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OCTOBER 2015

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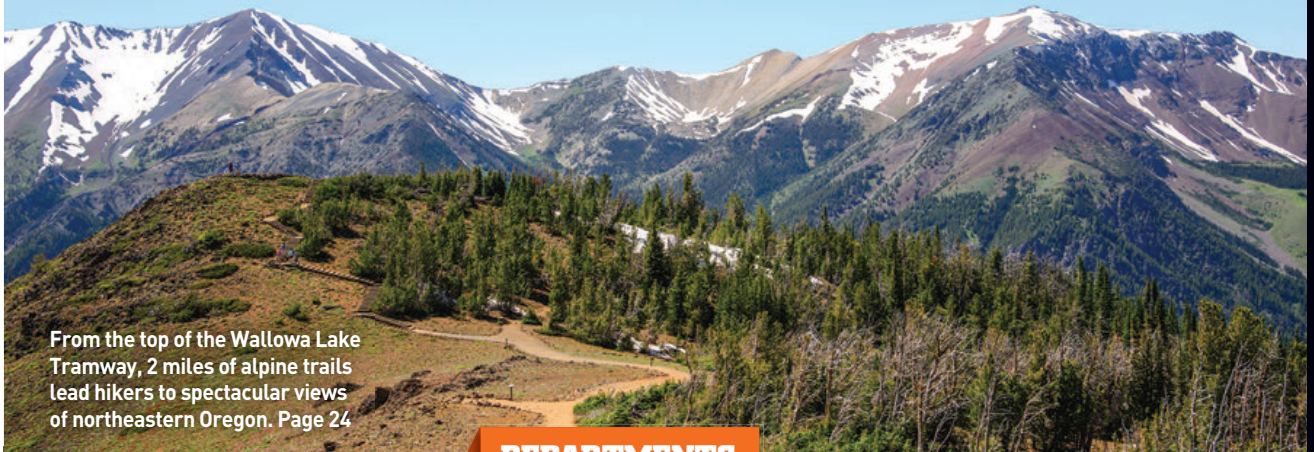
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With a 14-foot garage, Winnebago's Scorpion fifth-wheel has plenty of room for toys. Page 39

On the cover: 2015 Ford Expedition EL and 2016 Dutchmen Denali 2611BH in Southern California's Santa Clarita Valley. Photo by Chris Hemer

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Respect Can Be Contagious

Most RVers practice proper campground etiquette, but some people need a refresher course



It's been a while since I was on a rant about campground etiquette. My wife, Lynne, and I spent a lot of time in RV parks this past summer, and it was clear that a number of people need a refresher course on how to behave properly in a campground environment.

Believe it or not, I still see people emptying their holding tanks at dump stations without using a sewer hose. Beyond the fact that it's disgusting to see, it's unhealthy, smelly and leaves a mess for everyone else. Perpetrators should be expelled immediately and blacklisted from the park or facility.

It's also necessary to practice good manners when using the sewer connection at individual campsites. Many times the connection for the sewer hose is near your neighbor's patio. It should go without saying that, if people are having dinner at the picnic table next to the sewer connection, you need to empty the tanks later.

Dogs are wonderful companions — and I'm a dog lover — but I get tired of having to look down when I walk in common areas for fear of stepping on a lawn sausage. It's inconsiderate not to pick up after your dog relieves itself, which is only my first canine complaint. On a recent trip, we were parked a few RVs down from a lady who was enjoying the morning sun, sitting next to her small dogs roaming in their portable fenced-in kennel. The dogs were barking incessantly, annoying everyone within earshot. Amazingly, she never tried to quiet the barking, even though she was only a few feet away. There's no room for that kind of insensitivity, especially in parks where RVers cohabitate in close quarters.

While on the subject of noise, it's not considerate to force your neighbors to listen to your favorite genre of music or endure a loud TV perched in an exterior compartment. If you're going to have a party, let your neighbors know in advance, or better yet, invite them. It's always nice to meet new people. In most places, quiet hours start at 10 p.m., which is reasonable. If you're dry camping, pay attention to generator noise and the direction of the exhaust flow.

When we took our kids camping, the first thing we taught them was that a person's campsite is their kingdom and that space must be respected. Always refrain from walking through someone else's campsite; it's just plain rude to do so. Surprisingly, even adults break this rule.

The RV park experience is fun and social; practicing consideration for others just makes it better. 🗨️

— Bob Livingston, publisher

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DID YOU KNOW?

October is National Chili Month, and nothing warms the soul on a fall day better than a big bowl of chili. This hearty meal takes center stage at the World's Championship Chili Cookoff in Reno, Nevada, October 16 through 18.

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A Turn for the Worse?

In "The Great Escape," Bob Livingston's August review of the Escape 5.0TA fifth-wheel, there was a mention of making a 90-degree turn. I've been pulling a 17,000-pound fifth-wheel camper for about 14 years, and the first time I tried that, I noted the distortion of the tires and rims. I later learned that this maneuver can cause tire failure, bent rims and bent axles. I have left campgrounds when given a spot where a 90-degree turn was necessary.

Harry A. Jones, Brookings, South Dakota

Bob Livingston replies: *I've backed fifth-wheels and trailers into tight spaces many times and have never lost a tire or bent a rim. Most owners don't do this very often. You need to pull forward and remove the binding from the tires and wheels before unhitching the trailer.*

Don't Forget Casita

I read Kris Bunker's August article, "Direct Hits," with interest, as it reflected the experience I had. Imagine my surprise when the "Where to Buy Factory Direct" list didn't include the company I had bought from. We toured the Casita factory, ordered our trailer at the factory and returned to the factory to pick it up. That surely would qualify as factory direct! Casita gave us a great experience.

Merlin Kindel, Berea, Kentucky

Stay tuned. We'll include the factory-direct Casita in a roundup of light-weight fiberglass trailers in the December issue. — Editors

Nozzle Talk

I enjoyed reading Chris Hemer's August article, "Up on the Roof." I have thought about using a pressure washer on my RV but worried about damaging the roof. Before I attempt this, I have two questions: What fan nozzle did he use and what was the setting on his pressure washer?

G. Brian Mullinax, Duncan, South Carolina

Luckie Brakes

Like Mike Bonin, whose letter appeared in the August issue, I was so impressed with Bob Livingston's May article about conversion to disc brakes ("Whoa, Nelly!") that I decided to do this to our 36-foot Keystone Outback. I contacted Titan International and was told the Outback's T-44 AL-KO axles didn't work with their current kits. I then searched the Internet until I found a how-to video that references Southwest Wheel Company in Dallas. There wasn't a kit to convert these axles on Southwest Wheel's website either, but the company sold axles with the disc-brake conversion for little more than the cost of the conversion — what a deal! Upgrading to 5,200-pound axles with new matching springs (EZ Lube, to boot) came to \$1,000, plus \$550 for the actuator, \$100 for the lines and \$220 for shipping.

Now the fun began. Onto the pad and up on blocks went the trailer. Disassembly went quickly with my son and wife to help. First thing was to fit up the shocks. The kit came with self-tapping screws, but the suspension is welded via a square-tube channel system. After some thought, I added two 1.5- x 1/4-inch steel backing plates inside the channel. We were able to install grade 8 bolts to all the hanger locations and shock brackets — Loctite all around, very solid. After verifying that the new 12-inch discs and calipers would fit the wheels, we continued the installation of the axles, lines and actuator. A long weekend, and all was done.

We headed to the Oregon coast, and, boy, what a difference! Why trailer manufacturers don't install these is beyond me. Thanks again for your article.

David Luckie, Arlington, Washington



Chris Hemer replies: *Start off with the least-aggressive fan-spray nozzle the machine has and keep the tip about a foot away from the surface. Move the tip back and forth quickly as you work; don't keep it focused on one area. If it's not removing the dirt, move the tip a little closer; if that doesn't work, try a more aggressive fan tip. The most important thing to remember with a pressure washer is to start off conservatively, then gradually get more aggressive (with the distance, then the tip) until you find the right combination. Don't spray directly into seams, as the pressure can loosen them, and stay away from areas that appear damaged.*

Dirty Little Secret

Chris Hemer's "Dumping Basics" in the August issue's "Small Favors"

article was very informative, but he missed an important step. Step 3 starts with "Remove the sewer cap from the RV and attach the other end of the hose." I highly recommend that one should first be certain both the gray- and black-tank valves are closed. Not only are new RVers less aware of this process, they are also unaware of jokesters who get their jollies by opening valves in the night.

Ronald Green, Michigan City, Indiana

Turning Up the Heat

I read "The Heat Is On," Bill and Jen Gehr's article about RV thermostat replacement in the July *Trailer Life*, and have a few comments. When RVers attempt to replace their old, typically mechanical thermostats with digital electronic upgrades, they should always ask for a "micro-

volt” thermostat, which is easily distinguished because all micro-volt digital thermostats use batteries to power their electronics instead of the voltage available from the heating or cooling system.

Many modern micro-volt digital thermostats have additional adjustments that can be made by the user. For example, my Lux TX9600TSa has an adjustment for “delay” and “swing.” Instead of the anticipator often used in a mechanical thermostat (which simply heats the thermostat’s sensor ahead of the temperature of the room so it cuts off heating before the room overheats), many digital thermostats allow the user to set a delay time, which is the time before the on or off state of the thermostat is allowed to change. The shorter the delay, the faster the on/off cycle is, and the less temperature overshoot. Of course, too short, and the system cycles on and off continuously.

The swing is the number of degrees or fractions of a degree the thermostat perceives before turning on or off the heat or cooling. The smaller the swing, the more responsive the thermostat. With my thermostat adjusted to a two-minute delay and .25-degree Fahrenheit swing, my cabin, with its huge furnace, is controlled within plus- or minus-1 degree.

The article references a “double-pole, double-throw micro switch” to control two-speed fan operation. This is incorrect. The circuit requires a single-pole, double-throw miniature toggle switch or similar. A double-pole switch has a second set of single-pole, double-throw contacts that are unneeded for this application. And, a micro switch is a specialized device that is used in position sensing and similar applications, and is decidedly not the same as a miniature toggle switch.

Dave Michaels
Bedford, New Hampshire

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Nonstop action is the theme of the October 24 Cowboys of Color Rodeo in Mesquite, Texas.

Mesquite's Unique Cowboys of Color Rodeo

Texas hosts an annual multicultural celebration of ropin' and ridin' that depicts the Western way of life article by Neala McCarten

Ropin' and riding' may be standard rodeo events, but little else is standard about the Cowboys of Color Invitational Finals held each year in Mesquite, Texas. It has the usual rodeo events like steer wrestling, barrel racing, calf roping and bull riding, but then adds touches rarely seen outside the customary rodeo circuit.

There are *charros*, or Mexican cowboys, and women riders conducting a drill-team event called *escaramuza* (Spanish for skirmish), wearing the traditional colorful full-crinoline attire. Later in the rodeo, girls and boys perform their pint-size versions of some of the traditional events. Cute doesn't begin to describe the scene, as little ones work with tiny horses and lariats. More than 200 cowboys and cowgirls compete for cash prizes.

A big fan favorite is the newly added audience-participation event called Kickin' in the Dirt. The stands empty, and everyone fills the arena dancing to the lively music, quite literally kicking up dirt. It's a perfect reason to get up, get out and bring out your inner cowperson.

This year the rodeo holds special significance. It will be the 15th anniversary for the Cowboys of Color Rodeo and the National Finals. Although a full rodeo hasn't been offered every year, the first one took place in 2001 and was the culmination of the long-term dream of Cleo Hearn, a member of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association since 1959.

Hearn was nine years old when he met his first black cowboy, and he knew then that a cowboy was what he wanted to be. He became the first

black American to go to college on a rodeo scholarship, but his dream of competing eventually morphed into producing rodeos to encourage children to learn more about their heritage.

Today, his multicultural rodeo highlights the contributions of all ethnic groups who had a part in the history of the American West. Its inclusivity and laid-back vibe delight, educate and welcome all.

For 2015, the finals will be held on October 24 at Mesquite Arena.

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Lightweight Family RVing

KZ-RV adds the 18RBT floorplan to its Sportsmen Classic line, for a total of 10 lightweight travel trailers ranging from 15 feet 10 inches to 22 feet for the 2016 model year. The new, expandable Sportsmen keeps it simple for families, while providing all the necessary amenities, according to the manufacturer.

The 18RBT has full-size beds housed in pop-out structures at each end of the RV, a dinette that folds down into a 78- x 38-inch bed, and a 70-inch-long couch that also folds into a bed, to sleep a total of six people. The expandable trailer has 6 feet 3 inches of headroom, plus a



kitchen and bathroom that the company claims rivals that of many larger travel trailers. A large overhead cabinet in the kitchen is stationed next to the standard microwave with a two-burner range below. A 4.6-cubic-foot wood-paneled refrigerator blends in with the cabinetry.

At 18 feet 10 inches, the 18RBT weighs less than 2,700 pounds unloaded and can be towed by properly equipped minivans and SUVs. MSRP for the 18RBT is \$14,439. KZ-RV, 866-472-5460, www.kz-rv.com/sportsmen-classic

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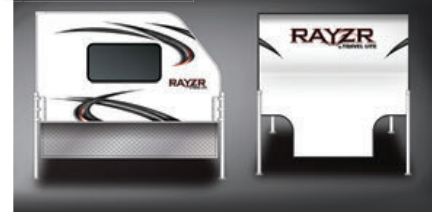
Rayzr's Edge

By the time you read this, Travel Lite's new truck camper will be available at dealers. Dustin Johns, president of Indiana-based Travel Lite, said the company has designed the Rayzr "based on dealer and customer demand for something less pricey that has less wind drag and is lightweight." The Rayzr has a base price of \$5,495 (SS model) and what the company claims has even less wind drag than a pop-up trailer. Due to the camper's one-piece fiberglass design, the wind never hits a flat surface, making the

Rayzr aerodynamic, and it weighs less than 1,000 pounds.

All models have opposing windows for cross-ventilation. A real lightweight at 750 pounds, the SS (Super Sleeper) sleeps three on a jackknife sofa and opposing 28- x 72-inch bench-seat sleeper. The FK (Full Kitchen) and FB (Front Bed) each sleep two. The FK has a three-way refrigerator, a dinette, a sink, a two-burner range, a furnace, a water heater, an outside shower and an optional Porta Potty. The FB has a 54- x 82-inch mattress, a sink, a stove, two countertops (one flips up), a wardrobe

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National Parks 3D Movie

National Parks Adventure, a 3D documentary for IMAX and giant-screen theaters, will be released in February 2016 to coincide with the centennial of the National Park Service. The film is narrated by Academy Award winner Robert Redford, a conservationist and environmentalist, who said the film "captures the stunning beauty of our wild places and reminds us these landscapes are an essential part of the human spirit."

Filmed over a nine-month period in 30 national parks — including Arches, Yellowstone and the Everglades — *National Parks Adventure* takes audiences on an off-trail experience into the great outdoors and untamed wilderness. The film is produced by MacGillivray Freeman Films, known for its award-winning adventure films, in partnership with Brand USA.

Said Thomas Garzilli, senior vice president of Brand USA, "We are thrilled to have Robert Redford lend his

DOCUMENTARY



voice to the project.... We can't imagine a better way to tell the stories of some of our country's most treasured assets — the national parks."



California RV Show

The Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) California RV Show takes place at the Fairplex in Pomona, California, October 9 through 18. Visitors to the 63rd annual event can peruse 100 vendor booths and take a free ride on the Fairplex's Ferris wheel. Walk through more than 1,300 brand-new RVs, enjoy how-to seminars from RV experts, check out vintage campers and listen to live music.

Baseball fans should plan to attend on Saturday, October 10, as legendary Dodgers and Padres first baseman Steve Garvey will be signing autographs.

Go to www.thebestrvshow.com/trailerlife to print a two-for-one-admission coupon for *Trailer Life* subscribers; buy one ticket for the \$10 admission price and get a second ticket free. Parking is \$10. 818-248-6600, www.thebestrvshow.com

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The Great Pumpkin

The scenic landscape around Half Moon Bay, California, will once again be dotted with scarecrows and pick-your-own pumpkin patches this October. The coastal city celebrates the 45th annual Half Moon Bay Art & Pumpkin Festival, October 17 and 18. Admission is free, and Volkswagen-size pumpkins will be on display, along with fine art.

Watch a 1,200-pound pumpkin being carved into a masterpiece; enjoy live music, family contests and zip-lining, and taste every food you can imagine infused with pumpkin. 650-726-9652

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Arkansas Adventures

Leaf-peeping is a good reason to visit Arkansas in October, as brilliant oranges, reds and yellows cover the landscape. Another reason is the autumn lineup of family-friendly events:

31st Annual Harvest Homecoming
 October 2 through 4, in the historic downtown square in Harrison. Arts and crafts, car show, 5K walk and entertainment. 870-365-5403.

Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day
 October 3, at the Lake Fort Smith State Park visitor center in Mountainburg. Bike rides, workshops and youth activities. 479-369-2469.

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The Price Is Not Right

When an Illinois reader opened her mailbox to find bills for pay-as-you-go satellite-TV service that far exceeded the advertised price, she notified RV Resolutions:

▶ Two years ago we bought a portable satellite TV antenna. We were attracted to it because of the ease of setup and DISH's advertised pay-as-you-go programming. After getting reasonable monthly bills, bills suddenly came for \$69.99 and \$92.55. This is not the pricing that was advertised. Claims such as "Pay only for the months you use" and "No charge to start or stop monthly service" are false. We have canceled this service and don't feel we should have to pay the inflated fees.

Sue Fordyce, New Lenox, Illinois

THE COMPANY RESPONDS

RV Resolutions contacted a DISH representative at Pace International, seeking compensation for Sue Fordyce, and received the following reply:



We are working with DISH to have the fees removed. Sue Fordyce's account was paused, not disconnected, and that's the reason she was charged. The customer said she is going to give DISH another chance and will call Pace directly to reactivate and deactivate her account to make sure this is done correctly in the future.

**Matt Catlin, Vice President of Sales and Marketing
Pace International, Rochester, Minnesota**

Out-of-Control Board

A Colorado couple wrote to RV Resolutions asking for help getting reimbursed for a faulty control board in their nearly new fifth-wheel:

▶ We need your help! We purchased an almost brand-new 2013 Keystone Cougar fifth-wheel in December of 2013. The original owner had to sell the Cougar because of illness, so we were not eligible for the factory warranty, although from what we could see, the fifth-wheel had not been used. The toilet-paper holder had never even been installed.

On a trip to Wyoming, the lower portion of the main control board quit working. We had a dealer replace the board three times under the extended warranty we purchased, and each one malfunctioned. Finally, a working board was installed, only to fail again at a remote site. We were obligated to have a mobile repair service make the repair and pay the \$707.64 bill, which wasn't covered by our extended warranty.

Keystone installs a different control board on later models,

leading us to assume that the one in the 2013 model was deemed to be a poor design. Although we are not considered the original owners of our Cougar, we feel Keystone should stand behind the product and reimburse us for this expense. We would appreciate any assistance RV Resolutions can provide.

**Marshall and Alice Mahlum
Lakewood, Colorado**

After RV Resolutions petitioned Keystone RV Company on the Mahlums' behalf, the couple sent the following thank-you note:

▶ We want to express our gratitude for the assistance RV Resolutions provided. We received a check from Keystone in the amount of \$707.64.
M.M and A.M.

Appalachian Affirmation

Normally in RV Resolutions, we read about RV owners who are having warranty problems. For a change, we would like to tell you about a good experience we had with our new Palomino Puma fifth-wheel. When the Dometic refrigerator stopped working, we called Appalachian RV Service in Murphy, North Carolina. Kevin Adams met us at Trackrock Campground the same afternoon, diagnosed the problem and ordered the needed part. When he returned, he told us the refrigerator was under warranty and there was no charge for the part. We had to pay a \$60 service fee, which Dometic later reimbursed. We can't say enough about Kevin Adams, Appalachian RV Service and Dometic.

**Bob and Dodie Meeks
Seminole, Florida**

NEED HELP? » RV Resolutions is a forum for the settlement of conflicts between consumers and RV dealers and manufacturers, accessory suppliers and service providers. After exhausting all other resources without success, please send a typed letter to *Trailer Life* RV Resolutions, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Include copies of appropriate bills and correspondence as well as a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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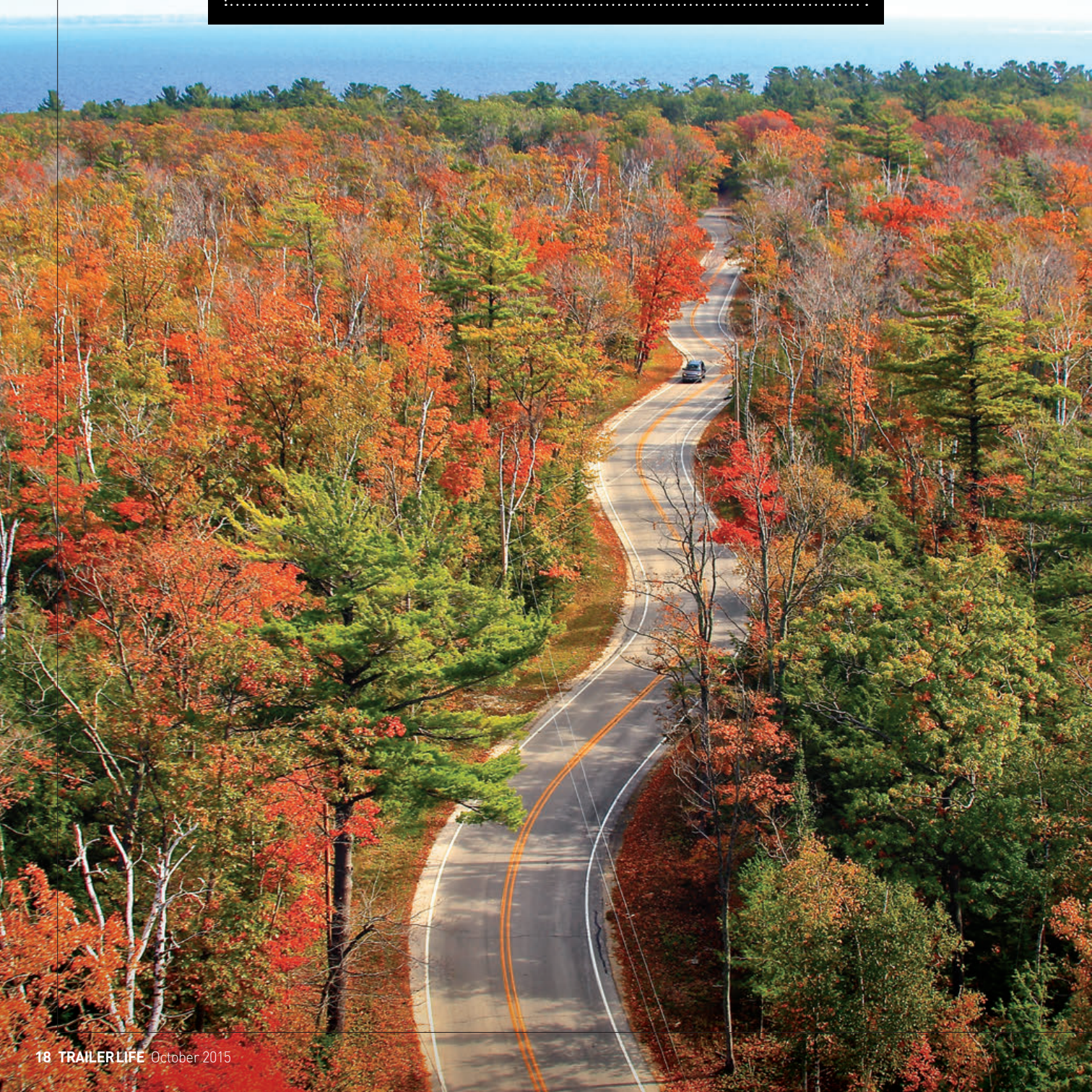
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W I S C O N S I N ' S **RUSTIC ROADS**

Turn back the clock to a quieter time on
117 bucolic backcountry drives spanning
nearly 700 miles in the upper Midwest

article by Tom Watson





From Dodge County to Door County: R-106 runs through scenic farmland (left), while Highway 42 (far left) twists its way to Rustic Roads near the tip of Wisconsin's thumb.

the character of the state. Here's a snapshot of some memorable off-the-beaten-path drives in each region.

NORTHWEST

Bound on the north by Lake Superior and running along the St. Croix River on its western border, the Northwest region is home to R-1, the state's first Rustic Road, and R-100, the 100th road added since the program began.

Following a section of the Flambeau Trail, a transportation route used by Native Americans and early fur traders, R-100 winds northward through 13.5 miles of beautiful back-country forests, lakes and waterways. Like many routes in this neck of the woods, it also offers the promise of a glimpse of the area's wildlife. Dense stands of hardwood forests guarantee brilliant displays of fall colors along this paved stretch that runs between Mercer and the Michigan border.

Only 2 miles long, R-62 serves as the only access to Timms Hill County Park, Wisconsin's highest point of land. Other scenic routes include a parallel lane along the Red Cedar River (R-89) south of Menomonie, a primitive stretch cut by small country streams (R-51) and a bucolic country road (R-92) whose shoulders are abloom with trilliums and other wildflowers each spring. Several more sylvan corridors ribbon through

Smack dab in the middle of Wisconsin, a dozen miles south of U.S. Highway 8, linking the state with Minnesota on the west and Michigan's Upper Peninsula on the east, lies what seems at first to be just another non-descript county road. It's a gravel band laid out over hills and through valleys sculpted by glaciers, winding its way past woodlands, fields and a scattering of lakes — a landscape that offers a sense of embarking on a more relaxing journey to the uncluttered and less hectic northern reaches of the upper Midwest in years gone by.

The commemorative marker along the route attests to the fact that there is indeed something special about this particular roadway. The 5-mile back-country lane is R-1, the first Wisconsin stretch to be officially designated a Rustic Road back in 1975. This year the state's Rustic Roads program celebrates 40 years of preserving the state's remaining "scenic, lightly traveled country roads for the leisurely enjoyment of bikers, hikers and motorists," as described by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

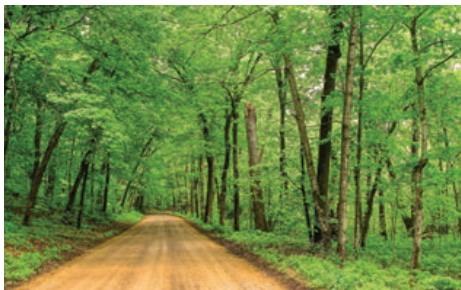
Currently, 117 Rustic Roads make up the network that includes 669 miles of routing through 59 counties, from the

southern shores of Lake Superior to the Illinois border, and from the Mississippi and St. Croix rivers along the state's western border east to Milwaukee and Door County along the shores of Lake Michigan. Each route is numbered in the order it was designated and is preceded with an "R" prefix. Road surfaces can be paved, dirt or gravel with a maximum speed limit of 45 MPH, although some are restricted to only 25 MPH.

Divided into four regions, the Rustic Roads network showcases Wisconsin's nature, history and culture along quaint and quiet country lanes. These local roads reveal the personality of each area and collectively express

Forty years after designating the first Rustic Road, Wisconsin continues to preserve its roads less traveled. (Below) R-56 is among several country lanes that wind through Amish communities scattered throughout the central part of the state.





Access to the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway (left) is through R-103's lush hardwood canopy (far left) and a short drive beyond the northern end of R-101, both of which parallel the waterway. (Below) Cana Island Road, designated R-38, passes through boreal forest to the island's 1870 light tower.

the north-country setting of the Chequamegon National Forest, many of which intersect regional hiking trails.

Historic buildings and sites such as old churches, schoolhouses and ethnic settlements are common along these routes throughout the state. In the Northwest region, the Smith Rapids Covered Bridge, one of two remaining covered bridges in Wisconsin, and a restored 1876 logging dam are key landmarks on R-105, northwest of Rhinelander.

NORTHEAST

Forests of conifers and hardwoods blanket the landscape between Wisconsin's northern border with Michigan and the Door County peninsula that juts out into Lake Michigan. Two state biking trails cross Rustic Roads in this section: the Red Cedar Bike Trail (R-107) and the Bear Skin State Trail (R-58).

Stone and arch bridges highlight the Northeast region's rich heritage of early settlements and developing agriculture, particularly in the Fox River Valley area just outside Appleton. Some of the vintage buildings featured along these routes include R-53's old silo and "century farm" — farmland owned by a single family for more than 100 years — reminders of the area's agricultural history.

A couple dozen miles northwest of Marinette lies the southern end of the longest Rustic Road in Wisconsin. Coursing its way north where it links up with Highway 8, R-32 takes travelers through a meandering 37.1-mile northern landscape of granite boulders and outcroppings, state forests and county parks. The route offers several opportunities to enjoy vistas of the Peshtigo and Thunder rivers and other flowages.

A bit farther north lies a 30-plus-mile loop of northern backcountry routes that make up R-74. Following streams and waterways in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest,

including the Popple River (a state-designated Wild River), this rustic gravel lane has an almost primeval feel.

Another Northeast highlight is the network of routes within Door County, all within sight of or in close proximity to scenic Lake Michigan. In Sturgeon Bay, R-77 skirts the shoreline for 3.5 miles, ending at a Coast Guard station and lighthouse at its southern end. Farther up the peninsula between Moonlight Bay and North Bay, R-38 brings the Cana Island Lighthouse into view. Its sister road, R-39, features the Toft Point State Natural Area and Ridges Sanctuary that showcase a variety of rare native plants.



Camping at High Cliff State Park.

IF YOU GO

Many Wisconsin Rustic Roads are within a few miles of commercial RV parks and public campgrounds at state parks and forests, if they don't skirt one directly. The following websites offer a broad range of camping options and other helpful information.

Good Sam Camping, www.goodsamcamping.com

Wisconsin Association of Campground Owners, www.wisconsincampgrounds.com/campgrounds

Wisconsin Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus, www.escapetowisconsin.com

Wisconsin Department of Tourism, www.travelwisconsin.com

Wisconsin State Park System, www.dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks/camping

SOUTHEAST

Lake Winnebago marks the northern extent of this corner of the state that includes Milwaukee and Madison, making it the most populated of the four Rustic Roads regions and therefore the one with the most parks and historic areas.

Several sites predate the Civil War. R-5 follows the route of the territorial road laid out in 1840. Cold Springs Cemetery along R-88 dates from the same period. Just south of Madison, R-19 passes a labor farm deeded in 1846, its documentation signed by President James Polk.

The Rustic Road outside the city of Portage has the distinction of being the shortest in the system. Less than a mile long, R-69 follows the Old Agency House Road. The house itself, built in 1832, sits adjacent to the Portage Canal, a system of locks and canals constructed to connect the Fox River with the Wisconsin River and provide continuous river traffic

GETTING THERE

By definition, Wisconsin's Rustic Roads are lightly traveled country lanes. Those with large RVs may want to consider touring the narrower routes in a tow vehicle or bringing bikes or walking shoes. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation has overseen the Rustic Roads program for 40 years and offers an informative website with route descriptions, lengths and road surfaces along with detailed maps.

www.wisconsin.gov/pages/travel/road/rustic-roads



from Green Bay to the Gulf of Mexico. Remains of the Old Fort Winnebago Locks structure are still visible from the edge of this Rustic Road.

Parklands and other natural areas are common throughout the network. In the Southeast, a section of R-52, a half-hour's drive north of downtown Milwaukee, runs adjacent to Cedarburg Bog State Natural Area, called "one of the largest and most biologically diverse wetland areas in

Wisconsin" by the state's Department of Transportation. Farther west, an opportunity to view the famous sandhill cranes of Horicon Marsh is enhanced by access to the Bud Cook Hiking Trail beyond the West Point Road segment of R-106.

Fields of wildflowers and a diverse array of upland birds make R-72 west of Oshkosh a popular 3.1-mile nature drive routed through the middle of 270 acres of Nature Conservancy land.

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SOUTHWEST

The Southwest's 70-some miles of Rustic Roads hold their own against more than 600 miles in the other three regions. Only 12 Rustic Roads are represented in this region that lies along Wisconsin's western border and the Mississippi River. Despite that proximity, R-99, 33 miles south of Prairie du Chien, is the only route on the western border with a segment that follows the river.

A bit farther north near La Crosse,

R-26 offers a commanding view of the Mississippi River Valley from Brinkman Ridge. R-21, about 15 miles southwest of Baraboo, skirts Natural Bridges State Park, the oldest primitive human site in the upper Midwest and the location of Wisconsin's largest natural arch.

This is a geologically diverse region where deep valleys, bluffs, rock outcroppings and rolling farmland create a patchwork quilt of landscapes. It's an unglaciated "driftless" area with

boulder-strewn fields, sandy soil and glacial moraine, visual reminders that this part of the state wasn't affected by the last Ice Age.

One of the most spectacular scenic areas is the area around Wildcat Mountain State Park. R-56 winds through the countryside just west of the park's towering rock formations and high ridgelines with panoramic views of woodlands and farms. Most roadsides are bursting with blooming wildflowers in the spring and broad expanses of brilliant colors in the fall.

R-70 and R-75 north of Platteville pass through a region settled by German and Welsh immigrants in the mid- to late 1800s. It's not unusual to come upon a horse-drawn wagon here and along other routes, as several Rustic Roads travel through small Amish settlements scattered across the state.

Just north of La Crosse, another unique Southwest road is 2.7-mile R-64 that reaches the entrance to McGilvray Road. Known locally as Seven Bridges Road and accessible only on foot, the historic thoroughfare's seven bowstring-arch bridges are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

FOLLOW THE SIGNS

Rustic Roads are marked with the network's distinctive brown-and-gold signs. A placard below each sign shows the R-prefix route number. Most routes are posted well in advance of junctions or intersections, while a few have to be sought out. Segments tend to run less than a half-dozen miles long and are typically accessible within a short distance of a major highway. While some of the roads are dirt or gravel, all are well maintained and nonthreatening to all but the largest vehicles.

Each Rustic Road has its own personality, its own natural and manmade attractions, and its own snippets of local and regional history. Linking to a slower paced yesteryear, the network of Rustic Roads provides a colorful and revealing tapestry stitched with decorative, nostalgic threads. They are quiet county roads away from mainstream traffic and cluttered development to enjoy at an unhurried pace. 🚗



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FULL TIMERS: 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.

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OUT YONDER IN OREGON



It takes a little time to reach this remote part of the West, but visitors to the state's far-northeastern corner are richly rewarded once they arrive

Northeastern Oregon is one of the best-kept secrets in the West. Home of the glorious alpine peaks of the Wallowa Mountains, it is a land of bucolic hills and valleys dotted with picturesque ranches and charming small towns. When my husband, Mark, and I took our 36-foot HitchHiker fifth-wheel on a road trip to this special corner of Oregon, we were enchanted by what we found.

Our first stop was Baker City (population 9,769), the largest town in the area other than La Grande (population 13,074). When we hopped out of our truck and began walking around, we were surprised by the many graceful Victorian and Art Deco buildings that line the city streets. Eye-catching Baker Tower rises nine stories above the town and has been the tallest

building in Oregon east of the Cascade Range since it was built in 1929. Nearby, the ornate Geiser Grand Hotel dates back to 1899 and radiates an elegant aura reminiscent of a bygone era.

Once a stopping point on the Oregon Short Line Railroad, this understated yet sophisticated city has miraculously resisted change throughout the decades while somehow still keeping up with

the times. As appealing as Baker City is, growth is not part of its essence, and the population has hovered between 9,400 and 9,900 residents since 1940. Yet, despite its refusal to allow big-box stores and industry to taint the outer edges of town with commercialism, modern culture is alive and well in the historic downtown. In summertime, when its many restaurants and bistros open their doors and spill out onto the sidewalks with street-side tables and chairs, the vibe in Baker City is decidedly youthful.

Every June the city holds a four-day bicycle stage race in which athletic cyclists vie for top honors in four races in and around town, akin to a mini Tour

Snowcapped beauty in northeastern Oregon's Wallowa Mountains. (Top) Trespassing? Who, me?





(Above from left) With a spectacular view, the beach at Wallowa Lake is a great place for sunbathing and swimming. The Wallowa Lake Tramway ascends 3,700 feet as it zips to the summit of Mount Howard.

de France. We joined the throngs of people at outdoor cafés drinking Oregon microbrews and watched the final stage of the race that goes in a circuit around the city streets. A colorful blur of cyclists flew past us over and over, as the announcer excitedly clocked speeds reaching nearly 40 MPH in the professional men's category.

Long before playing host to bicycle races, Baker City made its name with gold mines, and one of the biggest gold nuggets ever found is on display inside the city's U.S. Bank branch. Weighing in at more than 5 pounds, the fist-size hunk of gold was unearthed by George Armstrong in 1913. It escaped being melted down and is now one of the largest gold nuggets around. Valued at \$100,000 in today's prices, it is worth several times that as a collectible. Our eyes popped as we stared at it in its glass case and imagined what

Armstrong must have thought as he carried it on the train in his pocket to nearby Sumpter, where he had it appraised.

Entrepreneur and business magnate Leo Adler was born in Baker City. He launched his career with a walking route delivering the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies' Home Journal* and wound up the head of a massive magazine-reshipping dynasty. The lovely 1889 home he lived in for 94 years until his death at age 98 in 1993 is now a museum. Besides his pretty home, what we appreciated most about this self-made millionaire was the wonderful paved path his foundation built around town. The trail winds along the back of neighborhood streets and is popular not only with local walkers and runners but with deer, too.

Traveling north and east from Baker City, we felt like we had arrived at the

end of the world. We visited the tiny village of Joseph, tucked up against the soaring Wallowa Mountains at the end of a dead-end road. This small community of just 1,000 residents basks in a beautiful place that looks out upon pastoral landscapes filled with classic red barns. Every view is backed by exquisite mountain peaks, and until midsummer these towering pinnacles are crowned with snow.

The village of Joseph is an ideal little walking town, and we enjoyed many a happy stroll along the main drag. Red Horse Coffee Traders is a favorite gathering spot for locals and tourists alike, not only for its welcoming ambience and fresh-roasted coffee, but because it is a reliable place to find an Internet connection in this remote outpost.

(Below) For a fun excursion on unused railroad tracks, join the Joseph Branch Railriders tour. **(Right)** The annual Baker City Cycling Classic is the small-town answer to the Tour de France.





(Above from left) The Wallowas frame every view in the charming village of Joseph. On the other side of the mountain range, Baker City's Victorian and Art Deco architecture is a delight.

On many days we saw an odd four-wheeled contraption sitting on the front lawn of the coffee shop. It had twin recumbent seats, bicycle pedals and thick plastic-rimmed wheels. We got talking with a fellow named Kim Metlen sitting at a folding table nearby, and he explained that this vehicle was a "railrider." Before long, we had signed up to ride one on a tour he leads every day on the old railroad tracks just outside of town.

Metlen's Joseph Branch Railriders tour takes a unique approach to making new use of old abandoned railroad tracks. Rather than a rails-to-trails

program that removes the rails and ties from the ground, this rail-riding venture leaves the decommissioned railway in place and allows people to ride on the tracks using his custom-built tandem rail cycles. You can see the landscape from reclining side-by-side seats near ground level.

At the appointed hour, we found the four-wheelers lined up at the end of the rail line in Joseph, and two-dozen people showed up to pedal them the 6 miles out to the village of Enterprise. Helmets were required, even though it is nearly impossible to go more than 15 MPH, and there is no way the railriders

The Wallowa Mountains create a stunning backdrop to the rolling farmland outside Joseph, Oregon.



OREGON TRAIL: Some of the charm of this part of the Wallowa Mountains is its relative inaccessibility. The best way to get to Enterprise and Joseph with a big RV is from the west on Route 82 via the La Grande exit on Interstate 84. Roads coming into Enterprise from the north and Joseph from the southeast are narrow and have tight switchbacks.

WHERE TO STAY IN THE WALLOWAS

Although it's sparsely populated, the route from Baker City to Joseph in northeastern Oregon has plenty of places for intrepid RVers.

BAKER CITY

Mountain View RV Park (Good Sam Park)

541-523-4824, www.mtviewrv.com

Oregon Trails West RV Park (Good Sam Park)

541-523-3236

www.goodsamcamping.com

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

541-523-6391

www.fs.usda.gov/wallowa-whitman

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www.5peaksrvpark.com

Mountain View RV Park

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www.mtviewmotel-rvpark.com

Park at the River

541-432-8800, www.parkattheriver.com

Wallowa Lake State Park

541-432-4185

www.oregonstateparks.org

WALLOWA

Wallowa River RV Park

541-886-7002

www.wallowariverrvpark.com

Wallowa Valley Stay N' Wash

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www.wallowavalley.name

The end of another spectacular day at a tranquil campsite in northeastern Oregon.

can tip over. Metlen had helmets available for anyone who didn't bring their own.

The views along this trail were lovely, with mountains, valleys and distant farmlands stretching out before us. Each railrider was ridden by two people, and we all went at our own pace. In no time at all, it seemed, we had reached our destination in Enterprise, and everyone hopped out to walk around. The cars are light, so each pair of riders easily picked up theirs to turn it around to face the other way. Then we jumped back on again and rode back to Joseph, watching the mountains grow ever larger as we pedaled.

Stunning Wallowa Lake lies at the south end of Joseph, nestled into the base of the Wallowa Mountains. It is a long and skinny lake that runs north-south, and we drove along the scenic shore-side roads that flank its sides. Wanting to get up into the mountains for a view without too much effort, we took a gondola ride on the Wallowa Lake Tramway to the top of Mount Howard, 8,000 feet above sea level, where the panoramic vistas go on forever.

The tramway was built as part of a planned ski resort, but the ski runs were never created. Today, it makes for an easy way to get to the top of the Wallowa Mountains for a bird's-eye view of the Eagle Cap Wilderness. At the summit, we took the short hike around the mountain peak and enjoyed a tasty lunch at the restaurant, where we sat on a deck overlooking the lake and watched the gondolas floating up and down the mountainside.

Down at Wallowa Lake, we joined sunbathers catching the rays at a beautiful beach on the north end. Both kids and adults braved very cold water to swim, and lots of folks were out on kayaks and paddleboards. A few savvy people put their beach chairs right into the water so they could cool their toes, toss back a cold one and get a tan all at the same time.

At the south end, near the Wallowa Lake Tramway, Wallowa Lake State Park



snuggles along the edge of the shore. The park offers swimming, a boat launch and a small marina as well as pretty campsites. This end of the lake has other RV camping options, too, and several private campgrounds are situated right next door to the state park.

Back in the town of Joseph, we were fascinated by the big, beautiful bronze sculptures of Western and Indian themes that decorate many street corners. Valley Bronze of Oregon has its foundry in Joseph, where it offers tours, and there's a large gallery in town as well. We discovered that the town of Joseph itself has become a mecca for sculptors and other artists of all kinds.

The town is named for Chief Joseph, the leader of the Nez Perce tribe at the time that the Nez Perce were forcibly moved to Idaho from their homeland in the Wallowa Mountains. He was a peaceful and eloquent leader, and his many pleas for fair racial treatment — made shortly after the Emancipation Proclamation — were sadly met with deaf ears. He ultimately led his tribe in a run for Canada in hopes of obtaining political asylum for his people, but the U.S. Army was hot on his heels, and he eventually surrendered.

A regal bronze sculpture of Chief Joseph, created by artist Georgia Bunn and cast by Valley Bronze, was purchased by Christy Walton, daughter-in-law of Walmart founder Sam Walton, and donated to the town. Other vivid bronze depictions of Sacagawea, a

cowboy on a bucking bronco and a soaring eagle also grace the streets, each surrounded by vibrant, multicolored beds of flowers.

For outdoorsy folks, lots of excellent hiking trails wind through the Wallowa Mountains. Our favorite was the Hurricane Creek Trail a few miles outside of Joseph. After fording a rather intimidating looking stream by walking across an enormous fallen tree, the trail took us through the woods past colorful meadows filled with wildflowers and backed by mountains. After a bit of a climb, we eventually came to a waterfall.

The trail continued past the falls, but we had gotten so caught up in enjoying the views and taking photographs in the meadows that it was late in the day and we decided to turn back. A quick stop at Terminal Gravity Brewing in Enterprise for delicious local beers and burgers at a picnic table under the shady embrace of some wide trees was the perfect way to end a great day of hiking. 📷

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Joseph Branch Railriders
541-910-0089, www.jbrailriders.com

Travel Oregon
800-547-7842, www.traveloregon.com

Valley Bronze Foundry Tours
541-432-7551, www.valleybronze.com

Wallowa Lake Tramway
541-432-5331, www.wallowalaketramway.com

G R E A T A M E R I C A

FIVE SPINE-TINGLING DESTINATIONS

Fall is the season to get out on the open road for a quick weekend getaway or a relaxed longer trip to enjoy the changing leaf colors, autumn festivals and, if you pick your stops right, some hair-raising experiences. Just in time for Halloween, we've selected five of America's most supernatural haunts, along with an assortment of nearby RV parks that are considerably more down to earth. Prepare to be scared. *Mwahahahahaha...!*

NORTH-CENTRAL TENNESSEE

Sooner or later, anyone searching for well-known paranormal activities in American history will likely come across the tale of the Bell Witch. If you travel through middle Tennessee seeking a thrill from this legendary haunting, you'll be among thousands of visitors to do so over the centuries, including President Andrew Jackson.

Less than an hour's drive from Nashville, the Bell Witch Cave and homestead (www.bellwitchcave.com) are in the small town of Adams. According to local lore, the Bell Witch is the spirit of Kate Batts, a neighbor of the Bell family in the early 1800s. Batts

believed she had been swindled by John Bell in a land purchase and swore on her deathbed to haunt his family. In the years that followed, it is said that the Bells were tormented by a poltergeist that came to be known as the Bell Witch.

Fall is an ideal time to visit this spectral site, as locals put on a festival (www.bellwitchfallfestival.com) and a play highlighting the ghostly legend. For those who appreciate history and the outdoors, the Bell farm also shows how rural families lived during the 1800s and is close to the Red River for canoeing and kayaking.

If you'd like to read up on the history of haunts in the area prior to



Visitors to the Bell Home in Adams, Tennessee (above), may find themselves sharing the company of a witch.



Nicknamed the Rock, San Francisco Bay's Alcatraz Island is said to be haunted by the ghosts of prison inmates.

I CAN HAUNTS

TO VISIT THIS HALLOWEEN SEASON

visiting, seek out *The Bell Witch: The Full Account* (www.bellwitch.org) by longtime historian Pat Fitzhugh. For fun fall activities in nearby Nashville, visit www.thenashvilletraveler.com.

Clarksville

Clarksville RV Park and Campground (Good Sam Park)

931-648-8638

www.clarksvillervpark.com

Nashville

Nashville North KOA

615-859-0348

koa.com/campgrounds/nashville-north

Nashville Shores Lakeside Resort

615-889-7050

www.nashvilleshores.com

Two Rivers Campground

(Good Sam Park)

615-883-8559

www.tworiverscampground.com

SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

Not only is San Francisco an amazing place to visit in the fall for seasonal festivals to enjoy by day, but, come nightfall, the city has more than its share of paranormal activities. Well-known haunts include Golden Gate Park's Stow Lake, the Queen Anne Hotel and the Curran Theatre.

One of the most famous haunts is Alcatraz Island (www.nps.gov/alca), home to a federal prison from 1933 to 1963. Reports from both tourists and ghost hunters include unexplainable sounds and smells, and banjo music believed to be played by the most infamous Alcatraz inmate, gangster Al Capone. Beyond visiting "the Rock" for its ghostly associations, visitors can enjoy the island's tide pools, bird-watching opportunities and spectacular views of the bay.

In nearby San Jose, the sprawling



San Jose, California's Winchester Mystery House has been called "The most haunted house in the world."

Winchester Mystery House (www.winchestermysteryhouse.com) has been called "the most haunted house in the world." Constructed over the course of several decades by Sarah Winchester, the vast Victorian-style mansion was supposed to ward off spirits of those killed by her deceased husband's famous repeating rifles. The



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widow's psychic advised her never to stop building, and the cavernous residence's curiously twisting hallways, secret passageways, and rising and falling staircases attest to that. Now a tourist attraction listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the mazelike home has triggered numerous ghostly sightings.

Be sure to time your autumn visit to coincide with regional wineries' magical time of year called the Crush, the culmination of the yearlong process of growing wine grapes. Many wineries in nearby Napa and Sonoma counties host fall events surrounding the grape harvest.

Greenbrae

Marin Park (Good Sam Park)

888-461-5199, www.marinrvpark.com

Petaluma

San Francisco North/Petaluma KOA

707-763-1492
www.sanfranciscokoa.com

San Jose

Coyote Valley RV Resort (Good Sam Park)

866-376-5500
www.coyotevalleyresort.com

Visitors may not think of a haunted house when seeing this stately B&B in upstate New York, but overnight guests reportedly include those of an otherworldly nature.

WEST-CENTRAL NEW YORK

For a fall trip that includes not only local haunts but scenic views, outdoor activities and family fun, follow the Haunted History Trail of New York (www.hauntedhistorytrail.com).

Spanning 13 counties across the state, the trail is rife with legends of spirits dating back to early Native Americans and the first Dutch settlers.

East Bethany's Rolling Hills Asylum, a stop on the trail in the Finger Lakes region, was rated the second most haunted U.S. site by Haunted North America. Other stops in the Finger Lakes include the Allegiance Bed & Breakfast (www.allegiancebandb.com) in Mount Morris, a mansion that looks like a miniature White House. Rumored to have visitors of an otherworldly nature, the lodging was named for "Pledge of Allegiance" author Francis Bellamy, who was born nearby.

When not in pursuit of the paranormal, fall trips to the Finger Lakes can include harvest festivals, apple-tasting tours and corn mazes. Finger Lakes vineyards wrap up the

growing season with a host of October events, and the annual Autumn Festival of Ales, on October 3 this year, brings thousands of craft-beer lovers to the village of Honeoye Falls.

Byron

Southwoods RV Resort (Good Sam Park)

585-548-9002
www.southwoodsrvresort.com

Ithaca

Pinecreek Campground (Good Sam Park)

607-273-1974
www.pinecreekcampground.com

Spruce Row Campground and RV Park (Good Sam Park)

607-387-9225, www.sprucerow.com

Springwater

Holiday Hill RV Resort (Good Sam Park)

800-719-2267
www.holidayhillcampground.com

Watkins Glen

W.W. Clute Memorial Park and Campground

607-535-4438, www.watkinsglen.us/clute-park-campground



Chicago's famous Drake Hotel is just as well known for the guests who aren't on the reservation list.

GREATER CHICAGO

While the Windy City might ward off some tourists when temperatures become bitterly cold in the winter, September and October are ideal to visit for autumn festivals, spectacular fall colors and reasonable temperatures. To get into the spirit of the Halloween season, visitors can also seek out some of Chicagoland's favorite haunts.

In the city itself, one of most celebrated haunted places is the Drake Hotel (www.thedrakehotel.com), built in 1920. While the Beaux-Arts hotel has many mysterious happenings in its history, the best-known ghost is the Woman in Red who haunts the 10th floor. The specter is said to be the spirit of a woman who jumped out a 10th-floor window after learning of her husband's infidelity at a New Year's Eve party the year the hotel opened.

Venture outside the city about 30 minutes to Midlothian, and you'll find an abandoned cemetery known as Bachelor's Grove, with numerous

reports of ghosts and supernatural occurrences spanning its history. Cuba Road, which lies between the towns of Lake Zurich and Barrington, has sittings of all sorts of paranormal phenomenon, including phantom cars, spectral lovers and a vanishing house. Along Cuba Road lies White Cemetery, a small graveyard dating from the 1820s known for "mysterious hovering balls of light," according to folk historian Michael Kleen (www.mysteriousheartland.com).

Joliet

Leisure Lake Membership Resort (Good Sam Park)

815-741-9405, www.leisurelakeresort.com

Marengo

Lehman's Lakeside RV Resort (Good Sam Park)

815-923-4533, www.lehmanrv.com

Yorkville

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630-553-6323, www.hideawaylakes.com



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TOMBSTONE, ARIZONA

For a taste of the Old West and a hauntingly good time, swing by the tourist town of Tombstone, 70 miles southeast of Tucson. With a name that says it all, Tombstone was a dangerous place in the late 1800s. In less than seven years, Tombstone's population grew from 100 inhabitants to around 14,000 with the success of local silver mines. The West's most famous shootout took place at the town's O.K. Corral between a band of outlaw cowboys and legendary lawmen Doc Holliday and the Earp brothers.

Tombstone's best-known sites still stand for visitors to experience, including the Bird Cage Theatre (www.tombstonebirdcage.com), where, according to legend, 26 people were killed during an eight-year period. In 1882 *The New York Times* called it "The wildest, wickedest night spot between Basin Street and the Barbary coast."

The spirits of those who died violent deaths are said to walk the streets of

The Old West comes alive in Tombstone, Arizona, at the 1881 Bird Cage Theatre, said to be haunted by the many souls who were murdered inside.

Tombstone and haunt nearby Boot Hill Graveyard. On weekends, the Tombstone Trolley offers a Ghost and Murder Tour that visits haunted landmarks. More eerie fun can be found on the Gunfighter and Ghost Tour (www.tombstone-ghost.com), a walking tour that visits ghostly places, and at Sister Paranormal, where guests are in for an evening of "spirit contact."

Each fall the town throws its biggest annual event, Tombstone Territorial Days (www.tombstoneterritorialdays.com), a celebration of Arizona's military history that started in 1929 and takes place September 19 and 20 this year.

Bisbee

Black Canyon Ranch RV Resort (Good Sam Park)

623-374-9800

www.blackcanyonranchrv.com



Double Adobe Campground and Shotgun Sports (Good Sam Park)

800-694-4242, www.doubleadobe.com

Turquoise Valley Golf, Restaurant and RV (Good Sam Park)

520-432-3091, www.turquoisevalley.com

Huachuca City

Mountain View RV Park (Good Sam Park)

520-456-2860

www.mountainviewrvpark.com

Tombstone

Tombstone Territories RV Resort (Good Sam Park)

877-316-6714

www.tombstoneterritories.com

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Big Family Fun

The Ford Expedition EL and Denali Lite 2611BH travel trailer have more than enough room for your adventures

We've all heard the popular expression "Go big or go home." But if you have a large family and you're passionate about RVing, you pretty much have to go big or stay home. Finding the right setup to accommodate your own Brady Bunch used to require a station wagon or van, a travel trailer and a couple of extra tents, with the inevitable quarreling that would ensue about who was going to sleep where. Thankfully, the RV industry has addressed this need with a wide range of so-called bunkhouse models that not only are equipped with bunk beds but are designed from the very beginning for family comfort with larger sofas and dinettes that also turn into beds. Pair one of these trailers with a three-row SUV, and you have the makings for big family fun.

To get the party started, we selected Ford's recently updated, top-of-the-line 2015 Expedition EL Platinum and hitched it up to a 2016 Dutchmen Denali Lite 2611BH travel trailer. The Expedition EL, which offers three-row seating and room for up to eight, has a longer wheelbase than the standard Expedition (131 inches versus 119 inches) and more cargo space. In fact, with up to 130.8 cubic feet of real estate available, the EL is best in class

— but, more importantly, it still offers usable storage when the third-row seat is up. That's not something every three-row SUV can claim.

Plus, when equipped with the towing package (standard in the Platinum), this big ute can tow up to 9,100 pounds, more than enough to contend with the Denali Lite's claimed dry weight of 7,019 pounds. And though the trailer's gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) is 9,680 pounds, that leaves 2,081 pounds of

cargo capacity with water and propane onboard before exceeding the Expedition's maximum towing capacity. Just remember that if you pack the Expedition with as many people as seatbelts, you need to be aware of all that passenger weight, as the Expedition's gross combination weight rating (GCWR) is part of what determines its tow rating.

Before hitching up, we spent several days using the Expedition EL as a family vehicle. Living in the greater Los Angeles area, driving something this large on crowded streets and highways, not to mention densely populated parking lots, could pose a problem, but Ford did an admirable job of keeping this SUV's considerable bulk manageable. Mechanically speaking, the standard 3.5-liter EcoBoost V-6 engine, six-speed SelectShift automatic transmission with manual mode, quick steering, powerful brakes and composed suspension combine to make the extra-long Expo feel much smaller than it really is. Add the standard blind-spot info system (which incorporates rear-cross-traffic monitoring in addition to blind-spot monitoring), a standard rear backup camera and front/rear parking sensors, and it's hard to make a mistake as long as you're paying attention.



The Expedition EL looks great in its brilliant Ruby Red paint. The Denali Lite features a painted-gelcoat fiberglass front cap with LED lighting.

The Expedition's 2015 facelift was a vast improvement. This new Expedition looks much more athletic and chiseled than its predecessor, which now looks bulbous by comparison. Resplendent in gorgeous Ruby Red paint and optional polished 22-inch aluminum wheels (20-inchers are standard in the Platinum grade), the test Expedition had an air of elegance that continued once inside the expansive cabin. Perforated leather driver and front-passenger seats with double French stitching and 10-way power adjustability are both heated and ventilated, and although we had no occasion to use the heating feature, the ventilation worked well to keep our backs dry when entering the sun-soaked vehicle. Getting comfortable behind the wheel is easy for drivers of any size, thanks to power-adjustable pedals and a steering column that offers power-tilt and telescoping functions.

Front and center is a large touchscreen display that offers entertainment, phone, voice-activated navigation (part of Equipment Group 600A) and climate-control functions, as well as a rearview camera display. The screen is large, clear and easy to read, and there are redundant controls for volume, tuning, media and climate. But it doesn't end there. The steering wheel features buttons for cruise and Bluetooth phone functions, while a multidirectional control lets you cycle through various readouts on the display to the left of the speedometer. Ordinarily, this defaults to a small tachometer, but start



(Clockwise from top left) The bunkhouse features power-operated bunks and a large rear cargo door for loading bikes and recreational gear. The L-shaped galley countertop provides plenty of room for food prep. The forward bedroom is small but comfortable. The U-shaped dinette has room for four to six; the comfortable couch looks good and converts into a bed.

pushing buttons and you can get readouts for trip/fuel, towing, off-road, settings, digital speed, oil pressure, oil temperature, transmission oil temperature and more. Once you get used to scrolling through the various menus, you can do it quickly and find what you want pretty easily.

In a family vehicle, there has to be plenty of room to put stuff, and the Expedition has two cup holders next to the shifter and two more at the rear of the center console for second-row passengers. The center console is large and deep, and features two USB ports, a 12-volt DC port and an SD-card slot. There's also a handy pouch so you won't lose small items in the compartment's expanse, as well as slots for change and other small things. The lid is padded and comfortable, as are the armrests.

Second-row passengers won't suffer. These seats offer a heat function, independent climate controls on the back of the second-row console, and both 12-volt DC and 120-volt AC outlets to power accessories. Air conditioning is ducted through the ceiling so everyone can remain cool and collected, even on the hottest days. The third row, as in most SUVs, is best suited for kids, or

smaller adults on shorter trips. To access it, pull the strap at the second-row headrest to fold it down, pull a handle at the base of the seat to fold the seat-back forward, then pull another strap at the back of the seat to tumble the entire assembly. It sounds like a lot of work, but once you understand the concept, it goes pretty quickly.

Loading gear for a family trip is easy in the Expedition EL Platinum. The power rear liftgate opens almost silently with two quick pushes on the key fob, and we found the cargo area behind the third row large enough to stow luggage for five adults. If more room is required, and you can sacrifice the third row, a simple push of a button folds those seatbacks down.

Overall, we found very little not to like about this rig, except for the expansive use of chrome interior trim. Sure, it looks nice — but on a bright day, the many chrome flourishes blind you from almost every direction. There is chrome trim on the steering wheel, around every air-conditioning vent, on/around the shift handle, around the cup holders and on the door handles. It would be nice if chrome were a stand-alone option on the Platinum, as its

The bathroom has thoughtful touches like a bathtub with a curtain and a separate entry door.

oppressive brilliance was the only thing we disliked in this interior.

There were other minor annoyances. We don't understand the point of push-button start when you still have to pull the key fob out of your pocket to open the passenger doors — especially considering that the liftgate can be opened with a button on its handle with the key fob in your pocket. Either make the whole vehicle hands-free or don't bother. And, as is common with vehicles with a system such as this, the vehicle sends an alert when you walk away from it with the engine running and the fob in your pocket — except, instead of a quiet beep, it issues an annoying full-blast honk.

When it came to attaching the trailer, however, we found that we couldn't ask for a better towing companion. Once you specify Limited grade, you get the Heavy Duty Trailer Tow Package, which includes a Class IV receiver, wiring harness with four- and seven-pin connectors, auxiliary transmission cooler, heavy-duty radiator and an integrated trailer-brake controller. The engine has more than enough power to get the combo moving, and once under way, the ride is limo quiet. Turbo lag is noticeable at times, and the transmission can be lazy, especially when shifting between drive and reverse in a U-turn situation. Overall, however, this is a tow vehicle that will inspire confidence, and its extra length kept the nearly 34-foot trailer very stable, even with moderate side winds.



The Expedition EL interior is well finished, and the center stack is easy to navigate, thanks to its large touch screen and redundant controls. Chrome trim looks good but can be blinding on bright days. Leather seats offer power adjustment, heating and ventilation.

The Denali Lite 2611BH is a new floorplan for Dutchmen, and a well conceived one at that. As mentioned earlier, bunkhouse models are becoming increasingly popular, but a lot of interesting details make this model particularly family-friendly. For example, the rear bunks are not fixed; their height is power adjustable, similar to what you would find in a toy hauler. This is a pretty cool feature, because you can raise them all the way up, open the rear cargo door and have room for bikes or other items — sort of like a mini-toy hauler (but not for motorized toys).

Lower the bunks and you have enough height for two bunks with two sleepers on each, and if need be, Dutchmen supplies another thin mattress that can go on the floor for a triple bunk. The mattresses are thin and firm, but have a nice plush upholstery that should make them reasonably comfortable and warm in the colder months. There's also a ladder for the kids to get up to the upper bunk and privacy

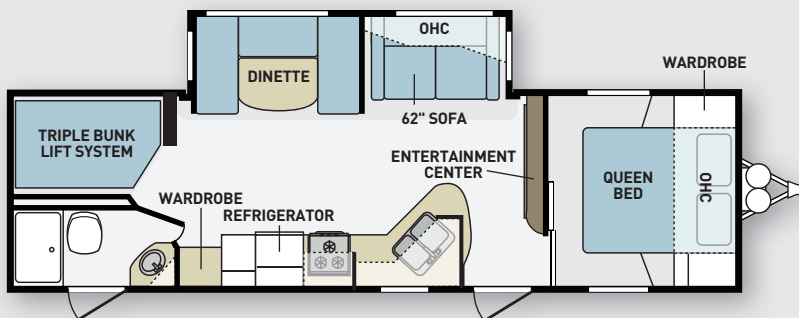
curtains so they can get some shut-eye while Mom and Dad are still up. There's even a location for an LCD television that is viewable only from the lower bunk, which may cause sibling rivalry but is a nice option, nonetheless.

The bath is thoughtfully placed right next to the bunk area and offers kid-friendly features like a bathtub with a curtain and separate entry door so kids can use the bathroom without tracking dirt, water, etc. through the living area. The toilet and a corner lavatory with mirror occupy the remaining space. There isn't much storage here otherwise, but adjacent to the bathroom is a good-size wardrobe with room for hanging clothes and three large drawers beneath.

On the street side in the large slideout (the only one in the unit) is a big U-shaped dinette that can easily seat four and perhaps six, depending on the size of the family. The table is supported by two posts, so it's nice and stable, and like all good travel trailer dinettes, it turns into a bed for two more sleepers. If you're keeping track, that's as many as eight smallish overnight guests so far, but we're not done yet. Next to the dinette in the same slide is a 62-inch sofa that is not only comfortable but converts into another bed for two more guests.

Across from the living-room slideout is the kitchen, which is semi-L-shaped and offers plenty of space to work with. Laminate countertops designed to look like granite are functional and attractive, and play nicely with the Beauflor faux-plank flooring and dark furniture, a popular scheme

DUTCHMEN DENALI LITE 2611BH



SPECIFICATIONS

2016 DENALI LITE 2611BH

Exterior Length	33' 10"
Exterior Width	8'
Exterior Height	10' 11"
Interior Width	7' 8"
Interior Height	6' 10"

Construction
Laminated aluminum frame; bowed wood rafter system (16 inches on center); one-piece TPO roof; one-piece painted-gelcoat fiberglass front cap

Freshwater Cap.	63 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	42/42 gal.
LP-gas Cap.	14 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	8 cu. ft.
Furnace	30,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu
Converter	60 amp
Battery	Dealer supplied
Tires	ST225/75R15
Weight (claimed, dry)	7,019 lbs.
Hitch Weight	908 lbs.
GVWR	9,680 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	2,661 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$28,268
MSRP, as tested	\$40,754
Basic Warranty	1 year

Dutchmen Manufacturing

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Fuel Economy, Towing	9.8 mpg
Engine	3.5L EcoBoost V-6
Horsepower	365 @ 5,000 rpm
Torque	420 lb.-ft. @ 2,500 rpm
Transmission	Six-speed SelectShift automatic
Axle Ratio	3.31:1
Fuel Cap.	33.5 gal.
Tires	285/45R22
Suspension, Front	Independent
Suspension, Rear	Independent
Brakes	4-wheel disc with ABS
Tow Rating	9,100 lbs.
Length	18' 4"
Wheelbase	131"
MSRP, base	\$ 64,320
MSRP, as tested	\$ 66,895
Basic Warranty	3 years/36,000 miles

Ford Motor Company

www.ford.com/expedition

these days. The sink and faucet are plastic, but the sink cover is genuine wood, which looks nice and can double as a cutting board. There are cabinets above, two large drawers below and a couple of cubbies, plus a large door underneath that will accommodate a normal-size kitchen trash can. On the other side of the kitchen L in the entryway are two more large drawers for food storage or anything else you might need quick access to.

A familiar three-burner Atwood stove/oven provides cooking heat, and for quick meals there's a small High Pointe microwave oven mounted above. An 8-cubic-foot Norcold refrigerator with a wood front and generously proportioned pantry with two drawers underneath round out the chef's quarters.

The forward entertainment center has a 32-inch LED HD Furrion television and features a large cubby to the left with a shelf in the middle. A Furrion radio/DVD player does the job and also operates exterior speakers located underneath a large awning with exterior lighting. There are cabinets underneath as well for additional storage. The living area is light and bright, courtesy of the LED lighting, large windows and a skylight/vent above the kitchen. Our only complaint here is that, on a hot day with the sun overhead, you'll get cooked while making lunch. Plan on a skylight cover, and you'll be fine.

Spoiler alert: You won't be blown away by the forward bedroom. It has enough room to sleep on the queen-size bed, which, of course, is the bottom-line function of a bedroom — but that's about it. There is a tall, narrow mirrored wardrobe on the left and a mirrored cabinet on the right (each with a drawer underneath), plus more cabinets overhead. The trailer we sampled had no TV, but there is a supplied mounting location on the forward wall that would put a TV in perfect view for watching from bed. A nice added touch is the sliding bedroom door, which offers more privacy and quiet than a curtain.

Outside, the Denali Lite has a large pass-through storage compartment up front, which is fairly common on today's travel trailers. What is uncommon, however, is the placement of the utilities. The dump valves, power inlet, city-water connection and a port for the exterior spray hose are at the left rear of the trailer (where they should be), but the cable connection is in the front of the slideout, and the black-tank flush is on the *opposite* side.

Quirks notwithstanding, the Denali Lite 2611BH is a well-executed floorplan that can sleep as many as a dozen (albeit small) people, if need be, and when paired with the Expedition EL, makes for easy travel to wherever your family adventures take you. 🗺️





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article by Ty Adams

CLASS OF 2016

FROM LIGHTWEIGHT TRAVEL TRAILERS TO LUXURY FIFTH-WHEELS AND INNOVATIVE TOY HAULERS, A DOZEN NEW FLOORPLANS AND LINEUPS MAKE AUSPICIOUS DEBUTS THIS MODEL YEAR

Even with sales numbers telling a story of recovery in both the towable and motorized RV markets for the past several years, not many manufacturers found it easy to jump directly back into major product line expansions in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. That all seems to be changing, with companies like Jayco, K-Z and Thor not only adding to product lines but to employee count and production capacity as well.

"After a long period where we were reluctant to hire in the hangover to the recession, we made the conscious effort last year to put that behind us," said Bob Wheeler, CEO of Thor-owned Airstream, while discussing the

company's recent completion of a 92,000-square-foot expansion. CrossRoads, Grand Design, Forest River, Keystone and Winnebago are among other RV manufacturers expanding facilities and boosting employee numbers to meet the growing demand.

With this level of investment happening across the industry, there is almost certainly more to come. In the towable market, the next wave of growth appears to be upon us, as model year 2016 is already rife with new models and floorplans. From price-conscious and premium toy haulers to luxury fifth-wheels, towable enthusiasts haven't had this much variety to choose from in years.



AUGUSTA LUXE

Pushing the high end of the luxury fifth-wheel envelope, Augusta RV recently unveiled the Luxe, a five-floorplan fifth-wheel that rivals many upscale Class A motorhomes when it comes to technology and aesthetics, but at a significantly lower price. Few would say the Luxe's starting MSRP of \$130,000 is a small sum, but the Augusta team believes the amenities provide a hefty value to match the price.

"With the Luxe, we went with a modern design and included several standard features on it that [no other towable manufacturer] does," said Chris

Eppers, Augusta RV's president. "It was designed for full-timers and extended-stay RVers as a luxury residential fifth-wheel that offers all the amenities a high-end home would have."

Standard features include a MORryde independent suspension, hitch pin box and disc brakes, soft-touch side walls that are easy to clean and function as an insulator and noise barrier, and residential hardwood cabinetry with dovetail drawers and hardwood stiles, trim and cabinet door fascia. The Luxe has the industry's first hybrid super-structure frame that features a 12-inch I-beam and stackable tube box, and it

is the only luxury fifth-wheel to offer a standard multiplex lighting system, according to the company.

The Luxe is "full-time climate approved," said Eppers, with dual-pane frameless windows, 3¼-inch hung side walls with fiberglass insulation, and thermal wrap as well as heat pads on all holding tanks, allowing the fifth-wheel to function from minus-10 degrees Fahrenheit up to 115 degrees.

Luxe floorplans range from 40 feet 7 inches to 44 feet 7 inches, and all include notable standards including hand-laid tile flooring, a 21-cubic-foot residential refrigerator, dual 15,000-Btu air conditioners, a 50,000-Btu on-demand water heater, a 50-inch HD LED TV in the living room and a 40-inch LED HD TV in the bedroom.

► Augusta RV, www.augusta-rv.com/luxe





GRAND DESIGN MOMENTUM

Grand Design RV is expanding its luxury toy-hauler lineup for model year 2016 with the Momentum (starting at \$88,000) and Momentum M-Class (starting at \$59,000). With both Momentum lines, Grand Design aims to deliver luxury and fun.

Now available in six floorplans, from 36 feet to just under 43 feet, with gross vehicle weight ratings (GVWR) from 16,500 pounds to 19,500 pounds, the Momentum features dual entry doors, a fully enclosed fuel-pump station with gas fills and a pump timer, a standard 60- by 80-inch queen bed (with an optional king bed on select models), large kitchen pantry storage areas and rust-resistant Tread Lite entry steps, as well as a recliner sofa with a memory-foam top, lighted LED cup holders, and heat and massage features. A port allows easy hookup to the optional solar-panel charging system.

In the 10- to 14-foot garage, the Momentum houses a removable garage carpet, 2,500-pound flush-mount tie-downs, a standard 32-inch LED HD TV (in most models) and an in-floor garage storage box (not available in M-Class models). Other garage options include a HappiJac bunk system, a pull-down screen wall or three-season garage wall, and a quick-setup ramp-door patio system with handrails, steps and an awning.

More entertainment options abound in the house portion, with a Bluetooth stereo entertainment system including a 40- or 48-inch LED HD TV in the living room and a 32-inch LED HD TV in the bedroom. The kitchen is outfitted with a four-door, 18-cubic-foot refrigerator, a 30-inch stainless-steel microwave, a three-burner stainless-steel range with a 22-inch oven and a stainless-steel sink with a residential faucet.

► Grand Design RV, www.granddesignrv.com

HEARTLAND ELKRIDGE

Last year, Heartland introduced the industry's first five-slideout, two-full-bath fifth-wheel with the ElkRidge 38RSRT. Now Heartland is adding a sixth floorplan to the ElkRidge lineup, the 39MBHS, a 42-foot quad-slide with a single bath and multipurpose bunk room.

"The ElkRidge brand has been a leader in innovative bunk-room floorplans," said Joel Eberlein, general manager of Heartland's ElkRidge and Big Country lines. "The [39MBHS] continues our trend of designing floorplans that meet the various customer lifestyles and ever-changing use of fifth-wheels."

The ElkRidge 39MBHS houses its bunk room on the driver's side near the mid-entry door, with large sliding doors that open to the kitchen and main living area. The room houses a sleeper sofa and an entertainment center with a TV. The large loft above the bunk room can be used for sleeping or storage. "This gives owners separate rooms without sacrificing traditional living space," said Eberlein.

With a base price of \$53,624, the 39MBHS has a dry weight of 13,145 pounds and a GVWR of 15,500 pounds. It comes with standard hydraulic front landing gear (a six-point leveling system is optional), as well as premium suspension with Dexter E-Z Lube axles, an E-Z Flex equalizer and Nev-R-Adjust brakes.

► Heartland Recreational Vehicles
www.heartlandrvs.com



HIGHLAND RIDGE HIGHLANDER

The toy-hauler field has become increasingly crowded in recent years, but there's always room for one more line of travel trailers with built-in garages. Positioned as midprofile units with a starting price of \$36,105, the new Highlander is available in two floorplans, an open-deck model and a rear-garage model.

The 34-foot front-deck model has an unloaded weight of 7,545 pounds and a GVWR of 10,400 pounds, and features an industry-first front-loading system for hauling large ATVs. The floorplan has a rear-bedroom, front-bath layout with a kitchen and living room located amidships. All models include a four-season package with R-38 insulation in the walls and floor, R-9 insulation in the side walls, double-insulated baggage doors, insulated slideout floors, heated and enclosed dump valves and a heated, enclosed underbelly. Bunk beds up front bring the sleeping capacity to six.

The 37-foot rear-garage model has an unloaded weight of 8,653 pounds and a GVWR of 11,995 pounds, and offers a ramp that doubles as a patio, which comes with an optional rail system with a pull-down screen door and manual awning. Inside, a kitchen-sink island anchors the galley and living room space, with the bedroom and bath located up front. The 8-by-10-foot garage houses two convertible sofas, bringing sleeping capacity to six. An optional HappiJac bed system can be added in the garage, boosting sleeping capacity to eight.

Other options include a 15,000-Btu main air conditioner, a 13,500-Btu secondary air conditioner, dual-pane windows and an exterior barbecue grill. The rear-garage model offers additional options ranging from an Onan 5,500-watt gas generator to a 24-inch bedroom TV and a 39-inch garage TV.

► Highland Ridge RV
www.highlandridgerv.com/highlander



KEYSTONE FUZION

Keystone has introduced a new luxury fifth-wheel toy-hauler floorplan with both side and rear patio decks. While all Fuzion models sport an innovative 8-foot rear ramp/deck, the new Fuzion 420 (starting at \$109,408) features both the rear deck and a new deck on the passenger's side, which combine to offer more than 160 feet of outdoor living space.

Both decks are accessible from inside or by separate steps leading off the ground, and both employ Keystone's exclusive MORryde FastTrack II patio system, which features permanently mounted patio rails and eliminates pins from the setup process, which Keystone says should take less than five minutes. The new second deck also comes equipped with a TV.

For owners who'd like to do some living inside the Fuzion 420 in addition to outside on the pair of decks, Keystone has designed a stylish and spacious interior.

At 43 feet and with a GVWR of 19,000 pounds, the sizable 420 features a half bath located off the garage and a full bath on the bedroom level.

The 12-foot garage includes electrically operated queen bunk beds, which lift to make room for toys or lower to convert to a dining and seating area. The garage also features Keystone's 5K Inter-Lock system for securely tying down motorcycles or ATVs, with each tie-down welded to the frame and rated at 5,000 pounds pull strength.

A sliding patio door opens to a mid-floorplan living room and kitchen, featuring an angled entertainment center with a fireplace and a 48-inch TV, as well as L-shaped kitchen base cabinets and an 18-cubic-foot refrigerator. The full bathroom is accessible from the living room, and the private bedroom features a standard king-size bed.

► Keystone RV
www.keystonerv.com/fuzion





KEYSTONE LAREDO

As for Keystone’s travel trailers, the company is not sitting idle for 2016, recently adding the 27RB floorplan to the Laredo LHT roster. “This model occupies a lightweight, lower-mid-price position in the Keystone lineup,” said Jim Mac, director of marketing. “But it also comes with features like a fiberglass front cap and vaulted 7-foot ceilings that are usually found in higher price points.”

With a base price of \$35,676, the 27RB offers other features that are uncommon in the marketplace, said Mac, starting with its layout as a non-bunkhouse trailer with an outdoor kitchen. “Most outdoor-kitchen models are bunkhouse floorplans with bunk beds in the rear,” he said. “We hear from a number of customers who would like an outdoor kitchen but have no interest in bunk beds.”

Designed for couples, the dual-slideout floorplan has a queen bed up front that measures 60 by 80 inches (as opposed to a standard RV queen, which is typically 60 by 74 inches), an island kitchen with added counter space and a large bath in the rear with a roomy shower.

The outdoor kitchen includes a refrigerator, pantry, counter workspace and a swing-out grill plumbed into the onboard LP-gas system. At just over 31 feet and with a GVWR of 7,780 pounds, the 27RB is designed for easier towing, especially in comparison to the larger trailers it competes with in terms of features and amenities.

► **Keystone RV**
www.keystonerv.com/laredo



LANCE 1995

For those in the market for easy-to-tow products, Lance keeps the hits coming with an updated 1995 floorplan in the company’s line of lightweight travel trailers. In the 1995, Lance achieves a low weight (3,950 pounds unloaded, 5,700-pound GVWR) through the use of the proprietary LanceLock aluminum super-structure, Lite-Ply cabinet construction and Azdel composite wall material that’s lighter, stronger and a more efficient insulating alternative than lauan plywood, and likewise nearly eliminates the potential for rot and mold.

The 23-foot 1995 is offered at a base price of \$29,000 and has an all-new front-end design with Lance’s standard large-radius window. The floorplan is a rear-entry, rear-bath layout with a front queen bed and a booth dinette housed in the single slideout.

Other notable features include a full-length electric lateral-arm awning with LED lighting, optional 160-watt solar panels and an optional four-season package with dual-pane windows and fully ducted, enclosed and insulated holding tanks and dump valves.

► **Lance Camper**, www.lancecamper.com/travel-trailers/1995

LIVIN’ LITE IGNITE

As the name suggests, Livin’ Lite aims to produce easily towed products. One of the company’s main methods for accomplishing this is to omit wood altogether, opting instead for aluminum frames and composite materials. With the all-new Ignite toy hauler, the company still uses aluminum and composites, but also strategically incorporates interior wood, including hardwood doors and cabinetry.

“This gives it the look and feel of a traditionally built coach inside but with the durability and weight reduction of our aluminum structure,” said Scott Tuttle, Livin’ Lite’s president. “It represents the best of both worlds.”

The Ignite is offered in five floorplans from 24 to 30 feet, with dry weights ranging from 5,000 to 6,000 pounds, allowing towing with suitably equipped half-ton trucks and larger



SUVs. Tuttle points out that traditionally built toy haulers generally come in the 9,000-pound range.

A full-featured toy hauler, the Ignite offers floorplans with well-appointed kitchen and bedroom areas, and garages between 14 and 20 feet long. Popular amenities include an LP-gas-powered generator and a HappiJac electronic bed lift.

The Ignite is priced between \$32,000 and \$45,000, which, combined with the toy hauler’s light weight, makes it “a great value for young families on the go,” said Tuttle.

► **Livin’ Lite**, www.livinlite.com

NORTHWOOD SNOW RIVER

For this model year, Oregon-based Northwood Manufacturing has given significant attention to its all-season Snow River travel trailer by revamping the 234RBS floorplan (one of four), which now features a redesigned front cap and updated interior.

With a dry weight of 5,950 pounds, a GVWR of 10,000 pounds and housed on an independently certified off-road chassis just under 27 feet, the 234RBS has a base retail price of \$35,960. The trailer features a new entertainment center mounted amidships with a swivel television for viewing from the living



room or private bedroom.

Other notable standards include a cathedral arched ceiling, a full-size bathroom at the rear of the trailer, a 20-watt solar panel, exterior speakers, and an exterior kitchen with a sink, fridge and grill. Options include a

slideout awning topper, an upgrade to a 15,000-Btu air conditioner, a 12-volt DC power jack, thermal pane windows, power sliding stab jacks, and 60- or 100-watt solar panels with a controller.

► **Northwood Manufacturing**
www.northwoodmfg.com



STARCRAFT SOLSTICE

The team at Starcraft RV isn't testing the waters with a single floorplan release for 2016 but with an entirely new fifth-wheel. With four initial floorplans and two more in the works, and a starting price of \$68,763, the 2016 Solstice is a luxury fifth-wheel occupying the top of Starcraft's lineup.

"We were aiming for top-of-the-line luxury at an affordable price," said Brent Froman, vice president of sales for Starcraft RV. Froman highlighted Starcraft's two-year warranty and proprietary Magnum Roof System, which uses oversize nail plates and stronger 7-inch header beams.

The 2016 Solstice comes with many residential amenities, including a 30-inch Samsung microwave, an optional 18-cubic-foot refrigerator (on select models), a Denver Mattress Euro-top sleep system,

two 13,500-Btu air conditioners with dual-zone control, porcelain toilets, and a 60-inch king-size fiberglass shower with two shower heads. Notable options include a six-point auto-leveling system, a king-size bed, a washer and dryer, an upgraded 5,500-watt generator, upgraded 15,000-Btu air conditioner, bumper-mount swing-arm grille, wireless backup camera and frameless thermal pane windows.

Offered in lengths from just over 37 feet to just under 44 feet, with a GVWR range of 10,665 pound to 16,500 pounds, the Solstice comes in a variety of front-bedroom layouts including a triple-slideout forward-facing entertainment center floorplan and a five-slideout, bath-and-a-half floorplan with an outdoor kitchen and dual overhead bunks above rear sofas.

► **Starcraft RV**
www.starcraftrv.com/fifth-wheels/solstice

VENTURE SONIC

In 2013, Venture RV, a division of K-Z RV, reopened a 65,000-square-foot production facility in Shipshewana, Indiana, to keep up with demand for the ultra-lightweight Sonic model. This year, Venture continues tapping into that expansion by adding another floorplan to the Sonic lineup, bringing the total to eight.

As with all Sonic models, the 234VBH offers an 82-inch ceiling height (that's 6 feet, 10 inches), slam-latch baggage doors and a one-piece seamless fiberglass roof.





Although the 234VBH is less than 26½ feet long, has a dry weight of 4,220 pounds and a GVWR of 5,200 pounds, it is one of the larger floorplans in the Sonic line. The starting MSRP is \$22,995.

"The rear of the 234VBH was designed with kids in mind," said David Boggs, Venture RV's national sales and product manager. "It boasts a bench seat, double bunks, a separate rear dinette that converts to make a third rear bunk, and a fourth fold-down bunk above the dinette, so it can sleep and seat six comfortably."

The living area has an entertainment center, an oversize dinette and a Murphy bed. The kitchen includes a pantry/closet for extra storage, a 6.3-cubic-foot refrigerator and a double-bowl sink with a cover.

► Venture RV, www.venture-rv.com

WINNEBAGO SCORPION

Immediately on the heels of last year's Spyder, Winnebago's first towable toy hauler, the company is introducing the Scorpion, a premium fifth-wheel with a large 14-foot garage space to haul all manner of motorized toys.

With a price range of \$70,000 to \$101,000 and a GVWR of 20,800 pounds, the Scorpion 4014 features a private half bath in the garage portion of the 45-foot unit, as well as a sliding-glass door, standard facing sofas and an optional queen bed. The door/ramp to the garage has 15-degree breakover angle clearance for easy entry, and when not in use, the door becomes a patio with an optional sliding railing and retractable steps.

In the living area, the wide-body design and radius ceiling provide a spacious interior with features such as an entertainment center with a 55-inch TV, a large kitchen island with a raised breakfast bar and a sizable wardrobe in the front bedroom, plus



a washer-and-dryer prep bay.

The Scorpion comes with a full bath amidships. Two slideouts expand from the kitchen/living room, housing the sofa and tables on one side and a 12-cubic-foot gas/electric refrigerator, 30-inch convection microwave and a cooktop on the other.

► Winnebago Industries
www.winnebagoind.com



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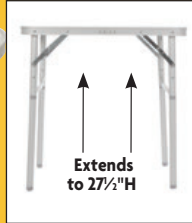
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THE BIG COVER-UP

Shielding an RV from Mother Nature's worst not only protects its good looks but prolongs the lifespan of your investment

If it weren't for pesky things like a budget, homeowner association rules, time and space, we would all have RV garages to protect our rigs. But unless you live in an RV community or have lots of property in an area with limited homeowner regulations, it's unlikely you will ever be allowed to construct an RV garage on your lot. Many owners rely on offsite storage, and in some cases, those facilities offer covered storage — but, of course, the cost is much higher than storing the RV in an uncovered lot. In our case, we have a large driveway at home but do not enjoy the benefits of an RV garage. For us, the best solution is an RV cover.

An RV is a major financial investment — not only the initial purchase but also the maintenance and

upkeep. Covering the RV helps protect the appearance and resale value, and also lowers monthly maintenance costs. By protecting the exterior with a cover, the caulk joints, acrylic roof vents, skylights and paint all stay looking new. It's a small price to pay to prolong the life of your RV.

In most cases, for the price of covered storage for a few months, you can purchase a cover and keep your RV protected when it is not in use. For some reason, there is a mis-

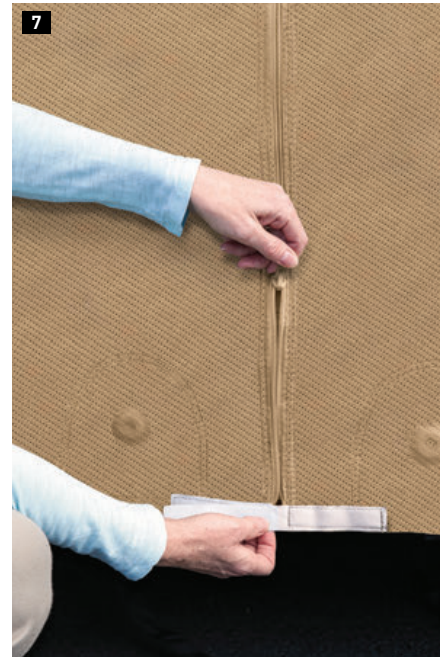
conception that RV covers are hard to use or can damage the finish, but our experience is just the opposite. Covers such as Camping World's new Elements brand, which we used, are soft and do not damage the exterior surface, plus they offer protection from weather and UV exposure.

Keeping an RV covered when not in use makes a big difference in the appearance of the unit over time. If you notice the condition of a trailer that stays outside and uncovered, you will

- (1) To get started, all you need is a model-specific RV cover, a helper and some time.
- (2) Along the bottom of the Elements cover, you will find buckles that are used in conjunction with adjustable straps. These straps run under the bottom of the RV to help hold the cover in place.
- (3) The buckles are sewn into reinforced flaps that help protect the RV from scratches and make the connections long lasting.
- (4) In addition to adjustable front and back straps, the Elements cover also has sewn-in elastic sections. This is a real plus because the elastic helps hold the cover in place properly and gives it a more custom fit.



(5) Another feature of the Elements cover is built-in handles. For those with an RV roof that can be walked on, these make it easy to properly position the cover. (6) Front, rear and side vents improve airflow to keep mold and mildew from forming. (7) Zippered panels allow easy entry when the RV is covered, and hook-and-loop closures keep the panels from unzipping during storage.



see the signs of UV damage. The rubber around windows starts to get chalky, and the paint, gel coat, decals and trim will start to deteriorate in just a few years, if left unprotected. Uncovered tires will show cracks around the sidewall areas.

A big concern of some owners is getting the cover on the roof and installing it properly. We found that most people who can climb on the roof can



Whether you're covering a large RV or a smaller trailer like the 23-footer pictured above, the following installation tips apply, assuming the RV has a roof that can be walked on. (1) Before installing the cover, remove or fold down any antennas. Clear the roof of debris and make sure there is nothing left that can tear the cover. (2) Use the Elements Tyvek Gutter Gard protectors to cover the gutter downspouts so they won't rip the cover. (3) Next, unroll the cover behind the RV and look for the large sewn-in tag labeled "Front." This is the part you will carry up the ladder to the front of the RV. Once you get on the roof, your helper can assist by "feeding" the cover to you. Step carefully around the air conditioner, folded-down digital TV antenna and any vents or skylights. (4) Position the cover on the roof in a bundle from front to back. Push the front

of the cover out and over the front of the RV, then push the sides over the middle sections, taking care to drape the sides over the downspout extensions at each corner (again, take advantage of your helper). Be sure the white Tyvek material is centered on the roof before making your way to the ladder and carefully climbing down, pulling the rear of the cover with you. On the front and rear of the cover are two sets of straps that help tighten and secure the cover. Snap them and pull the straps until they are just snug. Then position the straps that run under the RV and snap them to hold the cover in place. (5) Now your RV is completely covered, and it will be clean and ready for use next time without the harmful UV damage that often occurs on uncovered RVs. To enter the covered RV, unclasp the hook-and-loop closure and unzip the panel.

THE BIG COVER-UP

For durability, Elements covers have heavy-duty Tyvek on the roof and rugged polypropylene on the front, rear and sides.

also install a cover, if they follow the right steps, assuming the roof is designed to be walked on.. Climbing a ladder always has risks, so proceed with caution and make sure you have a helper with you in case you need assistance. All you really need is some self-confidence, a good pair of shoes (no flip-flops or slip-ons) and the desire to protect your RV.

Of course, if you are a full-timer, covering up is not an option, but for those of us who store our RV for part of the year, covering it makes a lot of sense.

ELEMENTS RV COVERS

The new Elements All Climate cover we installed is different from other major brands, and it offers several advantages. When compared to other brands, the sides are made from a heavier material to ensure they last longer. It also has a heavy-duty Tyvek roof panel that is 10 percent stronger than other brands you may have used in the past.

The Elements cover blocks 99.8 percent of UV rays and features three-layer construction to help make it last. Unlike tarps or poly sheets, the fabric actually breathes to let moisture pass through the material, which eliminates trapped moisture. It has vented sections on the front, rear



and both sides to improve airflow, which help eliminate mold and mildew, even when the RV is stored for long periods of time. The cover also comes with handy tie-down straps that go under the RV to prevent it from flapping in the wind or being blown off during storms.

Another major advantage is that the front and rear areas are reinforced with elastic inserts. This elastic really makes a big difference in keeping a tight fit. The cover also has an integral inner panel sewn into the backside to help prevent it from wearing on the front and rear bumper areas.

The sides extend down completely, so the trailer is covered from top to bottom. For those who need access while the RV is covered, full-length zipper panels allow easy in-and-out privileges on the entry side.

Elements covers carry a two-year warranty. Prices range from less than \$200 for small folding campers to \$550 for the largest fifth-wheels, with sale pricing often available.

www.campingworld.com/elements

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WWW.NORTHWOODMFG.COM

COVER TO COVER

RV covers come in all shapes, sizes and materials to protect every type of rig from the damaging effects of weather

Selecting the right cover for your RV is akin to selecting the proper type of sunscreen for your skin. Just as SPF 10 will do little to no good when you're out all day in direct sunlight, a lightweight, universal-fit cover may not protect your RV in an arctic ice storm. It's important to know the differences between the materials used in manufacturing the covers and to prepare for the worst (weather) when deciding on which level of protection to buy.

In addition to the Elements cover tested on the previous pages, the following companies offer various levels of RV protection at reasonable prices, and most are designed specifically for a range of ambient temperatures and weather conditions.

ADCO PRODUCTS Ⓞ

There are few barometers for success that resonate as effectively as longevity, so the fact that ADCO is celebrating its 60th year manufacturing RV covers is no small feat. Offering a wide assortment of cover applications, from all sizes of RV covers to tire covers and more, ADCO provides consumers with enough choices to select the right cover for their specific RV situation.

For short-term RV storage in moderate climates, the SFS AquaShed is designed to provide three times the protection of a standard cover. The cover beads water on contact, which offers a high resistance to overly humid climates, in addition to superior protection from UV rays. The breathable fabric is also resistant to ice buildup, mold and mildew, which can all be extremely harsh on the RV's outer skin and interior. SFS AquaShed is available in contour-fit (universal) covers only. Also available is a Designer Series, which includes the triple-layer AquaShed top panel and triple-layer, two-tone-gray polypropylene sides. Prices range from \$75 to \$160 for the standard AquaShed and start at \$200 for the Designer Series.

ADCO's Tyvek Designer Covers are manufactured for more intense climates and offer an effective shield from the sun with white fabric designed to reflect infrared heat and block nearly 99 percent of the sun's damaging UV rays. The covers are backed with a layer of polypropylene for increased durability and are available in custom and contour-fit configurations.

In addition to the unique side walls,

ADCO's Tyvek Wind Designer Series is currently the only cover on the market with a patent-pending wind-resistant technology, which the company is so confident will improve wind protection that it has upped the warranty to three years; buyers even get a set of four free Tyre Gards in the box to help protect the RV's tires. Tyvek Designer covers start between \$250 and \$300; custom covers start at \$29.99 per linear foot.

At the top of ADCO's product line is the custom-fit Sunbrella line of RV covers, designed for all climates. Sunbrella is well known for its durable outdoor fabrics, and the soft, highly breathable material combats water damage and mildew, while the secure fit (custom applications only) offers superior protection from wind damage. Prices start at \$34.95 per linear foot.

www.adcoprod.com



CALMARK COVER COMPANY Ⓞ

All Calmark custom and semicustom RV covers are made to the length, width and height of your particular RV. They are manufactured using Sunbrella acrylic fabric for protection from intense sun and harsh weather conditions. The covers also feature Fabric Stress Reinforcing technology, which provides 1,000-pound tensile strength for added durability.

Calmark covers are breathable, water resistant, and mold and mildew resistant, and are 100 percent non-abrasive. They feature zippered doors, tie-down grommets and friction-reducing tie straps. The six-year warranty and after-the-sale assistance are proof that Calmark stands behind its products. Contact the company for pricing.

www.calmarkcovers.com

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURERS



COVER TO COVER

CAMCO MANUFACTURING Ⓢ

Camco covers are designed to provide reliable protection during storage for most RV types.

Camco's UltraGuard covers are ideal for more extreme climates, including cold and snowy regions, and feature a triple-layer SFS top panel that beads water, offering increased resistance to rain and snow. The covers also utilize tough interlocking seams and a heavy-duty polypropylene fabric around the sides for maximum protection. Vented flaps help reduce wind lofting and moisture, and work in combination with a fully breathable design to help resist mold and mildew growth. UltraGuard covers utilize an integrated, self-adjusting hold-down system that the company says is guaranteed to keep the cover in place. The covers carry a two-year limited warranty, applicable to the original purchaser when used under normal operating conditions. Prices range from about \$100 to \$275.

Recommended for warm, sunny regions, Camco's lightweight, tear-resistant UltraShield covers offer the features of the UltraGuard, including a breathable design that resists mold and mildew. A self-adjusting strap system prevents flapping, and heavy-duty zippers allow access to doors and storage. Prices range from about \$199 to \$660. A storage bag is included with both UltraShield and UltraGuard covers.

www.camco.net



CLASSIC ACCESSORIES Ⓢ

Classic Accessories offers three different lines of covers for each type of RV. The most advanced is the PermaPro. The material in this cover is made from polyester that uses rip-stop technology (much like a parachute) and is treated to keep rain from penetrating the fabric. PermaPro covers are backed by a lifetime warranty. Prices range from \$499.95 to \$799.95.

The middle-grade line is called PolyPro 3, which is made of polypropylene and is three layers thick on the top, where most of the UV rays hit. The additional layers at the top prevent moisture from damaging the roof, and the material is designed so that it won't fade or discolor due to sun damage. PolyPro 3 covers have a three-year warranty. Prices range from \$199.95 to \$499.95.

Classic's entry-level cover is the PolyPro 1, which is constructed using a single layer of polypropylene. It will absorb UV radiation and prevent rain damage, and comes with a two-year warranty. Prices range from \$99.95 to \$209.95.

www.classicaccessories.com/rv



COVERCRAFT INDUSTRIES Ⓢ

Covercraft covers are custom designed with long-term storage in mind. These covers are manufactured using customer-supplied specifications, which are then input into a CAD system to develop a unique pattern. One zippered entry and a poly-cotton storage bag are included. Additional entries and storage bags made from the cover fabric may be ordered at an additional charge.

Among the three fabric options are WeatherShield HD fabric for intense sun environments and long-term storage, offering water repellency and protection for extreme UV, dust and other environmental hazards. Another option, Ultra'tect RV fabric retains its color and strength in extended outdoor exposure while providing a high degree of water resistance and UV protection at a reasonable price. Covercraft's top-of-the-line covers are made from Sunbrella fabric, preferred by many RV owners in the Sunbelt because the acrylic fibers provide almost 100 percent UV opacity to protect the vehicle from the damaging rays of the sun.

Visit the company's website for price information and to start the custom-order process.

www.covercraftrv.com

COVERQUEST Ⓢ

CoverQuest offers Carver Industries covers and products, in addition to the ADCO, Classic Accessories and Covercraft covers mentioned previously.

The U.S.-made Carver line of RV products includes full covers for all styles and sizes of RVs. Carver RV covers are double-stitched and folded four-ply, leaving no raw edges. They are offered in a marine-grade 8-ounce gray polyester, which the company calls Performance Poly-Guard. The fabric is a true loom-woven polyester, providing the strongest tear strength available, and is highly UV and fade resistant. It





is also extremely water repellent and mildew resistant, while remaining breathable to allow moisture to escape. All Carver RV covers come with hold-down straps, a storage bag and a reinforcement kit to strengthen areas of high wear.

Carver RV covers carry a five-year warranty and range in price from \$150 to \$950, depending on the style and size.

www.coverquest.com


EVEVELLE COVERS

Evevelle has 25 years of experience manufacturing a number of universal

RV covers. The company's rugged lightweight polypropylene Expedition S2 is Evevelle's midrange product. Three breathable layers of X-Strength fabric offer superior protection, according to the company. Expedition S2 covers feature under-the-RV straps, roof vents and zippered panels. The covers carry a three-year warranty, and prices range from about \$249 to \$599.

Evevelle's top-of-the-line Goldline

covers are constantly being updated, and this year's version is no different. Priced from \$399 to \$899, Goldline covers are made of a marine fabric and offer all the features of the Expedition S2 and more. Goldline covers are coated with Durapel rain finish as well as a UV inhibitor, in addition to an anti-microbial finish, all of which help make them UV and mildew resistant.

www.evevelle.com 



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MOUNT UP!



FIFTH-WHEEL HITCHES THAT PROVIDE STABLE TOWING AND A STEADY RIDE

Once you've decided to join the ranks of RV towing enthusiasts, there's still another big decision to make: conventional trailer or fifth-wheel trailer.

While towing a travel trailer with a conventional hitch has its advantages (namely, a receiver is already available on most properly equipped tow vehicles), fifth-wheel floorplans tend to have more flexibility and usable space. Plus, fifth-wheel combos tend to be more stable and are less likely to be severely affected by high winds, road irregularities and passing semitrailers. And, although there are definitely some enormous travel trailers these days, a fifth-wheel configuration can allow more trailer out back, provided the truck is properly rated to tow it, without sacrificing on-the-road comfort.

In a fifth-wheel setup, the trailer's kingpin acts as the pivot point between the truck and trailer. The kingpin slides into the hitch saddle and is secured by a latching mechanism. The improvement in road manners is mainly because of the placement of the hitch: the saddle is centered in the bed of the truck, slightly ahead of or directly above the tow vehicle's rear axle. This moves the pivot point forward from a conventional hitch's behind-the-truck placement, resulting in what many RVers consider a night-and-day difference in terms of handling stability. With the pivot point directly over the axle, there's no leverage exerted on the truck, side to side, as with a conventional travel trailer

arrangement. That means the truck's steering is not affected by the trailer's movement, and that makes for nearly effortless, comfortable towing.

While the hitch location can create a concern for trailer-to-cab contact, especially when the tow vehicle is a shortbed pickup, fifth-wheel-hitch manufacturers have designed both automatic and manual sliding hitches to temporarily reposition the hitch when making tight turns or backing into campsites. With early-model fifth-wheel hitches, mounting rails traditionally had to be permanently installed in the bed of the truck, but now a number of options eliminate that.

Another development is that many truck manufacturers offer factory-installed fifth-wheel hitches and/or mounting systems as an upgrade when purchasing a new pickup. For those who don't own a truck with a factory-installed hitch, and even for those who do, plenty of aftermarket choices do the job when it comes time to saddle up.

When shopping for a hitch, note that many manufacturers claim their hitches are "SAE J2638-compliant." SAE J2638 is a regulatory document created by the Society of Automotive Engineers to establish consistent "criteria for the hitch, tow-vehicle attachment structure, trailer attachment structure and coupling of trailers" with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of up to 30,000 pounds. With all that said, here's a guide to some of the most popular fifth-wheel hitches on the market, in alphabetical order.



Companion

B&W TRAILER HITCHES

For those looking for a clean, removable installation, the **Companion** fifth-wheel hitch system leaves the truck bed free of the typical hitch-and-rail system. Rated for a trailer weight of up to 20,000 pounds, the Companion utilizes the B&W Turnoverball under-bed mounting system (sold separately), which allows owners to tow a fifth-wheel or gooseneck trailer.

The hitch features a fully articulating head for pivoting in all directions, and three vertical adjustments vary the height from 16.25 to 18.25 inches. The Companion allows 4 inches of front-to-back adjustment with three coupler positions. The cam-action latch handle makes hitch release easy, even when parked off level. Inch-thick wraparound jaws connect tightly to the kingpin, and polyurethane bushings provide a rattle-free towing experience. The 30.5-inch-wide stance of the Companion is engineered for additional stability and strength. MSRP: \$934.



Patriot 18K Slider

Rated to tow up to 18,000 pounds, the **Patriot 18K Slider** is a rail-mounted fifth-wheel hitch with up to 12 inches of slide travel for maneuvering a shortbed truck. The Patriot offers automatic latching in both slide directions, while its fully articulating head allows front-to-back and side-to-side pivoting. For added versatility, three vertical adjustments from 17 to 19 inches can be

made, and the ¾-inch wraparound jaws provide a strong connection. As with the Companion, a cam-action handle makes release easy, and polyurethane bushings prevent metal-on-metal contact. The Patriot Slider fits all standard mounting rails. MSRP: \$799. **800-810-4918, www.turnoverball.com**

CAMCO MANUFACTURING

Camco offers its **Eaz-Lift** line of hitches in two fifth-wheel versions: the stationary Eaz-Lift 18K and the 18KS slider. The universal design allows both to be mounted on any existing base rails or Eaz-Lift's heavy-duty rails (sold separately). Both hitches have an 11-degree side-to-side pivot utilizing urethane cushions and a 32-degree front-to-back pivot. The kingpin remains in place, thanks to Camco's automatic locking jaws and a secondary handle lock.

The 18K is designed for stationary-saddle needs and offers an adjustable height from 14.5 to 18 inches. The 18KS utilizes the slider system to avoid truck and trailer damage by allowing additional turning clearance, when towing with a shortbed truck. For tight maneuvering, the system moves the hitch toward the tailgate up to 9 inches, and a flag on each rail indicates the slider has been locked in place. Fully enclosed rollers and a locking mechanism minimize debris buildup.

Camco also offers the Eaz-Lift Free Ride, a fifth-wheel hitch that can be lifted out of the bed when not in use, and the Rail Rider, the only slider that fits both fifth-wheel and gooseneck

trailers and leaves no rails behind, according to the company. Both can be completely removed from the truck bed, clearing it for hauling and storage. Both have an 18,000-pound rating and 10 degrees of side-to-side pivot.

Prices for all Camco fifth-wheel hitches start at \$645, with additional cost for legs, brackets and hardware. Camco offers plate and bracket installation kits for a variety of applications. **800-334-2004, www.camco.net**

CURT MANUFACTURING

Curt Q-series fifth-wheel hitches are designed to deliver a smooth, quiet towing experience. The **Q16**, with a 16,000-pound towing capacity, has a cast yoke head with poly-torsion



Q16

Q20

Q24



Eaz-Lift

MOUNT UP!

inserts. The torsion head promotes controlled coupling and a stable ride. The 20,000-pound-rated **Q20** and 24,000-pound-rated **Q24** use a spherical axial bearing for unimpeded head movement and feature dual-locking jaws with 360-degree kingpin contact to eliminate chucking noise.

Featuring extra-wide head openings and easy-to-see coupling indicators, Q-series hitches come with a durable carbide powder coating and meet SAE J2638 testing standards for safety. MSRP: Starting around \$800.

877-287-8634, www.curtmfg.com

DEMCO MANUFACTURING

Demco's flagship Hijacker Autoslide is a fully automatic hitch to help eliminate trailer-to-cab contact. With up to 14 inches of travel, the Autoslide automatically moves the trailer back and away from the cab of the pickup. No locking plate is required for standard pin boxes to activate the slide mechanism, as the Autoslide utilizes rack-and-pinion gear technology. The underbed mounting system leaves the bed free and clear when the hitch is removed. Three mounting systems and three height adjustments are available on two models rated to tow 18,000 and 21,000 pounds. MSRP: \$1,520.

Demco's **Hijacker Premier Series** offers the choice of a stationary fifth-wheel hitch or a manual sliding

mechanism. The hitches are easily upgradable to a 21,000-pound towing capacity. RVers can start with the 16,000-pound-rated hitch and let it grow along with their needs, without having to purchase a whole new hitch. Industry-standard bedrails are included, but frame-mounting brackets must be ordered separately. MSRP: \$793/16K stationary; \$1,287/21K manual slide.

The SL Series allows users the benefits of a manual-slide hitch to get into tight places. The 16,000-pound-rated Ultra Slide features a unique jaw-adjustment bolt and up to 8 inches of travel to assist during sharp turns. The 21,000-pound-rated Ultra has stainless-steel rollers and four height adjustments. MSRP: Starting at \$749.

800-543-3626, www.demco-products.com

HUSKY TOWING PRODUCTS

Husky W-series hitches include the 16K W (16,000-pound capacity) and **26K W** (26,000-pound capacity). Both feature fully articulating hitch saddles that make hooking up easier and the ride smoother by taking torque twist out of both the truck and trailer. Hitch-saddle articulation works to ease the ride when maneuvering into driveways and steep entrances where the truck and trailer may not be on the same plane. These hitches feature wraparound jaws that fully enclose the trailer kingpin. An easy-operation latch handle makes



26K W



16K Roller

hitching easier, and very visible latch-position indicators show that the trailer is attached securely. MSRP: \$675 to \$789. (Uprights and base rails are sold separately.)

The Husky 10 Composite Glider temporarily positions the trailer kingpin 10 inches behind the normal location so low-speed maneuvers can be executed without worries of the trailer and truck cab coming into contact. The unique handle design resists binding, allowing the operator to latch and unlatch the glide mechanism without concern for the trailer's angle. It activates automatically, allowing the trailer to move back for tight turns. When repositioned, it again latches automatically when the kingpin is back at the optimal cruising position, just ahead of the rear axle. MSRP: \$499.95 to \$619.95.

Another shortbed solution, the **16K Roller** temporarily positions the kingpin 9 inches behind the normal towing location and includes highly visible locking pins. The Roller's lift adjustment lets users minimize the distance between the wheels and rails for smooth operation. MSRP: \$399.95. 877-544-4449, www.huskytow.com



Hijacker Premier Series

**PULLRITE/
PULLIAM ENTERPRISES**

PullRite's fixed-position **Super 5th** hitch utilizes a unique gear-driven rotary latching mechanism to make towing more comfortable with less bumping and chucking. The latch locks automatically when hooking up, eliminating the need to remember secondary safety steps.

Designed with shortbed truck owners in mind, the automatically sliding **SuperGlide** moves up to 18 inches, facilitating 90-degree turns. Like the Super 5th, the SuperGlide features a rotary latching mechanism. Both can be mounted on standard base rails or PullRite's removable SuperRails and are available in 16,000-, 20,000- and 24,000-pound applications. MSRP: \$671.82/ Super 5th; \$1,217.36/SuperGlide.

Many Ford and Ram truck buyers who get the factory-prep kit for fifth-wheel towing still need to find an appropriate hitch. PullRite offers adapter kits that are easy to drop



Super 5th



SuperGlide

into the factory-installed "pucks," allowing owners to use the Super 5th, SuperGlide or other brands of standard hitches. The adapters are pinned at each corner, making it easy to position them in the truck bed without having to lift heavy welded frames, which also makes removal and storage easier. MSRP: \$619.14.

Ford truck owners have two more choices from PullRite: 18,000- and 25,000-pound-capacity OE Series hitches that pin directly to the factory-prep-kit pucks without requiring an

adapter. OE Series hitches feature a simple quarter-turn removable post at each corner, allowing the hitch to be installed or removed quickly with no tools required. MSRP: Starting at \$1,184.42.

574-259-1520, www.pullrite.com

REESE PRODUCTS/CEQUENT

Cequent's Reese brand offers an array of fifth-wheel towing products, including two Titan 16K fifth-wheel hitches rated to tow 16,000 pounds. The slider version

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MOUNT UP!



Titan 20K



Elite 18K



30K Low Profile

offers pin-mounting holes to better align with current rail kits; a Reese rail kit is sold separately. The slider also features a cast head with commercial durability and strength, a double-jaw mechanism and improved tolerances to help eliminate chucking. The round-tube slider version has a four-way pivoting head and is a good option for shortbed trucks. Both feature a customized grip-control handle to ensure proper hookup and high visibility for system integration, and both are SAE J2638 compliant.

The 20,000-pound-rated **Titan 20K** is likewise available both stationary and with a round-tube slider, and includes

all the features of the Titan 16K, plus a system for dampening vertical and longitudinal vibration and improving the ride.

Rated to tow 18,000 pounds, the **Elite 18K** hitch with slider is versatile enough to fit most shortbed trucks when paired with the Elite underbed rail system but can easily be installed on Ford F-Series Super Duty trucks equipped with the fifth-wheel OE towing package. With increased kingpin/jaw contact design, a self-latching jaw and a 26,500-pound rating, the Elite 26.5K has 4 inches of side-to-side pivot for better control and a wider footprint for increased stability. Both the Elite 18K

and 26.5K are SAE J2638 compliant.

The **30K Low Profile** hitch provides a whopping 30,000 pounds of towing capacity. The hitch features front-to-rear tilt capabilities for easy hookup on uneven ground. The low-profile design can be vertically adjusted up to 3 inches to permit level trailering. Side-to-side tilt reduces stress on the vehicle frame while creating a smoother, more comfortable ride.

MSRP for Cequent's Reese hitches, including models not listed here, start at around \$1,100 and range up to \$2,400.

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www.cequentconsumerproducts.com

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Up Close and Personal

Taking time at the end of the travel season to check all the components in an RV can make or break future trips

Planning a post-summer evaluation of your RV's structure and systems is a critical step to ensure longevity — and that the RV will be ready to go when pulled out of storage. Upon close inspection, you are sure to find at least one area where maintenance is required, and prompt action to make things right will not only keep your RV looking like it's road-ready but will ensure pride of ownership. The following steps and reminders are designed to help you get there, just like the pros would do it.

To uncover the little details, it's best to begin with a thorough cleaning of your RV. Since a number of these steps require roof access, be sure to use extreme caution when climbing a ladder and wear nonslip, secure footwear. Start on the roof with a bucket of water and cleaning solution specific for the RV's type of roof material.

For rubber roofs, the most widely used and trusted cleaning solution is Spic and Span, but there are commercial products for this purpose on the market. When cleaning a metal or fiberglass roof, as well as for use on the sides of any RV, you can use a solution of water and Dawn dish-washing liquid or any RV cleaning product formulated for exterior

surfaces. A medium-bristle brush will do a good job of gently removing even the heaviest environmental buildup.

After the roof is dry, carefully examine every inch of caulking around the vents, antenna and seams for integrity. If necessary, remove the old caulking and apply a high-quality sealant recommended for the type of roof material. Dicor self-leveling Lap Sealant (for specified purposes) works very well for recaulking roofing material.

Inspect all roof and plumbing vents for cracks or damage, and replace if necessary. Vent lids may look good, but they can deteriorate from the constant assault by the sun and are often fractured due to hail or tree branches. The vast majority of replacement vent lids can be purchased and installed far cheaper than replacing the entire unit. There are four or five different styles of 14- x 14-inch vent lids on the market; to be sure you're buying the right one, take a picture of the lid hinge assembly and show it to the parts person.

Raise the TV antenna and inspect for any broken plastic pieces or loose pins. Lube the gears in the base assembly using white lithium grease; crank the antenna up and down two or three times to evenly distribute the grease.

Inspect the roof air-conditioner shrouds. The sun will make the plastic



(1) Washing a roof is essential to longevity and should be done two or three times a year, especially after the travel season and before storing the RV, even if it's covered.

(2 and 3) Inspect the caulking around all vents and repair before a leak can damage the structure. (4, 5 and 6) A leak around the air-conditioner gasket can cause ceiling and frame damage. To replace, raise the air conditioner, remove the old gasket with a sharp putty knife and replace with a high-quality neoprene gasket. (7) Check all clearance lights for function and caulking integrity.



brittle to the point where they may even blow off during travel, thus exposing the compressor and blower motor to the elements — and possibly creating a traffic hazard. Once removed, check for a buildup of leaves, spiderwebs, mud dauber nests, etc. and clean all areas with compressed air. Carefully blow air through the rear condenser to clean out dust and debris.

The gasket between the air conditioner and roof should be checked annually. Once the interior grille is removed from the ceiling, the air conditioner can be unbolted so it can be lifted. At this point the gasket must be replaced. The gasket comes in two sizes in either black or white; generally, the black gaskets are higher quality and are recommended.

While you have the grille removed, check out the foam filter and clean with soap and water. If the filter is deteriorated, it's time for replacement, which is inexpensive. Allow the filter to dry completely prior to reinstalling. Inspect the evaporator through the intake area while the filter is drying. Clean any debris from the evaporator using a soft brush. The model number will be inside the intake cavity, should you need replacement parts.

Before leaving the roof, service the roof material per the manufacturer's recommendations. A properly maintained rubber roof should last 15 to 20 years. Metal or fiberglass roofs do not need a conditioner but should be kept clean. Any cuts or tears in rubber-roof material may be permanently patched with EternaBond tape. It's a good idea to carry EternaBond tape with you at all times, as you never know when a tree might attack.

Satisfied with servicing the top portion of your RV, let's head to the tow vehicle or the front of your motorhome, and check the wiper blades and wiper-fluid level. Wiper blades should be replaced annually, regardless of their condition. Open the hood of the tow vehicle or motorhome and check all fluid levels. Visually inspect the front of the engine compartment for anything out of place. Remove the air filter and carefully inspect for deterioration or excess debris and dust. Replace if necessary. For diesel motorhomes, move to the rear for a visual and fluid-level inspection.

Slowly walk around the exterior of the RV, carefully inspecting all windows and seals, refrigerator vents, compartment doors, clearance lights, exterior lights, taillights, backup lights and

(8) Wiper blades should be replaced annually. (9) Leaking windows can be fixed only by removing and replacing the frame seal, not with silicone. (10) Keep the slideout seals conditioned with a product like 303 Aerospace Protectant. (11) Slide-topper fabric can deteriorate over time; check and replace, if necessary, before it's too late.



✓ Up Close and Personal

license-plate light, and don't forget the headlights of the tow vehicle or motorhome. If the headlights are completely fogged over with age, there are kits that can be used to restore lens clarity (search for "headlight restoration kits" on Google to find examples). These kits are very easy to use and highly effective at making the lens look new again. Examine the weather stripping, moldings and caulking for cracking or peeling, and replace if necessary. Breaches in the seals on any of these items can allow water intrusion, which can seriously damage the structure and cause delamination.

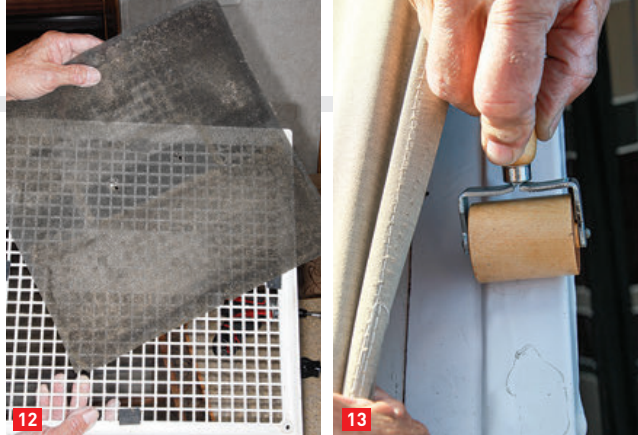
Open and close all windows, baggage doors and hatches. Lubricate anything that may be sticking, such as the hinge assembly or a window mechanism. Check with the manufacturer for the correct type of lubricant. Lubricate all locks with a graphite lubricant specially designed for tumbler-type locks.

Open and close the awning while watching for binding. Be sure it folds up into the correct travel position; a simple adjustment may be necessary when the hardware will not nest properly. Carefully inspect the fabric; it's amazing how fast the sun will deteriorate it. Powered awnings should be carefully inspected while extending and retracting. Listen intently for any type of grinding or metal-to-metal sounds. The wind sensor (if so equipped) can also be tested with a hair dryer. With the hair dryer on high speed in the cold setting, direct the flow of air 2 or 3 inches from the sensor to simulate a strong wind.

Inspect all of the slide toppers for proper tension, and check the fabric condition, especially where it is installed into the rail on the side wall. When slide-topper fabrics sag, it's a good indication that the spring needs to be tightened.

Enlist the aid of helping hands and operate the slideout rooms while listening to and watching the movement. They should move freely and evenly, opening or closing. Inspect all slideout seals including the upper seal. Clean and apply a protectant to both the inner and outer seals, if applicable. Use protectant that is free of petroleum distillates. Don't forget to inspect the bottom of the slideout room. Inspect all visible parts of the slide mechanism for loose bolts, excess rust

(14) Cracked tire sidewalls may warrant replacement, depending on the age and severity of the damage. (15) Drain and flush the hot-water tank after a long travel season or at least once a year. (16) Suburban hot-water tanks use an anode rod to prevent inner-tank damage. Replacing every six months is cheap insurance. (17) Lubricate the slideout mechanism only if called for by the manufacturer.



(12) Maintaining a clean air-conditioner return air filter is essential for keeping the evaporator free of debris. (13) If an inspection determines the need for slideout repair, the use of EternaBond tape will make the process clean and simple.

or damaged parts. It's amazing how fast damage can occur from a loose screw or debris buildup. Lubricate the slideout mechanism only if recommended by the manufacturer.

Carefully inspect and lubricate the entry step using the manufacturer's recommended product. With a flashlight, lie underneath the step and check the mounting bolts and all wiring. Having a step fail in the extended position can quickly turn into a damaged step that is beyond repair (not to mention an injury). If your RV's step is looking a bit rusty and is in need of some fresh paint, purchase a can of good quality black semigloss spray paint. Mask off the body of the RV around the step to prevent overspray. Apply as directed, using a facemask and protective eyewear.

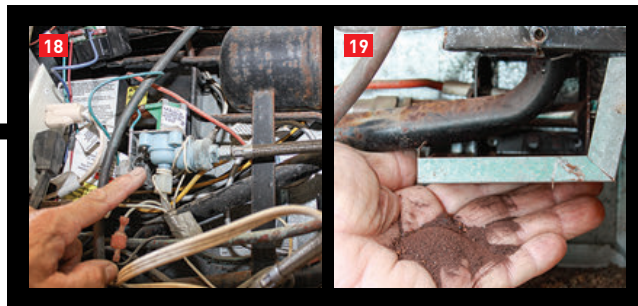
Inspect each tire for abnormal wear or cracking on the sidewalls and between the tread. Also, inspect the inside of the tire for any type of bulge or major cracking in the sidewalls. Tires used for RV service normally time-out before they wear out. Seven years is the maximum life of most steel-belted radials; Michelin, for example, suggests that tires can last up to 10 years, if they are properly covered during storage or long-term visits at an RV park.

The DOT (Department of Transportation) code on the side of the tire will provide the date of manufacture. The code may be visible from inside or outside, depending on mounting. Inflate all tires to the recommended pressure before putting in storage, and don't forget to inspect and check air pressure in the spare tire, if so equipped.

If the suspension is equipped with air bags, now would be the time to visually inspect for any type of wear, abnormal cracking and alignment of the mounting brackets on the frame. While you're crawling around under the RV, it's a good



(18) A leaking ice-maker water valve in the back of the refrigerator can cause expensive collateral damage to surrounding structures and appliances. (19) Inspection of the refrigerator burner assembly will prevent unexpected failures.



idea to visually inspect the hitch receiver. Inspect for broken welds or loose bolts. Repaint any rusting areas. Since you're still under the RV and/or tow vehicle, look for any type of fluid leak, loose or missing bolts, burned wires and anything that may be excessively rusted or seem out of place. Check trailer suspensions for worn spring shackles. Take a look at the date of the last bearing/brake service and handle accordingly. Basically, you are on a mission to visually check the overall condition of the entire chassis.

Remove the water-heater access door and check for excess dirt, burned wires, spiderwebs in the gas-tube assembly or corrosion from a leaky pressure-relief valve. Sometimes the leaking from the pressure-relief valve will stop with repeated openings and closings; replace it if the leaking doesn't stop. Drain and flush the inner tank. If the water heater is equipped with an anode rod, it should be replaced twice a year to protect the inner tank.

Open the access door to the rear in the refrigerator. Check for any type of a wasp nest, debris often caused by a bird's nest, and any wires that may be out of place or loose. Turn the refrigerator on gas and listen to the burner; it should have an audible flame noise. When the flame is silent, the energy (Btu value) needed for proper cooling is diminished. A professional should service the refrigerator gas system annually.

It's now time to move into the interior. Thoroughly test all appliances that have been dormant during the summer months. Inspect the refrigerator door gaskets and the interior plastic liner. Clean with the proper solution and put in two open boxes of baking soda, one in the freezer and the other in the refrigerator compartment, to absorb odors. Leave the doors cracked open while in storage.

An LP-gas leak/pressure test should be performed yearly, and doing this before the RV goes into storage or has been on the road for a while is a good idea. Improper gas pressure can affect the operation of all appliances. LP-gas regulators should be replaced every five years regardless of the condition. Replace the battery in the smoke detector every year. Test the smoke, carbon monoxide and LP-gas detectors — all three of these detectors should be replaced every five years regardless of the amount of use.

Test the operation of the toilet, and check for water leaks at the rear of the toilet and around the floor. Using a flashlight, inspect all of the moving parts that are visible. If the toilet is not holding water, a seal service/replacement is usually necessary, if cleaning the debris from the groove doesn't do the trick.

Change all water filters unless the RV is being winterized. Water filters can grow a certain amount of algae when they sit for extended periods of time. Most water-filter cartridges need to be replaced on an annual basis.

Using a flashlight, inspect all visible water and plumbing lines under the galley and bathroom sinks, as well as all the fixtures in the utility bay for leaks or compromised connections. Test the dump valves for smooth operation and make sure the valves close completely. Don't forget to check faucets and waterlines in the exterior shower compartment, if so equipped.

Operate the water pump while listening carefully for any type of a bearing deterioration or an unusual variation in RPM. If you suspect that the water pressure has diminished, it may be necessary to replace the water pump. Repair kits are usually ineffective and not reliable. Most water pumps have an intake filter between the pump and the water tank. Inspect and clean the filter before a problem arises.

Operate all the window blinds and inspect the cords and retainers. The cords, as well as all the plastic pieces, can be repaired or replaced. A good website to find these parts is www.fixmyblinds.com.

Remove all interior screens and clean with a mild soap-and-water solution. While the screens are out, open and close the windows while watching the mechanisms to make sure they are not bent or badly rusted. Lubricate with the light oil recommended for the type of window. Replace any gaskets that are deteriorated, torn or cracked.

Test the operation of the roof vents. Remove the screens and clean with a mild soap-and-water solution. Inspect and lube the vent crank assembly, making sure it is not bent or the nylon guide is not broken.

Inspect the shorepower cord as well as any extension cords and adapters that have been used during the season. Replace them when any of the cord ends are compromised. A bad connection can create a serious problem.

Clean and inspect the batteries. Check electrolyte levels in open-cell batteries, look for corrosion and check the condition of the cables, wires and terminals. It's a good idea to remove the cables one post at a time and remove any corrosion with 200-grit sandpaper. Clean the batteries and the battery compartment with a battery-corrosion remover/neutralizer or with baking soda and water. When reinstalling the cables, use a corrosion-inhibitor product available at auto-parts stores.

While an annual inspection may seem like a lot of work, there's no question that the payoff in the future will relate to trouble-free journeys. 🚐



Your Pinion Matters

Heavy towing for extended periods can put your truck's differential to the test, as added friction sends internal temperatures soaring. BD Diesel Performance's new Cast to Cool differential covers feature a larger oil sump that nearly doubles capacity and are designed to actually keep oil on the gears, rather than allowing it to fling onto the inner surfaces and drip back down, according to the company. Internal and external fins help dissipate heat, and the mounting surface features an integrated, reusable Viton O-ring to prevent leaks. Each Cast to Cool differential cover comes with stainless-steel Allen head-cap bolts and a magnetic drain plug. Available for popular Ram, Ford and GM applications.

MSRP: \$247
800-887-5030

www.dieselperformance.com
Circle 131 on Reader Service Card



Camp Casual

Packing plates and bowls into your RV every time you head out on the road is a pain, and using paper plates sure doesn't add much to your mealtime experiences. Camp Casual brings back the fun with a colorful, retro-inspired 12-piece dining set. The vintage-style dishes have RV-camping designs and are made of 100 percent BPA-free heavyweight melamine. The set contains four unique plates, four salad plates and four bowls. The company also recently introduced its five-piece kid-friendly mealtime set, which includes a three-part divided plate, a bowl, cup, fork and spoon. The kids' set is packed in a reusable box with a handle. The company claims the sets are top-shelf dishwasher-safe.

MSRP: \$49.99/12-piece set;
\$19.99/kids' set

818-864-2707, www.campcasual.com
Circle 132 on Reader Service Card

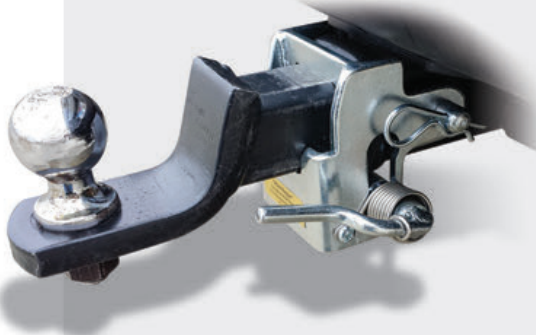


Make Your Li-ion Roar

Lithium-ion batteries are quickly gaining popularity due to their long life and light weight, two benefits that speak directly to RVers. Progressive Dynamics' Inteli-Power 9100L Series lithium-ion battery converterchargers are designed to meet the stringent voltages required for properly charging and maintaining lithium batteries. Lithium-ion batteries require special balancing circuits and chargers to prevent overcharging a cell or discharging too much. Inteli-Power units deliver filtered DC power to the lithium-ion battery to ensure the built-in electronic balancing circuits operate properly. Output voltage can be factory adjusted to meet OEM requirements for various lithium-ion battery chemistries and voltages.

MSRP: \$201 to \$351
269-781-4241

www.progressivedynamics.com
Circle 133 on Reader Service Card



Hug Your Hitch

When you tow a travel trailer, hitches are part of your life — and so are annoying rattles. Most of us just deal with it — or turn up the stereo. But if you've been searching for a viable solution, the Hitch Hugger from Dakota Metal Works might just be it. The spring-loaded Hitch Hugger removes the vertical and lateral slack in the ball mount and hitch-receiver assemblies, resulting in a quiet ride, whether towing or solo. The Hitch Hugger installs in seconds and requires no tools — just insert the ball-mount shank through the Hitch Hugger, place the assembly in the hitch receiver, and you're done. The product also helps eliminate wobble in bicycle racks, cargo carriers and receiver-mounted mud flaps. The Hitch Hugger is available in a variety of sizes to suit most popular hitch designs.

MSRP: \$69.95 to \$79.95, 605-368-0342, www.dakotametalworks.com
Circle 134 on Reader Service Card



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RiversideResort.com



High-Tech Electronics

Electronic devices continue to expand their functions in our everyday life, as features such as antilock braking and air bags are almost taken for granted. New automotive technologies come onstream frequently, and many drivers are unable to keep up with the changes. Let's take a look at how some of these technological wonders work.

Antilock Braking Systems

Antilock braking systems (ABS) were introduced to the U.S. market in the 1970s. Before that, ABS was used on aircraft, which have to stop fast in all sorts of weather conditions, sometimes on wet and icy runways.

The basic system designs have changed little over the years, although the components have become lighter, faster acting, more reliable and less expensive. Typical ABS installations include an electronic control unit (ECU) or computer, wheel-speed sensors for each wheel and a pump unit with at least two hydraulic valves.

The ECU monitors wheel rotation speeds. If it detects a wheel turning significantly slower than the others during braking, which indicates impending wheel skidding, it actuates valves to reduce hydraulic pressure to the affected wheel's brake. This reduces brake force on that wheel, so skidding is nearly eliminated. This ABS actuation is repeated rapidly and can be detected by the driver via brake-pedal pulsing. Some ABS systems can pulse braking pressure 15 times or more per second.

ABS tends to increase braking distances on gravel, sand and deep

snow. On these surfaces, locked wheels dig in and build up mounds in front of the tires, stopping the vehicle more quickly, but ABS allows the wheels to turn, preventing this from occurring. Some manufacturers provide an "off-road" button to turn ABS off or modify its function.

With early systems, often a professional driver could stop without ABS in somewhat shorter distances than the ABS was able to do on dry pavement. However, with modern systems, it's almost impossible to out-brake a good ABS, even in ideal conditions.

Traction Control

With the advent of ABS wheel-speed sensors and individual wheel brake-control capability, traction control became possible. Just as with braking, the onboard computer could quickly determine if drive wheels were spinning when under power and signal the engine controls to reduce power just enough to control wheelspin.

Early traction controls retarded spark timing to reduce power slightly, and if more power reduction was needed, electrical current to the fuel injectors of individual cylinders was briefly interrupted (controlled misfire) until wheelspin was controlled. On some vehicles, power cuts were used in conjunction with individual brake application, via the ABS, to clamp down on the spinning wheel and control wheelspin.

Meanwhile, throttle-by-wire controls were being developed, and this is what

was needed to improve the control of engine-power application during wheelspin. Various systems have also been devised to route power to the drive wheels with the most traction, including differentials and transfer cases that direct power to either the front or rear axles, or both.

Electronic Stability Control

Once we had ABS for braking and traction control for accelerating, the next logical move was to provide stability control for cornering. Many crashes involve vehicles skidding or spinning off the road, so the challenge was to find ways to reduce these situations by using technology to override the driver's inputs (which initially led to the impending loss of control).

When vehicles lose control, it is often caused by weight-distribution shifts while turning, exacerbated by excessive speed. For example, if a driver brakes hard (perhaps after realizing they are going too fast for a corner), just as the front wheels are being turned for the upcoming corner, the weight shift forward from braking can unload the rear tires and cause a loss of traction, allowing the rear end to swing around violently (pivoting around the front wheels, which now have more grip because of the forward weight shift). This leads to a quick spin off the road, if not caught in time.

Electronic stability control (ESC) adds a whole new dimension to vehicle dynamics. In normal driving, ESC continuously monitors steering inputs and vehicle direction. It determines the driver's intended direction through steering-wheel angle and compares that to the vehicle's actual direction, determined by sensors that measure lateral acceleration, yaw and individual wheel speeds. When the vehicle is not going where the driver is steering, ESC intercedes. This typically may occur during understeer or oversteer situations while turning on slick roads, taking emergency evasive swerves or when hydroplaning.



Mobileye makes a pedestrian warning system that sounds an alert and shows the distance to objects near the vehicle.

ESC employs a hydraulic modulator similar to an ABS unit, so each wheel receives the correct braking pressure. ABS reduces hydraulic pressure during braking, whereas ESC may increase pressure in certain situations. A vacuum brake booster may be used in addition to the hydraulic pump to meet required pressures.

An accelerometer measures lateral acceleration. The longitudinal acceleration sensor is similar but provides the computer with information about road pitch and is also another source of vehicle acceleration measurement. A roll-rate sensor may be used that is similar to the yaw-rate sensor but improves the controller's spatial orientation and helps provide vehicle behavior detection not available from the other sensors.

ESC also calculates the direction of travel and skid. By rapid and judicious asymmetrical application of individual brakes, it is often possible to prevent a vehicle from looping as it starts to go into a skid and bring it back to the direction commanded by the driver. The ESC system may also cut engine power and/or shift the transmission to slow the vehicle.

Some of the latest developments in ESC include Roll Stability Control (RSC), or active rollover protection, which is often used in high-profile vans and SUVs. When RSC detects a potential rollover situation, it reduces throttle, applies brakes to induce understeer and slows the vehicle. Active and passive safety systems can be networked to work together. For example, if sensors detect that a vehicle is about to crash, the computer could slow the vehicle, straighten seat backs and tighten seat belts, preparing for an accident.

Various studies have recognized ESC's effectiveness to help drivers maintain control and avoid or reduce the severity of crashes. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) found that ESC reduces crashes

by 35 percent. Additionally, SUVs with ESC are involved in about two-thirds fewer accidents than SUVs without ESC. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), an educational nonprofit organization, concluded that ESC reduces the chances of all fatal crashes by 43 percent, fatal single-vehicle crashes by 56 percent and fatal single-vehicle rollovers by 77 to 80 percent.

Trailer Stability Program

Vehicles towing trailers tend to be heavy at the rear and light at the front, which brings another potential handling problem. As speed increases, trailers that are not properly loaded or not hitched with a properly adjusted weight-distributing hitch can start to sway from side to side and may even go out of control. This is especially true with long and heavy trailers, particularly those that are tail-heavy.

When trailers start to sway, it is typically caused by a combination of speed, crosswinds, road conditions and an incorrectly loaded trailer. When sway occurs, many drivers try to keep their tow vehicle and trailer on course by countersteering. However, this may increase the swaying and eventually result in a loss of control. It is essential to detect and stop a towing sway situation before it can fully develop.

A Trailer Stability Program (TSP) detects sway mainly with a yaw sensor. The vehicle combination is slowed by automatically braking all wheels while simultaneously reducing engine power

to halt the swaying. TSP software in the ESP module may be activated when the trailer's electrical cable is plugged into the tow vehicle's receptacle.

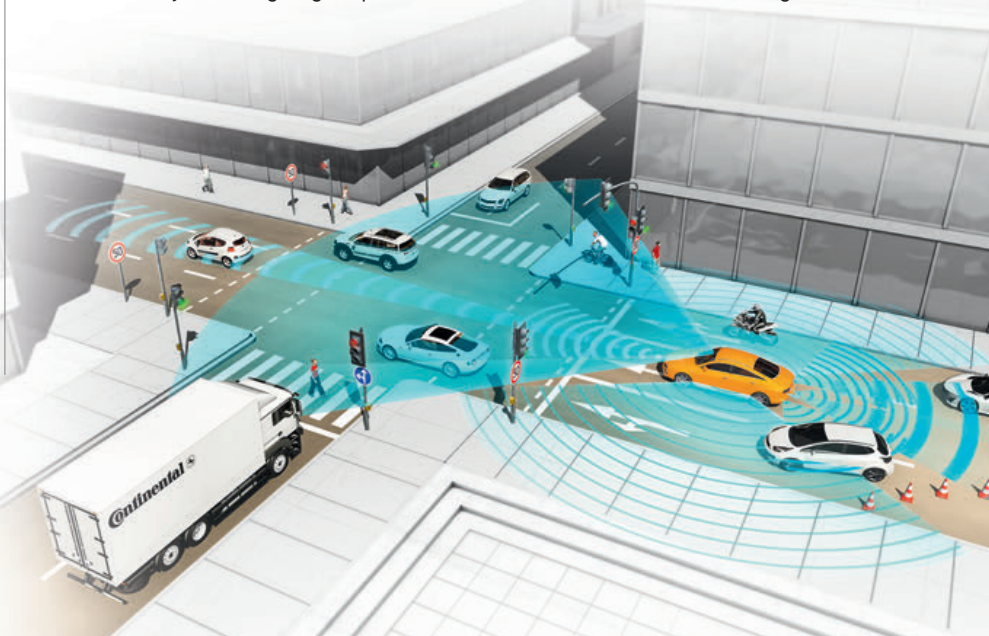
Systems such as ABS, ESC and TSP don't increase traction, nor do they change the laws of physics. Rather, they operate within inherent limits of the vehicle's handling and available traction, and optimize that combination. Careless or inattentive driving can still exceed the vehicle's limits, resulting in loss of control.

Air Bags

Crash-protection air bags work by having impact sensors near the periphery of the vehicle. When an impact greater than a preset threshold occurs, the sensor tells the air-bag control module to send voltage to the air bag's explosive charges. These inflate the bags in a few milliseconds, as they must be inflated before the force of the crash impact reaches the vehicle's passengers. This is particularly difficult in side impacts because of the extremely brief interval between vehicle impact and contact of the occupants with the side of the vehicle they are riding in. The bags are designed to stay inflated long enough to protect occupants from a secondary impact and then deflate to allow easy exit.

Newer front-air-bag systems may deploy in stages to reduce injury, and some vehicles have what is known as an occupant classification system (OCS). OCS measures the weight of the

Continental AG, a German manufacturer of high-performance automotive products, has developed a system that tracks vehicles all around and detects potential collision hazards.



passenger and his/her distance from the steering wheel (or dashboard) so the air bag can be deployed with the appropriate amount of force.

Backup Alerts

Backup alerts use small transmitter/receiver units, which are mounted on the lower-rear portion of the vehicle. These are connected to an onboard computer. When the vehicle is backed up near any objects, a variable alert, which increases as the vehicle gets closer, warns the driver of the proximity to hazards.

On some units, when a vehicle in the next lane enters the blind spot on either side, a warning indicator will light up in that side-view mirror. If the driver signals a lane change in that direction while the vehicle is still there, the indicator will flash to get the driver's attention.

Rear Cross-Traffic Alert (RCTA) can help when backing out from a driveway or parking space. When the vehicle is in reverse and speed is less than about 5 MPH, the system is designed to detect vehicles approaching from the right or left rear of the vehicle. If the system senses cross traffic, it warns the driver by flashing the side-mirror indicators and sounding a warning tone. These systems can work by using either ultrasound (sonar) or radar.

Backup Cameras

Backup cameras utilize a video camera with a wide-angle lens mounted at the rear of the vehicle that displays the images on a cab-mounted screen when the vehicle is shifted into reverse. This can also be handy for backing up to a trailer when there's no helper around, although it should not be relied upon solely.

Adaptive Cruise Control

Adaptive cruise control (ACC) is a cruise-control system that automatically adjusts vehicle speed to maintain a safe distance from vehicles ahead. These systems use either a radar or laser transmitter/sensor setup connected to a computer, which directs the vehicle to slow when approaching another vehicle and accelerate again to



Continental's Road Departure Protection sensor detects the vehicle's lane position.

the preset speed when traffic allows. They also apply brakes when needed to maintain a safe distance.

Brake Assist and Override

Brake assist (or Emergency Brake Assist/EBA) detects situations when emergency braking is required, by measuring how fast the accelerator is released and the brake pedal is depressed. If panic braking is detected, Brake assist automatically provides maximum braking to offset drivers' tendency to brake with insufficient force. Brake assist has been shown to reduce stopping distance by up to 20 percent in some studies.

Brake override is a safety feature designed to work as a fail-safe measure in the event that the vehicle receives mixed signals (i.e., the gas and brake pedals are pushed simultaneously), or an electrical malfunction causes the engine to keep accelerating even if the driver's foot is on the brake. Brake override detects if the brake and accelerator pedals are pressed at the same time, and then overrides the accelerate command and stops the vehicle.

Lane Departure Warning and Lane Keeping Assist

Lane departure warning (LDW) systems use cameras to watch for lane markings and computer algorithms to decide when the vehicle has moved out of its proper lane position (unless a turn signal is on in that direction). It then provides the driver with a visual alert

plus an audible tone or a vibration of the seat or steering wheel. These systems are designed to reduce crashes by addressing driver distractions, errors and drowsiness.

Lane Keeping Assist is a new feature, which, in addition to LDW, automatically returns the vehicle to its lane. Some vehicles combine lane-keeping systems with adaptive cruise control to provide additional safety.

Autonomous (Self-Driving) Vehicles

With the above-named technologies, the question is no longer if autonomous vehicles are possible, but rather, when they will be available to the public. Accurate sensing and a lot of computing power and complex programming are required. It's expected that some self-driving vehicles will be available to the public later in this decade.

Google has been one of the leaders in this technology, and several states have already passed laws allowing the testing of driverless vehicles. The majority of vehicle crashes are caused by driver error, and having a computer in control is likely to reduce the number of mishaps.

It will be interesting to see how the inevitable court cases shake out. If the courts find that vehicle manufacturers are liable when a self-driving vehicle crashes, resulting in multimillion dollar verdicts, that could affect the viability of this up-and-coming technology. Time will tell. 🚗

Storage Solutions

Installing stretch netting in RV compartments and cabinets is just the beginning of an adventure to keep stuff under control

DIFFICULTY 1 2 3 4 5

TIME TO COMPLETE 30 MINUTES

TOOLS NEEDED SCREW GUN, SCREWDRIVER, MEASURING TAPE

It's no surprise that just about every RVer out there concocts ways to manipulate, modify or add space for storage, even if there really isn't anywhere left to go. Unfortunately, while packing an RV, most owners find that they run out of space much sooner than anticipated. This is especially the case for RVs like toy haulers, where a large portion of living and storage space is dedicated to an open garage. While owners end up scratching their heads for solutions, sometimes it's best to turn to companies that specialize in storage organization, like Organized Obie.

The company has created a huge line of organization products that allow RVers to either take advantage of nooks and crannies for stashing stuff or simply keep the items from flying around on bumpy roads. Many of the items found on the www.organizedobie.com website use stretch netting in a number of configurations to keep stored items in control and easily accessible. Some of the items that work for RVs include pre-sized Barrier Stretch Nets, Gear Nets, Framed Nets, and mesh TXT Pockets with quick and easy adhesive mounting.

All of the Obie items are do-it-yourself-friendly, meaning the products allow for a lot of freedom and creativity when determining which ones are best and how to affix them for your individual needs. To get a good feel for the stor-



To install the netting, screws are pushed through the eyelets in the ends and driven into the wood surface using a screw gun and Phillips bit. Holes were predrilled to prevent splintering while driving the screws.

age netting, I installed a 12- x 16-inch Framed Net (\$17.90) and a 24- x 60-inch Gear Net (\$74.80) in the exterior compartment of a toy-hauler travel trailer. A 10- x 10-inch TXT Pocket (\$27.95) and a 20- x 24-inch Barrier Net (\$24.50) were installed in an interior cabinet.

To install the netting, simply determine the best location for the chosen product and mark the area to be pre-drilled for the included screws. It is worth mentioning that predrilling makes installation cleaner, since lower grades of woods found in many RVs will splinter when driving screws. Once the area is predrilled, all that's left to do is screw in the included J-hooks or the small plastic clamps (depending on the product), being careful not to overtighten. Since the Gear Net didn't come with hardware, I used 1-inch cabinet screws with a big flangelike head to cover the hole. Using this kind of screw also helps with mounting strength and support, plus it eliminates the need for washers.

All in all, I was able to install four completely different types of Obie organizers in about half an hour. Quite possibly the best part of the Obie stuff is that, if you think out the situation, you'll be able to take advantage of otherwise wasted space for storage, not to mention the ability to keep the items tidy. Using a wall in the compartment to hang the Gear Net resulted in a place to stash easily accessible items where the real estate was normally wasted. On the opposite side, the Framed Net was used to keep small, loose objects at bay, rather than being scattered all over the compartment while on the road.

The best way to plan for improving storage is to spend some time on the company's website. You'll be amazed at the number of products that can be adapted for RV use, beyond the net-type storage items. 📧

Organized Obie
574-266-1809, www.organizedobie.com

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MAX TIRE PRESSURE VERSUS REDUCED PRESSURE

Q It's an old question, but I do need your advice. I just bought four new tires for my trailer: P205/75R14 by MotoMaster, made in China. The dealer inflated them to 35 PSI, and the tire sidewall reads, "Max pressure 51 PSI." What would you put in? The trailer weighs 5,000 pounds. I had Towmax Power King trailer tires that were two years old with lots of sidewall cracks and 1/32 inch of wear. The Towmax dealer would not give any warranty for them, and that's why I went with passenger-car tires, which I had on all my other trailers with no problems.

Marc Bazin, via email

A First, we do not recommend you use passenger-car tires on a trailer. Trailer tires (called special trailer or ST) should be considered first because they are designed specifically for the way trailers are used — other tires are not. Failing that, light truck tires (called LT) can be used. That being said, the dealer probably left the pressure lower because he felt the tires had excess weight capacity



for your trailer's weight. Each tire manufacturer supplies a weight and loading/tire pressure chart for each tire it sells, and your tire dealer should be able to supply that chart. If your trailer weighs 5,000 pounds and your tire capacities add up to 8,000 pounds, for example, you can somewhat reduce the inflation pressure to provide a softer ride.

However, if you have not weighed the trailer (individual wheel weights would be ideal) and therefore do not know its true weight, we recommend you use the maximum inflation pressure listed on the tire sidewall to provide the highest load-carrying capacity.

Those MotoMaster tires are very inexpensive, which is a red flag, and I hope they do the job for you. Drop a note later and let us know how they work out. — **Jeff Johnston**

ENTERTAINMENT-CENTER SHUFFLE

Q I purchased a 2013 Coleman 249RB last year at the Camping World here in Las Vegas. I was wondering if there could be a way to move the island entertainment center toward the rear about 6 inches or so. The bed is just a bit too short for me, making for some uncomfortable nights. I don't think it is a load-bearing wall or anything like that. It seems like only screws attach it to the floor and ceiling. The wiring would have to be adjusted, this I know. I would sacrifice some room aft, but I'm willing.

Gene Johngrass, Las Vegas, Nevada

A That island entertainment center at the foot of the bed may not be a bearing wall in the same sense

as defined in a fixed residence, but it is part of the overall structure of the trailer. A shift in the wiring is likely called for, and it's important that, if you move it, you have it secured well to the appropriate-size structural floor and ceiling members to maintain the unit's body strength. You also need to be sure its new position won't interfere with the slideout room when stowed for travel.

This could be quite a project, so unless you're really good with this type of remodel, you may want to leave it to a shop with qualified technicians. — **J.J.**

LED LIGHT INTERFERENCE

Q We own a 2010 Forest River Rockwood 8265 ultralight fifth-wheel. We have been replacing the

12-volt DC incandescent lamps with LED lamps to save energy. The problem that occurs is that, when the TV antenna signal is poor and these light fixtures are used, the TV reception is reduced or shut off completely. The same seems to occur with different brands of LED replacement lamps.

I have checked all of the cable connections front to rear that I can access, but there has been no improvement.

Dave Thayer, Auburn, New York

A Each of those LED lamps contains a small electronic circuit board to regulate the voltage to the bulbs, Dave, and those circuits vary a great deal in complexity, cost and design. They also vary in how much radio frequency (RF) emissions they produce or feed back into the RV's 12-volt DC system. The more RF produced, the more likely it's going to cause interference.

At the same time, your TV should have fully shielded cables connecting it to the antenna and signal amplifier, and those should help protect it from stray signals. A low-power channel means

THE TECH TEAM



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



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

that a reduced-strength signal can be subject to more interference by outside sources such as the LED light circuits. First, check the coaxial cables to be sure the shielding hasn't been damaged and the contacts aren't corroded. This situation could also be aggravated by a bad ground connection in the power lines to the TV, the amplifier or antenna. Inspect all of your ground-wire connections, including those right at the battery and converter. This is your best bet for tracking down the source of the interference. — J.J.

STUCK DUMP VALVE

Q We recently purchased a 2014 Coachmen Brookstone fifth-wheel, and we are the first owners. There are three holding tanks: two gray and one black. We opened the black tank only two or three times before it would not close off totally; the same thing happened with one of the gray tanks. We put lots of water in the black tank before we flush it. We have tried filling the black tank with freshwater at least five times to clear any debris from the valve. What would you suggest we try next?
Don M., Safford, Arizona

A It seems like your trailer is under warranty, so this is the type of situation your dealer should be able to clear up for you in person. Your trailer isn't old enough for this to be a corrosion-related problem, and dump valves normally operate smoothly for years before jamming becomes a problem.

A black-tank valve could theoretically become jammed due to some solid obstruction dropped into the tank, but a gray tank, with nothing but liquid waste in it, should not cause the valve to stop closing completely. We don't have all the specs on your trailer, but if it uses valves controlled by flexible cables, the cables have probably gone out of adjustment. This is a common problem with this type of dump-valve actuating system, as some manufacturers tend to use cable attachments that aren't especially robust, but it's a fairly easy problem for the dealer to adjust and set right, once access is created.

Our best advice is to visit your dealer and have them adjust the cables, and you'll probably find the valves will close completely again. You can also check an RV accessory shop for waste-tank additives that include valve lubricants, and those may likewise help out. — J.J.

GPS MISGUIDANCE

Q I have a 2010 Suburban that I use to tow a 35-foot travel trailer. The GPS on the Suburban works well, but it does not seem to know that I pull a trailer, so it continually routes us through some tight places to save a few feet of travel distance or a few seconds of time. Is there an update to the GPS map/system that would be more sensitive to someone pulling a large trailer? It would seem logical that there would be, since people pull heavy trailers with the large Suburban, and surely they don't want to go down small roads with 10-foot clearances.

Dick Donovan, Reston, Virginia

A If you can determine the model number of the GPS (it should be on one of the screens), you can try an online search for an update. It's often a simple disc that's relatively cheap. You can also check with a Chevrolet dealer.

A vast percentage of those who use GPS navigation systems are driving solo vehicles, so factory systems aren't geared toward those who tow trailers. There are a lot of different trailer sizes, so it would be difficult to come up with a one-size-fits-all GPS towing program.

Garmin, Magellan and Rand McNally offer GPS devices designed for RVers. All of these devices allow you to program a personal profile and guide accordingly. — J.J.

AWNING EDGE SLIPPING

Q I just noticed that on our A&E slideout awning the edge of the fabric with the sewn-in rope is coming loose. This problem just started, and I would like to know the best way to get the cord back in the tube. We've had the camper since 2005. I tried unwinding the tube but could not get it completely



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unwound. Any help will be greatly appreciated.

Dave Meekins
Blythewood, South Carolina

A It seems like the polycord is sliding out of the fabric. During manufacturing, the polycord is sewn into the fabric. You'll need a partner to help you unroll the fabric from the roller tube. Use a cotter pin in one of the holes in the head casting, through the main shaft, to immobilize the spring. At this point, you should be able to slide the polycord back in place. Install a screw through the edge of the fabric into the roller tube to prevent future sliding. Do not use a long screw that may interfere with the spring assembly. Pull the cotter pin, and the fabric should roll back. There's lots of tension on the spring, so both people must hold on tightly, and it's wise to wear protective goggles. If you're not experienced with this type of repair, seek professional assistance. — **J.J.**

TOWING A JEEP

Q I recently purchased a tow dolly to tow my 1986 Jeep CJ7. It is a 258 inline-six engine with a five-speed tranny. I need to know the procedure to tow. Do I have the key on to keep the steering wheel unlocked? Can you advise me on how to tow this vehicle?

Rebecca Risher
Charleston, South Carolina

A When you are towing with a tow bar, with all wheels on the road, the steering wheel needs to be unlocked so the towed vehicle can follow the tow vehicle. However, when you are towing on a tow dolly, the front wheels are tied down onto the dolly and don't turn. Therefore, you don't need to keep the steering unlocked. Since the rear wheels will be on the road and spinning, you need to place the transfer case into neutral and put the transmission into fifth gear.

You also need tow lights and safety chains or cables. Additionally, you should have brakes on the tow dolly that are activated by a conventional and readily available trailer-brake control.

— **Ken Freund**

TRAILER SWAY PROBLEM

Q We just bought a Forest River Salem Hemisphere Lite 282RK travel trailer. We pull it with a 2013 GMC Sierra 1500 crew cab with 20-inch tires. I bought five-ply XL tires. We have an Equal-i-zer weight-distributing four-way sway-control hitch, and we drive only 60 MPH. The problem is, it still sways — the back of the truck moves back and forth in the wind or if a semi goes by. The dealer put the hitch on. Should I buy a sway-control bar for the truck, or do I need to get a better hitch set?

Tim Almich, Tea, South Dakota

A The 282RK is 35 feet in total length, has a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 8,700 pounds and a claimed hitch weight of 700 pounds. These so-called lightweight travel trailers, especially long ones like yours, are more easily moved around because there is a lot of surface area for the wind to blow against and not a lot of weight to keep everything planted. That trailer is also a rear-kitchen model, which may be putting more weight at the rear than other travel trailers, and that can cause unstable handling.

The first thing I suggest you do is weigh the combination on a truck scale and check the axle weights with the truck and trailer fully loaded for a trip with fuel, water and all supplies on board. Make sure the trailer's weight is properly distributed, loading as many heavy items in the forward storage compartment as possible.

You did not mention if you travel with the water tank full or empty. If the tank is forward of the rear axle, traveling with it full may help stability. If it is behind the axles, you should travel with it empty or with just enough water for flushing the toilet, washing hands, etc., while on the road. Be sure to compare the truck's rear axle weight to the gross axle weight rating (GAWR) tag, which should be located inside the driver's doorjamb.

Next, inflate the tires to the manufacturer's recommended inflation pressure, based on the actual load, by using a load-inflation chart (available on man-

manufacturer's websites and at tire dealers).

The Equal-i-zer hitch incorporates weight distribution as well as sway control, and it is a proven design that works well when used properly. Verify that the hitch is correctly adjusted, as this sounds as if your spring bars aren't tight enough, which can lead to unstable handling. — K.F.

TRAILER-BRAKE UPGRADE

Q We have a 2011 Bighorn 38-foot fifth-wheel. I tow it with a 2003 Dodge Ram 3500 dually. When having to make a panic stop, I do not feel secure in the braking capability it has, and I am considering installing disc brakes. A fellow RVer who had installed disc brakes on his similar fifth-wheel told me he was dissatisfied with the results. He then said he had the disc brakes removed and had the 7,000-pound axle upgraded to an 8,000-pound axle. He said this axle upgrade improved the braking performance. I am undecided on which is the best way to go.

Rickard Standish, Dallas, Oregon

A It's possible your friend may have had an improper match between his trailer-brake control and the electric-over-hydraulic disc-brake actuator. Not all brake controls, including some integral ones built into earlier model trucks from the factory, are compatible with all disc-brake units. When they're set up right, the aftermarket trailer disc brakes are fantastic and slow a trailer down with enthusiasm. Disc brakes are also an improvement over the stock brakes; they tend to get rid of heat and resist fade due to heat buildup on long grades better than drum brakes. — K.F.

DIESEL SMELL IN CAB

Q I own a 2011 Ram 3500 diesel and have had problems from early on with a strong diesel smell in my cab when stopping at traffic lights after driving 50-plus miles. I have had two dealers check this problem, and neither knows the answer. (continued on page 77)

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(continued from page 73) From looking at the Cummins Forum, I have read about a lot of other people having the same problem. Is there anyone with an answer, or is Chrysler just dodging the problem?

Jerry Dews, Port Neches, Texas

A We're not sure if you mean the smell of unburned fuel or the smell of diesel exhaust. When you are having the problem, pull over in a safe spot and quickly walk around the truck, sniffing for the area that the scent is strongest. Pop the hood and look for signs of fuel leakage or the sound of exhaust leaking. The air intake for the cab interior is located at the base of the windshield, so the engine compartment is the likely source of the odor.
 — K.F.

WINTERIZING WOES

Q Had you asked me last fall if I had winterized our 2008 Coachmen correctly, I would have said, "You bet!" This spring when I filled the water system, I found out I did not do so well. There is now a leak in the hot-water tank. Try as I may, I cannot locate a repair manual. Can you help?

Jim Snider, Novi, Michigan

A Jim, if the hot-water tank is made by Suburban, the only fix is to replace it. If it's an Atwood, then you have a couple of choices. The tanks are generally not repairable, but they can be replaced, which can be much less expensive than buying a new water heater, especially if it's an electric/DSI LP-gas model. Tank replacement should be done by a qualified technician.

If the leak is in the pipes or fittings near the tank, it's just a matter of following basic plumbing procedures and replacing or repairing the defective parts. — J.J. 🚚

HAVE A QUESTION? » Email our experts at rvclinic@trailerlife.com or write to RV Clinic, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Please include your hometown. No phone calls, please.

Keep Connected

Anyone who has hooked up a fifth-wheel and then pulled away, only to have the trailer come unhooked, knows how scary that can be. There are many things — from being in a hurry to a poor inspection routine — that can cause this. Almost always, the cause is driver error, and it can be very costly and dangerous.

I always look at the jaws on my fifth-wheel hitch to ensure that they are securely around the kingpin, and at night I use a flashlight. To help make this easier, I placed a small piece of yellow reflective tape on the jaw, so it shows up easily. Now, not only can I check the latching handle, but I can also easily see the jaw. If the tape isn't in the right position, I know to recheck everything before moving. The first illustration shows the fifth-wheel jaw open, and the second shows it closed (the proper position for moving your trailer).

Jay Key, Harrison, Arkansas



Get a Grip

I spotted a variation of this idea for a grab bar at a Chicago RV show. I bought a shower-stall grab bar at a home-improvement store and mounted it vertically next to the door inside my RV, so we can grip it when exiting. The inside of the door frame is metal, so the attachment is secure. The one I saw at the RV show had a custom twist, making it a bit more useful, but I couldn't find the name of the manufacturer, so I purchased a standard stainless-steel wall-mount grab bar instead. With our grab bar right inside the door, we feel very secure walking down the narrow RV steps, especially at night. Note: Do not install this grab handle unless the RV has adequate backing.

Warren Shulz, Griffith, Indiana

QUICK FIX

No-Muck-Up Hookups

After reading "Small Favors" by Chris Hemer about holding-tank products in the August issue, as a fairly new trailer owner, I have one tip to add. After hooking up the sewer hose, I start by opening the gray-water dump valve for about two seconds to check the hose connections. If there are any issues, spilling a little gray water is a lot less messy. Once you've verified that the connections are good, close the gray-water dump valve and proceed as normal. I can't take credit for this suggestion — I saw it on the *Trailer Life* forum, but I've only seen it mentioned once, and it seems like a really good idea.

Russ Heagle, Mountlake Terrace, Washington 📧

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

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Your Ship Museum Awaits

Climb aboard half-scale replicas of the forward section of the RMS *Titanic* in Branson and Pigeon Forge



Branson, Missouri, and Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, are both family resort destinations, which sets the tone for what's there. Neither caters primarily to adults — they have no casinos or enticing bars. In fact, Pigeon Forge is a dry town. They are also in the Bible Belts of their respective regions of the country.

Branson calls itself the Live Music Show Capital of the World, and has for 50 years. Offered are more than 100 daily shows, as some theaters have three performances a day. You can expect wholesome entertainment and displays of old-fashioned patriotism. The claim to fame of Pigeon Forge has traditionally been as a gateway to Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the most visited national park. As crowds have grown in the past few decades — more than 10 million park visitors last year — entrepreneurs moved in to create things for people to do here once they had seen the park, or to give them another reason to come in the first place.

Entertainer Dolly Parton, who grew up in the Great Smokies, is the most prominent of the entrepreneurs. She created a 154-acre theme park called Dollywood, which is much like the Silver Dollar City theme park in Branson. In fact, it was originally the property of the same people who run the one in Branson, and it, too, was called Silver Dollar City.

Both Branson and Pigeon Forge have *Titanic* museums — they're more like mini-tours of the RMS *Titanic*. The one in Branson opened in 2006, and the one in Pigeon Forge followed four years later. Both are built as half-scale replicas of the forward section of the ship and have 20 galleries displaying hundreds of artifacts.

But why here? Neither has any tie to the *Titanic*, as New York does, for example, being the destination of the ill-fated ocean liner that sailed from England. It's simply because huge numbers of people visit these tourist meccas.

By contrast, I recall visiting Golden Spike National Historic Site, where the track for the transcontinental railroad was joined in 1869. It is in Utah, in the middle



(Top) Grand staircase replicas in the Branson, Missouri, and Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, *Titanic* museums each cost \$1 million to create. (Above) The Branson *Titanic* attraction and its iceberg entrance, as seen from the road.

of nowhere. Someone — not the clearest thinker in our group of tourists — asked the ranger, “Why make us drive so far? Why not have the site closer to the freeway?” Obviously, at an historic site where an event happened, location is everything.

When “boarding” the ship museums, you receive a boarding pass of an actual *Titanic* passenger or crew member. At the end of the self-guided tour, in the Memorial Room, you discover the fate of the person whose name you have been carrying. Displayed here are names of the 2,208 passengers and crew, along with a picture of each of the survivors and a brief note on how their lives turned out.

The ship's grand staircase, in both locations, is made from the original blueprints. Handcrafted with inlaid wood, each cost more than \$1 million to build.

On the starboard side of the captain's bridge in the Pigeon Forge museum is an “iceberg.” It's actually a wall of ice kept frozen by refrigeration. Nearby is a pool of really cold water — I put my hand in it briefly — that simulates how the ocean felt that night. Those in the water froze to death; very few actually drowned.

The only Bible known to have survived the ship's sinking is rotated between the two museums. It belonged to a British minister onboard who did not survive. He gave the Bible to his sister-in-law when she was being placed in a lifeboat.

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34839	15'1"-18'
34840	18'1"-20'
34841	20'1"-22'
34842	22'1"-24'

Part #:	Length:
34843	24'1"-26'
34844	26'1"-28'6"
34845	28'7"-31'6"
34846	31'7"-34'
34847	34'1"-37'

5TH WHEEL

Part #:	Length:
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34853	25'7"-28'
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34855*	31'1"-34'

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64842	22'1"-24'

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64844	26'1"-28'6"
64845	28'7"-31'6"
64846	31'7"-34'

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Part #:	Length:
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34841	20'1"-22'
34842	22'1"-24'

Part #:	Length:
34843	24'1"-26'
34844	26'1"-28'6"
34845	28'7"-31'6"
34846	31'7"-34'
34847	34'1"-37'

5TH WHEEL

Part #:	Length:
34851	Up to 23'
34852	23'1"-25'6"
34853	25'7"-28'
34854*	28'1"-31'

Part #:	Length:
34855*	31'1"-34'
34856*	34'1"-37'
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