris Dougherty, Technical Editor



PEP UP THE PONIES

"Gas or diesel, an engine is just an air pump," writes Bruce W. Smith. "Get more air and fuel into it, and performance increases. It's as simple as that." To help RVers looking for a little more towing power, he rounded up 35 aftermarket products designed to boost air and fuel flow (page 40). A contributor to *Trailer Life* for nearly three decades, Bruce prefers a 4x4 pickup to any car — except a Corvette. His wife says he's quite at home in the outdoors, and she's quite happy in the comfort of an RV.



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FOLLOW THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

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LIGHTHOUSE
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ENLIGHTENED TRAILER

We're very fond of lighthouses and have been traveling all over the continent to visit them. We even added a custom lighthouse graphic on the rear of our RV. After reading "Pacific Northwest Paint Job" in your July Letters column and seeing the colorful murals on Tammy Bennett's trailer, I thought I'd share a photo of our trailer.

Robert Malo, Terrebonne, Quebec



HAVE A COMMENT?

Write to us at info@trailerlife.com or *Trailer Life*, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Please include your full name, city and state or province.



☹ Think Tanks

August's "Tanks a Lot" was a great article on extra fuel capacity by Bruce W. Smith. When towing our 36-foot fiver, mileage in our truck averages about 10 MPG. I got tired of having to start looking for a fuel stop at half a tank and getting anxious when we ventured off the interstates, so I put in a 36-gallon transfer tank. The ability to access fuel on the go allows me to choose where and when I want to stop to fill up.

Daniel Judy, Fort Madison, Iowa

Regarding "Tanks a Lot," I have a 2010 Ford F-350 and tow a 38-foot fifth-wheel. I looked into increasing the diesel-fuel capacity and settled on a Titan Travel Trekker 50-gallon in-bed tank. I am sure happy with my investment. I hate to drive into most gas stations to fill up with my fifth-wheel attached since I'm never really certain of the



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turnaround unless the station has an island for large trucks.

The stock tank has a 38-gallon capacity, for a total capacity of 88 gallons. I considered replacing the onboard tank, but that would have given me only 50 gallons. All I have to do is press the button on the Travel Trekker's controller, and fuel is dispensed into the 38-gallon tank.

Dan Nila, Prescott Valley, Arizona

So Much Time, So Few Campsites

I read Chris Dougherty's August column, "The Changing Face of RVing," about the swelling ranks of RVers. I am now retired and can go anywhere, anytime, but I often cannot because of crowded campgrounds.

Thom Schuett

Queen Creek, Arizona

Chris Dougherty replies: *The RV and campground industries hear you loud and clear, Thom, and recent initiatives are addressing that very issue. With RVing seeing an unprecedented level of popularity, it's requiring a lot of attention from many parties to catch up.*

The Turn of the Hitch

I read "Turn the Pin Around" in August's RV Resolutions. I had the same issue where my Andersen hitch was installed incorrectly. It damaged the side rail of the truck bed, and the installer took zero responsibility. Rotating the coupler 180 degrees on the kingpin solved the issue. Your graphic seems to suggest that you rotate the entire hitch platform, which may be misleading.

Jeff Koehler, Emerson, Georgia

LEVEL OR STABILIZE?

My husband and I read every issue of *Trailer Life* from cover to cover. Chris Dougherty's very informative April article, "On the Lighter Side,"

about the Grand Design Reflection 150 Series 230RL fifth-wheel highlighted the absence of auto-leveling jacks and stated, "Leveling is accomplished via blocks and scissor jacks in the rear." We have always been advised that scissor jacks are to be used only for stabilizing and supporting a trailer, and not for leveling, as they are not intended to bear the amount of weight that leveling would require. In the absence of leveling jacks, leveling should be done using blocks under the tires. We use the plastic stackable blocks, which make it easy to form a graduated step on which to lift the trailer.

Judy Ruhling, Woodstock, Georgia

Chris Dougherty replies: *You are absolutely correct, Judy, and I have generally been diligent about reminding people of that. The point I was trying to make was that you need to use blocks to level the trailer, and then stabilize using the scissor jacks. TL*



THEY CAME, THEY SAW, THEY CAMPED!



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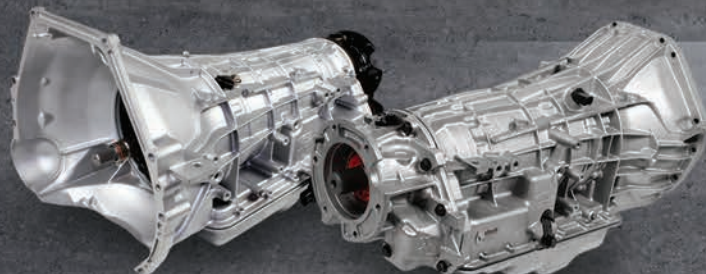
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HOCKING HILLS, OHIO

Out of this World

Gazing at far-off galaxies from John Glenn Astronomy Park, Ohio's new dark-sky venue

It's a clear night in Hocking Hills State Park in southeastern Ohio. Step out your RV's door, walk a short distance from the campground, and you'll enter a different world of intensely dark skies and very bright stars.

The Hocking Hills area abounds with caves, waterfalls, cliffs and gorges, but it also offers what has become a rare natural wonder: pristine dark skies. That made Hocking Hills State Park the perfect place to build the new John Glenn Astronomy Park (JGAP), where nature lovers and astronomers alike may view dazzling stars and planets the way our ancestors did, without the impact of city lights.

Before his death in 2016, astronaut and U.S. Senator John Glenn enthusiastically agreed to lend his name to the park, which opened in June, just in time for the summer solstice. Even during the day, JGAP offers visitors

a chance to learn about the solar system. Many features of its 80-foot Solar Plaza demonstrate the sun's orientation to the earth and how it changes throughout the year.

JGAP shines brightest on Friday and Saturday nights when Director Brad Hoehne conducts astronomy programs with local volunteers, many from the Columbus Astronomical Society and Ohio University. They enthusiastically share their love of the cosmos with those new to stargazing as well as seasoned amateur astronomers who bring their own telescopes. For capturing images of the night sky, JGAP offers the use of telescopes designed specifically for astrophotography.

Most exciting, though, is when the roof of the new observatory rolls back to reveal the huge reflecting telescope. Hoehne says, "I call it the 'Wow!' or the 'Whoa!' telescope because that's what people say when they look

through it and see the planets, moon and stars as they've never seen them before." He says globular clusters of stars are the biggest showstoppers. "One called M13, for example, contains over one and a half million stars and makes a ghostly haze in the dark sky." *Whoa!*

The park and its campgrounds are open year-round, but Hoehne and friends will put the seasonal Friday and Saturday programming on hold from the end of November through March. Admission is free, but donations are welcome.

John Glenn Astronomy Park
www.jgap.info

HOCKING HILLS STATE PARK

Open year-round, the main campground accommodates RVs on 169 sites, most with hookups. Amenities include a swimming pool, campground store, hot showers, flush toilets, laundry facilities and a dump station. parks.ohiodnr.gov/hockinghills

↑ A short walk from the campground at Ohio's Hocking Hills State Park leads to the new John Glenn Astronomy Park, with dark skies and dazzling views of the stars and Milky Way.



Eggs on Wheels

Ninety classic and contemporary molded-fiberglass travel trailers drew onlookers' attention for miles around as they gathered at the third-annual Eggs on the Hiawassee River Rally, May 31 through June 3. One of the largest events in the country for this RV niche, the rally took place at Riverbend Campground in Hiawassee on Georgia's northeastern border.

Named for the rounded shape of the trailers' shells, the rally drew about 175 owners and fans of the lightweight "eggs" that have boat-like hulls and no seams. The event showcased the new fiberglass Airstream Nest, a renovated 1971 Boler and other new and vintage trailers. Sponsors included Casita, Escape, Happier Camper, Liberty Outdoors, Little Guy MyPod, Oliver, Outback Trillium, ParkLiner, Relic, Scamp and Southland RV.

The fourth-annual Eggs on the Hiawassee River Rally will be held May 30 through June 2, 2019. If you have a molded-fiberglass trailer and would like to reserve a spot, call Riverbend Campground at 706-896-1415. — *John Martin*

www.facebook.com/groups/eggsonthehiawassee

Let's Make a Deal

● RV shows are great places to shop for the perfect rig. Not only do they showcase a fleet of new models all in one place, often with manufacturers' reps and dealers on hand to answer questions, they appeal to buyers with competitive prices.

On the West Coast, the largest RV consumer event is the 10-day California RV Show. This year's 66th annual show packs more than 1,300 new RVs into Pomona's LA Fairplex, October 5 through 14. Dealers from across the Golden State will bring the latest rolling stock for show-goers to walk through and even test-drive.

In addition to new RVs, educational seminars, exhibits and entertainment, the 2018 show offers celebrity meet-and-greets and free Ferris-wheel rides. Visitors to the show's website can enter the sweepstakes for a chance to win a new Lance 1475 travel trailer.

www.thebestrvshow.com

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74%

From RV shows to dealers' lots, sales of new RVs have spiked in the past few years. According to a 2018 survey conducted by Go RVing, 74 percent of recent buyers said innovative features and designs were what motivated them to make the purchase.
www.gorving.com/where-to-find/rv-shows

SWEET DREAMS

From a bunkhouse trailer to a mid-bunk toy hauler and a twin-bed motorhome, three new RVs make it easy to catch 40 winks



Leisure Travel Vans Wonder
Built on the Ford Transit chassis, the RTB (from \$118,300) features twin beds that slide together or an optional Murphy bed. But the beds aren't the only big news in this motorhome. The 24-foot, 9-inch Class C has the largest kitchen in the manufacturer's lineup and an innovative exterior garage that fits two full-size bicycles or other toys (within weight limits). Gross vehicle weight rating (gvwr) is 10,360 pounds.
www.leisurevans.com

Jayco Talon

The 42-foot, 4½-inch 392T (from \$64,310) is Jayco's first toy hauler with a mid-bunk room. The fully enclosed room has a 60-inch trifold sofa with a flip-down bunk above it, housed in a slide. There's more sleeping space in the loft above the room, plus a walk-around queen bed up front, a drop-down electric queen bed in the rear and three convertible sofas. The fifth-wheel has a 16,900-pound gvwr.
www.jayco.com



Travel Lite Aura

One of nine models in the new Aura line of lightweight travel trailers and toy haulers, the 30½-foot 31BHK (from \$27,710) features a rear bunkhouse and a convertible dinette in a slideout. The sizable master bedroom offers a queen bed and a small sink, separate from the bathroom. With a gvwr of 7,840 pounds, the trailer has an aerodynamically tapered nose, a diamond-plate rock guard and a pair of entry doors. A rear camp kitchen and electric awning make it easy to enjoy the outdoors.
www.travellitecampers.com

Trading Places

A Colorado family swaps apartment dwelling for life on wheels

Living the full-time RV lifestyle was something Coloradans Kendall James and Kyle Campbell had been considering for a while. The idea of enjoying freedom and mobility while keeping costs low had great appeal, so this year they took the leap and purchased a 24-foot travel trailer.

Having two children may have been a deterrent for some people, but the couple forged ahead and made the trailer a home for James' 21-month-old son,

Odin, and eight-year-old daughter, Rain, who splits her time living with her dad in the suburbs of Denver.

Although full-time RVing might seem unfathomable to some parents, James says the experience has brought her family closer together. Rain adjusted well to campground life, and Odin sleeps better than he did in their apartment. Additionally, moving into a travel trailer allowed the couple to dramatically reduce

their expenses.

Transitioning to a more nomadic way of life came with a period of adjustment. "Initially, there were a lot of little things we had to figure out," James says. "But it's definitely doable."

The couple towed the trailer from campground to campground before landing a seasonal hosting position at Camp Dick in Roosevelt National Forest. For a family that prefers living close to nature, the situation has been a bit of a dream, as a mountain hike is now just a short walk from their doorstep.

— Colin Howard

☛ **TAKE THE LEAP** For anyone thinking about full-time RVing — with or without kids — Kendall James recommends following your heart. "You might have some hard spots, but you expect that in life," she says. "My advice would be to just do it." TL

GOING FULL-TIME



PHOTO: COLIN HOWARD

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Contrast in Symmetry

The newest Ram pickup meets the retro-modern Little Guy Max travel trailer for a trek among the tall pines in Oregon

— by Chris Hemer

The experts say that we are witnessing the end of the great American sedan. They make a pretty good case.

It was recently announced that Ford would cease production of the Fusion, as well as the Taurus, and that GM was laying off as many as 1,500 workers at its Ohio plant due to slow sales of its Cruze family sedan. Moreover, the entire industry is experiencing slumping sedan sales compared to just a few years ago. What happened to the dream of owning a big family car with four doors, a cushy ride and V-8 power? Could it really be that the sedan is dying a slow death right before our eyes?

We submit to you that it is not. It has merely morphed into a Crew Cab pickup.

Think about it. Today's trucks are everything yesterday's cars were. They're roomy, smooth, comfortable and still offer V-8 power. And they have the added benefit of versatility. Your father's Oldsmobile may have been great on road trips, but it couldn't haul

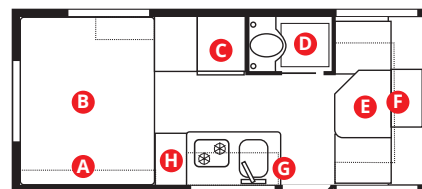


➡ Euro-style windows open wide to let the breeze flow through. A manual awning, outdoor speakers and TV mount provide al fresco entertaining options.

Cab Big Horn 4x4, which we paired with a 2019 Little Guy Max travel trailer from Liberty Outdoors. Admittedly, this lightweight teardrop wouldn't pose much of a challenge for the Ram from a towing standpoint, but considering we couldn't be sure what truck FCA would provide for our testing (new trucks are always in short supply for media use), we thought it wise to stay conservative from a weight standpoint. Besides that, the latest truck paired with a retro-style trailer just seems like a good fit, doesn't it?

CREW-CAB "SEDAN"

Ever since Ford introduced its all-aluminum F-150, weight reduction and overall efficiency have become the hot buttons for truck manufacturers. And though FCA has yet to buy into all-alloy construction — from either monetary or philosophical standpoints — it did focus on lightening the 2019 Ram 1500 in every way possible.



- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| A) entertainment center | E) dinette |
| B) queen bed | F) entertainment center |
| C) refrigerator | G) control center |
| D) wet bath | H) pantry |

FCA claims a reduction of nearly 250 pounds compared to the previous model, a full 100 pounds of which is credited to a new frame made from 98 percent high-strength steel. The claimed added strength and rigidity of the frame, combined with strategic use of aluminum and composite materials throughout, enabled an increase in maximum payload to 2,300 pounds and a maximum tow rating of 12,750 pounds, depending on options. The test truck was rated to tow 8,220 pounds.

You don't have to be an

Your father's Oldsmobile may have been great on road trips, but it couldn't haul a ton of gravel or tow a 12,000-plus-pound trailer.

a ton of gravel or tow a 12,000-plus-pound trailer. The numbers don't lie; Ford's F-150 has been America's number-one selling truck for 40 consecutive years, and in 2017 it was the best-selling vehicle in the world.

These facts are not lost on Ford's competitors, who have been trying to unseat the F-150 for decades. The latest salvo comes in the form of the 2019 Ram 1500, which has been completely redesigned. We're cautious to use the words "all-new" because the engine choices and eight-speed transmission aren't. But just about everything else is, and the result is the lightest, strongest, best-riding, roomiest and, when thusly equipped, most luxurious Ram yet.

With all of these improvements in mind, we were anxious to get our hands on a 2019 model for a full test. Fiat Chrysler America (FCA) came through with a Delmonico Red Ram 1500 Crew



The faux-marble countertop features a stainless-steel sink, faucet with pull-out sprayer and a two-burner range with glass cover. Plentiful drawers and cabinets with stainless-steel pulls provide enough storage for a family of three.

PHOTOS: CHRIS HEIMER

LARGE
WINDOWS
BRING THE
OUTSIDE IN



➡ Hardwood cabinetry in Light Maple is standard, and Dark Walnut (shown) is optional. The full-height kitchen pantry has enough space for extended stays.

engineer to notice the 2019's sleek new appearance, and although a revamp was indeed due, much of the design was influenced by aerodynamic goals. As a result, the new truck is the most aerodynamic in its segment, according to FCA, with a drag coefficient of .357, a 9 percent improvement over the outgoing model. The front fascia is more rounded than before and employs an active grille shutter system, which automatically closes off the grille to airflow when cooling isn't needed. In addition, a standard active front air dam automatically extends downward 2.5 inches at 35 MPH to smooth airflow. Trucks with the optional air suspension, like the test truck, cheat the wind by lowering the overall ride height by 0.6 inches.

Moreover, the truck's entire silhouette has changed. A higher hood directs air away from the wiper area, and a venturi roof design routes air back to the new rear spoiler and taller bed rails to ease turbulence behind the cab. Driving the truck solo on the highway, wind noise was almost nonexistent.

The test truck was well equipped for our intended use with the Trailer Tow Group Package (Class IV receiver, side-view tow mirrors with manual extension, and supplemental signals/courtesy lamps,

SIT OR SLEEP

Right, from top: The Little Guy Max's front dinette area features a freestanding table that easily folds down into a twin-size bed that is perfect for children or smaller adults. A 24-inch TV on an electric lift can be deployed from the forward console with the touch of a button.



\$545), the Premium LED Lighting Group (LED fog lamps, tail lamps and automatic reflector headlamps) and the Level 2 equipment group, which includes, among other things, remote start, which is incorporated into the key fob, and front and rear ParkSense parking sensors, which make negotiating tight spaces infinitely easier.

A Sport Appearance Package added body-colored door



➕ WHAT WE LIKED

Good value for the money. Plentiful standard equipment, solid wood cabinetry, clever use of space and lots of windows that open out to let Mother Nature in.

➖ WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE

A different bathroom-door option — perhaps a wooden one to match the cabinetry? A semitransparent shower door seems out of place in the dining and kitchen area.

handles, bumpers and grille for \$995. If we could order this truck for ourselves, however, we would skip this latter package and instead go for the Blind-Spot with Cross Path and Trailer Detection system, which is especially helpful on crowded highways and city streets. At \$595, it's a bargain.

As we entered the cab, the first impression was that the cabin is larger, and it is. Cab length was stretched 4 inches, which was most noticeable behind the test Crew Cab's front seats. Six-plus-footers could easily stretch out without their knees touching the seat backs, and the rear floor is now completely flat, which allows larger items (like our hard camera cases) to be stored inside. Also welcome are the integrated D-rings to secure your load, and one Ram Bin in-floor storage compartment on either side.

Up front, the redesigned center console offers 12 storage combinations. In fact, FCA claims that the new Ram has 151 liters of interior storage volume, nearly 100 percent more than its nearest competitor. The instrument panel is new, as is the center stack, which comes standard with a 5-inch touch-screen display, available 8.4-

Below, from top: A cab that is 4 inches longer than the outgoing model yields limo-like rear legroom. The driver's compartment features a roomy center console, 8.4-inch display and USB ports. The Level 2 Equipment Group adds options that include adjustable pedals.



inch display or the first application of Uconnect 4C Navigation on a 12-inch, fully configurable touchscreen.

Increased comfort and an overall reduction in Noise Vibration and Harshness (NVH) were achieved in many levels. Standard Frequency Response Damping (FRD) shock absorbers incorporate an internal valve that continually adjusts damping according to road inputs. During hard cornering, for example, the valve closes for greater stability; on rough roads, it opens for softer damping and enhanced ride comfort. Ride was exemplary, both solo and while towing.

Keeping interior noise at a minimum required new thinking as well. New electronically controlled Active Tuned Mass Modules (active vibration dampers mounted to the frame) work in concert with an interior Active Noise Cancellation System on 5.7-liter Hemi V-8 models to maintain interior noise levels as low as 67.1 decibels, making this the quietest Ram ever. If the goal was to attract customers that are used to the interior isolation of a high-end sedan, then FCA's engineers hit the mark. The Hemi's V-8 thrum could be heard in the background while cruising but was never intrusive. Thankfully, the dual-exhaust system (which shed 9 pounds for 2019) still allows the engine's muscular roar to come through under full throttle.

With 395 horsepower on tap, the Hemi had no trouble pulling the Little Guy Max, and reaching 60 MPH at the end of a freeway on-ramp posed no



THE MILD SIDE

While the 5.7-liter Hemi and 3.6-liter Pentastar V-6 offerings are essentially the same as they were last year, they're offered with a twist for 2019: the eTorque mild hybrid system. eTorque replaces the traditional engine alternator with a belt-driven motor generator unit and a suitcase-size, air-cooled 48-volt battery pack mounted to the rear wall inside the cabin. eTorque enables the start/stop function, brake energy regeneration, and most importantly, short-duration torque addition. eTorque adds up to 90 LB-FT of torque to the 3.6-liter Pentastar V-6 and up to 130 LB-FT to the 5.7-liter Hemi V-8 "in certain driving situations," according to FCA, to help get things moving more quickly.

challenge. In fact, driving the new Ram was pretty much what we expected, though the brake system came as a pleasant surprise. First of all, it is very powerful; FCA fitted front rotors that measure 14.9 inches front, 14.8 inches rear. The larger brakes make modulation so much easier during braking — when you need more stopping power, just press the pedal harder, and the brakes oblige. There are no dead spots anywhere in the

pedal travel, and we never detected a trace of fade.

The other surprise was the emergency-brake pedal, or rather, the absence of one. The 2019 Ram is

SPECIFICATIONS

2019 LITTLE GUY MAX

Exterior Length	21'
Exterior Width	7'
Exterior Height	9' 1"
Interior Width	7'
Interior Height	6' 7"
Construction	Tubular-steel chassis, aluminum framing, composite paneling, seamless fiberglass roof, block-foam insulation
Freshwater Cap.	20 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	14 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	9 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	10 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	4 cu. ft.
Furnace	16,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu
Converter	35 amp
Battery	Dealer supplied
Tires	LT235/75R15
Suspension	Leaf spring
Weight (freshwater and LP-gas full, no cargo)	3,389 lbs.
Hitch Weight	356 lbs.
Axle Weight	3,033 lbs.
GVWR	3,800 lbs.
GAWR	4,000 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	411 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$31,742
MSRP, As Tested	\$37,694
Basic Warranty	Two years

Little Guy Worldwide, www.golittleguy.com
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2019 RAM 1500 BIG HORN 4X4 CREW CAB

Fuel Economy, Solo	20 mpg
Fuel Economy, Towing	8.2 mpg
Engine	5.7L Hemi V-8
Horsepower	395 @ 5,600 rpm
Torque	410 lb-ft @ 3,950 rpm
Transmission	8-speed auto
Axle Ratio	3.21:1
Fuel Cap.	26 gal.
Tires	LT275/65R18
Suspension, Front	Upper and lower A-arms, air suspension and stabilizer bar
Suspension, Rear	Five link with track bar, air suspension, twin-tube shock absorbers, stabilizer bar
Brakes	Four-wheel disc brakes with ABS
Tow Rating	8,220 lbs.
Length	241.8"
Wheelbase	153.5"
MSRP, Base	\$31,695
MSRP, As Tested	\$48,365
Basic Warranty	3 years/36,000 miles
Powertrain Warranty	5 years/60,000 miles

Ram Trucks, www.ramtrucks.com

equipped with an electric emergency brake activated by a pull-on/push-off handle located in the general proximity of where the brake release would be.

RETRO-MODERN TEARDROP

To begin the tow test, we picked up our Little Guy Max trailer from B.Young RV in Portland, Oregon. Liberty Outdoors spec'd out a model loaded with just about every option, including a 100-watt Zamp solar panel (\$653), electric Smart Jack upgrade (\$290), gorgeous solid walnut cabinetry (\$1,015) and the Rough Rider package (\$573), featuring 15-inch aluminum wheels with Kenda off-road tires and 3.5-inch suspension lift. The professionals at B.Young then set up the test truck and trailer with the correct weight-distributing equipment, and we were off to enjoy the abundance of beauty that lies just outside Portland.

Arriving at our campsite, we were eager to start enjoying the Max. One of the nice things about a smaller trailer is the quick setup. After we lowered the A-frame jack, it was simply a matter of deploying the wide BAL stabilizing jacks on all four corners and unpacking. The Max offers a surprising amount of exterior storage, courtesy of a pass-through compartment at the rear that measures 35 cubic feet. It isn't very tall, but it is deep, wide and well finished — we can't imagine a small family being able to fill it up on most trips. Our meager supplies for the weekend looked like a suitcase inside a shipping container.

Liberty Outdoors has done a commendable job removing sacrifice from the small-trailer equation. The Max's patio area offers exterior speakers, and

even a TV mount with nearby HDMI, coax and 120-volt AC/USB outlets, so you can enjoy the outdoors while watching your favorite show or playing video games. The 6-foot, 3-inch-wide Thule Crown awning deploys manually and offers integrated LED-strip lighting, just like the big boys. It's quick and easy to crank out, but removing the crank handle from the socket proved fussy at times.

Perhaps our favorite part about setting up the Max is opening all the windows. It seems that a lot of manufacturers have forgotten that the point of being in the outdoors is to experience it, and the Max's windows — every single one — open wide to let the sweet breeze drift through. As an added benefit, each window features an integrated screen and night shade. We loved sitting at the front dinette with all the windows open, reading a book and listening to the rush of the tall pines outside.

If TV is more your thing, a 24-inch Furrrion HD flat-screen rises out of the front console on an electric lift at the touch of a button. The Max also comes with a Furrrion head unit inside the doorway that features DVD, CD, USB and Bluetooth compatibility, as well as an auxiliary port and remote control. The dinette area offers storage nooks and a shelf above, as well as a large drawer underneath the curbside bench for larger items like pillows or blankets. The table quickly folds down to make a 32-by-76-inch bed.

Right next to the dinette on the street side is a wet bath that is large enough for its intended purpose and nicely equipped with a waterproof TP dispenser, showerhead with an on/off valve and a textile shower caddy for shampoo, soap and other items. The

Below, from left: The cozy rear sleeping area features a queen bed and an entertainment center with TV, soundbar and storage cubbies. The large window provides amazing views.



area works well and is a great alternative when there are no bathrooms nearby, but limited holding-tank capacity means you'll have to keep visits short unless you have sewer hookups at your site. Also, we'd like an alternative to the residential-style frosted entry door; it seems out of place and doesn't offer adequate privacy.

The street-side kitchen is well conceived and thoughtfully designed. The large stainless-steel sink features a cutting-board cover, and a stainless-steel two-burner stove with electric ignition is located on the right. Tons of storage is afforded by overhead cabinets, a floor-to-ceiling pantry with adjustable shelves, and three large drawers beneath the cooktop, one underneath the stainless-steel-clad Dometic refrigerator. There is more than enough storage for extended stays, something you don't usually find in a small trailer.

Directly across from the pantry is a tall closet with room for hanging clothes as well as storing shoes and other items, and all the way to the back is the cozy sleeping area. Here again, the Max surprises with a 60-by-80-inch queen bed, and an entertainment center at the foot of the bed with another 24-inch Furrion TV and more storage cubbies. At the other end is a window, above which are more open storage and reading lights. Another huge window arcs across the bed; on one warm evening, we opened it to enjoy the breeze and look up at the Douglas firs and stars above. It was a delightful way to close out a day of adventure.

The days of big V-8 sedans may be over, but then again, so is the anxiety involved with pulling a large trailer with one. This author can recall family trips involving a Dodge Polara and an Aristocrat Land Liner that, in retrospect, was probably too heavy for the Dodge to pull [in fairness to my dad, there were no towing guides back then]. Now, more than 40 years later, the Ram 1500 Crew Cab takes the place of the family sedan, offering an effortless, trouble-free towing experience, and the Little Guy Max reminds of the good ol' days yet comforts with modern amenities. Progress is good. **TL**

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Nice Kitty

The comfortable four-slide Cougar 368MBI fifth-wheel has a separate midship suite that works as a second bedroom or secluded living space

— by Chris Dougherty

Sometimes you feel like company. Sometimes you don't. If you're the owner of the Cougar 368MBI, there's room to sleep the whole gang when you need it, and a second living area to enjoy when you don't.

Long-term RVing is quite popular these days with many folks choosing to work on the road while engaging in extended road trips or to satisfy a significant life change. Manufacturers are keenly aware of this and have been designing RVs with multizone floorplans, comfortable four-season livability and room to work. This is the basis behind the 368MBI, a midprofile fifth-wheel with four slideouts.

Stepping into the Cougar 368MBI isn't initially impressive. Just inside the door, you come face to face with a wall with a coat hanger and bulletin board. But that wall hides the livability secret of this model. On

Keystone's redesign of the Cougar's exterior suggests sophistication. The 368MBI is easy to tow, yet large in size and interior space.

the other side of it lies a fully enclosed mid-trailer room that serves as a private living area, den, sleeping space or even a mobile office.

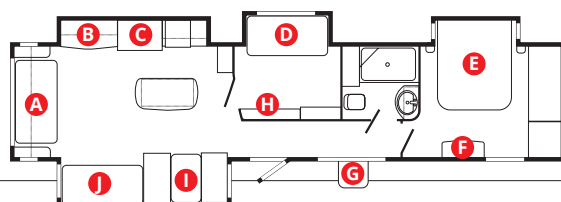
INSIDE SCOOP

The main living, dining and kitchen area of the Cougar 368MBI is attractive and warm, with the customary earth tones found in many of today's RVs. We find this color palette appropriate and comfortable, and while there are other interior-design schemes coming out (aren't there always?), those who have been around long enough to remember the white and teal decors of the '90s will probably agree that the current designs are more aesthetically pleasing.

The kitchen features nice LG solid-surface counters in a tan color with a "mineral" speckle. The center island has three drawers, a roomy cabinet and a Lippert Components double-bowl farmer's sink that is enormous and functional, making spaghetti-night cleanup a breeze. Available in single- and double-bowl configurations, the sink is ideal for an RV this size.

The Dometic four-door refrigerator is about as big as they get and has plenty of space to store food for the whole gang. Next to it, a three-burner range sits below the High Pointe 1.6-cubic-foot, 1,000-watt, under-cabinet microwave and exhaust vent.

This rear-living-room setup



A) sleeper sofa
B) entertainment center
C) refrigerator

D) sleeper sofa
E) queen bed
F) dresser/TV
G) pull-out grill

H) entertainment center
I) dinette
J) theater seating

is pretty standard, but Keystone kicked it up a notch with attractive glazed-maple cabinetry, a slick thermostat and a remote-controlled “real feel” fireplace below a 50-inch LED HDTV. A Furrion entertainment system provides sound and DVD content to this TV and the 32-inch in the bedroom, and music inside the rig and out.

Lippert’s well-made Thomas Payne furniture is standard and promises many wonderful evenings with movies and popcorn. The fabric has the feel of leather, with stitched seams. The combination includes a sofa sleeper on the aft wall and reclining theater seating across from the TV.

As mentioned, the feature that makes this fifth-wheel stand out is the second walled-off room, in addition to the master bedroom up front. The mid-RV room has a Thomas Payne sofa sleeper in a slideout across from rather narrow wall cabinets, which are ideal for mounting another TV. Some manufacturers have begun making this space more office-friendly. A few cabinetry mods in the 368MBI could result in a very workable desk, while still using the room as a second bedroom or a place to enjoy a TV program that your significant other doesn’t want to watch.

Above this room is a toy-hauler-like loft bunk accessible from the hallway. This is roomier than some we’ve seen and is ideal for smaller kids who’d love to climb up and have a retreat of their own. No kids? The loft becomes additional storage space.

The side-aisle bath features a shower with a seat, which is excellent, and there’s plenty of room to complete daily primping. The master bedroom, with a queen or optional king bed, is a bit tight, but it has ample storage space, a substantial front-wall closet with washer-dryer prep, and a bureau with drawers under

ROOM TO SPARE

Right: The center-island kitchen features solid-surface counters and a double-bowl country-kitchen-style sink. The four-door refrigerator provides plenty of space for vittles. Below right: Movie night, or even an afternoon nap, is restful in the Thomas Payne theater seating with cup holders and armrest storage.



the 32-inch HDTV. While many folks relish the thought of a king bed in their RV, a queen is frequently more practical, especially in this case. Bedside tables are on the small side, but they’re there, which some of the competition can’t say.

OUTSIDE STORY

For 2018, the Cougar’s 20th year in production, the fifth-wheel line received an exterior makeover. A new Cougar logo, in keeping with Keystone’s other brands, adorns the front cap. Paint and graphics are in tan, brown and black tones. The nicely painted front cap has integrated LED accent lighting.

The trailer has a spacious pass-through front compartment, MORryde StepAbove entry steps and dual right-side awnings — one on the body and a

The feature that makes this fifth-wheel stand apart is the walled-off room that sits mid-RV.



second on the slideout — for almost 40 feet of covered patio space. Under the front awning, a TV can mount on a bracket in the front compartment, and a built-in stainless-steel Capital Cooking grill pulls out from its own cabinet. LED lighting in the power awnings illuminates the patio area.

Out back is a storage tray with a 225-pound capacity and a proprietary fold-away bicycle rack. Coolers and small generators can be secured here nicely. The design of the bike rack is a bit of a miss with its so-so weight rating. The gate itself is heavy, and the bike rack bar was nothing more than a metal post with a pin that had a

huge amount of movement once installed.

On the left side are a fully accessible Dometic 35,000-Btu ducted furnace and a disappointing 6-gallon gas/electric water heater. This is a 40-foot fifth-wheel that can sleep up to 10, and a 6-gallon water heater won't cut it. We recommend replacing it with an instantaneous water heater like a Truma AquaGo or Suburban Nautilus that will provide instant and endless hot water yet fit in the same spot as the 6-gallon unit.

The front lower compartment, which houses the battery, is a good spot for extra gear. The utility panel is just inside the front compartment and is laid out logically with all the expected connections, including an outside shower and solar-panel prep.

The 368MBI is a four-season fifth-wheel, which was tested down to 0 degrees Fahrenheit, according to Keystone. Dual-pane frameless windows are optional.

With a three-year structural warranty and plenty of comfort, technology and good looks, the Keystone Cougar 368MBI is a fun fifth-wheel and decent value for the money. **TV**



Above left: The center room has a bunk above it, which is great for the kids or as extra storage space. Below left: There's ample room to walk around the queen bed in the master suite, and a front closet is washer-dryer-ready. Below: A dual-awning option ensures plenty of shade while entertaining or lounging outside.

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATIONS

KEYSTONE COUGAR 368MBI

Exterior Length	40' 1"
Exterior Width	8'
Exterior Height	12' 7"
Interior Width	7' 8 3/4"
Interior Height	8' 6"
Construction	Laminated side walls with five-sided aluminum superstructure, 3/8" walkable roof decking, TPO roof
Freshwater Cap.	81 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	38/76 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	12 cu. ft.
Furnace	35,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	15,000 Btu (std.) 13,500 Btu/bedroom (opt.)
Battery	Dealer installed
Tires	ST235/80R16-E
Suspension	Leaf spring with LCI Road Armor equalizer
Weight	11,575 lbs.
Hitch Weight	1,980 lbs.
GVWR	13,980 lbs.
GAWR (2)	6,000 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	2,405 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$46,500
MSRP, As Tested	\$60,786
Basic Warranty	1 year

Keystone RV Company

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Make Yourself at Home

Residential-style comforts and conveniences are packed in these travel trailers priced between \$25,000 and \$50,000

DDriving off the dealer's lot with our first pop-up camper, we thought we'd never buy another RV. We were certain it had everything we could ever want or need. Fast-forward less than two years, and there we were, heading down the highway with a brand-new quad-bunk travel trailer complete with a full bathroom, outdoor kitchen, power awning and stabilizer jacks.

There's a running joke among RVers that you start shopping for your next RV the day you bring home a new one. Many folks buy their first camping trailer only to start imagining life with all the possible upgrades soon afterward.

The RV industry has stepped up to meet this demand with more of the comforts of home. When you leave the entry-level market and move into the \$25,000 to \$50,000 price range, you'll find stainless-steel appliances, hardwood cabinet doors and solid-surface countertops.

You'll often find a superior level of construction as well, which may extend to aluminum framing, block-foam insulation, high-quality, lightweight materials and a gelcoat fiberglass

exterior. Other popular features in this price range include solar battery-charging packages and heated and enclosed underbellies.

A larger price tag doesn't necessarily mean a larger trailer, though. You'll notice some smaller trailers in this group of 12 new models, including two that come in under 20 feet and several that can be towed by the family SUV or van.

Whatever the budget, one thing is for certain: owners want their RV experience to match their individual style. You'll see manufacturers providing a broader range of fabric, flooring and exterior-color options, plus long lists of available upgrades from electric fireplaces to backup cameras and awning motion sensors.

Do you want a home away from home with a recliner and a washing machine? Or would you prefer a lightweight adventure trailer with solar panels, off-road capability and larger holding tanks? Looking for a couples' RV with a well-appointed kitchen? Or a bunkhouse that will comfortably fit the kids and their bikes? No matter what's on your must-have checklist, you can probably find it in this price range.

☛ Manufacturers are using high-quality lightweight materials to make comfortable RVs that can be towed with an SUV. One example is the Lance 1475, which comes with or without a slideout.



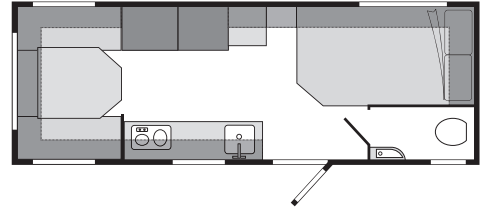


Exterior Length.....21' 4"
 Exterior Width.....7' 4"
 Interior Height.....6' 4"
 Exterior Height.....8' 7"
 Freshwater Cap.....28 gal.
 Black/Gray-Water Cap....22 gal./28 gal.
 LP-Gas Cap.....10 gal.
 UGV, Base.....3,210 lbs.
 Hitch Weight.....360 lbs.
 GVWR.....5,000 lbs.
 MSRP, Base.....\$33,150 CAD
www.escape-trailer.com

21-Foot Escape

With its lightweight fiberglass body, the 21-Foot Escape has a 5,000-pound gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR), making it particularly attractive to SUV owners who don't wish to purchase a larger tow vehicle. The wet bath is a common feature in trailers this size, but the storage capacity is definitely unusual. Overhead cabinets run along the majority of the perimeter, and the kitchen has ample drawers and pantry (or wardrobe) space. Light wood finishes along with strategic window placement create a spacious atmosphere inside, despite the small footprint. In addition to a dedicated double bed, the dinette can be converted for

additional sleeping space. The 12-foot power awning creates a comfortable outdoor space. Those looking to extend the travel season will be interested in the standard 12,000-Btu furnace and optional air conditioning, extra insulation and dual-pane windows. Custom interior finishes for flooring, counters and upholstery are available as upgrades.

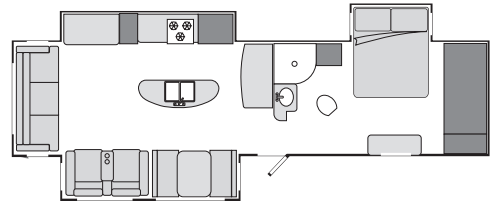


Exterior Length.....36' 11"
 Exterior Width.....8'
 Interior Height.....6' 8 1/2"
 Exterior Height.....10' 10"
 Freshwater Cap.....50 gal.
 Black/Gray-Water Cap....41 gal./41 gal.
 LP-Gas Cap.....14 gal.
 UGV, Base.....8,860 lbs.
 Hitch Weight.....1,020 lbs.
 GVWR.....9,995 lbs.
 MSRP, Base.....\$46,255
www.winnebagoind.com

Winnebago Minnie Plus 30RLSS

The Winnebago Minnie Plus 30RLSS is well suited for use as a couple's trailer with a rear-living layout and private master bedroom with a walk-around queen bed in a slideout. Opposing slides in the kitchen and living area and a domed ceiling create a spacious interior. Next to the theater seating for two, the standard dinette can be upgraded to a table and chairs. These features, along with the galley island and entertainment center, add a residential feel. The Minnie Plus line is constructed with aluminum frames, block-foam insulation and gelcoat fiberglass siding. Folks looking to make a statement can

choose from blue, cherry, orange, yellow or green exterior colors. Looking for something more subdued? Try the white, platinum or champagne options. Attractive standard features include a battery disconnect, outside TV hookup and exterior spray port for cleaning off kayaks or furry friends after an adventure.



Forest River Rockwood Signature Ultra Lite 8335BSS

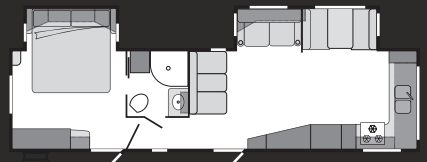
The Rockwood Signature Ultra Lite 8335BSS will catch the attention of those looking for a well-appointed travel trailer with a front kitchen and "windshield." The large window offers great views

while residents make use of the undermount stainless-steel double sink, large double-door refrigerator, Corian countertops and residential-style soft-close drawers. The rest of the living area offers a dinette and

theater seating in a slide, plus a 60-inch sofa, all positioned to enjoy the entertainment center and electric fireplace. The bathroom can be accessed from the hallway and the master bedroom, which houses a king bed in a slide. Two exterior doors allow entry to the living area and the master bedroom. Solar and rear-camera prep are standard, along with a control panel that can be paired to a smartphone app. The laminated-fiberglass side walls have subdued

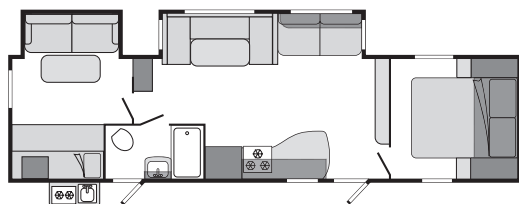
Exterior Length.....35' 11"
 Exterior Width.....8'
 Interior Height.....6' 11"
 Exterior Height.....11' 4"
 Freshwater Cap.....43 gal.
 Black/Gray-Water Cap....45 gal./90 gal.
 LP-Gas Cap.....14 gal.
 UGV, Base.....8,105 lbs.
 Hitch Weight.....1,205 lbs.
 GVWR.....10,005 lbs.
 MSRP, Base.....\$43,496
www.forestriverinc.com

graphics, or buyers can upgrade to the champagne exterior.



Venture RV SportTrek 322VBH

Families looking for room to spread out will appreciate the Venture SportTrek 322VBH, which offers a private master bedroom and a bunkhouse with two beds opposite a sofa in a slide that converts to a third bed with a bunk above it. The removable table and TV hookup make the bunk room a comfortable place for the kids to hang out. Parents will appreciate the master bedroom up front with a queen bed, double wardrobes and a charging station with a USB receptacle. There's plenty of room to spend time together in the spacious living area with a sofa and dinette in a slide, and an entertainment center that can be outfitted with an optional electric fireplace. One of the two exterior doors leads directly into the bathroom, a popular feature for parents who don't want kids tracking dirt through the RV. The outdoor kitchen is complete with a refrigerator, a two-burner cooktop and a sink. This model is prewired for solar panels and a rear camera. The optional bike rack/cargo tray will appeal to folks traveling with outdoor equipment.



Exterior Length.....	35' 11"
Exterior Width.....	8'
Interior Height.....	6' 10"
Exterior Height.....	11' 2"
Freshwater Cap.....	40 gal.
Black/Gray-Water Cap.....	32 gal./32 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.....	10 gal.
UVW, Base.....	7,130 lbs.
Hitch Weight.....	710 lbs.
GVWR.....	8,600 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$35,300

www.venture-rv.com

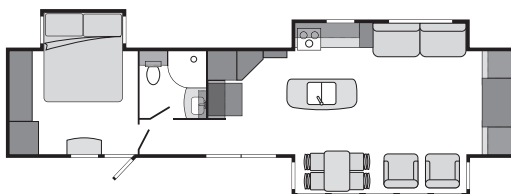
KZ Sportsmen 363FL



Exterior Length.....	40' 9"
Exterior Width.....	8'
Interior Height.....	6' 10"
Exterior Height.....	11' 4"
Freshwater Cap.....	38 gal.
Black/Gray-Water Cap.....	32 gal./64 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.....	14 gal.
UVW, Base.....	8,910 lbs.
Hitch Weight.....	1,460 lbs.
GVWR.....	10,460 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$35,344

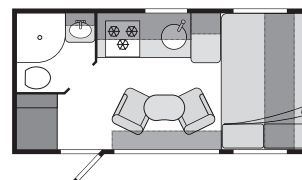
www.kz-rv.com

The longest travel trailer in this roundup at almost 41 feet, the triple-slide KZ Sportsmen 363FL has features that are popular with destination travelers including a sliding patio door and large windows that line one slideout. The kitchen has a residential design with a sink-in island, full-size refrigerator, cooktop range, oven and microwave. The cozy living area has two recliners, a sleeper sofa and a media center with an electric fireplace and plenty of storage. The master bedroom offers its own exterior entrance, plus a king bed, washer-dryer and ample closet space. The 18-foot Solera Smart Arm Power Awning has an LED light strip and exterior control. The trailer comes standard with 30-amp service, but buyers can upgrade to 50 amps and add an additional air conditioner. Other options include a motion security sensor and wind sensor for the awning.



Lance 1475

Downsizing is a notable trend in the RV industry, and the Lance 1475 meets consumer demand with this compact trailer that contains a unique set of features. The 1475 replaces the usual dinette with two comfortable lounge chairs with a pedestal table, and offers a full dry bath. Those wanting more space have the option of swapping the lounge chairs for a sofa and swivel tables in a slideout. Up front are a queen bed, three nicely sized windows and a storage shelf with netting. The kitchen packs a lot of punch with a 5-cubic-foot three-way refrigerator, a stainless-steel three-burner range and a surprising amount of counter space. The Truma Combi furnace and water heater are standard, as is an enclosed, insulated and heated freshwater tank. The trailer is prewired for solar panels, or optional 160-watt solar panels can be added at the factory.



Exterior Length.....	19' 8"
Exterior Width.....	7' ¾"
Interior Height.....	6' 6"
Exterior Height.....	9' 9"
Freshwater Cap.....	26 gal.
Black/Gray-Water Cap.....	22 gal./26 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.....	5 gal.
UVW, Base.....	2,600 lbs.
Hitch Weight.....	250 lbs.
GVWR.....	3,700 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$28,492

www.lancecamper.com

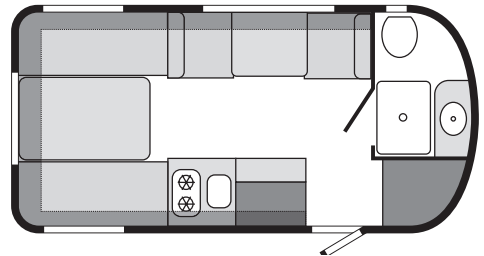


Exterior Length18' 5"
 Exterior Width6' 6"
 Interior Height.....6' 1"
 Exterior Height.....8' 3"
 Freshwater Cap.30 gal.
 Black/Gray-Water Cap.. 18½ gal./32 gal.
 LP-Gas Cap.10 gal.
 UGV, Base3,400 lbs.
 Hitch Weight340 lbs.
 GVWR5,000 lbs.
 MSRP, Base\$47,900
www.olivertraveltrailers.com

Oliver Legacy Elite

Folks looking for meticulous attention to detail packed into a small, lightweight RV will appreciate the Oliver Legacy Elite. Like other molded-fiberglass trailers, this model is lightweight compared to conventional options of the same size. And like many fiberglass trailers, the Oliver is made to order and can be purchased only from the manufacturer. The double-hulled design includes extra insulation between the two shells and allows for all-season comfort. For a smooth towing experience, Oliver's designers also paid attention to balance and stability when positioning the tanks and axles. Custom-molded covers for the spare tire and LP-gas cylinders mean nothing

unsightly breaks up the exterior aesthetics. Inside, the full bathroom boasts a molded vanity and shower. The side dinette can be converted into a single bed, and the rear dining table and seating convert to a double bed. Buyers can configure the space according to individual preference.



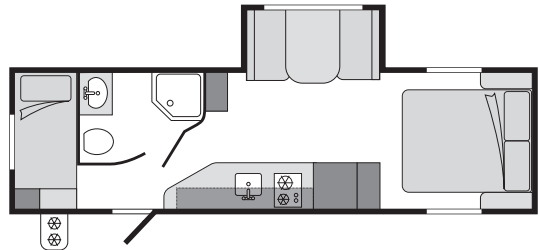
Travel Lite Falcon 27BHK

Modern style meets classic function in the lightweight Travel Lite Falcon 27BHK. The exterior is aluminum, and shoppers can choose from a range of graphics packages that will stand out, including black with neon-yellow striping. An outdoor kitchen with a refrigerator and two-burner range plus the standard electric awning create a comfortable outdoor

entertaining area. Inside, the 74-inch-long bunks, stretched across the rear of the trailer, have their own slider window, which helps with airflow issues sometimes found in closed-off bunk areas. The kitchen has a stainless-steel cooktop, microwave and sink, along with enough counter space to hold a coffeemaker or prep a salad. The layout prioritizes

storage with two cabinets below the dinette that can be accessed from outside the trailer. The north-south-facing walk-around master bed will be particularly

attractive to some folks. Upgrade options include the Extreme Sport Package containing an 80-watt solar panel, bike rack and roof rack with ladder.

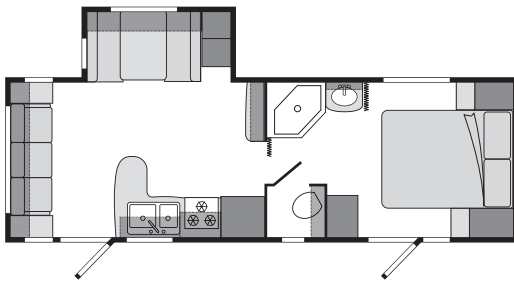


Exterior Length27' 4"
 Exterior Width8' 5"
 Interior Height6' 3"
 Exterior Height8' 8"
 Freshwater Cap.....31 gal.
 Black/Gray-Water Cap....30 gal./30 gal.
 LP-Gas Cap.....10 gal.
 UGV, Base.....4,200 lbs.
 Hitch Weight.....465 lbs.
 GVWR7,765 lbs.
 MSRP, Base\$26,978
www.travellitecampers.com

YOU'LL SEE MANUFACTURERS PROVIDING A BROADER RANGE OF FABRIC, FLOORING AND EXTERIOR-COLOR OPTIONS, PLUS LONG LISTS OF AVAILABLE UPGRADES FROM ELECTRIC FIREPLACES TO BACKUP CAMERAS AND AWNING MOTION SENSORS.

Northwood Arctic Fox Classic 25Y

As the name suggests, the Northwood Arctic Fox Classic 25Y is built to withstand the elements and allow folks to travel in all four seasons with fully insulated holding tanks, and block-foam and reflective-foil insulation. Additional construction points of interest include heavy-gauge aluminum framing and an "off-road" chassis. This well-designed rear-living layout allows for direct sightlines from the sofa to the entertainment center, a top priority for many RV shoppers. The L-shaped counter offers extra work space in the kitchen, and the lack of stainless-steel appliances will be attractive to those who enjoy a more traditional design aesthetic. The split bath places the shower and sink on one side of the trailer and the toilet on the other, with a pass-through aisle in the middle. Many RVers love this layout as it allows couples to more easily share the facilities. A porcelain toilet and glass shower door are standard.

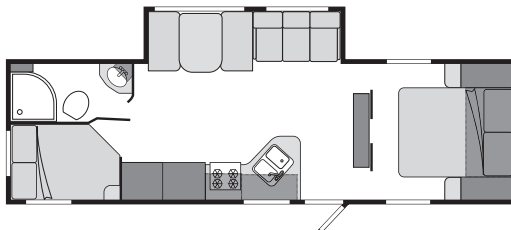


Exterior Length.....	30'
Exterior Width.....	8' 6"
Interior Height.....	6' 6"
Exterior Height.....	11' 4"
Freshwater Cap.....	57 gal.
Black/Gray-Water Cap.....	35 gal./47 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.....	14 gal.
UVW, Base.....	7,236 lbs.
Hitch Weight.....	808 lbs.
GVWR.....	10,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$46,953
www.northwoodmfg.com	

Jayco Jay Feather 27BH



The Jayco Jay Feather 27BH provides the popular double-over-double-bunk floorplan in a lighter-weight package. The bunks are positioned at the rear of the trailer, and the bottom bed flips up for extra bike or gear storage. The bathroom has a spacious corner shower stall, and there's a linen cabinet and medicine cabinet, plus additional storage below the sink. The double pantry could easily serve as wardrobe space. Meals will be easily prepared in the kitchen, which has a three-burner cooktop, oven and microwave. The angled kitchen sink extends the counter for appliances and food prep. For those who prefer to cook outside, an outdoor kitchen is an optional upgrade. The master bedroom has a walk-around queen bed and sliding doors on both sides for privacy. Goodyear radial tires come standard, along with a 19-foot power awning with LED lights. An A-frame-mounted bike rack is among the options.

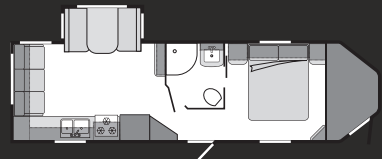


Exterior Length.....	32' 4"
Exterior Width.....	8'
Interior Height.....	6' 6"
Exterior Height.....	10' 10 1/2"
Freshwater Cap.....	42 gal.
Black/Gray-Water Cap...	30 1/2 gal./30 1/2 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.....	10 gal.
UVW, Base.....	6,015 lbs.
Hitch Weight.....	630 lbs.
GVWR.....	7,500 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$30,427
www.jayco.com	



Starcraft GPS 260RLS

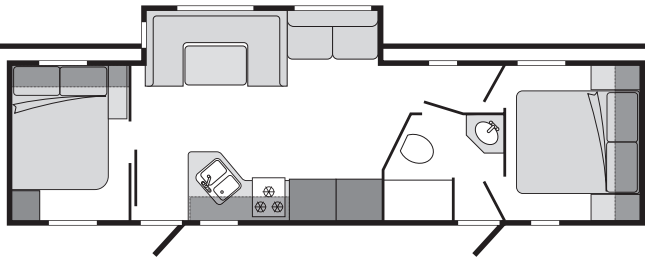
For those who travel with bikes and other gear but don't want to go the toy-hauler route, the new Starcraft GPS 260RLS is worth a look. This trailer has a front "garage" that offers 160 cubic feet of storage, a flexible rack system and a dedicated entry door with steps. There's plenty of room for camp chairs, grills, sewer totes or anything else you've ever struggled to fit into a storage compartment or the back of a tow vehicle. The GPS also ramps up the freshwater capacity with a 106-gallon tank, allowing adventurers to be off the grid for longer periods of time. The master bedroom is situated in the front with an east-west-facing walk-around queen bed, wardrobes on each side and overhead storage, plus direct access to the bathroom. The rear living area has a dinette in a slide, a sofa and an entertainment center. The kitchen contains a large pantry and ample counter space.



Exterior Length.....	32' 8"
Exterior Width.....	8'
Interior Height.....	6' 9"
Exterior Height.....	11' 3"
Freshwater Cap.....	106 gal.
Black/Gray-Water Cap.....	32 gal./32 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.....	14 gal.
UVW, Base.....	6,420 lbs.
Hitch Weight.....	655 lbs.
GVWR.....	8,695 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$27,714
www.starcrafttrv.com	

Forest River Alpha Wolf 29DQ-L

The double-master-bedroom layout makes the Forest River Alpha Wolf 29DQ-L somewhat of a unicorn in the travel trailer realm. It is certainly difficult but clearly not impossible to find two queen beds situated at opposite ends of a trailer. The rear bedroom has a wardrobe, overhead cabinets and underbed storage. The front bedroom has a walk-around bed with wardrobes and nightstands on either side. An exterior entrance toward the front accesses the bathroom, and a second entrance toward the rear leads to the main living space. Both have upgraded stability steps. The sofa and U-shaped dinette



are in a slide opposite the kitchen, which contains a large pantry and stainless-steel refrigerator, range and microwave. Solar-panel and backup-camera prep, and a tire-pressure monitoring system are available as upgrades.



Exterior Length.....	36' 8"
Exterior Width.....	8'
Interior Height.....	6' 8"
Exterior Height.....	11'
Freshwater Cap.....	55 gal.
Black/Gray-Water Cap.....	42 gal./84 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.....	10 gal.
UVW, Base.....	6,543 lbs.
Hitch Weight.....	900 lbs.
GVWR.....	7,900 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$33,146
www.forestriverinc.com TL	

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UNDERCOVER RVs

Cloaking a stored RV with the right cover protects the exterior finish from exposure to the elements and keeps it looking its finest – *by Jerry Smith*

Statistics show that RVs are stored for long periods of time. While you might imagine your RV is relatively safe from theft or vandalism during the off-season, it's actually under constant attack by the sneakiest vandal of all — nature — which bakes it with ultra-violet rays and attacks it with moisture. This is why you need an RV cover to stand guard and protect your investment.


UV rays are one of the biggest hazards an unprotected RV faces. Prolonged exposure to direct sunlight breaks down the paint, gelcoat and vinyl graphics, but there's more at stake than a dull finish on a once-bright surface. Paint protects the surface underneath, whether metal or fiberglass. Once the paint goes, the surface underneath begins to degrade. UV rays also turn plastic and soft rubber parts dry, brittle and discolored.

Then there's the effect the environment has on the roof. Sealants on an unprotected roof degrade faster, and the dreaded black streaks can form on the sides of the RV, which can be devilishly difficult to remove. As the sealants degrade, leaks can develop...and you know the rest.

It's important for a cover to be vented, or include panels made of a breathable fabric, to prevent moisture from getting trapped underneath. Cheap plastic tarps, typically found in hardware and home-improvement stores, promote mold, mildew and rust, not to mention the fact that the tarp can abrade the RV and cause serious damage. A good cover will have vents to release trapped moisture and a top made of a fabric like Tyvek, which lets moisture out but keeps water from getting in. A good cover also includes a padded underside, which, properly used, will not be abrasive to the RV surface. Most covers are available in models designed for specific climates, such as heat and bright sun, or snow and constant rain.

→ WISE INVESTMENT

According to the RV Industry Association, RV owners are likely to spend an average of three to four weeks in their RV annually. That's a lot of downtime for an RV, which can benefit from being properly stored and covered.



The fit is as important as the fabric. A loose-fitting cover can billow, making installation a hassle. It can also flap in windy conditions, rubbing the paint and roof, causing damage, and snagging and tearing the fabric on sharp corners. Covers come in semi-custom sizes, cut to approximately the dimensions of an RV, or are custom made specifically to a set of measurements you provide. Be sure to measure the RV yourself, and do not rely upon model numbers from the manufacturer. Because a snug fit results in stress in some areas, the best covers come with reinforced corners.

RV covers are secured by straps running underneath from side to side, and across the front and back. Weighted toss bags let you slide the loose end of the straps under the RV. Some covers come with these, but you can use almost anything that can be tied to the end of the strap. For extra points, train your dog to crawl under the RV trailing the strap for a treat on the other side.

Even the best RV cover will wear out in time, but there's no point in hurrying the process. Before installing a cover, go on the roof and sweep off any debris that could scratch the paint when the cover is snugged down. Even though you vacation every year, gravity never does, so make sure you're wearing nonslip shoes.

Fold down or remove any antennas, and make

sure there are no exposed sharp edges from solar panels and other accessories. Use pool noodles or shop rags to cover sharp edges on the roof. Sharp edges along the bottom of the RV should be smoothed out where they can make contact with the cover. Tape a few shop rags or an old T-shirt over them, and use adhesive remover to get rid of the tape adhesive later.

Tire covers are equally important for protection against the elements. Trailer tires are made with chemicals added to the rubber compound that fight UV, but they don't last forever. Also, the tires on the sunny side of a parked RV are subject to more exposure than those on the shady side and might deteriorate sooner. Clean the tires with warm soapy water before you cover them. Avoid tire dressings with alcohol, petroleum distillates or silicone.

Most cover manufacturers sell repair kits to patch rips or holes. If repair is not possible, balance the expense of a new cover against the damage it prevents to your RV, and the numbers come out in your favor every time.

Here's a roundup of some of the most popular RV covers for towables. There's sure to be one among them that will make your rig wake up from its storage slumber bright-eyed and ready for the open road.



ADCO

Featuring design aesthetics that mimic the graphics on contemporary RVs, **Designer Series Tyvek + Wind** is ADCO's flagship all-climate cover. It features a Tyvek roof panel, zippered doors, weighted toss-under buckles, and front, rear and bottom straps. A patented internal strap system ensures a snug fit that minimizes the fabric moving in the wind, and the top and bottom have extra reinforcements. Each Designer Series cover comes with four Travel Tyre Gards with a rear-fas-tending system. MSRP: \$250 to \$500. Three-year warranty.

Four-layer **Storage Lot** covers are made for travel trailers and, true to their name, are designed specifically for storage-lot environments — but, of course, you can use them elsewhere. The durable polypropylene covers have extra reinforcements and come with air vents to prevent mildew and mold, locking buckles to prevent slippage and rain-gutter protectors. MSRP: \$200 to \$350. Two-year warranty.

CalMark

CalMark covers are custom made to the RV's measurements, and the company can make a cover for any RV. Made of Sunbrella-brand woven acrylic, a breathable fabric that resists water, mold and mildew, these covers have a high UV rating and are nonabrasive to protect the finish underneath. Pictured here is the **Taxa Outdoors Cricket** cover featuring FSR (fabric stress reinforcement), which is designed to support the material, offsetting the weight of snow, wind and the sides of the cover. All seams are double-stitched for strength, and the cover has a zippered entry door. Repair/reinforcement kit containing extra fabric patches and glue are included. MSRP: From \$550. Six-year warranty.



Camco

Made with a top layer of breathable DuPont Tyvek, the **Ultra Shield Toy Hauler Cover** uses ultrasonic welded seams that make it 40 percent stronger than other covers, according to the company. The cover, made by Camco for Camping World, is held in place by elastic corners, front and rear cinching straps and an underbelly strapping system. Features include zippered entry doors, side panels for air circulation, a ladder cover and gutter protectors. A patch kit is included. MSRP: \$484.99. Three-year warranty.



Classic Accessories

PermaPro Deluxe covers have adjustable front and rear tension panels and elasticized hem corners for a custom-type fit. An air-vent system and quick-drying ripstop fabric are said to decrease wind stress, repel water and let inside moisture out. Long zipper pulls reduce the need for a ladder, and an integrated strap attachment and weighted toss bag eliminate crawling under the RV to install tension straps. Zippered panels allow entry to the RV doors and give access to all four sides of the RV to reach storage compartments. MSRP: \$171.95 to \$717.95. Lifetime warranty.

Like the PermaPro Deluxe, **PolyPro 3** covers come with adjustable tension panels, elasticized hem corners and an air vent, as well as an integrated rope-attachment system and a toss bag. The triple-ply top and single-ply sides protect against rain, snow, dirt, nicks and scratches. Made for travel trailers and toy haulers, the covers have zippered panels that allow access to the RV's doors. MSRP: \$187.95 to \$524.95. Three-year warranty.

SkyShield covers have a bonded, tear-resistant Tyvek top for UV and water protection, and ripstop sides for all-season use. Zippered side and rear panels give access to storage compartments. Elasticized hem corners and adjustable front and rear tension panels provide a snug fit, and the panels spread stress during windy conditions, according to the company. An air vent is said to lessen wind lofting and interior moisture buildup. Long zipper pulls reduce the need for a ladder. The cover has a weighted puck-toss system. MSRP: \$684.95 to \$894.95. Four-year warranty.



DIY TIP HOW TO COVER YOUR RV

There are several ways to get the cover onto the roof of your rig. The first is to hang onto the ladder with one hand and haul up the front end of the cover in the other hand. Obviously, this can be hazardous. So, a safer way is to tie a loop of rope around the cover and pull it up from the roof.

Lay out the cover lengthwise in front of the RV, with the back or rear end of the cover facing the front of the RV. Tie a rope around gathered material and throw the rope up to the roof. Then haul the cover up from front

to back on the roof, and finish unfolding the cover over the sides. Take your time positioning the cover, and don't get distracted and forget you're 10 or 15 feet from a hard landing. A helper on the ground to handle the bottom edge of the cover is a good idea.

Check the cover where it goes over the gutter downspouts, steps, body moldings, door corners or anything else that could snag and tear it. **1)** Carefully drape the cover over the sides of the RV. **2)** Run the straps underneath to

the other side and attach the buckles. You might need to do some fine-tuning as you cinch down the straps, keeping an eye out for potential snags.

When you're through, the cover should fit closely without drooping or billowing. Attach the end straps the same way and tighten. Securely tie off the extra straps when you're done, as flapping straps can do damage and cause the cover to loosen.



MORE ONLINE: For additional how-to tips on covering an RV, check out the PermaPro and Elements RV cover videos on our YouTube channel, [TrailerLifeDIY](#).





Coverking

The **Deluxe Premium 5th Wheel Universal** cover provides all-season protection against snow, rain and hail with breathable 600-denier polyester and double-stitched seams to prevent tearing. The cover has top curtain air vents designed to prevent moisture buildup and an easy-access zippered door flap. Adjustable quick-release buckles hold it in place, and lock grommets are incorporated into the bottom of the skirt cover. MSRP: \$349.99 to \$549.99. One-year warranty.



Eevelle

Goldline RV covers are made with marine-grade Marinex, a heavy-duty 7-ounce true loom-woven polyester constructed of 600-by-300-denier filament yarns with a 99-thread count. They're coated with Durapel UV inhibitor and an antimicrobial finish for mildew resistance. Microporous film allows breathability, and zippered panels with anti-scratch sleeves give access to all entry points. Integrated marine-grade XT straps with quick-release buckles are included, along with a toss bag, adjustable rear and side reinforced tension flags, a ladder cap, re-inforcement patch and storage duffel bag. MSRP: \$350 to \$500. Five-year warranty.

S2 Expedition RV covers include rooftops made of marine-grade fabric for maximum water resistance. Full-height

zippers around the entire cover allow access to any part of the vehicle, and a microporous film provides breathability. Heavy-duty reinforced corners with a sewn-in shock-cord hem, quick-release buckles for easy installation and removal, and a multipoint strap system for a snug fit in windy conditions are standard. Expedition covers come in sizing increments of 2 feet and feature reflective panels for safety at night. The company claims the cover blocks 99 percent of UVA and UVB rays. MSRP: \$275 to \$395. Three-year warranty.



TRAILER-COVER SAVER

This 10-Minute Tech tip from David Acton of Oak Harbor, Washington, was originally published in the October 2017 issue. It's such a clever way to protect the edges of an RV cover, we're reprinting it:



➔ In the directions for my travel trailer's Tyvek cover, it indicates that the cover should not come in contact with sharp corners to prevent it from tearing and to keep from voiding the warranty. Naturally, all the lower corners of my trailer are sharp. After experimenting with different things, I made an inexpensive and effective solution.

I collected a couple of disposable plastic food containers, the kind that sliced sandwich meat comes in from the grocery store. I cut off the top lip of each container with a box cutter, then used scissors to cut each one diagonally to make two corner protectors and tossed out the middle part. I trimmed the jagged cuts to make them smooth.

Using two pieces of hook-and-loop fastener for each corner, I attached the loop portions to the bottom corners of the trailer and the hook portions to the inside of the plastic containers so they align. I then attached the plastic corner pieces over the corners of the trailer.

These corner protectors weigh only a few grams, are easy to attach and remove, and work great. I've used them for years on all four bottom corners, plus the bumper corners.



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Bump-IT™ stick in hitch



BikeWing™ added



f in t w i lippertcomponents.com

PRODUCT ROUNDUP / RV COVERS



Elements

Sold exclusively at Camping World, **All-Climate** covers provide triple-layer protection against sun, snow, rain and black streaks. Each cover includes four reinforced roof-panel handles to help position it on the RV, grommets that won't rust or corrode, breathable polypropylene fabric on the side and end panels, and six Tyvek gutter protectors to prevent tears on sharp edges. Front, rear and side vents allow airflow, and zippered panels offer entry and access to storage areas. MSRP: From \$164.99. Two-year warranty.



Water-repellent **Premium** covers are made of a durable poly-oxford fabric, a lightweight material for easier handling and coverage. The covers feature mesh vents for better ventilation. Each cover has four reinforced roof-panel handles for positioning, and reinforced buckles and straps that are said to resist rip-out. An elastic insert and adjustable straps on the front and rear panels give a secure fit, and reinforced vinyl front and rear bumper panels provide extra wear protection. Camping World claims Premium covers store down to half the size of its All-Climate covers. MSRP: \$369.99. Two-year warranty. **TL**

SOURCES

ADCO, www.adcoprod.com
CalMark, www.calmarkcovers.com
Camco, www.camco.net
Camping World (Camco and Elements)
www.campingworld.com
Classic Accessories, www.classicaccessories.com
Coverking, www.coverking.com
Evelle, www.evelle.com

WHERE TO NEXT?

The secret to planning successful RV trips is simple: make campground reservations, book bucket-list experiences and leave plenty of time for road-trip kismet

— by *Stephanie and Jeremy Puglisi*

RVers love planning trips. Think for a moment about the endless and exciting possibilities. There are countless must-see destinations across North America, and thousands of RV parks and public campgrounds. When RV enthusiasts strike up a friendly conversation, it's never long before they're swapping travel recommendations and campground reviews. For many seasoned RVers, their favorite question is, "Where to next?"

Now, some folks might have the notion that RV travel is all about spontaneity. You hitch up your rig and hit the road with nothing but a full tank of fuel and a love of adventure. It's a nice idea in theory, but in reality, a completely unplanned RV trip can lead to stress and disappointment. After all, RVing is more popular than ever right now, and many campsites are booked a year or more in advance, especially during peak seasons.

Making plans in advance not only confirms you'll have a place to stay, it lets you take advantage of all the great crowd-sourced information

now available online and learn helpful details like the quirky hours of a craft brewery or discounted weekday tickets at a museum. We've found that trying to achieve balance works best: plan ahead but leave plenty of room for spontaneous experiences and relaxation.

KNOW YOURSELF... AND YOUR BUDGET

Remember all those options that were available when you were RV shopping? Whether you bought a teardrop trailer with a wet bath or a luxury fifth-wheel with massaging theater seats, you had to figure out what you wanted from the RV

EPIC CAMPSITE
Landing the perfect waterfront spot can take planning, perseverance and deep pockets. Booking by phone rather than online may pay off.

experience. Similarly, before planning any trips, you should have a good idea of your personal travel style and what you are looking to get from an RV vacation.

The most important thing to know is how many hours you are comfortable driving on any given day. If you like to drive no more than five hours at a stretch, choose locations that are closer to home or plan plenty of interesting stops along the route. If you're a road warrior who can clock 12 hours behind the wheel without stopping for a cup of coffee, it'll be much easier to reach those far-away destinations.

THE BEST RV TRIPS HAPPEN WHEN WE PICK A DESTINATION THAT SUITS THE SEASON AND OUR MOOD.

Another point to consider is how often you like to break camp. Travel days can be tiring with all the packing, hitching up and driving, and then setting up at a new campground. Some folks are happiest doing this only one time on an RV trip and opt for single-destination travel. Others love to see as many places as possible on a trip and will relocate every few days.

We love picking a few destinations within a region and staying at each place for three or four nights. However, we know plenty of others who are content to spend an entire two-week vacation at a single RV resort. Finding

your own rhythm will make those RV trips as amazing as you always dreamed they would be.

Finally, you have to know your budget. There is no such thing as the average cost of an RV vacation. Expenses vary tremendously depending on how far you drive, the destinations you visit and the types of campgrounds you book. Remember that the more you drive, the more you will spend on fuel, and that can be a big expense when hauling a large RV with a powerful tow vehicle.

To complicate things further, campground costs are all over the map. We've paid \$20 a night for a remote state-park campsite with no hookups and \$120 a night for a waterfront-resort site with a custom stone firepit. You can plan an RV trip at virtually any price point, but you'll likely be happier if you aren't blowing the family budget.

CHOOSE THE IDEAL DESTINATION

If you want to plan a truly memorable RV vacation, you have to pick a destination that ticks off all your travel boxes. Of course, people rave about the beauty of the Grand Canyon, but if you hate heat, crowds and hiking, it's probably not a good choice for your summer trip.

To limit our choices, we usually decide on the



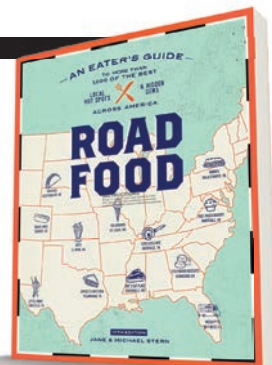
type of destination first. For instance, we'll pick between the beach, the mountains, the city or the tourist attraction. We'll decide whether we want to be active, take it easy or a combination of both. We'll discuss whether we want it to be an educational trip for our kids or just a chance to relax and unwind as a family. Then we'll look at the options within our preferred traveling distance.

One of our favorite things about the RV lifestyle is that we can comfortably enjoy any type of destination, whether it's Olympic National Park or the Big Apple. The best RV trips happen when we pick a destination that suits the season and our mood.

Top: Campgrounds at public parks often have spacious and secluded sites, perfect for outdoor meals. **Above:** Full-service RV resorts, like the Yogi Berra's Jellystone Park pictured here, offer on-site activities such as mini golf.

TRIED-AND-TRUE ROADSIDE EATERIES ➔

There are so many online resources these days, but the go-to restaurant resource during our travels is still *Roadfood* by Jane and Michael Stern. This is a classic guidebook, now in its 10th edition, and we have a well-worn copy that lives in our RV. The book's recommendations have given us countless extraordinary food experiences over the years, and we consider it an RV travel crime to miss eating at an official *Roadfood* joint when in the area. If you are traveling on a tight budget or with kids, try to visit recommended restaurants for lunch rather than dinner. You'll save a ton of money and have a more relaxed experience.



FIND THE PERFECT CAMPGROUND

Once we decide on a destination, we dive into campground research. Finding the most suitable campground is more of an art than a science, simply because everyone has different ideals. While there is no such thing as one perfect campground for all of us, there are perfect campgrounds for you. With a bit of research and reconnaissance, you can find them.

It's important to know the basic amenities that you want in a campground. Some RVers prefer a huge site with no hookups and a whole lot of peace and quiet. Others are looking for a heated swimming pool, modern playground and planned activities. Well-reviewed resorts, no matter how lovely, will not be a good fit if you prefer rustic state parks. It's important to seek out recommendations and reviews, but then do your due diligence to find your own campsite nirvana. And if you're traveling with a pet, never forget to double-check campground policies.

When making reservations, remember that even the best campgrounds have some less-than-ideal campsites. Everyone loves the convenience of online booking, but we believe that calling the campground

and discussing our preferences often lands us the best sites. Not every campground will guarantee a particular campsite, but we take advantage when they do.

PLAN THE BEST ITINERARY

There's a well-worn joke about folks needing vacations to recover from their vacations. We actually think RV travel is uniquely suited for combining fun and adventure with rest and relaxation. This is on account of two things: traveling with all the comforts of home and enjoying the benefits of campground culture.

While we love to get out and explore new destinations, we schedule plenty of downtime at the campground. This works perfectly for our family and seems to be a tried-and-true strategy of seasoned RVers.

We generally look to plan a single outing or excursion per day, whether it's a hike, a guided kayaking tour or a visit to the local botanical garden. This means we don't rush from one thing to the next, and we never get burned out halfway through our trip. It also allows room to squeeze in unexpected finds or recommendations. We're pretty sure one of the reasons we have such

5 QUESTIONS WHEN CHOOSING A CAMPGROUND

1. Can my RV fit in the campsite?
2. Does it have the hookups I want (water, electric, sewer, cable)?
3. Does it have the bathhouse features I want (flush toilets, hot showers, reputation for cleanliness)?
4. Does it have the amenities and activities I enjoy (playground, swimming pool, laundry, Wi-Fi)?
5. How far is it from the area attractions I plan to visit?

5 QUESTIONS WHEN CHOOSING A CAMPSITE

1. Do I want a back-in or pull-through campsite?
2. Do I want to be near or far from the pool, playground, pet area or bathhouse?
3. Can I hear road noise from the site?
4. Does a lot of campground traffic pass the site?
5. Is the campsite shaded or sunny?



Massey's Landing in Millsboro, Delaware, is one of many RV resorts that rent recreational equipment such as standup paddleboards, kayaks, canoes and pedal boats.

unforgettable vacations is that we're always asking locals and fellow RVers for suggestions.

Before we arrive at any vacation destination, we make a list of must-do activities and attractions for the trip. We research days and hours of operation in advance, and make sure to buy tickets for anything that requires reservations. So many people are devastated when they find out

that all the tours of Alcatraz Island are booked or that they needed to enter the permit lottery to visit parts of Zion National Park. We'll never forget the time we tried to bring our children to the top of the Washington Monument only to find the reservation system had been changed. We don't make that mistake anymore. Do your homework and don't miss out for lack of planning.



Top to bottom: Coveted sites in public campgrounds have become more challenging to reserve, particularly during peak seasons. Taking shoulder-season trips makes for quieter camping experiences and a better chance of having the beach to yourselves.

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MAP THE RIGHT ROUTE

The best part of trip planning might be researching destinations, campgrounds and attractions, but there are a few other (perhaps less exciting) items that should be on your trip-planning checklist as well.

The most important of these might be planning the route. When towing an RV, you want to make sure not to end up on a road with low clearances, steep inclines or narrow passes. Many of us rely on smartphone navigation for everyday driving directions. When planning an RV trip, take the time to plot your route in advance, and download maps and directions so they are available even if you lose cellular service.

You should also look for resources that help with finding RV-friendly gas stations and rest stops. Apps like Next Exit and GasBuddy offer information

about nearby gas stations, including fuel prices and crowd-sourced photos. We love the myPilot app, which gives information about Pilot and Flying J stations, many of which have dedicated RV gas lanes, propane for sale and dump stations.

GET READY TO GO

Nothing can ruin the vibe of a great vacation more than an emergency maintenance issue with your tow vehicle or RV. Planning ahead will give you the best chance of arriving at your destination without incident. We always double-check our tow vehicle in advance, making sure any scheduled maintenance has been addressed, including oil, other fluids and brakes. We take care of our travel trailer, regularly maintaining the axles, wheel bearings and tires. Our trip-planning checklist extends to a review of auto and RV insurance and roadside-assistance policies.

Lastly, you need to plan ahead for your sticks-and-bricks abode. Advances in smartphone technology offer RVers the opportunity to keep an eye on their homes, even while thousands of miles away. If you don't have an app that lets you turn interior and exterior lights on and off remotely, set some timers on them. Make arrangements to pause newspaper delivery, have the post office hold your mail, and ask a neighbor or friend to check on the house periodically and remove those unwanted flyers left at the front door.

The RV industry has exploded in the past few years, and that means it's more important than ever to do at least a bit of trip planning before you hit the open road with your rig. Last year we witnessed RVers being turned away at more than one campground office simply because there were no sites available. Booking your stay in advance will make sure that doesn't happen to you. **TU**

Pilot Flying J is known for its RV-friendly fuel stations, and the myPilot app maps them all. The app is handy for finding fuel prices, making cardless fill-ups at the pump and tracking rewards.



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CROWDSOURCED STRATEGIES

➔ Social media has opened the doors to getting recommendations from other travelers. We check RV-park reviews on the Good Sam Club website and other sources. Before visiting a destination, we love looking for inspiration on Instagram. We follow local convention and visitor bureaus' social-media sites, along with those of nearby national and state parks. This gives us ideas for popular regional attractions and off-the-beaten-track gems. We also follow local hashtags to find the trendiest dining and shopping destinations.

PULLING POWER

THIRTY-FIVE AFTERMARKET UPGRADES TO
UNLEASH YOUR TOW VEHICLE'S FULL POTENTIAL

No matter what tow vehicle you drive, one common denominator many of us share is that secret wish for just a little bit more power. It doesn't matter whether you're driving a new or old pickup and hauling a lightweight trailer, a heavy fifth-wheel or a truck camper. Having a few more ponies under the hood always inspires a certain level of driver confidence and superiority.

Gaining power from an engine

isn't rocket science. Gas or diesel, an engine is just an air pump. Get more air and fuel into it, and performance increases. It's as simple as that. The limiting factor with today's computer-controlled engines is finding ways to improve air and fuel flow while staying within the working parameters of computerized engine management systems and regulations for vehicle emissions.

HELPING GAS ENGINES BREATHE

On the gasoline side, performance products that improve airflow through the engine are predominately grouped around the air-filter system and exhaust side. Aftermarket cold-air intake (CAI) kits can improve airflow over a factory setup by providing less-restrictive piping and placing the air intake in a more desirable location to get the coldest air. Performance CAIs usually come with a larger filter and/or filter material that allows more flow than the typical stock replacement. When upgrading the CAI on gas and diesel engines, it's not uncommon to see power gains from 10 to 20 horsepower.

Flowing more air on the exhaust side is easily accomplished by replacing restrictive exhaust manifolds with headers that suck exhaust out of each cylinder in the most efficient manner possible and swapping factory catalytic converters and "cat-back" exhausts with ones that are larger in diameter and freer flowing yet still emissions-compliant.

If one is really intent on improving power, modifications to the internals and injection system are necessary. Among the most popular are aftermarket camshafts and superchargers that help flow more air and fuel. Such products require a high degree of mechanical skill to install and a bigger monetary investment than simply bolting on a CAI or aftermarket exhaust in one's garage.

BOOSTING TURBO-DIESEL POWER

Turbo-diesels have a wider latitude of power improvers because, in addition to the turbo(s), they have nearly three times more piping than a gasoline engine. They also have a much broader operating range in the air-fuel ratio than a gasoline engine. Flow more fuel into a diesel





AEM FILTERS

AEM claims 2011 to 2012 GM Duramax HDs can gain 14 horsepower and more torque with the installation of the **Brute Force Cold Air Intake**, which replaces the restrictive stock air filter and intake housing. The CAI uses a tuned and dyno-tested aerodynamic tube and housing to hold a washable, oil-free air filter that's said to be good for 100,000 miles between cleanings. MSRP: \$554.29.



AFE POWER

The **Momentum GT Intake System** can add up to 16 horsepower and 18 LB-FT of torque to 2014 to 2016 6.4-liter Hemi-powered Ram 2500/3500 trucks, according to aFe. This CAD-designed CAI system is roto-molded from a heat-resistant, cross-linked polyethylene material to ensure the coolest air-intake charge available and a filter-to-housing interface for a perfect fit. MSRP: \$480.



BANKS POWER

The **Techni-Cooler Inter-cooler with Boost Tubes** improves power, durability and fuel economy by increasing air density and minimizing loss of boost between the turbo and intake manifold on 2011 to 2016 GM 6.6-liter Duramax HDs. It's bigger than stock in every respect, from boost tubes to the core to the all-aluminum end tanks. Inter-coolers are also available for Ford and Cummins. MSRP: \$1,595.



The **Ram-Air Cold Air Intake System** has an aerodynamic shape that eliminates restrictions and a filter that flows more freely than the stock version. Enclosed housing keeps out hot air while inhaling cooler, denser outside air. Installing the appropriate kit on the 2011 to 2016 6.7-liter Power Stroke can increase air-intake flow by 26 percent for increased power, better fuel economy and reduced EGT. MSRP: \$369.



BD DIESEL PERFORMANCE

BD Diesel is known for offering a range of 48-state-legal **Turbo Kits** designed to provide more power while keeping towing EGT down by delivering ample air to the supplied fuel flow. Featuring BorgWarner turbos, kits cover Duramax, Cummins and Power Strokes through 2018 and come with all the parts needed. MSRP: From \$1,600.

Boosting overall performance and throttle response, **High-Flow Exhaust Manifolds** are designed to efficiently transfer heat and improve exhaust flow to the turbo for 2007.5 to 2018 6.7-liter Cummins engines. Close-tolerance slip joints and thick walls allow for heat expansion and contraction. MSRP: From \$479.



and pack more air into the intake manifold, and it'll make considerably more power than it would in stock form.

To make your quest for a little more towing power easier, we've compiled a list of products designed to boost later-model (2010 and newer) pickup and SUV gas and diesel engine performance. Most are 50-state legal; those that don't meet that requirement are identified below. Taking advantage of such upgrades can help turn that wish for more pulling ponies into reality.

BULLETPROOF DIESEL

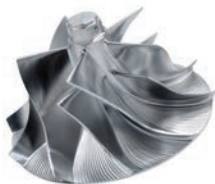
More power in diesels means more heat, and that places a bigger load on the cooling system. **Billet Water Pumps** replace the stock units on 6.0/6.4-liter Ford engines, and come with upgraded bearings and an all-billet impeller that replaces the plastic stock version. MSRP: From \$334.95.

H-Core EGR Coolers, like this 6.7-liter Cummins version, are designed to eliminate fatigue and heat-related stress fractures that cause factory coolers to fail. The interior tube design and TIG-welded external seams allow the cooler to survive more heating/cooling cycles. MSRP: \$1,545.



DIESELSITE

Upgrading the factory turbo compressor wheel on 2011 and newer Ford 6.7-liter and Duramax engines can be one of the biggest improvers for faster throttle response, higher turbo boost, improved fuel economy, more horsepower and reduced EGT. The **Wicked Wheel 2** billet compressor wheel is claimed to produce up to 60-horsepower gains in some applications. MSRP: From \$259.



Nothing kills a diesel faster than fuel contamination. The **Fuel Filter/Water Separator** from DieselSite provides protection from such a catastrophe for the 6.7-liter Ford. Fuel goes through a pair of 2-micron filters, and a low-pressure drop forces water out of the fuel. LED lights on the dash-mounted indicator inform the driver when filters need to be drained and changed. DIY installation is said to take 20 minutes. MSRP: From \$699.

**EDELBROCK**

Optimizing boost, flow and performance, **Dodge/Ram E-Force Superchargers** are claimed to deliver 421 rear-wheel horsepower and 441 LB-FT of trailer-towing torque on 2009 to 2017 5.7-liter Hemi-powered trucks. MSRP: \$7,274.87.



GM E-Force Superchargers can increase output up to 528 horsepower and 496 LB-FT of torque in 2007 to 2017 1500/2500/3500 trucks and SUVs, according to Edelbrock. A handheld programming module updates the ECU. MSRP: From \$6,665.87.



For 2015 to 2017 F-150s, **Ford E-Force Superchargers** are reported to boost rear-wheel horsepower on 93-octane gas to 533 horsepower and 482 LB-FT torque. Kits are 50-state-legal when used with the proper Edelbrock tune. MSRP: \$7,599.87.

FLOWMASTER MUFFLERS

The **American Thunder Cat-Back Exhaust System** is claimed to improve throttle response, fuel economy and power in 2011 to 2018 GM 2500/3500 gas-powered 6.0-liter Crew Cab shortbeds. The single-outside exhaust provides a moderate to aggressive exhaust note to go with the power benefits. MSRP: \$891.72.

The **Delta Boost Performance Tuner** for Ford's 3.5-liter EcoBoost is a simple way to gain up to 32 horsepower and 50 LB-FT of torque. The 49-state-legal module installs in-line with the boost sensor in the factory harness. It's controlled by a downloadable Bluetooth app. MSRP: \$347.99.

The **Delta Force Performance Air Intake** can up the performance of 2009 to 2018 5.7-liter Hemi-powered Ram 1500s and 2013 to 2018 2500/3500s. Not yet approved for sale or use in California, the kit includes a large-diameter eight-layer cotton-gauze air filter, a custom-fit air dam and a high-flow intake tube. MSRP: \$379.05.

**HEDMAN PERFORMANCE GROUP**

If you tow with a 5.4-liter 2004 to 2010 F-150 and need more power, **Performance Exhaust Headers** are designed to increase torque, resulting in improved towing performance. The 82630-series headers feature mandrel-bent 1½-inch-diameter primary tubes for optimum exhaust flow and a claimed precise fit to ensure easy installation. MSRP: From \$550.

**INDUSTRIAL INJECTION**

The **Stage 1 Holset XR Turbo** for 2007.5 to 2012 6.7-liter Cummins engines is a replacement turbocharger upgraded with a larger, more efficient 60mm billet compressor wheel with seven extended-tip blades and a slim-nose design to increase airflow. The upgrade is claimed to add 30 to 50 horsepower, lower EGT and improve throttle response. MSRP: \$2,850.



K&N FILTERS

The **Ford Super Duty Cold Air Intake** for 2017 and newer 6.7-liter engines is an easy upgrade to make more air for more usable power and acceleration. The kit, which is not legal for sale or use in California, directs cooler, denser air through a custom-molded air-intake tube into the engine's throttle body, adding 11.4 horsepower. MSRP: \$346.99.



The **Ram Cold Air Intake** replaces the restrictive factory air filter and air-intake tubing while retaining the stock air box. K&N claims the kit improves throttle response on the 2013 to 2015 6.7-liter Cummins and gives it up to a 14-horsepower increase. MSRP: \$410.99.



Installing the **GM Cold Air Intake** on 2017 and newer HD 6.6-liter Duramax engines can gain more than 15 horsepower. The mandrel-bent aluminum-tube air-induction system dramatically reduces airflow restrictions. Some K&N 77-Series air intakes are not legal for sale or use in California and other states adopting California emission standards, while others are 50-state legal. MSRP: \$339.99.

MBRP AUTOMOTIVE

The **Turbo Direct** and **Turbo Down-Pipes** for the 2008 to 2016 Ford 6.4/6.7-liter Power Stroke and 2001 to 2015 6.6-liter Duramax engines optimize exhaust flow in and out of the turbo. The direct-replacement kits are offered in a 3- or 4-inch diameter for application-specific installations. MSRP: From \$194.99.

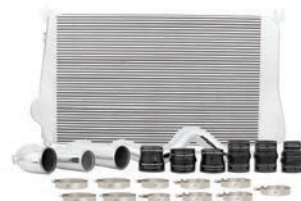


MISHIMOTO AUTOMOTIVE

The 6.7-liter **Cummins Intercooler Kit** can improve airflow and substantially decrease air-charge temperatures to the intake on 2010 to 2012 6.7-liter diesels in Ram trucks, enhancing engine performance and lowering towing EGT. MSRP: \$1,510.



The 6.6-liter **Duramax LML Intercooler Kit** includes everything needed to improve airflow and boost pressure, and decrease air-charge temperatures in 2011 to 2016 GM trucks at any power level. Like the Cummins Intercooler, the Duramax direct drop-in replacement has a lifetime warranty. MSRP: \$1,575.



PACIFIC PERFORMANCE ENGINEERING

The **High Flow Exhaust Manifolds and Up-Pipes Kit** for the 2011 to 2016 Duramax LML provides less restrictive exhaust flow for greater power, faster turbo spool-up, lower towing EGT, increased fuel economy and improved overall system reliability, according to the company. MSRP: \$1,499.99.



DIY TIP

To maximize the power potential of performance-enhancing bolt-ons, match up a 50-state-legal programmer, such as the **Banks Power Six-Gun**, **Superchips Dashpaq**, or **Edge Evolution CTS2** or **EvoHT2** (pictured), to make the appropriate timing and fuel-injection rates.



PROCHARGER

The **ProCharger Boost**, a bolt-on supercharger system for 2015 to 2017 GM 2500 HDs, is claimed to deliver 45 to 55 percent power gains to the 6.0-liter gas engines. The high-efficiency design creates 7 to 8 PSI of boost on 91/93-octane fuel. The system is not legal for sale or use in California. MSRP: \$6,598



The **High-Output Intercooled System** bolts on to 2011 to 2014 F-150 5.0-liter 4V engines to deliver more than a 50 percent increase in towing power and better fuel economy, according to ProCharger. The kit is currently 49-state legal for 2015 and newer; 2014 and older are EO- or CARB-approved. MSRP: \$6,099.



S&B FILTERS

Claimed to provide a 37.28 percent airflow improvement, the **Ram Cold Air Intake** for 2014 to 2018 2500/3500 6.4-liter Hemi trucks is designed with a huge air box and three large air inlets. It comes with a cleanable cotton or extendable dry filter. MSRP: \$299.



Positioning the filter intake box behind the front air inlet, the **Power Stroke Cold Air Intake** for 2017 to 2018 6.7-liter diesels in Ford Super Duty trucks flows nearly 60 percent better than the stock version, according to S&B. Power Stroke and Ram kits are not legal in California and states adopting California emission standards. MSRP: \$329.



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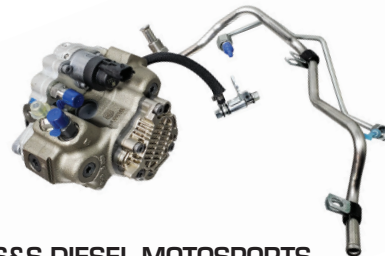


Model shown (Force) supports: Tag-Along and Pintle
Transformer supports: Gooseneck, 5th Wheel, Tag-Along and Pintle

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EMISSIONS REGULATIONS

Staying smog-compliant isn't difficult with the types of modifications mentioned here, as long as the aftermarket products are exempt or meet federal and/or California Air Resources Board (CARB) certification requirements for the state in which your vehicle is licensed. Such exemptions and certifications are usually spelled out clearly on manufacturers' websites and in published product information.



S&S DIESEL MOTOSPORTS

CP4 high-pressure injection pumps are the Achilles' heel of the 2011 to 2016 Duramax LML engine because of the potential for failure that can take out the entire injection system. The **CP3 Conversion Kit** includes the hardware necessary to replace the CP4 and is said to require no tuning changes. MSRP: \$2,500.



Ford 6.7-liter Power Strokes are also known for CP4 injection-pump failures. Although it can't keep the CP4 from failing, the **CP4 Disaster Prevention Kit** reroutes the pump bottom-end flow back to the tank and filters it to prevent debris from getting to the rest of the system and requiring expensive replacement of injectors, rails and lines. MSRP: \$360.



SINISTER DIESEL

Pitbull Series Turbos can maximize acceleration and torque on 2007.5 to

2017 Cummins 6.7-liter diesel trucks. The 49-state-legal drop-in replacement features a seven-blade billet compressor wheel and 70mm turbine wheel, VSR high-speed balance, amplified turbo noise and support for up to 690 horsepower. MSRP: \$2,995.



Featuring mandrel-bent aluminum tubes and silicone couplers, Sinister's **Cold Air Intakes** provide maximum strength, airflow and heat dissipation. The blue powder-coated CAIs are available for 2011 to 2016 GM HDs, 1999 to 2018 Power Strokes and 2004.5 to 2018 Cummins. MSRP: From \$299.



The 49-state-legal TIG-welded **Intercooler Charge Pipe Kit** improves airflow through the intercooler, improving power and lowering EGT in high-stress uses such as towing. Hot- and cold-side pipes are available together or individually for 1999.5 to 2017 Power Stroke, 2004.5 to 2012 Cummins and 2011 to 2016 Duramax engines. MSRP: From \$199. **TV**

RESOURCES

AEM Filters, www.aemfilters.com
 aFe Power, www.afepower.com
 Banks Power, www.bankspower.com
 BD Diesel Performance, www.dieselpowerperformance.com
 BulletProof Diesel, www.bulletproofdiesel.com
 Edelbrock, www.edelbrock.com
 DieselSite, www.dieselsite.com
 Flowmaster Mufflers, www.flowmastermufflers.com
 Hedman Performance Group, www.hedman.com
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 K&N Filters, www.knfilters.com
 MBRP Performance Exhaust, www.mbrpautomotive.com
 Mishimoto Automotive, www.mishimoto.com
 Pacific Performance Engineering, www.ppediesel.com
 ProCharger, www.procharger.com
 S&B Filters, www.sbfilters.com
 S&S Diesel Motosport, www.ssdiesel.com
 Sinister Diesel, www.sinisterdiesel.com

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Difficulty...
Time 15 minutes

When it comes to leveling, not all trailers and fifth-wheels are equal. Power leveling systems, many with automatic controls, are becoming more popular, but in reality, most trailer owners do not have the luxury of pushing a button to level their rigs. Owners quickly become aware of just how many leveling options are available, ranging from simple pieces of wood to devices designed to raise wheels. For its Endurance Heavy-Duty Leveling System, Hopkins Towing Solutions taps into both wood and plastic, the most commonly used materials for leveling chores, and backs it up with the electronic RV Smart-Level to give owners control of the process.

Endurance Leveling System

The Endurance Heavy-Duty Leveling System has LEGO-looking green plastic components that are mated to

custom-length wood boards for supporting the trailer wheel. Inside each kit, you'll find one interlocking wheel chock, two wheel docks, four mini ramps, a nonskid traction mat and all the hardware to secure the components to a separately purchased 8-foot length of 2-by-8-inch treated lumber. The lumber will allow you to make three interlocking ramps for a single wheel, which provides height versatility.

The assembly process begins by placing the plastic wheel docks in front of and behind the trailer tire, leaving a gap of about an inch. From here, the base measurement is taken from the outside edge of one wheel dock to the outside edge of the other dock. This distance will be the length of the top board, which is the impetus for determining the lengths of the middle and bottom boards. A line, square to the edges of the board, is drawn at this point.

Adding 6¼ inches to the length of the top board gives the length of the middle board, and adding 12½ inches to it gives the length of the bottom board. After marking lines for these measurements, a circular saw can be used to cut three boards to size.

Next, line up the wheel docks and ramps with the outer edges of each corresponding board, and mark and predrill all 16 screw holes, using a drill equipped with an ⅛-inch bit. To prevent the wood from splitting when driving the screws, ½-inch-deep holes should do the trick.



WHEEL DOCKS, CHOCK AND RAMPS

1) Wheel docks are placed in front of and behind the trailer tire, leaving about a 1-inch gap. The distance from the outer edges of the wheel docks determines the length of the top board. **2)** Once the three boards are cut and the plastic pieces are in place, corresponding holes are marked, pilot holes are drilled with an ⅛-inch bit, and the kit components are attached to the lumber with the provided screws. **3)** If the boards are cut properly, they will nest into each other, forming a neat interlocking stack.

REQUIRED TOOLS

- ☐ Circular Saw
- ☐ Safety Glasses
- ☐ Carpenter's Square
- ☐ Tape Measure
- ☐ Drill Motor
- ☐ Phillips Head Bit
- ☐ ⅛-Inch Drill Bit
- ☐ Pencil
- ☐ Construction Level



4, 5) To lift the trailer, the stacked boards are placed in front of or behind the wheel(s) and the trailer is pulled or backed until the wheel(s) are secure between the docks on the top board. Two kits are needed to lift both wheels on a tandem-axle trailer (not shown).

The plastic pieces can now be screwed into position, following the instructions. If the measurements are accurate, the boards will stack neatly, forming a lift position of around 4½ inches. Two kits are needed for a tandem-axle trailer. In this case, two stacks are placed in front of or behind the wheels and the trailer tires will climb the ramps/boards until positioned between each pair of docks. The traction mats hold the ramps steady enough for both wheels to be seated between the docks.

Alternatively, the user has the option of making one long stack of boards using the parts from one kit, but the weight will double, and handling the boards will be much more bulky — and not recommended by Hopkins. If the three boards

together are too tall, remove the bottom board to reduce height. Then, if needed, remove the middle board.

RV Smart-Level

Complementing the Endurance Heavy-Duty Leveling System is Hopkins' RV Smart-Level. Viewed from the driver's seat of the tow vehicle, the AA-battery-powered LED device lets the driver know when the trailer is level. This eliminates the need to get out of the vehicle. A series of LED lights informs the driver of the high and low points in increments of 1 inch; the device can measure up to 6 inches out of level.

Installation of the RV Smart-Level is straightforward and requires little time and effort. The process begins by placing the trailer on a flat surface

and adjusting the front-to-rear and side-to-side positioning until perfectly level, confirming status using a 3-foot or larger standard construction level.

With the trailer level, align the RV Smart-Level 1 inch from the front edge of the trailer using its built-in bubble level. Mark the

positions of the three holes through the mounting base. Pre-drill with a small pilot bit, stick the adhesive pad in position, and secure the device to the wall with the supplied screws. Take your time because the bubble is rather touchy and can move out of level if the screws in the base are overtightened.

The large-size LEDs are clearly visible to the driver and provide an easy-to-decipher trailer attitude at a glance. There are four lights on each side of a long green LED and an on/off button. The lights illuminate in relation to inches out of level, and when the trailer is in the right position, the green light turns on. When not in use, the LED panel folds into its own box for a finished look on the side of the trailer.

These two small investments will take much of the frustration out of setting up a trailer. The RV Smart-Level takes the guesswork out of finding the best spot to park your trailer at a campsite and prevents unnecessary repositioning. The Endurance Heavy-Duty Leveling System beats hauling loose pieces of wood, and the traction mat doubles as a carry handle while keeping the boards together for storage. **TV**

➔ **Hopkins Towing Solutions**
www.hopkinstowingsolutions.com



ON-THE-LEVEL LEDS

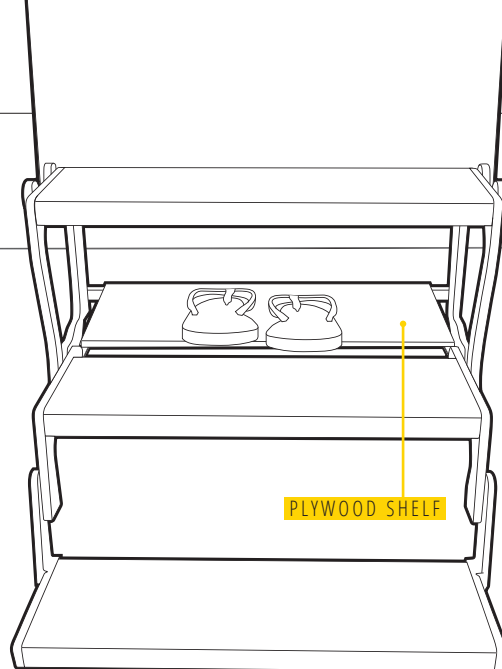
6) After a level attitude is confirmed on the trailer using a standard construction level, the mounting bracket for the RV Smart-Level is attached to the side wall of the trailer on the driver's side. A built-in bubble level guides the installer. **7)** The RV Smart-Level uses LEDs to inform the driver when the trailer is level. Mounted properly, the device will give the driver a clear view of the LEDs for making corrections while situating the trailer at a campsite.



IF THE SHOE FITS

Most trailers have folding steps outside the entry door. If you dislike tracking water and dirt inside or just want to reduce the number of shoes in the RV, consider making a portable outside shoe shelf under the extended steps. I made mine from 1/8-inch-thick plywood that's 12 inches by 26½ inches and fits snugly on the existing angle irons underneath our trailer's steps. A piece of corrugated plastic or Plexiglas could also work. Before getting under way, we remove the shelf and store it inside the entry door, ready for our next stop.

Larry MacDonald, Victoria, British Columbia



a durable warning system. Once in camp, we plug the fifth-wheel's umbilical cable into the newly mounted seven-pin socket, and the 12-volt DC house power constantly drives the LED strips.

Troy Tucker, Ladoga, Indiana

Tech editor's note: This works well if you're in a full-hookup site or have a method for charging the house batteries such as a solar system or portable generator. Use a voltage monitor to track battery condition and an inline ATC blade fuse holder and appropriate size fuse to protect the system.



hook up the trailer, I put the can on a "post" formed by the ball mount. I have driven 600-plus miles with this can. Because it has decided to stay in place, I put a coat of yellow paint on it. It looks like it's going to stay with me for a while.

Charlie Moore, Mokelumne Hill, California

Glad to See You

After nearly hitting my head on the fifth-wheel pin box when disconnected from the tow vehicle, I decided there had to be an answer to the problem that has plagued fifth-wheel owners and unsuspecting victims. It dawned on me that LEDs are the answer! At an auto-parts store, I bought a new female seven-pin RV socket with a mounting bracket, a length of two-wire SJ cord for wiring to the charge line and ground positions, wire loom and an LED-strip kit, and made

Can It!

Before hooking up our trailer for a 10-day trip, I greased the trailer ball and weight-distributing hitch. I told everyone who would listen to stay away because of the grease. As it turned out, I was the one who got grease on a good pair of shorts! I was so mad at myself that in anger I put a Bush's Baked Beans stubby can over the trailer ball and said something like "Take that!" To my surprise, the can stayed in place without any additional hold-down. Now when I



TECH ED TIP

WINTER STORAGE PREP

Getting ready to store your RV for the winter? Be sure to wash and wax your home on wheels and reseal the roof before putting a cover over the RV and placing it in storage. If there's an issue with mice, mouse-proof the underbelly by filling any voids with foam and/or stainless-steel wool, remove all food items and use hard totes to store anything left in the RV that could be used as nesting material. Consider treating the bottom of the RV with Mouse Free undercoating and lubricant (www.mousefree.com). If you have a generator, change the oil, add a fuel stabilizer such as Sta-Bil and fog the carburetor before putting it away for its winter nap.

—Chris Dougherty



To submit a DIY tip, email 10minutetech@trailerlife.com or write to *Trailer Life*, 10-Minute Tech, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Provide a selection of good-quality high-resolution photos. *Trailer Life* will pay \$35 for original 10-Minute Tech ideas. All payments require an SSN or FEIN.



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APEX UPGRADE

TAILORING A 2012 BUNKHOUSE TRAILER

INVESTMENT ☞ **Cost:** \$500 | **Time:** 3 months

In 2012 my wife and I purchased a new 20-foot Coachmen Apex 18BH. The lightweight travel trailer had most of the features we wanted, but we didn't need the bunk over the main bed, and the bathroom didn't have a vanity or washbasin. We were confident we could make the necessary modifications after having fitted out two sailboats from bare hulls over the years.

Removing the bunk was a little tricky as the plywood was bonded to the aluminum space frame. Outfitting the bathroom was more time consuming. There was limited space behind the toilet, the wheel-arch cover intruded, and new plumbing was required.

I built the complete

vanity with cupboards, doors and washbasin in my workshop, and the bathroom wall provided the back. I also installed a large medicine cabinet and Plexiglas mirrors.

To get at the PEX water plumbing, I had to cut out an access panel in the corridor adjacent to the tub. I tied in the hot and cold water after cutting the original pipes and adding tees with crimp fittings. The basin also required a tee in the ABS drain and vent pipe. Eventually, it was all leak-free.

Other modifications were made in the galley, and a locker was built under the bed. Now we have a semi-custom trailer with plenty of storage and all the features we want.

David Salter, Bath, Ontario



BEFORE & AFTER
Top to bottom: The Coachmen Apex kept its original exterior but saw significant modifications inside, particularly in the bathroom, which came with no sink or cupboards. The owner built a vanity to fit the space and installed mirrors, a medicine cabinet, cup holders and towel rails.

RV RENOVATIONS

Have you modified your RV or remodeled it completely? Tell us about it in 250 words or less, including the total cost and time spent, and email your description to info@trailerlife.com. Include an ample selection of photos illustrating the project, along with your full name and mailing address. We'll pay \$50 for every RV Makeover we publish.

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GO WITH ME CHAIR \$69.99

When Kristi Gorinas offered to send us a sample of the chair she invented, we were intrigued. The mother of five had conceived a lightweight, convertible chair that not only adapts to a wide range of children — from three months to 75 pounds — it has cleverly hidden leg holes that allow little ones to stand while safely strapped in the harness. Chairs have a snap-on canopy to shield youngsters from the sun, and the harness can be removed to give older kids the freedom to come and go. Available at Camping World and on the Baby Delight website, the Go With Me Chair weighs less than 7 pounds, folds to a compact size and comes in seven colors including bright orange, pink and lime green.

www.gowithmechair.com



STAFF PICK ✨ The Go With Me Chair was a hit at my family reunion in central Oregon last July. It set up instantly, straight from the matching tote bag. For our youngest family member, the standing option and detachable plastic snack tray were welcome features. — Valerie Law, Editor

JENSEN BLUETOOTH STEREO \$499.99

Designed to withstand the ups and downs of RV travel, the Jensen Bluetooth Wall Mount Stereo (JWM90A) from ASA Electronics can be controlled from a mobile app on an Apple or Android device. The 160-watt sound system has outputs for eight speakers and a subwoofer. An integrated DVD player and face-mounted HDMI and USB ports add to the stereo's functionality. Three speaker zones and dual-source audio control mean some folks can watch a DVD in the living room while others stream music to the outdoor speakers.

www.asaelectronics.com

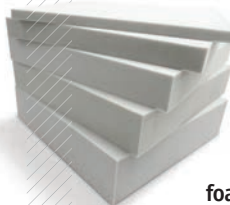


CONNECT-TO-PROTECT \$6.99-\$9.99

When not connected to the tow vehicle, the trailer's umbilical cord and plug are vulnerable to damage from accidental impact, corrosion and the elements. Hanington Innovations' Connect-to-Protect provides a simple solution. The patent-pending Connect-to-Protect holds the cable off the ground to keep it from being crushed and prevent moisture and debris from getting into the connector contacts. Available for four-, five- and seven-pin configurations, the device mounts to the trailer A-frame by drilling an 1/8-inch hole and attaching it with the supplied screw.

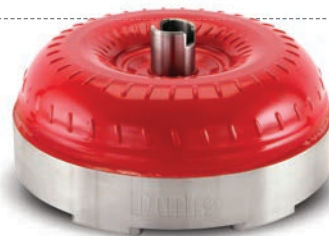
www.connecttoprotect.ca

DINETTE REPLACEMENT FOAM \$60-\$120



RV dinette cushions often fail to provide much support, especially after a few years of regular use, which is why Active RV Upholstery offers custom replacement foam. A leading upholstery shop in Yuma, Arizona, Active makes cut-to-fit foam replacements in three levels of quality: Classic, Heavy-Duty Regular and Heavy-Duty High Quality. For a plumper appearance, poly-bonded Dacron can be added for \$25 a piece. The company's website lets buyers order the size and style they need.

www.activervupholstery.com



BANKS BILLET TORQUE CONVERTER \$1,499

Torque converters are critical for power delivery, particularly on diesel pickups that spend a lot of time towing. According to Banks Power, the Billet Torque Converter not only quickens acceleration, it can prolong transmission life by increasing durability and lowering transmission-fluid temperature. The company claims it provides more than double the torque capacity of the stock 2004 through 2007 5.9-liter Ram Cummins (1,600 LB-FT versus 700 LB-FT). The Billet Torque Converter is also available for Chevy Duramax and Ford Power Stroke applications.

www.bankspower.com **TL**

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SOGGY TRAILER

Looking for help getting the leaks and water damage fixed in their toy hauler, a Southern California couple came to RV Resolutions:

FF We purchased our 2016 Forest River Sandstorm 180SLC in August 2015. We were super excited because the toy hauler gave us the freedom to go where we wanted, when we wanted.

In January 2016, we noticed that the bedding was damp, and the mattress was wet and discolored. We took the trailer to the dealership for repairs under the warranty. Then in January 2017, we noticed that the

boxes on the floor of the living area were wet and the mattress was discolored and molding. After taking the trailer to the dealership, we were told the warranty was no longer in effect.

We contacted USAA, our RV-insurance provider. The claims adjuster found leaks coming from the front-top seals and the cover seals, and possibly from the cargo area under the bed. His report concluded that the trailer "appears to have been leaking since purchase or soon after."

We are hoping RV Resolutions can help facilitate repairs and reimbursement of our financial costs. We own a beautiful toy hauler that we do not get to enjoy.

Roxy and Pedro Villa, Antelope, California

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

After RV Resolutions reached out to Forest River on the Villas' behalf, we heard from the service and parts manager at the manufacturer's California division:

We came to an agreement on assisting with offsetting the outstanding repair-bill balance. The Villas have since picked up the travel trailer, and it is back in use as intended.

Robby Olson, Forest River RV, Rialto, California

Roxy Villa confirmed the agreement and asked to make sure Robby Olson "gets kudos" for having worked things out for them.

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Idle Slideout

When the electric mechanism on his fifth-wheel's slide room had to be replaced, a Nevada reader sought reimbursement:

“While retracting the slideout on my Heartland Sundance XLT fifth-wheel, the actuator self-destructed without any noticeable issue. Then, when I tried to extend the slide, it drove the manual crank through the plastic wheel-well flare. I have repaired the flare and am asking to be reimbursed for the actuator replacement parts and labor in the amount of \$1,337.49.

The RV dealership that did the repairs referred me to Heartland's customer-service department, and Heartland referred me to the manufacturer of the slideout actuator, Lippert Components. After my initial phone call with Lippert customer service and several emails, it appeared that the company was reviewing my request,

even though the fifth-wheel was 10 months past the warranty period. However, the lack of response since then raises concerns that something has stalled the process.

During the phone conversation, the Lippert representative claimed that the company was not aware of any issues with the actuator. But when my local RV shop removed the failed actuator and compared it side by side to the replacement, the failure points appear to be substantially reinforced on the new one.

The failed actuator used inadequate press-on tabs to stop the powerful rotational torque of the electric motor. The replacement actuator uses more substantial tab material and has reinforced welds. I've enclosed a photo showing the failed tabs.

I'm hoping RV Resolutions can encourage Lippert to stand behind its product and reimburse me.

Mark Edwards, Carson City, Nevada

RV Resolutions contacted Lippert Components about Mark Edwards' situation and forwarded his documentation. A Lippert spokesman then called Edwards directly. In a follow-up note, Edwards let us know the issue had been settled to his satisfaction:

“Dan Collins of Lippert contacted me and was extremely helpful in resolving the problem. Thank you for your help.

M.E. ▣

NEED HELP RESOLVING AN RV ISSUE ?

RV Resolutions is *Trailer Life's* 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, mail a typed letter to *Trailer Life* RV Resolutions, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Include copies of appropriate bills, photographs and correspondence along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Selected letters will be edited and published unless otherwise requested.

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DIESEL FOR SMALL TRAILER? ➤

Q As a new RV owner, I'm looking for some professional advice regarding towing. My travel trailer is 1,670 pounds, and my vehicle's tow capacity is 2,700 pounds. Once loaded with people and gear, it's up to around 2,500 pounds. This becomes a problem when towing up and down the hills. That got us to thinking of purchasing a truck specifically for towing. I've reviewed *Trailer Life's* towing guides.

Is there an advantage to going with a diesel instead of a gasoline truck, if we choose a used vehicle with a towing capacity of, say, 6,000 to 7,000 pounds? I know the diesel will pull the load easier, but is this benefit worth the added price we'd pay for a diesel? Or would a V-8 gas-powered truck do the same job with no noticeable difference?

Mark Ladetto, via email



A Mark, you can refer to Chris Hemer's article "Diesel Versus Gas" in the September issue for an in-depth presentation. In short, you'd be wasting your money buying a diesel-powered tow vehicle for such a compact trailer. Today's gasoline-powered vehicles are rated to tow many times the weight of your trailer. A diesel would do the job, of course, but the extra cost of fuel and maintenance may not be worth it. Select a gas-powered rig, such as a 1500-series pickup or full-size SUV with a towing package, and you'll find it is more than adequate.

You can also check the *Trailer Life* website, www.trailerlife.com, or do a web search on "match a tow vehicle and trailer," and you'll find all kinds of extensive and detailed advice about the nuts-and-bolts figures regarding making such a matchup.

Slideout-Mount Failure

I have a Keystone Outback 210RS with a rear slide. After only three years, the slide tracks broke free from the ceiling, and the tracks cracked. My dealer says he has seen this before. The factory doesn't use enough screws, and even more importantly, doesn't use washers under the screws to hold the track up. The extra stress will cause the screws to pull through the track, causing the unsupported slide to crack the track.

If I had just added a few screws with washers, I would have saved an \$800 repair. So others avoid this, I wanted

to suggest that everyone take a look at how many screws hold up the track(s) on their slide(s) and check for washers. The screws should be no more than about 6 to 8 inches apart, depending on the size of the slide.

Rick Wilking, Golden, Colorado

It's too often that RV manufacturers rely on structural hardware being screwed into a wood-frame element, Rick, and when it's a load-carrying component like a slideout support, it has to be done just right, or it can fail prematurely. In your model, the roof structure elements run crossways to the trailer, while the slideout rails run lengthwise, so the only places the manufacturers can join the two is where the pieces cross each other. If you'd added screws between the roof beams, all the screws would be grabbing is the 1/8-inch decorative interior wallboard on the ceiling.

You could do that if you installed something like metal molly bolts that are designed to provide a secure grip in a thin material. Then you'd need to hope that the ceiling is securely mounted because the thin wallboard isn't load-bearing. The best bet would be for

the manufacturer to add structural backers where the slideout rails would be installed, something like 2-by-4s or even 1-by-4s, to give the screws something to securely hold.

Fifth-Wheel Sag and Lift

Q I have a 2014 38-foot dual-axle fifth-wheel. When towing it, I look through my truck's rearview mirror, and the fifth-wheel doesn't look level; one side seems to sag. And one of the landing-gear jacks was extended 12 holes, and the other one was at 13 holes when they just touch the ground.

I had a toy-hauler fifth-wheel, and I lifted it by reversing the axles from top to the bottom on the springs. I later had trouble with the frame cracking at the crossbeam welds. After much arguing, the manufacturer paid to fix it but told me reversing the axles had caused the problem. The technician said it caused too much flexing in the main beams. The repairs didn't hold up, and the manufacturer refused to repair it again. I sold it and bought a new fifth-wheel.

I have a Ford F-350 dually, stock suspension with airbags. I run about 70 PSI to level the truck. The kingpin box and fifth-wheel are as low as I can adjust them to allow about 6 inches between the bed rails and trailer front end. The tail of the trailer drags; the back is about 3 inches lower than the front. Is there another way, like adding leaves to the springs or helper springs,

💡 READER'S TIP: HITCH MOUNT REPLACEMENT

➔ I have a Flagstaff Micro Lite 23LB that I initially towed with a 2010 Nissan Frontier crew cab longbed. When I upgraded my tow vehicle to a 2017 Toyota Tundra, I encountered a small problem: the tailgate would not open without hitting the jack post with the trailer connected. I'm using an Equal-i-zer weight-distributing hitch that originally came with a 12-inch shank. To resolve the clearance problem, I replaced that with the EQ90-02-500 Equal-i-zer weight-distributing shank measuring 18 inches long with a 7-inch rise and 3-inch drop.

Rick, Stephenson, Virginia

Thanks for passing along this solution to a common problem, Rick. We appreciate the part number and product description as well.

or even replacing the springs to raise it up a bit, other than reversing the axles?

Bob Weiler, Gilroy, California

A Swapping the axles from above to below the leaf springs is not that much of a change, Bob, and I doubt the frame cracking is related to that swap. We've heard from many readers who've made this axle swap with great ongoing success. Most likely, the manufacturer and dealer were looking for something to pin the failure on, and your swap was a convenient scapegoat.

You could add airbags to the trailer using a Trailer Flex or Kelderman air-suspension system, and those might help with the trailer-height situation, but those systems are mainly used to help smooth the ride rather than widely varying the trailer height. Check the manufacturer's specifications, though, as they may offer ride-height adjustment as part of the installation process.

You could also have a custom spring shop fabricate leaf springs with more arch, which would effectively raise the trailer. Adding leaves to the springs would stiffen the suspension, and that could accelerate wear and tear on the trailer. Practically speaking, I'd stick with swapping the axles below the springs and have a frame shop add a few extra steel-tube crosspieces, side to side, near the spring perch mounts to reinforce the assembly for extra strength.

Editor's note: MORryde (www.morryde.com) in Elkhart, Indiana, specializes in trailer suspensions, including the SRE4000, which we installed in the March 2017 issue. The company would also be able to assist with raising the trailer to suit your needs.

EZ Lube Hub

In May's "Axle Greasing" letter, I believe you gave Robert Lauzon bad information. Lauzon asked about "greasable axles." Your response described a boat-trailer greasable axle spindle. However, I think Lauzon has a Dexter axle with EZ Lube hubs, which are not similar to greasable boat-trailer spindle hubs.

The Dexter EZ Lube spindle has a hole through the center that goes to the rear bearing, not to the middle of



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the spindle, as you described. Allowing the grease to go to the rear bearing allows old grease to be pushed out of that bearing and then pushed through the hub through the outside bearing, which replaces the rear-bearing grease and the outside-bearing grease. This is unlike a boat-trailer axle with a center-drilled grease fitting that deposits fresh grease only to the middle (sometimes only to the outer bearing) of the spindle

but does not actually replace the grease that's in either bearing.

Dexter recommends 12,000 miles to inspect the wheel bearings, even with the EZ Lube axle. I greased the EZ Lube spindle at 6,000 miles and then pulled the hub at 12,000, as recommended by Dexter. Your response was to pull the hubs annually, which is not the manufacturer's recommendation.

Pulling the hubs annually is some-

thing I do with my boat trailer because the grease is not getting replaced like it does with the EZ Lube Dexter axle.

Dean Smith, Henderson, Michigan

I understood from your answer to the "Axle Greasing" letter that you should not, or could not, grease the bearings from the Zerk fitting on the axle.

I have a 2014 Keystone Outback travel trailer with Dexter EZ Lube axles. They have a hole drilled through the axle to the back of the inner bearing with a double grease seal on the inside. As you add grease through the Zerk fitting and spin the wheel, the grease is pushed through the inner bearing to the outside bearing where it exits through the hole in the wheel hub. You continue with the grease until the old grease is followed by the new grease out the hole. You then clean off the grease that has exited and put the rubber cap back on.

When I brought my trailer from a private party, I greased the axles on all four wheels until the new grease was exiting the axle cap. I did not know about the Dexter axles when I bought the trailer but have been very pleased with the thought of not having to pull off the wheels and hubs to repack the bearings, as I have done for the past 44 years.

The Dexter EZ Lube website has a video of how to complete the repacking without removing the wheel or hub.

Charles Morris, Thatcher, Arizona

The bottom line with any of the alternate-lubrication hub systems is to follow the manufacturer's recommended service procedures and schedules. These systems create a lot of problems for people who don't follow the directions or are just too lazy to read them — as the tendency is to over-lubricate. The hub has a Zerk fitting, so, therefore, some owners feel they absolutely must add grease now and then, and that's not right. It's fairly easy to overdo it and contaminate the brakes with excess grease. Some users, as a knee-jerk reaction of sorts, routinely add a pump or two of grease every few thousand miles, and that's totally unnecessary and can be damaging.

It's also not necessary, unless the



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trailer wheel is immersed in water on a regular basis, to add "fresh grease" now and then. As long as the bearings and grease are maintained on a regular schedule, and that includes disassembly to inspect the bearings (which you can't do if you just pump in grease as a service procedure), the grease inside the hub is just fine.

Bearing grease does not degrade quickly like engine oil because it's not subjected to the heat and combustion contaminants. If the trailer is dramatically overloaded or the bearings are poorly adjusted, and those factors cause overheating then, yes, the grease can degrade faster than normal. That also can happen if using the wrong type of grease. On a properly set up and used trailer, the grease is fine on a year-to-year service schedule. It's best to follow the manufacturer's service schedule.

COMMENT: TO GREASE OR NOT TO GREASE?

➔ Regarding a letter in May's RV Clinic about greasing bearings, your response stated that trailer bearings should be greased annually. On what basis do you advise that? Is there a minimum number of miles suggested that would justify the need for annual service? The reason I ask is that our travel trailer seldom is pulled more than 1,000 miles each year, with a maximum of 3,000 miles. Is it reasonable to delay repacking of the bearings to every two years with such usage?

John Heyd, Brentwood, California

The annual or 12,000-mile recommendation comes directly from the axle manufacturers, John, so that's what we pass along to our readers. In your case, with minimum miles rolled up each year, I'd say you can go longer between servicing the bearings. Axle grease that's not being subjected to heat, moisture or other degrading conditions can last a long time.

Pull a dust cap for a close look at the grease now and then to ensure it's still in good shape. Check behind the backing plate for leaks. You might consider using one of the synthetic greases, as longevity is one of the claimed benefits of synthetics.

Wrong Axle Grease

I was having trouble with braking on my 2016 28-foot toy hauler, so I opened up the hubs and found that the bearing

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

grease had liquefied due to the wrong grease being used. It leaked from the seal and got on the braking magnet. I consulted with a local RV service center and was informed that this is a problem with a lot of the RVs being sold. One of my RVing buddies had the same trouble with his 2014 toy hauler.

I would like to inform my fellow RVers that they should inspect the wheel hubs, and I suggest they replace the factory grease with the red high-temperature grease.

Mark Chapman, Apple Valley, California

Thank you for the suggestion, Mark. It's always a good idea to be sure the lubricants are up to spec. The red grease may be one supplier's color; be sure to use the axle manufacturer's specified lubricant, which is always a high-temperature-type designed for wheel bearings, or upgrade to a higher grade if you make any changes.

Hitch-Pin Weight Capacity

Q I have a 2002 GMC Sierra 2500HD 4x4 Crew Cab shortbed with the Duramax diesel and Allison Transmission. The truck is rated to pull 16,000 pounds. I am asking for assistance to determine the pin-weight capacity.

My GMC dealer informs me it is 1,500 pounds or three quarters of a ton, but he cannot produce any documentation. This makes sense, as it is a three-quarter-ton truck, but that doesn't mean it is correct. With a properly installed fifth-wheel rail and hitch, what is the max pin weight? Can I increase that by adding airbags? I'm looking at a new fifth-wheel trailer with a pin weight of 2,710 pounds.

Ervin Angler, Crystal River, Florida

A Did your dealer — with a straight face — really tell you your truck could carry 1,500 pounds on the rear axle because it's a "three-quarter-ton truck"? The terms "half-ton" and "three-quarter-ton truck" were once specific ratings for load-carrying capacity, but that was many years ago; today, they are general descriptive terms.

But in general, it's easy to determine how much your truck's rear axle

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can carry. Take your truck, loaded with the cargo and passengers normally along when towing, to a public scale and record the weight on the front and rear axles. Compare these numbers to the data label on the driver's doorjamb and note its gross axle weight rating (GAWR). That's the maximum the truck axle can carry without being overloaded. For example, if the rear axle is rated at 5,000 pounds and it weighs 3,000 pounds, there are 2,000 pounds of payload left.

Adding airbags will not increase that weight rating, but they can help the truck ride in a more level stance when the trailer is hitched up. The trailer weight may be perfectly suitable for the truck but it still may sag a bit in back with the extra load. **TL**

HAVE A TECH QUESTION ?

Email rvclinic@trailerlife.com or write to RV Clinic, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Include your full name and hometown. Selected letters will be answered in the magazine, but time does not permit individual replies. No phone calls, please.

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⌚ UNTAMED WEST

Clockwise from below: The highest point in the Black Hills, the historic summit tower atop Black Elk Peak (7,242 feet) is a hiker's heaven. Bighorn sheep butt heads on a cliff in Custer State Park. A wild baby burro nudges his mother a few feet from the road.



Faces of the Black Hills

From hiking to wildlife watching, there's more to South Dakota than Mount Rushmore

— by Lisa Ballard

In South Dakota's Black Hills, the faces of presidents Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt on Mount Rushmore aren't the only things to see. Among the buttes and rocky spires lies an enormous patch of protected mixed-grass prairie laden with wildlife. We spend time there every year. It's a place where the Wild West still feels untamed.

Hiking up Black Elk Peak is one of my favorite things. The trail climbs 1,100 feet, but it's spread over 3½ miles with good footing most of the way. The effort rewards with a chance to explore a stone fire tower with jaw-dropping views into four states: South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana and Nebraska.

Custer State Park is always part of the itinerary. We commonly see bison,

pronghorn, deer, prairie dogs and bighorn sheep on the park's wildlife loop. And then there are the "begging burros." Descended from the pack animals used by pioneer-era miners, these extroverted equines have no qualms about squishing their noses onto your vehicle's windows and peering in. Perhaps the animals in the park enjoy watching us as much as we like watching them! **TV**



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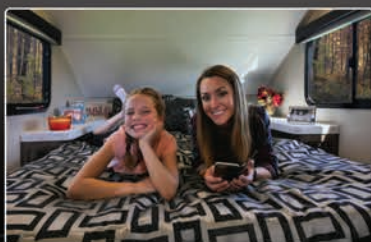
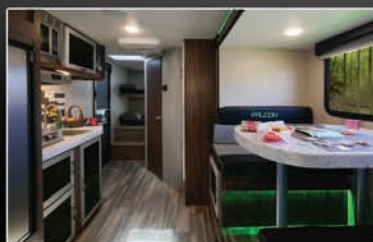
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