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Beaufort, South Carolina



➤ The Minnie Plus fifth-wheel, in three floorplans, is new to Winnebago's towable line. Page 10

On the cover: A golf cart rolls down the rear ramp of the 2018 Grand Design Momentum 376TH at Elkhart Campground in Indiana. Photo by Shawn Spence

Season of Giving

Spreading good cheer as we wrap up a very good year for RVing



It has been a great year to be an RVer. The RV industry and lifestyle have seen unprecedented growth, which is a testament to the freedom and fun while traveling this great land. The recent surge in RV ownership drove many innovations, not only in the design of our homes on wheels but in the technology that is either built into them at the factory or installed as aftermarket additions — making our RV journeys easier and more enjoyable.

A few innovations stand out. First is the widespread use of multiplex systems. Initially reserved for only the highest-end motorcoaches, multiplex systems reduce the wiring needed in RVs and possible failure points, and result in more convenient switching. Additionally, more new RV systems have become mobile-app-friendly, and many functions can be controlled from a smartphone, tablet or built-in touch screen. RV entertainment systems are likewise evolving and improving. In fact, most new models have better audio and video setups than my house had just a few years ago.

The infusion of contemporary building products into RVs is making them better as well. For instance, Azdel, a lightweight composite panel that is impervious to water, rot and delamination, is being used by more manufacturers to replace luan plywood in laminated side walls. Grand Coach, a new manufacturer of small motorhomes, now employs a lightweight, state-of-the-art material for its cabinet faces and doors that improves not only the motorhome's appearance but also its carrying capacity.

Because of these technological advancements, RVers now can live, work and play on the road like never before. But sometimes the sheer number of new products can be overwhelming, particularly when shopping for others. If you're like me, trying to decide what to get my travel companions and fellow RVers for the holidays can be frustrating. That's where *Trailer Life's* RV Gift Guide can help. The magazine's editors and contributors all came up with personal wish lists, and we included the best of that gear in our online guide. From mugs, blankets and bowls with retro-trailer patterns to Wi-Fi extenders and solar-charging kits, this year's guide has something for every RVer. Check it out at giftguide.trailerlife.com.

2017 has been a tough year for those affected by hurricanes, and as I write this, the Las Vegas mass-shooting investigation is under way. With all that is going on in the world, the holidays remind us of our humanity and the need to give our time and resources when possible. For those who have been dealt a hard blow by these events, I hope you find some solace in the holiday season. For the rest of you, please join me in spreading some cheer to those who are having a rough time.

We wish all of our readers happy holidays and a joyous, prosperous new year filled with RV adventures. 🚐

— Chris Dougherty, Technical Editor

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Publisher Ann Emerson

Editor Valerie Law

Managing Editor Donya Carlson

Technical Editor Chris Dougherty

Senior Art Director Rick Damien

Production Director Bob Dawson

Production Manager Brenda Hutchinson

Marketing Manager Lorisa Pierson

Business Manager Katey Purgatorio

Publisher Emeritus Bob Livingston

Consulting Editors Chris Hemer, Jeff Johnston

Contributors Cate Battles, Ed Bolduc, Bryan Johnston, Peter Lewis, Kevin Livingston, Stephanie and Jeremy Puglisi, Pamela Selbert, Bruce W. Smith

Vice President National Sales Terry Thompson
847-229-6759

RV Marketplace/Classifieds Katey Purgatorio
847-229-6756, katey.purgatorio@goodsam.com

Advertising Sales/Southwest Sue Seidlitz
847-229-6813, sue.seidlitz@goodsam.com

Advertising Sales/Southeast Kim Whitaker
919-412-6325, kim.whitaker@goodsam.com

Advertising Sales/Northeast Lou Cicirelli
954-297-9234, lou.cicirelli@goodsam.com

Advertising Sales/Northwest Scott Oakes
847-229-6758, scott.oakes@goodsam.com

Customer Service

Subscriptions (print and digital)

800-825-6861

trailerlife@cdfsfulfillment.com

Editorial

info-ll@goodsam.com

www.trailerlife.com

GS MEDIA & EVENTS

President Mark Boggess

Vice President/Publisher Ann Emerson

Vice President/Advertising Sales Terry Thompson

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RV Quality Time

I am responding to Steve Preas' letter in October's RV Clinic, "Lexus or Yugo?" The fact that there are no *Consumer Reports* or J.D. Power-type resources for RV quality and ratings is a concern to many people who visit online owners' forums. I follow several owners' groups and witness that too often manufacturers ignore customers' pleas for help, even when they are for obvious warranty concerns. *Trailer Life* dedicates an entire column to RV Resolutions.

More often than not, it appears that manufacturers simply don't have a system in place to deal with these issues. Why not? RV manufacturers must listen to and acknowledge the consumer's voice and embrace it, not hide from it. Empower the likes of J.D. Power with follow-up surveys that measure problems after delivery, as well as customers' attitudes in the first year and experiences after three years of ownership. The manufacturer that implements this first will become the clear leader, and with that, we all win.

E.A. Ulbrich, Louisville, Kentucky

Sanitation Lessons Learned

Thanks for "Dirty Little Secrets," Chris Dougherty's article on sanitation systems in the May issue. I have several additional lessons that might prove helpful to some readers.

First, since hooking up, draining and detaching the system has to be done frequently, before purchasing an RV, make sure that its valves and caps are easily accessible from a comfortable position. Not all manufacturers have figured out that this is important. Having to empty tanks before heading out on the next leg of your trip is even

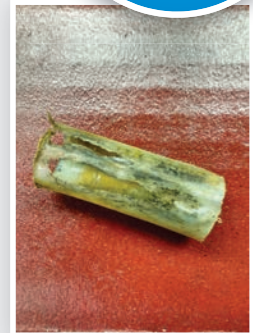
less fun on a rainy day if you have to crawl under the unit to reach the valves.

Second, before removing the caps on holding-tank outlets, make sure

Bronze-Medal Winner

I've been reading your recent articles and letters about tire wear. We had a blowout on our fifth-wheel and noticed strange wear patterns on two other tires. I decided to check the shackle bushings. The enclosed photo shows what they looked like. I replaced them all with the wet-bolt-kit upgrade from MORryde, which comes with thicker shackles and greasable bolts. So \$100 worth of bronze bushings solved our tire woes. As you've noted, these parts should be installed at the factory.

Gary Bartz, Hayward, Wisconsin



the gate valves haven't jostled open a bit during transit. If they have, you may be greeted with an unexpected outflow of sewage when the caps are removed.

Third, some leakage past the valves can happen in transit, so it is a good idea to place a drip pan under the outlets before removing the caps, just in case. Our unit can often leak about a cup of waste water. It's better to catch this leakage and put it down the drain than to let it spill on the ground.

Ed Austin, Newport News, Virginia

No Comparison to Corvettes

Who, if anyone, offers an extended warranty against delamination? With as many RVs as I've seen with bubbles and sides delaminating, I would think this would be a major issue. If one of the auto manufacturers had a product with a problem such as this, consumer protection would get involved, and there would be recalls.

My bride would like to move up to a larger fiberglass-construction fifth-wheel, but unless I can get a long-term warranty, it's not going to happen. As a Corvette owner, I haven't had any problems like this, and my car is almost 30 years old.

Bob James, Franklin, Indiana

Technical Editor Chris Dougherty responds: The main walls of most fiberglass RVs aren't fiberglass like your Corvette. They are fiberglass-

reinforced plastic (FRP). It's not the sheet of FRP that fails but the lamination. To keep weight down and strength at its maximum, many manufacturers laminate body panels using FRP, which is bonded to lauan, which is bonded to the structure. This is usually filled with Styrofoam insulation, and another lauan panel is bonded to the inside, which is the internal paneling.

When the sealants fail and moisture gets into the lauan, the bonds begin to weaken and fail, and it delaminates, causing bubbles to form on the side of the RV. Solid fiberglass, like your Corvette, is impervious to water, but it's much heavier. A solid fiberglass trailer the size of a big fifth-wheel would be too heavy to tow. The largest one on the market is 21 feet.

We aren't aware of any extended warranties that protect against side-wall delamination. That said, there are a couple of things that make delamination less likely. First is to maintain the roof and side-wall seals and cover the RV when it's in storage. Second, shop for a fifth-wheel with Azdel composite panels instead of lauan. Azdel is claimed by the manufacturer to be impervious to water. 🚐



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A restored seven-window trolley-top 1950 Westcraft Capistrano with a kitchen, bedroom, bathroom and living room is one of the vintage trailers available for rental at the Sou'Wester.



Time Travel in Seaview

A quirky RV park on Washington's Long Beach Peninsula offers vintage-trailer rentals, loaner bicycles and an honor-system store

article by **Bryan Johnston**

Walking through the historic Sou'Wester Lodge, I half expected to see someone wearing an "I Like Ike" button or a poodle skirt. "Visitors are transported to a different time," says Thandi (pronounced Tawn-dee) Rosenbaum, sole proprietor of one of the more unique stops in America's northwest corner.

You see, the Sou'Wester, in tiny Seaview, Washington, is populated with classic trailers — about 20 of them — that you and your travel companions can call home for a spell. Now that these trailers' days traveling on the road have passed, they are permanent fixtures at the Sou'Wester's campground.

For from \$83 up to \$193, you can spend the night in a Shasta trailer, an Airstream Wanderer "Potato Bug," a 1954 Spartan Manor, a 1958 Boles Aero or one of several "mansion" trailers on the grounds. "Probably our most popular trailer is the African Queen," says Rosenbaum, "a 1953 Pacemaker trilevel trailer, complete

with four beds and a mural from the Bogart-Hepburn movie."

Rooted in a less cynical time, the Sou'Wester boasts a communal vibe. The lodge lends out bicycles that visitors can use for local sightseeing. "Sometimes a bike or two disappears, but sometimes bikes just show up!" says Rosenbaum. "We're a very trusting lot here."

This unique getaway even has an honor-system store that really defines its culture. "People keep track of their own purchases and then settle up at the end of their stay," says Rosenbaum. "It's the first thing they encounter when they arrive, so it sets the stage and lets them know, OK, this place is a little different from the rest of the world."

The Sou'Wester is located on the Long Beach Peninsula, and Rosenbaum likes to joke that the property is surrounded by water on five sides: the Pacific Ocean, the Columbia River, Willapa Bay, the cranberry bogs...and the rain. In

addition to the inn and campground, the facility offers wellness classes, community gatherings and weekly artist's residencies.

Cross the 4.1-mile U.S. Route 101 bridge to the south, and you're in Astoria, Oregon, famous for its Victorian mansions and movie locations for the 1980s films *The Goonies* and *Short Circuit*. Head north and you're in the town of Long Beach, which, as the name implies, has a really long beach — 28 miles. If you're starving for a taste of the big city, Portland is two and a half hours to the south, and Seattle is a four-hour drive to the north.

With its laid-back atmosphere, the Sou'Wester is a place from the past. "People seem transformed when they arrive," says Rosenbaum. "And the one word we keep hearing to describe the resort is 'magical.'"

The main lodge was built in 1892, and the trailers are bona-fide classics, so the step-back-in-time feel is genuine. Ike would have approved.

Sou'Wester Lodge

360-642-2542, www.souwesterlodge.com



Minnie Plus Fifth-Wheel

Winnebago has added a new family member to its Minnie towables line, the Minnie Plus fifth-wheel. Available in three floorplans, with nearly 8-foot-high ceilings, the Plus was designed to maximize the living area and be light enough to be towed by most half-ton trucks, reports the company.

Ranging in length from 27 feet 3 inches to 29 feet 6 inches, all of the floorplans have a 50-gallon freshwater tank, a master bedroom with a walk-around queen bed, and a master bathroom with two entrances and a porcelain toilet. Other niceties include custom cabinets, solid-surface countertops, a flush-mount three-burner range and oven, an 8-cubic-foot double-door refrigerator and a 10-gallon DSI water heater. With the exception of carpeting around the bed and the dinette in the 25RKS, interior flooring is all vinyl for easy cleanup.

The 25RKS has a rear kitchen that spans the width of the

trailer and seating for up to seven with the dinette in the slide and a sofa across from the galley. The 27REOK has theater seating across from a large entertainment center, plus an outdoor kitchen. All floorplans are offered in two decors: Stone with two-tone white cabinetry paired with brown and tan furniture and black appliances to give the Plus a modern look; and Graphite with two-tone white cabinetry, a black couch and black appliances for a sophisticated feel.

Solar-charger prep is standard, and options include an electric fireplace (27RLTS and 27REOK only), a freestanding table and four chairs, lounge chairs, a sofa, a second 15,000-Btu air conditioner, dual-pane windows, an extreme-weather package and a 31-inch LED TV in the bedroom.

Minnie Plus fifth-wheels are available in eight exterior colors from notice-me Cherry, Blue, Yellow and Orange to more subdued Green, Champagne, Platinum and White. Base MSRP is \$40,448.

Winnebago Towables, 574-825-5250, www.winnebagoind.com/products/fifth-wheel/2018/minnie-plus/overview

The Minnie Plus features innovative two-tone cabinetry and a designer-patterned ceiling. Shown is the single-slide 27-foot-3-inch 25RKS with a 8,500-pound GVWR.



NEWSWIRE

MANUFACTURING



Hymer's Lightweight Travel Trailer

Erwin Hymer Group North America has new owners and investments, more employees and a 255,000-square-foot production facility in Cambridge, Ontario, branching out from its Kitchener plant. The facility is producing new lines of German- and Canadian-engineered Class B motorhomes under the Hymer brand and ultralight travel trailers under the Hymer Touring brand. According to Jim Hammill, president and chief executive officer of the company, "We have modified how it's [the trailer] built and made it even more lightweight...people are going to be able to pull it with any car they have." www.gohymer.com

DEVELOPMENT



Central California RV Retreat

Cava Robles, an upscale RV resort scheduled to open in May 2018 in Paso Robles, California, will offer 200 pull-through full-hookup RV sites. The resort, located amid rolling vineyards and featuring natural surroundings, will have two large pools, a fitness center and a covered picnic spot. A restaurant and bar will serve locally sourced wine and beer, shuttles will transport guests to nearby wineries and events, and the resort will schedule programs such as wine tastings, concerts and nature walks. Paso Robles offers small-town charm and oak trees. Cava Robles is a Sun Communities Signature RV Resort. pages.suncommunities.com/cava-robles

TOW VEHICLES



Ford Super Duty Limited

Ford has been building F-Series trucks for 70 years and recently unveiled its 2018 Super Duty Limited, starting in the low \$80,000s for the F-250 Limited. The F-450 Limited starts at \$87,000; fully loaded, it's close to \$95,000. The new Super Duty Limited's features include 360-degree camera coverage, adaptive cruise control, lane-keeping alert, forward collision warning, panoramic moon roof, heated steering wheel and two-tone leather seats, and a power tailgate. The F-450, capable of towing more than 30,000 pounds, is powered by a 6.7-liter Power Stroke turbodiesel V-8 and has a six-speed transmission. www.ford.com/trucks

PHOTO BY JEREMY AND STEPHANIE PUGLISI

Stay and Play in Myrtle Beach

Sixty miles of beaches, a boardwalk with arcades and restaurants, an amusement park with a 187-foot-tall Ferris wheel, water parks, live entertainment and shopping — there's something fun for everyone in Myrtle Beach. With year-round mild weather, the city on South Carolina's Atlantic coast is ideal for those traveling in RVs, and some RV resorts have ocean-front sites. The following are upcoming events from late November 2017 through February 2018:

The Carolina Opry Christmas Special: 30th season of holiday performances, November through January

Nights of a Thousand Candles at Brookgreen Gardens:

Countless sparkling lights and 5,500 hand-lit candles, November 30, and December 1 to 2, 7 to 9 and 14 to 17

Broadway at the Beach Holiday Tree Lighting and A Very Broadway Christmas: Holiday parade, entertainment, kids' activities, music and fireworks, December 3

MarshWalk Santa Crawl: Bar crawl with costume contest, December 16

New Year's Eve at Brookgreen Gardens: Hand-lit candles, music and lights, December 31

Restaurant Week Myrtle Beach: Dinner deals at participating eateries, January 11 to 21

Myrtle Beach Stamp and Postcard Show: Free parking, admission and appraisals, February 10



(Above, from left) Experience a winter wonderland and show at the Carolina Opry Christmas Special. Brookgreen Gardens comes to life with twinkling lights, hand-lit candles and holiday music.

Marshi Gras Celebration: Parade and costume contest along the MarshWalk, February 13

Broadway at the Beach KidzTime Festival: Live performances, mascot appearances, pony rides and petting zoo, February 17 to 24

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Down to the Wire

A Utah fifth-wheel owner sent a letter to RV Resolutions asking for help when his extended-warranty claim for electrical work was denied:

▶ Last November the AC circuit supplying the microwave in our 2014 Grand Design Reflection went dead. The breaker had not tripped. I assumed this was a repeat of an earlier issue where an electrical connector in the underbelly had shorted, requiring a repair that was covered by our extended warranty.

We took the rig to General RV in Draper, Utah, and the folks there discovered that the problem was the cable feeding AC power to the kitchen slide. The line was originally secured to the frame using nylon zip-tie fasteners, and some of those had failed. The cable had dropped onto the slide mechanism, which had pinched the cable and broken the wires during operation of the slide. The repair involved rewiring and securing a new cable with sturdy stainless-steel clamps.

Our extended-warranty company considers using zip-tie fasteners a significant design flaw in this instance, and our claim was refused on that basis. While painful, that is a provision of the warranty, and I understand it.

I provided Grand Design with this information. After several businesslike messages were exchanged,

the representative advised that, because the fifth-wheel is well past the manufacturer's warranty, Grand Design will provide no consideration in the matter.

Here's what really troubles me. This is a condition that is likely to be experienced by others. I'm out just \$700 or so, but the damage for someone else might be measured by a very different standard. I encourage anyone with a Reflection to check the condition of the wiring under the slides and consider increasing the security of those fasteners.

Richard Tanner, Sandy, Utah

[A few weeks after RV Resolutions contacted Grand Design on Richard Tanner's behalf, we received the following thank-you note from him:](#)

▶ I'm pleased to advise you that, following receipt of your inquiry letter, I was contacted by Grand Design and arrived at a reasonable resolution of this issue. Your assistance is very much appreciated.

R.T.

Tattered Covers

[When the manufacturer didn't make good on an offer to replace the peeling theater seats in their fifth-wheel trailer, a Delaware couple asked RV Resolutions to step in:](#)

▶ We purchased our Columbus fifth-wheel in 2014 from Hitch RV in Milford, Delaware. When preparing it for a two-month trip this past January, we noticed that the theater seats were starting to crack. In March, we stopped at Hitch RV and relayed to the service manager what was happening. He took photos of the upholstery, which by then had started to peel, and submitted them to the manufacturer.

After several calls to the dealership in the following months, we heard from Jennifer at Forest River. She said replacement seats would be shipped to Hitch RV for installation. We asked her to email this in writing, and she agreed.

To make a long story short, we never received the confirmation email, and Forest River has not replied to subsequent emails. With every use, the seats have continued to deteriorate, to the point where the whole upholstery is now cracking.

While we realize that RV Resolutions cannot assist with every problem, we are hopeful you may be able to help with this.

**Marvin and Patricia Mitchell
Lewes, Delaware**

[After bringing this to the attention of Forest River, RV Resolutions received another letter from the Mitchells:](#)

▶ We would like to thank you for the prompt attention you gave to our problems. We received a copy of your letter to Forest River asking for an amicable resolution. As we never heard anything further from the manufacturer, we felt the problem was not going to be resolved. Much to our surprise, we received a call from Hitch RV's service manager saying our new seats had been delivered.

We feel certain that without your intervention this would not have occurred. Again, thank you so very much for assisting us in getting cooperation from Forest River.

M. and P.M. 📧

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



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Bob Livingston
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Gaining Mome

Grand Design's premium toy hauler offers a high level of luxury and all the amenities

When it comes to towable RVs for full-timing, it's not unusual to find large-scale trailers that range up to mammoth triple-axle, multi-slide fifth-wheels. From that bunch of fifth-wheels earmarked for full-timers, selection is fine-tuned to standard and toy-hauler configurations. Most of these fifth-wheels have prices north of \$100,000 and little to wish for when it comes to livability and function. For those who want to bring outdoor vehicles along, making the choice between a fifth-wheel that emulates a stationary home and a toy hauler could be difficult — until the Momentum 376TH came along.

The granddaddy of Grand Design's

toy-hauler line, the Momentum represents the best in a premium-grade toy hauler with refined amenities. The striking fifth-wheel features tall, glossy-black exterior walls that provoke awe-inspired stares. Sweeping but tasteful hues of gray, white and copper-orange accents are the foundation for the Burnt Orange graphics package. If you happen to be seeking the ultimate Harley hauler, this eye-catching paint package alone may put an end to your shopping experience.

Testing the Momentum required a tow vehicle suited to the task of moving a mini-Taj Mahal-like fifth-wheel. We chose a four-wheel-drive Ram 3500

dually with all the bells and whistles the factory can deliver. While the Ram was a 2017 model, it was fitted with Fiat Chrysler's latest fifth-wheel hitch, rated at 30,000 pounds. New for 2018 and mounted via a proprietary puck system built onto the frame, the hitch proved to work smoothly and free of glitches.

Since the Momentum tipped the scales at 16,780 pounds with water and LP-gas, the Ram turned out to be a valuable partner for the combo. The 2017 Ram is identical to the 2018 model year with the exception of an increase in torque to a class-leading 930 LB-FT for the venerable 6.7-liter Cummins diesel engine. Tied to the Aisin six-



entum

s to enjoy outdoor adventures

speed transmission, the truck easily lived up to its 30,320-pound tow rating and handled the Momentum with grace and style. The optional auto-leveling air-ride suspension civilized the ride, which was certainly welcome when tooling around solo on some of the ragtag roads we experienced.

The cab of this gorgeous dually was well stocked with techy info and entertainment equipment, and plenty of other options, both creature comfort and performance, as expected from the more than \$80,000 sticker price. That's a lot of coin, but it's a sign of the times for a luxury heavy-duty pickup that also serves as a powerhouse tow vehicle.

On the back end of the combo, the Momentum, like most of the Grand Design family of towables, begins life on a solid platform. The foundation starts with a combination of 10- and 12-inch steel I-beams as a base for making up the 8-foot-5-inch-wide body stature. Building in this manner also helps to eliminate the stress on things like slide-out mechanisms, providing an overall firmer feel in the finished floor structure and allowing the fully automated six-point hydraulic leveling system to have a wider and more stable stance.

This fifth-wheel frame is supported by a trio of 7,000-pound-rated axles, utilizing self-adjusting brakes and riding on the popular Equa-Flex suspension system that features bronze bushings. A Trailair Rota-Flex pin box is employed for the connection point to the truck.

While the beautifully finished optional full-body paint and impressive selection of storage compartments and utilities wanted to take center stage,

it's hard to ignore the special Weather-Tek-prepped subflooring and storage system, held together and up tight to the frame with an exclusive Rail-Tite rigid aluminum-rail method for securing the underbelly. In addition to the robust sealing down below, the 35,000-Btu heating system supplies ducted heat throughout the entire underbelly and storage bay. This, along with 12-volt DC heated pads on each holding tank, makes certain that year-round living is a true capability.

Insulation plays an important role and is made proof-positive by way of a triple-insulated main floor and its impressive R-45 rating, a thermal double-layer roof that runs the R factor up to 40, and the R-11 solid-foam protection in the fiberglass-clad walls. Even the garage floor maintains an R-25 rating. Overall, this rig is well protected from the elements.

While wandering the outer edges of the 41-foot, 3-inch 376TH, it doesn't



take long to discover an abundance of finely finished storage — like the pass-through exterior compartment that (comically) has enough room for two people to take up residence — and the truly useful utilities. Some of these multi-component systems are supplied by a single manufacturer for service compatibility. For instance, every door that could or should lock, including the entry, uses one key.

In addition to the tremendous number of perfectly placed and well-lit storage areas behind the 1½-inch-thick insulated slam-latch-fitted doors, you'll notice convenience touches such as an integrated InterVac vacuum system and an ideally equipped exterior kitchen supported by a mini-fridge and stove. If the view isn't quite enough, feel free to

(Above, from left) The dining table and four chairs blend nicely with the decor in one of five slideouts. The island structure is perfectly proportioned in the roomy kitchen, and the large RV refrigerator provides greater flexibility when boondocking. A roomy shower, porcelain toilet and vessel sink (large enough to scrub hands without making a mess) make up the bathroom.

watch the LED TV in the outlying entertainment center behind the next door. Of course, you can't overlook the fact that there's also an appropriately sized Cummins Onan 5.5-kilowatt gasoline generator up front, which shares its fuel supply with the onboard and enclosed fueling station, or that this fifth-wheel even has a coiled, quick-coupler water-hose attachment.

If you've spent some time perusing dealers' lots for toy haulers, you'll notice that this Momentum packs some serious ingenuity and wow factor into its floorplan and decor. Immediately upon

entering, the extravagance is obvious, with an almost overwhelming amount of open space provided by a floorplan reminiscent of a roomy condo with luxury touches where they belong.

Heading up the small flight of stairs to the right takes you to a kingdom of cushy, comfortable couches encircling the inviting living room. On the way up, you'll see that Grand Design put some forethought into this rolling palace by utilizing the available space to place sweep and vacuum hose ports in the steps.

The living room is fitted with three leatherlike sofas from Lippert's Thomas Payne Collection that provide great lounging versatility. A highlight for many will be the two-person theater seating, which contains everything you could ever ask of a couch. Here, you'll find blue LED-lit cup holders, footpath-finder light strips from underneath, and extra-relaxing heat and massage features that go hand in hand with the fully reclining pair of plush seats. These central and rear seating positions provide perfect views of the massive 48-inch telescoping LED TV, which hides behind the functional fireplace.

The dark-stained cabinetry atop

GRAND DESIGN MOMENTUM 376TH

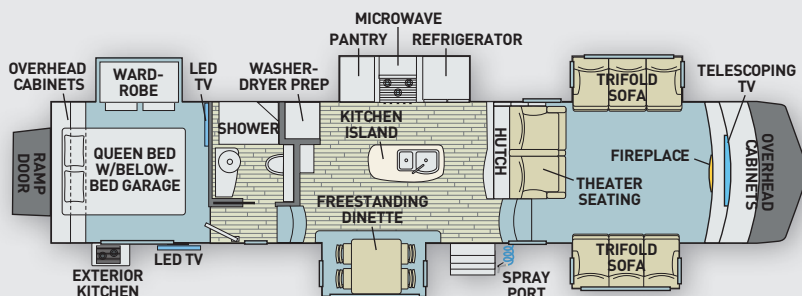


ILLUSTRATION BY DOUG PALIUN



(Clockwise, from top left) An outside kitchen and entertainment center are almost prerequisites for a toy hauler, and Grand Design's Momentum 376TH is no exception, offering a compact refrigerator, stove and LED TV. The front storage compartment is huge and will provide sanctuary for just about everything any owner will need for outdoor adventures and life in RV parks or boondocking locations. The command-center touch screen controls most of the systems and can be paired to a mobile device. Programmed tutorials shorten the learning curve necessary to navigate the various icons. An onboard 5.5-kilowatt gasoline generator provides power when electrical hookups are not available.

the entertainment center and color-coordinated wood trim complement a couple of matched trifold couches that offer soft seating or sleeping positions. Helping to brighten the room and offset the dark interior are off-white walls and carpeting, and recessed LED puck lighting. The entertainment center and opposing couches reside in two of the five slideouts found in this fifth-wheel.

Below the living area, moving toward the back, is a roomy and extremely functional kitchen/dining room/office/resource area — a Grand Central-esque focal point for much of life's daily duties. Right away, your peripherals are pointed toward the array of sleek, dark cabinetry surrounding a perfectly planted central island. To say the least, there's no shortage of storage inside the 376TH, and certainly not in the kitchen, which is bordered by two significant cabinet structures, one serving as a pantry and the other with a washer-and-dryer connection, nicely tucked in next to an assembly of stainless-steel-trimmed appliances.

A decent-size flush-top mounted stove and oven combo, utilizing the common RV three-burner configuration, offers additional counter space when covered and is backed by a full-height

granite backsplash for both form and function. Immediately overhead hangs a residential-size and -style convection microwave with the range hood and light. Just to the right rests a mammoth 18-cubic-foot stainless four-door Norcold real RV refrigerator. This is a major bonus if you're a frequent boondocker, which is likely the case if you're enamored by a toy hauler.

Continuing on around the solid-surface-topped island that houses a large double-basin stainless-steel sink with a tall faucet, you'll find another

useful piece of integrated cabinetry. A hutch offers yet more drawers and storage, and serves as a slightly narrow desk, but don't try sitting at it because there's nowhere for your legs to go. However, it doubles as a great kitchen-counter work area when needed.

The hutch is also home to a digital touch-screen command center that controls nearly everything in or on the fifth-wheel, including the leveling jacks, slideouts, awnings, several light switches and monitors.

The ceiling in the garage area has a power lift to provide additional headroom. A golf cart fits snugly in the space.



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(Above, from left) A trio of couches — one with theater seating for two — turns the front section of the fifth-wheel into an inviting living room. The electric fireplace and 48-inch LED TV highlight the front entertainment center. In the rear, closets and windows surround the queen bed.

Relatively new to the industry, the all-inclusive touch screen may seem a little intimidating at first, but after viewing some of the on-screen programmed tutorial videos, the functions are quickly learned. In fact, the setup is so user-friendly, there's even the ability to get apps for a phone or favored device and run the show from a handheld.

Showcasing the attention to detail and fit and finish exhibited throughout the Momentum, the dining area is right across the walkway, housed in a slide-out and encased in pleasantly appointed surroundings. While not splashy, the space is supported by a simple, effective and comfortable — maybe even a little unique-looking — freestanding table and chairs.

"Upward and onward" is a good way to describe the remaining half of this fifth-wheel. Another set of stairs leads directly to the super-sufficient and well-laid-out bathroom and master bedroom, each quite roomy, comfy and usable in its own respect.

The bathroom comes first, and once inside, the basic box shape is overcome by luxury items such as the solid-surface countertop and the clear vessel sink that's actually big enough to wash up in. The non-constricting shower/tub is enclosed by a glass door and fitted with a skylight for additional headroom and daylight. A residential-type and -size porcelain toilet is a welcome amenity. These water features, as well as all the others aboard, are supported by a healthy 117-gallon freshwater tank, a hefty 104-gallon gray-water tank and a relatively standard (maybe even a little small for this beast) 52-gallon black tank.

The bedroom, like the rest of the fifth-wheel, is equipped with everything you want and nothing you don't. The mirrored-door, full-height dresser is big enough to mandate his-and-her sides and is in its own slideout. Tucked behind the rear of the bed, making up the headboard, is the final portion of seemingly endless dark cabinetry. Aside from that, you'll find a centrally located 60-by-80-inch queen bed with a memory-foam mattress to supply slumber and sweet dreams. Although it is a bit on the slim side, there is enough room to walk around the bed without struggles. The other purpose of the bed's position is to allow for more headroom while loading the garage directly underneath.

The garage has clean and coordinated finishing touches, and includes the bed-lifting mechanism to provide a safer loading head height. The garage's slightly-larger-than-the-bed dimensions (63 inches wide by 111 inches deep and 66 inches tall) leave enough room for a couple of motorcycles, a small quad or a golf cart. Those who don't need space for bigger toys will appreciate the design and function, which really cater to inside livability.

About the only complaint I had with the 376TH was the fact that the bathroom is 100 percent blocked when the slides are closed for travel. There's also virtually no access to the kitchen and the refrigerator, so be prepared to open the slides for any hope of lunch or a bathroom break on the road.

Minor shortcomings aside, you'll have the Momentum to experience the Life of Riley while exploring outdoor-recreation spots without giving up an ounce of luxury. 🚐

SPECIFICATIONS

2018 GRAND DESIGN MOMENTUM 376TH

Exterior Length	41' 3"
Exterior Width	8' 5"
Exterior Height	13' 5"
Interior Width	8'
Interior Height	8' 6"/6' 6"
Construction	Aluminum frame, laminated walls, foam insulation, rubber roof
Freshwater Cap.	117 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	52/104 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	12 gal.
Refrigerator	18 cu. ft.
Furnace	35,000 Btu
Air Conditioners (3)	15,000/15,000/ 13,500 Btu
Converter	50 amp
Battery	Dealer installed
Tires	ST235/85R16 LRG
Suspension	Equa-Flex/leaf spring
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full; no cargo)	16,780 lbs.
Hitch Weight	5,060 lbs.
Axle Weight	11,720 lbs.
GVWR	20,000 lbs.
GAWR (3)	7,000 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	3,220 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$101,211
MSRP, As-Tested	\$117,808
Warranty	1 year/base; 3 years/structural

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Torque	900 @ 1,700 rpm
Transmission	Aisin 6-speed
Axle Ratio	4.10:1
Fuel Cap.	34 gal.
Tires	LT235/80R17 LRE
Suspension	Coil/front, air/rear
Brakes	Disc
Tow Rating	30,320 lbs.
GVWR	14,000 lbs.
GCWR	39,100 lbs.
Length	21' 7.3"
Wheelbase	169.3"
MSRP, Base	\$58,875
MSRP, As Tested	\$80,995
Basic Warranty	3 years/36,000 miles

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ON-THE-GO GARAGES

A DOZEN TOY-HAULING TRAVEL TRAILERS AND FIFTH-WHEELS WITH CONVERTIBLE BACK ROOMS FOR TRANSPORTING GEAR, RUNNING A BUSINESS, PURSUING A HOBBY OR JUST STRETCHING OUT

A decade ago most toy haulers looked like the RV industry's version of a man cave, replete with stripped-down styling, plenty of interior neon lighting and exterior graphics that mimicked race-car design. Fast-forward to the present, and toy haulers offer all the luxury and comfort available in traditional travel trailers and fifth-wheels along with the added convenience and flexibility of a garage. Many still have over-the-top graphics in keeping with current RV cosmetic trends, but the interiors have been significantly refined.

Changes in toy-hauler layouts and design have a lot to do with the recent surge in sales. However, the growth in popularity is also a result of increasing product awareness among RV consumers. Toy haulers are available at almost all towable dealerships, and they can be found in campgrounds across the continent, not just in the West where they got their start with ATV and off-road enthusiasts.

Bottom line? Toy haulers are having a moment. What started 30 years ago as a niche product available from a handful of RV manufacturers is now mainstream, snapping up more and more of the market share, particularly on the towable side.

What's a Toy Hauler?

So, what is a toy hauler, anyway? A toy hauler is an RV with a large hinged door that typically opens in the rear for access to a designated garagelike space, offering a ramp for loading and unloading gear. Apart from that unifying feature, toy haulers come in a wide variety of sizes and layouts with plenty of options in both travel-trailer and fifth-wheel models. The dozen 2018 floorplans on the following pages demonstrate that variety, showcasing everything from an ultralight 24-foot one-room trailer to a pair of 44-foot triple-axle fifth-wheels with three slideouts.

Who's Buying Toy Haulers?

Traditionally, buyers were folks with motorized "toys" such as ATVs, motorcycles, golf carts and dirt bikes. The market has expanded in the past few years as shoppers embraced the versatility of having a "garage" on the road. Our family recently moved from a bunkhouse travel trailer to a toy hauler to transport our bikes, kayaks, surfboards, paddleboards and other outdoor gear more easily.

Many RVers are attracted to the garage space that allows



them to comfortably enjoy hobbies at the campground. Woodworkers and quilters outfit workshops in their toy haulers, and other creative uses include personal offices, art studios and dog-grooming quarters. We have also seen RVers embrace the toy hauler for commercial use, storing goods for festival pop-up shops or tools for mobile RV servicing. Bottom line? If you are looking for a flexible space to tailor to your individual needs, a toy hauler might be worth checking out.

How to Shop for a Toy Hauler

If you are in the market for a towable toy hauler, first narrow the search by choosing between a fifth-wheel and a travel trailer. While fifth-wheels may offer a more stable platform for towing heavier toys, conventional travel trailers allow full use of the truck bed and come in lighter weights, and the smaller models can more easily navigate out-of-the-way places.

The next important step is getting the length, width and height specs for what you plan on storing in the garage. Sizes vary, and you want to be absolutely confident that the toy hauler will adequately store the requisite cargo. Don't assume a bigger rig means more garage space. A quick look at the models in this roundup will demonstrate that the opposite is often the case.

You will also want to decide whether you prefer a garage that is separate from the main quarters. Living and sleeping in the space used to transport a motorized vehicle is an unappealing notion for some folks. Others want a small, lightweight toy hauler, so a one-room travel trailer is the best option.

Other Considerations

There are some options more commonly available on toy haulers that you may want to consider when shopping. Would you like an onboard generator or solar prep for boondocking out in the dunes with your ATV? Do you need a fueling station to gas up before taking off on your dirt bikes? These features will be appealing to many buyers with motorized toys, but if you are transporting a golf cart to a full-hookup campground or running a business in the back of your toy hauler, you can probably pass on those extras.

Something else to note when shopping is that the hitch/pin weight for toy haulers is typically higher than for other travel trailers and fifth-wheels. Toy haulers are engineered to account for the additional weight of motorized vehicles in the garage. You will need to pay careful attention to the numbers, making sure that the tow vehicle can handle both the gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) and the hitch/pin weight.

Lastly, note the difference between the unloaded vehicle weight (UWV) and the GVWR. You will want to make sure there is plenty of weight capacity to safely transport your toys and gear.

A few years ago, someone at an RV show said to us, "You wouldn't buy a house without a garage, so why would you buy an RV without one?" For RVers with motorized toys to haul, the question makes sense, but at the time, we thought we didn't want the compromises inherent with a garage model. Now, as we travel all over the country in our personal toy hauler, easily carrying all the gear we need for a family of five, we wonder how we ever got along without it.

All decked out: The Jayco Octane T32H offers a ramp patio system with rails and a rear awning, and has a second patio on the side with even more awning-shaded space. The 12½-foot-deep garage morphs from a cargo carrier to a roomy seating and sleeping area.



Dutchmen Voltage Epic

With sleeping accommodations for eight, the nearly 44-foot 3970 is a residential triple-slide fifth-wheel that offers distinct living and kitchen areas but forgoes a traditional dining space in favor of a large refrigerator and pantry, and plenty of seating. Luxurious touches include heat and massage functions in the couches, quartz countertops, and a sound bar and subwoofer in the entertainment center. The bathroom is next to the king-bed master suite and boasts a stylish vessel sink and large tub. A single touch-screen panel allows owners to control all automated systems from one place, including the generator, water pump, water heater and lighting, as well as to monitor battery condition and fueling-station levels. Standard dual fuel tanks (30 and 40 gallons) will be popular among buyers looking to park their motorized toys in the 11-foot-long garage.

Exterior Length43' 10"
 Exterior Width8' 4"
 Interior Height8' 6"
 Exterior Height13' 4"



Garage Length..... 11'
 Freshwater Cap. 160 gal.
 Black-/Gray-Water Cap.....45/90 gal.
 LP-Gas Cap. 14 gal.
 UVW, Base 16,320 lbs.
 Hitch Weight 3,546 lbs.
 GVWR..... 20,000 lbs.
 MSRP, Base..... \$88,884

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Forest River Vengeance

At just over 43 feet, the **422V12-6** fifth-wheel has three slideouts and more traditional styling flourishes than many of its counterparts, including wooden blinds, a wood-paneled refrigerator and fluted-glass fronts on the kitchen cabinets. The master bedroom contains a king-size bed with wardrobe space along both sides, plus a mirrored wardrobe running the length of the wall. There is a place for a television but no dedicated entertainment center. The dual-entry master bathroom is

complete with a skylight and a curved-glass shower door. An additional full bathroom is located toward the rear. Occupants pass through the bathroom to gain access to the 12½-foot-long garage, which is outfitted with an electric bed and a sofa-bunk combination. The garage can also be accessed through the ramp door, which converts to a patio as an option. Power awnings extend along the entry-door side, but the kitchen slide takes up some of the outdoor living space. Standard are 100-gallon black-, gray- and freshwater tanks.

Exterior Length	43' 2"
Exterior Width	8' 6"
Interior Height	8' 5"
Exterior Height	13' 4"
Garage Length	12' 6"
Freshwater Cap.	100 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	100/100 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
UWW, Base	13,409 lbs.
Hitch Weight	2,972 lbs.
GVWR, Base	18,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$63,222

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Grand Design Momentum

The 43½-foot **399TH** fifth-wheel combines the livability of a residential interior with the utility of a 13-foot-long garage. The front entry opens to a free-standing dinette, theater seating, an entertainment center with a fireplace, and a fully appointed kitchen with stainless-steel appliances in a slideout and a central island. If desired, an optional full-slide sofa replaces the dinette and theater seats. Stairs lead up to the bathroom and master bedroom where a wardrobe slideout and queen-size bed are standard, and a king bed is optional.

An additional half bath is located in the garage area, which comes fairly stripped down in the standard model but can be dressed up with options such as a HappiJac electric bunk system, a ramp-door patio setup, a three-season garage wall and patio lounge chairs. An additional fold-down side patio with a TV is standard.

Exterior Length	43' 4"
Exterior Width	8' 6"
Interior Height	8' 4"
Exterior Height	13' 5"
Garage Length	13'
Freshwater Cap.	157 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	104/104 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
UWW, Base	15,900 lbs.
Hitch Weight	3,400 lbs.
GVWR	20,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$98,251

574-825-9679, www.granddesignrv.com/showroom/2018/toy-hauler/momentum





Heartland Road Warrior

The highly stylized interior of the 44-foot **RW426** fifth-wheel will attract buyers with posh tastes. Unusual design choices are everywhere, such as the bean-shaped kitchen island and orb pendant lights above it, and the carved-tree art framing the loft bed. The master suite contains a king-size bed in a slideout with an opposing window, TV and storage space. The dual-entry master bath features a large tub. In the living space, a single sofa with reclining seats for five and a pair of removable pedestal tables are housed in a slideout on the door side. The 13-foot-plus garage is outfitted with a half-bath and electric queen bed, plus an optional sofa bed. The garage also has a TV, overhead cabinets, and a handy storage box in the floor offering space for tethers and tools. The ramp doubles as a patio and comes with rear steps.

Exterior Length	44'
Exterior Width	8' 5"
Interior Height	9'
Exterior Height	13' 5"
Garage Length	13'
Freshwater Cap.	100 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	69/80 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
UVW, Base	16,060 lbs.
Hitch Weight	3,750 lbs.
GVWR	20,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$95,698

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PHOTO BY SHAWN SPENCE



Jayco Octane

The 38-foot **T32H** brings a traditional fifth-wheel toy-hauler floorplan into a travel trailer. The floorplan sleeps six and offers three distinct rooms, one of which is a garage with a 12½-foot-deep cargo space, a HappiJac queen bed and convertible sofas, TV prep and overhead cabinet space. The side patio is another unusual feature for a travel-trailer toy hauler. The master bedroom boasts a king-size bed with two wardrobes and overhead cabinet storage. The kitchen has stainless-steel appliances and ample counter space, while the high ceilings bring a residential feel to the living area. Goodyear tires are standard, and available options include a rear party deck, a 5.5-kilowatt generator, a heated and enclosed underbelly, and an electric auto-leveling system.

Exterior Length	38'
Exterior Width	8' 6"
Interior Height	8' 7"
Exterior Height	13' 1½"
Garage Length	12' 6"
Freshwater Cap.	136 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	45.4/45.4 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
UVW, Base	10,345 lbs.
Hitch Weight	1,490 lbs.
GVWR	14,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$52,916

800-283-8267, www.jayco.com/products/toy-haulers/2018-octane



Keystone Raptor

At 43½ feet, the **426TS** packs a ton of residential fifth-wheel finishes along with toy-hauler functionality. The door-side kitchen includes a large stainless-steel refrigerator and a convection-microwave oven, a range with a glass cover and an island sink with a pullout faucet. The dual-entry master bathroom has his-and-her sinks and a large shower with a molded seat and skylight. Housed in a slideout, the standard king-size bed faces a fully appointed entertainment center with cable and satellite prep. A loft bed provides additional sleeping space or storage. The garage has ducted heating and air conditioning, electric beds with dual flip-down sofas, a pull-down screen for the ramp door and a hinged entrance with

shading that opens out onto the patio deck. Two electric awnings (15 and 16 feet) provide ample exterior shading on the door side. A backup camera and hydraulic auto leveling make setup easier.

Exterior Length.....	43' 6"
Exterior Width.....	8' 4"
Interior Height.....	8' 8"
Exterior Height.....	13' 6"
Garage Length.....	13'
Freshwater Cap.....	112 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.....	82/82 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.....	14 gal.
UVW, Base.....	15,580 lbs.
Hitch Weight.....	3,570 lbs.
GVWR.....	19,000
MSRP, Base.....	\$103,115

866-425-4369
www.keystonerv.com/raptor



K-Z Sportster

In the **300THR** travel trailer, owners enjoy a front master suite that is separated from the living area and kitchen by a pass-through bathroom. The bedroom has a walk-around queen bed with wardrobe space on both sides. A linen closet in the bathroom provides additional storage. The kitchen has a double sink, a microwave with a turntable and a range with a three-burner cooktop. The living area offers a nice option for two recliners opposite the entertainment center, in addition to double convertible couches in the garage. The full-width cargo area in the 33-foot-plus trailer is nearly 14 feet long, and a narrower 6-foot-wide cargo space extends 15 feet 11 inches. On the exterior of the trailer, owners will appreciate the 18-foot power awning, front power jacks and a standard black-tank flush.

Exterior Length.....	33' 2"
Exterior Width.....	8' 6"
Interior Height.....	7' 6"
Exterior Height.....	12' 3"
Garage Length.....	13' 10"
Freshwater.....	75 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.....	32/32 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.....	10 gal.
UVW, Base.....	6,890 lbs.
Hitch Weight.....	1,160 lbs.
GVWR.....	10,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$29,319

866-472-5460
www.kz-rv.com/products/sportster-travel-trailer-and-fifth-wheel-toy-haulers





Lance

The **2612** travel trailer measures just under 32 feet long and has no slides yet still provides a 12-foot-plus garage and sleeping accommodations for seven or eight. The separate master bedroom has a queen-size bed, two wardrobes and a USB charging station. The L-shaped kitchen has a nice amount of counter space along with a double sink, stainless-steel appliances and a built-in spice rack. The rear living area contains two swivel chairs and a jackknife sofa, plus the dual HappiJac system, which includes a dedicated queen bed and two sofas that convert into additional beds. A removable carpet kit for the garage area is standard, as are a 100-gallon freshwater tank and a 40-gallon fuel

tank for motorized toys. Buyers have the option to include a generator, solar panel, central vacuum system and a ramp patio.

Exterior Length	31' 11"
Exterior Width	8' 6"
Interior Height	8'
Exterior Height	11' 5"
Garage Length	12' 2"
Freshwater Cap.	100 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	45/45 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
Dry Weight, Base	7,050 lbs.
Hitch Weight	845 lbs.
GVWR	9,950 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$51,939

661-941-9250

www.lancecamper.com/toy-haulers/2612



Livin' Lite QuickSilver

With its QuickSilver lineup, Livin' Lite offers an option for folks who want a toy hauler but have a tow vehicle with limited capacity. These ultralight travel trailers have heavy-gauge aluminum frames, aluminum-sheet side walls and aluminum interior cabinetry. The **7x20HJ** is just over 24 feet long and has a front kitchen and bathroom, a 60-inch fold-up sofa bed in the middle and a 60-by-75-inch bed in the rear.

A freestanding dinette table can be folded for storage or extra living space. A pull-down rear screen over the garage-door area, solar prep and an outside shower are nice standard features. A two-year limited warranty and six color choices for the exterior paint job are standard. An option that will attract many buyers and expand the living space into the outdoors is the ramp-door patio package with railings and cables.



Exterior Length	24' 2"
Exterior Width	8' 7"
Interior Height	6' 8"
Exterior Height	9' 7"
Garage Length	10' 2"
Freshwater	50 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	28/28 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	10 gal.
UWW, Base	4,040 lbs.
Hitch Weight	670 lbs.
GVWR	7,000 lbs.
MSRP, Base	\$27,369

866-472-5460, www.livinlite.com/products/quicksilver-toy-haulers



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ON-THE-GO GARAGES



Northwood Desert Fox

The **215W** packs a lot of functionality into a fairly small space. This 25-foot travel trailer has one multifunctional room and a bathroom at the front of the rig. The garage offers nearly 11 feet of cargo space from the ramp door to the kitchen counter, or nearly 15 feet along the door side of the trailer. The standard cable kit turns the ramp into a patio. The garage transforms into either a living space with sofas and a table, or a bedroom with an electric bunk and optional second bunk. Cabinets along both sides and a wardrobe in

the bathroom provide ample storage space. The trailer is built for year-round adventure with an aluminum frame and off-road chassis. It comes with an onboard fuel station and air compressor. A 20-watt solar panel is also standard, but buyers can upgrade to an optional 60- or 100-watt panel.

Exterior Length25'
 Exterior Width8' 6"
 Interior Height8'
 Exterior Height12' 10"
 Garage Length10' 11"
 Freshwater Cap.72 gal.
 Black-/Gray-Water Cap.36/46 gal.
 LP-Gas Cap.14 gal.
 UVW, Base6,688 lbs.
 Hitch Weight1,060 lbs.
 GVWR10,400 lbs.
 MSRP, Base\$44,351
800-766-6274, www.northwoodmfg.com/toy-haulers/desert-fox



RV Factory Weekend Warrior

The RV Factory is all about customization, from interior finishes to exterior paint jobs, so this is a great option for those who want to choose upholstery, countertops and cabinets. The layout of the 44-foot **4250W** fifth-wheel offers distinct living room and kitchen areas, with the kitchen counter placed back to back with a wrap-around sofa. Owners will particularly appreciate the direct

sight lines toward the entertainment center and fireplace. The master suite has a king bed in a slideout, creating loads of space and storage. There is a full bathroom near the master bedroom and an additional half bath in the garage, along with a loft sleeping area. A heated and enclosed undercarriage, 40-gallon fuel station and automatic leveling system are standard. Stackable washer-dryer prep is also included.

Exterior Length44'
 Exterior Width8' 6"
 Interior Height8' 9½"
 Exterior Height13' 6"
 Garage Length14' 4"
 Freshwater Cap.170 gal.
 Black-/Gray-Water Cap.50/50 gal.
 LP-Gas Cap.10 gal.
 UVW, Base14,900 lbs.
 Hitch Weight3,200 lbs.
 GVWR21,000 lbs.
 MSRP, Base\$115,999
844-284-6678
www.weekendwarriortoyhauler.com/fifth-wheel-brands/toyhauler-5th-wheels

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Winnebago Spyder

The 35-plus-foot **29KS** combines a traditional travel-trailer layout with an ample 16-foot-long garage. Two exterior doors offer separate entry to the main living area and the master bedroom. This allows for easy use of the kitchen, bedroom and bathroom even when the garage is fully loaded with gear. The L-shaped kitchen is in a slideout, offering a nice amount of counter space and a large double sink with a sprayer faucet. The bathroom can be accessed from the bedroom and main living area. A 100-gallon freshwater tank, 40-gallon fuel station, pull-down ramp screen, patio kit and solar prep are standard. Buyers have the choice of five exterior fiberglass colors, and can choose a black or white front cap. Upgrade options include a generator and an additional 20-gallon fuel tank dedicated to the generator.

Exterior Length.....	35' 2"
Exterior Width.....	8' 6"
Interior Height.....	8' 2"
Exterior Height.....	11' 11"
Garage Length.....	16'
Freshwater Cap.....	100 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.....	41/41 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.....	10 gal.
UWW, Base.....	9,060 lbs.
Hitch Weight.....	1,320 lbs.
GVWR.....	12,400 lbs.
MSRP, Base.....	\$54,368

574-825-5250

www.winnebagoind.com/products/toy-haulers/2018/spyder/overview



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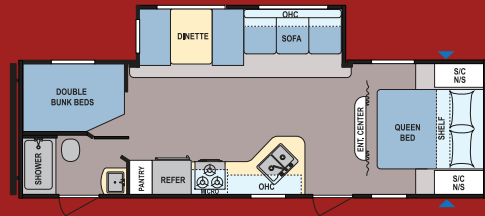
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FR058298-0917

SATELLITE-TV PO

KING'S QUEST ANTENNA AND ROOFTOP MOUNTING KIT IMPROVE THE ODDS OF CAPTURING

A television in an RV is about as common as a kitchen sink these days, and many new models are equipped with multiple LED screens right from the factory. Receiving programming for these TVs is kind of a mixed bag for those who travel. Some campgrounds have cable hookups, but the variety of programming is often limited. Over-the-air broadcast channels are dependent on locations being closer to bigger population centers, so those who look forward to favorite programs might have to make compromises. A good choice for RVers is receiving programming via satellite, and King offers a portable antenna, the Quest, that adds great versatility to capturing the necessary signals.

Streaming from online providers is also gaining traction among television watchers, but until Wi-Fi capabilities and data service become more robust, connecting TV receivers to a satellite antenna is still more practical. Over the years we have used roof-mounted satellite antennas for convenience, but unless you can park in areas sans trees and other obstructions, reception can be interrupted or even nonexistent.

Using a portable antenna is a good solution since it can be positioned

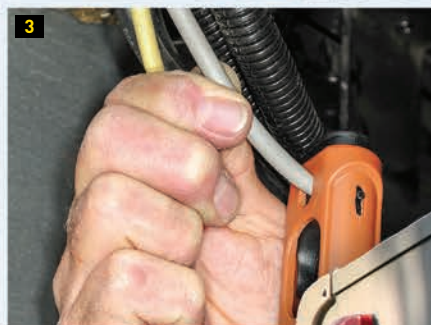
remotely to gain a clear view of the southern sky, but in many cases, storing it can be problematic. So when King introduced its Quick Release Roof Mount Kit, that proverbial light bulb illuminated. Why not store the antenna on the roof, freeing up valuable storage space, and take it down when necessary? That's exactly what we did, and the results were interesting...in a good way.

King's automatic, portable antennas have been around for a long time,

and its latest iteration, the Quest, is sleek looking and requires no external power to operate. There are various models available, and the VQ4100 we selected is designed to receive standard definition (SD) programming from DirecTV, which is our provider. Unfortunately, high-definition (HD) programming is not available from DirecTV when using anything but a specialized rooftop system or a bulky home-style dish mounted on a stand, but similar King portable models, with the same footprint as the Quest, are capable of receiving Dish HD programming.

Wrestling with the decision of whether to install a rooftop antenna, we reminded ourselves that we've been unable to receive a signal about 30 percent of the time (due to trees in RV parks), so we elected portability to improve the odds.

The King Quest is designed for



1) The dome was mounted close to the air conditioner, which was contrary to the installation instructions. At this point, the roofline is not level, exceeding the limit suggested in the instructions. However, the antenna performed better than expected in this location. **2)** After discovering a kink and slice in the factory coax that prevented the Quest from operating, the cable was cut to make way for better-quality RG-6 coax. **3)** To repair the factory coax, the wire was stripped using a tool acquired at a home-improvement store.

PORTABILITY

TRACKING ELUSIVE SIGNALS WHILE SOLVING STORAGE DILEMMAS

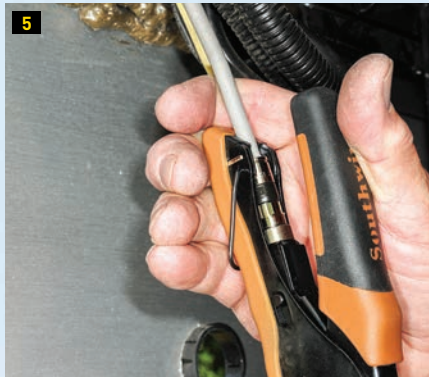
out-of-the-box operation with only a few simple hookup procedures, requiring no special tools. It uses a Power Injector that's placed close to the receiver, a few hookup coax cables and a 120-volt AC power supply. Once the antenna is placed in a spot where it has a clear view to the southern sky and the cables

are connected, it's ready to go. The "dome" can be placed on the ground, and the housing is weather resistant.

We initially did just that and found a caveat in the setup that was no fault of

King's. The antenna requires a strong signal through the coax to operate the positioning motor and electronics to locate the signal. The use of inexpensive low-grade coax routed throughout many RVs (rather than the satellite-industry standard RG-6 cabling), along with multiple splitters, can create enough resistance to prevent the antenna from working when the receiver and TV are turned on. That's what happened when we hooked up the Quest to a test fifth-wheel. Further inspection revealed a kink and partial cut in the coax routed through the slideout to the entertainment center.

4) We purchased high-quality RG-6 coax and connectors online. 5) The connectors were crimped on the cables using the proper tool. 6) A coax butt connector was used to mate the cables.

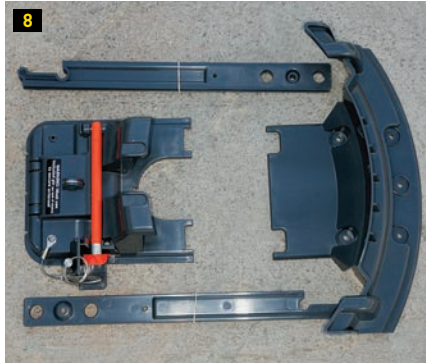


SATELLITE TV PORTABILITY

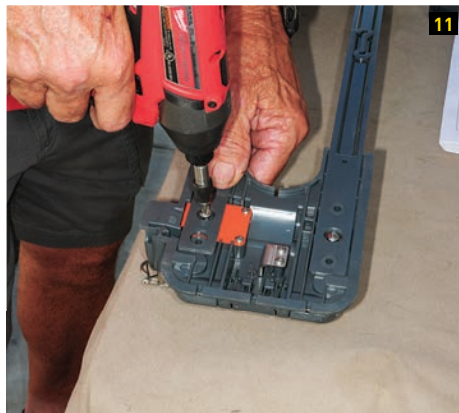
The solution was to cut the existing cable under the slideout, install professional-grade connectors and route new RG-6 cable through a central manifold that was mounted under the trailer. After the rewiring was accomplished, the system worked perfectly.

Once the operation of the antenna was verified, the MB700 Quick Release Roof Mount Kit (MSRP: \$109) was installed. The kit consists of cleverly designed brackets that mount to the roof and lock in the antenna in seconds, with no tools. To install, the stringers are snapped together and attached to the latching mechanism and rear bracket. A few tools are needed, like a drill motor, bits, an open-end wrench or coax connector tool, and the appropriate sealant for the roof type.

It takes about 30 minutes to assemble the pieces and attach to the roof once the proper location is established. That's where we broke the rules to accommodate our desired use of the antenna. The handle on the antenna must be pointed to the rear of the trailer, and it's best to run the shortest length of coax cabling possible. There



- 7)** Heat-shrink tubing was applied to seal the connection from moisture and road debris. **8)** The King MB700 Quick Release Roof Mount Kit makes it possible to install the Quest dome on the roof. The kit is cleverly designed and easy to use. Mounting the dome on the roof solves the storage problem and provides versatility of operating on the roof or ground. **9)** Assembling the roof-mount brackets is simple.



- 10)** Assembling the bracket kit takes only a few minutes with common hand tools. **11)** The quick-release mechanism is built into the rear-bracket section. Once assembled, the bracket is screwed into the roof. **12)** An orange bar locks the lip of the Quest base to the bracket and snaps in place using the spring clip. A safety pin is then inserted to prevent accidental opening.



👉 KING'S QUEST FOR A SIGNAL

The King Quest satellite dome offers portability and good performance. Lightweight and easy to handle, the Quest automatically searches for a signal when the receiver is on. Locking in a signal takes only a few minutes as long as the view to the southern sky is clear. Models are designed for the major satellite-TV providers but will receive only standard-definition programming when used with DirecTV.

13) The King TR1000 Tripod Mount is a high-quality apparatus that secures the Quest for remote positioning off the ground.

14) The base of the Quest fits nicely in the specially designed arms that fold out from the center pole. **15)** A quick-release lever allows smooth movement of the tripod legs, which changes the elevation of the pole.

16) The folded tripod stores neatly in the provided carry bag.

must be no line-of-sight obstructions, like the air conditioner or other accessories on the roof, and the antenna must be within 2 degrees of level.

We wanted access to the antenna from the rear ladder without climbing on the roof, so we elected not to follow conventional wisdom or route the cables through the roof. Instead, the bracket was mounted adjacent to the rear ladder, leaving enough clearance for access to the roof when the Quest was in position. Doing so put the antenna precariously close to the air conditioner, and since the roofline was raked down at the back, the Quest was tilted more than the specification called for by the company. Cabling to the antenna was routed down the ladder externally to the aforementioned central manifold.

What we gained by installing the antenna in this manner was the ability to remove it by climbing partially up the ladder and reaching over to unlatch the bracket and unscrew the cables. The procedure can be somewhat awkward, so care must be taken when negotiating the ladder and using your hands to mount or remove the antenna.

This configuration gave us the flexibility to remove the antenna from the roof for use on the ground when necessary and leave it on the roof while on the road, freeing up storage space. Although we routed the coax cabling to the unit, we had no premonition that the antenna would work well on the roof; there were just too many complicating factors specific to our installation.

Surprisingly, after using the antenna on the roof during an eight-week journey, we were able to receive a signal during most of the trip. Sometimes the signal was on the weak side, making it difficult to receive all the subscribed channels, but it was convenient to leave



it mounted on the roof, especially when we were only spending the night. Heavy trees and big storm clouds prevented a clear pathway to the satellite, but using Las Vegas gambling terminology, “we were still ahead.”

On those days, the antenna was removed from the roof and placed on the King TR1000 Tripod Mount (MSRP: \$99.99), positioned for a clear signal and attached to two separate cables that connected at the manifold. When set up on the ground in clear view of the southern sky, the Quest performed flawlessly.

The tripod has legs that are spread out to provide stability on the ground, and folding brackets that conform to the

Quest base are attached to the center pole. Anchors are included to stabilize the antenna in the wind, and the tripod can be conveniently packed in the provided carry bag.

The lightweight Quest is easy to handle and quick to set up. It takes only a few minutes to find the signal, and the antenna can accommodate two receivers — which was necessary to watch two TVs independently. Retail price for the Quest is \$549, which is a good value for the convenience afforded by the portability and creative mounting systems. 🚐

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952-922-6889, www.kingconnect.com

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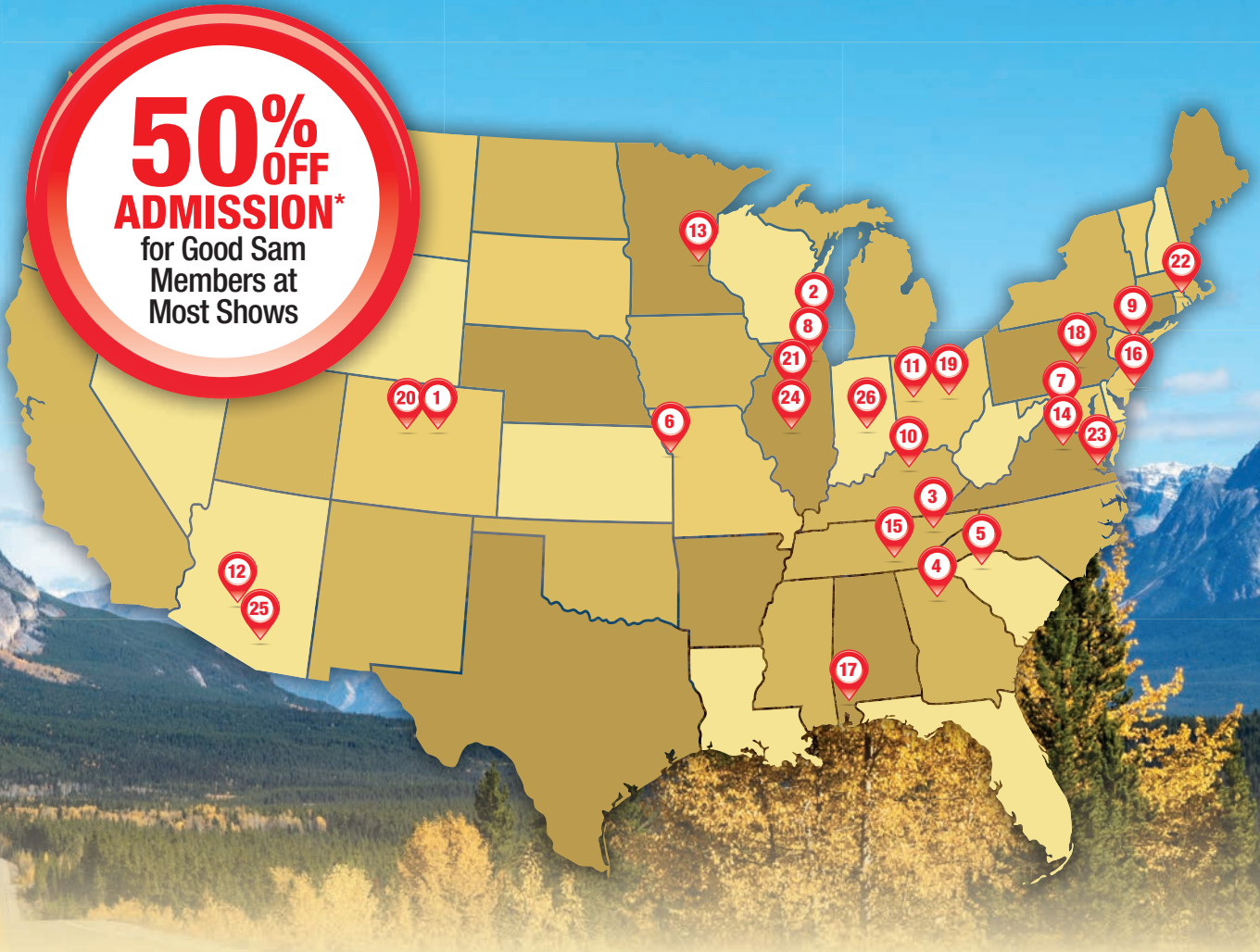


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01	Colorado RV Adventure Travel Show	1/4/18 - 1/6/18	Colorado Convention Center
02	Wisconsin RV Show	1/5/18 - 1/7/18	Wisconsin Center District
03	Knoxville RV Show	1/5/18 - 1/7/18	Sevierville Convention Center
04	Greater Atlanta RV Show	1/5/18 - 1/7/18	Georgia Int'l Convention Center
05	South Carolina RV & Camping Show - Greenville	1/5/18 - 1/7/18	TD Convention Center
06	Mid America RV Show	1/11/18 - 1/14/18	Kansas City Convention Center - Bartle Hall
07	Washington Camping RV Expo	1/12/18 - 1/14/18	Dulles Expo Center
08	Greater Chicago RV Show	1/12/18 - 1/14/18	Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center
09	New Jersey RV & Camping Show - Edison	1/19/18 - 1/21/18	New Jersey Convention & Exposition Center
10	Lexington RV Show	1/19/18 - 1/21/18	Kentucky Horse Park
11	Cincinnati - Dayton RV Show	1/25/18 - 1/28/18	Dayton Convention Center
12	Greater Phoenix RV Show	1/26/18 - 1/28/18	Phoenix Convention Center
13	Minneapolis/St. Paul RV, Vacation & Camping Show	2/9/18 - 2/11/18	Minneapolis Convention Center

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Map#	Event Name	Dates**	Venue
14	Richmond Camping RV Expo	2/9/18 - 2/11/18	Richmond International Raceway Complex
15	Chattanooga RV Show	2/16/18 - 2/18/18	Chattanooga Convention Center
16	Atlantic City RV & Camping Show	2/16/18 - 2/18/18	Atlantic City Convention Center
17	Gulf Coast RV Show - Mobile	2/16/18 - 2/18/18	Mobile Convention Center
18	Harrisburg RV & Camping Show - Pennsylvania	2/22/18 - 2/25/18	PA Farm Show Complex & Event Center
19	Columbus RV Show	2/23/18 - 2/25/18	Greater Columbus Convention Center
20	Colorado RV, Sports & Travel Show	3/1/18 - 3/4/18	National Western Complex
21	Central Illinois RV Show - Peoria	3/2/18 - 3/4/18	Peoria Civic Center
22	Rhode Island RV & Camping Show	3/2/18 - 3/4/18	Rhode Island Convention Center
23	Virginia RV Show - Hampton	3/9/18 - 3/11/18	Hampton Roads Convention Center
24	Springfield RV & Camping Show	3/16/18 - 3/18/18	BOS Convention Center
25	Greater Tucson RV Show	3/23/18 - 3/25/18	Tucson Convention Center
26	Good Sam RV Super Show - Indianapolis	4/12/18 - 4/15/18	Indianapolis Motor Speedway

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Beyond its role overseeing highway funding, construction, maintenance and safety, the Federal Highway Administration also rates roads for their natural beauty and other important attributes. Overall, the agency has designated 150 roads National Scenic Byways or All-American Roads, the latter being the best of the best. Take a drive along Utah Scenic Byway 12, and you cannot but agree that the feds got it right when they named this 124-mile stretch of pavement an All-American Road.

RED CANYON

Going from west to east, Scenic Byway 12 starts at the junction with U.S. Route 89 just west of Bryce Canyon National Park in southwestern Utah. The fun starts almost immediately. Take the turn east off Route 89, and by the time you get up to cruising speed, a highway

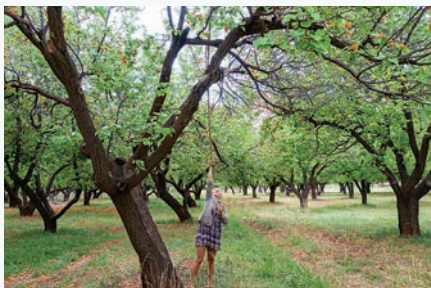
sign proclaims "Red Canyon," part of Dixie National Forest. That's your cue to sit back and enjoy the ride.

Barely 100 yards past the sign, a pull-off beckons, and my wife and I get our first serious taste of what is to come. Three trails of less than a mile expose us to those impressive

sandstone spires known as hoodoos that reach their apotheosis in Bryce Canyon. A mile farther on, behind the Red Canyon Visitor Center, another series of trails affords views of the surrounding area, including 15 red-rock arches. A half mile farther brings us to Red Canyon Campground, a well-placed U.S. Forest Service facility and our home for the night.

CEDAR BREAKS

While enjoying the serenity of our Red Canyon campsite, a neighbor gave us a tip. We hadn't planned to visit Cedar Breaks National Monument, about 35 miles to the west, but our new friend mentioned that the wildflowers there were in bloom. So early the next morning, we backtracked a bit and headed down State Route 143 from



(Left) RV sites at Fruita Campground in Capitol Reef National Park are available on a first-come, first-served basis and are conveniently located near the orchard (far left).

The 1.5-mile Angel's Palace Trail in Kodachrome Basin State Park affords wonderful views — a nice payoff for a short hike.





(Far left) The slightest of overhangs was sufficient to provide shelter to those in need of it, ancient or contemporary. This one is in Capitol Reef National Park. (Left) Anasazi State Park Museum's Ancestral Puebloan village in the town of Boulder.

the village of Panguitch.

At 10,000 feet, spring comes late to Cedar Breaks, and the place was awash with color, rivaling in my mind only Mount Rainier for alpine-wildflower magnificence. Add a beautiful natural amphitheater, and you have sensory bliss. We took the ½-mile dog-friendly hike to the campground and the 2-mile Alpine Pond Trail, and the scenery was wonderful. The nice-looking Point Supreme Campground will be the place to stay on our next visit to the area.

BRYCE CANYON

Bryce Canyon National Park is a favorite, besting the other beautiful public parks in Utah. I can't resist gazing in wonderment at the multicolored spires of infinite variety pointing skyward. Geologists tell us that Bryce is not technically a canyon because by definition canyons are formed by flowing water (picture the Grand Canyon and the Colorado River). Instead, Bryce is a series of amphitheaters similar to the one at Cedar Breaks.

The park's hoodoos formed by the freezing and thawing of water. Approximately 200 days a year, ice and snow melt during the day and freeze at night, fracturing the rocks until they create shapes that visitors come to see. Viewing them in the morning is totally different from viewing them at sunset, so we do both and get two different parks for the price of one.

There are a couple of must-do tasks. We drive the main park road, State Route 63, 18 miles from the visitor center to Rainbow Point, stopping at viewpoints and taking hikes along the canyon rim. We recommend in particular the aptly named Inspiration

Point and Sunset Point. At the latter, we hike the gorgeous 1.3-mile Navajo Trail from the rim down into the canyon, where we commune with those hoodoo gods. And then we do it again at sunset. In all, there are more than 50 miles of trail to suit any and all. We camp at Sunset Campground in the national park.

From mid-April through late October, vehicles 25 feet and longer are not allowed in a number of Bryce Canyon parking lots, including those at the visitor center and Sunset and Inspiration points. During peak season, it's best to unhitch at the campsite and drive your tow vehicle solo, or take one of the frequent shuttle buses to the park's popular destinations.

GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE

Scenic Byway 12 skirts the northern boundary of this largely undeveloped 1.9-million-acre national monument, one of two sections where it can be accessed by conventional vehicle. Roads into the monument's interior are suitable for four-wheel-drive

vehicles only or those traveling on foot, horseback or mountain bikes.

The monument was named by early geologists, and there's some logic to it. The rock formations that we see are a series of cliffs and plateaus that resemble steps rising thousands of feet. Each step represents a geologic period of time, and they have been named to coincide with what we can readily discern — cliffs of Chocolate at the bottom, Vermilion at the second level, followed by White, Gray and Pink. Thus, the "staircase." The nearby Escalante River shares the honors, named for Spanish priest and explorer Silvestre Vélez de Escalante. The river was named for him in 1872 by a Lake Powell survey crew.

We are inspired by the sheer immensity of the place as we gaze off into the seemingly endless distance and the kaleidoscope of colorful rock formations. We stop at the visitor center in the village of Cannonville and learn that this area has been a hotbed of discovery for paleontologists and has the added distinction of being the last

The remote area encompassing Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument was the last region in the United States to be mapped.



UTAH'S ALL-AMERICAN ROAD

place in the United States to be mapped, a testament to its remoteness and relative inaccessibility.

Grand Staircase-Escalante was set aside as a national monument in 1996 and is unique in that it is administered by the Bureau of Land Management, not the National Park Service. We wind up spending the night in the BLM campground at Calf Creek Recreation Area, midway between the villages of Escalante and Boulder, and take a few hours to hike the 3-mile trail to a 125-foot waterfall. Developed public campgrounds in the area are rare and generally unsuited to larger rigs, but Escalante has a number of RV parks.

KODACHROME BASIN

Kodachrome Basin State Park spreads out just off Scenic Byway 12 near the aforementioned village of Cannonville, which lies just a few miles east of Bryce Canyon National Park. It is home to nearly 70 red-sandstone spires known as sedimentary pipes, ranging in height from 6 to 170 feet. In an area with no shortage of picturesque spires, these are different from those we see elsewhere. They were inspiring enough that the Eastman Kodak Company gave its consent to name the park after what



GETTING TO UTAH'S ALL-AMERICAN ROAD

From the junction with U.S. Route 89, Utah's Scenic Byway 12 travels 124 miles through Red Canyon, Dixie National Forest and Bryce Canyon National Park, then past Kodachrome Basin and Anasazi state parks and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The byway ends near the town of Torrey at the junction with State Route 24, about 5 miles west of Capitol Reef National Park.

For More Information: Scenic Byway 12 Foundation, www.scenicbyway12.com

WHERE TO STAY ON THE SCENIC BYWAY

BRYCE CANYON NATIONAL PARK

Bryce Canyon has a couple of campgrounds near the visitor center. **North Campground** accepts reservations for some RV sites, and **Sunset Campground** has first-come, first-served sites only. www.nps.gov/bryca/planyourvisit/northcampground.htm
www.nps.gov/bryca/planyourvisit/sunsetcampground.htm

NEARBY: Bryce Canyon Pines RV Park

A five-minute drive from the entrance to Bryce Canyon, this Good Sam Park furnishes full-hookup RV sites and has resort-type amenities. 800-892-7923, www.brycecanyonmotel.com/bryce-campgrounds

CAPITOL REEF NATIONAL PARK

The only developed campground in Capitol Reef, **Fruita Campground** has first-come, first-served sites and historic orchards. www.nps.gov/care/planyourvisit/fruitacampground.htm

NEARBY: Thousand Lakes RV Park and Campground

In Torrey, 6 miles from the entrance to Capitol Reef, this Good Sam Park accommodates RVs with full-hookup sites and a range of amenities. 800-355-8995 www.thousandlakesrvpark.com

NEARBY: Wonderland RV Park

Another full-service Good Sam Park in Torrey, Wonderland has the distinction of being the closest RV park to Capitol Reef. 877-854-0184, www.capitolreefrvpark.com

CEDAR BREAKS NATIONAL MONUMENT

High-altitude **Point Supreme Campground** takes reservations for RV sites and also offers first-come, first-served spots. www.nps.gov/cebr/planyourvisit/campgrounds.htm

DIXIE NATIONAL FOREST

The U.S. Forest Service provides first-come, first-served RV sites at **Red Canyon Campground**. www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/dixie/recarea/?recid=24944

GRAND STAIRCASE-ESCALANTE NATIONAL MONUMENT

NEARBY: Calf Creek Campground
Small RV sites are available on a first-come, first-served basis at the Bureau of Land Management campground in Calf Creek Recreation Area. www.blm.gov/visit/calf-creek-recreation-area-campground

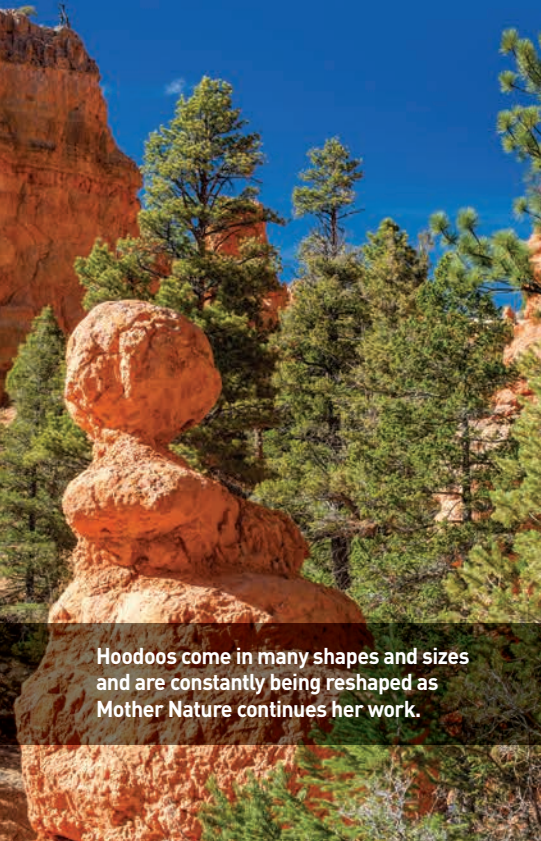
NEARBY: Canyons of Escalante RV Park

Located in Escalante, this Good Sam Park has full-hookup RV sites, including some pull-throughs. 435-826-4959 www.canyonsofescalantervpark.com

KODACHROME BASIN STATE PARK

The state park's **Basin Campground** accepts reservations for most of its full-hookup and primitive campsites. A few additional sites are first-come, first-served. www.stateparks.utah.gov/parks/kodachrome-basin/park-campground

Hoodoos come in many shapes and sizes and are constantly being reshaped as Mother Nature continues her work.



is commonly regarded as the most famous photographic film of all time.

This is a great hiker's park. We start at the 1½-mile Angel's Palace Trail that affords wonderful views of Kodachrome Basin, Bryce Canyon and the surrounding area, a nice payoff for a short hike. While spending the night at the park's 31-site campground, we decide that red is our favorite color.

CAPITOL REEF

Scenic Byway 12 ends at the village of Torrey where it intersects State Route 24. That is our signal to take a short detour by turning east on Route 24 to Capitol Reef National Park. Like the other parks on the route, this one has picturesque red-rock formations, but it also possesses some unique characteristics that set it apart.

The park's name comes from two disparate geological features. A rounded mountain reminded early travelers of the nation's capitol, so they named it Capitol Dome. And a steplike rock known as the Waterpocket Fold appeared to be as formidable to cross as a barrier reef would be in an ocean.

From about 300 to 1300 AD, ancestors of modern-day Hopi, Zuni and Paiute tribes inhabited this area and left behind some impressive and easily accessible carvings (petroglyphs) and paintings (pictographs), inspiring us to imagine how they lived and wonder why they left. About a mile east of the visitor center on Route 24, we hike a raised trail along a stretch of rock wall known as Petroglyph Panel where images easily recognized as bighorn sheep share space with maps, clan symbols and pictures of other animals.

Nice, but there's more to come. The park's main road, Scenic Drive, extends 8 miles from the visitor center. We drive it, stopping periodically to take pictures and read about landmarks. But once the pavement ends, the real fun begins. We drive another 2.4 miles on a good gravel route called Capitol Gorge Road (take your tow vehicle and leave the trailer at the campground).

Finding space in the small parking lot at the end of the road, we stop and lace up our hiking boots. We review the

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trail map and know that we're in for an easy 1 1/4-mile jaunt along a narrow wash with steep canyon walls. We soon learn that these rock walls are a marvel. In what the park calls the Pioneer Register, art left behind by travelers decorates the walls in many locations.

What is particularly interesting is the diversity of the inscriptions. Ancient petroglyphs share space with inscriptions by Spanish and European explorers, as well as early settlers. Many of these are dated so we have a travelogue detailing the entire breadth of local history, each "artist" having been inspired by the previous one. Seeing the occasional graffiti, we ask ourselves if this is sacrilege or simply another inscription left by a traveler using tools in common use today.

Capitol Reef pays homage to the early Mormon settlers who made their mark in Utah starting in the late 1800s. They planted orchards here containing more than 3,000 trees that still bear fruit, and we spend an hour harvesting apricots and happily pay the \$1 per pound donation. We spend another hour cleaning rotting apricots off our boots, as there aren't enough pickers to keep up with the crop, much of which ends up on the ground. We fondly remember that on a previous visit it was apples, so we suggest planning a visit around harvest season.

Later on, we visit the one-room Fruita Schoolhouse, built in 1896 and used until 1941, and the historic Gifford Homestead, now a small retail shop. We buy fresh berry pie, blueberry syrup and cinnamon rolls for breakfast, and set up camp in the park's Fruita Campground, next to the apricot orchard.

In all of the southern Utah parks, it is important to be aware that many areas are prone to flash floods, so be particularly alert when rain is in the forecast, and also when hiking or camping near washes that you will see everywhere. A rainstorm upstream from where you are can be as dangerous as one that is right on top of you. Lightning is also dangerous year-round, and you should seek shelter if you hear thunder.

Don't let these weather warnings dissuade you from exploring this spectacular region; just be watchful. 🚗

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LITTLE TOWNS ON THE PRAIRIE

THIS YEAR MARKS THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF LAURA INGALLS WILDER, WHO BROUGHT A PIONEER FAMILY TO LIFE IN HER LITTLE HOUSE BOOKS. FOLLOW ALONG ON THIS MIDWESTERN TOUR FOR A GLIMPSE BACK AT THE AMERICAN FRONTIER

When I was nine, fascinated by the Old West and sorry I'd been born too late for life as a pioneer, I discovered Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House series of books at our local library. The librarian suggested starting with *Little House in the Big Woods* in which Laura begins her story. I was hooked at the first sentence: "Once upon a time a little girl lived in the Big Woods of Wisconsin in a little gray house made of logs." And as I read on, the life I dreamed of became wonderfully real.

Over the next few years, I read and reread the eight beloved Little House books. Simply and beautifully — in a style as compelling to adults as children — Laura recounts the story of her pioneer youth, bringing to life her earliest memories of big family gatherings in Wisconsin where she was born. Then, propelled by her restless father's "itchy feet," the family embarked on long journeys to unsettled land, traveling by covered wagon, which at the time seemed to me the best possible way to go.

Every year or two "Pa," Laura's father, Charles Ingalls, would load up his family and their few belongings, and off they'd go, traveling hundreds of miles (at roughly 2 miles per hour) to new homes on the frontier, to live in a log cabin, a claim shanty on the prairie and a dugout on a creek bank. He liked staying ahead of civilization, though "Ma," Laura's

mother, Caroline, would have preferred town life with school for their daughters, Mary, Laura, Carrie and Grace. Their only son, Charles Frederick, "Freddie," died at less than a year when Laura was nine.

Years after my husband, Guy, and I had read the books to our own children, and watched the *Little House on the Prairie* TV series that ran from 1974 to 1983 and made Laura a household name, we decided it would be fun to follow a Laura Ingalls Wilder trail, visiting all the sites where she had lived.

There is a designated trail — the Laura Ingalls Wilder Historic Highway (U.S. Highway 14 plus side trips) that features five northern sites of her life in Pepin, Wisconsin; Spring Valley, Minnesota; Burr Oak, Iowa; Walnut Grove, Minnesota; and De Smet, South Dakota.

But the Ingalls family also lived elsewhere, and Laura, her husband, Almanzo Wilder (whose youth she describes in *Farmer Boy*), and their daughter, Rose, later moved several times (to Minnesota briefly, then Florida, back to Dakota and finally to the "Big Red Apple," Missouri).

Ingalls' childhood homesite can be visited in Mendon, Missouri, at 21876 Ingalls Road (660-256-3340, www.brunswickmo.com/visitor-info/thing-to-do-see). The Little House on the Prairie Museum (closed during winter months), near Independence, Kansas, has a replica of the family's log cabin,





(Far left) A guide at Ingalls Homestead just outside of De Smet, South Dakota, uses a pony-driven cart to take a young tourist for a pony ride. (Left) A re-created dugout gives an idea of the cramped quarters of the family home in *On the Banks of Plum Creek*. It is among the structures at the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum in Walnut Grove, Minnesota.

an 1872 schoolhouse, a post office and gift shop (Independence Chamber of Commerce, 620-331-1890, 620-289-4238, www.indkschamber.org).

At Rocky Ridge Farm near Mansfield, Missouri, where Laura and Almanzo moved in 1894 and lived the rest of their long lives, visitors “meet” Laura as an adult. It was here, in 1911, that she began writing articles and columns for newspapers and magazines. The first of her Little House books was published in 1932 when Laura was 65.

She doesn’t include dates in the books (which she said were “based” on her life), isn’t exact about locations and leaves out some of her family’s travels altogether. But at least seven of the places she lived — now historic sites — can provide maps and other information. For economy of miles, we suggest following her trail geographically rather than chronologically.

Our trip, following just the designated trail (though we’ve visited all the sites on other occasions), began in Pepin, Wisconsin, near where Laura was born on February 7, 1867. Pepin Historical Museum, aka the Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum, is here and displays a quilt Laura made. Other artifacts are “from her era” and include farming implements, kerosene lamps and a bison-skin coat, among others. Her books and the numerous spin-offs of them are available. The museum is open from May 15 to October 15 at 306 Third Street (715-513-6383, www.pepin.wisconsin.com).

The Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial

Society manages the museum and also Little House Wayside, a 1974 replica of the Ingalls’ log cabin that is open year-round for self-guided tours on the original site 7 miles north of town on winding County Road CC. Now, fields of tall corn have replaced the Big Woods. But the humble 20-by-25-foot cabin, a “main” room with a fireplace, two smaller rooms and a loft, offers a glimpse into Laura’s pioneer childhood. A timeline of her Little House series and travels is tacked on one wall.

Pepin holds an annual Laura Ingalls Wilder Days (usually in September), which includes a Laura Contest, Olde Tyme Fiddle Competition, crafts demonstrations, quilt show, pioneer games and a horse-drawn wagon (www.lauradays.org).

The trail crosses the Mississippi River into Minnesota at Nelson, just south of Pepin and sky-blue Lake Pepin, a lake as sublimely beautiful as any you can imagine. It was frozen but near spring thaw when the Ingalls crossed. That night, Laura wrote, the ice began breaking up, cracking like gunfire.

Drive west 18 miles on Highway 60, south 35 miles on U.S. Route 63, then east 5 miles on Highway 16 to Spring Valley, the longtime home of Almanzo’s parents after they came west from New York. Laura and her family lived here from 1890 to 1891 and attended church with Almanzo’s family at the 1876 First Methodist Church, according to a source at the Spring Valley Historical Society.

In 1976 the church became a museum run by the historical society. Ornate with red and yellow brick, and

LAURA INGALLS AND HER FAMILY LIVED IN SPRING VALLEY, MINNESOTA, FROM 1890 TO 1891 AND ATTENDED CHURCH WITH ALMANZO WILDER’S FAMILY AT THE 1876 FIRST METHODIST CHURCH.



(Left) Just a few miles west of Walnut Grove, Minnesota, is the Wheels Across the Prairie Museum in the railroad town of Tracy. Laura took her first train ride here in the 1880s.

stained-glass windows made in Italy in 1715, the building is on the National Register of Historic Places. Exhibits include 19th-century artifacts and Wilder family photos. There's also a shop that sells gifts and books.

Across the street and part of the museum complex, the 1865 white-frame Washburn-Zittleman House displays early quilts, toys and 19th-century furnishings. The museum complex at 220-221 W. Courtland Street (507-346-7659, www.springvalleymn.com/museum.org) is open from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Church tours are \$5, and it's \$7 to tour all of the buildings (student discounts apply).

Though on private property and not open to the public, the Wilders' barn, with a brown stone foundation and red door, is still standing at 702 Tracy Road, a short distance from the museum.

From Spring Valley, it's about 40 miles to Burr Oak, Iowa, where Laura's childhood home is still on its original site; take Highway 16 east

to U.S. Route 52 south. The Ingalls came here in 1876 from Walnut Grove, Minnesota, discouraged by two consecutive years of crop failures caused by grasshoppers and drought. En route, they stayed a short time with relatives at South Troy, Minnesota, where baby Freddie died.

Pa had found work managing the 1876 Masters Hotel in Burr Oak, and Ma, Mary and Laura cooked and cleaned at the 11-room white-frame establishment, now a museum. The family lived there and at two other sites (no longer standing) during their months in Burr Oak (not mentioned in her books). The youngest daughter, Grace, was born here, said museum director Steve Luse.

Life-size dolls of the Ingalls family, made by a local woman, now sit in the hotel's front parlor. Outside, a picnic pavilion stands on a grassy slope near a covered wagon much like the one that brought the family here, and would take them back to Walnut Grove less than two years later. The museum is open

from May through mid-October; tours cost \$8 for adults and \$6 for ages six through 17. A visitor center is across the street in the former Burr Oak Savings Bank at 236th Avenue (563-735-5916, www.lauraingallswilder.us).

Return to Highway 14 at Rochester and continue west 165 miles to Walnut Grove, which Laura describes in *On the Banks of Plum Creek*. The Ingalls family first arrived in 1874, having returned to Wisconsin from Kansas and staying three years before heading to Minnesota. The Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum in Walnut Grove is first-rate (866-305-2872 or 507-859-2358, www.walnutgrove.org/museum.html).

There's a dugout, above ground but much like the Ingalls', as well as a little red schoolhouse, a rustic chapel, and a two-room settler home that is similar to the "wonderful house" Wilder describes that Pa later built on Plum Creek. There's also Grandma's House, furnished with 19th-century artifacts, and Heritage Lane, where dozens

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WHERE THE WILDER THINGS ARE

The Laura Ingalls Wilder Historic Highway spans several Midwestern states and connects five northern sites that were a treasured part of the author's life. The route passes through Pepin, Wisconsin; Spring Valley, Minnesota; Burr Oak, Iowa; Walnut Grove, Minnesota; and De Smet, South Dakota.

The official *Little House on the Prairie* website provides more details on these locations as well as other historic sites and museums related to the classic books and TV series. www.littlehouseontheprairie.com/historic-locations-and-museum-sites



of exhibits include a covered wagon illustrating pioneer-era travels. The museum offers hands-on experiences for children with a mercantile shop, bank and post office, and clothing, buy money and groceries so kids can relive pioneer days.

The 1870s depot building displays other items, such as the buffalo coat that helped Pa survive three days in a snowbank during a blizzard, excerpts from Laura's books, family photos, murals of Walnut Grove and more,

including the bit of trivia that Laura is distantly related to England's Prince William.

There's also an extensive gift shop, a butterfly garden, and two areas of "prairie plantings" where tall grasses are jeweled with asters, flox and other wildflowers to represent natural prairie. The museum at 330 Eighth Street is open daily from April through October, with extended hours in July and August. Admission is \$7 for adults and \$4 for ages 6 to 12.

Remains of the Ingalls' dugout can be seen 1½ miles north of town off County Road 5 on property now owned by farmer Stan Gordon (watch for the Ingalls Dugout Site sign on the right). To accommodate Wilder fans, Gordon has cut a path through his cornfields to the creek; it costs \$5 to drive back (parking and turning around are adequate for a fifth-wheeler).

A short walk through wildflowers leads to the "banks of Plum Creek." What little is left of the dugout is in the

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bank on the opposite side. There's a wood bridge and a path up a steep hill for views down on the ruins, where grass once grew on the roof.

An annual outdoor drama based on Laura's life in Walnut Grove — *The Wilder Pageant*, now in its 41st year — is held just west of town. Dates for 2018 are July 6, 7, 13, 14, 20 and 21, with a family festival in the park on pageant Saturdays. General admission is \$18 (888-859-3102, www.walnutgrove.org).

Ahead 7 miles at the west edge of railroad-town Tracy on Highway 14 is the Wheels Across the Prairie Museum, not on the "official" tour but worth a stop. Established in 1971, the museum began with a 1915 American steam engine, boxcar, cabooses and historic depot, said founder Dorothy Pamp. A mannequin sits on a bench in the depot representing the real Laura, whose first train ride was from Walnut Grove to Tracy in the 1880s, Pamp said.

The museum, open seasonally starting the first weekend in May, is laid out like a small town and includes a historic barbershop, summer kitchen, 1860s log cabin, post office, blacksmith shop and chapel (507-626-1949, www.wheelsacrosstheprairie.org).

The trail continues west about 100 miles to De Smet, South Dakota — Dakota Territory when the Ingalls came in 1879 — where Pa had taken a job as timekeeper and paymaster with the Chicago and North Western Railroad. The Ingalls family briefly lived in an 8-by-10-foot claim shanty, and then in the six-room Surveyors' House, a "mansion," wrote Laura, their first winter in Dakota Territory. That spring, Pa got a homestead claim southeast of De Smet, said our tour guide of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Historic Homes.

Tours begin at the gift shop at 105 Olivet Avenue and include the Surveyors' House, which was moved 1 mile west into town in 1884, four years after the Ingalls lived in it. Other sites include the one-room De Smet's First School, attended by Laura and sister Carrie in 1880; a replica of the Brewster School where Laura taught; and the fine five-bedroom home Pa built on Third Street from 1887 to 1889. There, he, Ma and

Mary, blind from age 14, lived the rest of their lives. Pa died in 1902, Ma in 1924, and Mary four years later. Laura, Carrie and Grace married and lived elsewhere. A Discovery Center is across the street from the gift shop, and visitors can dress up like pioneers and learn Braille. There are more than 2,000 original Ingalls-Wilder artifacts in the collection.

Sixteen other sites mentioned in Laura's books are on a self-guided tour that includes the original Loftus Store, the site of Pa's store (now an attorney's office) that was home to the family during *The Long Winter*, and De Smet Cemetery southwest of town where Pa, Ma, Mary, Carrie and Grace are buried.

The Laura Ingalls Wilder Memorial Society runs the museums, which are open year-round. Admission is \$12 for adults, \$6 for ages six to 12, and children five and under are free (800-880-3383, www.discoverlaura.org).

An annual Laura Ingalls Wilder Pageant, an outdoor theater production, is held 1 mile southeast of town on Rose Lane. *These Happy Golden Years*, 2018's event, will take place July 6 to 8, 13 to 15, and 20 to 22 (800-776-3594, www.desmetpageant.org).

Across the road, where the five cottonwoods Pa planted for Ma have grown huge, is Ingalls Homestead at 20812 Homestead Road, looking today much like it did after Pa had "proved" the land over seven years more than a century ago. Tim and Joan Sullivan bought the "shy" quarter-section (156 acres) in 1997 with the plan to let visitors — now more than 40,000 a year — "experience" pioneer life. Business hours for the homestead vary (800-776-3594 or 605-854-3984, www.ingallshomestead.com).

Ann Lesch, the Sullivans' daughter, who works at the homestead, said previous owners had built the dugout, hay-roof barn and Ma's furnished "little house." Her parents added another barn that's home to an array of cats, ponies and five teams of draft horses that take visitors for covered-wagon rides. They also moved a 1902 garage here from De Smet, and offer wheat-grinding, rope-making and other demonstrations of 19th-century life skills. The Sullivans plant wide fields



(Top) The Ingalls' family plot at De Smet Cemetery in South Dakota. Laura and Almanzo are buried in Mansfield, Missouri. **(Above)** A re-creation of the Brewster School in De Smet where Laura taught.

with corn, wheat and oats to illustrate growing and harvesting, and have replanted stands of purple and yellow coneflowers, bluestem and buffalo grasses, common here in Laura's day.

Horse-drawn covered wagons take groups of visitors to one-room Johnson School, built in 1889 and moved to the property in 1994. "Students" sit at 1860s desks while a "teacher" conducts lessons dressed in period attire.

The homestead includes an extensive gift shop. Four RV sites with full hookups (\$30 per night) are available nearby; reservations are required. Four covered wagons and a bunkhouse are available for rental, and there's tent camping as well. Nearby Lake Thompson Recreation Area (the lake is mentioned in several of Laura's books) has pull-through and back-in sites.

Tim Sullivan said the homestead provides "a wonderful opportunity to teach history the hands-on way." He added, "This land has inspired a lot of stories."

Laura Ingalls Wilder published five books about her years in Dakota: *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, *Little Town on the Prairie*, *The Long Winter*, *These Happy Golden Years* and *The First Four Years*. She once explained, "I wanted children now to understand more about the beginning of things, to know what is behind the things they see, what it is that made America as they know it." 📖



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the integrity of standard electric drum brakes, which can be a great service convenience while on the road.

Electric drum brakes have long

been the dominant braking system used on travel trailers and fifth-wheels due to their reliability and low cost. They operate using two brake shoes with attached friction material commonly referred to as the brake lining. At the bottom, an adjuster joins the two shoes together. An electromagnet, connected to an actuating arm, is energized by electric current from the brake controller in the cab of the tow vehicle. When energized, the magnet is attracted to the rotating surface of the drum, causing the

MORE WHOA, LESS MAINTENANCE



actuating arm to move and press the brake shoes against the drum. Friction between the brake linings and the drum slows the wheels.

Unfortunately, every time the brakes are activated, the friction needed for slowing the trailer causes the brake linings and the drums to wear, forming a gap between them, subsequently decreasing the performance of the brakes. On standard electric brakes, the gap can be mitigated by manually adjusting the brakes after the first 200 miles and then every 3,000 miles. Although the brake adjustment isn't difficult, the procedure requires raising the vehicle, safely supporting the frame, crawling underneath for access behind the wheels and performing the adjustment with a special brake tool. Having the adjustment done by a professional adds to the trailer's

1) The dust cover is removed, exposing the cotter pin and castle nut. The test trailer was equipped with LCI's Super-Lube axle spindles. 2) The brake wires on the right side of the trailer are routed through the axle tubes.

maintenance cost, but it's well worth it if you aren't comfortable performing this procedure.

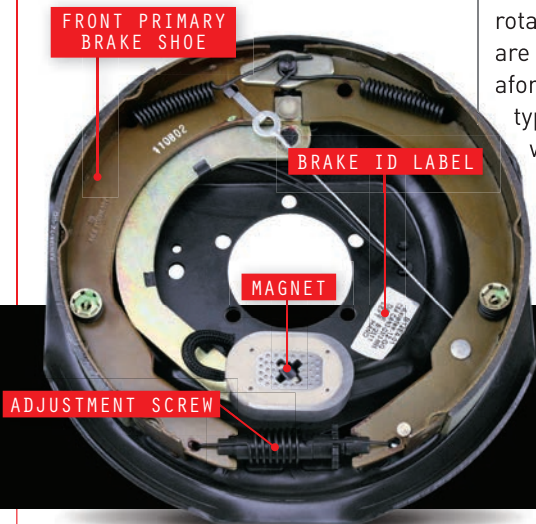
Often, even seasoned RVers will overlook brake adjustments. Instead, brake wear is compensated for by increasing the gain on the brake controller, sending more voltage to the magnets. Increasing the gain is an imperfect solution that still results in reduced brake performance and causes increased wear of the magnet and drum surface.

Forward Self-Adjusting Brakes have a mechanism that automatically adjusts the brake shoes during every forward stop. A cable attached to the front brake shoe wraps around a pulley on the rear brake shoe. The cable is connected to a lever that rotates the adjuster when the brakes are applied, keeping the required aforementioned gap in spec. This type of self-adjusting drum brake was used for many years on motor vehicles with drum brakes, so it is not a new technology; it's a proven, reliable system used

in a new application.

To test the effectiveness of these self-adjusting brakes, the components were installed on a 33-foot travel trailer. The installation took about an hour per wheel, including greasing the bearings, and the process should be within the capability of trailer owners who are familiar with brake maintenance. Although the brakes did not come with installation instructions (the company is in the process of developing an installation manual), the necessary information can be found in the Electric Brakes Owner's and Service Manual on www.lci1.com.

Two brake assembly sizes are available: 12-by-2-inch for trailer axles rated between 4,000 and 7,000 pounds, and 10-by-2.25-inch for 3,500-pound-rated axles. The test trailer was equipped with LCI axles, rated at 5,200 pounds, and fitted with 12-by-2-inch electric drum brakes. To get the first number in the brake size, measure the inside diameter of the brake drum or the diameter of the installed brake shoes. The



KNOW RIGHT FROM LEFT?

When replacing the brakes, be sure to order two left and two right brakes. Double-check when installing them. The primary brake shoe faces the front of the trailer, and the brake ID label indicates left or right.

TO TEST THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LCI'S SELF-ADJUSTING BRAKES, THE COMPONENTS WERE INSTALLED ON A 33-FOOT TRAVEL TRAILER.

second number is the width of the brake shoe. We used LCI part number 296651 for the left side and 296652 for the right, which include the brake assembly, washers, nuts and sealed wire connectors. New drums are not included with the brake assemblies.

There is a difference between the left and right brake assemblies, and they must be installed in the correct position. LCI provides a label on the new assemblies that indicates the intended sides. A quick visual inspection will reveal that drum brakes have a forward-facing primary shoe and a rear-facing secondary shoe. The primary shoe has an easily identifiable shorter brake lining than the secondary shoe and should always be installed with its brake lining facing toward the front of the trailer.

Installation began with jacking up the trailer. A trailer must never be lifted by the suspension or axle. An appropriately sized jack should be placed under the trailer's frame, being careful not to push against propane pipes or electrical wires. A block of wood between the jack and trailer frame can help prevent damage to the frame. The front and rear of the wheels on the opposite side of the trailer were

chocked, and jack stands were placed under the frame and axle. For safety, never raise or support a trailer with its leveling or stabilizing jacks.

Once off the ground, the lug nuts and wheels were removed. Working on one drum at a time, the dust cap was removed. This can be done using slip-lock pliers, a dust-cap removal tool or a flat-tip screwdriver. The cotter pin was then removed, followed by the castle nut, flat washer, outer bearing and drum. Some axles may use a retainer instead of a cotter pin, which can be pried off easily with a screwdriver. The two brake wires were cut near the crimped-on connectors. It was not necessary to tape the wires since no electrical current was present. The final step was to remove the backer-plate nuts and the brake assembly.

The new brake assembly, which comes completely assembled and ready to bolt on and wire up, was held in place with the new nuts and washer, and tightened to 35 to 55 LB-FT. Connecting the wires was made easy

with the included sealed terminals, which didn't require stripping the insulation. One wire from the brake assembly was inserted into one of the three holes in the connector, and one of the trailer wires into another hole. Electrical polarity isn't a concern with an electromagnet. These weather-resistant connectors, which are included, are filled with dielectric grease to provide moisture resistance.

The connector was crimped with pliers, making sure the cap was fully seated but being careful not to apply too much force. Slip-joint pliers should not be used due to the action of their jaws, which can cause the cap to become cocked with only one side fully engaged. Be sure to check the connection carefully to verify that the connector grabbed correctly. Purchasing additional connectors before starting the job is a good idea in case one fails, as they are not reusable. LCI sells its Sealed Wire Connectors on its website (store.lci1.com/sealed-wire-connector), or you can purchase 3M Scotchlok 314

3) LCI's Forward Self-Adjusting Brake is shown on the left, and the trailer's original standard electric brake is shown on the right. 4) This inner seal showed indications of wear and was allowing grease to enter the drum.



MORE WHOA, LESS MAINTENANCE

connectors, which are available from Amazon, Waytek Wire and some local auto-parts stores.

The test trailer bearings were due for service, so this was an opportune time for repacking and replacing the inner seal. Bearings should be repacked once a year or every 12,000 miles — if possible, with a bearing packer (available at tool and auto-parts stores). If repacking isn't necessary, the inner axle seal should be inspected for nicks, tears, cracks and axle grease that has passed through the seal. If there is any reason to suspect that the seal has failed, it should be replaced by prying it out with a seal removal tool or a screwdriver. Never strike or press on the inner bearing to force out the seal, which could damage the bearing. Install the new seal with a seal driver or by placing a block of wood over the seal and driving it evenly with a hammer until flush with the edge of the drum.

Next, the drums were inspected for excessive or uneven wear, scoring and damage on both the braking surface and the surface that contacts the magnet. Precise tolerances, provided by the axle manufacturer, can be checked by a qualified technician. It may be possible to resurface the drums to correct uneven wear or scoring; however, it may be necessary to replace them. The test trailer's drums showed only minor wear and were reused.

After the drum was slid in place, the outer bearing, flat washer and castle nut were installed on the



5) Five backing-plate nuts and washers attach the brake assembly to the axle housing.

spindle. The castle nut was tightened to 50 LB-FT while slowly rotating the drum. The castle nut was then loosened and finger-tightened until snug. A new cotter pin was inserted into the hole in the spindle. If the tabs on the castle nut do not line up with the hole in the spindle, slightly loosen the castle nut until the cotter pin can be inserted. With the cotter pin installed, the castle nut should be free to move slightly. The wheels were then reinstalled, and the lug nuts tightened to the torque specification and sequence in the trailer owner's manual. The lug nuts' torque was rechecked after the first 50 miles and rechecked after the next 50 miles.

Like all new drum brakes, LCI's Forward Self-Adjusting Brakes should be properly broken in (burnished). LCI recommends a break-in period requiring 20 to 50 brake applications. To burnish the brakes, set the brake controller's gain to approximately midway or slightly higher (see the brake controller's owner's manual for directions). Tow the trailer at about 40 MPH, then activate the manual button or lever on the brake controller until the combo slows to 20 or 25 MPH. Using only the manual control forces the trailer's brakes to slow down both the tow vehicle and trailer, which helps burnish the brakes quicker. Braking applications should

be conducted at no less than 1-mile intervals to prevent the brake linings from overheating.

Burnishing the pads smooths out any high spots in the brake linings, magnets and drum surfaces. LCI states there should be close to 100 percent contact between the brake lining and drum surface after 50 brake applications, and the driver should notice an increase in brake performance in as little as 10 applications. The brakes on the test trailer became noticeably more effective after the break-in. The trailer has been towed more than 2,000 miles since the installation, and the brakes have functioned evenly and strong with no noise or excess heat.

LCI's Forward Self-Adjusting Brakes can pay for themselves through reduced maintenance costs. The 12-by-2-inch brakes sell for \$96.03 each, and the 10-by-2.25-inch assemblies are \$83.72 each. The relatively low cost of the braking assembly makes it practical to replace the entire unit rather than just the pads on the old brakes, given the time and effort involved, and the peace of mind knowing the brakes will always be adjusted properly. 🚛

Lippert Components, Inc.
574-537-8900
www.lci1.com/self-adjusting-brakes

BEARING GREASE

When repacking the wheel bearings, using the correct grease is essential for protecting them. LCI recommends the following products:

- Kendall L-427 Super Blu
- Mobil Mobilgrease HP 222
- Mobil Ronex MP
- Pennzoil Premium Wheel Bearing Grease 707L
- Valvoline Valplex EP Grease

ARGOSY ODYSSEY



BEFORE LAUNCHING THE ADVENTURE OF LIFE ON THE ROAD, ONE COUPLE BEGAN THEIR JOURNEY BY TRANSFORMING A VINTAGE AIRSTREAM TRAILER



A few years ago, my husband, Chad, and I sold our business, a riverside bar in Asheville, North Carolina. With our status as empty nesters rapidly approaching, we began to plan our great escape. We had always aimed to leave town once the kids became adults, but only in recent years had we decided to downsize from a stick-built house to a home on wheels.

Because of Chad's skill set, we knew it would be cheaper to renovate a fixer-upper than to buy a used trailer in road-ready condition. We also liked the idea of customizing our future home and the freedom of options it offered.

After a few months of scouring Craigslist, classified ads and online forums for an inexpensive trailer with a solid frame, I came upon a 1976 Airstream Argosy. The listing was for a 22-footer that was in decent shape, at least on the outside, and it was just around the corner in Forest City, North Carolina. Priced at a mere \$2,000, it seemed too good to be true.

We weren't the only ones hunting for classic Airstreams, and I knew I had



to be quick. The ad was posted early on an October morning, and I replied 20 minutes later. The following week, our future home was delivered. The size was a perfect fit for the two of us, our dog, Maggie, and our goat, Frankie.

Buying the Airstream was a gamble. Neither of us had any experience with RV remodels. For all we knew, our trailer could have been a hump of aluminum junk. The interior needed

to be completely gutted. The skins were moldy, the floors rotten, and mummified mice were hiding in the insulation. But despite its lackluster facade, we saw the Argosy's potential.

Before getting started, we needed to make sure the trailer wasn't a money pit, so we took it to a shop for inspection with our fingers, toes and eyes crossed. Although it seemed like an eternity, fewer than 10 days passed before we



(Top) The author, Cate Battles, and her husband, Chad, enjoy the view of Lake Tahoe with their pet goat, Frankie, and pup, Maggie. **(Left)** With the Grand Tetons in the background, Cate adds details to the Argosy's mural, including the solar eclipse the couple witnessed while visiting the national park.



(Top, from left) Cate stands in the doorway of the Battles' 1976 Airstream Argosy moments after it was delivered. Chad stripped the vintage travel trailer down to the bare bones in preparation for the remodeling project. The couple spent the following six months fixing the Argosy up before finally hitting the road. (Bottom, from left) To save space, the couple opted to build a convertible dinette bed in the front bay. This was a change from the original floorplan, which placed the bed across from the kitchen. As the renovation neared its end, Chad installed the kitchen appliances and cabinetry, and Cate worked on the decor, shopping for items like vintage glassware and light fixtures.

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ARGOSY ODYSSEY

got the call back from Mark Coyne, owner of RV Services, an extremely busy shop in Asheville. Had we made the right choice or a \$2,000 mistake? Fortunately, Mark told us that, despite its advanced age and dingy appearance, the trailer was in good condition. What a relief!

It was time for the real work to begin, but where to start? Everything on the inside needed replacing, but the foundation, frame and shell were intact. Considering that this was our first time renovating an RV, the task was going to be an adventure in and of itself.

Chad has an electronics degree and is one of the handiest guys I've ever met. If he isn't familiar with something, he studies and masters it. He has experience in many fields, from theater-set design to insulation, roofing, plumbing, cabinetmaking, even building a sofa from scratch, and he knows his way around a sewing machine. He researched Airstream forums and Youtube videos for instructions and listened to Mark's great advice.

After getting the green light from the shop, our first task was gutting what was left of the inside and taking down the remaining cabinetry, interior walls, sinks and toilet. Removing the rotten floor and 40-year-old insulation was the



(Left) To make the interior of their rolling home feel warm, inviting and comfortable, the Battles decorated it with a Southwest-Midcentury Modern flair. **(Right)** Perched on the bed, Maggie takes in the view of the Sierra Range through the Argosy's screen door.



nastiest part of the project. Once that was complete, Chad cleaned off and primed the frame, and laid down new insulation and a vapor barrier. With the subfloor finished, he mapped out where everything would be placed, from the plumbing, electrical wires and LP-gas lines to cabinets and appliances.

We were lucky to find and download the 1976 Argosy manual, but several details weren't mentioned, and we had to figure them out on our own. Altering the original floorplan, we moved the bed to the front bay and created a convertible dinette. We also wanted to shed as much weight as possible, so we picked lighter weight materials than were

originally in place and created as many dual-purpose areas as we could, such as hidden compartments, shelving and storage space.

Another unique addition to our Argosy was a porthole from a decommissioned ship, bought by our family in Nantucket as a "camper warming" present. We love having the extra window in the door. The porthole has since framed many landscape photos on our travels and is a favorite feature of our website, www.argosyodyssey.com.

With the framing in, paint on the walls and the flooring laid down, the Argosy started to feel like home, and it was time to paint the exterior. I wanted a two-tone retro theme, but after pricing out a professional paint job, a friend suggested that I paint a mural myself. Not only would that save us thousands of dollars, it would cover the imper-

BY DOING ALMOST EVERYTHING OURSELVES, WE WERE ABLE TO PERSONALIZE THE ARGOSY AND SAVE MONEY WE WOULD LATER USE FOR TRAVEL.





THIS ARGOSY IS OUR ARGOSY

Unlike its silver-bullet siblings, our vintage Airstream rolled out of the factory already painted and was the perfect subject for a mural. As an artist, I found the Argosy to be one big, blank canvas. Choosing the theme "This Land Is Your Land," I created a landscape around the trailer based on the eternal words of Woody Guthrie — from the California redwoods to the sparkling desert, waving wheat fields and ribbons of highway.

After lightly sanding the Argosy's exterior and giving it a bath, I mapped out the painting. I used Valspar Anti-Rust Armor oil-based enamel in a rainbow of colors and applied an enamel clear coat for extra durability.

The mural is an ongoing project that I expand upon as we venture to new places, and I don't think I'll ever stop working on it as long as we own the Argosy. In August, we were lucky enough to experience the total eclipse in the Tetons, and I made sure to add that to the scene as well.



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fections that came with the trailer and result in a one-of-a-kind Airstream. As a bonus, it also hides scratches that result from our travels down narrow roads full of branches and sagebrush that would make owners of polished Airstreams cry.

I saved one of my favorite tasks — decorating! — for last. After months of sleepless nights caused by Pinterest-induced insomnia, I began collecting vintage items from light fixtures to glassware. Keeping our dream home on wheels affordable was key, so finding thrift-store items, salvaged materials and other cost-effective solutions was a must.

While brand-new Airstreams this size can cost \$45,000 or more, we completed the remodel for less than \$10,000, including some contracted work. By sticking to a tight budget and doing almost everything ourselves, we were able to personalize the Argosy and save money we would later use for travel.

Renovating an old Airstream, or any vintage camper, is a ton of work, but it's an incredibly rewarding experience. As time goes on, we continue to add and amend things that could be improved. That's just part of the journey. The important thing is that we now have a home that provides the freedom to travel with ease.

The benefits are endless. It takes only 15 minutes to clean the whole house. We aren't bogged down with material clutter, and because we boondock, we are constantly surrounded by beautiful countryside, which also makes Maggie and Frankie quite happy. Reconnecting with nature and living a self-sufficient lifestyle have changed us in so many ways. We appreciate the little things that we took for granted back in Asheville, like a hot shower or a beautiful sunrise.

After traveling nearly 30,000 miles around North America, we are pleased to say we love this lifestyle and are grateful that it has taught us to live in the present rather than wait for the future. Every day is a new adventure, every place and experience bring us new knowledge, and we're excited to see what awaits around the bend. 🚐

Keep Your "I" on the Ball

The portable wireless iBall camera makes simple work of hitching up a trailer

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

I've lost track of how many times I thought I was getting away with something as a kid and my mom would know exactly what I was up to. How could she possibly know? Because, as she — and parents everywhere — claimed, "I have eyes in the back of my head." The iBall Digital Pro Wireless Trailer Hitch Camera is sort of like that: It sees what's outside your field of vision and makes hitching up a trailer a piece of cake.

The iBall box contains only three components: a 3-by-4-inch camera mounted on an adjustable magnetic base, a 3.5-inch color LCD monitor attached to a 6-inch adjustable gooseneck that plugs into a 12-volt DC power port, and a cable for charging the lithium-ion battery. Once the camera and monitor are in place, it's no longer necessary to twist around to look out the rear window or climb in and out of the tow vehicle to check your progress when hitching up.

Nowadays, many vehicles come standard with rear-vision cameras, but the iBall's portability offers closer and unlimited viewing angles. We don't have a backup camera on our truck, so the iBall is really appreciated when hitching up a trailer. The image on the monitor is clear, and we can back straight under the coupler on the first try. The camera can also be placed on the rear wall of a trailer when backing it up. Since the camera attaches with a magnet (which won't scratch the



The iBall can be used on any vehicle with a steel skin and can be easily positioned for the best view of the ball mount and trailer coupler. (License plate removed for photos.)

vehicle's paint), you'll have to find a ferrous-metal location on RVs with aluminum and fiberglass side walls. In most cases, this will require adding a metal plate, or you can use a suction-cup device to hold the camera. Because the camera isn't permanently attached, it should not be left on the tow vehicle or trailer while driving.

The iBall, with a 120-degree field of view, can be placed on the back of the tow vehicle facing the hitch or off-center for side viewing, or wherever works

best. It also works well for hitching a fifth-wheel, especially when a toolbox obstructs the view. But the camera does more than match up trailers and tow vehicles. For one outing, we loaded dirt bikes onto a trailer to tow with our motorhome. To keep an eye on the bikes, I set up the camera inside the back window of the motorhome, placed between the glass and the curtain. A glance at



NOW YOU SEE IT » The iBall Digital Pro comes with an LCD monitor attached to an adjustable gooseneck that plugs into a 12-volt DC port, a camera and a charging cable for the lithium-ion battery.

the monitor now and again while driving confirmed that they were secure.

The iBall's digital signal will not interfere with Bluetooth and other frequencies, according to the manufacturer, and will transmit up to 100 feet with no obstructions. To test how well the camera transmits to the screen, I placed the camera around a corner of the house, so that the garage blocked the direct line of sight to the monitor. Back inside the truck, I got a clear view of the plants on the side of the house, and that was 56 feet away. Option buttons on the monitor adjust camera orientation, brightness, saturation and contrast.

We discovered other uses for the iBall on the outing with the dirt bikes, such as setting it up on a picnic table outside to spy on our dog when I was inside the motorhome cooking. When the motorhome's brake light was acting erratically, we set the camera on the motorcycle trailer, facing the RV's brake light, for periodic checks from the cockpit. In this application in broad daylight,

it was hard to see on the monitor, but it worked. There's no light on the iBall, so you'll have to rely on the tow vehicle's light and/or the lights on some trailer hitches when hooking up in the dark.

The instructions call for an initial eight-hour charging of the battery. To turn the camera on and off, hold down the button for three or four seconds. A blue light indicates it's on, and the light changes to purple when it's connected to the monitor. Generally, the wireless camera would be used for short spurts to aid in hooking up, but I wanted to see how long a charge would last, so I set up the camera and left it on. It transmitted to the monitor for just over four hours before the battery called it quits.

The company claims the camera is submersible for use when backing a boat into water, though you won't want to dilly-dally. And it can be used in the rain; again, make it brief.

The iBall worked well in every application, and we have no complaints, though some people may prefer an



The iBall's 3.5-inch color monitor has adjustments for camera orientation, brightness, contrast and saturation. We were impressed with the quality of the image.

adjustable gooseneck that is longer than 6 inches or a monitor that is larger than the 3.5-inch screen that's supplied. MSRP for the iBall Pro is \$229.99, including shipping.

Portable and hassle-free, the iBall is a handy device to keep a close "i" on things. 📹

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Don't Throw in the Towel

To keep bath towels from falling forward during travel and landing at my feet when I open the RV's closet door, I came up with the idea of using a double refrigerator bar to hold them in place. The spring-loaded bar is made by Camco (available online at Camping World and Amazon). With the bar positioned in front of the stacked towels, the towels stay put, and we can just reach in and grab one as needed.

Joy Morgan, Lenoir City, Tennessee

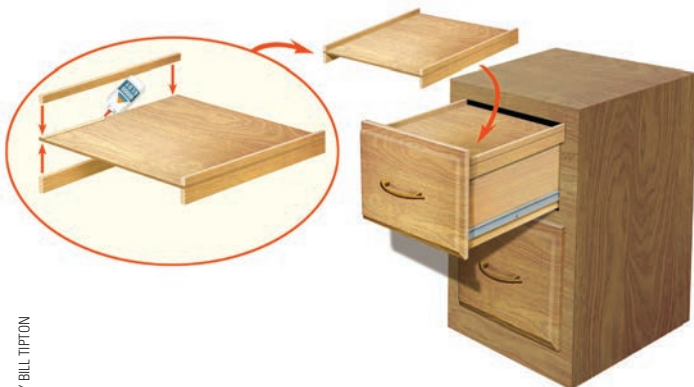


Extending Gutter Spouts

Many trailers have a drip rail to collect air-conditioner discharge water and rainwater that runs off the roof, and some have plastic add-on extensions designed to send water away from the side walls. Unfortunately, sometimes these extensions are not long enough or are placed inappropriately, and can cause runoff water to dribble down the side wall, creating black streaks.

I made a simple and cheap solution. Since the extension on my RV is 3/4 inch wide, I bought a short length of 3/4-inch (inside dimension) flexible plastic hose at a hardware store. I cut off a 4-inch piece, heated one end with a hair dryer until it was pliable, applied epoxy and pushed it firmly onto the extension. The epoxy ensures that the piece remains in place during travel. Runoff water now clears the side wall, and there are no more black streaks.

Larry MacDonald, Victoria, British Columbia



One Nightstand

Since we have a set of drawers instead of a nightstand next to the bed in our RV, I devised a nightstand of my own. All it took was a 1/4-inch-thick wooden board that I placed across the top of the open drawer and some brad nails to fasten on a couple of side rails (wood glue would work in place of brads). I used 3/8-by-3/8-inch wood strips for the side rails (1/4-inch round would work, too) to hold the nightstand in place on top of the open drawer and keep things from sliding off the top. Now I have an instant nightstand!

I cut the board to fit inside the drawer for storage when it's not in use.

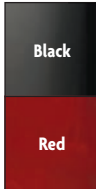
Ron Brown, Pine Grove, California

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Heavy-Duty RV Electric Cords

30-Amp Cord with Handles, 25' #95701
Club SALE \$44.97 Reg. \$69.99

30-Amp Cord with Handles, 50'
(not shown) #95702

Club SALE \$79.97 Reg. \$112.99

50-Amp Cord with Handles, 15'
(not shown) #95703

Club SALE \$97.97 Reg. \$134.99

50-Amp Cord with Handles, 30'
(not shown) #95704

Club SALE \$149.97 Reg. \$211.99

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Aqua Soft Tissue,
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- 12" W padded seat
- 250 lb. capacity
- 20" tire dia.
- Folds for storage

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Adventurer Three-Speed Folding Trike,
Bright Blue #87466

Heavy-duty steel frame with powder coat finish.
Club SALE \$299.97 Reg. \$439.99 | 🚚

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BEST SELLER!

Heavy-duty RV Wash & Wax, Gallon #19909

Formulated for fiberglass, metals, poly
finishes, rubber and wood.

Club SALE \$18.47 Reg. \$30.99

32 oz. (not shown) #19944

Club SALE \$6.27 Reg. \$10.49



Fits all standard
14" x 14" vents

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Strap for easy
removal!

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45%

Vent Cushion With Strap #106744

Keep cold air and light out. 3" thick foam with
removable cover. **Club SALE \$7.14** Reg. \$12.99

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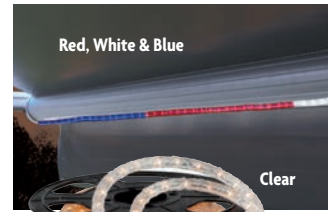
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**\$11.29
VALUE!**

#27913



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18' Rope Lights

Connect two for extra
length. UL Certified. 120-volt.

LED Red, White & Blue #102438

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Clear #69142

Blue (not shown) #87183

Club SALE \$14.99

Reg. \$16.99 | ♥



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Rain and Snow Beaters

Driving safety becomes a big concern when winter weather does its best to slow us down. A key component of safe driving is having windshield wipers that can handle the worst Mother Nature dishes out. PIAA's Si-Tech (Silicone Technology) Flat Wiper Blades do just that, with a frameless design said to keep windshields streak-free while eliminating snow and ice buildup. The heat- and ozone-resistant blades are claimed to continually reapply an active silicone coating on the windshield to increase rain and snow repellency and ensure quiet operation, whatever the season. PIAA warrants the blades for one year under normal use.

MSRP: From \$26.99

800-525-7422, www.piaa.com/sitech

Circle 131 on Reader Service Card



Handy Hitch Tote

It's hard to find a good location to store a cumbersome weight-distribution ball mount and spring bars where they are easy to access yet out of the way. The Hitchport Storage System allows you to place the system right on the trailer A-frame. One mount holds the ball mount, and another holds the spring bars. By drilling a hole in the front frame crossmember and hooking a chain quick-link through it, you can hook the spring-bar chains neatly to it or use a lock for security. The company says the stainless-steel mounts fit all 2-inch spring bars and most popular round, square and trunion-style spring bars.

MSRP: \$12.95/Hitch Bar Storage Mount

\$13.49/Spring Bar Storage Mount

772-214-0951, www.hitchportllc.com

Circle 132 on Reader Service Card



Road to Recovery

Tow-vehicle seats take a beating over time from normal wear and exposure to the sun. When it's time to freshen them up, Coverking's Molded Custom Seat Covers are said to be a perfect fit. They are made using 3D warp-knitting technology so they match every curve without unsightly stitches and seams at critical wear points, according to the manufacturer. Underneath the water-resistant and breathable polyester top layer is a thick, molded foam laminate to maximize fit and comfort. Available in black, gray and taupe, the custom seat covers come with a two-year replace-or-repair warranty.

MSRP: From \$249.99

800-268-3754, www.coverking.com

Circle 133 on Reader Service Card

Juice Manager

Xantrex has become the OEM standard among many RV manufacturers when it comes to sine-wave power inverters. Now those who want to step up to the latest inverter for older RVs can do so with one of four new Freedom Series models: X 1000 and X 2000 inverters, and XC 1000 and XC 2000 inverter-chargers. The latter has an onboard LED display, built-in battery charger, high-surge capacity to handle residential-size AC fridges, microwaves and power tools, and a 30-amp internal transfer switch to make fast transitions from shorepower to batteries. The inverter provides full output in temperatures ranging from minus-4 to 104 degrees Fahrenheit, according to the company. The wiring bay is roomy with quick-connect AC terminals, making installation a breeze.

MSRP: \$775. 800-670-0707, www.xantrex.com

Circle 134 on Reader Service Card



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CENTRAL PNEUMATIC SUPER COUPON

21 GALLON, 2.5 HP, 125 PSI VERTICAL OIL-LUBE AIR COMPRESSOR

Customer Rating ★★★★★

SAVE \$49

Air delivery: 5.8 CFM @ 40 PSI, 4.7 CFM @ 90 PSI

~~\$149.99~~ **\$109.99** Compare \$199

ITEM 69091/61454 62803/63635/67847 shown

38100690

LIMIT 3 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

PREDATOR SUPER COUPON

8750 MAX. STARTING/7000 RUNNING WATTS 13 HP (420 CC) GAS GENERATOR

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 68530/63086/69671/63085 shown

ITEM 68525/63087/63088 CALIFORNIA ONLY

• GFCI outlets

Wheat kit and battery sold separately.

~~\$599.99~~ **\$529.99** Compare \$2700

SAVE \$2170

38101974

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

FREE SUPER COUPON

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CENTECH 7 FUNCTION DIGITAL MULTIMETER

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 63604/63758 98025/69096/63759/90899 shown

38097590

VALUE \$16.45

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20% OFF SUPER COUPON

ANY SINGLE ITEM

38095819

LIMIT 1 coupon per customer per day. Save 20% on any 1 item purchased. *Cannot be used with other discount, coupon or any of the following: Items on website inside Stock Card membership, Extended Service Plan, gift card, open box item, 3 day Parking Lot Sale item, compressed floor jack, saw mills, clamping, robotic, chisels or cuts, Trailers, Welders, welders, Adrenaline, Baser, Cober, CoproPro, Daytona, Earthquake, Hercules, Jailer, Lince, Padlock, Predator, Scientific, Singapore Valley, Trench, Zinch, but exclude on prior purchases. Non-transferable. Original coupon must be presented. Valid through 3/14/18.

U.S. GENERAL SUPER COUPON

26" 16 DRAWER ROLLER CABINET

Customer Rating ★★★★★

14,600 cu. in. of storage, 1060 lb. capacity, Weighs 235 lbs.

SAVE \$653

~~\$2999.99~~ **\$3099.99** Compare \$952.99

ITEM 61609/67831 shown

38102802

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

CENTRAL MACHINERY SUPER COUPON

8", 5 SPEED BENCHTOP DRILL PRESS

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 62520/60238 shown

38105791

SAVE \$50

~~\$67.99~~ **\$49.99** Compare \$99.99

LIMIT 3 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

PORTLAND SUPER COUPON

7 AMP ELECTRIC POLE SAW 9.5" BAR

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 68862/63190/62896 shown

38110578

SAVE \$84

~~\$79.99~~ **\$64.99** Compare \$99.98

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

PITTSBURGH AUTOMOTIVE SUPER COUPON

1 TON CAPACITY FOLDABLE SHOP CRANE

Customer Rating ★★★★★

Boom extends from 36-1/4" to 50-1/4", Crane height adjusts from 82" to 94"

ITEM 69512/61858/69445 shown

38110680

SAVE \$169

~~\$1099.99~~ **\$999.99** Compare \$269

LIMIT 3 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

BADLAND Battle Tested SUPER COUPON

2500 LB. ELECTRIC WINCH WITH WIRELESS REMOTE CONTROL

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 61840/61297/63476/61258 shown

38114071

SAVE \$70

~~\$77.99~~ **\$49.99** Compare \$119.99

Voted Best Winches

LIMIT 3 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

EARTHQUAKE XT SUPER COUPON

1/2" COMPOSITE PRO EXTREME TORQUE AIR IMPACT WRENCH

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 62891 shown

381216076

1190 TORQUE BOLT BREAKAWAY

NEW

WEIGHS 4.4 LBS.

SAVE \$394

~~\$149.99~~ **\$129.99** Compare \$524.95

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HaulMaster SUPER COUPON

STEP STOOL/WORKING PLATFORM

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 62515 66911 shown

38121182

350 lb. capacity

SAVE 65%

~~\$57.55~~ **\$29.99** Compare \$199.99

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

PITTSBURGH AUTOMOTIVE SUPER COUPON

#1 SELLING JACKS IN AMERICA

RAPID PUMP® 4 TON HEAVY DUTY STEEL FLOOR JACK

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 60706/62319/68056 shown

38121561

WEIGHS 105 LBS.

SAVE \$90

~~\$124.99~~ **\$109.99** Compare \$199.99

LIMIT 3 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

COVER PRO SUPER COUPON

10 FT. x 20 FT. PORTABLE CAR CANOPY

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 63054/62858 shown

38134869

SAVE \$106

~~\$129.99~~ **\$99.99** Compare \$205.99

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

drillmaster SUPER COUPON

4-1/2" ANGLE GRINDER

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 69645 60625 shown

38134962

SAVE 60%

~~\$14.99~~ **\$9.99** Compare \$24.98

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

HaulMaster SUPER COUPON

72" x 80" MOVING BLANKET

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 69505/62418 66537 shown

38147578

SAVE 66%

~~\$17.97~~ **\$5.99** Compare \$8.99

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

SUPER COUPON

TILTING FLAT PANEL TV MOUNT

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 62289/61807 shown

38149038

176 lb. capacity

SAVE \$85

~~\$249.99~~ **\$149.99** Compare \$99.99

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

SUPER COUPON

SOLAR ROPE LIGHT

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 62533 63941/68353 shown

38153586

SAVE 66%

~~\$13.99~~ **\$9.99** Compare \$29.97

Great outdoor accent lighting, Super bright light

LIMIT 8 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

VIKING SUPER COUPON

JUMP STARTER AND POWER PACK

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 62749 shown

38158161

SAVE 16%

NEW

~~\$79.99~~ **\$69.99** Compare \$84.19

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

CENTRAL MACHINERY SUPER COUPON

20 TON SHOP PRESS

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 32879 60603 shown

38169817

Pair of arbor plates included

SAVE \$220

~~\$179.99~~ **\$149.99** Compare \$369.99

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

HARDY SUPER COUPON

POWDER-FREE NITRILE GLOVES PACK OF 100

Customer Rating ★★★★★

ITEM 68498 shown

5 mil thickness

SAVE 53%

~~\$7.99~~ **\$5.99** Compare \$12.99

YOUR CHOICE

LIMIT 8 - Coupon valid through 3/14/18*

*Original coupon only. No use on prior purchases after 30 days from original purchase or without original receipt. Valid through 3/14/18.

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MICE INTRUSION

Q We have a 25-foot Airstream Safari that mice are getting into. We have stuffed the tongue with steel wool, a suggestion from a service/restorer of Airstream travel trailers, but they are still getting in. I don't see any holes or places of entry. The bottom is all aluminum covered, and there are no damaged or broken areas. Do you have any suggestions?

Chris Hart, Attica, Michigan

Q Has no one ever experienced a rodent problem in their RV? I don't recall seeing any letters bemoaning the nastiness they discovered in their units. I have found droppings in drawers, partially eaten packages and nests in the basement storage area of my fifth-wheel. In a cold-weather campsite, my RV's converter failed because a mouse had found a warm place to do its "duty." Why have RV manufacturers not been able to seal off vermin entry points to the interior living space of the units they build?

Barry Ulrich, Ozark Missouri

A Mice have been getting into RVs ever since there have been RVs. The presence of the aluminum belly on your Airstream helps, Chris, but mice are sneaky and can work their way into an opening of perhaps 3/4-inch diameter or smaller. Accessing tiny places is their gig, and they're very good at it.

Barry, yes, we see letters about rodent intrusion all the time, regarding RVs of all price ranges, including the top-end models, but there's not often anything new we can add to the discussion. An online search will reveal many different home remedies for trying to make an RV impervious to intrusions, as well as making the RV interior an undesirable place for mice to hang out.

Check a current RV, and you'll probably see a fair amount of expanding foam at locations where pipes or



wires enter the RV underbelly. It's quick and easy at the factory to squirt in some foam and let it expand, harden and help seal up a gap. Check all those foam spots for signs of damage or chewing. You can buy aerosol cans of similar expanding foam at a home-supply or hardware store. When adding any spray foam, hold a small scrap of metal window screen in place to embed it in the foam to make it harder for mice to chew through later.

Pull the tires off your trailer and check all around inside the wheel wells. Those are places where gaps can easily exist and allow mice entry. Don't forget the roof, as there are numerous vent openings, and some of those also provide direct access to the inner-roof structure or, from there, down inside the walls. A small piece of window screen, a piece of thin aluminum flashing, a caulking gun with latex (not silicone) based adhesive and a pair of tin snips can go a long way toward sealing many mouse-access locations — although a determined critter may still chew through later.

A product that has been on the market for a few years called Mouse Free (www.mouse-free.com) is an undercoating and lubricant that can be sprayed on the undercarriage of the RV. Between the lubricant and the peppermint extract in the mixture, mice stay away, according to the company, and there are reviews online that confirm this.

These type of steps, along with any suitable hints you can find online, are about the best you can do to help mouse-proof your RV.

MORE FORMALDEHYDE SMELL

This letter is in response to J. Douglas' September letter, "Formaldehyde Smell," about being unable to get rid of the formaldehyde smell in his Starcraft Launch travel trailer. I recently purchased a 29-foot 2016 Starcraft Launch and had the same experience with outgassing of formaldehyde. The formaldehyde smell initially was so intense that it irritated my eyes and breathing.

I was concerned that I would not be able to take the trailer on a planned five-week trip. I live in Florida and decided to use the advantage of the summer sun to help detox the trailer. Every sunny day I would open the trailer windows and doors, and turn on the bathroom and stove exhaust fans. I did this for a week or so but still found that the smell would come back when the trailer sat closed up overnight. Upon

further inspection, I realized that the formaldehyde smell was trapped inside all the cabinets, drawers and closed-up spaces and would seep out from these spaces overnight.

Therefore, I started opening up all the cabinets and drawers on the days that I aired out the trailer. After several more weeks of airing it out with the door, windows, cabinets and drawers open, the smell finally was gone. I also think that the intense Florida sun helped to bake out the formaldehyde since the trailer was so warm inside. We were able to take our five-week road trip through the eastern United States

TECH EXPERT



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

and Canada and view August's solar eclipse in Tennessee with no smell of formaldehyde distracting us from the activities.

Arthur Peplow, Winter Haven, Florida

Regarding the letter from J. Douglas, I may have a solution. I worked for the New Mexico Environment Department for many years, and we frequently had concerns about that chemical smell. The best suggestion was to turn the temperature way up in the room where the smell originated and try to cook off the fumes. Two or three days might just do the trick.

D. Brinkerhoff, Bernalillo, New Mexico

Regarding J. Douglas' issue with formaldehyde odor in his trailer, a number of years ago I had carpeting, a headliner and a rubber floor covering installed in the cargo area in a new van. There was an unacceptable odor of formaldehyde, which was diagnosed as emanating from the carpeting or adhesives. The odor was quite strong, causing eye and nasal irritation. The recommended treatment was to place an open pan of ammonia in the closed van overnight. After doing this two or three times, the odor was completely eliminated and has not returned.

**Warren Stirling
Huntington Beach, California**

Seeing these recent letters about excess formaldehyde smell made me think someone forwarded a bunch of old mail from 1991, but, alas, that's not the case. It's surprising to hear that some RV manufacturers are still using products containing that much formaldehyde. Thank you, everyone, for your suggestions for clearing out the smell. Arthur, you're right, owners may not think of the fact that the back side of the cabinet panels inside the cabinet and drawer enclosures are also outgassing, so these areas need to be aired out. Manufacturers could help this by being more diligent about choosing better-quality materials minus the excess formaldehyde quotient, and that would help us from having more 1990s-vintage discussions.



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 EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

Note that the ammonia trick may work, but ammonia is a hazardous compound and must be used with proper ventilation. Be sure to open a door after the treatment and allow the vapors to dissipate before re-entering the RV, then open the windows and roof vents, and perhaps use a roof-vent fan to improve air circulation. Do this well before reoccupying the RV.

WHEEL AIR LEAKS

October's RV Clinic included a question from Norm Underwood, "Tire Pressure Dropping," concerning the chronic loss of air from the tires on his 2016 Rockwood fifth-wheel. We experienced the same problem on one of the four tires on our 2017 Northwood Arctic Fox 25R. When we took it to a tire shop for repair, thinking there was probably a nail to blame, we were surprised to find there was a pinhole leak in the aluminum wheel itself.

I wouldn't think it is possible for all four of Underwood's wheels to have the same defect, but unless his dealer submerged each one in water, I wouldn't write it off. Our wheel was replaced under warranty after we informed the dealer of the tire shop's findings. Incidentally, our dealer is not equipped to do tire-problem diagnosis and repair, so it would behoove Mr. Underwood to seek diagnosis elsewhere if his dealer is likewise limited.

Harry Baughman
Leavenworth, Washington

We had the same problem with our fifth-wheel that Norm Underwood had with his Rockwood. We pulled the tires off the rims and found that there were casting defects on all of the rims, allowing air to leak out. It turned out that the RV manufacturer was aware of the problem but had not recalled that batch of rims. The company did replace them free of charge when we contacted them.

Tom Wright, Canandaigua, New York

Regarding the letter from Norm Underwood, there is a clear coating that covers the aluminum wheels on some brands. The clear coat peeled from the

wheel on the fifth-wheel we have now. If it peels near the bead, it may cause air loss. The bead will need to be cleaned and a sealant put on the bead. Most tire shops know how to fix this.

Gary Bartz, Hayward, Wisconsin

Thank you for the suggestions, guys — I'm sure some of our readers will be taking a closer look at their RV's wheels if slow air loss seems to be an undiagnosed problem.

Fully immersing the wheels in a water bath is a terrific way to find those annoying little pinholes that could be causing air leaks, and recommending that a tire shop should try this procedure is a good idea.

Aluminum wheels aren't the only type that can have air leaks. Steel wheels, especially older ones with some rust in wear-and-tear areas, can also leak, especially around the bead seats. Once rust starts to build up near the beads, it's possible for air to slowly leak past that corrosion. If your RV has steel wheels with apparent leaks, have them dismounted and check the bead seats for problems.

BATTERY MISMATCH

In response to Roy White's May letter, "Batteries, Storage and Charging," he said that when he purchased the trailer, he had the dealer install a second battery that was a larger one. This is where the selling dealer messed up.

You never install a larger-amp-rated battery next to a lower-amp-rated battery because the smaller of the two batteries controls the amount of charge that goes into the larger battery. For example, with the smaller battery at 600 amps and the larger battery at 850 amps, the trailer converter and a battery charger senses when the smaller battery is fully charged.

The converter and battery charger continue to operate, but the larger battery won't accept additional charge. If you charge each separately and then hook them together, the larger battery is drained down first. When the larger battery gets down to the charge in the smaller battery, that's when both bat-

teries start working together. At that point, they lose their charge equally.

Dick May, Warsaw, Missouri

You bring up an excellent point, Dick. RV batteries connected in multiples should always be replaced as a group and be similarly sized. The same applies when considering a battery's age. An older battery, even when matched to an identically rated new battery, will always have different and somewhat diminished charging, holding and discharging characteristics. When the batteries are the same age, type and size, they stand a better chance of equal performance traits that won't drag down the better of the two, as happens when things are mismatched.

WASTE-TANK CURIOSITIES

Q First, let me thank you for being there to answer so many questions over the years. Now for part one of my two-part question: When draining the tanks, regarding an electric macerator versus a standard traditional hose, is one better than the other?

Part two: My RV's gray-water tank fills very quickly. Does it make sense to leave that valve permanently open while camping? I understand it's good to use the gray water to flush the septic hose.

Dave Eisler, Oxford, Pennsylvania

A We're glad we can be of help, Dave. A macerator isn't necessarily better than using a regular sewage-tank dump hose; it's just a different way to do the job. Regular gravity dump hoses have worked fine for a long time, and they still do. A macerator provides several advantages, though, chief of which are its abilities to pump the waste a longer distance than is typically handled by an RV dump hose and to pump uphill if necessary.

You can use the built-in macerator hose, such as the one that comes with the Thetford Sani-Con system, or attach a minimum 3/4-inch garden hose to the end of the macerator hose, which must be carefully kept separate from use for any other purpose. The garden hose would allow you to **(continued on page 71)**

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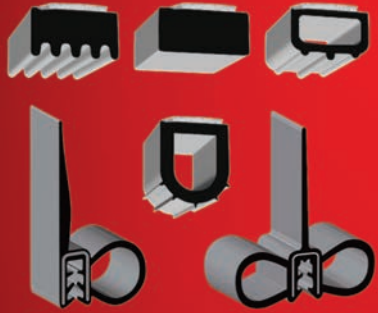
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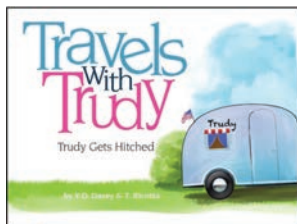
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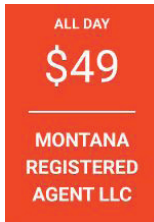
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access a dump station at home, for example, where you may not have a standard RV sewage dump available.

If you always park in a place with a standard dump station, a standard hose will likely do the job. But if you want extra flexibility for more dumping options, and a cleaner and easier way to dump the tanks, a macerator is a good investment in hardware for your RV.

You can leave the gray-tank valve

open, Dave, and then close it when you need the gray-water backup for flushing the dump hose after emptying the black tank. Personally, I'd leave the gray-tank valve closed all the time and open it only when the tank is mostly full.

When the valve is left open, water entering the tank and then flowing out of the hose is a relatively small stream of water with little velocity to carry away small-particulate solids that are

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present even in the gray water. With the tank partly or mostly full, there's a lot more water pressure, volume and speed to carry away much of the particulates. This water flow can be especially useful when rinsing the dump house with the gray water after emptying the black tank. Also, when the valve is left open while connected to the sewer connection, sewer gas can percolate through the tank and back up into the RV and through the roof vents, which is quite unpleasant.

Open or closed, it's your choice, but I know what I'd do.

TESTING SAFETY DETECTORS

I always check my smoke, carbon-monoxide and propane detectors before every trip. Recently, a good friend lost his fifth-wheel to fire while going down the road. No cause was found, but the trailer was a total loss. Since that incident, I checked my propane detector and pressed the button as always, and the alarm went off. I then checked the detector with an unlit propane torch, and it did not set off the detector. I purchased a replacement, and it worked perfectly and went off in the presence of propane. The old detector had a date that showed it was almost six years old. I hope this helps someone.

Russell Crawford
South Lake Tahoe, California

The various detectors in your RV don't have unlimited life spans, as you discovered, Russell. The sensitive detecting elements are eventually contaminated by impurities in the air, such as cooking fumes, hair spray, aerosol cleaners or simple airborne dust particles and the like. A smoke detector may go eight years, an LP-gas detector, perhaps five years, and for a carbon-monoxide detector, about six years is a useful life span. Removing the detector may show a date code on the back.

If you buy a used RV and aren't sure about its history, replace all of the detectors. These devices are not particularly expensive, and the safety they provide is always worth it.

SOLAR-POWER PLUG

Q I have a couple of concerns, but the first is the main one. Last spring, I purchased a new Dutchmen Coleman trailer that had the Furrion solar-power port installed. I was excited about this because I use solar to keep the trailer's battery charged when camping off the grid.

I had to order the connector to hook up the solar panels to the RV plug. But when I do that, it seems that the battery is actually drained of power rather than being charged. My dealer simply suggested that the panels are not "matched" to the plug. Maybe because this is something relatively new, the dealer knows nothing about it.

Furrion has not replied to my attempts to contact its customer-service people. I have fixed the problem by simply ignoring the plug and connecting wires from the panels directly to the battery, but there must be a solution that is better than this. It would be much easier to hook up directly.

My other concern is that the trailer has a power awning that is very rough while going out and retracting, as if something is binding up. The dealer replaced the channels and tracks attached to the RV, but this made no difference. Again, the dealer offered no further explanation or effort to fix the problem.

Sam L. Linkous
Blacksburg, Virginia

A First, you should not connect the solar panels directly to the battery, unless the solar-panel setup has an integral charge controller. The charge controller is a regulator that ensures the proper voltage is flowing to the battery. You didn't say which brand of solar panel you're using, but both the Furrion and Zamp Solar portable panels have built-in charge controllers. If you simply purchased one or more solar panels and put the system together yourself, then you likely need a charge controller.

It seems strange that the batteries are being discharged. Each solar panel has a blocking diode array to allow current flow toward the battery but not

backward. Are you sure the solar panels are working correctly, and for that matter, wired with the correct polarity? Check their power output using a multimeter to determine that there is charge-level voltage in excess of 12.5 volts. For the best help with an RV-solar-charging setup, do an internet search for a local solar company that's experienced with RV installations, and they can likely help get the setup straightened out.

It's hard to speculate about an awning cure beyond what the dealer found when the trailer was in the shop. You didn't say which brand of awning is on your RV, but contacting the manufacturer and inquiring about a local authorized dealer or service center might help. If they aim you at the previous dealer that installed new parts but didn't cure the problem, have the manufacturer make a different recommendation so you don't waste more money on a shotgun-parts approach to repair.

Often, it's the small independent shops with mobile services and experienced help that can solve this kind of problem. In addition, if the awning was installed somewhat crooked, that can cause some extra binding and the jumping you notice. Finally, some of the motorized awnings don't deploy smoothly at the best of times, so you may be seeing some standard operating procedures there.

THERMOSTAT REPLACEMENT

Q We bought our 2015 Keystone Bullet 248RKS travel trailer in the fall of 2015 and have enjoyed many trips in it. Every trip brings some kind of challenge and solution to the rig, including an upgrade of the water pump, a folding extension for the counter, awning protection while stored and so on.

The last trip out, I had to fumble with the thermostat at night, since it has no background light and is very hard to see without a flashlight. Is it OK to replace it with a comparable lighted home-type thermostat?

Chris Barkoukis
Washington Court House, Ohio

A If your RV thermostat is the simple analog-type that's nothing more than an on-off switch for the furnace, you can likely find a residential-type thermostat that offers the same connections, but most home thermostats operate more than just an on-off furnace circuit. The light in a home thermostat is powered by either a low-voltage supply routed through the wires leading to the thermostat, or internal batteries. Your setup may have just two wires available if it's an on-off model.

So, you'll need to route extra wires to the thermostat location, then find a suitable power supply for the unit, and it may not be 12 volts DC, so another option may be called for. If you need a transformer-type power supply, say to provide 24 volts AC to power the thermostat, then you probably won't have the lighting available if you're dry camped, if the thermostat will even work at all.

Many of today's thermostats are

designed with sophisticated circuitry that also operates the air-conditioning system and a heat pump, monitors exterior temperature, has timing circuits and so on. This applies to both home and RV HVAC systems, and adapting this type of thermostat cross platform would be highly impractical, if not impossible.

That said, if you have an analog thermostat that operates both the air conditioner and the heat, you may be able to upgrade the thermostat to one with more functions from the A/C manufacturer, but don't try to connect someone else's thermostat on the new units because damage to the control board can result. 🚗

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The Spirit of Beaufort

Spanish moss and live oaks are woven among history in this resilient island city on the South Carolina coast

Sometimes pit stops educate me unexpectedly. Last spring, on our annual road trip from Florida to New York, my husband, Jack, wanted to check out Beaufort (pronounced *BU-fert*) on South Carolina's Port Royal Island. Beaufort is 10 miles inland from Hilton Head as the crow flies, on the Broad River, which is more of a long, salty finger of the ocean. The Broad River is famous among anglers for its cobia runs. We struck out fishing but hit a home run for a history lesson.

Arriving in the early evening, we strolled through Henry C. Chambers Waterfront Park, a relaxing green space beside the river. Named for a longtime mayor of the city who obtained federal funding for the park's creation, this multi-acre common contained pleasant paved pathways, swings, pavilions, playgrounds and majestic live oaks laden with Spanish moss. The moss waved from the trees like sage-colored ribbons in the hair of a seaside Methuselah. Some of the live oaks along the bay were so large, they were already old during the Civil War.

The Civil War was particularly momentous for

Beaufort, as we learned from a series of plaques commemorating the city's tricentennial. Senator Robert Barnwell Rhett, a Beaufort native, led the Confederacy's quest for separation from the Union, triggering the start of the Civil War. In November 1861, the Union Navy subdued the Confederate fleet at Hilton Head, then used Beaufort as a base for the rest of the war. The plantation owners fled, effectively freeing 10,000 slaves, who were among the first freed slaves in America.

At the far-eastern end of the pedestrian waterfront area, we found a couple of cannons aimed at the river. I stood behind one, trying to imagine the early 1860s. What a tumultuous period in our country's past. But Beaufort survived intact, despite dramatic ups and downs. Like the 7-foot tide that twice daily fills and empties the local marina and salt marshes, constantly changing the view from Waterfront Park, so have swung the fortunes of Beaufort over time.

The resilience of this community bears witness to the strength and spirit in all of us. 📍



By Land and Sea

(Above) The author peers over a Civil War cannon still in position to protect Beaufort. (Left) Sailboats moored peacefully in the city's harbor belie the twice-daily 7-foot change in water level.



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