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SEPTEMBER 2014

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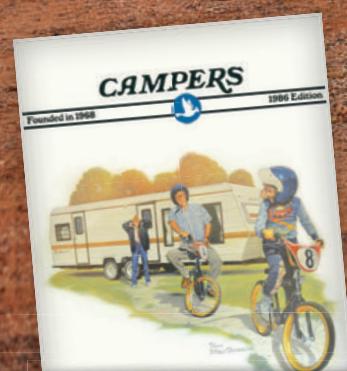
Nebraska City, Nebraska



Winnebago's bright-pink Minnie supports breast cancer awareness. Page 18

**On the cover:** The Ram 1500 and Lance 1995 on the eastern slope of California's Sierra Nevada. Photo by Chris Hemer. See page 46

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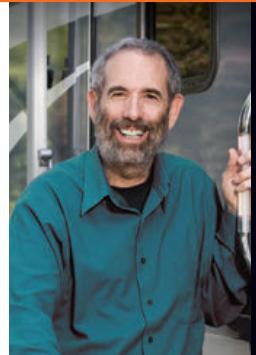


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# Hooked on Performance

I'm not complaining...but bolt-on and plug-in components for extra horsepower and torque are making us gearheads soft



**A**merica's love affair with the pickup is stunning. Ford's F-150 has been the number one selling vehicle for as long as I can remember, and RVers make up one of the largest groups of truck owners in the nation. I guess demographers and psychographic analysts can try to second-guess why people are obsessed with pickups, but I have a simple answer: they make the best tow vehicles and they're fun to work on.

I bought my first pickup, a Chevy, 42 years ago — crude by today's standards, but I was pretty proud of it. It towed a 20-footer then, and the small-block V-8 did a credible job. But it wasn't enough. It didn't take long before the intake manifold was swapped for a nice aluminum Edelbrock, the carburetor replaced with a modified Holley, headers installed, of course, and glass-pack mufflers added for macho sound. It was a nice ride, and towing the trailer I could crest the Sherwin Grade on Highway 395 in California's Sierra Nevada with pride.

I was hooked on performance. Over the years I built engines and transmissions looking for more power. There was never enough horsepower and throttle response. I have to laugh when I think about the number of hours spent bent over fenders. Today I can make all the power I need and more by plugging a module into an OBDII port under the dash and pushing a few buttons. Of course, most of this is possible because of the diesel engines in pickups. I can still spend time in engine compartments, but most likely it's only to change the air intake, which is pretty simple.

A good example of plug-in power technology is the SCT/Bully Dog tuner featured on page 63. While the SCT/Bully Dog is one of many tuners on the market, it's the first one that can unlock the 2013 and 2014 Dodge Ram PCM. Impressive gains can be realized from tuners, but there are other products out there that can unleash dormant power. A guide to the latest bolt-on components can be found on page 70. And truck engines don't get all the love. New bolt-on shock absorbers for trailers are described on page 92.

By the way, kudos to Ram for finally putting a diesel in a half-ton truck. The 1500 with the EcoDiesel (see page 46) adds another dimension to the half-ton segment. Nissan has already announced a diesel for its Titan; my crystal ball tells me GM and Ford might be looking at diesels for their half-tons.

Being last up the hills is no longer an option. ☰

— Bob Livingston, publisher

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**DID YOU KNOW?** The Lamstead Kampkar was invented by the Lambert family, makers of Listerine mouthwash. When beer was outlawed during Prohibition, Anheuser-Busch, brewers of Budweiser, kept busy building the Lamstead.

FOLLOW THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

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### Just the Facts

To say that my wife and I were intrigued by Bob Livingston's July review of Winnebago's new Destination fifth-wheel would be an understatement. The phrase that continues to reverberate with us is, "What were they thinking?"

We are now on our fifth travel trailer and continue to be amazed at what manufacturers do (or don't do, as the case may be). We are convinced that those who design and build RVs never actually use their products before they go to market. Things that don't make sense dumbfound us, as the Destination did you. Large-scale manufacturers should know better!

We shopped around quite a bit before our last purchase. We almost bought a different unit, until we discovered that the "trendy" kitchen island we liked so much totally prevents access to the entire rear half of the trailer, including the bathroom, unless one of the slides is open, which means having to open a slide at every dump station just to put tank deodorant in the toilet or not being able to easily use the bathroom while en route.

We basically like our latest acquisition, a Keystone Bullet 286QBS, but continue to be perplexed. The owner's manual is the worst we've encountered — the instructions are vague and tend to invoke the caveat "if equipped." If that's the case, why doesn't the manufacturer provide the customer with an actual list of whether or not the unit "is equipped"?

In the bathroom, the (very necessary) medicine cabinet prohibits leaning fully over the small sink, and the sole bathroom light puts the whole right side of one's face into shadow (really handy for shaving). Again, this leads one to wonder if anyone involved in the trailer's manufacture has ever actually used the finished product.

I have added backup lights to every trailer we've had. (Have the manufacturers never had to back into

### Battery Basics

Enjoyed the articles in the July issue regarding batteries ("Power Bank" by Bob Carpenter and Ken Freund's answer to Tom Ballard in the RV Clinic column). I have experienced the same battery rundown noted by Ballard. However, after much discussion with the service guys in the dealer's shop, I installed a blade switch in the battery compartment that completely disconnects the circuit. From what I discovered, the propane sensor at least continues to operate, since this is required to be hardwired and not affected by the battery disconnect. That small load over a period of three or four weeks will completely drain the system.

I have four 6-volt batteries paired to make 12 volts and paralleled to add strength. With that blade switch in place, all electrical is disconnected, and the batteries survive a much longer downtime without requiring me to recharge them, either through hooking up or running my generator.

Thanks for good articles on batteries and tires.  
**Ed Hugill, Via email**



a site in the dark?). And why can't manufacturers include a sparker on gas ranges? How much extra can that possibly cost?

We were impressed by Livingston's critique of the Destination and hope that you continue to be as candid in future reviews!

**Michael Gleason, Bangor, Maine**

### More to the Story

In the Newswire section of Around the Bend in the July issue is an article on the RV driver shortage. Seeing the country while delivering RVs and needing only a proper tow vehicle sounds inviting. As both an RVer with a fifth-wheel and a DOT safety professional, I think it's unfortunate readers are not aware of "the rest of the story."

There's a whole gamut of federal and state regulations applicable to performing this type of job, from getting a DOT number to having a federal medical card, following hours-of-service rules and getting drug and alcohol tests. In many cases, you es-

sentially become your own trucking company. I know this because I was a regulator and now work in the private DOT sector. It may not be as inviting as it initially seems.

**Jim Bramm, Campbellsport, Wisconsin**

### Boosting Cell Signals

Bob Livingston's article in the July issue about the SmoothTalker system offers a lot of information. I'm an Airstream owner, and the trailer's aluminum shell certainly impairs cell-phone signal quality! A side-by-side comparison of the SmoothTalker and the Wilson Electronics products would assist greatly in making a purchase decision.

**Franklin D. Sanders, Rochester, Vermont**

### The American West

I enjoyed the July article "Beyond Mount Rushmore" by Scott Simianer. In the third paragraph, he indicated he had found a fossil on one of his hiking adventures and another time he found a U.S. Calvary button. These finds may not have been in a national

## LETTERS

park, but I think it should have been mentioned that it is against the law to remove fossils or artifacts from any of the national parks.

**Garry Kinzie, Menifee, California**

I read with interest "Beyond Mount Rushmore." The author's statement regarding Harney Peak as the tallest point in North America east of the Rocky Mountains at 7,242 feet is

incorrect. Casper Mountain, overlooking Casper, Wyoming, is about 8,800 feet. Casper Mountain has several campgrounds, a ski slope and cross-country skiing, hiking trails (including one for the visually impaired), a repeater station for Wyoming's only NPR station, and numerous vacation homes and cabins.

**Samuel Murdock  
Mechanicsville, Virginia**

## Good Read

I always enjoy reading Bill Graves' *America's Outback* column and look forward to it each month. I'm landlocked in West Virginia now, but life has been lived in Alaska, Delaware, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maine and Alberta, with camping and trailering here and there. So I know a bit of the American Outback and appreciate what Graves shares.

**Jane, Charleston, West Virginia**

*Trailer Life* has improved my camping experience with hints and tips no one ever told me. *America's Outback* travels with Bill Graves are enticing and make me want to take a road trip. Thank you for a great read.

**John Sidoran, Camden, New York**

## High-Flying Fun

I read with interest your "Winging Over Wisconsin" story on AirVenture Oshkosh in June's *Trailer Life*. I am a pilot and RVer and have attended AirVenture every year except two since 1984, having camped there each time. The author of your story wrote, "Members can book sites at discounted rates." Although campsites can be paid for in advance, particular sites can't be booked — it's first come, first served. Otherwise, your story was right on! AirVenture is a great event for the whole family, pilots or not.

**Glenn Brasch, Tucson, Arizona**

## Hooray for Maps!

Thank you for including maps with the travel articles! I've read letters previously in this column from readers requesting maps to locate the featured travel destination or trek. I'm glad to see them now included.

**Nancy Dunn, El Cajon, California**

## Come East!

*Trailer Life*'s articles allow readers the chance to see the sights and campgrounds that we may not get an opportunity to visit. There are many great campgrounds and destinations in our area that may interest campers from the West Coast. Maybe you could publish some articles on places like New York's Watkins (continued on page 13)

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<sup>†</sup>Requires two parallel-linked EU2000i generators. \*Warranty applies to all Honda GX Series Engines and GX Series-powered Honda Power Equipment, 100cc or larger, purchased or put into rental service since January 1, 2009. Exceptions apply. See full warranty details at [honda.com](#). Does not apply to EU1000 models. Please read the owner's manual before operating your Honda Power Equipment and never use in a closed or partly enclosed area where you could be exposed to poisonous carbon monoxide. Connection of a generator to house power requires a transfer device to avoid possible injury to power company personnel. Consult a qualified electrician. ©2014 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.

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## LETTERS

(continued from page 10)

Glen State Park, the Finger Lakes region and wineries, and the Thousand Islands.

**Joe Z., Buffalo, New York**

### Go West!

To anyone planning a trip that includes Moab, Utah, two attractions that receive less publicity than Arches and Canyonlands national parks are deserving of attention. The first is Dead Horse State Park located on the same road as Canyonlands. It is a reduced-scale version of the Grand Canyon but still big enough to be awe-inspiring and is much less crowded. The other recommendation is Highway 128 that runs northeast from Moab along the Colorado River with canyon walls towering overhead. It is a pretty spectacular route, but you will have to drive carefully because of the twists and turns in the road, especially if you are driving or towing a large RV.

**Ed Austin, Newport News, Virginia**

### Word to the Wise

I recently spent five days in Prescott, Arizona. The people are very friendly, but the city of Prescott is not. I had gone downtown and parked on the main street (Gurley Street), which uses diagonal parking spaces. I pulled into a parking space and turned the steering wheel fully to the right. When I returned to my vehicle, there was a parking citation on the windshield. The citation was for Not Parking Within Markings.

Upon examination I found that my vehicle's tires were well within the lines, but the right front tire was resting on the line at the curb. So, technically, they are correct, as I was on the line with one tire. I am a retired peace officer, and in my 33 years of service I have seen my share of unnecessary citations issued. But I must admit this is by far the most shortsighted and insular incident I have seen. I will send the city of Prescott their pound of flesh and pay the \$93 parking citation and avoid ever returning there.

Finally, while fueling my vehicle prior to leaving, I was talking to the station attendant. He asked how my stay was, and I told him it was great, other

than the parking ticket. He walked to the back of my truck, apparently looking at the license plate, then returned and said, "You parked downtown, didn't you?" I told him I had, and he told me that receiving a parking ticket downtown is very common for out-of-state visitors as the city officials know that owners

of out-of-state plated vehicles will not drive back to contest the citation.

I am in no way suggesting that people should not visit Prescott; I only suggest that they beware of the heavy-handed enforcement techniques so that they do not meet the same fate.

**C. Worley, Rogue River, Oregon** 

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Midway Village's World War II Days is a living history display of 1940s-era military machines, base camps and re-enactors.

## Rockford's Time Warp

**Come to Midway Village in Illinois this September to experience the country's largest World War II re-enactment with more than 1,000 participants**

article by Pamela Selbert

Overhead, small military planes drone menacingly. Columns of uniformed soldiers move along a dirt road. On the field, battle tanks are maneuvered into position, as soldiers hurry to stay behind the cover of the rumbling vehicles. Clouds of smoke billow from the muzzles of tank cannons with each booming salvo, and the sharper crack of rifle fire and rapid *rat-tat-tat* from machine guns shatter the air.

Watching the spectacle, you might think you've fallen into a time warp and are witnessing World War II raging once again. Thousands of modern-day spectators pack the nearby stands to witness the event — the largest WWII re-enactment in the country. It's been held here at Midway Village in Rockford, Illinois, every year since 1996, says Scott Koelling, event coordinator and one of its founders.

Midway Village, established on 148

acres about 40 years ago, includes more than two dozen Victorian buildings — a print shop, a blacksmith shop and a hotel, plus a museum housing some 150,000 artifacts that "tell the story of life in Rockford." The wide-open fields and adjacent woods on the property provide a perfect setting for the re-enactments.

The event gets a little bigger every year, Koelling says, with more than 1,100 soldier re-enactors expected to take part in World War II Days in 2014. In addition, about 200 civilian re-enactors will interpret 1940's life on the home front and in a small French town.

Visitors will see 1940s-era base camps that include working field kitchens, narrated skirmishes, dozens of military machines (jeeps, tanks, artillery, motorcycles and planes, which are privately owned

by museums and participants), horses and dramatic pyrotechnic displays. Soldier re-enactors, dressed in appropriate uniforms, represent many of the countries involved in the war, both Allied and Axis forces. Battles are from both the European and Pacific theaters.

Koelling explains that World War II Days was begun "not to glorify war but as a way to honor men and women in uniform and what they did. It's important that we don't forget," he continues. "World War II Days is a living history display intended to entertain, but more importantly, to educate."

This year, World War II Days takes place September 20 and 21 at Midway Village, 6799 Guilford Road in Rockford, Illinois (815-397-9112, [www.midwayvillage.com](http://www.midwayvillage.com)).

Among the many RV parks in the Rockford area is Blackhawk Valley Campground, open mid-April through mid-October, on the shores of the lovely Kishwaukee River. It includes more than 130 sites, many with 50-amp service, a playground, a minigolf course and a laundry. Rates are \$30 to \$35 per night (815-874-9767, [www.blackhawkvalleycampground.com](http://www.blackhawkvalleycampground.com)).



## San Diego's Fleet Week

Southern California's Fleet Week San Diego honors the men and women of the military through a series of public events. September 9 through October 5 this year, the monthlong celebration includes the Miramar Air Show, an Enlisted Recognition Luncheon for 200 military personnel, a Navy open house where visitors can take ship tours and the Fleet Week Coronado Speed Festival where classic cars zip around a racetrack set up on the military base. Other events include the Football Classic and MCRD Boot Camp Challenge, which is a 3-mile race with obstacles used only by Marine recruits. All are invited to join in thanking sailors, Marines and Coast Guardsmen and -women for their service to the country.

For a list of campgrounds in the San Diego area, go to [www.goodsamcamping.com](http://www.goodsamcamping.com).

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Ram is the first domestic truck maker to announce that its full lineup of 1500, 2500 and 3500 pickups are J2807 compliant, which means they meet or exceed the Society of Automotive Engineers' (SAE) standard and criteria for measuring and rating tow standards. "Ram has been preparing for integration of the SAE towing standard over the past few years, and adding heavier three-quarter-ton and one-ton trucks to the criteria gives it more teeth," said Mike Cairns, director of Ram truck engineering. "For too long, an uneven playing field existed, and towing capacities went unchecked. We're happy to be the only pickup truck manufacturer to align with the SAE J2807 towing standard across our pickup truck lineup." Ram states that all of its current tow ratings will stay the same and in some special instances will actually be up-rated with the new requirements.

### Pennsylvania RV Show, September 10 to 14

America's largest RV show opens on 21 acres in Hershey, Pennsylvania, September 10, displaying everything from the smallest camper to the largest motorhome. It's the first show of the season to debut manufacturers' new 2015 products. Sponsored by the Pennsylvania RV and Camping Association (PRVCA), the event incorporates industry and public days to create a hybrid show with more than 1,300 new RVs on display. Educational seminars include Tips for Buying an RV, Work Camping and Matching Trucks to Trailers, as well as travel experts speaking on topics that include Alaska RV Adventure by Highway and Ferry, Great Rocky Mountain RV Adventure and Route 66 RV Adventure. Admission is \$10 for adults and free for children under 12. On opening day, September 10, admission for attendees 55 and older is half price.

**888-303-2887, [www.prvca.org](http://www.prvca.org)**

### Lance Camper Partners with Pro Angler Brett Hite

Lance Camper has entered into a marketing partnership with professional tournament angler Brett Hite. "Based on owner surveys, we know fishing continues to be a favorite activity of Lance customers, especially with our truck camper customers, many of whom pull boats behind their rigs," said Bob Rogers, marketing director for Lance. "From weekend warriors to tournament pros, from inland lakes and rivers to salt water, fishermen love the outdoors, and many of them enjoy RVing. Brett was a Lance customer before we met and is a passionate truck camper enthusiast, spending more than 200 nights per year in his Lance Camper," Rogers added. Hite has been a professional angler for 11 years, with career earnings exceeding \$1 million, and 2014 has proven to be a truly exceptional year so far, with him finishing fourth in the Fishing League Worldwide Angler of the Year standings.



## Bicycle Adventures

Want to enjoy the outdoors and get some exercise? Bicycle Adventures, based in Issaquah, Washington, has 14 fall tour dates with rides through Western states that include daily miles of 25 to 50, 50 to 60 and 70-plus. Here's a sampling of upcoming tours; check the company's website for more details.

**September 21:** The Leavenworth Mountain Biking tour offers four days of backcountry fat-tire riding and rafting in Washington state.

**September 14, 21 and 28:** San Juan Island 6 Day Classic begins in Seattle and travels through lavender fields and explores a shark reef sanctuary.

**September 15:** Ride for four scenic days through Oregon's Wallowa Mountains and Eagle Cap Wilderness on the Wallowas & Hells Canyon tour.

**September 20:** Cyclists wanting to explore Oregon's John Day Fossil Beds National Park can do so on this four-day tour.

**September 28:** If you're into arts and

crafts, pueblos, Southwestern cuisine and Spanish-style towns, consider the six-day Santa Fe & Taos tour.

**October 5:** The six-day Moab & Arches Classic tour focuses on Utah's natural playground and two national parks.

**October 12:** Spend six days in the land of Geronimo, Cochise and 250-year-old saguaro cactus on Arizona's Cactus Classic.

**October 27, November 1, 6 and 11:** Pick from one of four departure dates for this four-day Death Valley National Park tour leaving from Las Vegas, Nevada, and covering a variety of terrain that includes 200 miles of eerie salt flats, sand dunes, badlands, valleys and mountains.

**Save \$200:** Mention *Trailer Life* magazine when booking and you will receive \$200 off any of the company's fall tour departures. The discount applies until September 15, 2014. Contact Bicycle Adventures for prices and details.

800-443-6060, [www.bicycleadventures.com](http://www.bicycleadventures.com)

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## Winnebago's Pink Minnie

In support of breast cancer awareness, Winnebago Towables added a pink Minnie to its 2015 trailer lineup. A \$1,000 donation will be made to the American Cancer Society for every pink Minnie sold. Available in six floorplans, the special option Minnie with breast cancer awareness ribbons is constructed with aluminum framing and has easy-to-clean vinyl flooring. Exterior lengths range from 19 feet 2 inches to 26 feet 9 inches with 7½- to 8-foot widths. Standard features include a uniquely designed bathroom for maximum space and a fiberglass exterior with a diamond-plate rock guard. In addition to pink, the Minnie comes in other fun colors that include cherry red, lemon, lime, orange and white. The trailer is available with one or two slideouts or can be ordered without a slideout. MSRP starts at \$16,668.

According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in women, and more than 200,000 new cases of invasive breast cancer will be diagnosed in women this year. "We feel very strongly about supporting the fight against



breast cancer," said Winnebago Towables President Johnny Hernandez. "This disease primarily affects women, and these women are our grandmothers, mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, granddaughters and aunts, which means this disease impacts virtually all of our lives."

Cinda White, senior representative of community engagement for the American Cancer Society, said, "We're thankful for the generosity of Winnebago and their support in helping us finish the fight against breast cancer."

### Winnebago Towables

574-825-5250, [www.winnebagotowables.com](http://www.winnebagotowables.com)



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# GREAT LAKE

The vast Lake Michigan shoreline may look like an ocean, but it's an epic freshwater paradise.

**F**rom the bottom, it looked like an easy climb up a sand dune. Yet 20 minutes later, I'm still huffing and puffing, as with each step my footing quickly loses its grip on the steep, sandy hillside. I soon realize I'm ascending the mother of all sand dunes, the strenuous Dune Climb at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, a national park that skirts Lake Michigan's oceanlike shoreline.

A stiff wind blows tumbleweeds across my path and sand in my face. I still have another bluff to conquer, but I can see the summit ahead where, I'm told, the view makes the climb well worth every grunt and every grain of sand in my now-full sneakers.

"When people ask where to bring their kids, we tell them to come out here," says tour guide Mike Norton between breaths. "We say, 'Tell your



# LKE ESCAPE

Tag along on a coast-hugging 200-mile road trip from Traverse City to Mackinac Island

kids it's the biggest sandbox in the world."

I turn and behold a striking view of this stretch of northern Michigan's Leelanau Peninsula. I see Glen Lake, carved by glacial erosion, with its striking luminescent pale-green hues.

"When you get to a high place, sometimes you can look out at two or three lakes, and each one will be a different color," says Norton. "You might have one that's a deep jade green, another that's

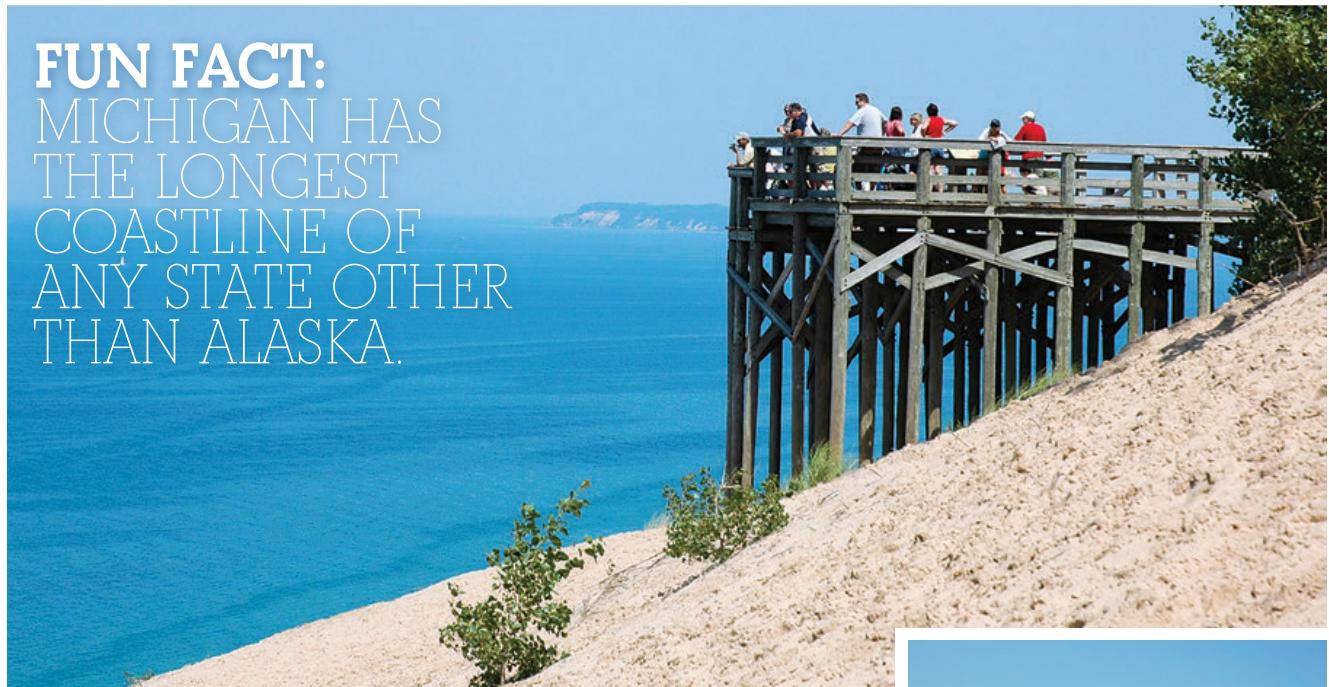
turquoise and yet another that's cobalt blue."

When we reach the summit, we're greeted by a commanding view of Lake Michigan with whitecaps created by a blustery wind and stunning colors that change as the sun ducks in and out of the clouds. From up here, I witness the many faces of northwestern Michigan's rugged environment, from desert to wilderness, forest to beachfront and sand dunes to rain desert.



## FUN FACT:

MICHIGAN HAS THE LONGEST COASTLINE OF ANY STATE OTHER THAN ALASKA.



(Above) Lake Michigan Overlook at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore rises to the occasion with a magnificent view of South Manitou Island. (Right) The view from the top of the Dune Climb is worth every step. (Previous spread) Charlevoix South Pier Lighthouse.

It's the first day of my peninsula-and-island-hopping adventure, a more than 200-mile trip along U.S. Route 31 from the Traverse City area to Mackinac Island, a region with a prominent lumbering, fur-trading and Native American history. In the state with the longest freshwater coastline in the country, I'll pass shimmering lakes within valleys dotted with cherry orchards and vineyards. I'll experience the charm of the boating communities

of Charlevoix and Bay Harbor. I'll follow in the footsteps of Ernest Hemingway around historic Petoskey. And I'll leave behind the RV life in exchange for bicycle jaunts and horse-and-buggy rides on forested Mackinac Island.

After the Dune Climb, Norton leads me along 7-mile Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive, created by and named after a local lumberman turned nature buff. We stop at an overlook of Glen Lake with a view of Alligator Hill,



shaped like the reptile's protruding head and flat jaw.

Our next stop, Dune Overlook, is a 4-square-mile coastal scene in a rain desert that looks more like New England. "It gets lots of rain, and because it's sand, the water disappears almost immediately," says Norton. "So the plants living there, like cottonwoods and cacti, can handle long periods of aridity."

The most dramatic stop, however, is Lake Michigan Overlook, perched 450 feet atop sandy cliffs from where I can see out to North and South Manitou islands in the distance.

Still in the national park, we drive through the ghost town of Glen Haven, passing Jack pine and fir trees on the way to the Glen Haven Maritime



**Pop the cork:** Eight northwestern Michigan vineyards cultivate varietal wine grapes on the Old Mission Peninsula, ideally situated on the 45th parallel.

Museum. "Glen Haven was a fueling port," says Norton. "They cut wood from the forest for steamships that burned wood in their boilers." A former Coast Guard station, the museum reflects how things looked during the early 1900s with exhibits that include a boathouse, a bunk area and the steering-wheel helm of a steamer.

Upon leaving the park, we pass through touristy Glen Arbor and stop for lunch at Cherry Republic for cherry jam, cherry salsa, dried cherries and even cherry barbecue sauce. "Everything in this restaurant is cherries, even the coffee," confirms owner Bob Sutherland. This is the number one cherry-growing region in the world, after all, with a unique peninsula microclimate.

### TRAVERSE CITY TO PETOSKEY

Back in Traverse City, we take Michigan Highway 37 up the Old Mission Peninsula, a land sliver snuggled between the East Arm and West Arm of Grand Traverse Bay. We pass farmers markets, cherry orchards and vineyards, stopping at the antique-filled Old Mission General Store, which dates back to the 1830s, and Bowers Harbor Vineyards, where we sample cherry wine. The whitewashed 1870 Mission Point Lighthouse sits on the peninsula's northernmost tip, where howling winds add to vivid sunsets.

Heading north on Route 31, the gleaming 17-story tower of Grand Traverse Resort and Spa in Acme is a prominent landmark, one of northern Michigan's tallest buildings. I find another interesting sight as I approach Charlevoix, a roadside exhibit of a giant pie slice representing what was once the world's largest cherry pie. According to the sign, the pastry baked in 1976 used 12,750 pounds of cherries and pie filling and 1,730 pounds of crust.

Gleaming white pleasure boats line Charlevoix Marina, not far from a curving beach and rocky pier flanked by the deep-red Charlevoix South Pier Lighthouse. But what grabs



## Cherry Capital of the World

With more than 3.8 million cherry trees, Michigan provides up to 75 percent of the U.S. crop of tart cherries used in pies, jellies, juice and dried fruit, with most of these grown around Traverse City and the surrounding Grand Traverse Bay area.



my attention are the nearby "mushroom" stone houses that date back to the 1920s and 1930s. The gnomelike homes have rounded cedar-thatched roofs.

Route 31 continues to hug Lake Michigan as it passes the golfing and beach community of Bay Harbor. A few miles farther up is Petoskey, an upscale town named after 19th-century Odawa chief Ignatius Petoskey (originally Pet-O-Sega), born to a French fur trader and an Ojibwa mother. His statue stands in the center of a small square opposite the 1899 Stafford's Perry Hotel. The area is also home to the official Michigan state stone, the Petoskey stone — shiny 350-million-year-old coral found along the shores of Little Traverse Bay.

I start my Petoskey tour at the Little Traverse History Museum, housed within an 1892 train depot. Exhibits show how brawny loggers once harvested area forests to rebuild



Hop a ferry to Mackinac Island harbor but leave your RV on the mainland: motorized vehicles have been prohibited here since 1898. (Right) A statue of Chief Petoskey rides the winds of change in his namesake city.

Chicago after the 1872 fire, and photographs and artifacts highlight favorite son Ernest Hemingway, who spent much of his youth in the area after his father built a cottage on nearby Walloon Lake.

"We had Hemingway in his formative years. I think we had him at his best," says Peter Fitzsimons of the Petoskey Area Visitors Bureau. "We had him when he was developing

his love of the outdoors, his love of hunting and fishing, and his respect for the Native American Indians — all of the things that wove their way through his writing."

We follow Hemingway's trail to tree-lined State and Woodland streets and a simple white home where he briefly lived while renting a room from Eva Potter. It was known as Potter's Rooming House. Hemingway also

frequented the 1875 billiard hall that's now City Park Grill, housed in one of Petoskey's oldest buildings. In the 1910s and 1920s, a young Hemingway would jot down ideas for his stories while seated at the mahogany bar. "In one of the short stories of Nick Adams, Hemingway actually refers to this place as the Annex, which it was once called," says restaurant manager Jason Septic.

Between the bright-green waters of Walloon Lake and Lake Charlevoix, not far from Boyne Mountain's winter ski trails and summer zip-lines, lies the small community of Horton Bay. A sign outside the Red Fox Inn and Hartwell & Company Bookstore reads "Hemingway Slept Here." Inside, books of Hemingway's stories and biographies clutter the store, and quotes from the author adorn the walls.

"My grandfather taught him how to fish," says owner James Vol Hartwell. "This village influenced his interests and attitudes."



(Top) With thick stone walls, thatched roofs and fairy tale architecture, Charlevoix's unique "mushroom" houses seem plucked from the pages of *The Hobbit*. (Above) At 12 miles across and 32 miles long, Grand Traverse Bay makes a big impression on Michigan's northwestern coast.

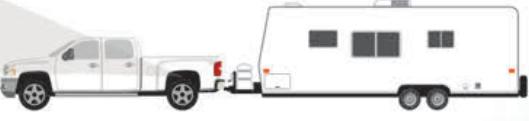
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## MACKINAW CITY TO MACKINAC ISLAND

An hour's drive north leads me to Mackinaw City, where I hop a 20-minute ferry to hilly Mackinac Island, one of the Midwest's most popular resort destinations.

I arrive in the busy port flanking Huron Street, the island's quaint but bustling storefront main drag. It's cluttered with bicyclists and echoes with the clip-clop of horse hooves — motorized vehicles have been banned here since 1898. Bicycle rentals and chocolaty fudge shops dominate every block, providing some of the island's favorite pastimes.

I begin my visit with a walk up the steep stone palisade to Fort Mackinac, built by the British in 1780 but falling to the Americans after the Revolutionary War. Today, interactive displays and period furnishings fill 14 original buildings, while re-enactments and cannon firings reverberate within the stone ramparts.



**(Above)** Two-wheeled travel is a great way to get around on Mackinac Island, a bicyclist's paradise with no cars allowed. Bring your own bike or take a spin on a rental. **(Right)** Traditional handmade fudge is one of the island's most popular souvenirs.



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Although horse-driven carriages will take you to the same sights, I opt to rent a bicycle and tour the island along curvy roads and bike paths cutting through forested bluffs. I stop in at a few churches and museums on Market and Main streets and find more interesting sights inland.

Unusual stone formations pierce the treeline: Arch Rock, a bridgelike span of eroded breccia carved out of a hillside 146 feet above Lake Michigan's shoreline, and Sugar Loaf Rock, another breccia mass shooting up 75 feet. The best views of the 2,318-acre island can be seen from nearby Point Lookout and the hilltop site of Fort Holmes.

I also stop in at the island's iconic Grand Hotel, built in 1887 during the Gilded Age and particularly noted for the hundred or more rocking chairs on its 660-foot-long porch. The Classic Revival-style hotel was popularized in the 1980 movie *Somewhere in Time* with Christopher Reeve and Jane Seymour, filmed at the hotel and on the island.



## Camping on the Lake Michigan Coast

On my trip up the Lake Michigan shore, I met Florida RVer Jane Dikman, who first visited the area with her husband in 2009.

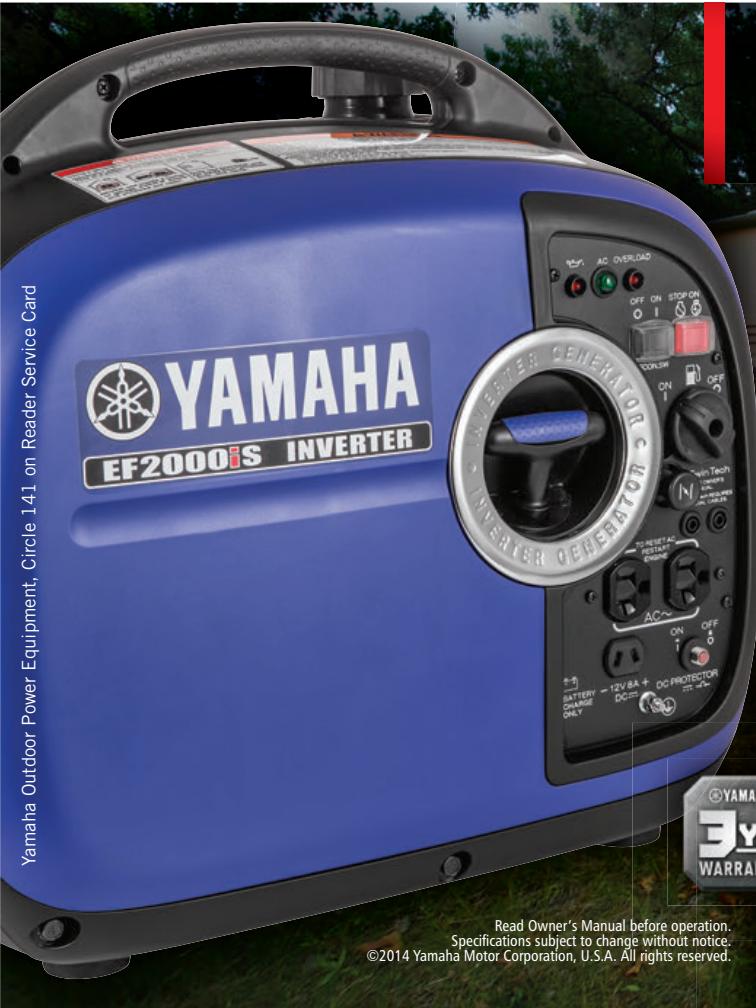
"We had a reservation for a week and ended up staying four months," Dikman told me. "Lake Michigan is the Promised Land. We actually refer to it as the Michigan Ocean because it's every bit as beautiful as the Caribbean. But as they say up here, 'No sharks, no salt.'"

Michigan has more than a thousand RV parks, from upscale resorts to mom-and-pop campgrounds to state parks and national forests. Take advantage of the following websites to search by city for RV parks along the Lake Michigan coast and throughout the state.

[www.goodsamcamping.com](http://www.goodsamcamping.com)

[www.michigan.org/campgrounds-rv-parks](http://www.michigan.org/campgrounds-rv-parks)

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As I return to the mainland, I again gaze upon the aquamarine coast that made this stretch of Lake Michigan shoreline so enticing to me. "It's crystal clear and just has a beautiful look to it," Fitzsimons told me back in Petoskey. "The water defines who we are. For the early Native Americans, it was their transportation. Today, it's our air conditioner in the summer and our snow generator in the winter. It's our recreation and means so many things to us. It's not a good lake — it's a Great Lake." ☀

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Mackinac State Historic Parks

231-436-4100, [www.mackinacparks.com](http://www.mackinacparks.com)

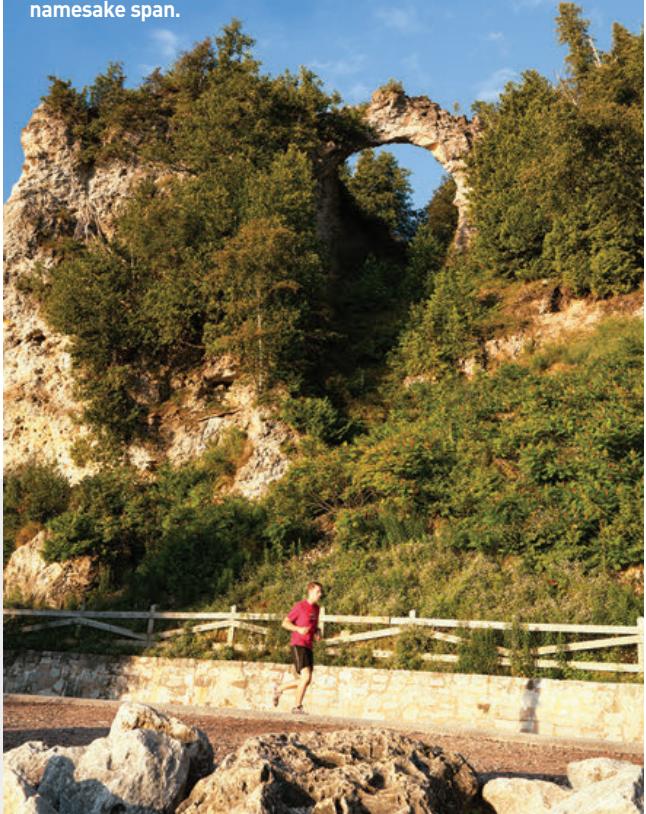
#### Petoskey Area Visitors Bureau

800-845-2828, [www.petoskeyarea.com](http://www.petoskeyarea.com)

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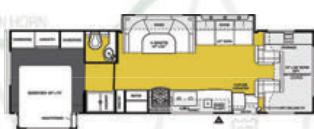


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# COUNTRY

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article by Irene Middleman Thomas



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ELVIS PRESLEY ENTERPRISES. PREVIOUS SPREAD: PHILLIP PARKER/MEMPHIS CVB

**E**ither I'm naive or there's truth to the legend of Southern hospitality. In Memphis, even the panhandlers are friendly. Strolling by one during a recent visit, he told me I had a nice smile and didn't even ask for money. Nor did the others I saw there. I was prepared for great music, fascinating heritage and succulent food but was pleasantly surprised by the warmth and openness of the Tennesseans I met in the western part of the state.

While Graceland, the estate where Elvis once lived, is perhaps the most visited spot in Memphis, the city is bursting with historical venues well worth your time. These include the Rock 'n' Soul Museum, Sun Studios, Gibson Guitar's factory and the National Civil Rights Museum, built on the site of the Lorraine Motel, where Martin Luther King was shot. Blues and rock 'n' roll lovers are in heaven here, reliving the musical genres' heydays.

Start your morning in Memphis with a down-home breakfast of sweet potato pancakes and a side of grits at the Arcade Restaurant, just like Elvis would have done. The waitress will call you "honey," and if you get there early, you might be lucky enough to

sit in Elvis' booth in the back. If you're there at lunchtime, indulge in the King's favorite, a fried peanut butter and banana sandwich. The Arcade has been dishing it up to Memphians since 1919.

Now that you are in an Elvis mood, head on over to Graceland, where you'll likely spend at least two hours exploring the lower level of his home, the grounds, the Presley family graves and various other exhibits, such as his gold and platinum records and trophies, his cars, his airplanes and massive amounts of memorabilia from all over the world (Elvis' likeness on a rhinestone vest? Pink Elvis scrapbooks? "Oy Gevalt, Elvis" needlepoint pillows?).

If you want some of that stuff for your own, there are a whopping 11 gift shops to attend to your needs. Graceland tickets run from \$34 and up for adults (discounts for 62 and over), and parking is \$10. Graceland RV Park



Elvis Presley's white-columned mansion, Graceland, opens its doors to the public. The King's flashy man cave, the Jungle room, features '70s green shag carpeting. His casket rested in front of the living room's peacock stained-glass windows.



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and Campground is located on 19 acres and is within walking distance of Graceland. Thanks to the displays commemorating his generosity and kindness to many in his family and outside of it, you'll likely come out of Graceland with an increased appreciation of this oh-so-talented, iconic man who died too young. After all, he sang "Walk a Mile in My Shoes" with emotion that he obviously really felt.

There's much more to music in Memphis than Elvis, of course, including the many artists who recorded and found fame at Sam Phillips' Sun Studios, now welcoming the public for enthusiastically guided tours during the day and still hosting recording sessions in the evenings. You'll likely feel a thrill walking around the small studio, thinking of the greats who were here before you.

This is the spot where the so-called Million Dollar Quartet of Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins recorded their one song

together, an impromptu jam session. So many others were here: Howlin' Wolf (aka Chester Burnett), Ike Turner, Roy Orbison, Junior Parker, and the list goes on and on. You can hold the microphone from those days and do a little lip-sync for a fun photo op.

You'll hear all about Carl Perkins' million-selling song "Blue Suede Shoes," which Presley later recorded on another million-seller. And you'll see Presley's high school diploma and hear the poignant recording he made in 1957 at age 18 for his mom's birthday. Actually, it wasn't her birthday — that was his way of sweet talking the secretary into letting him in the studio.

The Memphis Rock 'n' Soul Museum is perhaps the only museum you'll ever visit with a dance floor (called Express Yourself) which allows you to fully enjoy the hit songs that were belted out here from the 1930s through the '70s. The Stax Museum of American Soul Music is yet another musical heritage haven, celebrating the music

of soul greats such as Isaac Hayes (see his gold-plated car with white furry interior), Al Green, Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding and many others.

A very old Memphis highlight is a visit to Beale Street, where you can hear live blues (and some jazz) all day and night. Beale Street is considered one of the top entertainment districts in the nation, and you'll know why after a few moments in this incredible little world of its own. Club after club lines a three-block stretch, dotted with outstanding restaurants such as Itta Bena, situated over B.B. King's own blues club (where you can sometimes see him pop in for a set). Named for the tiny Mississippi town where the blues legend was born, Itta Bena dishes up contemporary Southern food — I just about drooled over the shrimp and grits platter.

Speaking of food, it's fabulous in this region. I felt like I had found my food heaven at downtown spots like Charles Vergo's Rendezvous, which has been serving succulent ribs and more since

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1948. It's famous for staff members who have been there for decades, and upon meeting the affable owner, I knew why. These were absolutely the best ribs I had ever tasted, and the ambience was cozy and supremely friendly — I recommend not missing it.

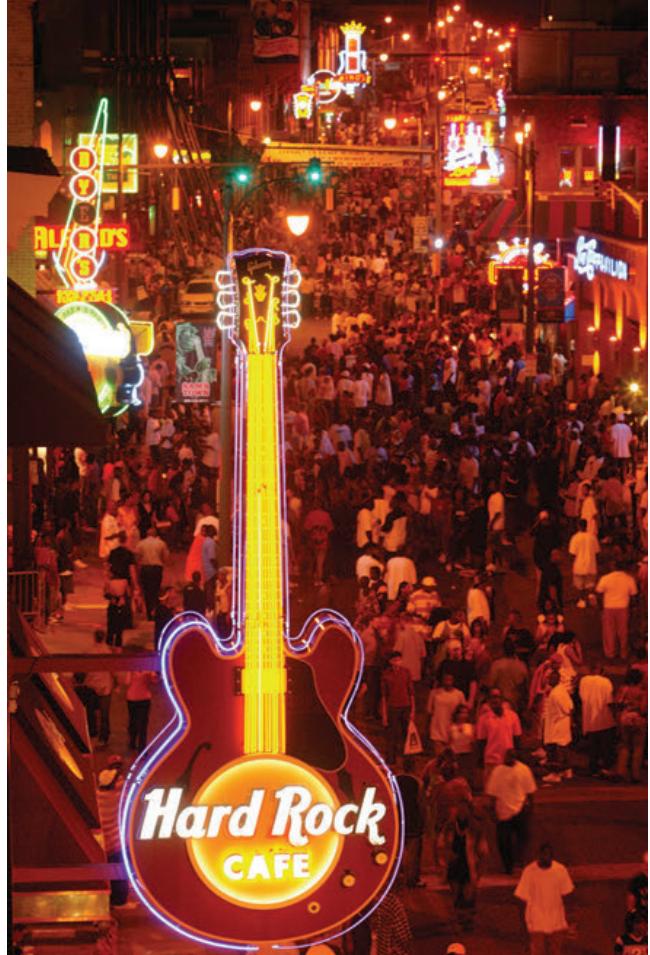
I also had the best fried chicken of my life at Gus's World Famous Fried Chicken, and I'm not even into fried chicken! This hot-and-spicy chicken spot brings long lines of diverse crowds of businesspeople, laborers, tourists and just about everyone. It was so good that I even brought home a plastic cup to remind me of the experience.

During my visit, I was served many fried green tomatoes, creamy grits, sweet potato pancakes (in Elvis' own breakfast spot), chess pie, hushpuppies, catfish, fried pickles, cornbread, collard greens and other Southern favorites that brought me happily into memories of Mark Twain, *Gone With the Wind* and countless Southern movies.

Heading on from Memphis, consider spending a few days in the Jackson area, where you can camp in woodsy RV parks and visit such places as the West Tennessee Delta Heritage Center in Brownsville. Here, we saw the original schoolhouse attended by Tina Turner (a tiny shack) and memorabilia of

---

Another neon night on Beale Street in the heart of downtown Memphis with three blocks of more than 30 nightclubs and restaurants.



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## ADVENTURES IN ELVIS COUNTRY

Carl Perkins, Sleepy John Estes and other musicians from the region. I was delighted with the Cotton Museum, with its Lincoln artifacts and fascinating presentation of cotton's importance to the South and its significance to slavery and the Civil War.

If you're lucky enough to visit in the autumn, you may see white fields all over that look like snow, but it's actually cotton bolls, ready to be harvested. For those of us not from the South, it's a bit of a thrill to park the vehicle by the side of the road and pick up a boll or two — they are all over the place. Yes, they are like a bunch of cotton balls stuck together, all fluffy and white, but with a seed in each ball.

Shiloh National Military Park is in the area as well, regarded by many as one of the best Civil War sites in the country. Shiloh was the scene of one of the most momentous battles — a key turning point — and is now full of very moving monuments. The visitor center shows an excellent film that depicts the story of Shiloh. Enthusiastic, informed park rangers will take you on a tour, or you can grab a brochure and do it yourself. It's a strange experience to be in such a lovely, peaceful spot, full of stately trees and rolling hills, and reflect



The author sips a cup of coffee in Elvis' booth at his favorite restaurant, the Arcade, established in 1919.

PHOTO BY RENEE MIDDLEMAN THOMAS

on the carnage that occurred here to thousands of young men.

West Tennessee is a place of foods many of us have only heard about, music we've loved and grown up with, and both positive and not-so-positive events in American history. It's a place where you'll hear plenty of y'all's and bless-your-hearts. This is not cookie-cutter America — it's a soulful place all its own. ☺

## WHERE TO CAMP IN ELVIS COUNTRY

Numerous RV parks populate west Tennessee. Here's a Memphis campground that's right across the street from Graceland and a couple more in rural towns near two Civil War battlefields.

### Graceland RV Park and Campground, Memphis

Fifteen minutes from downtown Memphis, just off Elvis Presley Boulevard, Graceland RV Park is conveniently situated across the street from Elvis Presley's home, Graceland. The 19-acre RV park features full-hookup RV campsites with 30- and 50-amp service and free Wi-Fi. There's a bathhouse and laundry facilities, a swimming pool, a camp store, biking and walking trails, and 24-hour security.

866-571-9236

[www.graceland.com](http://www.graceland.com)

### Green Acres RV Resort, Savannah

One of the largest RV campgrounds in west Tennessee, Green Acres has a healthy repeat-customer base and prides itself on service. RV campsites have 30- and 50-amp service, and some are pull-throughs. The resort offers Wi-Fi, a laundry, a convenience store, restrooms, covered pavilions, fishing ponds and a swimming pool. Family owned, Green Acres is near Shiloh National Military Park and is open year-round. Pets on leashes are welcome.

731-926-1928

[www.greenacresrvparktn.com](http://www.greenacresrvparktn.com)

### Parkers Crossroads RV Park and Campground, Yuma

Located 45 minutes from Shiloh National Military Park, Parkers Crossroads offers 30- and 50-amp hookups, free Wi-Fi and cable, and all but four sites are pull-throughs. Recreational amenities range from a swimming pool to a driving range and a fishing dock with a stocked pond. The park has large areas for dogs and offers information on self-guided tours of nearby Parkers Crossroads Civil War Battlefield.

731-968-9939

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Graceland RV Park and Campground is within easy walking distance of Elvis' Memphis home.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ELVIS PRESLEY ENTERPRISES

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A wide-angle photograph of a desert landscape dominated by large, light-colored sand dunes. The sky above is filled with scattered, white and grey clouds. In the foreground, several small figures of people are visible, standing on the dunes to emphasize their immense size.

article and photos by Therese Gundersen

# SHIFTING

Dig into North America's tallest sand dunes in the shadow of the Sangre de

The Great Sand Dunes near  
Alamosa, Colorado, call the  
adventurous to explore.



A peculiar yet incredible sight awaits the adventurous near the city of Alamosa, Colorado — Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. While flat prairie and tumbleweeds bordered what seemed to be a road to nowhere, signs assured us that we were headed in the right direction as we turned off Route 160 onto State Route 150. In contrast to the flat San Luis Valley and lofty Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the sand dunes appeared small and insignificant at this distance. We could hardly wait to discover what made them so "great."

Exploration would wait for the morning, as we settled in at Great Sand Dunes Oasis RV park on a rise in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristos. The panorama of the mountains, the dunes and the flat prairie was spectacular. As the sun began to set, its rosy glow reflected off the dunes in breathtaking beauty, progressing through changing shades of red with shifting shadows. Darkness arrived, howling coyotes called, and bright stars appeared in the black sky. In the distance, the lights of Alamosa looked like more stars settled on earth.

The Great Sand Dunes, about 38 miles from Alamosa, have been recognized as a national monument since 1932. In 2000 Congress expanded the area to protect the entire dune system. These 150,000 acres became Great Sand Dunes

# SANDS

## Cristo Mountains in southern Colorado's San Luis Valley

National Park and Preserve, with the dunes-only section named Great Sand Dunes National Park.

The main dune field is around 30 square miles (more than 19,000 acres) with sand dunes that are the tallest in North America. Star Dune rises 750 feet and is the seventh largest in the world. These dunes are unusual, but they aren't unique. Similar dunes exist in other areas of North America, including Coral Pink Sand Dunes State Park in Utah, White Sands National Monument in New Mexico and Imperial Sand Dunes in Southern California.

The location of the dunes is essential for their formation. The San Luis Valley, approximately the size of Connecticut, is lodged between the Sangre de Cristo and San Juan mountain ranges. Geologists believe this valley was once covered by a huge lake that later receded due to climate changes, leaving a few small lakes. The sand that was left — what geologists call a "sand sheet" — makes up around 53 percent of the sand deposits and is stabilized by the root systems of grasses and shrubs. What remains of the smaller lakes today forms the *sabkha* wetlands, a salt-encrusted white plain covered by saltbush and salt grasses. *Sabkha* is an Arabic word for salt-crusted depressions common along the coasts of North Africa and Saudi Arabia. Even at these locations, *sabkhas* are typically bordered by sand dunes.

The dune area may look like a desert, but there is water just inches below the surface. Sand and water set the stage for the creation of the dunes. Add wind, and these three elements perform a well-choreographed dance. Wind blows the sand, made up of rounded fine-grained quartz, pumice, ash and lava, toward the mountains. Water carries it back down Medano and Sand creeks onto the sand

sheet. The wind then blows it back from the sand sheet onto the dune field. The underlying wet sand helps the dunes keep their shape. During storms, the wind switches directions and blows the sand from the mountains back toward the valley, adding to the height of the dunes.

Although the sand is constantly moving, when photos taken in 1874 and 1999 are compared, they show that the shape of the dunes has changed very little. The traditional Ute word for the dunes, *sowapophe-uvehe*, means "the land that moves back and forth." What an ideal name for these shifting sands!



**Families at play on Medano Creek, a seasonal stream that slows to a trickle by midsummer.**

## IF YOU GO

**Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve** charges an admission fee of \$3 per adult 16 years and older (free for children), valid for one week. The park's \$15 annual pass admits the pass holder and all family members in their vehicle for a year from the purchase date. The \$80 America the Beautiful annual pass permits entry into all U.S. federal recreation sites (National Park Service, USDA Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Reclamation) and allows access for the pass owner and up to three passengers (888-275-8747, [www.store.usgs.gov/pass](http://www.store.usgs.gov/pass)).

To take a virtual tour of Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve during daylight hours, visit [www.nps.gov/grsa](http://www.nps.gov/grsa) and click the Weather/Webcam link on the right side of the homepage.

### RV CAMPING

**Great Sand Dunes Oasis** in Mosca provides an awesome view of the dunes and the San Luis Valley. Open from April through the end of October, weather permitting, the privately owned RV park

Along with their immense size and remarkable creation, the dunes have their own wildlife, most of which can be stepped over without being seen. Unique to the dunes are seven species of insects including the circus beetle. This six-legged performer will actually stand on its head when it becomes frightened. The Ord's kangaroo rat is the only mammal that makes a home in the dune field. Squirrels, coyotes, deer, mountain lions and black bears live in the nearby mountains and drink from Medano Creek.

During late spring and early summer, the creeks flow as the



melting snow on the Sangre de Cristo Mountains finds its way down the slopes. At this time, visitors may feel like they are at the beach and can wade and play in the water and even try tubing. In later summer, Medano Creek is more like a bubbling brook than a flowing river and can be crossed easily. The adventurous must be prepared for the heat, though. The National Park Service (NPS) reports that the sand can reach temperatures of 140 degrees Fahrenheit midday in the summer. Hats are recommended, and drinking water is necessary. Thankfully, according to the NPS, there are no scorpions, poisonous snakes or quicksand.

At daybreak, the dunes called us to explore. As we drove closer, they looked like they were growing larger. The title "great" no longer seemed unsuitable for these massive hills of sand. Only the dunes' front facades were visible as

offers 20 campsites for \$38 per night for two people. All sites are pull-through and are spaced widely enough apart for slideouts on two sides. Amenities include hot showers, a recreation room, laundry facilities and a dump station. Pets camp for free. 719-378-2222, [www.greatdunes.com](http://www.greatdunes.com)

**Piñon Flats Campground** at Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve is 1 mile north of the park's visitor center. The public campground opens April 1 and usually closes at the end of October. Forty-four RV sites can be reserved up to six months in advance on [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov). Forty-four more sites are available on a first-come, first-served basis, serviced by a kiosk at the entrance. The nightly rate is \$20. Some spots can accommodate RVs up to 35 feet, but longer rigs have difficulty turning corners and avoiding branches. There are no hookups, but restrooms provide sinks and flush toilets. A dump station and water are available during warmer months. 719-378-6395, [www.nps.gov/grsa](http://www.nps.gov/grsa)



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we began our trek across the flat sand sheet, yet they extend for many miles beyond. The sand was fine, and heat waves rose in the bright sun. We felt like we were at the beach with the sand shifting under our feet, but there were no waves or cooling breezes here, 730 miles from the ocean. Nor were we at sea level. The base of the dunes is at an elevation of approximately 8,175 feet.

We believed that after a short stroll we would reach the base of the dunes but discovered that it's difficult to accurately judge distances across the flat sand sheet or from dune to dune. As we walked along, we occasionally took a break and looked back to where we started our trek. Ultimately, we realized that we had covered some distance when we noticed other visitors on the sand sheet began to appear as tiny ants scattered near an ant mound.

The dunes are immense, their size breathtaking, and they seemed to grow larger still when we accepted the challenge and began to climb. After



Sandboarders shred the dunes on the steep slopes above Medano Creek.

emptying sand from our shoes several times, we waited until the hike was over to remove the sand again. This may be one hike when cowboy boots would be the better choice of footwear.

Climbing the dunes is a challenge. For each step forward, the climber's foot may slip three-quarters of a step

backward. But the ascent is worth the effort. High Dune, only about 1 mile from the visitor center, is approximately 650 feet tall. Once the summit is reached, the view is spectacular. The dunes extend almost as far as one can see.

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## Sunset and Sand

The setting sun's rosy glow creates changing shadows on the Great Sand Dunes and Cleveland Peak. (Above) Sand-filled shoes are a memorable part of the adventure.



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fame saw these dunes in 1807, his description recalled images of the ocean. "Their appearance was exactly that of the sea in a storm." Pike described the view from the top of a tall dune perfectly — the countless dunes look like ocean waves flash-frozen during a violent storm. Visions of rolling and breaking waves, and swelling and surging seas come to mind. The magnificence of these sand dunes — not to mention the challenging climb — caused my breath to catch and my heart to swell.

As Connecticut natives, we were intrigued by the span of the valley between the Sangre de Cristo and the San Juan mountains, roughly the size of our home state. Such a wide expanse is not seen in New England.

Eventually, it was time to make our way back down the dune. Some explorers carry things such as snowboards or sandboards, sleds, skis and pieces of cardboard to slide down the dunes. For us, it was tremendously fun to run down. It felt like we were leaping in slow motion, weightless like an astronaut in space.

The sky was clear with a few small clouds when we visited. But climbing the dunes during a storm would be unwise. Lightning is a definite danger.

Incredibly, if lightning strikes the dune field, it can cause a fascinating phenomenon called a fulgurite. Fulgurites, sometimes called petrified lightning, are natural root-shaped formations with a glassy interior. To create these, lightning



**Great Sand Dunes Oasis RV park offers full-hookup sites and spectacular views of the dunes and San Luis Valley. And pets are allowed!**

must reach temperatures of 3,270 degrees Fahrenheit. The average length of fulgurites is 1 to 2 inches, but they can be up to 30 inches long. If you are lucky enough to find one, the NPS asks that you leave it for others to enjoy.

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve is definitely worth traveling to, even though it may seem like it's on a road to nowhere. You may forget the geological aspects and the feel of sand-filled shoes, but you'll always remember the experience of the climb, the view from the peak and the amazing creation of shifting sands. ☺

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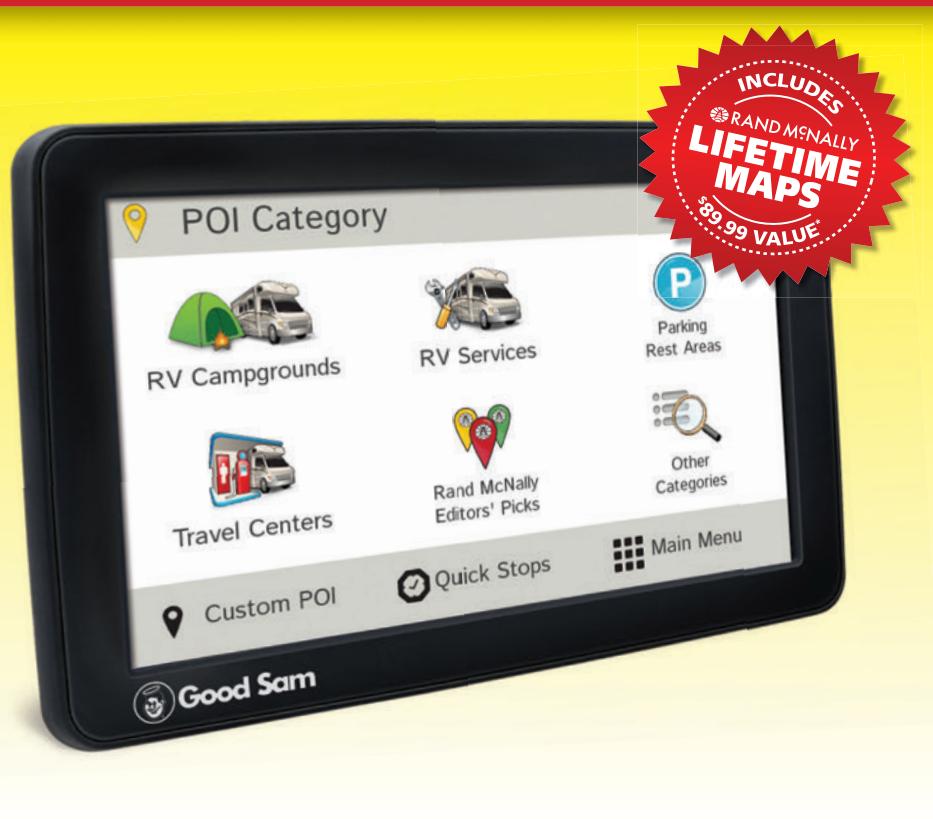
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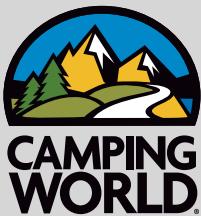
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article and photos by Chris Hemer

# A Perfect Pair

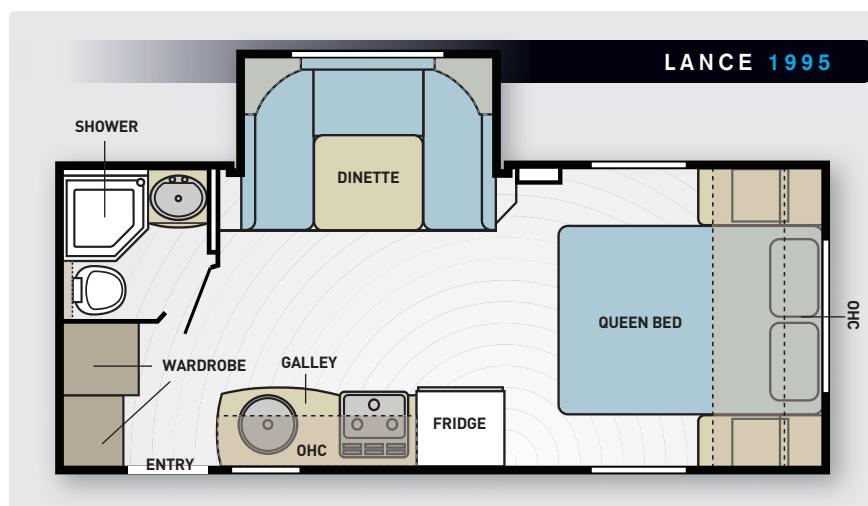
The new Ram 1500 EcoDiesel and Lance 1995 travel trailer are a match made in RVing heaven

**A**s we drive through the scenic Owens Valley along California's Highway 395, the word that keeps coming to mind is "effortless." The trailer feels planted and stable, and the tow vehicle purrs along contentedly, nonplussed by neither steep grades nor an incessant headwind. This is trailering nirvana. This is the way it's supposed to be.

Trailer towing is a numbers game: Horsepower, torque, tow capacity, hitch weight, gross axle weight (GAWR) and gross vehicle weight (GVWR) ratings. They all factor into what truck and trailer make a good pairing but don't necessarily tell the whole story. In fact, there are dozens of factors that can affect the way a trailer tows — from suspension and brakes to wheelbase and weight balance. Frequently, as we set out on a test, we find something lacking in the way the combination works, but we learn to accept it, because we know the

two weren't built for each other and therefore can never be perfect. But the 2014 Ram 1500 Outdoorsman EcoDiesel and the lightweight Lance 1995 travel trailer are about as close to a perfect match as you can expect to get.

The Ram 2014 model year brings with it an abundance of upgrades, the most notable of which is the segment-exclusive 3.0-liter EcoDiesel V-6 engine and TorqueFlite eight-speed automatic transmission. Between them, they bestow this light-duty Ram with impressive EPA fuel economy ratings of 20 MPG city/28 MPG highway, with only a 1 MPG penalty paid (both ratings) if you opt for 4WD. The Italian-sourced V-6 produces 240 horsepower at 3,600 RPM, but more importantly, 420 lb-ft of torque at only 2,000 RPM. That's more twist than even the top-dog 5.7-liter Hemi, and at roughly half the RPM, too. With a max tow rating of 9,200 pounds, it falls well short of the top 1500-series





Optional power patio awning and exterior speakers made for a comfortable place to sit and relax at the end of the day's activities. Front storage compartment has enough room for anything you're likely to bring on the trip.



gasoline offerings, but after sampling its capabilities, we think it may be conservatively rated.

In an effort to give customers more choices, the Ram 1500 models are available in a dizzying array of nine trim levels, five cab/bed configurations and seemingly limitless options. The tester that Ram provided us with underscores the latter; the base price of the Ram 1500 Crew Cab 4x4 in Outdoorsman guise is \$40,615, but with options (including the \$2,850 EcoDiesel), that price swelled to an astounding \$53,385. And that's without

cowhide at your backside.

For this princely sum, you get the Customer Preferred Package 28T (\$1,545), which includes relevant equipment such as a Class IV hitch receiver, fog lamps, a steeper 3.92:1 axle ratio (3.55:1 is standard), tow hooks, a 32-gallon fuel tank, "extra heavy duty" rear shock absorbers and an anti-spin rear differential. It also brings niceties such as power-heated mirrors, remote start, and painted front and rear bumpers that look rather striking. We'd also go with the Trailer Tow Mirror and Brake Control Group (\$330), which in-

cludes an integral brake controller; the spray-in bedliner (\$475); and the Rear Camera and Park Assist Group (\$595), which includes a huge backup display that makes solo hitching a cinch.

Depending on where you live, you may also appreciate the heated seats and steering wheel included in the Comfort Group (\$330), but we would opt out of extras like the upgraded UConnect, audio and speaker systems (\$995), four-corner air suspension (\$1,695) and black 20-inch wheels (\$1,400). We'd also avoid the \$1,295 RamBox Cargo Management System,



## S P E C I F I C A T I O N S



**(Above from left)** While relatively short, the Lance 1995 isn't lacking in space. The dinette has room for four to six, the kitchen has plenty of storage, and cabinets at the rear of the trailer can accommodate clothes up top, supplies below. An easy-to-use Jensen AM/FM/DVD/iPod player is located just inside the entry door. The bedroom area is well equipped with wardrobes, overhead storage, countertop space and 120-volt AC power outlets. A firm queen mattress has additional storage underneath the bed platform.

which sacrifices valuable bed space for lockable storage inside the bed walls. Thankfully, Ram offers the EcoDiesel engine across its model line, so it's still possible to get a competent, comfortable and economical tow vehicle for less than \$40,000.

These days, there seems to be an unwavering focus on making pickups more civilized, and the Outdoorsman's interior reflects this. Call us old-fashioned, but we still believe that a truck, at its core, should make you feel as though you're driving a truck, not a family sedan. We certainly appreciated the comfortable seats and legible instruments (including a multi-information display between the tach and speedometer), but there's nothing satisfying about turning a knob to put a truck into gear or pushing a little button to select a 4WD mode.

What's more, eliminating the column shift likewise dispatched the most logical place to put the tow/haul mode switch, not to mention manual shift controls. After searching for a while, we felt what we thought (wanted?) to

2014 RAM 1500 OUTDOORSMAN	
Fuel Economy, solo	22 mpg
Towing	12.6 mpg
Engine	3.0-L V-6 turbodiesel
Horsepower	240 @ 3,600 rpm
Torque	420 lb-ft @ 2,000 rpm
Transmission	8-speed automatic
Axle ratio	3.92:1
Fuel Cap.	32 gal.
Tires	P275/60R20
Suspension, Front	Upper and lower A arms, air suspension, stabilizer bar
Suspension, Rear	Solid rear axle with 5-link and track bar, air suspension, stabilizer bar
Brakes	4-wheel disc with ABS
Tow Rating	8,650 lbs.
GVWR	6,950 lbs.
GCWR	14,500 lbs.
Curb Weight	5,633 lbs.
Length	19' 8"
Wheelbase	149.5"
MSRP, base	\$40,615
MSRP, as tested	\$53,385
Basic Warranty	3 years / 36,000 miles

### 2015 LANCE 1995

Exterior Length	23' 9"
Exterior Width	8'

be manual shift paddles behind the steering wheel, which would have been great, not to mention logical. Alas, these were for the audio system volume and tuning. The manual shift controls are actually small buttons, placed adjacent to one another on the right side of the steering wheel, above the cruise controls. Change is good if it's done to make an improvement, but why Ram thinks this arrangement is better escapes us. Please, Ram, bring back the column shift.

There were other oddities. The "key" (a sort of amalgam of key and key fob)

Exterior Height	9' 9"
Interior Width	7' 8"
Interior Height	6' 5"
Construction	Laminated floor, walls and ceiling with aluminum framing, block-foam insulation, one-piece TPO roof
Freshwater Cap.	45 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	45 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	45 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	10 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	6 cu. ft.
Furnace	25,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu
Converter	55 amp
Battery	Dealer supplied
Tires	ST205 / 75R14
Suspension	Rubber torsion bar
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full; no cargo)	4,860 lbs.
Hitch Weight	520 lbs.
Axle Weight (2)	4,340 lbs.
GVWR	5,700 lbs.
GAWR	2,900 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	840 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$25,346
MSRP, as tested	\$27,107
Basic Warranty	2 years

### Lance Camper Manufacturing

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is located low on the dash, and the key chain constantly bumped the right knee of taller drivers. In fact, the blocky dash actually juts out at its bottom, putting one's knees precariously close to hard plastic once the seat is moved up to a comfortable driving position. The center console has the usual armrest storage, but in front of it is what amounts to a square hole and two cup holders. It's not attractive, nor is it an efficient use of space. Moreover, we found the center stack to be overly complex, with some of the controls arranged as buttons, some built into the color touch-screen display.

Figuring out what you need and how to access it takes one's eyes off the road for too long.

These gripes aside, the Ram is really very pleasant to drive, whether towing or solo. Its structure is rigid, as a truck should be, yet the ride is still compliant, even with the 20-inch wheels. It handles well, and the brakes feel strong but not grabby. The engine ... ah yes, the engine. It feels as though it taps into a bottomless well of torque, easily pulling the test trailer up any grade at the posted speed limit, even in a strong headwind. It is silky smooth and refined, but as a result, it sounds about as tough as a Volkswagen TDI. It's barely audible at idle, and once cruising down the highway, you can't hear it at all unless you mash the throttle. The eight-speed automatic transmission performed its duties in a similarly seamless manner, although it seems like the extra gears are academic with so much torque on hand.

As we exited Highway 395 near

Lone Pine and made our way to the campsite, we were looking forward to spending time near the foot of the Sierra Nevada in the Lance 1995. A leading camper manufacturer since 1965, Lance is accustomed to packaging a lot of features and livability into a small space, and the 1995 is no exception. It has a generously proportioned living area and bedroom, and every single cubic inch is used efficiently, whether for living, storing or both.

Starting up front, the queen bed has a large nightstand on either side, with a drawer and plenty of counter space for a book, a glass of water, reading glasses and the like. There's also a 120-volt AC outlet on either side for charging a phone or tablet while sleeping, for example, and underneath the overhead cabinets are appropriately placed reading lights and a single task light right in the middle.

Above each nightstand is a small wardrobe, and larger items like comforters and extra pillows can be stored



under the bed platform, which is equipped with gas struts for support and a latch that keeps it from opening and closing during travel. There's even a curbside magazine rack, and on the street side, a tall, thin cabinet with a power outlet and two cubbyholes cut into it that would be a good place to keep small items. We also appreciated the fact that the bedroom can be separated from the living area by a curtain that felt substantial and well made.

The living area is dominated by a

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curbside dinette slideout, which is both wide and very deep. Once it is deployed, it completely changes the character of the living space; it's hard to believe that this is only a 24-foot trailer with roughly 19 feet of floor space.

The kitchen is well equipped with a 6-cubic-foot Norcold refrigerator, a small microwave (a \$210 option) and a three-burner Atwood stove with a decorative metal-look backsplash. The test trailer had no oven, which we didn't miss, as it provides more stor-

(Above from left) 3.0-liter V-6 EcoDiesel is smooth, quiet and surprisingly powerful. Rear seats in the crew cab model have more than enough legroom for 6-plus-footers, even with the front seats adjusted to a comfortable position. The center console offers armrest storage, plus an open bin for odds and ends and two smallish cup holders. Instruments are legible, but the steering wheel buttons are small and hard to read. Center stack is dominated by the large touch-screen with backup camera display.

age for kitchen essentials. However, if you really want an oven, there is still an amazing amount of storage in this area. Two large, deep drawers fit underneath the dinette, and a great cabinet underneath the sink has a shelf and three

pullout bins that make it easy to organize smaller stuff. There is no cutlery drawer, per se, but it would be easy enough to put one into the top bin.

The sink is large and round, and is a pleasing gray color instead of the

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usual white. It has a black plastic cover for more prep space, which we used at times, as there isn't much room otherwise. To the right of the microwave is an overhead cabinet that is segmented to make organizing your things easier. The left section is good for plates and bowls, to the right and above are perfect for seasonings and a few pantry items, and below this is a space that seemed ideal for coffee mugs. The only complaint, and it's a minor one, is that this cabinet door doesn't go all the way up level with the ceiling, so if you're tall, you have to duck under it.

After preparing a simple meal the first evening, we settled into the U-shaped dinette, which we considered large for any RV, not just one this size. Four people fit easily, and as many as six could probably squeeze in. The seat cushions are well padded and very comfortable, and in the corners are small shelves with elegant brushed nickel rails to prevent knickknacks from falling off. We loved the added de-

tail of a dimmer-equipped light switch located in the top of the slideout room. Once seated, it's easy to turn on the light, then dim it for the desired amount of dining ambience. And just above the dinette is a skylight that has a sliding corrugated cover built into it to keep out the morning sun — another nice detail.

Small travel trailers are often used in primitive campgrounds, and it became increasingly evident that Lance designed the 1995 appropriately. Knowing we would be staying at a site without hookups, we had anticipated just listening to music during dinner, but then noticed a small LED light on the face of the 24-inch LED television, which is mounted on a telescoping arm for viewing from the bedroom or living area. Curious, we poked the power button and the television came on ... so we plugged a DVD into the Jensen AM/FM/DVD/iPod stereo (which we normally would have watched on an iPad) and enjoyed a movie in surround sound!

The A-frame is equipped with

a dual battery tray, and the interior lights are all LED, so power consumption was of no concern on our trip. For that matter, neither was water use. The 1995 has a 45-gallon water tank as well as 45-gallon waste- and gray-water tanks. Clearly, Lance knows its customers and understands how its products will be used.

At the rear of the trailer is a cabinet that contains two huge wardrobes, with large storage compartments underneath. Here again, Lance thought this through. Having this cabinet right by the entry door makes it quick and easy to pack for a trip. The bathroom is located just inside the entry door as well, and although it's nothing special, it does have essentials like a porcelain toilet, a vanity and a medicine cabinet with lights. We had to chuckle at the fact that the TP holder was located in the under-sink storage, but when we looked around, we realized there really wasn't anywhere else it could be mounted. The shower is your typical

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white enclosure with a curtain, but it did the job just fine.

Lance claims the 1995 is four-season certified, and we believe it. With temperatures approaching 90 degrees during the day, the interior never got hot or stuffy, and with temps hovering just higher than 50 degrees at night, we never found it necessary to turn on the furnace. Besides, the weather was too nice to be inside anyway. We spent our afternoons and early evenings underneath the power patio awning (\$754), listening to music through the exterior speakers and watching the floor of the Owens Valley take on a soft orange glow as the sun set over the majestic Sierra Nevada behind us.

As mentioned earlier, one can never expect a truck and trailer combination to be perfect, as perfection is both elusive and subjective. However, one can hope for contentedness at the end of a journey, and the Dodge 1500 Outdoorsman and Lance 1995 deliver on the most meaningful levels. ☐



The Ram Outdoorsman looks striking in red and black with black 20-inch wheels. Lance 1995 features a polished diamond-plate rock guard that is stylish and functional.



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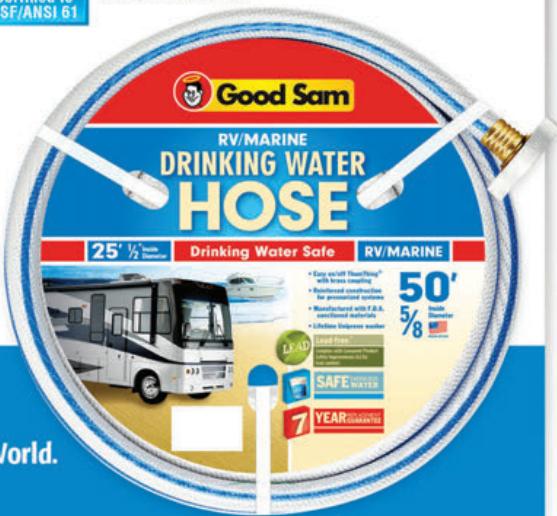
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# King-Size Camper

Three slideouts, a dry bath and an island kitchen are comfortably packed into this roomy truck camper

**U**nder the guidance of new owners Don and Pat Rose, Albany, Oregon's Chalet RV is experiencing a renewal of energy and development excitement. The evidence of this is visible in the new DS116RB triple-slide truck camper with interesting features and an interior layout that take it to the next level.

The DS116RB shown here is one of three camper models in the company's lineup. Two have dual slideouts (a third is optional), and one is a triple-slide model that's standard.

At an estimated 4,700 pounds dry weight, this is a big camper — and the 11-foot 6-inch floor length means it needs to be mounted on a heavy-duty pickup with an 8-foot box. Its floorplan uses a curbside rear-corner entry door and includes a curbside galley slideout, a streetside dinette slideout and a rear-curbside corner bath that likewise incorporates a slideout. Forward, there's the usual over-cab bed configuration, and an island unit in the

kitchen contains a dual-bowl sink and assorted storage cabinets, plus flip-up counter extensions.

A floorplan of this type in the limited space available for a truck camper is possible only through the use of slideouts and having the floor positioned above the pickup bed rails. That calls for a few steps up, and the DS116RB uses built-in entry steps plus a retractable three-step exterior stairway. Climb the steps and you face the streetside bathroom area, with the galley counter on your immediate right and a wardrobe to the left. A cabinet with a centralized array of monitors and controls plus the standard fuse and circuit breaker power center is located just above the entry door.

The DS116RB comes standard with a dry bath, but the optional rear slideout (\$2,828) allows the inclusion of a



wardrobe outside the bath, a larger curved-door shower, and a larger vanity and storage cabinet inside the bath. The stub wall that mounts the bathroom door and separates the two storage cabinets also travels with the slideout, and an interlock switch prevents the slideout from being drawn in with the door in the closed position.

Forward of the entry door is the galley with the stove, pantry, 8-cubic-foot refrigerator and storage cabinets, plus an L-shaped counter extension. Hardwood cabinets with face-frame doors and full-extension ball-bearing drawer glides are used throughout. Adjacent to the galley is the aforementioned fixed-position island unit with a double sink with a removable-head faucet and optional filtered water



**The surprisingly spacious DS116RB features a curbside entrance and three slides for amazing livability — but at 4,700 pounds dry weight, only dually owners need apply. (Top) The rotating entertainment center showcases a 32-inch TV visible from the rear lounge area or the forward bedroom.**



(Top right) Placing the standard-size dinette in a slideout makes it possible to fit four adults comfortably. Those are bigger dinette windows than you find in much larger RVs. (Below right) What's this... an island kitchen? Yes, and it's equipped with a pantry, an 8-cubic-foot refrigerator and an L-shaped counter extension for extra prep space.

spigot (\$160), optional swing-up counter extension (\$196) and storage cabinets.

Use of the entire slideout means the full-size streetside dinette table can readily accommodate four adults in dining comfort. The table breaks down so the dinette serves as a secondary sleeping area, and two large storage drawers are located beneath the seats. Extra-expansive windows provide excellent scenery views from the dinette.

A 32-inch TV is built into the rotating entertainment center that includes a wardrobe on the opposite side. The entertainment center's fixed base is fitted with an AM/FM/CD stereo with Bluetooth connectivity along with the solar panel charging system monitor center and another storage drawer. The unit can be rotated facing the rear for TV viewing in the living area or forward for watching from the cabover bedroom. Dual entries with modest height step-ups flank the standard queen-size bed with accompanying storage cabinets near the head of the bed.

Most of the interior features a generous 6-foot 7-inch ceiling, and even the claustrophobia-resistant cabover bed



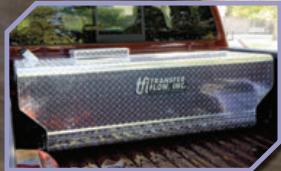
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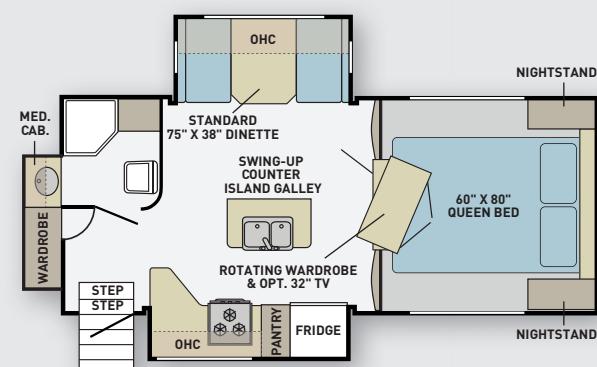
area ceiling height ranges from 54 inches at the aft end and tapers to 36 inches up front.

Chalet is constantly trying new features on its truck campers and towable RV products, and on this camper an in-floor heating system keeps users' feet toasty as long as the unit is plugged into 120-volt AC shorepower. This feature will likely be available as a production option by the time this story is in print, and it augments, rather than replaces, the standard 30,000-Btu furnace.

All-season use is built into the DS116RB. The aluminum-framed, laminated walls, floor and roof are 2, 3 and 4 inches thick, respectively, and dual-glazed Thermopane windows are standard. All freshwater and holding tanks, plus all related plumbing and camper electrical service are in the enclosed heated basement that includes extra-thick insulated access doors where appropriate.

Boondockers will find the optional 300-watt solar panel array (\$2,893) useful, as well as the battery compartment, which is designed to handle four to six batteries. As a further aid toward power conservation, 12-volt DC LED lights are used throughout the camper's interior and exterior.

Smooth fiberglass exterior skin and a TPO plastic roof are standard, as is heavy-duty vinyl plank-type wood-grain flooring. A variety of high-tech and other functional options is available for this and other Chalet RV products so users can travel off the beaten path in comfort.



<b>Exterior Length</b>	20' 0"
<b>Exterior Width</b>	8' 0"
<b>Floor Length</b>	11' 6"
<b>Interior Height</b>	6' 7"
<b>Freshwater Cap.</b>	66 gal.
<b>Black-/Gray-Water Cap.</b>	38 gal. / 38 gal.
<b>LP-Gas Cap.</b>	14 gal.
<b>Dry Weight (estimated)</b>	4,700 lbs.
<b>Sleeping Cap.</b>	4
<b>MSRP, base</b>	\$65,492

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# Under the Radar

**Family-friendly and reasonably priced, the retro-chic Autumn Ridge trailer offers surprisingly upscale standard features**

**S**tarcraft RV is one of the more recognizable names in the RV industry, and with good reason. It's difficult to go unnoticed when your company has been successfully manufacturing travel trailers for half a century. Yes, 2014 marks 50 years since the already established boating manufacturer took a chance on designing a pop-up camper that would ultimately shake up the towable market. Now, some five decades later, Starcraft is still going strong, having added a variety of lightweight and premium trailers to its lineup.

These days, Starcraft cuts its teeth on family-friendly floorplans that are generally towable by properly equipped midsize pickups, vans and SUVs. The 2015 Autumn Ridge 286KBS that we recently spent some time in is no exception. Unloaded, it weighs in just north of 7,000 pounds. The trailer sports an open floorplan ideal for taming the hustle-and-bustle that the whole RVing crew can bring, all at a relatively affordable price.

When discussing the appearance of the Autumn Ridge, one must begin with the corrugated aluminum exterior. A throwback to RVs of the past, this lower-cost construction technique works to set the Autumn Ridge apart from the smooth-sided fiberglass crowd. That such a skin is generally associated with entry-level trailers is of little consequence to me, as I prefer the ease of repair and retro-chic look of the Autumn Ridge's aluminum exterior. An optional fiberglass exterior with frameless windows (\$1,649) is also available.

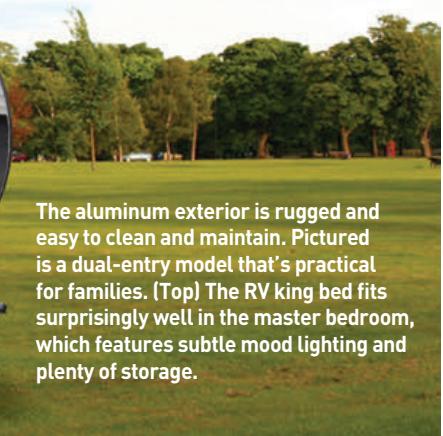
The black-diamond-plate front skirt comes courtesy of the mandatory Customer Convenience Package (\$1,949), which also includes an outside shower, dual LP-gas cylinders, exterior speakers and a water-heater bypass, to name a few. All 2015 Autumn Ridge trailers also feature the likewise mandatory Show Stopper Package (\$937), which includes some much-appreciated add-ons such as an electric A-frame jack, an electric



awning with LED lighting strip, LED accent lighting under the kitchen countertops, a pillow-top mattress and a CD/DVD player. That's quite a lot of usable features for the money, alleviating the tension created by deeming two optional packages mandatory. In effect, these components are standard features, because, of course, "mandatory option" is a contradiction in terms.

As mentioned above, the floorplan of the 286KBS is wide-open and great for entertaining a tribe of young 'uns. The plush Ultraleather sofa at the rear converts to a bed, offering the little ones a place to bed down for the night. The trailer features the optional freestanding table with four chairs in place of a standard dinette (\$465), an option we'd definitely uncheck to gain a bit more sleeping space (and under-bench storage) for the kiddos. Admittedly, the table and chairs were nice for a more open dining experience, but we've found that the standard dinette's versatility is tough to beat when the sun goes down.

Entertainment is provided by an optional 32-inch LED TV (\$600), while the Show Stopper Package provides a dual DC 12-volt USB charging outlet



The aluminum exterior is rugged and easy to clean and maintain. Pictured is a dual-entry model that's practical for families. (Top) The RV king bed fits surprisingly well in the master bedroom, which features subtle mood lighting and plenty of storage.

to go with the aforementioned CD/DVD player. All seating in the living area affords a good view of the television. A small cabinet near the rear wall houses the control panels and the living room slide controls, all hidden behind a cork-board door that's great for messages and holding keys.

Cabinets feature raised panels for more style, and the galley's solid-surface counters are a step up from the usual laminate. We always hope for a flip-up countertop extension and were disappointed that we didn't find one, though two slotted sink inserts not only look nice, they add a bit more real estate to the prep area and are also useful as drying stations for dishes and flatware.

The valance over the window in the galley area features a nifty spice rack, which is a clever use of otherwise dead space. Simple meals were easy to whip up using the microwave, three-burner cooktop and range/oven, while the 8-cubic-foot refrigerator with black metal inserts (great for magnets) did the trick for keeping things cool.

Speaking of cool, the 13,500-Btu air conditioner did a fine job of keeping temps down in the central Texas heat, though as the mercury rises, we're sure we could justify spending another \$150 on the 15,000-Btu unit in the upgrade to Customer Convenience Package. A solid door closes off the living area from the lav, and an included towel bar/mesh holder for odds and ends is a nice ad-



**The optional freestanding table and chairs does wonders for entertainment purposes, but larger families may appreciate the flexibility of a convertible dinette.**

dition to bathroom storage but is in full view of the rest of the trailer with the door open.

It seems strange to dub the bathroom the star of a trailer, but there's no denying that's the case in the 286KBS. Simply put, the shower rivals many residential homes in terms of style and space, and surpasses some. In fact, it's the largest shower I've yet encountered in a trailer. A trifold glass door (part of the \$1,762 Premier Package) — which I have no doubt would break with extended use by my kids, so plan accordingly — encloses the shower stall, which features an integrated seat and shelves.

One extremely cool feature is the inclusion of dual showerheads — an upscale overhead fixture and a standard wand-type. This proved to be a major

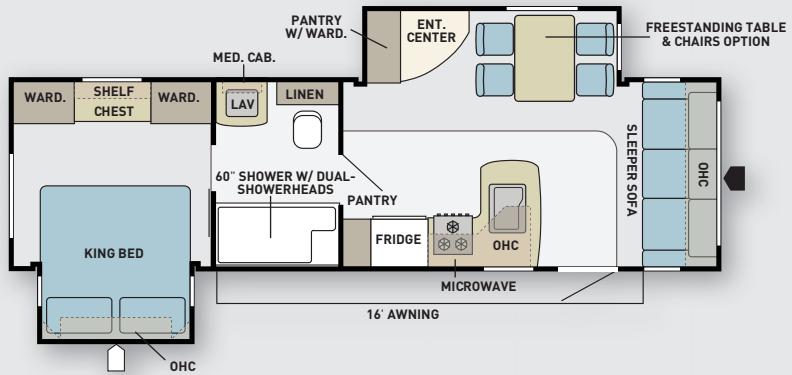
selling point for most of our crew, as a comfortable stream of water cascades down to make showering a more pleasant experience. The problem for me is that it's practical only for RVers 6 feet tall and shorter. At 6 feet 2 inches, my head bumped directly against the faucet, making a mess of the surrounding area, so I had to settle for the conventional method. Oh, well.

A hollow sliding door closes off the master bedroom, and a large streetside built-in entertainment center/vanity/wardrobe unit dominates the wall, but in a good way. There is ample storage here for all of your clothes, and probably those of your neighbors as well. Kudos to Starcraft for including an extremely practical piece of furniture.

The master also (continued on page 121)

## QUICK INFO

Exterior Length	33' 11"
Exterior Width	8'
Interior Height	6' 9"
Exterior Height	11' 2"
Freshwater Cap.	68.6 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	32.5 gal. / 65 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
UVW	7,160 lbs.
Hitch Weight	865 lbs.
GVWR	9,500 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$26,229



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# POWER GRABBER

**SCT/Bully Dog GT Tuners for diesel engines unleash horsepower and torque, and can even unlock the Ram PCM using a special cable**

No matter how much power Detroit packs under the hood of new diesel trucks, RV owners want more. For some, that may seem like an ego problem exclusive to gearheads, but in reality, more power makes towing big trailers and fifth-wheels a better experience. Come on, no one wants to crest grades last or be stuck behind a slow semi and frustrated that there's not enough horses to pass — especially at high altitude.

The horsepower and torque race between the big three diesel truck manufacturers is red hot, and at this point the Ram has pretty strong diesel numbers provided by the venerable Cummins engine. Still, many owners turn to power tuners to up the ante, and until now, getting the 2013 to 2014 Ram

power control module (PCM) recalibrated was a painful process. SCT/Bully Dog has made it possible to unlock and calibrate the PCM without removing and shipping the module to its service center for this critical part of the tuning process and sidelining the truck for a number of days.

Tuners, like the SCT/Bully Dog GT we tested, are known for their robust recalibration capabilities, which are completely incongruent with the simplicity of the installation procedure. While the installation normally involves only plugging an adapter into the OBDII port under the dash, hooking up a power wire and mounting the monitor on the dash, windshield or pillar, unlocking the Ram PCM so it can respond to the GT Tuner control involves

a few more steps and a lot more time.

Before starting the installation on the 2014 Ram 2500 4WD shortbed, the tuner was updated using a computer that's connected to the Internet. That involved plugging the Micro SD card that comes with the kit into a card reader and then into the USB port in the computer. SCT/Bully Dog provides site information, and it's just a matter of following the prompts on the Update Agent from the Windows Start menu. Once the card is updated, it's pushed into the GT monitor. This must be done with a PC, as the card cannot be



(Below and right) SCT/Bully Dog GT Tuner was installed on a 2014 Ram 2500 towing a 30-foot trailer that weighed 7,450 pounds. Dyno runs before and after installation of the tuner were performed as part of the testing procedure.



# POWER GRABBER



(1) Cable harness that comes with the tuner is first plugged into the OBDII port for the initial programming. 2) Monitor screen is used to select year, vehicle and engine. Touch buttons on each side of screen are used while following specific prompts that make programming effortless. 3) A special cable harness is used to unlock the Ram PCM and must only be used for this step. Red flag distinguishes the cable from the one in the kit.

updated using a Mac computer.

From here the SCT/Bully Dog cable harness that came with the GT Tuner was plugged into the vehicle's OBDII port, and the Install Wizard took us through the first part of the programming process, which includes selecting the vehicle/engine.

It's very important that the proper cable harness is used for the initial step. In 2013 to 2014 Ram Cummins applications, a special cable harness for unlocking the PCM must be ordered separately. If the incorrect unlock harness is used, the PCM can be damaged and the truck may not run. If that happens, the installation becomes a lot more complicated, not to mention the downtime to get it fixed.

To prevent the accidental use of the unlock harness, a red flag is affixed to the cable. At this point it's best to differentiate the cables and put the unlock version out of reach until needed. The instructions and clear prompts on the monitor screen will allow you to download the initial information easily, even if you're not a computer nerd. This

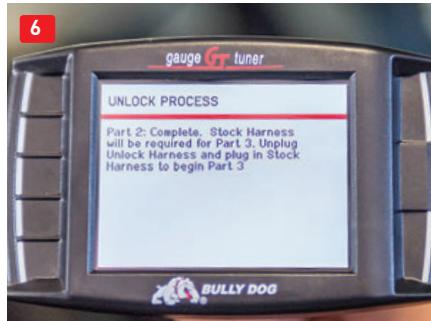
cable is then disconnected from the OBDII port and put aside.

The next step takes the most time and cannot be interrupted, so plan accordingly and follow the monitor prompts after plugging in the unlock cable. Before starting the unlock process, another special cable provided with the unlock kit will be utilized; this cable also has a red flag for identification. You'll need to locate the 3 Plug OEM connector under the hood; the illustration in the instructions provides a basic road map to the backside of the intake manifold, which is below the brake reservoir where this connector can be found. After unplugging it, the SCT/Bully Dog cable is inserted, and the other end is temporarily routed to the cab and plugged into the unlock cable

before it's inserted into the OBDII port.

Following the prompts on the monitor screen, you'll be instructed to turn the key to different positions before continuing. The engine must not be started during the unlock segment, so the key has to be turned carefully.

The third and final part of the install requires that the first cable harness used in the process be plugged back into the OBDII port after the 3 Plug OEM terminals are reconnected. At this point, the unlock cables can be removed and stored. Again, it's important to follow the prompts precisely without interrupting the process. Once unlocked, the data can be downloaded into the PCM after the initial cable harness is reinstalled; this cable harness will remain hooked up to the monitor and OBDII



4) Before the unlocking procedure can start, a cable is plugged into the Ram's 3 Plug OEM connector, which is found below the brake reservoir under the hood. 5) The special cable is then routed temporarily and plugged into the unlock cable harness. 6) Prompts on the screen will guide the user during the unlock process, which can take a while. This procedure cannot be interrupted. 7) Once unlocked, the kit's cable harness is reconnected and the final data programming is installed into the PCM. When done, the monitor will provide plenty of information for the driver.

port. A 12-volt DC power lead will need to be routed from the fuse block and connected to the harness. Be patient; figure on around two hours to complete the entire procedure.

Once the install is completed, the promised results are eye-opening. In stock form the Cummins 6.7-liter diesel in the Ram 2500 is rated for 370 horsepower and 800 lb-ft of torque, which is pretty strong right out of the box. Add the SCT/Bully Dog GT Tuner, and gains of 20 percent can be realized, depending on the setting (Tow/Economy, Performance or Extreme).

Stock horsepower and torque were confirmed on a dynamometer, and then the Ram was hitched to a 30-foot trailer for road testing. The Ram with the six-speed automatic transmission and 3.42:1 rear axle ratio is rated at 17,120 pounds, so towing the 7,450-pound trailer was not much work for the truck. Nevertheless, it provided a baseline to compare against.

Seat-of-the-pants throttle response

while towing was as good as expected for the Ram in stock form. Acceleration was decent, and the six-speed transmission downshifted when gaining elevation. Fuel economy was lower than expected for the combo, recording 10.25 for the on-highway run. Dyno runs showed 348.2 peak horsepower and 691.5 lb-ft of torque at the rear wheels.

Back on the road after the GT Tuner was installed and placed in the Performance mode (as suggested by SCT/Bully Dog), throttle response was more spirited, and downshifting at the same locations was less frequent; overall drivability improved dramatically. We carved two seconds off the 0-to-60 and 40-to-60 MPH times and picked up almost a mile to the gallon in fuel consumption. Most RV owners use the Performance setting; it's not recommended to use the Extreme setting when towing. Horsepower in the Performance mode was improved by 22 percent and torque went up 24 percent.

## ACCELERATION

	0-60 MPH	40-60 MPH
Stock Towing	18.85 sec.	9.32 sec.
Tuner Towing	16.47 sec.	7.18 sec.

## FUEL ECONOMY

Stock Towing	10.25 MPG
Tuner Towing	11.10 MPG

## PEAK HORSEPOWER

Stock	348.2 HP @ 2,653 RPM
Tuner	426.2 HP @ 2,649 RPM

## PEAK TORQUE

Stock	691.5 LB-FT @ 2,637 RPM
Tuner	857.7 LB-FT @ 2,592 RPM

SCT/Bully Dog's GT Tuner is more than just a tool for recalibrating the PCM for horsepower and torque; it's a full-fledged information center. Tapping into the OBDII port allows the monitor to capture valuable real-time data and display crucial information that the driver can use while on the road. For example, the monitor will show exhaust

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8



9



10



**8)** Computer screen on the dynamometer is used to monitor engine function and performance. **9)** Dyno operator uses a console inside the cab of the truck while running the engine at various RPM levels. **10)** Performance figures are based on rear wheels spinning on the dynamometer. At the end of the day, impressive horsepower and torque gains were realized while running the engine with the tuner in the Performance mode.

gas temperature (EGT) and turbo boost pressure; if EGT is too high or over-boost thresholds are detected, the tuner (after programming) will defuel to protect the engine.

Also on the screen are RPM, coolant and transmission temperatures, and fuel economy, just to name a few. The driver can monitor fuel flow and see how many gallons per hour are

being burned as well as view graphs that show wasted energy and driving efficiency.

The tuner is a very powerful tool for keeping tabs on the engine and transmission while boosting performance with the touch of a button. Some people might find the screen on the small side, depending on the mounting location, but it doesn't take long to acclimate to the

graphics and icon/number locations.

SCT/Bully Dog's GT Tuner for diesel engines retails for \$699.99; the unlock kit for the 2013 to 2014 Ram runs \$50.

Getting up the hill last is no longer a problem, and improved fuel economy is the bonus. 

#### SCT/Bully Dog

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- Push-to-reset circuit breakers
- CARB Compliant
- 1.6 gallon fuel tank
- Easy pull recoil start
- Sound level 58 dBA at 23'
- Weight 84 lbs.

**Champion 3100W Inverter Cover**



**Champion 2000W Inverter Generator**

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- Overload protection
- 1 gallon fuel tank
- Easy pull recoil start
- Sound level 53 dBA at 23'
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# POWER for the Road



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Today's RVs are packed with modern conveniences, so having a reliable source of electricity is a must, whether you're hooked up to shore power at a campground or boondocking in the backwoods. Without 120-volt AC power, you won't be cranking up the air conditioner, turning on the TV or even brewing a morning cup of coffee.

Savvy RVers turn to mobile generators to provide the comforts of home—or at least the power to run them—when they're camped off the grid. These roving RV power plants range from portable gasoline-fueled generators to permanently installed gasoline, LP and diesel units. As an added benefit, a portable generator not only keeps things humming in your RV, it comes in handy when the lights go out at home or you need to run power tools where no extension cord can reach.

You'll see portable generators at home improvement stores, big box discounters and RV accessory stores. How do you know which one is the best fit—and which one best fits your budget? For affordable, portable power, Champion's lineup of rugged, easy-operating portable generators is hard to beat. Long a favorite of contractors and widely seen at construction sites, Champion generators also transition smoothly into RV and camping applications with a diverse selection of RV-friendly models.

## Pull n' Go

For a portable generator to be worth the money, it should be easy to operate. One of the most frustrating problems with some generators is hard starting, particularly in cold weather. Champion generators feature Cold Start Technology that increases fuel flow to the carburetor during cold starts, sparing you from repeated attempts at cranking. Electric push-button starting is another handy feature available on the 9500-watt model that makes overall operation easy and efficient.



The 2000 watt inverter-equipped model parallels with another 2000 watt unit for twice the power.

## Plug n' Play

Once your generator is running, how do you get the power to the RV or the accessories you want to run? Champion generators come with multiple receptacles for 120-volt output (depending on the model) in 20-amp, 30-amp and 50-amp variations. The TT-30 RV receptacle found on select Champion 4000-watt and 9500-watt models makes it easy to plug in a 30-amp cord without an adapter. The 9500-watt model offers a 14-50R receptacle for 50-amp power cords. All Champion portable generators come equipped with standard 120-volt outlets to plug in household appliances, lighting and other accessories.

For added convenience, larger Champion generators come equipped with wheels and tow handles or a wheel kit can be easily added. A wheel kit is simple to add to the popular 4000-watt model, which comes in 49-state and CARB-compliant configurations.

Built-in voltage protection is also key when plugging in your RV, with its onboard appliances and electronics. Champion's Volt Guard, shuts off the

power when it senses a surge or spike, protecting both the generator and your appliances and electronics.

## Silent Sipper

Whether you're sitting in a rustic campsite surrounded by Nature or elbow-to-elbow at a race track, your generator should be as quiet as possible. Champion employs the latest technology to make sure their generators don't drown out your conversation or keep you awake all night. The 4000-watt models produce only 68 decibels at 23 feet. That's quieter than the average vacuum cleaner yet powerful enough to run a 13,500 Btu RV air conditioner. Inverter models like Champion's 3100-watt and 2000-watt portables are even quieter, producing 58 decibels and 53 decibels at 23 feet respectively.

Fuel economy matters too, of course, since it's sometimes inconvenient to stop the generator to refill the fuel tank, leaving the RV and its appliances temporarily without power. Fuel-thrifty 4000-watt Champion generators run for about 12 hours at 50% load using about four gallons of gas. The 9500-watt model runs

about eight hours at 50% load on about six gallons of gas. With gas prices hovering around \$3.50 to \$4 per gallon depending on what area of the country you're in, that's a lot of power for less than \$25.



## Two By Two

Versatility lets you get more use out of your portable generator in camp or at home. Connecting two 2000-watt Champion inverter generators with a parallel operation kit doubles your power output so you can run a rooftop RV air conditioner in camp or use just one unit when you need less power, such as for lighting, charging laptop and cell phone batteries or operating small appliances. Use two generators when you need it, one when less power will do, saving fuel and money.

Another advantage of the Champion 2000-watt and the 3100-watt inverter-equipped generators is the clean, smooth power they produce. Comparable to the electric power serving your home, this steady, regulated power is preferable for operation of entertainment electronics, computers and other power-sensitive accessories.

## Easy Maintenance

Who wants to spend hours servicing a generator that you could be spending enjoying your RV vacation? Champion generators are easy to maintain, with features like the QuickDrain system that gives you easy access to the oil drain plug. They also feature gauges or indicators that let you monitor basic functions such as power output and operating hours so you know when service is due.

## More Power?

When choosing the generator that's best for your needs, tally up the wattage requirements of the electrical accessories you plan to use (usually listed on the appliance or in the owner's manual). Allow that you won't be using everything at the same time and remember that appliances such as air conditioners require more power for start-up. Your generator should have sufficient output to not only start your appliances but to keep them running, so make sure the generator's peak wattage and running wattage are both adequate for the load.

Whether your portable power needs are extensive or minimal, Champion has a portable generator sized right for your RV lifestyle. Champion portable generators are available at Camping World and other retailers.

# PERFORMANCE IMPROVERS

An aftermarket intake, exhaust or tuner adds horsepower and torque to most diesel

**P**erformance equipment isn't just for hot rods anymore. Adding after-market performance parts to a tow rig might be just the thing you need to get over that hill at a comfortable 55 MPH, even when you've loaded down the trailer for a long trip. Or perhaps you'd appreciate an improvement in fuel economy. In any case, passing other vehicles and entering busy highways shouldn't be a white-knuckle experience. A little more power can inspire confidence and make your travels a lot more enjoyable.

You may have considered performance parts before but were leery of the claims of increased horsepower and torque, better mileage and no warranty concerns. We're here to clear this up for you. First, we've gathered a bunch of performance parts that you might want to consider for your rig, plus we've talked to multiple sources about what you can expect to achieve. And we even met with the industry association SEMA (Specialty Equipment Market Association) to learn more about government regulations and how manufacturers are complying with them.

For many years, performance enthusiasts have been increasing the horsepower and torque of their engines by adding an aftermarket intake, exhaust and tuner. The trifecta package was practically a given if someone was interested in going beyond stock.



# ICE

and gas engines

## LEGAL UPGRADES

The easiest, least expensive performance enhancer is a cold-air intake. Cooler air is denser and packs more punch in the combustion chamber than warmer air and can even lower exhaust gas temperature (EGT) a few degrees, according to some manufacturers. Cold-air intakes often change where the air is drawn from (in the front rather than inside the fender, for example) and include less-restrictive air filters.

Next, factory settings can be reset

so that the engine puts out more power with a so-called tuner. Tuners run the gamut from simple plug-and-play units to elaborate color touch screens that can display gauges that keep you informed of parameters such as transmission temperature and boost levels. Most tuners have several settings, so you can select the power level you'd like to run. Some have a tow setting, while others are safe for towing no matter which level you choose.

Most of the tuners simply plug into the under-dash connector (known as the OBDII port), and after answering some prompts (year, make, model, engine, tire size, etc.), the tuner reprograms the Power Control Module (PCM) or Engine Control Module (ECM), depending on the year of the vehicle. Some allow you to adjust the automatic transmission shift points and firmness, some let you read, diagnose and clear diagnostic trouble codes (that Check Engine light on your dash), and some



A) This AEM intake system is for 2011 to 2012 Chevrolet and GMC 2500 and 3500 trucks that run the 6.6-liter Duramax diesel engine. It features an enclosed rotational molded plastic airbox, a two-piece air-intake tube and a high-performance oil-free Dryflow air filter. B) A high-flow intake tube leads to a custom intake box and Dryflow filter in this 2011 to 2012 Ram 6.7-liter Cummins cold-air intake system from AEM. A polypropylene material with a high-heat rating keeps the turbo's extreme temperature out of the incoming air charge. AEM's testing showed an increase of 19 lb-ft of torque and 8.5 horsepower at 2,100 RPM. C) Each hand-built Airaid product is designed to be a direct fit for the application. Airaid says urethane casings make its filters impervious to heat, fluids and contaminants. The company claims the 2013 GM HD family of trucks can see a boost of 29 horsepower and 55 lb-ft of torque using the MXP cold-air intake system, which repositions the mass airflow sensors for less restriction.



D) Swapping out the factory pressure-bent exhaust for a bigger, mandrel-bent system has long been a favorite way to pick up an easy 5 percent increase in power. When choosing an aftermarket system, such as this Banks Monster exhaust, you can often make changes to the stock exhaust in regard to single pipes, dual pipes, dual tips and more. E) The enclosed housing of the Banks Ram Air intake system keeps out hot engine air and provides a cooler intake charge. A more aerodynamic shape eliminates restrictions, and a larger, easily accessible (and cleanable) air filter comes with a limited lifetime warranty.

even let you adjust the cooling fan on/off temperatures. (See the evaluation of the SCT/Bully Dog GT Tuner on page 63).

A performance exhaust system is also a viable option for gasoline and diesel-powered vehicles. These so-called cat-back exhaust systems (which bolt on after the catalytic converter) often offer bigger, mandrel-bent tubing and a less restrictive muffler (or mufflers) that help reduce backpressure and can improve both performance

and mileage. This upgrade typically comes with an improvement in sound, and even appearance. Aside from a polished chrome or stainless-steel tip, different configurations are offered by manufacturers, such as a split side or split rear exit. And some even offer a choice of material, such as galvanized, aluminized steel or stainless steel.

Unfortunately, there isn't a lot you can do to the exhaust of 2008 to current diesel trucks, which are equipped with

a diesel particulate filter, or DPF. Polished tips or a "DPF-back" exhaust kit is about it, but earlier trucks can still take advantage of improvements with a cat-back exhaust or even a turbo-back exhaust system in states with 49-state guidelines.

## CHANGING DIESEL REGULATIONS

In 2008, the EPA started requiring a DPF on heavy-duty trucks (three-quar-

F) Max Energy from Hypertech plugs into the under-dash connector and offers multiple tune programs and other application-specific performance features. Hypertech claims a 2 to 4 MPG increase, and diesel users should see a 176-horsepower bump and 289 lb-ft torque increase. Hypertech's Interceptor takes the computer information, reconfigures it and sends it back to the truck. It tunes the engine as you drive. G) Juice With Attitude, in both color screen and color touch screen, is Edge's premier product line. The tuner controls timing and duration of the injector firing to deliver maximum horsepower. Users can expect better fuel economy, on-the-fly adjustability and monitoring capabilities. H) The SCT/Bully Dog GT Tuner is an engine tuner, monitor, gauge package and diagnostic device all in one unit. It features four on-the-fly power levels, safety defueling and speedometer calibration. It can also display more than 15 vehicle parameters and read and erase diagnostic trouble codes.





I) Injen has been very successful with filter and metal tube systems but recently decided to join the full-airbox crowd for maximum protection and cool air. This new design from Injen is for 2007 to 2010 GM Duramax 6.6-liter diesels. J) The Blackhawk from K&N Filters is a new line that features a black powder-coated intake tube and reusable Dryflow filter. That's right, the pioneers of oiled air filters now offer a no-oil option.

ter-ton and up), and biannual smog tests required the original exhaust parts to be intact when the truck was inspected. This threw the aftermarket performance parts world for a loop, and many are still trying to figure out where they fit in. When some companies offered "DPF Delete" options, the EPA cracked down, and now nearly all companies are towing the line. But you can still find power and torque for your rig. Many companies have taken the time and expense to get their products approved by the EPA, and they get what's called an Exemption Order (EO). By using parts blessed with an EO, you

can enjoy improved performance and still pass a smog test.

Which brings us to the emissions equipment so many people want to remove. It's important to realize that not all of the smog-related equipment that comes on a modern vehicle is bad. Take the Selective Catalytic Reduction technology that came into prominence to help meet 2010 emissions standards. The system uses Diesel Exhaust Fluid (DEF), which is a combination of urea and deionized water that is sprayed into the exhaust stream of diesel vehicles to break down NOx emissions into harmless nitrogen and water. Because



K) The black section of this Chevrolet exhaust system shows what you get with the Magnaflow 5-inch kit: better flow, smoother bends and the tough look that black portrays. (L) Complete kits from MBRP include a high-flow down pipe and an exhaust that runs from behind the DPF filter to the tip. MBRP also recently developed the Quiet Muffler specifically for the needs of trailer enthusiasts.

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this system deals with the emissions at the tailpipe (often called after-treatment technology), manufacturers were able to more aggressively tune the core engine for more horsepower and better fuel economy. The DEF is stored in a separate tank and typically has a blue filler cap; it never comes into contact with diesel fuel in any way.

After-treatment technology also means that aftermarket companies can boost horsepower and torque without affecting the level of NOx emissions, and that's good news.

## WHAT ABOUT WATER INJECTION?

Several companies are now offering water injection as a way of increasing power without affecting the DPF. Water injection has been used for many years, and even diesel engine inventor Rudolph Diesel was purported to have said, "Every diesel should have water injection." You can think of it as a chemical intercooler, delivering



M) This 2012 to 2014 Ram Cummins air-intake system from S&B Filters was completely computer-designed and manufactured in the USA. N) The injection of water or a blend of water and methanol into diesel engines has long been a favorite way to keep exhaust gas temperatures down and increase power. Snow Performance offers complete kits that are easy to install and include a digital controller that promises to improve mileage by 1 to 3 MPG.

a colder, denser charge into the combustion chamber. The benefits, besides more power, include better fuel economy and lower EGT. In fact, some say you can expect EGT that is 250 degrees cooler.

Snow Performance specializes in water/methanol injection, and, for

example, the company claims a 70-horsepower improvement over stock on a 2011 Ford F-350 6.7-liter Power Stroke. Better yet, Snow claims a 1 to 3 percent improvement in fuel economy. A small, steady spray of water is injected across the entire power curve (even at cruising speeds). The increase in

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combustion efficiency comes with no need to increase the amount of diesel going into the engine. Lower EGT is one of the positive results. Water injection does not leave a "signature" on a truck's computer, so there should be no concern over warranty issues. Snow Performance has units for diesel-pushers RVs, too. Banks Engineering also markets a water-injection system for diesel engines.

## WHY CAN'T GAS ENGINES SEE THE SAME GAINS AS DIESELS?

Put simply, diesel and gas engines are two different animals — they're built differently, and they operate differently. Because of the high compression used in the design of a diesel engine, the bottom end and rotating assembly (engine case, crank, rods, pistons) are all far more stout in a diesel than in a gasoline engine. And the direct injection used in diesels is also far easier to tune.

The difference in fuels and the way the two engines burn it is also a big reason they can't see the same gains. For example, diesels burn hotter and make more power when you add more fuel to them (within reason). One manufacturer we talked to likened tuning a diesel engine to stoking a coal fire in a locomotive. By contrast, gasoline engines are far more sensitive to a correct air/fuel ratio; simply adding more fuel can actually hurt performance.

Gasoline engines used in trucks and SUVs don't have nearly the compression of a diesel engine and aren't assisted by a turbocharger. So the only way to create the kind of horsepower gains in a gas engine that you can see in a diesel is to modify it dramatically with more compression, a turbo/supercharger, etc., which costs a lot and requires a higher grade of fuel (premium or better) to keep detonation at bay.

But that doesn't mean you can't see improvements in a gasoline engine — it's just that the gains will



O) The Flashpaq from Superchips has a host of user-controlled features and a two-year limited powertrain warranty. The company says you can expect better shifting and throttle response, especially when towing.

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## PERFORMANCE IMPROVERS

### WILL IT VOID THE WARRANTY?

Adding any aftermarket part can't lead to the voiding of the warranty. With that said, however, it can have an affect on the warranty. In 1975, Congress enacted the Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act to protect consumers from manufacturers who were not honest in their warranty rejections. It's simply not enough to claim that any aftermarket add-on is the cause of a defect in the vehicle; it must be proven. And if proven, everything else that is protected under the warranty is still covered. Obviously, it is prudent to buy good quality parts designed specifically for your vehicle from reputable aftermarket companies. Don't go for that \$69 tuner on eBay.

#### How SEMA Has Helped

SEMA was founded in 1963 as the Speed Equipment Manufacturers Association, but a lot has changed since then, and the modern SEMA is a trade organization for the automotive specialty market. The nonprofit organization is headquartered in Diamond Bar, California, where the newest member benefit has unfolded: the SEMA Garage. This garage allows member companies to use nearly \$2 million worth of parts, including a full aftermarket-part Executive Order (EO) certification lab, operated in partnership with the Automobile Club of Southern California.

We talked to SEMA's vice president of OEM and product development programs, Mike Spagnola, for more insight. "People tend to think it's only California that has laws restricting what you can do to your tow rig's driveline," Spagnola told us, "but it's more accurate to say that only California enforces it. But other states are starting to enforce it."

So aftermarket manufacturers have to pay attention and make sure their parts are in compliance. To get an EO could take around \$30,000, if they were paying a regular lab to do the testing.

Put 40-inch tires on your rig, and then expect the dealer to replace the worn-out ball joints, and you might not be getting your way. That is called "cause and affect." The burden of proof for the damage, however, lies with the manufacturer. So if you put an aftermarket air intake on the truck, and the transmission later burns up a clutch pack, the dealer can't get away with saying that the warranty doesn't apply. One aspect of the Fed's act is that it helps consumers resolve disputes in a timely and inexpensive way. Many times the Better Business Bureau is used to solve stalemates. Note that leased vehicles might not be covered by the Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act.

We also consulted the SEMA Action Network (SAN) for help with this question, and it's clear that adding performance parts can't "void" the warranty, but there's plenty you should know. From the SAN website ([www.semaactionnetwork.com](http://www.semaactionnetwork.com)): "Federal law sets forth requirements for warranties and contains a number of provisions to prevent vehicle manufacturers, dealers and others from unjustly denying warranty coverage. With regard to aftermarket parts, the spirit of the law is that warranty coverage cannot be denied simply because such parts are present on the vehicle or have been used. The warranty coverage can be denied only if the aftermarket part caused the malfunction or damage for which warranty coverage is sought. Disputes in this area usually boil down to arguments over facts and technical opinions, rather than arguments over interpretations of the law."

SEMA is actively helping aftermarket companies get certified by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) so that their products can be sold in all 50 states. The SEMA Garage is a premier automotive research and testing facility that can measure vehicle fuel efficiency, exhaust emissions, drive-wheel horsepower and other auto-related tests at a reduced cost. One of the core capabilities of the SEMA Garage is emissions testing related to obtaining CARB EO certification. Automobile Club technicians are responsible for all automotive and emissions testing and act as unbiased third-party entities, an essential component of independent automotive tests.



P) The Stryker from TS Performance is an injector duration module that gives a cleaner, more efficient burn in the cylinders without shortening the life of the DPF. The company claims the unit will add up to 200 lb-ft of torque and 135 horsepower on the 2013 to 2014 Ram 6.7-liter Cummins-powered truck. Plus, it offers plug-and-play installation.

not be as dramatic. Cold-air intakes and exhaust systems apply to gasoline engines, too, and a tuner can do more than just increase power. For example, 5-Star Tuning specializes in Ford's gasoline V-10 Triton engine that shows up in a huge number of pickups and motorhomes. Mike Butler of 5-Star says he uses the SCT tuner to improve fuel economy but also to afford a better driving experience. The shift points can be modified, and driving on cruise control can be greatly improved, as the transmission will no longer hunt endlessly for the right gear at exactly 65 MPH. In other words, adding a tuner to a gasoline engine is not just about power increases.

### WILL IT FIT?

Back in the day, aftermarket parts were notorious for questionable fitting issues. In fact, a common expression among performance enthusiasts was, "Bolt-on parts don't." But today, with the increased use of sophisticated 3D measuring devices and computer-assisted design, nearly every part on the market bolts right on with no need to get a hammer out of the toolbox. Since SEMA has a bevy of technological tools and shares measurement information with members, there's really no excuse anymore for bolt holes not to line up.

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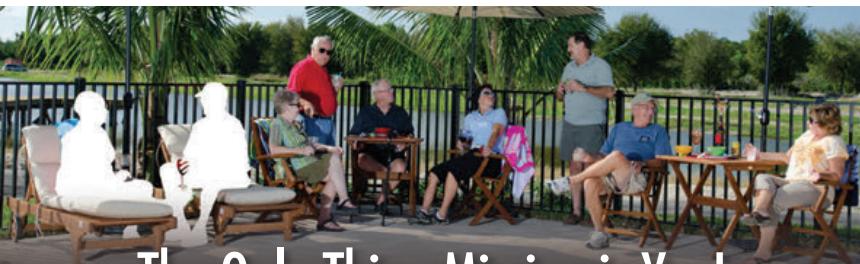
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## CONCLUSION

We hope we've cleared up some misconceptions about aftermarket performance tuning parts and spurred you into continuing to research what is available for your specific rig. We've included quite a few examples to get you started in your search for just the right parts to make your traveling better, but near-endless combinations are available for your tow vehicle. ☮

## SOURCES

**AEM Induction Systems**  
800-992-3000, [www.aempower.com](http://www.aempower.com)

**aFe Power**  
(Advanced Flow Engineering)  
951-493-7155, [www.afepower.com](http://www.afepower.com)

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\$499** Reg. \$549 **NEW!**  
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**A** **Q® 2000** #72901 (Mfr. #53060001)  
280 sq. in. cooking surface. 12,000 BTU. Push button ignition.  
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Use it as a grill stand or as a trolley with any Q® model grill  
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**Club SALE \$69.99** Reg. \$79.99 | \$9

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**Dometic® Portable Stainless  
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Makes 12 cubes in 14 minutes!  
LED touchpad controls. | \$30 \$9 | ❤



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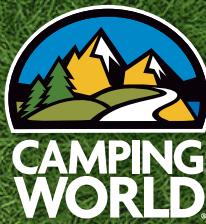
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 \$20 \$9 |



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Bonus removable cushion!

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WITH PURCHASE OF THETFORD AQUA-KEM® SIX 8 OZ. BOTTLES (#4160)

**CLUB SALE \$12.47**

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Thetford All-Season Aqua-Kem® Six 8 oz. bottles #4160 | Ship Wt. 4 lbs.



47½" L x 23½" W x 31½" H

**CLUB SALE \$69.97**

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Folding Table with Bins #60256  
Aluminum frame. Bins store inside folded table for easy transport. 60 lb. load capacity.  
 \$18 \$9

Legs adjust to 4 heights



Folded

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- **FREE MINI FOOTBALL!**  
(to the first 50 customers)
- **2-DAY ONLY SPECIALS!**



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OVER \$1000 VALUE!



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# IT'S A WR

Whether your RV is stored in a hot, cold or rainy climate — or all three — it's

**E**ver find yourself surrounded by yellowing fiberglass? How about a cracked awning? Or how about caked-on insects and bird droppings? These are all symptoms of one of the most inexcusable — and easily preventable — oversights in the RV lifestyle. Simply put, protecting your RV with a suitable cover is absolutely necessary for prolonging the integrity of the rig's structure, not to mention keeping it looking good.

But not everyone is convinced. The number of uncovered rigs at RV-storage facilities near my central Texas home bewilders me, especially considering that the temperature can vary by 50 to 60 degrees in a matter of hours. That's a

dangerous game when it comes to protecting the exterior of your investment.

"UV and sun damage can be quite severe over time, especially in the southern United States," says Lyndon Pohl, director of marketing for vehicle-cover manufacturer Eevelle. "UV rays can break down exterior finishes such as paint, and also plastics and joint caulking. The results can be anything from faded and peeling paint to a leaky roof."

But the damage doesn't stop on the outside. "Another factor to consider is that the interior of the vehicle can be damaged from prolonged UV exposure as well," says Pohl. "All of the interior plastics are subject to fading and cracking



Covers, like this one from ADCO, shelter your RV from the harsh extremes of the sun and protect the interior from UV exposure as well.

article by Kristopher Bunker

# AP!

smart to keep it covered

and becoming brittle. The same is true of the interior fabrics. Exposure to direct sunlight will fade materials and cause premature wear."

Ideally, the way to avoid all that nasty sun damage is to unhitch your RV in a climate-controlled garage and keep it free from the harsh extremes of seasonal weather. But we here in the real world understand that "ideal" is often far-fetched, so "near-ideal" becomes more of a reality. Sheltering your RV with a good-quality, nicely fitting cover is the closest you can come to the protection afforded by a covered garage, and it's exponentially more practical — and more affordable than you may think.

With wide-ranging prices beginning around \$200 and rising well higher than \$1,000 for certain (valuable) additions, there's virtually no reason you shouldn't invest in an investment to protect your investment (whew!). And because of that wide range in prices, you should contact each manufacturer individually with precise measurements (see "Measuring Up" on page 84) and a list of your weather-related requirements.

Be sure to do your homework, and beware of cheap knockoff brands often available at big-box stores and X-marts, as they may degrade with time and exposure to the elements and can damage to your RV's finish.

Now that that's clear, here's a look at some of the top RV cover manufacturers in the business, along with their best product offerings.



## ADCO

ADCO RV covers are available in universal and custom configurations. "If the consumer is on more of a budget or doesn't know how long they will own their RV," says Morgan Ein, managing partner at ADCO Products, "there are two universal-fit options": ADCO's Designer Series SFS AquaShed for short-term storage or moderate climates with more rain than sun, and the Designer Series DuPont Tyvek for long-term storage in high-UV or snow locations. Both RV cover lines feature three-ply polypropylene side walls and roofs of either SFS AquaShed fabric or high-density Tyvek synthetic material.

Three layers of fabric comprise the SFS AquaShed roof, with two outer layers of polypropylene and a microporous high-tech-film middle layer that allows moisture to pass through while enabling proper breathing.

The Tyvek roof material is engineered to block up to 98 percent of dirt and dust particles larger than 3 microns and up to 99.8 percent of damaging UV rays, according to DuPont. Tyvek is also resistant to solvents, acids and alkalis, offering the RV improved protection from bird droppings and acid-type rain. The off-white fabric is available in both contour-fit and custom-fit configurations.

ADCO's custom-fit covers feature woven-acrylic Sunbrella fabric by Glen Raven Mills, making them resistant to cold cracking. The tan or gray color of the fabric is woven into the fibers, which enhances fade-resistance. Ein recommends Sunbrella fabric "for anyone who plans to own their RV for many years and wants a perfectly tailored fit." ADCO products are available at Camping World.

**ADCO Products, 800-541-2326, [www.adcoprod.com](http://www.adcoprod.com)**

## CALMARK

Calmark custom-tailored covers are made to order for the dimensions of individual RVs. All Calmark covers are manufactured using acrylic-woven Sunbrella fabric, meaning they are highly UV-rated, breathable and water-, mold- and mildew-resistant. Calmark covers offer a zippered door, polyester tie-down straps, and buckles.



# IT'S A WRAP!

Custom Calmark cover



and grommets for improved wind protection, plus a six-year warranty.

Perhaps most importantly, all Calmark covers feature the company's exclusive Fabric Stress Reinforcement (FSR), which utilizes 2-inch-wide, 1,000-pound-rated webbing sewn approximately every 4 feet across the inside top and connected to the side panels. FSR provides the necessary support to offset added weight and stress on the covers caused by wind, rain, snow and ice, according to the company.

**Calmark Cover Company, 800-838-7236, [www.calmarkcovers.com](http://www.calmarkcovers.com)**



## CAMCO

Intended for use in warm, sunny regions, Camco's UltraShield cover features a three-year warranty and provides protection for stored RVs with what the company calls the lightest-weight cover in the industry. The tear-resistant woven material allows the cover to slide on easily. The breathable design is intended to improve air circulation, resist mold and mildew growth, and reduce wind lofting and inside moisture. Other features include a self-adjusting hold-down system to prevent flapping plus a storage bag.

Recommended for cold, snowy regions, Camco's UltraGuard cover features a triple-layer SFS top panel designed to bead water on contact for maximum resistance to rainfall and snow. Tough interlocking seams and heavy-duty polypropylene fabric around the sides increase durability, while the vented design resists mold and mildew, reduces buffeting and minimizes moisture. Like the UltraShield cover, UltraGuard comes with an integrated self-adjusting hold-down system and a storage bag.

**Camco Manufacturing, 800-334-2004, [www.camco.net](http://www.camco.net)**

## MEASURING UP

When it comes to measuring an RV before purchasing a cover, it's best to listen to what the pros say. We spoke with Morgan Ein, managing partner at ADCO Products, and he offered some in-depth tips based on his years of experience:

"Many consumers hesitate in making that cover purchase because they are not confident that they will purchase the correct product. There are two main areas of concern for these folks: buying the right size and buying the right fabric for their climate (see "Know Your Fabrics" on page 87). For sizing, it's important to hand measure the overall length of the unit. It's a mistake to assume that the RV is a certain length based on the model number of the vehicle. They rarely match."

"Measuring can be simple. Think about what a bird's-eye view of the RV would be. When you look down on your RV from the sky, you would want to know the overall length from the longest two points, be it a bumper, spare tire or ladder. Hitches [A-frames] can be excluded for measuring trailers. If the consumer finds the overall length to be right on the border of two sizes of covers, use the bigger model. There are built-in features to take up any extra slack in the material."

"Once a true length is determined, [one should] consider what fabric or model RV cover would best be suited to the storage location of the RV. Consumers who plan on owning their RV for many years will save time and money in the long run by investing in a custom-fit RV cover. These are made to order [based on] the exact specs of the RV. They fit better and last longer."

# TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THESE COMPETITIVE RATES!

PURCHASE OR REFINANCE your RV with APRs\* as low as **4.25%\*\***

**4.25 %\*\***  
on loan amounts of  
**\$50K+**

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**4.79 %\*\***  
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APR is fixed for the entire loan term. Lower rates with shorter loan terms are available.

Rates are accurate as of June 17, 2014. Rates and terms may vary with market conditions and are subject to change without notice. See website for current rates and terms.



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\*\*APR applied to the loan is the APR in effect on the date the application is received and is valid until 30 days after the loan is approved. APRs may vary with loan term. For a refinance request, RV must be 2004 model year or newer. For a purchase request, RV must be 2006 model year or newer. Maximum loan to value is determined by the following: credit score and model year, with collateral value being established per NADA Used Wholesale Trade-in value. Maximum loan term may vary based on model year, loan amount, loan type and lender guidelines. This offer is not available to applicants who use their RV as a principal dwelling (Full-Timer); visit website for Full-Timer rates and terms. Financing provided through Good Sam Finance Center.

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# IT'S A WRAP!

## CLASSIC ACCESSORIES

Classic Accessories offers three lines of RV covers for varying degrees of protection. The entry-level PolyPro 1 line features one-ply non-woven polypropylene that is lightweight, fast-drying, highly breathable and scratch-resistant. Construction includes elasticized bottom corners and integrated D-rings at ropes to help secure the cover to the vehicle. A storage sack and two-year warranty round out the PolyPro's features.

The PolyPro 3 offers the same benefits but adds three-ply non-woven polypropylene to the roof panel for enhanced protection and breathability. A polyethylene film layer between two polypropylene fabric sheets comprises the water-repellent roof material. Additional features include a three-year warranty, multiple tension panels for a snug fit, three to five full-length panels to allow access to vehicle doors and bump-outs, and from one to three vents



**PermaPro**

on each side to promote air circulation, reduce moisture buildup and mildew, and decrease lofting.

The top-shelf PermaPro line is made of what Classic calls "super-strong single-ply polyester with a ripstop grid pattern." The polyester is quick-drying, lightweight, extremely durable and slips easily over the RV and accessories. The fabric has been

UV-treated to increase fade-resistance and weather-treated to repel rain and snow. PermaPro offers an integrated undercarriage system with click-close straps for wind security, multiple tension panels, five to seven full-length zippered panels, three vents to reduce wind buffeting and a four-year warranty. **Classic Accessories, 800-854-2315, [www.classicaccessories.com](http://www.classicaccessories.com)**



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Rapidly breaks down waste and all brands of toilet paper. Environmentally friendly and septic tank safe.

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Now you can choose the world's #1 portion control holding tank deodorizer with a fresh lavender fragrance.

### PORITA-PAK® HOLDING TANK DEODORIZER

The original portion control product that revolutionized the industry. Nothing to measure or pour... Just Drop It In!



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**WeatherShield HD**

## COVERCRAFT

Covercraft manufactures made-to-order covers in three fabrics. Customers submit their RV's measurements and protection needs for a custom-made cover.

Covercraft's Ultra'tect covers are designed to retain their color and strength in extended outdoor exposure, while providing a high degree of water-resistance and UV protection. Ultra'tect covers were developed in partnership with Safety Components Fabric Technologies Inc. (SCFTI), a U.S. textile firm and leader in woven fabric technology with roots going back more than 100 years.

Developed primarily for intense sun environments and long-term storage, Covercraft's WeatherShield HD covers use UV-resistant polyester woven by Glen Raven Mills, makers of Sunbrella fabric.

## KNOW YOUR FABRICS

RV covers come in a variety of fabrics, and each type has its own benefits. At first glance, buyers may become confused because of the different nomenclature used by each brand, but they all follow virtually the same principles, with added benefits and increasingly more complex names as the price goes up.

Generally, most covers begin with polypropylene, a thermoplastic polymer (think blanket of pliable material) that is lightweight, fast-drying and resistant to many types of acids such as those found in bird droppings. Some covers also include the familiar polyester, known for wrinkle resistance, durability and high color retention.

The bond between the two fabrics is the prefix "poly," which means many. A polymer is a large molecule comprised of many subunits, and RV covers are comprised of complex synthetic materials, the further description of which would likely lull you into a deep, dark sleep. Suffice to say, the poly prefix generally means rugged and durable.

Other materials include the coveted Sunbrella fabric, interwoven with durable acrylic for added longevity, as well as manufacturers' own "secret" blends of synthetics for improved weather-resistance.

**TRC presents**

# BEWARE OF THE PEDESTAL

**RV's Are  
At The Mercy  
Of The  
Power Pedestal**

Available In  
Hardwires, Portables  
and  
RVC Compatible  
Automatic Transfer  
Switch Models

**SURGE GUARD**  
RV Power Protection  
*Don't Plug-In Without It!*

## Don't Plug-In Without It!

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Surge Guard 30A and 50A Surge Protectors**

- Identifies Faulty Park Power
- Analyzes Circuits to verify pedestal power
- 2100 Joules - 30A Model 44260
- 4200 Joules - 50A Model 44270

**Easy-T-Pull**

**Surge Guard Protects  
Your RV Against:**

- Power Surges
- Over/Under Voltage
- Mis-Wired Pedestal
- Open Neutral

**ON SALE NOW! PLUS, \$59 INSTALLATION** at Camping World for Good Sam Club Members. Also available at other RV retailers.

# IT'S A WRAP!

Covercraft's Sunbrella covers provide protection and years of service in intense sun climates, where UV rays can rapidly degrade the RV's paint and interior. Because of its unique construction process and use of naturally UV-resistant acrylic fibers, Sunbrella is the recognized leader in long-wearing marine fabrics for bimini boat tops, sail covers and deck enclosures.

**Covercraft Industries**

800-426-8377, [www.rvcovers4u.com](http://www.rvcovers4u.com)



WeatherShield HD

**Performance  
Poly-Guard**



## COVERQUEST

CoverQuest is an online retailer that offers both ADCO products (see page 83) and Carver Covers.

Carver Covers are made from marine-grade loom-woven 8-ounce polyester known as Performance Poly-Guard. The haze-gray fabric offers what CoverQuest calls "the highest tear-strength available" and is highly UV- and fade-resistant. Poly-Guard is also water-repellent and mildew-resistant while remaining breathable to allow moisture to escape. The cover features a five-year warranty.

This fall CoverQuest will offer new products from Carver Covers at [www.carvercovers.com](http://www.carvercovers.com).

**CoverQuest, 888-726-9300, [www.coverquest.com](http://www.coverquest.com)**

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SMARTPAUSE™ VALVE  
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GOOD SAM CLUB MEMBERS SAVE UP TO 25%

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## Expedition



## EEVELLE

Eevelle offers universal covers at varying price points designed for the RV market. All covers feature straps every 3 to 4 feet for securing to the RV, and vents in the fabric help combat wind buffeting, in addition to allowing moisture to pass through to help fight mold and mildew. The covers are treated with a No. 8 UV finish to minimize sun damage.

Expedition covers, Eevelle's most popular brand, are made of lightweight polypropylene and feature straps, roof vents and a zippered side entry. The roof is made of a three-

layer waterproof fabric. Eevelle also uses a proprietary Durapel weather-finish additive for improved protection. Expedition covers carry a three-year warranty. Look for the new, improved Expedition S2 lineup this fall.

Eevelle's flagship Goldline covers are made of a durable marine fabric and offer all the features of the Expedition.

Available from Amazon.com and various retailers, Eevelle covers are made in 2-foot increments, offering a snug fit not found in other universal covers, according to the company.

**Eevelle, 760-434-2231, [www.eevelle.com](http://www.eevelle.com)**



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Battery Doctor® Battery Accessories



### Battery Doc™ 6/12 Volt Smart Charger

- Fully automatic 3-stage 900mA charger
- Charges both 6-volt and 12-volt batteries
- LED display indicates charging status
- Features reverse hook-up protection
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- Improve safety and security of stored vehicles, RVs and seasonal equipment

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- Fully automatic 3-stage 1.25 amp 12-volt charger
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- LED display indicates charging status
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- Includes ring terminal and alligator clips with 12" connector cords, 12-volt accessory connector with 12" adapter
- 120 volts

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# Best Outdoor Gear for

**NEW & EXCLUSIVE!**



Coleman® NXT Voyager™ Grill

- Propane powered—connects to onboard RV propane system
- 8,500 BTU
- 168 sq. in cooking surface
- Includes 10' low pressure quick connect hose

**NEW!**



Coleman® NXT 50 Propane Grill with Stand

Stands 33½"H x 30"W x 18¼"D

- Lid and collapsible legs latch securely for easy transport
- 8,500 BTU cooking power
- 168 sq. in cooking surface
- Includes 10' low pressure quick connect hose



Folds to 35½"L x 11½"W x 18¼"H



Coleman® NXT 200 Grill

Stands 37½"H x 36"W x 27½"D

Folds to 40)L x 27½"W x 13¾"H

- 33¾"H open
- Taller lid design—4¼" from top of grill to lid
- Metal side tables
- 20,000 BTU cooking power
- 321 sq. in. cooking surface
- Dual Eventemp burner with heat core
- Removable grease cup
- 2-piece rubber/nylon wheels

## Coleman® NXT Accessories

Coleman® NXT Griddle

Heavy-duty porcelain-coated steel. 13½" x 13".



Coleman®  
45-Quart  
Wheeled  
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17½"H x  
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Four cup holders  
molded into lid

Coleman® Half Gallon Jug

10½"H x  
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Holds 22 cans



Holds 70 cans

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Sets up in  
less than  
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Smart Chair

300 lb.  
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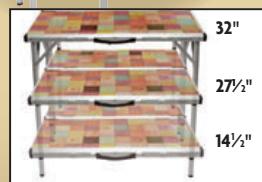
Cool mesh  
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Use tables together,  
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Adjusts to  
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- 20,000 BTU cooking power
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- Stable, wide-base legs fold for storage
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Coleman®  
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- 20,000 BTU cooking power
- 285 sq. in. cooking surface
- Stable, wide-base legs fold for storage
- Easy-glide wheels for portability
- Uses disposable cylinders

Coleman® Fold N Go Grill

- 6,000 BTU cooking power
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- Folds to 14" L x 12" W x 6 1/2" H
- Uses disposable cylinders



Coleman® Roadtrip Accessories

- Duffel Bag  
Grated Griddle, 13" x 13"  
Big Griddle, 26 1/2" x 13"  
Griddle, 13" x 13"

Grated Griddle  
Griddle

Coleman® Gladiator Series  
2-Burner Propane Stove



- 24,000 BTU cooking power
- Folds to 24" L x 13" W x 5" H
- Includes 2 griddles

Coleman® Reversa Wrap



78" L x 38" W



Coleman®  
Cot Size Airbed

Outdoor Living is What We Do Best!



# SMOOTHING OUT THE BUMPS

**Joy Rider Shock System bolts onto trailer and fifth-wheel suspensions without special tools or welding**

When it comes to trailer suspensions, not much has changed since our grandfathers first hitched up. A typical trailer suspension is comprised of leaf springs and common hardware. When attached to a frame, the ride is not much better than an old buckboard, leaving stored items in disarray and a lot to be desired.

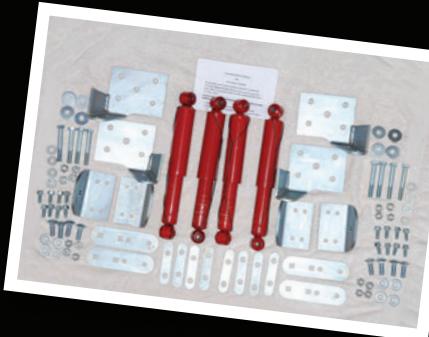
An alternative to harsh ride quality is one of the independent or air suspensions that are on the market, but these systems are cumbersome to add after the fact and usually require specialized equipment and highly trained technicians for installation. In addition, for proper long-term performance, routine maintenance is critical and often overlooked by the owner.

A new company on the scene, RV Im-

provement Systems, has just introduced the Joy Rider Shock System that is destined to change the way trailers and fifth-wheels ride — without follow-up maintenance. The system uses heavy-duty, gas-charged shock absorbers that are suspended on unique bolt-on brackets that not only look nice but also keep the shocks in the proper position for optimum performance.

Shock angle is the critical factor. Heavy-duty gas shocks damp the suspension during compression and rebound, rather than just compression. There are a few trailer manufacturers that add shock absorbers to their towable RV suspensions but, unfortunately, many of these kits are installed at angles that make the shocks virtually ineffective. Think of it as a placebo for the chassis.

**The complete Joy Rider Shock System includes everything needed for a successful at-home installation with the use of tools that many people already have.**





(1) Trailers often come from the factory with shock angles that are too severe to be effective. (2) Using  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch carriage bolts and Nylock nuts, install the shock mount extensions for the Joy Rider to both the right and left shock mount assemblies and tighten firmly.

The optimum angle for a heavy-duty gas shock absorber is 40 degrees or less. Beyond 45 degrees, other problems start to arise, and shock absorbers could begin to lose oil from the reservoir until they no longer function. At this point, they lose rebound and damping control, neutralizing their intended effect.

Not only do the Joy Rider brackets present the shocks in a straighter angle, but the design also incorporates a 15-degree outward angle to help mitigate irritating side-to-side motion. This added stability will be especially noticeable when navigating off-camber driveways or uneven roadways, potholes and bridge decks. The Joy Rider Shock System also angles the shock absorbers toward each other, instead of in the same direction as is commonly seen. This specific angle helps control axle rollup during hard braking. Axle rollup occurs when increased pressure on the front axle decreases pressure on the rear axle, causing it to hop.

The adjustable bracket system is designed to fit most single, double and triple-axle suspensions, above or below the leaf springs. No need to worry about replacing existing U-bolts, as the Joy Rider's clever bracket system utilizes the original U-bolts.

Installation of the Joy Rider Shock System takes three to five hours, depending on obstructions and the

mainframe configuration directly above the axles. Tools and other items needed include  $1\frac{1}{2}$ -,  $\frac{1}{2}$ - and  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch drill bits approximately 8 to 12 inches long, a cordless  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch impact wrench, an 8- to 10-inch-long  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch drive extension, as well as  $\frac{1}{16}$ -,  $\frac{3}{4}$ - and  $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch impact sockets, depending on the size of the nuts holding the U-bolts, a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch box

end wrench and a  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-drive torque wrench capable of at least 90 ft-lbs of torque. You will also need a floor or bottle jack and two to four jack stands of different sizes (short and tall frames). The installer will have to drill eight holes for each axle.

The first step can be done on the bench. Begin by attaching the shock-



(3) Remove the two factory U-bolts and set aside for later use, but discard the factory tie plate. (4) Install the Joy Rider shock mount assembly utilizing the factory U-bolts and the supplied stiffener plates — two per shock plate assembly. (5) Use an alternating cross pattern with an accurate torque wrench to tighten the U-bolts to 90 ft-lbs. (6) Loosely bolt the Joy Rider shock absorber to the shock mount extension to aid in installing the upper bracket to the optimal position.

## SMOOTHING OUT THE BUMPS

7



8



9



(7) Upon determining the location of the upper bracket, mark the underbelly material with a felt tip pen. (8) Cut away the underbelly material from between the upper bracket and trailer frame. (9) Hold the upper bracket to the frame to ensure that the necessary underbelly material has been removed.

mount extenders to the right and left shock-mount assemblies using  $\frac{1}{2}$ -13 x  $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch carriage bolts and  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch Nylock nuts. From here, the rest of the install is under the trailer.

Remove the tie plates and U-bolts from the leaf spring assemblies; hold on to the U-bolts. The right and left shock plates are then mounted in place of the factory tie plates using two  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-thick stiffener plates per shock mount across the U-bolts. The bolts are tightened to 90 ft-lbs of torque.

The shock is then loosely installed to the lower shock mount extension using  $\frac{1}{2}$ -x  $1\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-long bolts, making sure that a M12 flat washer is put between the bolt head and the shock absorber, and a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick spacer is placed between the shock absorber and the shock mount extender before securing with the  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch Nylock nut.

Once the shock is in place, the other end is connected to the upper shock bracket and swung up to the trailer frame for

An advertisement for Splendide Laundry Centers. On the left, there are two white, stackable laundry machines: a top-loading washing machine on the bottom and a front-loading dryer on top. In the center, a woman with short grey hair and glasses has her mouth wide open in surprise, with her hands on her cheeks. She is wearing a red and white striped shirt. To the right of her face is the Splendide logo, which includes the word "Splendide" in a stylized font above "Laundry Centers". Below the logo is a yellow banner with the text "Best Performing. Most Reliable. Best Supported.".

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(10) A cordless impact wrench will be invaluable when installing the Joy Rider shock absorber to the upper and lower brackets. (11) Using a 12-inch-long drill bit will allow for adequate reach when installing the upper bracket because the leaf springs will be in the way of a drill with a shorter bit. (12) When installing the  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch self-drilling bolts to the upper bracket, the cordless impact wrench came in handy when equipped with an 8-inch  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch drive extension and  $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch-deep socket.

proper positioning. When in place against the bottom of the frame, the hole locations are marked for drilling. Make sure all underbelly material that sneaks in between the bracket and frame is removed; the bracket must be flush against the frame.

If additional clearance is necessary, raise one side of the trailer at a time and place at least two jack stands under the trailer frame for safety. You may need to remove the tire and

wheel assembly at this time.

The shock absorber is then removed from the upper mounting bracket before it's clamped to the frame using Vice-Grip pliers. Drilling the holes in the frame is the hardest part, depending on the clearance around the springs, hangers and equalizer. Longer drill bits make the process easier. These may be hard to find locally, though large home-

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## SMOOTHING OUT THE BUMPS



(13) Install the Joy Rider shock absorber with a 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch,  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch bolt,  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick spacer and Nylock nut to the upper bracket and tighten securely. (14) Joy Rider's unique shock absorber installation angles both shocks toward the center of the trailer's suspension. This outstanding design sets it apart from any other system on the market today.

improvement stores carry a selection, and a number of suppliers on the Internet sell them for around \$15.

Before drilling, be sure to check for hoses or wiring above the frame. It's important to use a stepped process for drilling holes. Start by drilling a pilot hole using the long  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch bit. Open the holes with the  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch drill bit and again with the  $1\frac{1}{32}$ -inch bit, which is the final hole size. For thinner frames (ultralight trailers), drill a  $2\frac{1}{64}$ -inch hole through the frame. If access for drilling the holes for the upper brackets is extremely difficult, you may need to drop one end of the leaf spring. This can be accomplished by removing one bolt from either end of the leaf spring; be sure to use jack stands to support the axle. The  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch self-threading bolts that hold the upper brackets to the frame can be driven using a  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch impact wrench.

The final step is to bolt the shock to the brackets and remove the retaining wire that prevents the shock from extending during the installation process. At this point, all the bolts should be double-checked for tightness and proper torque. Lower the trailer back to the ground and check for adequate clearances for all components.

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**(15) The outward angle of the Joy Rider shock absorbers helps mitigate uncomfortable, side-to-side rocking motion.**

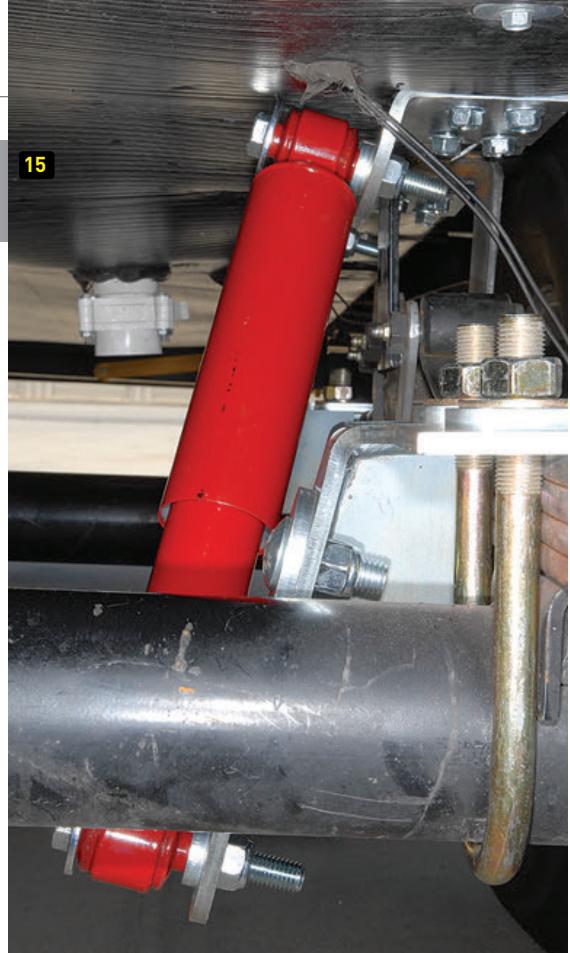
Don't be concerned if the shock mounting assembly rides up against the leaf spring; this is a normal position.

With the install completed, we checked the positioning of the Joy Rider shock absorbers using a protractor; they were at a 35-degree angle. The lighter suspension of the fifth-wheel, weighing in at 10,000 pounds, did not allow for a great amount of distance between the frame and springs, so the shock angle was affected. Heavier trailers will have more clearance, so shock angles will be closer to 20 degrees. Even so, the improvement in ride quality was good, and the stuff inside the cabinets was not as disheveled after traveling.

The Joy Rider Shock System will give owners the opportunity to upgrade suspensions that, by today's technology standards, are still pretty crude. The high-quality gas shocks and brackets make it possible for any trailer to behave better while on the road. And over time, the smoother ride will have a beneficial effect toward the preservation of the structure, appliances and stored items. Tandem axle kits sell for \$495, and that investment will help make trailer suspensions from your grandpa's day a lot more civilized. All parts carry a three-year warranty. 

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Camping means different things to different people, but one thing's for sure: Being out on the water is a high priority for RVers who like to experience the outdoors. Nature just gets right up in your face when you are exploring on the water. You witness things that can't be seen from a campsite or trail.

The trick for the RV crowd is finding a way to transport that kayak, pontoon boat, stand-up paddleboard or what-have-you when you're already storing all of your camping supplies. Don't worry — there are plenty of great options for boating with inflatable, foldable and modular watercraft that make a remarkably small footprint when it's time to pack.

With so many ways to go these days, we can give you only a sampling from some of the best manufacturers in the business. Peruse these companies' websites and you'll discover additional options that may be just right for you.

## Inflatable Watercraft

### Aire Tributary Tomcat Tandem

Aire offers a host of inflatables that can be stowed in an RV or tow vehicle, from river rafts to catarrafts to stand-up paddleboards (SUPs) and everything in between. Aire's Tributary Tomcat Tandem is ideal for those looking for a two-person inflatable kayak that's very stable and has extra room for gear. The Tomcat is surprisingly high-performance with its heavy-duty PVC outer shell, double-top-stitched seams, 20-gauge vinyl bladders and superfast drain system. Easy for two to navigate, the kayak also works for a single paddler and a stash of gear. The kayak sells for about \$750, weighs 54 pounds and can safely carry 450 pounds.

**Aire**

800-247-3432, [www.aire.com](http://www.aire.com)





### Aquaglide Columbia

The hard bottom of the inflatable Aquaglide Columbia Two HB gives it excellent performance, and it's just as comfortable as a recreational touring kayak. The 6- to 12-psi high-pressure floor is rigid and stable and combines with a removable fin and long waterline for outstanding tracking. Constructed of commercial grade hull material blended with rugged 600-denier polyester, the 400-pound-capacity kayak accommodates up to two paddlers. Front and rear spray guards keep occupants dry, and bungee deck lacing means gear is close at hand. Priced around \$1,000, the Columbia Two HB collapses to 28 x 12.5 x 29.5 inches and comes with a storage bag.

**Aquaglide, 509-493-4958,  
[www.aquaglide.net](http://www.aquaglide.net)**



### Classic Accessories Oswego

Looking for high weight capacity in an inflatable fishing pontoon? Classic Accessories' 10-foot-long Oswego can hold up to 450 pounds yet weighs only 76 pounds. Footrests and the padded



### Hobie Mirage i14T

The pedal-powered Mirage i14T inflatable kayak is just one example of the high-quality vessels Hobie makes for water sports. The double-scissor action of two MirageDrives uses the big leg muscles for pedal propulsion rather than just the smaller arm muscles — although you can use a paddle, too. The high-back seats have inflatable lumbar support and thick padding. There's a pump, an optional sail kit and even



### Coleman Sevylor Fiji

With the Coleman Sevylor Fiji, RVers can have the feel of a full-size kayak with the convenience of an inflatable. This lightweight two-person kayak has a fixed rear seat and removable middle seat. The floor is a semirigid I-beam with three chambers designed to keep the boat's solid shape on the water while holding up to 400 pounds. The Double Lock Fast Valve speeds inflation and deflation. Constructed of PVC and guaranteed not to leak, the Fiji Travel Pack Kayak sells for \$149.99 and comes with one aluminum touring paddle that breaks down into five pieces and a travel bag for compact storage.

**Sevylor  
800-835-3278, [www.sevylor.com](http://www.sevylor.com)**

a drink holder. Retailing for \$2,699, the Mirage i14T has handles for easy launching, and it all deflates into a wheeled storage bag.

**Hobie Cat Company  
800-462-4349, [www.hobiecat.com](http://www.hobiecat.com)**



### Sea Eagle FastTrack

Fast and light, Sea Eagle FastTrack kayaks have a sleek, curved shape and a state-of-the-art NeedleKnife keel. The high-pressure drop-stitch



## WATERCRAFT TEST

**Sea Eagle NeedleNose Stand-Up Paddleboard**

by Bob Dawson

The NeedleNose 126 inflatable SUP gets “likes” across the board from my family, including both sons. Collin, the 21-year-old (pictured below), took to the SUP like, well, a fish to water. He was up and paddling without hesitation and gave the board positive marks for its quickness and the physical workout it gave him. The real surfer in our family, 14-year-old Logan, likes that it’s an easy-to-use water toy that’s the polar opposite of “shreddin’ the gnar” on a short board.

One of the first things I noticed about the NN126 is that it does indeed come in a pretty small package. It arrives in a duffel bag that’s easily stowed in a decent-size RV storage compartment or the bed of a pickup, and weighs about 39 pounds, including the three-section paddle that snaps together and the optional DC-powered pump.

Unpacking the NN126 is simple and straightforward with only a few pieces, the main one being the board itself that unfolds and inflates quickly to about 3 or so PSI. After that, the backpressure is a bit much for the power pump, so we switched to the hand pump to get it to the recommended 12 to 15 PSI that makes it a truly rigid board. I broke a little sweat getting it there, but it was worth the effort.

Schlepping the inflated NN126 from California’s Pacific Coast Highway to the beach at Leo Carillo, just west of Los Angeles, was less work than I imagined. The handle is placed balance-center of the board, and it and the paddle together weigh only 27 pounds.

Being long and broad, the NN126 is maybe more boat than board. When I first took it out, I tried surfing it and failed dismally. But then I took it to the harbor and found it to be an excellent flat-water craft. It’s stable, fast and maneuvers well, which the Sea Eagle folks chalk up to their patent-pending NeedleNose design.

I was happiest on the NN126 in the kneeling and sitting positions when I borrowed my friend’s kayak paddle. In fact, I was so happy that I will definitely order the optional seat. It was exhilarating to maneuver as fast and well on the NN126 as my friends on their kayaks.

When the day is done, getting the board back into that convenient duffel is nearly as easy as getting it out. The first time you put the NN126 away, though, you may want to consult the very comprehensive online manual for the best folding strategy. Pricing starts at \$999.

**Sea Eagle, 800-748-8066, [www.seaeagle.com](http://www.seaeagle.com)**

floor provides rigidity to the whole structure (you can even use the kayak as a stand-up paddleboard), making it very responsive to paddle strokes. The 1,000-denier hull material is extremely tough (visit Sea Eagle’s website to see them pound on it with a claw hammer). The rear skeg keeps the kayak headed on course but can be removed for whitewater. FastTrack kayak prices start at \$1,099, and Sea Eagle offers a 180-day full-refund policy and a three-year warranty.

**Sea Eagle**

**800-748-8066, [www.seaeagle.com](http://www.seaeagle.com)**

**Folding Watercraft****Bergans of Norway Ally**

Bergans’ versatile folding canoe comfortably fits a family with two children or two paddlers and plenty of gear. The Ally (pictured in action on page 98) is wilderness-ready because of its strong and resilient skin and reinforced bottom. The closed-cell foam pad acts as a shock absorber with a slightly flexing hull and offers a high level of buoyancy along with effective thermal insulation. Different hull shapes are available for a variety of conditions

— for example, a straight keel for high speeds on flat water and a slight rocker for stability and large payloads on river expeditions. Ally canoes sell for between \$1,867 and \$2,173.

**Bergans of Norway**

**303-834-9709, [www.bergans.com](http://www.bergans.com)**

**Folbot Greenland II**

Folbot’s top-of-the-line two-person expedition model has a huge payload capacity (600 pounds) and is perfect for serious exploration or just for fun. Folbot says it is the world’s longest continuously producing folding kayak manufacturer, and the Greenland II is a result of that heritage. At 17 feet long, 62 pounds and



PHOTO BY GARY L. WILSON

# QUIET

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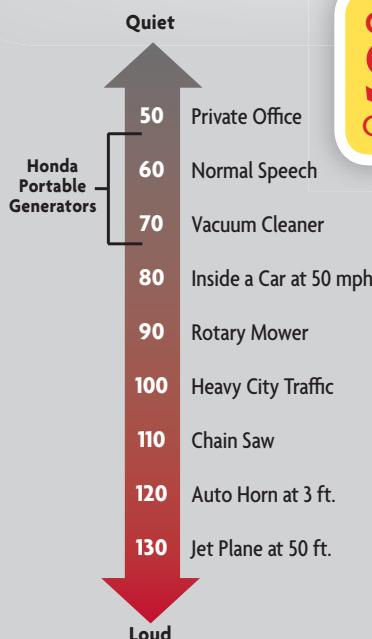
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priced at \$2,500, this skin-on-frame kayak is the biggest and most expensive model Folbot offers among a selection of nine. Built in America, the Greenland II assembles in less than 20 minutes and takes up 75 percent less storage space than a traditional kayak when folded.

**Folbot, 800-533-5099, [www.folbot.com](http://www.folbot.com)**



#### **Folding Boat**

The Folding Boat Company's patented K-Pak design provides a compromise between a rigid hull and an inflatable. By combining the best attributes of both, the K-Pak offers a utilitarian boat that is very comfortable, stable, easy to assemble and weighs only 18 pounds. The boat's aluminum frame folds inside the outer skin to just 37 inches. It fits

into its own backpack, and setup takes about five minutes. The \$895 K-Pak is great for fishing, wildlife photography, sightseeing or just a leisurely paddle.

**Folding Boat Company, 919-622-4542, [www.foldingboatco.com](http://www.foldingboatco.com)**

#### **Porta-Bote**

The new high-performance line of Porta-Bote's unique folding watercraft incorporates engineering advances that allow these vessels to travel 20 percent faster than previous models using the same

low-powered outboards. Available from 8 to 14 feet, Porta-Bote models are built with a patented folding transom and can be opened or closed in just a few minutes. Weighing half as much as a comparable aluminum craft, the compressed boat requires only 5 inches of depth and can be stored on the roof or side of an RV. Porta-Bote's copolymer resin hull material is warranted for 10 years. The smallest model sells for just less than \$2,000.

**Porta-Bote  
650-961-5334, [www.porta-boat.com](http://www.porta-boat.com)**

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### Sea Eagle FoldCat

The patented folding frame of the Sea Eagle FoldCat assembles in a quick five minutes. It provides a full floor for more usable space than in ordinary pontoon fishing boats and a "safety net" to catch dropped gear. For stability, two super-buoyant 16-inch pontoons are spaced widely apart. The motor mount can take up to a 3-horsepower engine. Two 360-degree swivel seats offer plenty of back support, and generous cushions make waiting for the fish more comfortable. Up to four rod holders can be mounted in predrilled holes on two benches. Available for \$1,449, the FoldCat packs tightly and is stowed in two durable nylon bags.

**Sea Eagle, 800-748-8066, [www.seaeagle.com](http://www.seaeagle.com)**

### Modular Watercraft

#### Expandacraft

How would you like a rowboat one day and a sailboat the next? Expandacraft is a modular boat system that allows you to quickly reconfigure from one type of watercraft to another and then break it down for easy storage. Purchase the \$100 hull sections separately to build your own craft or buy a ready-made sit-on-top vessel for \$750 and up. Kits are available for sailing, rowing, pedal power and more. Each section is 4 feet long and 10 inches at its widest point. The Solo 12 can handle a 240-pound load, while the Tandem 16 can float up to 450 pounds.

**Expandacraft, 813-810-2554, [www.expandacraft.com](http://www.expandacraft.com)**



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[classicaccessories.com](http://classicaccessories.com)**RV-Friendly Watercraft****WATERCRAFT TEST****Advanced Elements AdvancedFrame Sport**

by Allen M. Zatkin

My wife and I both love the intimacy with our aquatic environment that kayaking provides, not to mention the low-impact workout. But because our hard kayaks were so cumbersome, we rarely took them along on RV journeys and consequently missed many great places to dip our paddles. Then I stumbled upon some kayaks that solved the portability problem and worked nicely with our first love, RVing.

The Advanced Elements line of AdvancedFrame inflatable kayaks incorporates an internal aluminum frame for the bow and stern, which allows these boats to cut through the water like a rigid kayak. The Sport model folds down to a slim 30 x 17 x 8 inches and fits easily in an RV storage bay, car trunk or pickup bed. The sturdy bag (included) has room for the very comfortable standard seat or the optional and even more comfortable high-back seat, which has inflatable lumbar support.

Setup and takedown are quick and easy. Using a small rechargeable air-bed pump, we can quickly blow up our two kayaks 90 percent of the way. We then top them off with a hand pump equipped with a pressure gauge. We can have our kayaks out of their carrying bags and on the water in less than 10 minutes. They weigh only 23 pounds each, so getting to the water's edge is a breeze.

Most of the inflatable kayaks I've seen or paddled fit into two categories: heavy and bulky whitewater touring kayaks or flimsy plastic jobs that are more toys than serious watercraft. The molded-in fin and sharp bow and stern configuration of the AdvancedFrame Sport make it track like longer hard kayaks and give it the ability to handle crosswinds well.

While not intended for rapids and bouncing off rocks, the kayak's multilayered fabric construction is rugged and well adapted for mild to moderate touring and exploring. Advanced Elements encases the air bladders in tough fabric chambers that make the hull rigid yet still very lightweight. The proprietary valves are easy to use, and they make inflating and deflating surprisingly fast and easy. All in all, these kayaks are a nice package at a reasonable price of less than \$440.

**Advanced Elements, 866-262-9076, [www.advancedelements.com](http://www.advancedelements.com)**



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**Point 65°N Rum Runner**

The success of Swedish company Point 65°N's popular modular kayaks led to development of its stand-up paddleboards. The 11.5-foot Rum Runner is a take-apart SUP with three sections that snap together in seconds and transport easily in an RV or tow vehicle. The displacement hull makes it a fast and straight-tracking board for paddling on flat or choppy water. Rotomolded polyethylene construction provides both strength and impact resistance. The Rum Runner has two built-in cup holders and a carrying capacity of 265 pounds. Each section weighs less than 15 pounds, and the combined weight is less than 36 pounds. MSRP: \$999.

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**Snap Tandem**

The take-apart Snap Tandem is a high-performance sit-on-top kayak that's exceptionally easy to store, carry and put together. Made of blow-molded durable polyethylene, the Snap is easy to handle, both in and out of the water. The kayak's modularity allows it to turn into a solo boat simply by removing the midsection. Add a second midsection, and it's a triple. The patent-pending Snap-Tap system is strong and comfortable, with grooves and hooks that hold it all together. The kayak has drink holders, contoured foot braces and great back support. MSRP: \$799.99

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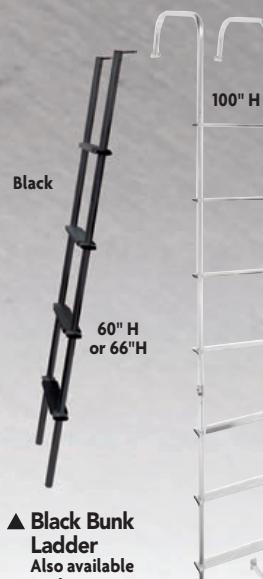
◀ 3500 lb. Electric Tongue Jack, Black



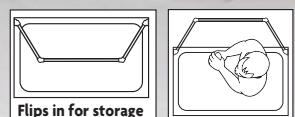
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## A Titan of a Tank

It's been said that we should enjoy the journey as well as the destination, but frequent fuel stops can suck the joy out of any road trip. Titan Fuel Tanks offers extra-capacity direct-replacement fuel tanks for a variety of diesel pickups to help extend driving range and decrease fuel stops. Shown here is one of Titan's new tanks for Ram Cummins trucks, available for 2003 to 2012 crew cab longbed pickups, as well as 2010 to 2012 crew cab shortbeds. Made from lightweight polyethylene, these tough, corrosion-free tanks hold 56 gallons of fuel in shortbed applications and 60 gallons on longbeds. Titan tanks come with everything needed for installation in place of the original tank.

**MSRP:** starting at \$1,424

**800-728-4982, [www.titanfultanks.com](http://www.titanfultanks.com)**

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## Cover Your Cover

Patio awnings protect us from the sun — and now you can return the favor with an Awning Pro-Tech awning cover. Said to greatly extend the life of awning fabric, especially on RVs that are stored outdoors for extended periods, the 20-foot kit contains five 4-foot sections to protect awnings from 16 to 20 feet long. Each section is flexible enough for easy installation, and the complete cover goes on in just minutes. Made with a UV-resistant polymer, the Awning Pro-Tech won't discolor or get brittle, according to the company. It's stain-resistant and easy to clean, and is covered by a lifetime warranty as well as a 60-day money-back guarantee.

**MSRP:** 20-foot kit, \$119.99

**855-782-6837, [www.awningpro-tech.com](http://www.awningpro-tech.com)**

Circle 151 on Reader Service Card



## Here, Piggy

For those of you who carry detached 50-amp power cords and don't want to drag out a heavy cable just to charge batteries or hook up to 30-amp power, Conntek offers its Pigtail Adapter Cord, which features two-pole, three-wire grounding. Measuring 18 inches long, the Conntek cord is bright yellow so it's easy to find in a crowded storage compartment. The cord is UL approved (and CUL approved for Canadian compliance), and comes with a five-year warranty. A leader in power-connection technology, Conntek has a complete line of electrical products for the RV market available at outdoor recreation retailers and Amazon.com.

**MSRP:** \$80

**414-482-0800, [www.conntek.com](http://www.conntek.com)**

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## AMPed Up

AMP Research recently announced that it has taken its popular PowerStep automated running boards to the next level by simplifying the electrical installation. AMP's



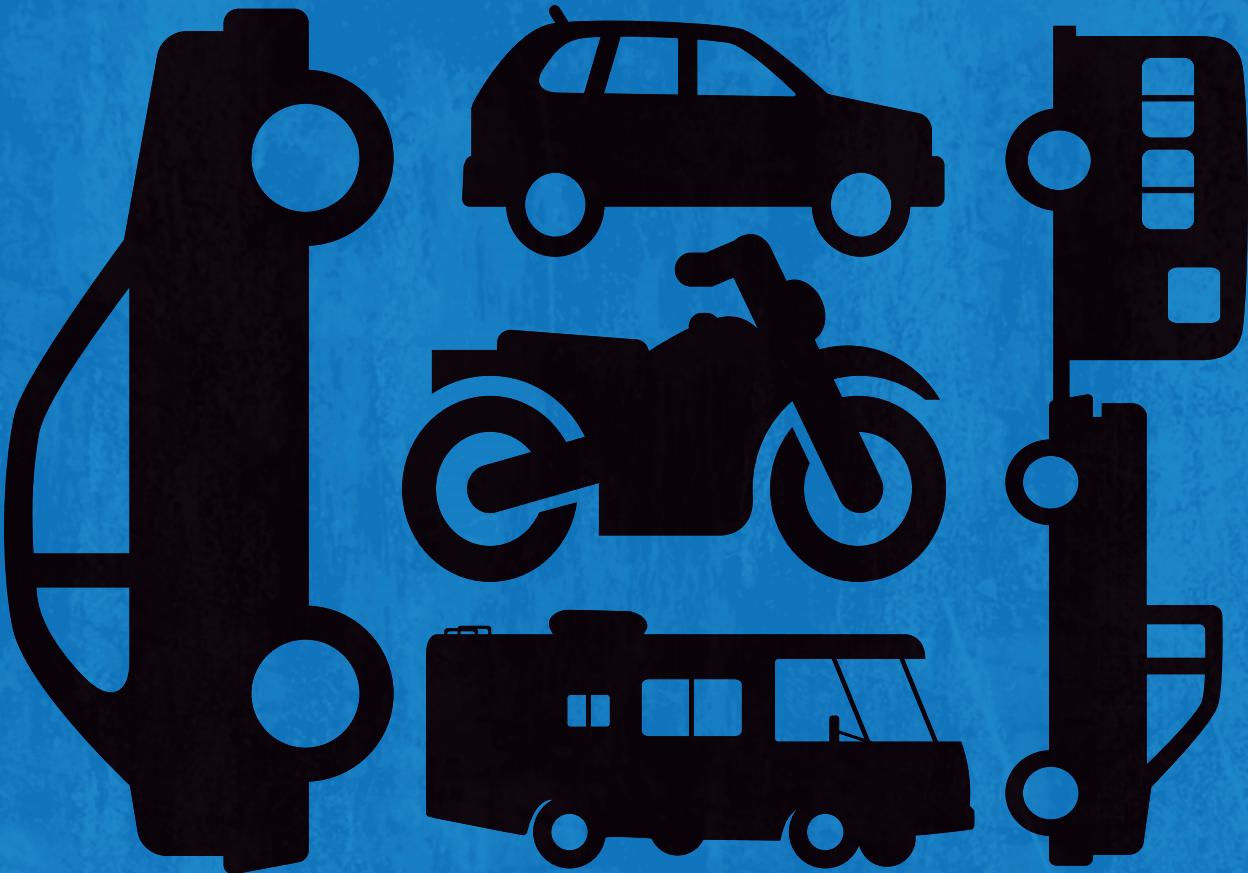
innovative Plug-and-Play system eliminates the need to access the door panels to reach the wires as part of the installation process, saving approximately 90 minutes, according to the company. The PowerStep with Plug-and-Play uses the On Board Diagnostics [OBDII] port to connect the controls of the PowerStep to the vehicle's computer system. Currently, 2014 Chevy Silverado and GMC Sierra 1500 applications are available. Ford and Ram truck applications coming soon.



**MSRP:** PowerStep with Plug-and-Play, \$1,299

**949-221-0023, [www.amp-research.com](http://www.amp-research.com)**

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## Exhaust and Engine Brakes

If you have ever towed a heavy trailer with a diesel-powered truck down a steep grade, you probably know how little engine-braking force a diesel provides. This can truly be a white-knuckle ride, especially for drivers accustomed to the amount of engine braking that gasoline engines provide.

Steep mountain downgrades can overtax the brakes, and without some sort of supplemental braking device, the brakes can wear quickly, overheat and even fade completely. As a result, exhaust brakes have become very popular for diesel tow vehicles and motorhomes.

### Understanding Engine Operation

To understand how exhaust brakes work, it's helpful to know a little about the differences between gasoline and diesel engines. In gas engines, when the vehicle is coasting with a closed throttle, there's almost no pressure on the tops of the pistons (partial vacuum). At this point the atmospheric pressure in the crankcase exerts significantly more pressure on the bottoms of the pistons, relative to what's on top. This resistance causes engine braking, which slows the vehicle.

Diesels, unlike gas engines, control engine RPM and power simply by varying the volume of injected fuel. There is no throttle valve limiting the entry of air into a diesel engine, so air continues to enter the cylinders freely on decel-

eration. As a result, there's very little engine braking when a driver lifts off the accelerator pedal, because there is little resistance (pumping loss) to slow engine speed as the pistons descend during their intake strokes.

In normal diesel operation, air enters during the intake stroke, and then gets compressed during the compression stroke. At a precisely timed moment, fuel is injected into the cylinder, and then air heated by compression ignites that fuel. A pressure rise from expanding combustion gases drives the piston downward during the power stroke, which supplies torque to the crankshaft via the connecting rod. Essentially, the more fuel burned, the more heat generated, resulting in more pressure pushing down on the pistons, and hence more torque.

Pistons pump exhaust gases out through open exhaust valves, then through the exhaust system to the atmosphere. At idle and when coasting, little fuel is being burned, and without that, there's little expansion or exhaust flow to build backpressure. Low pressure on top of the pistons when

the exhaust valves open results in little resistance as the pistons rise in their bores. This is why diesels don't slow down much when you let off the accelerator pedal.

### Exhaust Brakes

To compensate for the lack of back-pressure, diesel exhaust brakes use a valve to create a temporary restriction in the exhaust system downstream from the turbocharger, which builds up backpressure to reduce engine speed and produce supplemental braking force. This valve closes when the accelerator pedal is released and opens as the vehicle comes to a stop, depending on the system's settings. The amount of engine-braking force (or reverse torque) is generally proportional to the backpressure applied to the engine.

In many situations, exhaust brakes are effective enough to maintain a safe downhill speed without having to use the vehicle's service brakes. Engine-braking force can also be increased by downshifting the transmission, as long as safe maximum engine speeds are maintained.

Typically, exhaust brakes provide between about 60 and 80 percent of engine-power reverse torque.

When the exhaust valves open, the backpressure from the exhaust brake exerts downward force on the piston tops to resist upward movement. It would be tempting to close off the exhaust completely to build up high pressure and generate a lot of engine-braking force. However, there are practical limits.

Exhaust backpressure also presses against the underside of closed exhaust valves, and at higher engine RPM, the pressure can potentially become too



Exhaust brakes are mounted just downstream of the engine and require a servo to open and close their valve during operation. A well-designed unit can deliver reverse torque approaching 60 to 80 percent of engine power.

high, overcome the valve springs' closing force and pop the exhaust valves open. If backpressure is not regulated, this can cause the valves to hit the pistons, resulting in severe engine damage. Therefore, exhaust brakes must always allow some flow through the exhaust system to prevent excessive pressure from causing damage.

The critical pressure where exhaust valves can be popped open varies with engine design, with factors such as valve-spring seat pressure and the area of the valve heads. Engine manufacturers have set recommended limits on maximum backpressure from exhaust brakes: 40 psi for Ford Power Stroke diesels, 55 psi for GM's Duramax and 60 psi for Cummins engines.

### Engine Brakes

There is another type of diesel engine compression brake, commonly called a "Jake brake," that is widely used in large diesel trucks. Jake brakes (named after Jacobs Vehicle Systems, a major manufacturer of engine brakes) work internally in a diesel engine and require more complex installation and cost more than exhaust brakes.

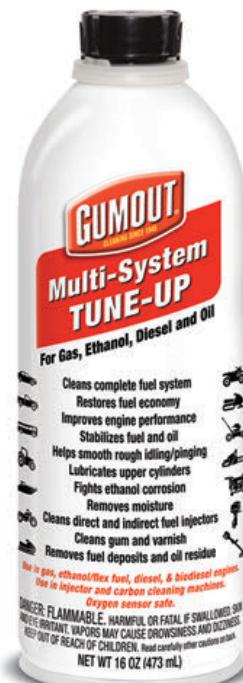
Jake brakes (or more generically, engine brakes) use hydraulic pressure to open exhaust valves near the end of the compression strokes to release the compressed air into the exhaust stream. The resulting engine braking comes from the engine having to compress air without making any power during the power stroke. There is additional resistance or pumping loss when the pistons descend during power strokes with both valves closed without combustion. This process is very noisy, and there are laws against using unmuffled engine brakes in many areas.

Due to the cost, complexity and noise issues, internal engine brakes are usually only available on higher end diesel-powered motorhomes.

### Recommendations

Exhaust brakes are recommended and almost essential for diesels towing heavy loads, especially in mountainous terrain. They're sold by a number of aftermarket companies, and some

new trucks are now available with them from the factory. When shopping for an aftermarket exhaust brake, consider initial price, features, difficulty of installation and the reputation of the manufacturer. Premium exhaust brakes include exhaust pressure modulation (EPM), which allows the unit to vary backpressure to match the need under various engine speeds and loads.



### Gumout Multi-System Tune-Up

Many RVers have been experiencing problems with ultra-low-sulfur diesel (ULSD) fuel and reformulated gasoline containing ethanol. For use in gas, ethanol, diesel and oil, Gumout Multi-System Tune-Up is designed to improve engine performance and restore fuel economy. It's made to handle modern engine technologies such as gasoline direct injection and turbocharging, and it's said to be equally effective on engines without those systems.

Gumout's diesel deposit-control additive addresses the needs of modern diesel engines and the issues they have with ULSD fuel, such as reduced lubricity and corrosion of fuel tanks, pumps, injectors and other metal parts. It is designed to keep modern diesel fuel injectors clean, at

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## PERFORMANCE CORNER

the nozzle tip and inside the injector.

Diesel engine performance can suffer when fuel injectors are dirty or sticky, resulting in loss of fuel economy and power. Gumout's hyper-dispersant cleans injectors to restore power and fuel economy, reduce emissions, remove internal direct-injector deposits that cause sticking, and provide lubricity and wear protection for fuel pumps, according to the manufacturer.

Ethanol allows water to have a faster and worse corrosive effect on critical engine parts and can also eat away at seals. Fuel containing ethanol will experience phase separation where ethanol and water separate from fuel and settle at the bottom of the tank. This introduces more potentially corrosive water into the fuel system when allowed to sit. An ethanol corrosion inhibitor will help to offset the corrosive impact of ethanol and sustain engine performance over time. The Gumout product also protects from corrosion in ULSD fuel and biodiesel.

Gumout Multi-System Tune-Up uses polyetheramine (PEA) as an agent that's designed to clean inside the combustion chambers where many other cleaners burn up. When mixed with a tank of gas on a regular basis, it is said to clean the entire fuel system, removing carbon deposits from direct and indirect fuel injectors, intake valves and ports, piston tops, cylinder heads and combustion chambers. PEA can start restoring fuel economy and improve engine performance after a single fill up, and continued use can yield even better results. PEA also leaves lasting protection from carbon deposits in addition to cleaning up existing deposits.

When fuel and oil sit for long periods, they deteriorate, and carbon residue settles, attaching itself to key engine parts and causing varnish and gummy buildup. An antioxidant will stabilize fuel and oil for longer life and better performance from engines that are not used frequently. The use of a stabilizer is important for engines of all sizes that are used seasonally.

Gumout Performance Additives, 855-888-1990, [www.gumout.com](http://www.gumout.com).

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# Salvage Operation

**Rebuilding an RV from the ground up from two junkyard trailers**

In preparing for my retirement more than 20 years ago, my wife, Helen, and I started looking at new RVs and found that the travel trailer with all the extras we wanted would cost in excess of \$35,000. I priced out the materials that would be required to build a trailer myself and figured I could make one for less than half the price of a new one.

We wanted a 34-foot trailer with a three-way refrigerator, an icemaker, a large awning and electric levelers with controls inside, to name a few of the hoped for conveniences. I'd seen folks spending hours setting up their trailers with jacks, boards and all sorts of things. We wanted one that could be set up in a few minutes.

I was in a salvage yard one day in the course of my business as an auto insurance claims supervisor, and sitting there were two wrecked camping trailers, both less than six months old. One was a 28-foot Fleetwood Prowler and the other a 34-foot Fleetwood Terry. The Terry was exactly what we wanted. Shortly after that, I was able to obtain both trailers at auction.

Before I began the project, I built a large lean-to shed on the side of my barn to have a place out of the weather. Then I spent two days jacking up the Terry's collapsed roof and supporting it with 2x4s, so the trailer could be towed home. It was quite a sight traveling



(Above from left) More than two decades ago, family and friends helped raise new walls on the floor of a wrecked trailer. Today, the trailer's interior looks as good as new.

down Interstate 75 and generated many comments from bystanders.

From the two trailers, I salvaged all of the doors, windows, air conditioners, ovens, stoves and heaters. I stored duplicated items for future use, if needed. I then dismantled the Terry down to the frame and floor, to be used as the platform, and put the broken walls together enough so they could be used as patterns.

This being a family project, I enlisted my wife, son, daughter-in-law and a friend to help, starting with installing the new walls. I was able to save all of the 12-volt DC wiring by laying it off to the side. For safety reasons, I rewired all 120-volt AC systems with new wire.

The siding presented a problem because there were no companies in my home state of Florida doing that kind of work. I cut a 1-foot section of the original siding from top to bottom and sent it to a company in Georgia to fabricate new siding, then rented a flatbed semi-truck to transport it home.

After the siding was installed, the

doors and windows were positioned and new flooring put in place. The original cabinets were destroyed beyond repair, but the cabinet doors were salvaged, so we built new cabinets and installed Formica counters and tabletops. The original dinette seats and valances were reupholstered, wallpaper was placed on the interior walls, and new drapes were made.

One problem with home-built trailers is weight. If not controlled, it is easy to overbuild a trailer. I carefully weighed every item that was put on this trailer. The listed dry weight on the original Terry was 8,800 pounds. The loaded weight of my trailer is 9,052 pounds.

We've since put more than 80,000 miles on the rebuilt trailer, and it's still in excellent condition, even though it is more than two decades old. Our longest trip was to California, Oregon and across the upper states to Minnesota, then back home to Florida's west coast.

Total cost was \$12,102.33, a considerable savings from the price of a new trailer at the time. ■



**DIY DUO** » The author not only rebuilt the trailer, he outfitted a Ford E-350 cargo van with a TV, sink, cabinets and an electric sofa bed.

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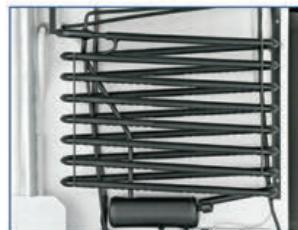
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## PROPANE ON OR OFF?

**Q** We enjoy the convenience of traveling with a fully packed refrigerator and freezer in our 36-foot travel trailer. My husband and I have heard from some RV enthusiasts that the propane should be turned off while fueling up at gas stations, while others say it's OK to leave on. What is recommended?

**Marc and Katherine Pickard, Roscoe, Illinois**

**A** There is no question or discussion about this one, Marc: Every propane-fueled device in your RV represents a possible ignition source for the gasoline vapors that drift around a gas station during fueling. You need to be sure the water heater, furnace and refrigerator are off during a fuel stop, because if they're still on, those devices can still be running a spark-ignition cycle while trying to fire up a burner. To be safe, shut them all down.

— Jeff Johnston



## DUMP-VALVE CONTROL

**Q** My fifth-wheel has cable-operated waste-dump gate valves. They have been really hard to open since I purchased the unit a year ago. In one outing last year, I could not drain my blackwater tank and had to bring it 600 miles back to the dealer to be repaired. The dealer says to lube the cables, but how, since the trailer's underbelly is enclosed? The last fifth-wheel I had for 15 years had rods that were accessible and never gave me a problem.

**Frank Walker, Westchester, Illinois**

**A** You're right, Frank. Lubricating the cables generally requires access to the cable at the valve (to release the set screw), and that would mean dropping the belly pan. Lubrication would help, if you remove the cables from the housing and spray with pure silicone. Doing this

may be time consuming.

A manufacturer uses a cable system when the dump valves are located in an odd or inaccessible place that the usual solid rod controls won't fit. A popular aftermarket solution to this problem is to install some of the electrically operated dump valves available today. These are fairly reliable and make dumping an easy, push-button affair. — J.J.

## LONG-TERM TRAILER STORAGE

**Q** In June 2013, we took delivery of our new Jayco White Hawk 30DSRE travel trailer. We were going to take our "maiden voyage" the following month, but due to an unexpected family situation, we had to cancel our trip and place the trailer in storage. It has been in storage ever since.

The storage lot is in a very clean

and well-maintained campground. The surface of the lot consists of grass and stone. To avoid problems with the tires, I placed plastic leveling blocks under each tire to elevate it off the grass-stone surface and protect against moisture and sinking. With the assistance of a friend, the trailer was winterized in November and covered with an ADCO Tyvek Designer cover. I stop by the storage lot and check on things at least once every couple of weeks. I accessed the inside of the trailer a couple of weeks ago, and after this past winter, I can happily say that all looks great inside.

Depending on how things go with my situation at home, I'm not sure if I will be taking my trailer out this year. If I need to keep this trailer in storage for another year, what extra precautions do I need to take? I try to keep my tires up to pressure, and I have not dewinterized the trailer. The tire covers and trailer cover are still in place, as is the RV antifreeze. I was advised not to take any action until I am ready to use it, and the RV antifreeze can remain in its lines for up to two years. Is this true?

Will keeping it in storage another year hurt? I just don't want to take it out

### THE TECH TEAM



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



**JEFF JOHNSTON:** Jeff served as technical director of *Trailer Life* for 18 years and has been an RV enthusiast, mechanic and writer since he could hold a wrench.

of storage after an extended period of time and have something go wrong. I know when I do take it off the storage lot, my first trip is to get it checked out at an authorized Jayco dealer to have it inspected before any long road trips. Any advice on keeping my trailer in long-term storage for possibly another year will be appreciated.

**Glenn Metzger, West Deptford, New Jersey**

**A** You're on the right track with checking into longer term storage of your trailer, Glenn. First, RV water-line antifreeze doesn't go bad in the sense of getting moldy or anything. However, over that kind of long-term use, it can be diluted by condensation that forms in the water lines, and for that reason, RV antifreeze manufacturers recommend that it be refreshed each year. Pumping fresh antifreeze through the plumbing system is also cheap insurance.

You didn't mention the battery, but I'm guessing you're storing it, or them, in a climate-controlled location and hooked up to a trickle-charge battery maintainer.

For this type of longer storage, you might want to support the axles on blocks to get the trailer weight off the tires. One season on the tires isn't bad, but a couple years may affect them adversely. Otherwise, you've taken the right steps. — **J.J.**

## LIPPERT SLIDEOUT SYSTEM

**Q** We have a 33-foot 2008 Challenger fifth-wheel trailer with three slides that are moved by a Lippert hydraulic system. The slides are not controlled individually but are all on the same line. They move out in sequence — 1) bedroom, 2) opposing living room, 3) large living room slide — and retract in the same sequence, 1, 2, 3. Getting ready for a weekend trip after the fifth-wheel sat in storage for a few months, I attempted to open the slides, which worked in sequence until number 3. It moved only about a foot of its 3-foot travel when it stopped. I retracted all of them and let them sit for a couple of minutes and then opened them again.

They all extended as they should.

The next day we arrived at our weekend destination, and I attempted to open the slides. Slides 1 and 2 deployed, except slowly, and 3 started out, slowly, but stopped about 8 inches from full out. We retracted them and tried again. Same result. We retracted them for another try. Again it stopped about 8 inches from full out. I then manually pushed it out to full extension, while my wife pressed the slideout button.

The day of departure, they retracted normally. We returned home and opened the slides to clean the unit. All of them worked normally without the slow or sluggish movement of a few days before and fully extended as they should. I'm scratching my head as to what may be the problem, if indeed there is one.

The fluid reservoir is full, and I haven't noticed any fluid leaks. We live

into shorepower. Given the unit's age, an older battery may not be in good enough condition to fully hold a charge, either, or there may be some corroded connections to the pump. Check the battery condition and state of charge and check all of your RV's hydraulic pump connections, and you may find the culprit. — **J.J.**

## VINYL FLOOR SPLITS

**Q** The reason the floor cracked or split on Ronald Sensor's camper ("Trailer Floor Flummox," July issue) is called cold-cracking. It's due to the way the trailer is built. The floor is built, then the flooring is put down, and the walls then put on top of the flooring, clamping it so it can't contract. At extreme temperatures of minus-20 degrees or less, the flooring will crack. I just replaced the bathroom floor. I had stored my

**A** trailer's axle carrying capacity is calculated by starting with the trailer's wet axle weight, meaning empty of cargo but with propane and freshwater aboard

in Tucson, Arizona, and traveled to Flagstaff, where the air temperature was about 30 degrees cooler than Tucson that day. I can't imagine the temperature would affect the operation unless it was below freezing, which it wasn't. The only thing I can zero in on is the pump. We are leaving for another trip soon, so I would like to resolve this issue.

**Don Scheibe, Tucson, Arizona**

**A** The system seems to work OK part of the time, so it seems the pump is probably OK, Don. You didn't say anything about the electrical system, batteries or how the trailer is stored, as far as the batteries being plugged in. We suspect the first problem, when you took out the trailer from storage, may be due to a partially discharged battery. The proper slideout performance when you left the campground could be because the battery(s) were charged during the campout while being plugged

trailer at the dealer, and he had 50 or so cold-cracked floors this year, some on brand-new rigs.

**Robert Crone, Carthage, New York**

**A** Thank you for the information on the split vinyl flooring, Bob. We've received several emails with essentially the same information, so it appears our past winter was frigid enough to affect a lot of stored RVs. It's good to know there probably isn't a more sinister problem going on, such as a wet and buckling subfloor. — **J.J.**

## AXLE OVERLOAD?

**Q** In the June issue, the TrailManor 2417KS is listed with a GVWR of 4,041 pounds. Subtracting the stated hitch weight of 450 pounds gives 3,591 pounds on the axle, which exceeds the 3,500-pound gross axle weight rating (GAWR). Surely, "close enough" is not

good enough in today's litigious society. Are the GVWR and cargo capacity slightly overstated? Also, it would be nice to see the origin and load rating of the tires to further identify the trailer's capacity limit.

**Mike Kempin, Cedar Rapids, Iowa**

**A** Living in a litigious society also means paying close attention to the small details and how all the per-

tinent facts fit together. Take another look at the TrailManor spec box in that issue, Mike, and look up one line from the 4,041 GVWR figure. The axle weight on that trailer is 2,518 pounds, which leaves a chunk of cargo capacity before reaching the trailer's 3,500-pound gross axle weight rating (GAWR). So to answer the question, no, the GVWR and cargo capacity are not overstated. The figures all line up well on this trailer.

A trailer's axle carrying capacity is calculated by starting with the trailer's wet axle weight, meaning empty of cargo but with propane and freshwater aboard, which is the 2,518 pounds shown in the article. The axle is rated at 3,500 pounds GAWR, and the difference between the wet weight and GAWR is 982 pounds of weight-carrying capacity on the axle. The hitch also carries some of the trailer's weight, of course, and that explains the 1,073-pound cargo carrying capacity stated in the article.

The axle's 3,500-pound GAWR is established by the axle manufacturer, based on the capacity of all the components in the axle, including the steel components, wheel bearings, axle braking capacity, wheel load rating and tire rating. All of the components in the axle need to meet or exceed the axle's 3,500-pound GAWR; in effect, the GAWR is based on the weakest link in the chain, so to speak. The tires and wheels, for example, are always selected to be equal to or more than, in this case, the stated 3,500-pound GAWR. As long as you know the axle GAWR, you can be assured the tires and wheels are up to carrying the GAWR capacity. — J.J.

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## MORE ON TIRE BALANCING

**Q** I read Bob Hines' letter in May's RV Clinic about his Chinese-made tires. Please ask him to have his next trailer's tires balanced. The wheels also may have come from China and will not allow the balancing to occur. That is what happened with my Coleman CTS233QB trailer. We put only 400 miles on the unit, and I wanted the tires balanced before starting our summer travels.

We had Discount Tire try to balance all five tires/wheels, and none would. We then replaced all five wheels with Discount Tire's Trailer White W21-4612 wheels and had all five tires balanced without any issues. I hope these tires now last the summer through the mountains and hills of Arizona by at least being balanced. I also hope that others will not have the same issue and assume that the problem is their driving, the road or the tires, when all along it could have been the wheels that

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caused the problems.

Our RV's old wheels were made in China by Jingu. The trailer was built by Dutchmen, and the warranty guide points to Lionshead Specialty at 574-533-6169 for wheel and tire information.

**Howard Billings, Sun City, Arizona**

**A** It's not a popular thing to do yet among trailer towing enthusiasts, but we encourage people to have their trailer wheels balanced to help prolong tire and related hardware life. It would take a seriously defective wheel to be bad enough that it can't allow the tire and wheel combination to be balanced, but your experience seems to point that way. — **J.J.**

## LEVELING THE TRAILER

**Q** I'm a first-time RV owner. I park my RV on my driveway. The front of the driveway has about a 20 percent slope. I use leveling blocks and the jack to level the trailer. I also live in an area where the winds can get up to 25 to 30 MPH. What will be the safest way to add blocks to level the RV besides pouring more concrete on the driveway?

**Thomas Choy, Lancaster, California**

**A** I'm guessing that, as it sits, you need to crank the trailer A-frame jack way down to bring it to level, and you're concerned about how wobbly the jack post is with it extended that far.

First, be sure the tires are chocked front and back with substantial blocks of wood or concrete. If you build up a base for the A-frame jack, it should look like a pyramid. The wider the base, the better, so start with a stack of 2x6-inch lumber about 18 inches long. Alternate two on the ground, two across those, two more across those and so forth. Then use 2x6-inch lumber, perhaps 12 inches long, and stack those farther, again alternating them so they lay across each successive layer. Top those with two or three layers of boards and use those as the base on which the A-frame jack rests, with the flat plate, not a wheel, attached to the bottom of the post. The assembly should be more than steady

enough to keep your trailer secure in the gusty winds of the desert. — **J.J.**

## HIGH-TEMPERATURE PAINT FOR RV GAS RANGE TOP

**Q** My husband and I have a 1977 High-liner RV with a Wedgewood three-burner LP-gas stove with oven. The range top, which pops out, is white and is starting to chip and peel. I have called the company that makes this stove and was told they no longer make this model. I have called Dampney Company of Massachusetts, which carries Thermoalox paint, and was advised I cannot use this paint on the range top as it will blister and peel due to the open gas flame. Please advise if there is a high-temperature paint I can use, as the stove is otherwise in good condition and works fine, and I'm hoping I don't have to replace it.

**Peg Cardinal, Guilderland, New York**

**A** You might try some exhaust header paints such as VHT, which is available in white (although it is more of a flat white) at auto-parts stores and speed shops. If you want a more durable coating, contact a shop that provides ceramic header coating such as Jet-Hot ([www.jet-hot.com](http://www.jet-hot.com)). — **Ken Freund**

## RAIN LEAKS

**Q** Two of my camper's six cargo compartments leak rainwater. My RV repair guy installed new tight-fitting gaskets along the rim of the doors, making it rather hard to close the doors, and they still leak. I know to check around manual latches and keyed locks for leaks. I have hose-tested, spraying hard, and they seem watertight, but somehow rain is still getting in. I fixed a few minor leaks by removing a latch or lock and drying things thoroughly, then applied a little silicone glue and reassembled, followed by wiping away the excess, drying, and retesting with hose spray.

My repair guy told me to drill drain holes in the floor of the compartments, which helps, but I still find some rainwater in there. Is there anything else I can do to make those compartments

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**RV CLINIC**

watertight, or do all campers with fiber-glass cargo compartments leak?

**Bob Haynes, Tampa, Florida**

**A** I suggest you obtain plastic containers with lids for everything in the compartments. I have found leaks by crawling inside compartments (where possible) with a flashlight while a helper sprays water from a hose nozzle at possible leak spots. Make sure the assistant is not angry with you before you get locked in! It may be that flexing on the road opens up gaps that don't appear when your RV is parked. — K.F.

**MOUNTING A GENERATOR**

**Q** We just purchased a 2015 Rockwood 32-foot Signature Ultra Lite fifth-wheel. I was thinking about purchasing a bolt-on receiver and purchasing the Torklift lock and load carrier for my Honda EU3000is generator. The rear bumper is welded to the frame rails. Will the weight be too much? The spare tire is already attached to the bumper.

**Brian and Andrea Perry,  
Berkley, Massachusetts**

**A** Honda's specifications show the generator as weighing 134 pounds dry, and 3.4 gallons of fuel plus oil bring it up to about 155 pounds in round numbers. That's a fair amount to have hanging off the back (I'd recommend mounting it in the tow vehicle behind the cab, if possible). Besides the physical strength of the rear bumper and frame rails, consider that this will make your rig even longer, and having that much weight in back reduces hitch weight, which could lead to sway. A bolt-on receiver won't work; you'll need a welder to fabricate a custom receiver. Fifth-wheel trailers are more forgiving than travel trailers, but I suggest you pay careful attention to weights. — K.F. 

**HAVE A QUESTION? ➤** Email our experts at: [RVClinic@trailerlife.com](mailto:RVClinic@trailerlife.com) or write to: RV Clinic, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. No phone calls, please.

**WALK-THROUGH:**

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The Autumn Ridge offers a huge shower enclosure, dual showerheads and a glass door for luxurious cleanup accommodations.

**(continued from page 60)** features a king-size bed that somehow doesn't dwarf the floor space, and small shelves flanking the comfy bed are useful for eyeglasses, books and remotes. The bedroom area is a bit dark when the sun goes down, as the included lights are more of the mood variety. We'd like to see a light placed above the vanity desk in the wardrobe unit.

Overall, Starcraft has done a fine job making the Autumn Ridge much more upscale than its price would indicate. Smart appointments like raised panels, textured surfaces and window treatments make it easy to forget that this is a family trailer at its core. There are also dual-entry models (pictured on page 59) for more family conscious versatility. Add LED lighting outside and in, a porthole-type living-room skylight lined with the same (Premier Package) and a truly impressive bathroom arrangement, and it's easy for buyers to appreciate how some subtle, well-placed extras can bring a trailer up a few notches in terms of overall value and livability.

Special thanks to Crestview RV (512-282-3516, [www.crestviewrv.com](http://www.crestviewrv.com)) in Buda, Texas, for assistance with this Walk-Through.

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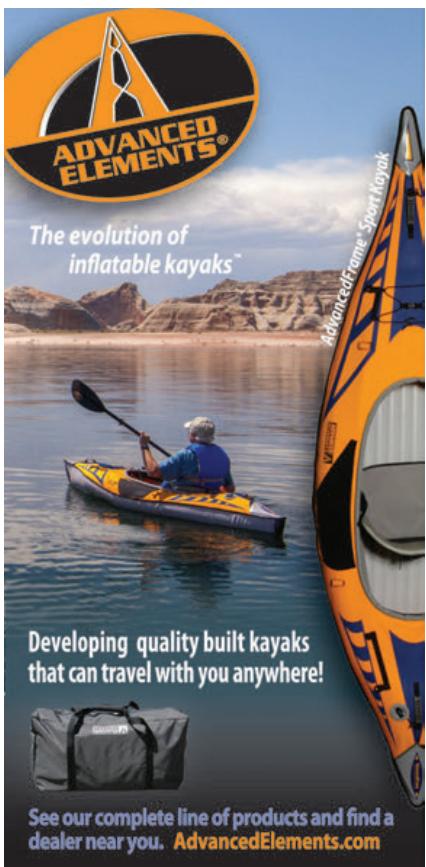
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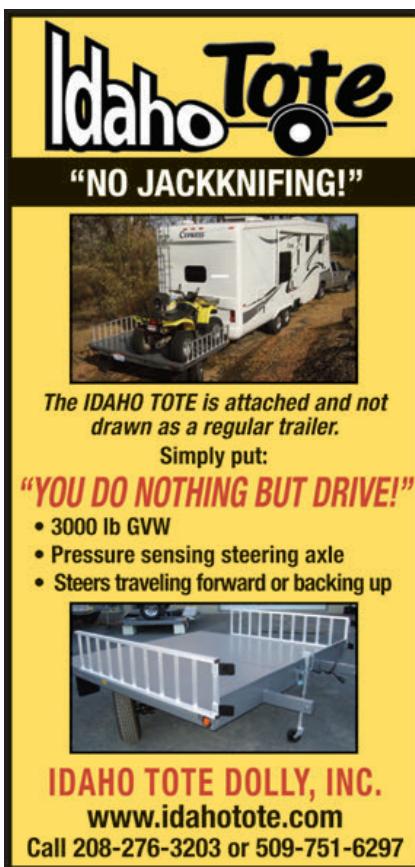
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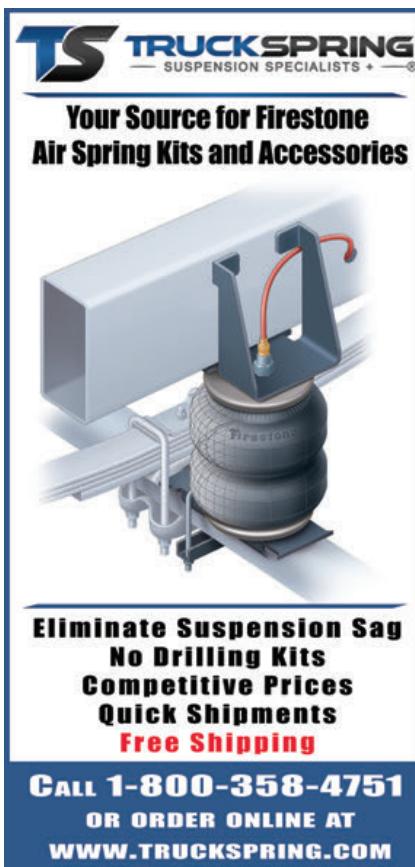
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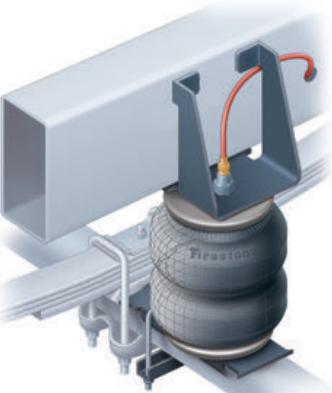
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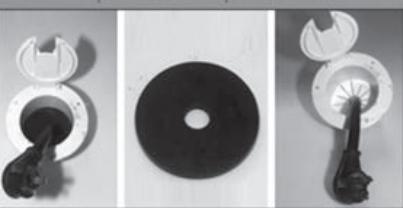
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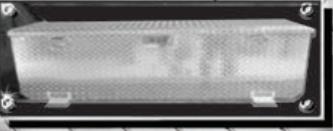
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**Darryl Steeves, Calgary, Alberta**



## No-Fail Support Block

I noticed that my neighbor's A-frame jack had sunk into the asphalt driveway because the wood had failed. I made a support block from layers of 2x4-inch lumber, screwed and glued together. I finished with a 4-inch-round steel electrical plate cover. The A-frame jack now sits on the plate and is very secure. It has worked well, both at home and away. I hope this idea will help other RVers so they won't have to deal with broken boards or sunken A-frame jack supports.

**J. Kaner, Anchorage, Alaska**

## QUICK FIX

### X Marks Your Stuff

We marked anything that can be stolen from outside our RV with a dab of paint, using the same color. For instance, we marked under the arms of our folding chairs, on the bottom of the cooler, under lanterns and on tools. That way, we are able to identify our items if they should end up in another campsite. — **George Barthelmes, Wellborn, Florida** ☺

To send your submission, write to: 10-Minute Tech, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036 or email: [10minutetech@trailerlife.com](mailto:10minutetech@trailerlife.com). Please include an illustration or photo, if applicable. *Trailer Life* will pay you \$35 for original 10-Minute Tech ideas.



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# Cornhusker State Time Capsule

The Kregel Windmill Factory Museum showcases Middle America's development of modern technology



**N**ebraska City is on the Nebraska-Iowa border, which is the Missouri River. These two states and their immediate neighbors produce most of the livestock that is raised in the United States. This is all farm and ranch country, and Nebraska City is about in the middle of it. It is also windmill country — or it was in 1903 when George Kregel built his windmill factory here.

This small factory — more like a heavy-duty machine shop — made windmills for two generations of Kregels. Today, it could still produce windmills, but instead it is a well-preserved showcase of the early 1900s. It's a factory museum, the only one like it in the country, and has a metal lathe, the oldest piece in the shop, that was developed during the Civil War.

The American whirligig windmill has been around for as long as farmers and ranchers have needed water pumped from deep wells. A windmill cannot pump enough water to irrigate field crops, but it can keep water troughs full for livestock.

Windmills have been in use around the world for centuries, mainly to grind grain. The Dutch made them a national symbol, using them with dikes to keep the sea from flooding the land. What schoolroom, where we were taught geography, didn't have a picture on the wall of a windmill in Holland with all the tulips in bloom?

We in America have our own style of windmill. It does not have the frills and charm of the Old World embodied in the Dutch windmill with its paddlewheel blades, called "sails." But few symbols are more glamorous, yet poetic, than that given to the ranchers and farmers of America in their windmills.

George Kregel and his son, Arthur, began making windmills before World War I, here on Central Avenue in this single-story wood-frame factory. "Their Eli brand windmill was simple in design," Jim Stark told me. "It turns out that they lasted the longest of any made in that day." Jim is vice president of the board that runs the Kregel



(Top) Belts and spinning wheels are what drove the Kregel Windmill Factory in the early 1900s. The factory now is just as it was when it closed in 1939. (Above) Jim Stark explained that some of the old Eli windmills, made here, are still operational today.

Windmill Factory Museum, recently opened to the public.

The Kregels are gone now, but their factory remains just as they left it when they quit making Eli windmills in 1939. To me, it appeared as a workshop where the employees were on a lunch break.

The energy that drove this factory is suspended from the ceiling — wheels of all sizes joined together by belts. Some wheels are small and wide; others are narrow and 3 feet in diameter. It is fascinating to see how the Kregels applied what I would call "bicycle-engineering" to create grinding and drilling tools that operate with great speed and power. Two electric motors run the whole place.

"Do you ever run it?" I asked.

Jim said, "We have, and it has a rhythm of its own that's like nothing I have heard or felt. With all the belts running, the sound is of an occasional squeak and a constant whir that moves the air. Of course, it's illegal to run it today, as the belts are unguarded. Otherwise, we could throw the knife switch right now and start doing work."

Jim told me that before the windmill came on the scene, Nebraska was almost a desert. Pioneers lived along the rivers. Carrying water at 8 pounds a gallon got old very quickly. It is not hard to see how this Nebraska City factory helped Middle America develop and prosper in the last century. As Jim put it, "The windmill was the workhorse that helped settle the Plains States."

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