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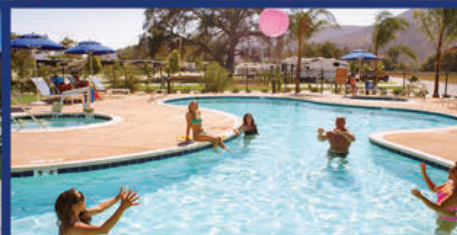
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Georgia's Mighty Fortress

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Oregon's Alps



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As *Trailer Life's* 75th anniversary comes to a close, we deck the halls with December covers, including 1948 (right) and 1953 (left). Page 12

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A Fond Farewell

On the cover: The Arctic Fox 990 traverses Oregon's Wallowa Mountains in the bed of a Chevrolet Silverado 3500. Photo by Bruce W. Smith

Last Page, New Beginning

As Bill Graves hands over the reins of his popular *America's Outback* column, his legacy will continue to captivate readers



RVers are a curious group of people. I think it's safe to say that most RV enthusiasts enjoy seeing new places — you know, the lust for exploring what's around the next corner. But beyond experiencing new geography, there's the desire to learn about the people who make little-known destinations unique. These are the people who will never become top-of-mind newsmakers but have great stories to tell and are making a difference in their own way.

To find these people, you have to travel the back roads, and there was no better person to do that than Bill Graves, author of *America's Outback*, a column that has graced the pages of this magazine for 23 years. As we call a close to 2016, Graves is hanging up the keyboard after writing his farewell column (see page 74), reminiscing about the start of one of the most popular features in the history of *Trailer Life*.

The success of *America's Outback* was no accident. Graves made an art form of finding people who touched the lives of others, and he never ran out of material or enthusiasm for writing his column. His magnetic personality and ability to sniff out stories, combined with his love of RV travel, allowed him to capture the hearts of readers. Graves' monthly contribution will be sorely missed, and as he passes the baton, we wish him all the best as he continues to wander *America's Outback*.

Two exceptional writers, Lisa Densmore-Ballard and Emily Fagan, will take the reins of the back page starting next month, and although exploring North America will continue to be the focal point of this new column, the format will change. Ballard and Fagan will contribute in alternate months, zeroing in on interesting destinations and attractions, but one prominent photograph will embellish each story.

Both of these photojournalists have impressive credentials. Ballard, who calls Red Lodge, Montana, home when not on the road, contributes regularly to more than 30 publications and is a past president of the Outdoor Writers Association of America. Fagan is a full-timer who is well respected in the RV community and contributes articles and photography to a number of publications.

Both Ballard and Fagan travel with husbands who also contribute to this magazine and other publications. Together, they are poised to keep this sacred column in *Trailer Life* alive and well for an incredibly engaged readership, many freely admitting to turning first to the last page upon receipt of the magazine.

As for Graves, his legacy will be forever sealed. And for that we are grateful. 🚐

— **Bob Livingston, publisher**

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TREK TO THE TREE

For 90 years, a crowd has gathered on the second Sunday in December to celebrate the season at California's General Grant Tree, a giant sequoia named the Nation's Christmas Tree by Calvin Coolidge. This year is no exception.

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Ford's Heavy Hitter

Regarding October's "Light-Heavy-weight Champ" by Chris Hemer, the 2017 Ford Super Duty trucks look really attractive to me, too. I love the new features and capabilities. But be careful; the new trucks are considerably larger. Before buying one, measure your garage carefully.

Paul Weis, Loveland, Colorado

"Light-Heavyweight Champ" was an informative article, but I take exception to the comment, "Not that it matters to RVers," in reference to the 2017 Super Duty's front-axle rating. My experience is that the front axle of a long truck — already near its limit with a diesel engine, heavy-duty transmission, front-wheel differential, four-door cab, people, furry companions and items in the cargo box (tools, compressor, firewood) — is substantially loaded by the force of turning and stopping when combined with a heavy trailer.

The first set of tires on our tow vehicle lasted only a year. We replaced them and started to pay close attention to the load on the front axle. It's been smooth cruising ever since.

Dave Clark, Mono, Ontario

I read Chris Hemer's article on the new Super Duty with great interest. He was a bit disparaging about the V-10 engine, which isn't available in the 2017 trucks but comes on Class A motorhome chassis. In my experience, there are reasons to favor V-10s.

In 2006 I went from a Class A to a 14,000-pound fifth-wheel towed by a six-speed-manual F-250 with the V-10 engine. According to that year's *Trailer Life* tow guide, it pulled only 400 pounds less than the diesel, and it sold for about \$2,000 less. I bought my V-10 based on torque and horsepower curves that showed the diesel and gas V-8 climbed steeply to their peak torques and fell off quickly. The V-10 peaked around 2,200 RPM, dipped slightly, and from there was almost flat for more than 1,000 RPM, which allowed the engine to climb even higher on the

Colorado's Deep, Dark Secret



After reading "Stargazing Across America" in September's *Around the Bend*, I wanted to chime in about Westcliffe, my hometown, a Dark Sky Community in Colorado. We invite everyone to visit our wee town at the foot of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and enjoy the fabulous nighttime skies. Westcliffe even has a Good Sam Park, Grape Creek.

Becky Poisson, Westcliffe, Colorado

The International Dark-Sky Association designated Westcliffe, Colorado, and neighboring Silver Cliff an official Dark Sky Community in 2015. For information about seeing the nightly light show above the two ranch towns — with populations of less than 600 and elevations approaching 8,000 feet — visit the Wet Mountain Valley Dark Skies website, www.wetmtdarkskies.org. — Editors

horsepower curve before upshifting.

What makes the difference is the number of cylinders — the more cylinders, the more power strokes per revolution. Maintenance costs for the V-10 are about on par with a passenger car, except for the additional oil. Then there are the benefits of no DEF and no engine brake.

In 2011, Ford removed the V-10 from the regular Super Duty lineup. In 2012, I went back to a Class A motorhome with the V-10 and have yet to have a diesel RV — either a motorhome or a truck and trailer — match me climbing grades.

Carter M. Brough, Whitney, Texas

Substance Over Style

Thank you for "Take a Load Off," Chris Dougherty's October article about trailer weights and loading. These and other factors leading to tire and bearing failure need to be repeated more often. I can understand the need to keep costs down to remain competitive, but we are towing dangerously, and the industry is hurting itself. Manufacturers should put more money into safety and reliability, rather than fancy paint and vinyl art that shrinks before the trailer is old.

Put on wonderful tires and forget the pretty alloy rims.

Jim Wallace, Gun Barrel City, Texas

I Can't Drive 65

Bob Livingston's September article, "Maxxis ST Tires," points out an important shortfall of most trailer tires, namely max speed, in this case, 65 MPH. Many highways now have 70- and 80-MPH speed limits. Would you restrict your speed crossing a 350-mile state to 65 MPH when almost everyone is running 75?

My Keystone Montana 29RL came with LT tires made by Cooper that I replaced due to age. Cooper recommended an LT replacement, which I bought. Since then, I have put more than 21,000 miles on the tires with no problems. I routinely weigh my trailer and truck, check the air pressure and try to limit making tight, twisting turns on pavement.

Bill Rasner

Stephenson, Michigan 🇺🇸

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(Far left) Unique boutiques like this “wearable art” shop abound in Cambria. (Left) Visitors can observe elephant seals lounging and jousting at the rookery in Piedras Blancas for free every day of the year.

Pines by the Sea

Cambria, located midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, is an adventurer’s delight

The community of Cambria, established 150 years ago, is a small seaside town on the central coast of California with plenty to do. Characterized by its Monterey pine forest (one of only five remaining native stands worldwide), one-of-a-kind shops and restaurants, and a 1-mile boardwalk along Moonstone Beach, Cambria is also a popular destination for wine aficionados, with nearby wineries and tasting rooms in town.

Our visit began in the heart of Cambria at Fiscalini Ranch Preserve, which protects 437 acres of forest, habitat and wildlife on land and sea. Visitors can traverse the network of trails on their own, but we followed docent Stephen Beck through pine and coast live oaks. As we emerged from the forest, the Pacific Ocean appeared in front of us, backdropped by a clear-blue sky. The footpath meandered down to the Bluff Trail, from where we watched otters blissfully floating on their backs in the waves.

Next, we wandered through Cambria’s quaint shops with unique art, antiques, handmade clothing and baked goods. After downing delicious warm muffins overflowing with olallieberries while on the go, we headed back later to the source, Linn’s Restaurant, for a full meal — and ordered an olallieberry pie to go.

A stroll along Moonstone Beach’s wooden boardwalk is a must for visitors and locals alike. The beach is named for the small, white translucent “rocks” mixed in with sand. Inspecting the tidepools, we discovered tiny critters moving about.

Visitors can pick up a free points-of-interest map at the Chamber of Commerce, or for \$10 the Cambria Historical Museum offers a self-guided walking-tour map of 26 historic structures. An interesting juxtaposition is the tiny jailhouse situated next to the original Fresnel lens from the Piedras Blancas Light Station, located 16 miles north.

Cambria is part of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. From the seat of a kayak or on the shore, you may spot seals, sea lions, otters, dolphins or even whales.

Ten miles north in San Simeon is Hearst Castle, an estate showcasing publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst’s impressive art collection. The property was once Hearst’s private zoo, and exotic animals still roam the hillsides. We spotted a lone Rocky Mountain elk and half a dozen zebras. Another 5 miles north is the Piedras Blancas Elephant Seal Rookery, where hundreds or thousands of elephant seals (depending on the season) can be seen lounging, jousting and battling for breeding rights.

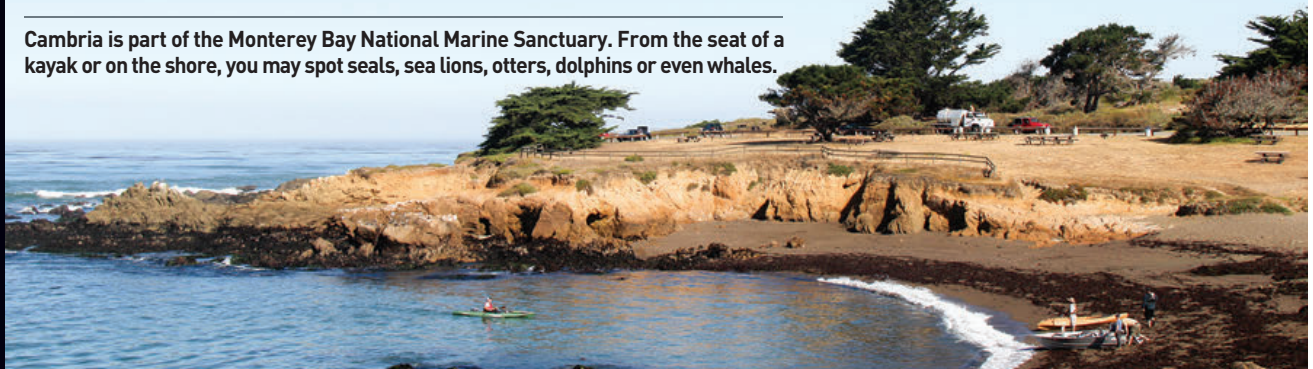
For year-end visitors, Cambria hosts a festival in the style of Germany’s holiday street markets. This year’s Christmas Market runs from November 25 to December 23 (closed November 28 and 29, and December 5 and 6) with entertainment, music, vendors, food and *Glühwein*, Germany’s traditional hot mulled wine.

Cambria Chamber of Commerce

805-927-3624, www.cambriachamber.com

Two miles north of Cambria, **San Simeon State Park** offers dry camping for RVs up to 35 feet (no showers; chemical toilets only). 800-444-7275, www.reserveamerica.com

Morro Dunes RV Park, 21 miles south of Cambria in Morro Bay, has full hookups. 805-772-2722, www.morroddunes.com



Coachmen Chaparral

New for 2017 in Coachmen's Chaparral line of eight fifth-wheels is the 41-foot 9-inch, five-slide 381RD with a rear-den floorplan. Coachmen also offers five Chaparral Lite models, with 11,000- to 11,500-pound gross vehicle weight ratings (GVWR), and two X-Lite versions, each with a 9,900-pound GVWR.

In the 381RD's den, a leather sofa with theater-seating and footrests backs to a buffet-bar countertop. The sofa faces a 50-inch HDTV with a fireplace below (both are options), flanked with leather trifold sofas that each sleep two. Overhead maple cabinets with glass doors complement the elegant furnishings.

The galley is a chef's delight with a large island offering lots of counter space. Within easy reach are an 8-cubic-foot double-door refrigerator (larger 12- and 14.7-cubic-foot refrigerators are optional), a 22-inch range with a 30-inch microwave above it and a large pantry. The galley can accommodate eight diners with four bar stools placed at the



buffet bar and island counter, plus four chairs at the free-standing table, which offers a three-sided view through the windows.

Three steps lead up to the bedroom, with a memory-foam mattress on the walk-around queen-size bed (a king bed is optional). The bedroom has plenty of wardrobe space, and washer/dryer prep in the closet is standard.

The Chaparral's side walls are made from Azdel composite, which is impervious to water, and Coachmen claims it has tested the fifth-wheel's insulative properties in extreme weather from 0 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit.

Base MSRP for the Chaparral line ranges from \$35,288 to \$52,193, with the 381RD starting at \$51,823.

Coachmen, 574-825-8330, www.coachmenrv.com

NEWSWIRE

TRUCK CAMPERS



Lance Announces RV Enhancements

Lance, a California-based manufacturer of truck campers, travel trailers and toy haulers, announced 50-plus standard and optional enhancements to its truck camper products. On the list are three designer decor packages that include stainless-steel appliances, planked wood-styled vinyl flooring, new countertop and table designs, residential-style sinks with high-rise pullout faucets (in most models), Euro-inspired cabinet-door and -drawer hardware, and new window treatments. The 1172 camper gets a new jackknife sofa and an entertainment center.
www.lancecamper.com

FUNDRAISER



Pechanga Charity Golf Tourney

Southern California's Pechanga Resort, Casino and RV Park hosted its 18th Charity Golf Classic this past summer, donating more than \$100,000 to four local charities. The two-day tournament raised money for the American Red Cross of Riverside, Million Kids, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and the American Indian Veterans Memorial. More than 300 participants received complimentary use of the Journey at Pechanga driving range and free range balls. Over the years, the event has raised more than \$1 million for nonprofits throughout the region.
www.pechanga.com

VINTAGE TRAILERS



Happy Campers Calendar

Just in time for holiday gift-giving, RV enthusiast Glenda Palmer has created the 2017 Happy Campers calendar and is donating \$5 from each sale to the National Park Service (NPS). Palmer and her siblings camped frequently when they were growing up, and they still do. Her sister owns a 1957 Field & Stream trailer and, that, combined with the NPS centennial, gave Palmer the idea to paint vintage camping trailers in 13 national parks — one for each month, plus one for the cover. The colorful 8½x11-inch wall calendar sells for \$30.45, including shipping and handling.
www.happycamperscalendar.com

INDUSTRY NEWS



Winnebago Acquires Grand Design

Winnebago Industries, manufacturer of motorhomes, travel trailers and fifth-wheels, entered into an agreement to acquire Grand Design Recreational Vehicle Company, manufacturer of towable recreational vehicles, for approximately \$395 million in cash and \$105 million in shares. Fast-growing Grand Design generated \$428 million in revenue in the past year, and was founded in 2012 by Don Clark, Ron Fenech and Bill Fenech, a management team with more than 80 years combined leadership experience in the RV industry.
www.granddesignrv.com
www.winnebagoind.com

RV Parks Celebrate the Season

Step into a storybook this holiday season and enjoy festive lights, music and celebrations at various campgrounds around the country. Here are a few RV parks that pull out all the stops to guarantee that kids and adults alike have a merry time.

▶ From Thanksgiving night through December 26, the entire **River Country Campground** in Gadsden, Alabama, is decorated, and music plays from the park's on-site radio station. RVers are welcome to bedeck their sites, and non-campers can drive through for \$3 (adults) or \$2 (children ages 2 to 12). 256-543-7111
www.rivercountrycampground.com

▶ **Lake Rudolph Campground** and RV Resort in Santa Claus, Indiana, hosts a 1.2-mile-long drive-through featuring music, three light tunnels and dozens of storyboards that tell the

story of Rudolph and how he learned to fly. Admission is \$15 per vehicle, with \$4-off coupons available at select McDonald's restaurants. Each vehicle gets a free photo with Rudolph. 888-929-7010
www.santaclauslandoflights.com

▶ **Jellystone Park Resort** in Eureka, Missouri, has a drive-through display that is open to the public for \$20 per carload. Staged from November 18 through January 8, from 5:30 to 10:30 p.m., the festive holiday event features millions of lights, animated scenes and special effects.
www.santasmagicalkingdom.com

▶ **Jellystone Camp-Resort** of Nashville, Tennessee, hosts the Dancing Lights of Christmas, November 4 through January 1, with Santa's Village and LED lights that dance to Christmas tunes broadcast through vehicle radios.



Optional fire-truck rides allow visitors a unique view of the lights.
www.thedancinglightsofchristmas.com

▶ Holiday visitors can drive more than a mile through the Christmas Carnival of Lights at **Jellystone Park Camp-Resort** in Caledonia, Wisconsin. Handcrafted displays feature elves, reindeer, Santa and other beloved characters among more than 1 million twinkling lights. The event runs from November 28 through December 31, except Christmas day, and Santa visits on the nights of December 21, 23 and 24. Admission is \$15 per car.
www.wichristmascarnival.com

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Desert Gardens RV Park, Circle 105 on Reader Service Card

December 2016 TRAILERLIFE 11

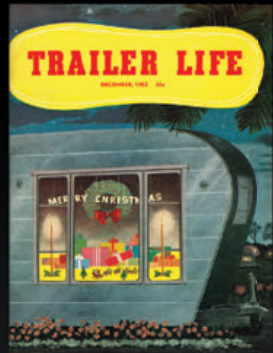
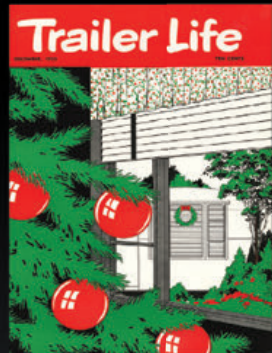
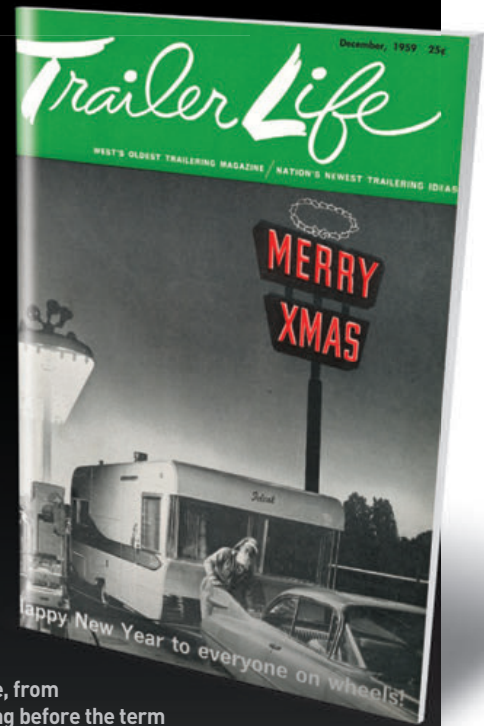
75 YEARS OF TRAILER LIFE

Trailers and Tinsel

Wrapping up our 75th anniversary with season's greetings



As 2016 draws to a close, we're topping off our yearlong tribute to *Trailer Life's* 75th anniversary with a look at December covers through the decades. With holiday themes and retro mastheads, these covers are reflections of their times, starting with the post-World War II 1945 edition. In that issue, Editor Harry Hammond Beall wrote that it was "the first Yuletide in four long years that we could really observe with a feeling of ease." Beall went on to extend the magazine's best wishes to loyal readers, advertisers and the "trailer coach" industry, a sentiment we echo today. Happy holidays from *Trailer Life*, and here's to another 75 memorable years on the road to adventure. 🚐



Holiday Cheer for 75 Years

December issues, from cover to cover (above, from left): St. Nick skis into an RV park in 1945, long before the term "RV" was coined; wreaths spruce up travel trailer windows in the boom years of 1950 and 1952; and Santa fuels up a two-door coupe to tow the 21-foot Ideal in 1959. (Left) True to the times, Santa's helper decks the halls in a fur-trimmed minidress on the December 1968 cover. (Below, from left) A Monaco motorhome delivers the goods in 1979; Santa puts the finishing touches on a toy trailer and tow vehicle in 1984; and as the 20th century nears its end, the December 1998 issue recommends cutting-edge "Gifts to Go" that include the "amazing" PalmPilot personal digital assistant and an Olympus camera that stores a dozen high-resolution photos on its data card.





Furrion RV Chef Collection™ gourmet appliances now available in 2017 Heartland® Big Country® (pictured), Big Horn®, Landmark®, Cyclone®, Road Warrior® and Boss®. Now you can recreate home cooking in your RV with appliances that cook with heat and control that no other RV appliance can deliver. Whether you are preparing a Thanksgiving turkey, baking a cake or cooking a pizza, Heartland's new kitchens has the performance and function to achieve delicious results.

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Furrion, Circle 110 on Reader Service Card



The Waiting Game

The owner of a fifth-wheel trailer came to RV Resolutions for help after he spent months pursuing reimbursement for a warranty claim with no success:

▶ On August 3, 2015, we stayed the night at Rockwell RV Park in Oklahoma City and did not unhook our fifth-wheel but did drop the front jacks. The next morning the left front jack would not retract. A mobile-service company charged \$85 to provide a temporary fix so we could get home.

The fifth-wheel is a 2014 Forest River Palomino Columbus purchased new from Camping World of Lubbock, Texas, on August 30, 2014, with a one-year warranty. I filed a claim with Forest River and was told that I was not the first owner of the RV and therefore was not eligible for reimbursement. This is when I was put on a three-month email merry-go-round to confirm that I was indeed the original owner.

In the meantime, on August 10, I took the fifth-wheel to Camping World of Lubbock for repair of the failed jack. The RV was there through October 20, waiting for parts to be delivered and repairs made. After returning home, I found that the front bedroom slideout would not extend. I made another appointment at Camping World and returned to

Lubbock on December 16.

The service department found that a blown circuit breaker was keeping the slideout from working. That circuit breaker is located immediately behind the faulty jack, and I have to wonder if it was just a coincidence that the circuit breaker went out at the same time that the jack was repaired.

I was charged \$100.27 for the fix, but since the warranty had expired while the RV was sitting at Camping World, I requested reimbursement. It is now June 13, 2016, and I still haven't been reimbursed.

Douglas Stoddard, Clovis, New Mexico

[RV Resolutions got in touch with Forest River and Camping World of Lubbock on Douglas Stoddard's behalf. A month later, Stoddard sent a follow-up note:](#)

▶ I want to thank all at RV Resolutions for working on this problem. I received a check from Forest River for the \$100.27 I had to pay for fixing the slideout. Additionally, Camping World offered a \$100 gift card for the inconvenience caused by the incorrect warranty registration.

D.S.

Five-Year Title Fight

[After struggling with a dealership to obtain the title to his RV, an Iowa reader eventually gave up — until years later when he wanted to transfer the title to a new owner:](#)

▶ More than five years ago, I purchased a camper from U.S. Adventure RV in Davenport, Iowa, and was told that the title would be mailed in a couple of weeks. A month later, when the title had not come, I called and was told it would arrive shortly. Another month later, I called again and was told the same thing. Months passed, and I forgot about the title.

Seven weeks ago I decided to sell the camper, and my quest for the title resumed. I called the dealership and talked to the "title lady," who assured me that she would investigate and call me that afternoon. Three weeks went by with no call, so I called again. This time she said she would investigate and call me the next day. Two more

weeks went by with no call.

I then traveled to the dealership and asked to see the manager or the owner. The manager was out, and the owner did not want to talk to me. Instead, the title lady met with me, and after blaming the situation on others, she went to the owner's office. When she returned, she said the title would be sent directly to me within five days. Nineteen days have now passed, and still no title.

Tom Parrott, Fruitland, Iowa

[RV Resolutions did not hear back from U.S. Adventure RV after reaching out to the dealership, but we did receive the following report from Tom Parrott:](#)

▶ The good news is that I finally received the title I waited more than five years to obtain. I then contacted the four parties who made offers to purchase the camper. Of course, without a title I had been unable to accept them. Three of the parties had purchased other campers, and the fourth was no longer interested.

I then became acquainted with a young family with few resources who loves the outdoors, and I decided to deed the camper to them at no cost. They were ecstatic. Because of the poor business practices of U.S. Adventure RV, a struggling family is now experiencing a more joyful future.

T.P.

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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NEW GUIDE FOR THE NEW YEAR

Don't hit the road without Good Sam's 2017 RV park and campground directory

Good Sam members can save big with the latest edition of the *Good Sam RV Travel & Savings Guide*. Members pay just \$6.95 for the 2017 directory of RV parks and campgrounds — more than 60 percent off the \$19.95 non-member price.

Topping that off, the impressively thick publication comes packed with \$1,000 worth of money-saving coupons redeemable at Camping World SuperCenters.

The annually updated guide provides information on nearly 12,500 North American RV parks and public campgrounds, including the 2,100-plus Good Sam Parks that offer members the 10 percent nightly discount. For 2017, campground listings include Wi-Fi-at-site availability and expanded hookup and amperage information. Good Sam's exclusive RV park ratings and articles on everything

from family-camping vacations to snowbird destinations help RVers decide where to stay, and state and provincial maps help them get there.

► The 2017 *Good Sam RV Travel & Savings Guide* will be on sale at Camping World SuperCenters in early December. Orders placed on the Camping World website will start shipping in early December (shipping and handling fees apply to online orders).

www.campingworld.com/2017guide



Florida's Bay Bayou RV Resort is one of more than 2,100 Good Sam Parks highlighted in the latest *Good Sam RV Travel & Savings Guide*.



February in Phoenix

Good Sam gears up for a new event in Arizona's Valley of the Sun

RV enthusiasts will roll into Phoenix International Raceway, February 23 through 26, 2017, for the Good Sam RV Super Show, a first-of-its-kind event that organizers hope to expand from Arizona to other regions of the country. Beyond shopping for RVs and RV gear, Good Sam members get the added benefits of mingling with fellow members and saving on overnight parking and day passes.

The slate of activities and sense of community elevate the Phoenix event above other RV shows. Young families will particularly appreciate the lineup of kids' activities, from carnival rides to a scavenger hunt. Adding to the fun, live music from the RealTones and Swing Tips and Saturday's fireworks show will bring members and other show-goers together.

Of course, RV dealers will be on hand to give tours of new and used motorhomes, travel trailers and fifth-wheels, and merchandise displays will showcase the latest RV equipment, outdoor gear and camping supplies.



► For information about member discounts and to reserve a parking spot, call 866-838-5299 or visit www.goodsamrvshow.com.



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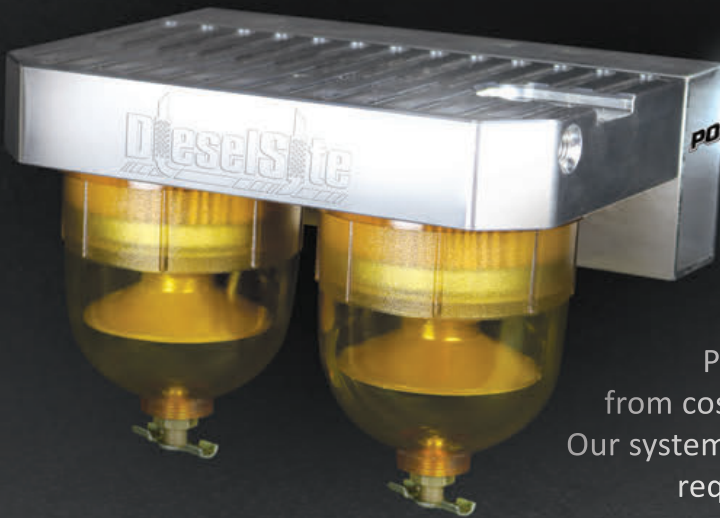
ONLINE COUPONS: For the holidays and year-round, Good Sam members can save hundreds of dollars on RV supplies and outdoor gear at Camping World with members-only retail coupons on the Good Sam Club website. These exclusive online coupons are updated every quarter, so check often to find the latest offers at www.goodsam.com/coupons.

LP-GAS DISCOUNTS: Good Sam members can save 25 percent off the regular retail price on up to 40 gallons of liquid-propane gas every Tuesday and Wednesday at Camping World SuperCenters. LP-gas is available at most Camping World locations throughout the United States. To find participating stores near you, go to www.campingworld.com/stores.

HOLIDAY SAVINGS: Be on the lookout for the latest Camping World sales flyer featuring huge savings on RV accessories and supplies at the Big Year-End Sale.



SEASON'S GREETINGS FROM GOOD SAM As the Good Sam Club wraps up its yearlong 50th-anniversary celebration, we'd like to extend a warm holiday greeting to members and say thank you for your years of loyalty and patronage. We wish you all the best in 2017 and look forward to another 50 years of happy camping.



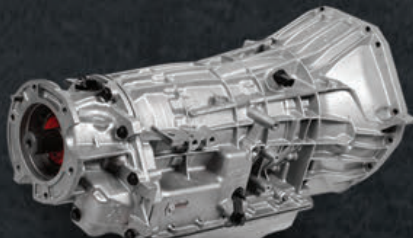
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Backcountry E

Northwood's Arctic Fox 990 puts a fully self-contained base camp in the bed



(Above) The Arctic Fox 990 truck camper thrives on the less-traveled eastern side of Oregon's Willowa Mountains. (Right to far right) Doubling as a bed, the dinette allows plenty of space to enjoy home-cooked meals and the view. The galley is nicely appointed with a three-burner gas range and ample counter space. An arched ceiling is new for 2017, increasing interior headroom by 4 inches and making the cabover sleeping area more spacious.

B&B

of a 4x4 dually truck



Three fat trout sizzle in the frying pan in front of me, as I survey the mountain lake where I'd caught them just an hour earlier. A few feet away, my wife puts the finishing touches on a nice garden salad at the dining table, with its window providing an idyllic view of another alpine lake a few hundred yards from where we are camped and the snowcapped mountains beyond. There's not another person or vehicle within a dozen miles. This is an outdoor adventurer's heaven.

What makes our evening dinner even more special is the accommodations. Our backcountry bed-and-breakfast has been a 2017 Arctic Fox 990 truck camper tucked in the bed of a Chevrolet Silverado 3500 crew cab 4x4 dually, an ideal combo for anyone who loves to take roads less traveled and camp in places frequented by few other RVers.

Arctic Fox is Northwood's premier truck-camper line, and the 990 is designed for maximum comfort. Its signature feature is the curbside slideout where the dinette resides, which really opens up the galley and dining area. The slideout, which has an exterior storage compartment underneath, can be operated by the conventional control located at the bottom of the entryway, or like we did, by using the wireless remote control that also operates the 2,500-pound-capacity Rieco-Titan electric jacks and roll-up electric rear awning, both included with the Fox Value Package.

We'd picked up the test unit at Northwood Manufacturing's head-

quarters in La Grande, Oregon, and struck out from there to explore the Hells Canyon Scenic Byway, a 218-mile road trip that circles the Wallowa Mountains, also known as the Alps of Oregon. The paved route affords spectacular views of the Snake River, and a multitude of gravel roads reach deep into the Eagle Cap Wilderness and Wallowa-Whitman National Forest of northeastern Oregon.

There's no better home-on-wheels when the pavement ends and the gravel roads begin than a properly equipped 4x4 pickup and a first-class camper like the upgraded Arctic Fox 990. This kind of setup gives adventuresome RVers the freedom to travel and fully enjoy special areas of the country like the Wallowas. One feature we appreciated from the first moment we moved our gear into the 990 was the Fox Landing, a flip-down back-porch-and-step system that makes getting in and out as easy as walking up steps into a house. Of all the options for a camper going on a 4x4 dually, this would be at the top of my list.

During our first night on the road, we camped at Wallowa Lake State Park, along with hundreds of other RVers and tent campers. It was there that we really appreciated the 4½-inch-thick high-density foam in the roof, the 2½-inch-thick foam in the walls, the residential fiberglass insulation in the walls and floor, and the optional dual-pane windows, all of which helped keep the noise from the surroundings out, as well as allowing the optional 11,000-Btu air conditioner to keep the camper quite comfortable on a 100-degree day.



A few days later, the insulation inside the laminated, multilayer walls proved its worth when temperatures at a rustic campsite unexpectedly dropped into the 30s. No worries, as the 20,000-Btu furnace had to kick on only a few times to maintain a comfortable temperature. With its thick walls, substantial insulation, heated holding tanks and other cold-weather components, the welded-aluminum-frame 990 is a true four-season camper.

While many truck campers create a sense of claustrophobia in the sleeping area, the 990 is bright and spacious, thanks to the 2017 model's arched roof, which increases headroom in the middle of the camper by more than 4 inches over the previous edition. That added headroom really helps when you're in the 58-by-80-inch queen bed above the cab and trying to get clothes organized or just tidying up. The ceiling height is also evident when standing in the galley, where even a 6-foot 6-inch chef will feel comfortable.



(Above, from left) Frequently used kitchen items can be stored in the pull-out pantry's convenient wire-rack organizer. The 6-cubic-foot refrigerator easily handled groceries for our trip, but extended stays might require creative loading.

A skylight power vent and LED ceiling and reading lights enhance the airiness inside the camper. Multiple USB charging ports and 120-volt AC outlets situated on both sides of the bed are new additions, so those who need to power laptops, smartphones, tablets

and CPAP devices can do so with ease. The 990 comes with half a dozen speakers and a Kenwood AM/FM/CD player with Bluetooth for dual-phone connection and wireless music browsing. A 19-inch LED TV in the cabover area and a DVD player are optional.

MAXXIS® TIRES

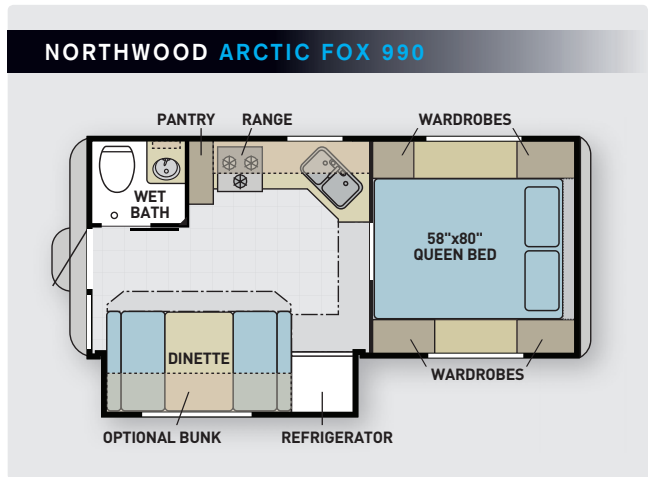


The galley is outfitted to handle whatever the designated chef wants to serve, whether grabbing a quick breakfast, making a light lunch or taking the time to prepare a nice dinner. The test floorplan, finished in the Early Autumn interior theme, had the typical trio of overhead cabinets with hardwood doors above the galley to hold bulky items and a pair of slide-out drawers below the countertop that surrounds the double sink.

The stainless-steel High Pointe 22-inch microwave and Wedgwood Vision three-burner high-output range are easy to operate and powerful enough to get cooking done at all levels. The range hood above the gas stove works well, its strong fan filling the air outside the camper with the aroma of fried fish. Just to the left of the gas range is a vertical pull-out pantry with a wire-rack organizer that we found really handy, as it holds an assortment of kitchen essentials like spices, flour, cereal, sandwich bags and aluminum foil.

Two steps away, on the curbside, the 6-cubic-foot two-way refrigerator-freezer runs off the dual 7-gallon LP-gas cylinders, 30-amp campground power or the optional 2.5-kilowatt Onan generator (generator, solar and satellite prep are standard).

Speaking of meals, the 990's dinette seats four comfortably, and with just the two of us, it was like eating at a diner — without the waitress or crowd. We had a spectacular view out the window at every meal. If we had needed to accom-



modate an overnight guest, the table has a quick-release that drops the top to seat level to transform it into a bed.

When it comes time to freshen up, the wet bath is bright and efficient. The sink is molded in, the medicine cabinet accommodates toiletries and the foot-pedal toilet operates quietly. A skylight lightens the already white interior. The 6-gallon gas/electric quick-recovery water heater makes bathing on cold mornings a treat.

Even with the aluminum-frame structure, the Arctic Fox 990 is not a lightweight camper and is not suitable for

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ST205 / 75R15 - 6PR

ST205 / 75R15 - 8PR

ST225 / 75R15 - 8PR

ST225 / 75R15 - 10PR

ST235 / 80R16 - 10PR*

*3 ply sidewall construction

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single-rear-wheel pickups. The base model weighs a little more than 3,000 pounds “dry,” but the test unit came close to 4,500 pounds with its 59-gallon water tank filled, 14 gallons of LP-gas, and the optional rear steps, generator, air conditioner, deep-cycle batteries, dual-pane windows and hook-on step that eases access to the cabover area and doubles as a seat. Add two passengers, fuel, food and gear, and the total combination weight approached the Silverado’s 13,000-pound gross vehicle weight rating.

Driving 400 miles up and down a wide variety of roads and terrain during our Hells Canyon Scenic Byway tour, the one-ton dually proved the ideal truck for carrying the fully optioned 990. The only addition I’d install on the truck would be heavier-duty



(Above, from left) The standard sound system links to a smartphone or other device via a USB cable or wireless Bluetooth connection. A 5-foot storage drawer extends under the floor and can hold fishing rods or other long items.

sway bars to better offset the load’s high center of gravity.

After using Northwood’s Arctic Fox 990 as our backcountry base camp, I

can safely say it’s a sweetheart setup for couples that enjoy exploring off-the-grid locations and don’t like limits on where they can go camping. 🐾



SPECIFICATIONS

2017 NORTHWOOD ARCTIC FOX 990

Box Length	10'
Exterior Width	8' 1"
Exterior Height (with A/C)	9' 4"
Interior Width	7' 8"
Interior Height	6' 7"
Cabover Height	3'
Freshwater Cap.	59 gal.
Black-/Gray-Water Cap.	43 / 39 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	6 cu. ft.
Furnace	20,000-Btu
Air Conditioner	11,000-Btu
Batteries (2)	12-volt
Generator	2.5-kW
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full; no cargo)	4,392 lbs.
Base MSRP	\$27,618
As-Tested MSRP	\$40,686
Basic Warranty	1 year

Northwood Manufacturing

www.northwoodmfg.com/truck-campers/arctic-fox-camper
Circle 136 on Reader Service Card



The optional Fox Landing step system eases entry and exit, and makes a handy porch for leaving dirty shoes outside. When it rains, the electric awning keeps the porch — and shoes — dry.



Secret Slice of Oregon

The Hells Canyon Scenic Byway is a nature lover's back door to grand vistas and outdoor adventures

A bald eagle swoops down from its perch high atop a tall, slender pine at the lake's edge and gracefully plucks a fat trout from the clear water — breakfast on the fly. The morning sun bathes the beautiful raptor and its catch, while the glass-smooth surface of the lake a hundred yards from where I am standing reflects the snowcapped Wallowa Mountains to my west.

I keep working my way down the fast-flowing stream that feeds into the eagle's fishing ground, hoping I'm just as proficient as my white-headed friend. The air is as pure as the snow on the mountain peaks with a hint of pine and fir. The only sound is the rushing of the creek flowing over countless rocks on its downward path to the lake.

An hour later, my wife and I are

sitting outside our truck camper enjoying fresh trout for breakfast while watching a trio of mule deer easing their way around a rocky outcrop not far from where the eagle is again perched, waiting and watching.

That was our first morning's welcome at a remote dry camp in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest on the edge of the Eagle Cap Wilderness in northeastern Oregon. Avoiding crowded campgrounds, we had opted to tour the 218-mile-long, horseshoe-shaped Hells Canyon Scenic Byway (HCSB) that skirts the eastern side of the Wallowas and the western side of the Snake River.

Think of the route as the letter "D," where the HCSB is the curve of the "D," and the straight side is Interstate 84, with La Grande at

[Below and opposite page, bottom] Hat Point Road leads 20-plus miles from the community of Imnaha to the best view of the Snake River's famed Hells Canyon.



Where to Stay on the Scenic Byway

The **Wallowa-Whitman National Forest** has a wide range of campgrounds, including some with full-hookup campsites for larger RVs. Traveling with a truck camper, we opted for three rustic campgrounds — Fish Lake, Indian Crossing and Twin Lakes — that were accessible from the Wallowa Mountain Loop and didn't require reservations. Although these campgrounds don't have RV hookups or much in the way of amenities, fishing, hiking and the scenic surroundings are world-class.

541-523-6391

www.fs.usda.gov/wallowa-whitman

RV parks and public campgrounds accommodate RVers along much of the byway, including a couple of Baker City Good Sam Parks that supply full hookups and all the amenities:

Mountain View RV Park

541-523-4824, www.mtviewrv.com

Oregon Trails West RV Park

541-523-3236, www.goodsamcamping.com

What to Know If You Go

Hells Canyon Scenic Byway is paved and open to all vehicles. However, it's prudent to call the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest office in Baker City (541-523-6391) or Joseph (541-426-5546) for the latest road and campground information. For those traveling with trailers longer than 24 feet, we recommend unhitching and taking day trips in the tow vehicle, particularly when exploring secondary Forest Service roads such as FR 315 to Hat Point Overlook.

Before heading into the area, obtain a Northwest Forest Pass (800-270-7504, www.fs.usda.gov/main/wallowa-whitman/passes-permits), which allows the pass-holder and accompanying passengers use of Forest Service facilities. Some campsites require an additional fee of \$5 to \$8 per night.

For More Information

Travel Oregon

800-547-7842, www.traveloregon.com

Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce

800-585-4121, www.wallowacountychamber.com



(Above, from left) Spotting a dusky grouse near Fish Lake brightened what was an already memorable day on the Wallowa Mountain Loop. The lower of the Twin Lakes lures anglers with excellent trout fishing.

the top end and Baker City on the bottom. RVers rolling along I-84 see the majesty of the Wallowa Mountains to the east, but few know the secret outdoor playground that lies on the other side of Oregon's Alps.

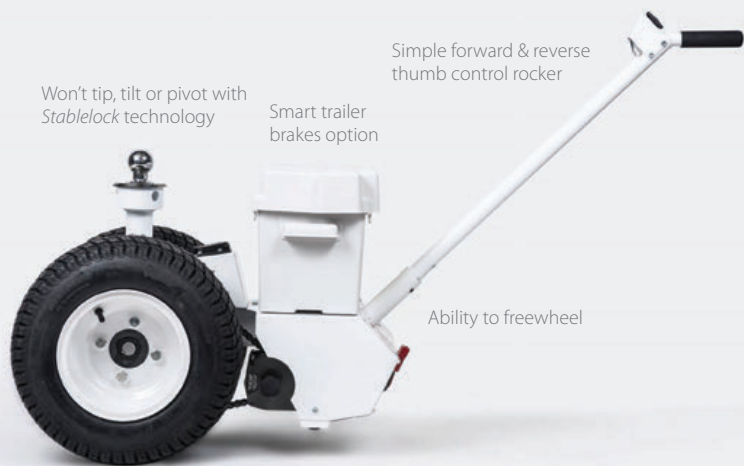
Driving the length of the HCSB can be done in less than six hours, but doing so robs travelers of the scenic countryside the Wallowa band of the Lower Nez Perce Indians and their leader, Chief Joseph, once called home. To really enjoy this unique area, set aside at least four or five days, if not a week.

The best time of year to enjoy the scenic byway is mid-June through late September. That's because the southern portion, specifically the



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Secret Slice of Oregon

Wallowa Mountain Loop (Forest Service Road 39) that links State Route 82 with Route 86, is covered in snow much of the year. Open from mid-June through early October, weather permitting, the route offers unspoiled views of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, easy access to hiking, fishing and camping opportunities, and a measure of solitude that is rare in this day and age.

Side trips, such as the drive to Hat

Point Overlook, can extend the total driving distance close to 400 miles. To witness Hat Point's breathtaking view into Hells Canyon, instead of going south on the Wallowa Mountain Loop, travel north on Route 350 to the little town of Imnaha. From there, a pair of Forest Service roads, 2640 and 315, lead to the impressive overlook, but the last couple of miles are gravel and steep, and are not advisable for vehicles towing trailers.



Expect a fresh catch for dinner when fishing the lakes, streams and rivers that ripple and flow along the Wallowa Mountain Loop.

Taking a few days, or a week, to explore the Hells Canyon Scenic Byway will be one of those rewarding road trips that you'll want to share with others yet at the same time keep a secret. 🐟

Think Small to Catch Your Limit

Many trout anglers fishing the high country that the Hells Canyon Scenic Byway weaves through get flustered when it comes to what gear to take along. The reality is, it's best to keep it simple and think small, if you want to be successful. An ultralight four-piece pack rod, a matching spinning reel loaded with clear 6-pound-test monofilament and the right lures are all you need.

High-country trout are voracious feeders. Present them with a lure that replicates what they normally prey upon, and the chances of putting fish on the galley table are excellent. My go-to lure is a slowly retrieved 2-inch Rapala Rainbow Trout in the floating or sinking model. Another excellent lure is a ¼-ounce red-and-white Mepps Aglia spinner, with or without a hair hackle. Change up the retrieve speeds to find the most effective pace. I keep several on hand, along with a Mepps Trout Kit.

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Leading Lights

As travel trailers evolve to match a wide range of tow vehicles, RV makers are rolling out slimmed-down and trimmed-up models — from feathery fold-downs and lithe hybrids to longer but still lean floorplans

When the new millennium roared in, bigger was most definitely better. The full-size SUV and pickup rage was on, financing was no-money-down, and equity lines on fast-appreciating homes were there for the asking. No wonder lineup after lineup of bigger and better RVs followed suit. Fast-forward past the burst bubble and ensuing recession, and for many RVers in the market for new travel trailers — both big and small — lighter is now better.

With manufacturers offering “light” and “ultralight” lineups across a broad spectrum of sizes, slimmed-down trailers can actually stretch up to 35 feet and weigh 6,500 pounds or more. Accordingly, the family SUV, minivan or compact pickup may be all that’s needed to tow many trailers on the lighter side of the spectrum. And even the largest lightweights can be pulled by properly equipped half-ton trucks, eliminating the need for owners to fuel, store, insure and maintain a more powerful tow vehicle.

With so many buyers opting for easier-towing RVs, designs and features have advanced to suit, making the new crop of light-but-loaded trailers just as attractive as those

triple-axle Conestogas. As a result, leaner models have been embraced by a wide range of RVers, including empty-nesters, young families and active couples, all of whom still want to have a great time outdoors and on the road but without the size, cost or hassle of owning the biggest barge in town.

Of course, it’s important to keep real-world weights in mind when shopping for any RV. The dry weights claimed by manufacturers are typically nowhere near what trailers weigh when loaded for use. For example, a vehicle rated to pull 3,500 pounds may seem capable of towing a trailer with a 3,000-pound dry weight, but after adding the factory-installed options — which often are not included in the dry weight — plus fuel, water, LP-gas and cargo, that 3,500-pound rating is quickly surpassed. Buyers are much better off using the trailer’s gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) as a towing match. As long as the GVWR isn’t exceeded, chances are good the tow vehicle’s factory limit won’t be eclipsed either.

The good news is that the selection of trimmed-down trailers with big-time amenities has never been better. Here’s a sampling of the leading lightweights for 2017.



Oliver's 23½-foot Legacy Elite II “towed like a dream” in *Trailer Life*'s test of the twin-bed floorplan earlier this year.

Aerolite

Among the seven travel-trailer brands offered by Indiana-based Dutchmen RV Company, Aerolite has a name committed to lightweight performance. Making up Aerolite's Zero Gravity Series are 19 trailers ranging from 18½ to 37½ feet, plus a new Aerolite Luxury Class. The single-axle **Aerolite 174E** (\$16,353 MSRP), an expandable hybrid with two tip-out tent beds, has a friendly dry weight of 3,188 pounds to go with its 18½-foot length. Numerous Aerolite packages include upscale outside speakers, an exterior shower, stainless-steel appliances, electric stabilizer jacks, aluminum wheels and a power A-frame jack. Another Dutchmen brand, Coleman, promises family-focused amenities in amply equipped lightweight trailers. For instance, the 22-foot 9-inch Coleman Light 1805RB, with its fold-down sofa and single slideout, weighs 4,189 pounds dry.

574-537-0600, www.aero-rv.com

Airstream

From the spritely Basecamp to the elegant and aptly named Land Yacht, 85-year-old Airstream continues to roll out an extensive RV fleet from its Ohio factory. While prices can soar to six figures for premier models, lighter but still well-equipped Airstreams can be found for far less. Smallest is the two-person Basecamp, a stylized single-axle trailer stretching 16 feet 3 inches and weighing 2,585 pounds dry. Just slightly larger and featuring Air-



stream's traditional silver-bullet styling, the 16-foot 4-inch Sport 16 sleeps up to four and tips in at 2,860 pounds dry. Weighing 3,634 pounds dry, the Sport 22FB adds interior volume, thanks to its longer 21-foot 8-inch length. Other Airstreams on the leaner side include the smaller Flying Cloud and International models. With a length of 19 feet 2 inches and a dry weight of 3,823 pounds, the **International Signature 19** (\$65,600 MSRP) adds a sleek, upscale interior at an equally upscale starting price.

877-596-6111, www.airstream.com



Bigfoot

When the lead photo on a manufacturer's website shows an RV parked not in a grassy meadow with sunflowers and

butterflies but buried in snow against the backdrop of a frozen mountain, you know the company is serious about four-season RVing. Based in British Columbia, Bigfoot builds lightweight, well-insulated fiberglass trailers that are ready to tackle such real conditions. Available in seven floorplans, Bigfoot's 2500 Series trailers come in lengths from 17 feet 5 inches to 25½ feet. With a dry weight of 3,275 pounds, the **Bigfoot 25B175FB** (\$38,948 MSRP) is the heaviest of the three smallest models. Niceties include prewiring for solar panels, 15-inch aluminum wheels and an exterior shower. Optional are a power A-frame jack, barbecue hookups and an 11,000-Btu air conditioner — perhaps unnecessary when surrounded by snow!

250-546-2155, www.bigfootrv.com

CrossRoads

With a triple-axle Elevation toy hauler and 43-foot Hampton "extended-stay" trailer in its lineup, Indiana's CrossRoads Recreational Vehicles knows how to impress. But when it comes to maximum features and minimal weight, the single-axle Zinger Z-1 Lite makes an impact, too. With a length of 21 feet 11 inches and a dry weight of 3,320 pounds, the **Zinger**



Leading Lights

Z-1 Lite ZR-18BH (\$13,800 MSRP) is a viable choice for towing with many SUVs and compact pickups. For the price, it nets unexpected features like a DSI water heater, diamond-plate protection up front, a generous 6½-foot ceiling height and bunk beds. Stepping up, the tandem-axle Sunset Trail Ultra Lite adds a full-size refrigerator, LED lighting and a power awning. Lengths extend from about 22½ feet to almost 26 feet, with dry weights from about 4,000 to 4,600 pounds.

260-593-3850, www.crossroadsrv.com



Escape

From British Columbia comes Escape Trailer Industries' compact and light-weight lineup. The manufacturer's trademark two-piece molded-fiberglass shell results in low weight and durability. The smallest model, a 17-foot 8-inch single-axle trailer, comes in two floorplans. The **Escape 17** (\$25,500 Canadian MSRP) weighs only 1,970 pounds dry, within range of many commonly owned vehicles. For an extra \$1,400 and an additional 200 pounds of dry weight, the Escape 17 Plan B has a full wet bath and a pair of dinettes that convert to beds. A bit longer at 19½ feet and with a tandem axle, Escape's most popular model has a dry weight of 2,610 pounds. The company's longest trailer, a 21-foot 4-inch unit, weighs 3,140 pounds dry and can pair with a wide range of tow vehicles.

855-703-1650, www.escapetrailer.com



Heartland

Headquartered in Indiana, Heartland RV offers an impressive 60 tandem-axle trailers under its Lightweight banner, including nine Mallard, 15 Sundance, 20 North Trail and 16 Wilderness models. Dry weights for Wilderness trailers begin at 4,683 pounds for the 26-foot 9-inch 2250BH and extend to 7,680 pounds for the 36-foot 9-inch 3250BS, all within the towing range of most half-ton pickups and full-size SUVs. In the middle of the lineup, the 31½-foot, two-slideout **Wilderness 2775RB** (\$27,300 MSRP) has a 6,280-pound dry weight. Upscale features include a kitchen island and dual-ducted air conditioning. Lighter still, North Trail has dry weights that start at 4,450 pounds for the 26½-foot 21FBS and 4,695

pounds for the 24-foot 3-inch 20FBS, then build to a scale-tipping 8,095 pounds for the 37-foot 9-inch 32RETS. 877-262-8032, www.heartlandrvs.com

Highland Ridge

Fully embracing the growing interest in lightweight and easy-to-tow travel trailers, Indiana-based Highland Ridge RV offers five Light models, from 22 feet 7 inches and 6,035 pounds dry, and nine even airier Ultra Lite models, starting with the 24-foot 1-inch UT2310RK at a dry weight of 5,070 pounds. With vaulted ceilings, a flush-floor slideout and bunk beds, the 31-foot 9-inch **Ultra Lite UT2802BH** (\$28,275 MSRP) sleeps up to eight. Other desirable amenities in the Ultra Lite lineup include a full entertainment system, a 13,500-Btu air condi-





tioner with a Quick Cool feature, plenty of R-38 reflective-foil insulation in the floor and roof, a power A-frame jack, 15-inch aluminum wheels and a 15-foot power awning. Highland Ridge presents these trailers as half-ton towables for good reason: They are.
260-768-7771, www.highlandridgerv.com

Jayco Ⓜ

If you have a smaller tow vehicle, Jayco's 11-foot 7-inch Jay Sport 8SD folding trailer makes sense. With a 1,535-pound dry weight, the Indiana manufacturer's lightest trailer yields a six-person sleeping capacity, and its novel carryout stove lets you move the cooking outside. Working up the ladder brings the Hummingbird, which, as the name implies, is a line of ultralight single-axle trailers. The entry point is the new 16FD, but even the largest and best-equipped model, the 19-foot 9-inch



17RK, weighs just 2,860 pounds dry. You'd never guess by appearances, but the 21½-foot, tandem-axle **Jay Flight SLX 174BH** (\$14,392 MSRP) weighs a mere 2,880 pounds dry, making it an easy-towing family bunkhouse.
574-825-5861, www.jayco.com

K-Z Ⓜ

K-Z RV, a division of Indiana-based Thor Industries, makes travel trailers with a half-dozen nameplates and more than 80 floorplans. Billed as an Ultra Lightweight, the Spree Escape comes in 16-foot to 27-foot 3-inch lengths. The smallest model, the 16-foot E14RB, weighs a feathery 2,202 pounds dry. Stepping up from there, the Vision V19RB weighs a relatively modest 3,650 pounds dry, despite its tandem axles and 23-foot 1-inch length. Edging into half-ton pickup or V-8 SUV territory, the 28-foot 3-inch tandem-axle Spree 240BHS weighs 5,160 pounds dry. The new 33-foot 5-inch **Connect C281BH** (\$27,000 MSRP), with a 5,940-pound dry weight, appeals to families with its roomy kitchen and bathroom, and wide bunk beds.
866-472-5460, www.kz-rv.com




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Leading Lights



Lance Ⓢ

Southern California's Lance Camper puts a Match Your Vehicle toolbar right on the homepage for its travel trailers, letting buyers select from 3,500-, 5,000- and 6,000-pound tow ratings. In the 3,500-pound category are the 15-foot 9-inch Lance 1575, weighing 2,655 pounds dry and sleeping four, thanks to its standard slideout, and the 14-foot 10-inch **Lance 1475** (\$23,888 MSRP), weighing 2,495 pounds dry. Even without a slide, the 1475 still packs a lot into its floorplan, including a pair of comfortable armchairs and a small table, a dry bath and an entertainment center with a 24-inch flat-screen TV. Pluses include a backup camera, a 160-watt solar panel and a 10-foot power awning. Starting point for the 5,000-pound search is the

16½-foot 1685, with a 3,710-pound dry weight and a single slideout, while the entry model in the 6,000-pound camp is the 21-foot 2-inch 2155 with a 4,600-pound dry weight, dual slideouts and a kitchen island.

661-949-3322, www.lancecamper.com

Northwood Ⓢ

Among the four trailer brands offered by Oregon's Northwood Manufacturing, the company devotes three — Fox Mountain, Snow River and Nash — to lightweights. The Nash brand supplies the most compact and towable of the group, starting with the 22-foot 4-inch **Nash 17K** (\$23,193 MSRP), with a 4,400-pound dry weight. Built to get the job done, the 17K has what Northwood describes as an "off-road chassis," along with a high quotient of practical features like a 13,500-Btu air conditioner, heated holding tanks, a power A-frame jack, four-season insulation, an exterior shower and 15-inch aluminum wheels for its tandem axles. Options include 60- or 100-watt solar panels, exterior marine-grade speakers, a bike rack and a cargo carrier. Weighing 5,145 pounds dry, the 28-foot 8-inch Nash 25C offers front and rear doors — one for the living room and the other for the rear bedroom — a dinette slideout, and a bedside 12-volt DC and USB charging center.

800-766-6274, www.northwoodmfg.com



Oliver Ⓢ

Based in Tennessee, Oliver Travel Trailers builds a unique pair of trailers, the Legacy Elite and Legacy Elite II, that utilize double-wall fiberglass-shell construction mounted atop aluminum-box frames. The formula gives maximum strength and strong insulation from heat, cold and noise, and is lightweight for easy towing. The 18-foot 5-inch Legacy Elite has a single axle and weighs 3,640 pounds dry. Up-level features include 16-inch aluminum wheels (even the spare!) and a dinette that converts to a large 74-inch-long bed. Moving up, the 23½-foot tandem-axle **Legacy Elite II** (\$49,900 MSRP) has a dry weight of 4,600 pounds. One of two floorplans, the twin-bed model offers an



uncommon but welcome layout.

888-526-3978

www.olivertraveltrailers.com

Winnebago

Winnebago Industries divides its operations into Motorized, built in Iowa, and Towables, built in Indiana. The company has the travel-trailer market covered with four lightweight model lines, from the 18-foot 4-inch, single-axle **Winnie Drop WD1710** (\$13,333 MSRP) at 2,360 pounds dry, up to the 35½-foot Ultralite at 6,500 pounds dry. Right in between are four Micro Minnie floorplans, including the 19-foot 2-inch 1706FB. Tipping the scale at 2,980 pounds dry, this tandem-axle trailer impresses with such standard features as an aluminum frame, an aerodynamic front wall, a slideout, ducted air conditioning, a stainless-steel sink and a double-door refrigerator. But back to the little Winnie Drop, with styling reminiscent of 1950s-era "canned ham" trailers. Three of the four floorplans include a kitchen slideout — perfect for storing a real canned ham!

574-825-5250

www.winnebagoind.com



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AMERICA'S TOWERS OF STRENGTH

Steeped in colonial history, a string of fortresses along the south Atlantic coast provides a fascinating glimpse back in time. Among them, Fort Frederica on Georgia's St. Simons Island preserves the remains of an impressive military bulwark

Beatre Hawkins was one of those women who held a grudge. It didn't matter that her husband, Thomas, was the regimental surgeon and town magistrate for Fort Frederica, the military outpost on St. Simons Island on the coast of colonial Georgia. Hawkins' anger had reached a fevered pitch. The focus of her rage was John Wesley, the town's minister and founder of the modern Methodist Church. When she heard his voice by her hearth, she raced down the stairs, a pistol in one hand and scissors in the other, aiming to kill the well-meaning reverend, but the quick-footed Wesley escaped, minus only a few bits of cloth from his cassock.

Hawkins' ire stemmed from her voyage to North America on the same boat as Wesley. A year earlier, in 1735, the governor of Georgia, James Oglethorpe, had recruited Wesley to serve as Savannah's minister and a missionary to local native populations. During the arduous transatlantic passage, Hawkins pretended

to be a disciple of Wesley's, passing the endless days at sea listening to his methodical sermons in hopes of gaining his affections. He ignored her advances. Spurned, she could not tolerate him ashore.

Not all was peaceful at Fort Frederica, even when the fortress was not under attack.

FORT FREDERICA'S FATE

Fort Frederica was one of a number of colonial-era forts built by the Spanish, British and French along the southeastern coast of the New World to protect their territories from each other and from local Native American tribes. Fort Frederica was one of the British forts.

Oglethorpe, a soldier and politician in King George II's court, made several voyages to the Georgia frontier to establish settlements for the relocation of thousands of poor drifters and bolster the crown's defenses against the aggressive Spanish just to the south in Florida. In 1734 Oglethorpe sailed down the Georgia coast from newly settled Savannah, looking for

The powerful pre-Revolutionary War cannons at Georgia's Fort Frederica could fire a 12-pound cannonball up to 1 mile.





The imposing portal is all that remains of the soldiers' barracks at Fort Frederica.

strategic positions to fortify. Fort Frederica, near the mouth of what is now the Frederica River, was one of those positions. He returned two years later to begin construction of the fort, which he named for Prince Frederick, King George II's only son.

Fort Frederica served as a basecamp for Oglethorpe's forays against the Spanish until the Battle of the Bloody Marsh in 1742. In an aggressive retaliation after fending off Oglethorpe at the edge of St. Augustine in Florida, the Spaniards planned to lay ruin to the British defenses from Georgia to South Carolina, with Fort Frederica as their first major conquest. However, the British repelled the Spanish by ambushing them as they passed through a marsh on a military road between Frederica and another British outpost, Fort St. Simon, 6 miles to the south, which had surrendered to the Spanish a day earlier.

Legend says the marsh ran red with Spanish blood, hence its name. Defeated, the Spanish retreated to Florida and never threatened Georgia again. Ironically, the end of the war between Spain and Britain in North America was the end of Fort Frederica as well. Without purpose, the fort and the settlement supporting it declined within a decade and were eventually abandoned.

My husband, Jack, and I stumbled upon Fort Frederica last spring.

Casual history buffs, we always enjoy touring old forts as a way to step back in time. Of the many forts along the south Atlantic coast, Frederica is one of our favorites because it is more an archaeological park than a massive, preserved fortress.

SAFEGUARDING THE COAST

From the entrance at the visitor center, we made our way down a short portion of the old Military Road that used to connect Frederica with Fort St. Simons. Great veils of Spanish moss dangled from the graceful oak trees beside the road, now a wide footpath. As we walked, I watched a brilliant red summer tanager songbird nab a pale green bug with its beak from atop one of the many branches arching gracefully over the path. Today Frederica is inhabited by a hundred

species of resident and migratory birds, rather than soldiers and colonists.

At the town gate, the path became Broad Street, the main street leading through the town of Frederica to its fort. The only evidence of the once-thriving settlement was the outlines of several stone foundations, including the house in which the hot-tempered Beatre Hawkins and her husband resided. Beyond the duplex the Hawkinses shared with the town constable lies the fort itself — or what remains of it. Fort Frederica was not a large battlement. It contained two modest storehouses and a magazine, along with a limited soldiers' quarters.

Most of the soldiers — 200 or so — lived in barracks on the east side of the town. Today the portal to the barracks is the most imposing structure on the Fort Frederica grounds, but the fort's walls are the most interesting. Crumbling from weather, time and disuse, they reveal a classic colonial-era tabby construction common to the Southeast. Tabby, also called coquina, is a concrete concocted from broken oyster shells. We could see the shells mixed into the mortar.

The "32-pounders" by the fort's walls were another attention-grabber. Pointing across the river as if poised to repel another Spanish armada, these powerful cannons — giant muzzle-loaders, really — could fire a 12-pound cannonball up to a mile!

After examining the cannons, we retreated to the town again, looping

FORT FREDERICA NATIONAL MONUMENT

Located about 75 miles south of Savannah, Georgia, Fort Frederica National Monument is easily accessible from Interstate 95 and coastal U.S. Route 17 on the F.J. Torras Causeway that connects the city of Brunswick and St. Simons Island. The visitor center is open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., except Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. Admission is free. 912-638-3630, www.nps.gov/fofr



past the entrance to the barracks. We meandered along the well-maintained grassy paths to a small graveyard, then back to the visitor center, uneager to leave this fascinating place, so steeped in colonial history. Like all of the forts along the Southeast coast, Frederica preserves an important period in American history in details that can be truly appreciated only in person.



The remains of Fort Frederica are part of a larger parklike historic site.

15 FORTS REVISITED

America's south Atlantic coast has enough military forts to keep a history buff happy for a month or more. From Florida to Virginia, here are some additional battlements worth including in your itinerary.

Florida

FORT PIERCE

Fort Pierce Inlet State Park: Built in 1838 during the Second Seminole War, Fort Pierce is now little more than a mound of sand and shells, but it's worth a visit for its half-mile beach, home of the World War II program that was a predecessor of today's Navy Seals. The park is a favorite spot for swimming, snorkeling, scuba diving, bird-watching, fishing and beachcombing.

772-468-3985, www.floridastateparks.org/park/fort-pierce-inlet

JACKSONVILLE

Fort Caroline National Memorial:

Located in the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, Fort Caroline is one of the oldest forts along the Southeast coast. Built by the French in 1564 as

a safe haven for the Huguenots, the fort was invaded by the Spanish 11 years later. Today it preserves the brief and lesser-known period of French settlement in Florida.

904-641-7155, www.nps.gov/timu/learn/historyculture/foca.htm

KEY WEST

Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park:

Named for U.S. President Zachary Taylor shortly after his death in 1850, the fort served as a Union outpost during the Civil War. It now hosts a weeklong series of Civil War reenactments each February and becomes a spectacular haunted attraction with a Civil War theme for Halloween. One of the few public beaches in the Florida Keys is adjacent to the fort.

305-292-6713, www.floridastateparks.org/park/fort-taylor

ST. AUGUSTINE

Castillo de San Marcos National Monument:

Constructed in 1672 by the Spanish, Castillo de San Marcos is the oldest masonry fort in the continental United States. Chief Osceola was

incarcerated here during the Second Seminole War (1835 to 1842). Reenactments and historic-weapon demonstrations help visitors learn about life during the fort's heyday.

904-829-6506, www.nps.gov/casa

Fort Matanzas National Monument:


Construction began on this Spanish fort, known for its lookout tower, in 1740 after St. Augustine withstood a siege by Georgia Governor James Oglethorpe. Oglethorpe attacked Fort Matanzas twice but was thwarted, the second time, in 1742, by cannons — the only time the fort ever fired on an enemy. As Spain's colonial empire declined, the fort fell into ruin. Its 100 acres of salt marsh and barrier islands are now a wildlife sanctuary.

904-471-0116, www.nps.gov/foma



WHERE TO STAY

A couple of Good Sam Parks welcome RVers in Brunswick, Georgia, on the mainland about 7 miles from St. Simons Island's Fort Frederica.

 **Coastal Georgia RV Resort**
912-264-3869
www.coastalgarvresort.com

 **Golden Isles RV Park**
912-261-1025
www.goldenislesrvpark.com

The massive walls of Georgia's Fort Pulaski were believed to be impenetrable until the invention of rifled-cannon fire.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WWW.VISITSAVANNAH.COM



(Above, from left) "Soldiers" dressed in Civil War-era uniforms deploy a cannon at Georgia's Fort Pulaski, located on Cockspar Island between Savannah and Tybee Island. The top of the battlements and the parade grounds inside Fort Pulaski are open for visitors to explore.

Georgia

COCKSPUR ISLAND

Fort Pulaski National Monument:

Believed to be impenetrable with its 7½-foot-thick brick walls backed by masonry piers, this Confederate fort fell to Union forces within moments of the first rifled-cannon fire. With the introduction of rifled cannons, which shoot a spinning, bullet-shaped shell, massive fortresses such as Pulaski became vestiges of a bygone war era. Today, visitors can explore the fort's grounds and watch cannon demonstrations.

912-786-5787, www.nps.gov/fopu

DARIEN

Fort King George Historic Site:

Established in 1721, Fort King George was the oldest English fort on the Georgia coast and marked the southern boundary of the British Empire in colonial North America. The fort's buildings have been re-created at the original site, which is situated on the Colonial Coast Birding Trail.

912-437-4770, www.gastateparks.org/fortkinggeorge

RICHMOND HILL

Fort McAllister State Historic Park:

Union General William Tecumseh Sherman ended his notorious 1864 March to the Sea at Fort McAllister. Later, Henry Ford helped restore the site, considered the best preserved of the Confederacy's earthen battlements. It is now the centerpiece of a 1,725-acre state park and includes a Civil War museum and a public campground.

912-727-2339, www.gastateparks.org/fortmcallister

TYBEE ISLAND

Old Fort Jackson: Located on the Savannah River, the Old Fort Jackson ramparts offer a view across the coastal plain that in itself is worth the visit to Georgia's oldest standing brick fortification. It is also the only fort to showcase its privy, which flushes naturally each day with the tide.

912-651-6840, www.chsgeorgia.org/ofj

North Carolina

ATLANTIC BEACH

Fort Macon State Park: Located just south of Cape Lookout National Seashore, Fort Macon is a must-see, not only as a Civil War-era fort with daily cannon and musket demonstrations but also for its 1½-mile beach, estuaries and dunes. Robert E. Lee engineered the erosion system for the fort in the 1840s, two decades before becoming general of the Confederate army.

252-726-3775, www.ncparks.gov/fort-macon-state-park

KURE BEACH

Fort Fisher State Recreation Area:

Just south of Wilmington, Fort Fisher protected a critical Confederate supply line during the Civil War. When the fort fell in early 1865, the Union effectively cut off provisions to General Lee's army, which ultimately led to his defeat. The fort served as a World War II training site for the first U.S. anti-aircraft units.

910-458-5798, www.ncparks.gov/fort-fisher-state-recreation-area

ROANOKE ISLAND

Fort Raleigh National Historic Site:

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AMERICA'S TOWERS OF STRENGTH

on the first of three voyages to North America. Later, the Union brought freed slaves to prepare them for life after the war. This historic site preserves a portion of one of England's first settlements and is a worthy add-on to a visit to Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Kitty Hawk. 252-473-2111, www.nps.gov/fora

South Carolina
CHARLESTON

Fort Sumter National Monument: The place where the first shots of the Civil War were fired, Fort Sumter was taken by the Confederates in 1861 after they cut off supplies to this strategic stronghold at the entrance to Charleston Harbor. Today, the fort is accessible by ferry or private boat, and is known for its extensive collection of Civil War armaments. 843-883-3123, www.nps.gov/fosu

HILTON HEAD ISLAND

Fort Walker: One of four forts erected on Hilton Head during the Civil War, Fort Walker was built where Captain William Hilton claimed the island for the British Empire 200 years earlier. It is the site of the Battle of Port Royal (1861), which pitted two brothers against each other, Confederate General Thomas Drayton and Union Commander Percival Drayton. Percival persevered, and 50,000 Union troops were stationed here. The local Coastal Discovery Museum leads weekly Forts of Port Royal walking tours at the site. www.coastaldiscovery.org/home/discover-and-learn/walkstalkstours

Virginia
HAMPTON

Fort Monroe National Monument: Originally constructed in 1609 as a wooden stockade known as Fort Algernonne, Fort Monroe's more substantial stone battlement was built after the War of 1812 to bolster coastal defenses. It remained in Union hands throughout the Civil War, although Virginia was a Confederate state. Escaping slaves considered it a symbol of freedom, hence the nickname Freedom's Fortress. The fort was only recently decommissioned in 2011. 757-722-3678, www.nps.gov/fomr

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Highland Ridge RV, Inc., Circle 114 on Reader Service Card

CLEAN FUEL, HAPPY ENGINE

DIESELSITE'S WATER SEPARATOR AND FILTER KIT HELPS THE FORD 6.7-LITER POWERPLANT RUN SMOOTHLY AND KEEPS EXPENSIVE REPAIRS AT BAY

A flashback to early diesel-powered trucks brings to mind the dreaded smelly black smoke that billowed from the exhaust pipe. In addition to burning our eyes and lungs, these trucks were noisy and polluted the air. Modern technology has brought a new breed of diesel engines that are much quieter, while churning out impressive horsepower and torque and providing better fuel economy. A major factor contributing to these advancements is the high-pressure common-rail fuel systems.

Ford's 6.7-liter diesel engine takes full advantage of these advancements and is tough to beat for smoothness and quietness during long hauls. With the new technology, however, engine and fuel problems can take years to manifest, and in the case of the latest Ford diesel engine, water separation proved to be an issue when subjected to a tank

of contaminated fuel. By the time the water in fuel (WIF) warning light in the truck's dash illuminates, it may be too late to prevent damage or rust to the fuel-injection system's internal parts.

DieselSite, an aftermarket manufacturer of high-quality and innovative parts, discovered the hard way that Ford's new fuel system may be overly sensitive to WIF. Today's ultra-low-sulfur fuel has a propensity to attract water, and when coupled with a slight lack of maintenance, can cause failure to certain parts of the fuel-injection system. After experiencing a failure from water that should have been trapped by the factory water-separation system in one of DieselSite's Ford trucks with only 23,000 miles on the odometer (and \$12,000 in repair bills), the company developed a new fuel filter and water separator that is

relatively easy to install.

This state-of-the-art system for 2011 to 2016 6.7-liter diesel engines is designed to fit existing frame bolts without drilling a single hole and is made from CNC-machined billet aluminum for exacting performance and durability. Polycarbonate fuel bowls are made of the same material as safety glasses to withstand road debris and allow for at-a-glance assessment of the condition of the fuel.

DieselSite's clever filter reminder, Filter Minder, which mounts in the side of the aluminum body, keeps tabs on filter condition without having to crawl under the vehicle and peer through the polycarbonate bowls. The company even offers an optional warning light that mounts in the dash and signals the driver of immediate fuel-contamination issues with the filter. Ford-style connectors are provided with the kit, and high-quality fuel lines keep the installation easy



(1) DieselSite recommends replacing the factory fuel-filter element at mandated intervals. **(2)** The Filter Minder allows you to see the condition of the fuel filters at a glance without having to crawl underneath the vehicle. **(3)** DieselSite's fuel-filtration system comes with everything needed for an easy installation, including a spare set of filters and O-rings. **(4)** The CNC billet aluminum base and high-quality polycarbonate fuel bowls are durable and designed to last for the life of the truck.



(5) Before starting the installation, the water is drained from the original fuel-filter system. The water should never need to be drained again. **(6)** Be sure to use a six-point, 32mm socket when removing the primary filter assembly to prevent the plastic housing from being damaged. **(7)** Discoloration and contamination indicates that this fuel filter needed replacing, regardless of mileage. **(8 and 9)** Always use the supplied O-ring when replacing the manufacturer's fuel filter. This will prevent air from entering the system, causing serious problems with fuel-injection performance. **(10)** Removing the original fuel lines to replace the secondary fuel-filter assembly can be difficult. The lines are hard to remove, and diesel will spill out.

CLEAN FUEL, HAPPY ENGINE



11



12



13

yet effective.

To keep the fuel safe, DieselSite utilizes two polycarbonate bowls with a separator cone that removes large particles and water from the fuel as it flows through the filter assembly. Fuel then travels into the upper section of the filter assembly through a 2-micron particle separator, and water can be removed through the petcock located at the bottom of each bowl. The reservoir can be visually inspected on a regular basis and water drained

(11) To mount the new DieselSite unit, the two nuts are removed from the fuel-pump bracket. Fortunately, the bolts will not fall back through the frame, making installation of the filter assembly quick and easy. **(12)** After positioning the new unit, place the original nuts on the studs and tighten them to 50 ft-lbs of torque. **(13)** DieselSite supplies high-quality fittings with the air-filter assembly. Overtightening the fittings can damage the O-rings and may cause a fuel leak.

as necessary.

The company claims the filtration kit will not affect the factory warranty, and, in fact, several Ford service centers are already offering it as an option.

Installation starts with the removal

of the two lower nuts from the bolts protruding through the frame that hold the original fuel pump in place. Once the warning light and Filter Minder are mounted into the aluminum base, the filter assembly is installed using the two

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studs and nuts, tightening to 50 ft-lbs.

The rubber fuel line is then cut in half, and both pieces are installed on the fittings in the aluminum body, using the supplied hose clamps. Two OEM-style fittings with supplied stainless-steel hose clamps are installed on the rubber hoses, paying close attention to orientation of the fittings in the aluminum body. Proper orientation is critical, so follow the instructions carefully.

Once a catch pan is placed under the original filter-and-fuel-pump assembly, the yellow connector closest to the truck frame is removed. We highly suggest wearing clear safety glasses, durable rubber gloves and an old long-sleeve shirt, as diesel fuel will run out and splatter from residual pressure. Quickly install each fitting into the proper connector to prevent excess fuel from escaping. Double-check the hose positions to make sure they are correct.

The next step is to follow the

procedure in the owner's manual for purging air from the fuel system. It calls for 30 seconds with the key on followed by two seconds off, with the steps repeated at least six times. We executed these steps 10 times, adding a little insurance before test-driving the truck.

This may be a good time to change the existing fuel filters, if the mileage interval time is close. Both original fuel filters must be left in place and changed at the recommended factory intervals. The OEM filters will not plug with debris; however, the paper element can deteriorate over time and contaminate the system with paper particles and possibly compromise the factory warranty.

After the air is purged from the system, both polycarbonate fuel bowls are checked to make sure the fuel is void of air pockets. During this procedure, you will know whether any of the fittings are leaking. It's important to make sure the rubber fuel lines are



(14 and 15) The optional Filter Minder warning-light electronic sending unit is installed in the base assembly after removing the plug with an Allen wrench.

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CLEAN FUEL, HAPPY ENGINE

(16 and 17) Install the uncut fuel hose to the inlet and outlet fittings. This will allow the fuel hose to be cut to the proper length after it is routed through the frame of the truck and prevents debris from entering the hose end. **(18)** A strip of masking tape on either end of one of the hoses will indicate that the correct hose is used during installation of the fittings.

routed away from sharp edges. Use cable ties to secure them.

Figure on spending around an hour for the installation, including the addition of the optional warning light. You'll need common hand tools and a pan for catching the fuel.

The kit retails for \$699 with two extra fuel filters. A system with fuel-heating capability sells for \$948. The warning light for the dash is \$75, and replacement filters are \$11. Replacement polycarbonate bowls are also available. DieselSite provides a one-year unlimited-mileage warranty.

The initial test drive should be a route that is close to home and include either a hill climb or a freeway entrance that will allow you to accelerate hard. If all of the air has not been purged from the system, the dash light will alert the driver, and the air-purging process must be repeated.

Modern diesel-powered trucks are designed to have a long and happy life, which can be extended with superior fuel filtration and water removal. The high-quality filter and water-separator assembly from DieselSite will no doubt be worth the added cost, especially when compared to the repair bill for a fuel-system failure. 🚛

DieselSite

888-414-3457, www.dieselsite.com



(19) Do not overtighten the hose clamps. This can damage the plastic OEM-style fittings supplied by DieselSite since this is the low-pressure side of the fuel pump. **(20)** Before installation, examine the connector for the dash-mounted warning light for any type of debris that could possibly cause a faulty connection. **(21)** After startup and before the test drive, double check the hoses and fuel bowls for any possible fuel leak. **(22)** Polarity of the wires coming from the fuel-filter sensor is critical. Be sure to follow the directions carefully to ensure that the warning light will function properly. **(23)** During installation of the dash warning light, apply gentle pressure to the bulb to prevent damage from excess force. **(24)** Install the Change Fuel Filter decal, along with the indicator light.

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MASTER OF SWAY CONTROL

A high-tech cure for trailer sway, Hayes' electronic system applies varying braking force to the trailer's wheels to bring it in-line

It's the age-old dilemma that all trailerists deal with: trailer sway. It can be a real problem that ranges in severity from an annoyance to a frightening loss of control. There are a number of ways to minimize sway, but once it starts, often as the result of outside forces, it takes an immediate action on the part of the driver, or a device, to stop it.

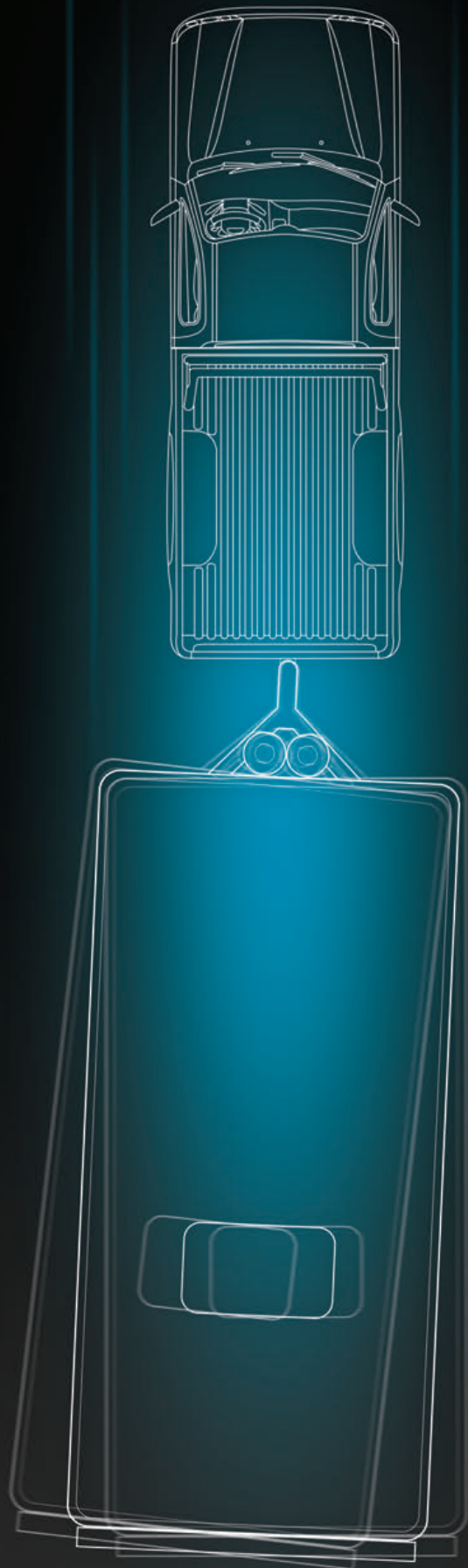
What causes sway? A number of factors can contribute to it. First is a mismatched tow vehicle and trailer. Some SUVs are poor tow vehicles, despite having high tow ratings. This is the result of a short wheelbase combined with high-profile light-duty tires, and trailers that are not balanced properly (i.e., not enough hitch weight). While the powertrain can easily handle the weight, the bouncy suspension, coupled with flex in the tire sidewalls, can allow "the tail to wag the dog," as the saying goes.

Incorrect hitch setup is another major contributor. If a trailer rides too high in the front, it can lead to sway. Failure to use a sway-control device, or using the wrong type, can also be a factor.

Then there are the outside contributors, which include crosswinds, road crown and catching the edge of the road. When these things come into play, the first reaction many drivers have is to jerk the wheel to get back on the road, over-correcting steering and starting the lateral movement of the trailer, which can lead to control problems. And then there are passing trucks, whose large sizes can cause air currents to push against a large, lightweight RV, leading to sway.

How can we fix sway? First, of course, is to match the tow vehicle to the trailer. The longer the trailer, the more wheelbase and stiffness you'll need in the tow vehicle. While there are a number of sway-control devices on the market,

.....
Trailer sway can be a dangerous problem brought on by crosswinds, passing vehicles, overcorrected steering and other factors.



from specialty hitches to hardware that provides friction to resist the lateral movement of the trailer, Hayes Towing Electronics has developed a high-tech way of dealing with trailer sway, the Sway Master. The system electronically controls the trailer by calculating the rate of sway and applying the trailer brakes at a rate that brings the trailer back to center without drastically altering the vehicle's speed or ride characteristics or requiring the driver to manually activate the trailer brakes.

The Sway Master is equipped with a gyroscope, or electronic inertial sensor, to determine the rate of sway, and a GPS receiver to determine vehicle speed. It uses this data to determine if a sway event is occurring

and, if so, how much power to apply to the trailer brakes.

The Sway Master is a remarkably simple device to install. The trailer's seven-way plug connects to the unit, which is mounted on the A-frame of the trailer with four self-drilling screws. The cable from the device then plugs into the seven-way receptacle on the tow vehicle. The only caveat is that the Sway Master has to be mounted in such a location that it has a clear view of the sky. The main unit has a status light on it, so when it is plugged into the tow vehicle, the driver immediately knows whether it is working or not. Parallel circuitry in the unit works in tandem with the seven-way circuitry, so there's no



Eye to the Sky

The Sway Master uses a GPS receiver to detect the speed of the vehicle and an inertial sensor to detect trailer sway. Combining the two technologies, the Sway Master calculates the amount of brake force to apply.

AS SOON AS A SLIGHT SWAY WAS DETECTED, THE SWAY MASTER APPLIED JUST THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF BRAKE FORCE TO STOP IT.

wiring involved.

To see how it would operate under varying circumstances, we put the Sway Master to the test on two different travel trailers towed by the same vehicle, a 2012 Ford F-350, which has a Class 5 hitch receiver and is capable of towing a trailer without weight-distribution or sway-control gear.

We had the opportunity to test

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the new 2017 Winnebago Minnie 2500FL trailer, which is 28 feet long and weighs around 5,300 pounds empty. Even without weight distribution or another sway-prevention device, the Minnie towed pretty compliantly. Once we got out on the interstate with no traffic around us, I put the trailer into a sway event (don't try this at home; I'm a former professional driver). Immediately, there was a nice little tug on the truck, and the trailer came right in line. I tried again with the same result. As soon as a slight sway was detected, the Sway Master applied just the right amount of brake force to stop it.

Later on, while being passed by high-speed trucks and being influenced by slipstream currents exerted on the trailer, it was evident that the Sway Master countered the situations immediately.

We then installed the Sway Master on a 33-foot travel trailer that weighs about 10,000 pounds. This time we used a standard weight-distributing hitch without a sway control and conducted the tests in the same manner — except that we experienced winds in the 20-MPH range and occasional gusts around 30 MPH on Labor Day during Post-Tropical Hurricane Hermine.

.....
Installing the Sway Master may require some prep. In this case, we had to move the original seven-way cable and LP-gas line to make room. The Sway Master must have a clear view to the sky for the GPS to function, so keep it as far forward as possible.



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(Above left) Installing the Sway Master is simple. Four self-drilling screws secure it to the frame. **(Above right)** The trailer's seven-way cable plugs into the unit. The cable is routed to the front and secured using cable clips, and the LP-gas line is resecured.

Results were mixed, as we had some brief wind-driven sways that did not seem to cause the Sway Master to activate the brakes. However, we were able to get the unit to activate with some hard, intentional sway events during a controlled test. Our take on this is that, with a 33-foot trailer, the sway "feel" at the A-frame is considerably different than with the shorter Winnebago. At no time did we have a sway condition that resulted in a loss of control of the trailer.

The Sway Master comes with a holder for the seven-way plug to keep it clean and out of the way.



The benefits of having the electronic device for controlling sway are threefold: First, you don't have to apply the trailer brakes. The Sway Master does it for you.

Second, in a sway event, most people will panic and hit the tow vehicle's brakes, and if they don't panic, they'll engage the trailer brake's manual control on full. This will likely lock up the brakes, if the brake-control gain is adjusted too strongly. Based on the amount of trailer sway and vehicle speed, the Sway Master applies a calculated amount of amperage to the brakes for just the right length of time.

Lastly, with the Sway Master, both hands remain on the wheel, maintaining full control of the vehicle.

If the trailer is prone to sway, the driver will feel a lot of tugging from the trailer as the Sway Master is activated. But it will be safe tugging and an indication that the tow-vehicle-and-trailer setup is less than ideal and needs some attention.

The Hayes Sway Master comes with a two-year limited warranty and is an accessory that every trailerist should consider. It has a \$349 suggested retail price and at press time was available at Camping World at a discounted Good Sam Club member rate of \$299. 📞

Hayes Towing Electronics

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STRONG-ARM TACTICS

Torklift's frame-mounted tie-downs and quick-connect turnbuckles stabilize truck campers on the road and speed up loading and off-loading



The 2017 Northstar 9.5 Igloo U fits perfectly in the F-350's 8-foot bed. Torklift's frame-mounted tie-down system and a rubber mat ensure that the camper stays put.

Whether you're driving on the interstate or traveling down a dirt road to your favorite fishing hole, a properly secured truck camper is a must. To accomplish this, truck campers come with four attachment points built into their frames — usually a metal plate with a hole in it or an eyebolt. Corresponding anchor points, called tie-downs, are installed on the pickup, and turnbuckles or other hardware secure the truck and camper at these points.

Torklift International makes a popular truck-camper tie-down system that uses brackets attached directly to the truck's frame, the safest method for securing a truck and camper. For trucks built after 2001, installation requires no drilling and utilizes existing holes in the vehicle's frame. Older trucks and those with aftermarket hitch receivers may require drilling.

To evaluate how Torklift's frame-mounted tie-downs install and perform, we attached a set on a 2012 Ford F-350 diesel-powered 4x4 with a regular cab, 8-foot bed and off-road package, and completed the project using the lift at Diamond RV Centre in West Hatfield, Massachusetts. Ordering the right tie-downs was easy using the Find Your Fit automated tie-down application guide on the Torklift website. Installation was straightforward with the provided manual, although we found some details in the black-and-white pictures difficult to see. A phone call to the tech-support number on the manual's cover turned up online instructions with color pictures that were easier to follow.

The front of the truck frame on the passenger's side was readily accessible, and installing that tie-down was a

////////////////////////////////////
(1) Fuel-tank dimensions on the test truck varied slightly from those on other F-350s, preventing the supplied lower hook bolt from sliding into place. Torklift's technicians quickly fabricated and shipped a custom bracket that fit perfectly. **(2)** On the front passenger's side, the tie-down receiver is slid over the fasteners and held tightly to the frame. A flat washer, lock-washer and nut are added to each fastener. All nuts are torqued to the manufacturer's specifications. **(3)** On the driver's side, the center bolt is threaded onto the coiled end of the bolt fisher, along with a plate and star washer, and tugged carefully until it is pulled out of the hole in the frame. Star washers are used when it isn't possible to place a wrench on the bolt head; the star washer helps keep the bolt from turning while it's tightened.



1



2



3

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breeze. U-shaped mounting brackets were slid onto the top and bottom of the C-channel frame (Torklift refers to these as "hook brackets"). A third bolt was inserted through a steel reinforcing plate and then through an existing hole in the frame.

Installation on the front driver's side was more difficult because the fuel tank blocked access to the inside of the frame. The fuel tank was protected by a metal shield, and several bolts held the tank shield to the frame. These were removed, allowing the shield to hang out of the way.

The remainder of the driver's-side installation was similar to the passenger's side. Hook brackets were used on the top and bottom of the frame, and a bolt was placed in an existing hole in the center of the frame. Due to the design of the tank on this particular truck, one of the hook brackets that came with the kit wouldn't fit. A call to Torklift's engineering team with some photos and additional measurements was all it took to get a redesigned bracket shipped out at no charge.

Because of the location of the fuel tank, the center bolt and reinforcement plate could not readily be inserted through the inside of the frame, so Torklift provided a special tool called a bolt fisher. As the name implies, a bolt fisher is a length of thin, rigid wire that is coiled at one end and used to pull, or "fish," a bolt through a hole. Leaving the fish wire attached until a nut is installed ensures that the bolt can be retrieved

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FAST ON THE DRAW

Torklift's FastGun turnbuckles have quick-release handles that allow the truck and truck camper to be connected — or disconnected — in seconds. Rubber O-rings make speedy work of setting the proper spring tension.



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- (4)** All fasteners are tightened according to manufacturer's specs using a 1/2-inch torque wrench. Some items on the frame may need to be relocated, depending on the application.
- (5)** With the front driver's-side installation complete, the emergency-brake cable is rerouted with a special bracket (arrow).
- (6)** To mark the drilling location, the tie-down receivers are placed against the hitch-receiver side plates, as far rearward as possible, and used as templates. Drilling the required 7/16-inch hole in the thick side plate takes three steps, starting with a 1/8-inch pilot hole, followed by using a 1/4-inch drill bit and then a 7/16-inch bit.
- (7)** The rear passenger's-side tie-down receiver is mounted to clear the diesel exhaust pipes.

easily if it falls back into the frame.

The parking-brake cable had to be relocated to avoid the newly installed tie-downs. This was easily accomplished with a supplied emergency-brake bracket. The fuel-tank shield was reinstalled as the final step for the driver's side.

Because the F-350 had an aftermarket hitch receiver, holes had to be drilled in the hitch-receiver side plates to install the rear tie-down receivers. If the truck had the factory hitch receiver, we could have used a kit that mounts directly to the truck frame without drilling.

The tie-down receivers fit perfectly, with plenty of clearance for the exhaust tailpipes. Each tie-down insert was slid in place and fastened with an R-clip. For added security and to prevent theft, Torklift offers tie-down locks that

replace the R-clips. They come in a package of four with all locks utilizing the same key.

To put the new tie-downs to the test, a 2017 Northstar 9.5 Igloo U was mounted on the F-350, courtesy of



8

- (8)** Prior to assembling each FastGun, the turnbuckle (left), threaded hook bolt (center) and other associated hardware (right) are laid out and checked.



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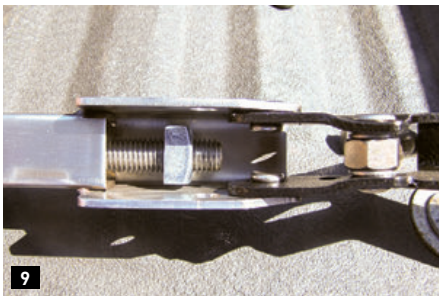
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STRONG-ARM TACTICS



9



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11

(9) Initial assembly of the four turnbuckles is not difficult or time consuming, and no tools are needed. To start, the threaded 1/2-inch hook bolt is inserted, and a square nut is attached. **(10)** A rubber flat washer is fitted onto the hook bolt, and a nyloc nut ensures that everything stays in place. **(11)** To set the correct spring tension, a rubber O-ring is installed on the threaded hook bolt and pushed up until it is even with the bottom of the turnbuckle body. After the handle is locked down, the space between the O-ring and the turnbuckle body should measure 1/4 inch. By adjusting the gap to 1/4 inch and clamping down the lever, the spring applies the optimal pressure of 300 pounds.

Truck Camper Warehouse in West Chesterfield, New Hampshire. Bill Penney, the dealership's owner, recommends using a rubber mat to protect the truck bed and the bottom of the camper. Spray-in bed liners contain rubber and can be used, but

Penney prefers rubber mats. Torlift advises against plastic bed liners that may result in horizontal movement or materials that might compress under the weight of the camper and cause vertical movement. Mounting the seven-way receptacle in the bed is rec-

ommended to keep the rear connection free for trailer use.

With the truck camper loaded in the bed, it was time to install the turnbuckles. Conventional installation is time-consuming and requires turning the center section of the turnbuckle until the necessary tension is reached, followed by tightening a locknut to



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prevent it from loosening. A length of chain makes up the distance between the turnbuckle and the tie-downs.

Torklift's solution is the FastGun turnbuckle, a considerable time-saver. With FastGun's quick-connect/disconnect feature, installation is simply a matter of moving the handle into the locked position and inserting a locking pin. The quick-release feature is particularly useful if the turnbuckle covers the pickup's fuel-filler door. FastGun's spring-loaded mechanism also mitigates sudden jolts, such as potholes and speed bumps, preventing damage to the camper frame or tie-downs during travel.

Assembly was not difficult but required several minutes of turning the threaded J-hooks and test fitting, followed by more turning until the correct length was achieved. After the initial setup, installing each turnbuckle takes just a few seconds. Hook one end to the tie-down and the other to the corresponding attachment point on the camper, pull the handle closed and install the pin. Labels should be marked to indicate each turnbuckle's location — for instance, "DF" for driver's-side front and "PR" for passenger's-side rear.

We were impressed with the construction of the Torklift tie-downs and turnbuckles. Their ease of use made mounting a truck camper less of a chore. But most importantly, knowing that the camper was securely attached to the frame of the truck gave us peace of mind.

Torklift's frame-mounted tie-downs have varying retail prices that depend on the application, with front tie-downs starting at \$342.99 and rear tie-downs starting at \$298.99. FastGun turnbuckles are sold in pairs that retail for \$319.99. They come with a polished stainless-steel finish, like the ones we installed, or powder-coating in white or gray. Torklift also makes a lightweight military-grade aluminum-alloy tie-down system called Talon. Although these are more expensive than Torklift's steel tie-downs, Talon tie-downs are lighter and won't rust, a definite plus for those who live in areas where rust is a problem. 🚐

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DIFFICULTY 1 2 3 4 5

TIME TO COMPLETE 1 HOUR

TOOLS NEEDED TAPE MEASURE, DRILL MOTOR AND BITS, WRENCHES OR SOCKET SET

Finding adequate space for storing items in any RV is an ongoing battle. Most of us want to take too much, as we never know what will be needed away from home. And keeping the stuff organized can also be a challenge. Trailer owners tend to fill up the truck bed or the back of the SUV with items that won't fit in the RV's storage compartments, and motorhome owners love to pack their dinghy vehicles.

One of the most versatile storage containers is the Rubbermaid ActionPacker, a durable plastic box and lid with lockable latches. But leaving these weather-resistant containers in the bed of an unattended truck makes them vulnerable to theft, and the back of an SUV is not much more protected. And let's not forget that these containers slide around in transit, many times out of reach.

Swag Off Road, a company with roots in the off-highway-vehicle accessory business, markets the Baja Bin and Alumi Lid, a couple of aluminum-based products specifically designed for securing ActionPacker containers. Not



(Above left) The aluminum Baja Bin protects the ActionPacker's sides and lid, and opens to allow the plastic container to be lifted out for access. With an optional padlock, the mounting bracket also provides theft protection. An aluminum accessory mount for ammo cans keeps these boxes from moving around. (Above right) The ammo can bracket is mounted forward of the fifth-wheel hitch in the truck bed, and the 8-gallon Baja Bin is bolted close to the tailgate.

only do they anchor an 8- or 24-gallon ActionPacker, they help protect against damage over time and provide a base for stacking without collapsing the container's lid or side walls.

The Baja Bin and Alumi Lid are made from lightweight yet rigid $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch-thick laser-cut and -stamped aluminum sheet, which creates rugged pieces. Laser-cut holes are placed symmetrically throughout the top and bottom of the Baja Bin, which reduces weight and allows dimpling. The provided hinges, nuts, bolts, detent pins and latches are all stainless steel.

To install the Baja Bin, choose a location such as a truck bed or storage compartment where there is enough room to swing open the top and bolt down the bottom. Then mark the four $\frac{5}{16}$ -inch hole positions, drill the holes, and bolt the bracket in place. The ActionPacker is simply lowered into the Baja Bin, and the top is latched down; a pin or optional padlock secures the top.

An 8-gallon ActionPacker can be lifted out of the Baja Bin with ease. The bin for the 24-gallon ActionPacker, which will likely be heavy when loaded, has a fold-down front section so it can be slid out

without lifting. The 8-gallon Baja Bin retails for \$145, and the 24-gallon model sells for \$175.

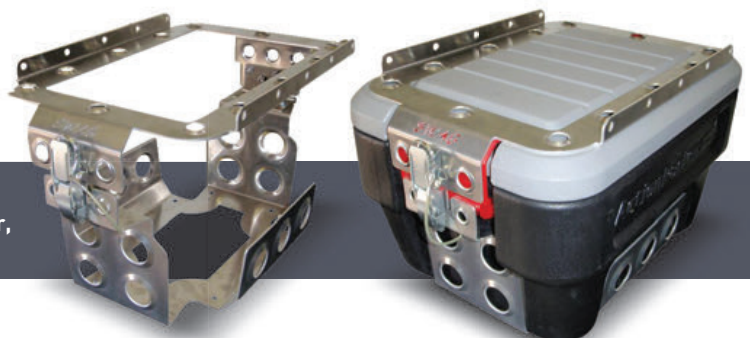
The Alumi Lid, an optional accessory, attaches to the predrilled Baja Bin top with a couple of additional bolts and detent pins with rings. The two bolts make up a quick hook-and-hinge application at one end, while the two detents lock things down at the other. The lid provides a basic platform for stacking or allows mounting of tools or accessories. It's available for the 8-gallon Baja Bin and has a retail price of \$53.

If smaller storage containers are needed, the company offers similar mounting systems for .30- and .50-caliber ammo cans.

Swag Off Road's storage solutions add versatility and perform as intended. American-made quality, obvious toughness and innovation turn simple plastic containers into valuable assets for RVers who can use a little more space to stash necessary items. 🚚

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One-Step Battery Disconnect

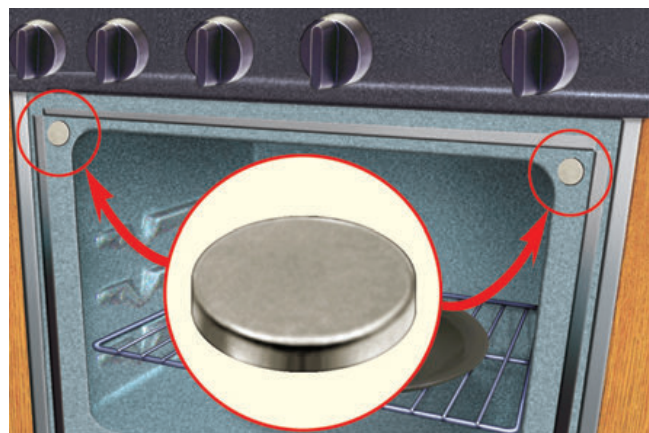
I got tired of removing the cover on my 12-volt trailer battery every time I was not using it and having to take the nut off the positive battery post to disconnect the cable. So I purchased a keyed battery-disconnect switch from an auto-parts store and installed it right into the plastic cover on the battery box. There was room inside the corner of the cover to install the switch and have clearance for the terminals on the back to not touch anything.

It was easy to do, and I can store the key with the battery by putting a short cable or chain on it and drilling a receiver hole on the side of the plastic battery-box mount (or put it elsewhere). By mounting the switch this way, it is enclosed within the cover and



protected from the weather. It performs perfectly, is trouble-free and removes all 12-volt DC power from the trailer when it's not in use.

Dennis Callison, Coleman, Michigan



Magnetic Oven-Door Fix

After many years of use, the oven door on our SunnyBrook 27FKS's Wedgewood Vision stove no longer closed tightly, allowing heat to escape when we used the oven. I disassembled the door and inspected the springs and hinges, and found nothing broken or out of alignment. To fix this problem, I ordered $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch by $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch rare-earth magnets from Lee Valley Tools (www.leevalley.com; part number 99K32.11) and placed one magnet inside the door seal at each top corner.

This is the perfect fix! The oven door now closes tightly and stays closed, yet it's easy to open.

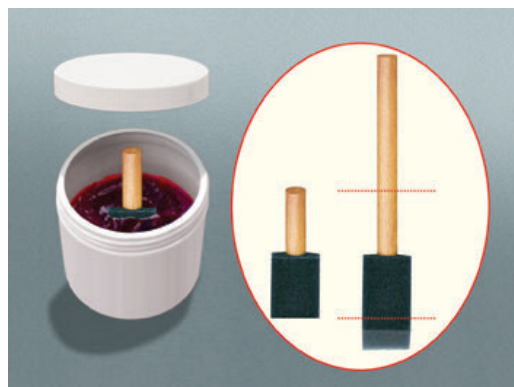
Bob Moye, Ajax, Ontario

No-Fuss Hitch Grease

No matter how careful I was, I always made a mess when I greased the hitch ball. I came up with an idea that has worked great, and everyone I've shown the fix to has taken the time to duplicate it. My brother uses it for his fifth-wheel as well.

I remove about half the grease from the container to lower the level. I shortened the wooden handle of a foam paint brush so it will fit easily inside the container. I also cut off a bit of the foam on the end so the brush is a little stiffer. I store the foam brush in the middle of the grease container and screw the cap back on. No fuss, no mess.

Pete Riehl, Portland, Oregon 🚚



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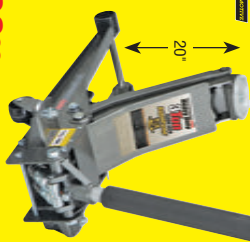
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3200 RUNNING WATTS 6.5 HP P/2 CD GAS GENERATOR
ITEM 65079/65078/65080/65081/65082/65083/65084/65085
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MSRP: Original: \$25/month
Obsidian: \$199/quarter
888-878-7044, www.getcairn.com
Circle 137 on Reader Service Card



Soften the Ride

Geny Industries' Rubber Torsion Flex Hitch combines the flexibility of an adjustable weight-carrying ball mount with a mechanism that offers a smoother ride when towing. The company claims it's able to reduce shock transfer by using heavy-duty rubber cords to cushion the ball from the shank. In addition to smoothing the ride, the hitch comes with a gauge to monitor and adjust hitch weight for a properly balanced load. The powder-coated ball mount is available in 2- to 2.5-inch shank sizes and 16,000- to 21,000-pound capacities, with drop sizes ranging from 5 to 15 inches to fit a wide range of towing applications. Geny's Versa-Ball hitch ball is included.

MSRP: \$490
574-218-6363, www.genyhitch.com
Circle 138 on Reader Service Card



Light My Yule Log

It's just a palm-sized plastic-covered brick with a red pull-string, but within seconds of yanking that string, the Pull Start Fire begins smoking and is soon burning twice as hot as conventional fire starters, according to the manufacturer. Just loop the green string around your holiday Yule log or the bottom timber in your fire pit, pull the red string, and — boom! — the 5-inch fire starter does the rest. No matches, no lighter, no accelerants. The eco-friendly Pull Start Fire contains recycled materials and is said to burn for up to half an hour, even in windy, wet weather. Each fire starter comes wrapped in thick-plastic waterproof packaging.

MSRP: \$24.95 for six
www.pullstartfire.com
Circle 139 on Reader Service Card



Take a Load Off

Standard rear leaf springs on pickup trucks and vans can flatten out under the hitch weight of a trailer, and adding leaf-type overloads to help reduce flex can create a harsh ride when not towing. Roadmaster Active Suspension

(RAS) gives factory springs the ability to carry the load without compromising ride quality, solo or towing, according to the manufacturer. The RAS retrofit uses a variable-rate coil spring attached above the leaf-spring pack to convert the passive rear suspension into an active mechanical suspension. RAS is said to reduce trailer sway in crosswinds and improve overall handling, stability and safety. It comes with a 30-day money-back guarantee.

MSRP: Starting at \$429
800-398-5036, www.activesuspension.com
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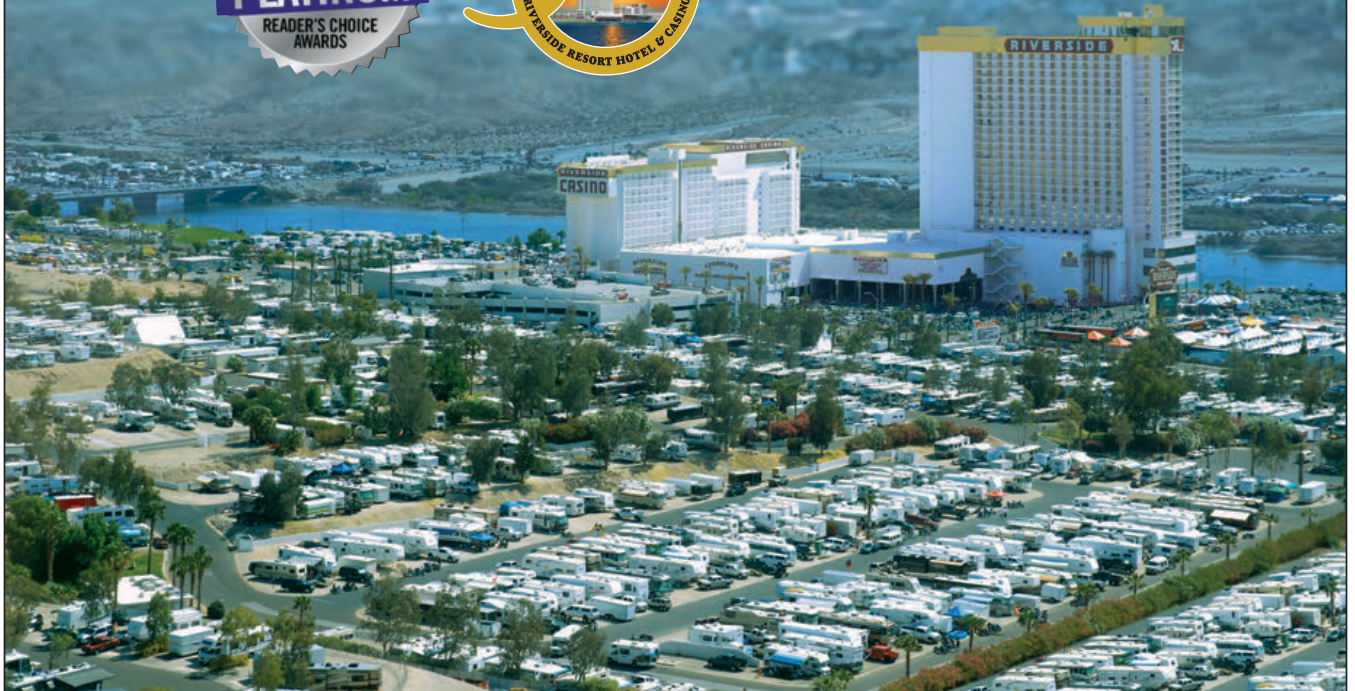
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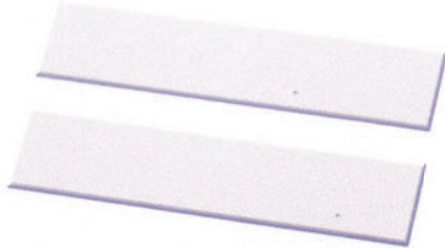
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TRAILER TIRE WOES

Q I just replaced all four tires on my Keystone 298RE travel trailer after one failed. The failed tire went flat with no indication of a problem while driving. It looked OK when we got to our destination, but a few days later I found it to be flat when checking the pressure. When the remaining tires were removed, they all were out of shape and had bulges. The trailer is only two years old and has less than 7,000 miles on it. I always check tire pressure. I replaced the stock D-rated tires with E-rated Maxxis ST tires.

The suggested pressure for the original D-rated tires was 65 PSI. How much air should I put in the E-rated tires, and will 80 PSI cause uneven wear? I estimate the trailer weighs about 8,500 pounds.

Vinny Rizzo, New Port Richey, Florida

A Two years and 7,000 miles seems like a ridiculously low service life for any tire. Since you didn't mention what size Maxxis tire you purchased, I can't give you the inflation pressure, but you need to know, with certainty, what your RV weighs, and then use the load and inflation table available on the Maxxis Tire website to determine the proper inflation pressure.



Start with a trip to a public scale or the scale at a truck stop with the trailer in loaded and ready-to-travel mode. The scale will tell you what the trailer axles and hitch weigh, and you can also learn your truck axle weights to be sure all the other weight-related factors for your combination are up to snuff.

That said, there are some folks who will run the sidewall at maximum pressure all the time. The risk you run doing this is accelerated center tire wear, and if you tow a lot of miles, you may be replacing the tires sooner rather than later, but this is certainly safer than running the tires on low pressure.

For maximum tire life, adjust the tire pressure to the actual weight carried by the tire. — **Chris Dougherty**

VACUUM TOILETS AT HIGH ELEVATIONS

Q I own a 2013 Boulder motorhome with two Dometic SeaLand toilets connected to a vacuum pump, and I've found that these toilets are affected by altitude. Have you heard of this issue?

The toilets work fine in Florida, where I live, but they struggle to achieve the needed vacuum when traveling to elevations above 6,000 feet. These are basically marine toilets designed to be operated at sea level.

Note that both toilets are on the curbside opposite the black-tank drain. Toilets on the driver's side can depend on gravity.

Dennis Chouinard, Titusville, Florida

A This type of vacuum-flush toilet is used on Class A motorhomes and higher-end fifth-wheel trailers. A couple of things could be happening here. First, at 6,000 feet, the air starts getting fairly thin, so any device that depends on pumping air, either a compressor or a vacuum pump, is going to work harder and pump longer to accomplish a given task. Second, if you have any air leaks in the system, the pump will likewise be working extra hard to do the job. We've heard from other users who likewise report the pump takes as much as twice as long to "recharge" the system for flushing, so your altitude experience is likely fairly common.

I recommend taking the coach to a service center familiar with that Dometic SeaLand system and having it checked for leaks. Have technicians check the pump units, as well, as those can also develop sealing problems around the pump mechanism. With the pumps in good shape, they'll be better able to handle the thinner air at altitude. — **Jeff Johnston**

REFRIGERATOR POWER

Q We are new to RVing and wanted to try it out on a light budget, just in case it's not our thing. We found an amazing deal on a 2006 30-foot Citation Supreme fifth-wheel. It's well laid out and solar-equipped, and is an all-round solid unit that had been kept in amazingly good condition. We tried it out on a six-week trek across the United States and love it!

The only problem we have found is the refrigerator. It is a two-way model, 120-volt AC or propane. Although the

THE TECH TEAM



CHRIS DOUGHERTY: Technical editor for *Trailer Life* and *MotorHome*, Chris is an RVDA/RVIA certified technician, former service manager and lifelong RVer.



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.



3 months into ownership of our rig we had a height related accident. At a fuel stop, we cleared the stations overhead going into the fuel island, but there was a road grade change that altered the clearance height. We hit the overhead as we pulled out . . . we brought the damaged rig to our dealership.

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RV CLINIC

refrigerator and the fifth-wheel are heavily insulated, and the refrigerator is very efficient when plugged in to 120-volt AC, we found items in the fridge to be cool but not cold after a long day of travel. I am concerned about using the propane mode while on the road, and obviously 120-volt AC is not an option when you are moving.

Short of replacing the refrigerator with a three-way model, is there an option to keep it running while on the road? Would it be reasonable to install an inverter that would allow the fridge to run from the solar/12-volt batteries while we are driving?

Lyn Overholt, Eagle Bay, British Columbia

A Starting out with an affordable RV to test the waters, so to speak, is a smart idea, and we're glad you've enjoyed it. Yes, you could use an inverter to power the refrigerator when driving, and the battery charge line from your tow vehicle would help keep the batteries charged, along with the solar-panel charger setup. This will draw a fair amount of current, and you'll need to evaluate your refrigerator's power draw on 120 volts AC, the size and condition of the batteries and so forth to determine how to assemble a proper setup.

Alternately, just use LP-gas as power for the fridge while driving. This is a bit of a controversial subject, and there are people on both sides of this fence, but a lot of people use LP-gas while on the road. There are a few places where it's not legal, especially in some areas in the Eastern part of the country, and you need to shut off LP-gas-powered devices when refueling to avoid sparking any fires. LP-gas is the most efficient way to power your RV's refrigerator, and it should work great for what you want to do. — J.J.

PICKUP ENGINE BRAKING

Q I have a 2003 Chevy Silverado with the transmission brake. We are planning a trip to Montana and Yellowstone from Louisiana and would like some advice on how and when to apply the transmission brake for the best results.

I do have several years of 18-wheeler experience, so I know about mountain driving, but the pickup is not the same as having a Jake brake. Is there any need to add an engine brake for better control on downhill grades?
Mark Bevill, Blanchard, Louisiana

A First, we're not sure what you mean by "transmission brake," but we're assuming it's the transmission-shift hold feature rather than a braking system, per se. Also, you didn't say how large a trailer you're towing, so we can't use that information as part of the basis for our answer.

In general, that transmission-shift hold feature allows you to shift down and use engine-compression braking to help maintain a safe speed on downhill grades without relying completely on your truck's service brakes. That helps avoid overheating the truck's brakes, and the resultant fading and reduction of braking power. The transmission holdback feature does a pretty good job.

You also didn't say which engine your 2003 Silverado has, but since you are asking about an engine brake, we're going to assume it has the Duramax diesel.

It's important to understand the difference between an engine brake, which you refer to, and an exhaust brake. An engine brake, like the Jacobs ("Jake") brake you're familiar with, changes the engine's exhaust-valve timing to create resistance in the combustion chamber, which in turn slows the vehicle. Engine brakes, like the Jake brake, are already integrated into the powertrain package, so there isn't one available for the Duramax through the aftermarket. Even if there was, it would be very expensive to purchase and install.

An exhaust brake, which is readily available in the aftermarket from several companies, closes off the exhaust system when activated, creating back-pressure in the cylinders that results in resistance that slows the vehicle. Generally speaking, they are two different methods of achieving the same goal. Exhaust brakes are effective in controlling downhill speed and also reduce service brake wear, which is why

they are integrated in current diesel engines. — **J.J.**

CROOKED CORNERS

Q I have a 2014 Forest River Surveyor. The plastic trim insert covering the screws cracked, split and was failing. When I removed it from the slide, I discovered the miter joints on the trim were not tight. There was more than half an inch gap at the corners. The only one that was tight was the top left; the rest were filled in with black rubber. There were others with minor cosmetic problems that I repaired.

Do you think the trim gaps will create a problem?

Richard Bowman, Lodi, California

A Unfortunately, this is a common occurrence, Richard, and I have seen it a number of times. I have also documented where this can cause leaking, especially if the manufacturer uses foam tape instead of a butyl sealant when installing the trim.

I recommend looking closely at the trim joint for any apparent water entry. If it looks like there's been a breach, then removal and reinstallation of the trim is recommended, as well as resealing the trim with a product like Seal-Tite Corner Seal tape from Dicor. This way, even if the joint doesn't meet together correctly, it will still be sealed.

If the joint looks like it is dry, then applying additional sealant and securing new corner covers may be the way to go. Covering the roof seam and the top of the wall seam with EternaBond tape would also be a good idea. Be sure to follow the installation instructions carefully. — **C.D.**

BRAKE-CONTROLLER BLUES

Q We have a 2004 Kountry Star fifth-wheel equipped with four hydraulic-disc brakes. I have towed it with my 2004 Ram 3500 diesel with an aftermarket Draw-Tite brake controller and have had no problems. I recently purchased a 2016 Ram 3500 diesel, and it came equipped with a factory-installed brake controller.

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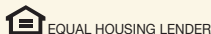
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I tried to tow my trailer with my new truck, and I programmed the trailer brakes to the truck with the setting of electric/hydraulic brakes, and the trailer brakes do not work. But when I hook the new truck up to my flatbed trailer, which has electric brakes, it works just fine.

The Ram dealership told me I need to purchase an aftermarket brake controller and disregard the factory controller. Can you advise me on what to do?

Gary Lest, Beulah, Colorado

A This is a pretty common issue, Gary, and you probably won't have to replace the truck's integrated brake controller — and you probably don't want to. The integrated brake controller is tied into the truck's computer system. Using a digital signal, it can control trailer braking almost like the trailer is stopping with the truck, as the signal is based on the truck's brake pressure.

I spoke to a technical-support specialist at Kodiak Trailer Disc Brake Solutions, and he confirmed that there may be a conversion kit available for your brake system to make it work with the new controller. HydraStar calls it a cam kit, but the key is to call the pump manufacturer, which is likely Dexter Axle Company or Cargo Towing Solutions, to find the proper conversion kit and make sure you have all the brake-system information handy.

If one isn't available, the Kodiak tech rep said you do have the option of using a good aftermarket brake controller, like the Tekonsha P3, but you'd probably be better off replacing the pump with a new, compatible unit, as you'll get the benefit of the truck's integrated braking system and won't have to mess with wiring and drilling holes in your new truck. — **C.D.** 🚚

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

For advertising information contact Terry Thompson:

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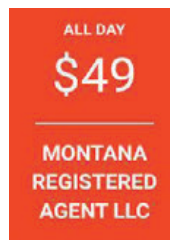
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 October 1, 2016

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A Fond Farewell

Longtime contributor Bill Graves has written this column for more than 20 years. The magazine and Bill's devoted readers bid him adieu, as he follows new roads to adventure

In the early 1990s, I pitched an idea to my friends at *Trailer Life* to run a monthly column written by an RVer who was traveling the back roads, namely me. This was because that was what I was doing. It was a tough sell. *Trailer Life's* travel stories were focused on a destination, and back roads did not fit that definition.

I tried airy phrases like "selling the mystique of travel," and "exploring America's back roads." Still, nothing clicked. So I headed out and wrote five stories, took a lot of color slides (digital cameras were a novelty at the time), and sent them in to the editors. This was my best shot — better to show them a story than try to explain it.

Six months passed. Nothing. Then came a note from the editorial director that they were redesigning the magazine and thought it would be refreshing to have stories from "off the beaten track." Important lesson here: If your proposal becomes the boss' initiative, you've won.

That is how America's Outback was born. If you have been traveling vicariously with me for some of those 20-plus years, perhaps you've sensed how much fun I have had writing this column. To be able to travel, and have someone want to read what I have to say about it, has been among the most rewarding experiences of my life. These have been wonderful years, and I am not exaggerating when I say the thoughtful mail from you, the readers, has kept me going.

Trailer Life is wrapping up its 75-year anniversary, and I

Columnist Bill Graves got friendly with a lemur last year at the Alabama Gulf Coast Zoo in Gulf Shores, Alabama. At the zoo, visitors can have one-on-one encounters with baby tigers, lemurs, kangaroos and reptiles.



(Above) In the summer of 2009, Bill met Santa at the Holiday World theme park in Santa Claus, Indiana. The jolly old elf wore a vest filled with ice water to keep cool in the 90-degree heat. (Right) Rusty, a mixed lab, was Bill's constant companion for 13 years of RV travels. Her viewpoint, as Bill understood it, was often expressed in America's Outback.

am proud to have been included in a good part of it. I am 84 now, and though it's hard to say good-bye, I've decided it's time that I retired from this column. I would like to share some words from my debut column in the July 1993 issue about the simple joy that comes from the freedom and independence of traveling in a recreational vehicle:

"What follows in the months to come in this column are what I discovered and who I met roaming the two-lane roads of this country — mostly in the West. You will meet a train conductor in Campo, a cowboy near Current, a cook in Coalinga, an archaeologist in Caliente, a hooker in Ely, a hairdresser in Ajo, a country-western singer in Taft and many, many more.

"These stories are not profiles of rural towns or a rehash of their history, but 'what once was' pervades them all. And my intent is not to gore someone's ox, but some may be. Nor do I intend to send you scurrying across the blacktop to see for yourself, but you may.

"They are not reports, but rather perceptions. Perhaps they are what you would hear near a field of wildflowers in the shade of Emmy's motorhome awning." Emmy, a full-time RVer, was the subject of that first column.

Thank you to my great friends at *Trailer Life* for their professionalism and friendship, but mostly for their faith in me from day one. It has been a great trip! And thanks especially to you, the readers, for joining me for the ride.

Merry Christmas to you all. I'm looking forward to seeing what's around the next bend in America's Outback. 🚐

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