

**PRODUCT PREVIEW: 32 INNOVATIVE A-LIST ACCESSORIES**

# TRAILER LIFE

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## Old Dog, New Tricks

Return of the Iconic Scotty

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SUSPENSION  
BASICS**

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GOES A LONG WAY

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MODEL 2285 SHOWN IN ROADSTER



MODEL 2375 SHOWN IN MIDNIGHT

Lance Campers, Circle 113 on Reader Service Card



## Lance



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Despite its name, more than two-thirds of the Alaska Highway is actually in Canada. Ride along as the author travels from Fairbanks, Alaska, to Haines Junction, Yukon, in the first of a two-part series. Page 28

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Matlacha, Florida



➤ Products displayed at the SEMA show included many game-changers for RVers. Page 20

## Lightweight Doesn't Mean Spartan Any Longer

The RV industry is redefining compact trailers, and buyers are clamoring to be part of the lifestyle



When my wife, Lynne, and I bought our first new travel trailer back in 1972, we were thrilled that it could be easily towed by our Chevrolet Malibu. The car was sporty enough to be fun to drive, and the trailer offered the livability we needed to make our transition from a tent and sleeping bags heavenly. Inside, the amenities were appreciated but spartan. While it was only 13 feet long, it had an amazingly large convertible dinette, a toilet room/closet and a galley with only the basics.

Returning home from our second trip, we went directly to the dealer who sold us the trailer and traded it for a larger model that was self-contained. We also traded the car for a new Chevy truck because the trailer was too heavy for the car.

Our new trailer had a gaucho bed, a dinette, a bigger galley and a roomy rear bathroom. At around 21 feet long, the trailer wasn't a lightweight by any means, and by today's standards, livability paled in comparison.

While attending the National RV Trade Show in Louisville, Kentucky, last fall, I sauntered into a new Winnebago Minnie Plus travel trailer and flashed back to our first self-contained rig. Classified as a lightweight trailer, the Minnie Plus is not that much heavier, but with 9 feet more floor space, it featured a similar floorplan that is light years more comfortable than that 21-footer we had in the 1970s.

Instead of a pullout gaucho, the Minnie Plus has a fixed queen mattress in a private room. There's a couch and dinette, and the bath is big. Add in modern RV conveniences, and it's easy to see why the lightweight segment is growing so rapidly.

The popularity of lightweight trailers is spearheaded by affordability and the ability to tow these rigs with just about any SUV, crossover or compact truck. And here's the kicker: You can have just as much fun in one of today's lightweight trailers as you can with larger RVs with luxurious amenities.

I often think about the story a reader shared with us years ago. He and his wife were traveling in their pickup camper and parked in nasty weather next to a couple in a highline bus conversion. When an internal power failure sidelined the systems in the bus, the owners were invited to dinner in the camper. After a wonderful meal with new friends, the bus owners came away with a new perspective on the RV lifestyle. Bigger is not always better, and while luxury can be nice, it doesn't impact the overall RV experience.

Sales of full-featured lightweight trailers are exploding, and on the motorized side, the popularity of smaller Class B's is at record levels. The RV community is more diverse than ever, and that's pretty exciting. 🗨️

— Bob Livingston, publisher

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### DID YOU KNOW?

February is American Heart Month, as proclaimed in 1964 by President Lyndon B. Johnson. RVers can celebrate by taking a heart-healthy hike.

**Publisher** Bob Livingston

**Editor** Valerie Law

**Managing Editor** Donya Carlson

**Technical Editor** Chris Dougherty

**Senior Art Director** Rick Damien

**Production Director** Bob Dawson

**Production Manager** Brenda Hutchinson

**Sales Administrator** Katey Purgatorio

**Consulting Editors** Wes Caughlan, Chris Hemer, Jeff Johnston

**Contributors** Lisa Ballard, Ed Bolduc, Bobbie Hasselbring, Peter Lewis, Kevin Livingston, James Richardson, Bruce W. Smith, Gary Wescott

**Vice President National Sales** Terry Thompson  
847-229-6759

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

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

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

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

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

### Customer Service

**Subscriptions** (print and digital)  
800-825-6861  
trailerlife@cdsfulfillment.com

**Editorial**  
info-tl@goodsam.com  
www.trailerlife.com

**GS MEDIA & EVENTS**

**President** Mark Boggess

**Senior Vice President/Group Publisher** Bob Livingston

**Vice President/Advertising Sales** Terry Thompson

**Vice President** Ann Emerson

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## Tipping the Scales

It was certainly a pleasure to see the "Leading Lights" layout on lightweight and little trailers in the December 2016 issue. Even though our Ford F-150 will tow 8,500 pounds, we chose the Lance 1575 for its build quality and ease of towing and parking. It offers a nice slideout for the dinette and ample room for moving around. We do not wish to own a fifth-wheel with its own zip code.

**Doug Allen, St. Charles, Missouri**

"Leading Lights" wisely cautions readers to go more by a trailer's gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) than the often-misleading dry weights. When we bought our 2015 Highland Ridge Open Range Roamer, we browsed a number of brands. After looking inside, I went right to the certification label and checked the GVWR before settling on a trailer that had a rating well below the towing capacity of our 2006 GMC Sierra 2500HD. When I told the salesman they should not recommend trailers with a GVWR higher than what the buyer's tow vehicle could handle, the typical reply was that they were not responsible for how the buyer loads the trailer and tow vehicle.

**Scott Lewis, Santa Margarita, California**

## Braking News

December's "Master of Sway Control" was missing one important detail. The Hayes Sway Master is not compatible with General Motors' integrated trailer brake controllers. For those who tow with a vehicle other than a GM with an ITBC and have an open A-frame trailer with a good position to mount it, the Sway Master should work well.

**Jim Williams, Binghamton, New York**

## Clear Steering

Bruce W. Smith's "Tight Steering" article in the November 2016 issue got my attention. I ordered the BD Diesel Steering Box Stabilizer, and my grandson helped me install it. It took only 30 minutes, and it made all the difference in the world.

**Everett Dennis, Richland, Oregon**

# A Bill of Goods

After reading Bill Graves' final column, "A Fond Farewell," in the December issue, I felt compelled to tell him how much I have enjoyed America's Outback month after month. We have also done extensive traveling, and my only regret is that I can't pass along the things I've experienced so others can feel the same excitement and joy — as Bill has done in each issue of *Trailer Life*.

**Ed Keller, Allentown, Pennsylvania**

Sad to see you go, Bill. As Bob Hope used to say, "Thanks for the memories."

**Pete Bustabad, Faison, North Carolina**

I have truly enjoyed the travel experiences Bill Graves has shared and want to wish him the best. By the way, Bill, you're only a kid at 84.

**Fran Boruff, Loveland, Colorado**



## Different Strokes

In "The Big and the Small of It," Bob Livingston's November Driver's Seat column, he mentioned the old saying "Different strokes for different folks" in regard to the 43-foot Voltage Epic fifth-wheel and the 20-foot Travel Lite Idea trailer tested in that issue. This should be standard in every issue — a high-end luxury RV and a more affordable working-person's camper.

I am not wealthy, but I want to purchase a trailer. Before starting a subscription, I knew very little about trailers and fifth-wheels. I am learning more with each issue and am grateful to your dedication to this field.

**Jeremy Landers, Snyder, Texas**

## Heavy Voltage

I have a question about the cargo-carrying capacity (ccc) of the Dutchmen Voltage Epic V3990 toy hauler featured in November's "Amped Up in Vermont." Early in the article, you say that the ccc is 1,697 pounds, but on the spec list it says 2,227 pounds. To my mind, that is not a lot either way for a fifth-wheel that size. As you mention, it would be easy to overload it.

**Lutz Fehst, Oakville, Ontario**

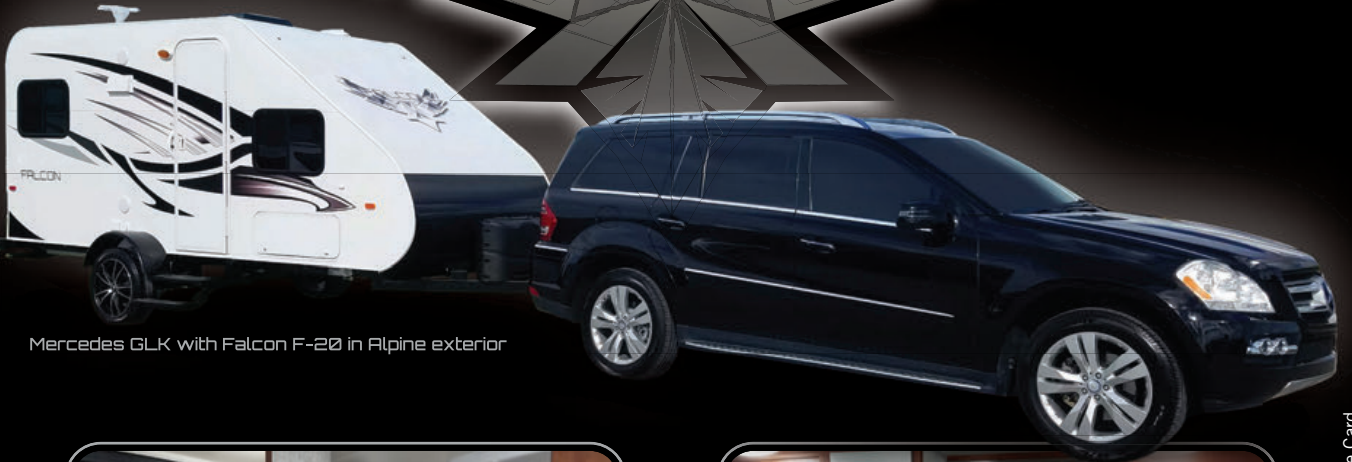
Chris Dougherty replies: *You are correct, Lutz. The numbers got scrambled, and we apologize for the error. Here are the true numbers. GVWR: 20,000 pounds. Unloaded vehicle weight (uww), which included a full water heater and one cylinder of LP-gas: 16,860 pounds. Filling the 150-gallon water tank added 1,250 pounds, and filling the second LP-gas cylinder added 30 pounds, bringing the as-tested uww to 18,140 pounds and the actual ccc (GVWR minus uww) to 1,860 pounds.*

*As you can see, the V3990 has a ccc that is 163 pounds higher than the article stated and 367 pounds lower than the spec chart listed. This ccc requires the owner to be selective when loading the RV with cargo, depending on the weight of toys in the garage and whether the 150-gallon water tank is filled for travel. Note that the V3990 has two gasoline tanks (one for the fuel station and one for the generator) that were empty for weighing.* 🚚

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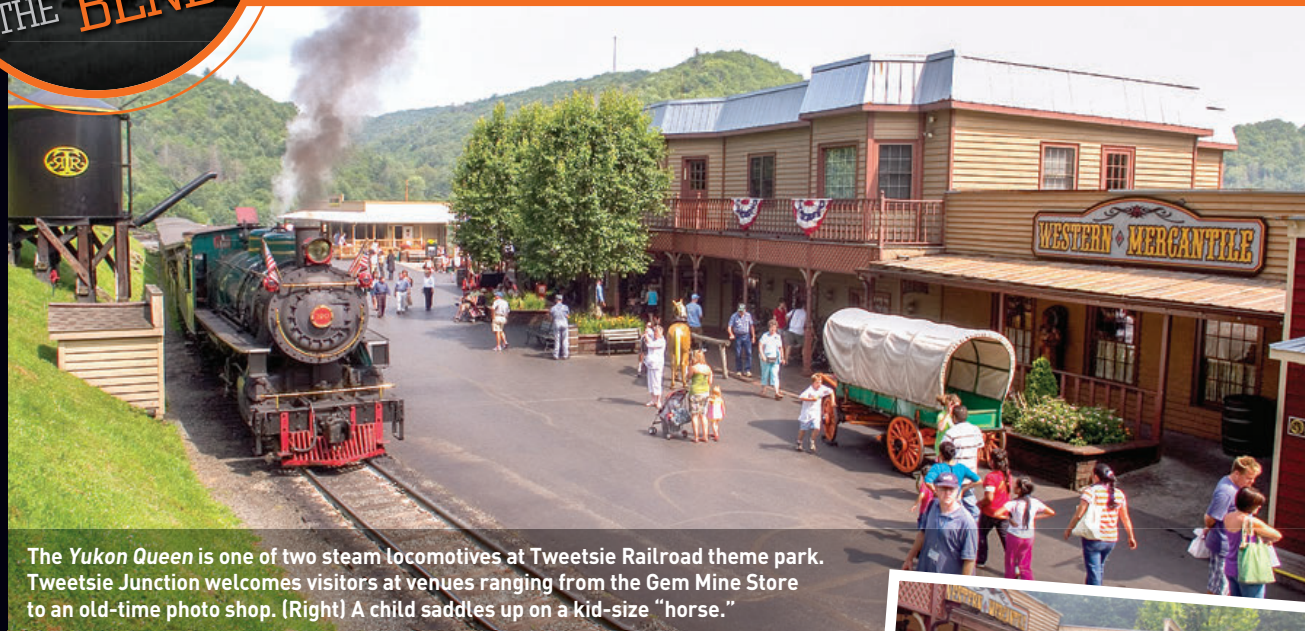
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The *Yukon Queen* is one of two steam locomotives at Tweetsie Railroad theme park. Tweetsie Junction welcomes visitors at venues ranging from the Gem Mine Store to an old-time photo shop. (Right) A child saddles up on a kid-size "horse."



## Ticket to Ride

North Carolina's first theme park, Tweetsie Railroad, celebrates its 60th anniversary in Blowing Rock

article and photos by James Richardson

Engine No. 12, a coal-fired steam locomotive built in 1917 for the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina (ET&WNC) Railroad, has a stormy past. After weathering tropical storms that wiped out large portions of the railroad's tracks and bridges, being moved to Virginia and then surviving a hurricane, No. 12 celebrates 100 years in 2017. Part of Tweetsie Railroad, North Carolina's first theme park, the locomotive is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Opened in 1957, Tweetsie Railroad began as an excursion train ride aboard No. 12, the only surviving narrow-gauge engine of the ET&WNC. No. 12, built by Baldwin Locomotive Works, was used to haul passengers and freight between Johnson City, Tennessee, and Boone, North Carolina, over the Appalachian Mountains. The theme park obtained another steam locomotive, the *Yukon Queen*, in 1960 from Alaska's White

Pass and Yukon Route.

Tweetsie Railroad is a family-oriented railway and Wild West theme park located on U.S. 321 between the western North Carolina towns of Boone and Blowing Rock. In addition to a 3-mile ride aboard an authentic steam locomotive, the park features amusement rides, live shows at the Tweetsie Palace Saloon, shopping, dining, a petting zoo and other entertainment.

The "Tweetsie" name comes from the train's shrill whistle as it transports passengers through the mountains and over a trestle. On its route through the scenic countryside, it encounters robbers and Indians. Special events take place throughout the season, including a Fireworks Extravanga, Cool Summer Nights Wild West Train Adventure and Railroad Heritage Weekend. The most popular for kids of all ages is the Ghost Train Halloween Festival, which runs week-end evenings from September 22 to

October 28 this year.

Celebrating its 60th season in 2017, Tweetsie Railroad is open Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from April 7 through May 26. Starting May 29, the park will be open daily through August 20, and then it's back to Friday through Sunday hours, August 21 through October 29, plus Labor Day Monday. Nearby RV parks include Honey Bear Campground, 4 miles from Tweetsie Railroad, and Flintlock and Grandfather campgrounds, both within 10 miles of the theme park.

**Tweetsie Railroad**  
828-264-9061, [www.tweetsie.com](http://www.tweetsie.com)

**RV Parks in Boone, North Carolina**  
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800-788-2582, [www.grandfatherhrrv.com](http://www.grandfatherhrrv.com)

**Honey Bear Campground**  
828-963-4586  
[www.honeybearcampground.com](http://www.honeybearcampground.com)

## Sundowner Aluminum Toy Haulers

Sundowner Trailers, a family-run builder in Coleman, Oklahoma, known for its equestrian trailers, offers the Pro-Grade toy-hauler line. The trailers are all-aluminum constructed with a seamless roof, built with the same structural design as Sundowner's horse and livestock trailers.

With many different floorplans available in the Pro-Grade line, from 9 to 40 feet in length and with sleeping capacity for two to 10 people, the toy haulers have bigger garages than competing toy haulers, according to the company. Interior heights range from 7 to 9 feet. The floorplans are what Sundowner calls a starting point, and customers work directly with dealers to create and customize the interior of



Pro-Grade 2586 GM

PHOTO BY SHAWN SPENCE PHOTOGRAPHY



Pro-Grade 2486 SGM

each trailer to fit specific needs.

The newest floorplan, the 2586 GM, is a single-slide 33-footer that weighs 8,500 pounds and has a 14-foot garage and a full rear ramp. The trailer is protected by a three-year hitch-to-bumper warranty and a transferable eight-year structural warranty.

Base price for the 2586 GM is \$66,726. Sundowner Trailers, 580-937-4256, [www.sundownertrailer.com](http://www.sundownertrailer.com)

### NEWSWIRE

#### MILITARY SERVICE



#### Granting a Veteran's Wish

Hope for the Warriors, a nonprofit organization dedicated to post-9/11 service members, their families and families of those killed in action, granted Sergeant First Class Robert Fleming his wish. Through A Warrior's Wish program, where combat-wounded service members are honored, the father of three was presented with a Jayco Jay Flight 28BHBE, a 33-foot travel trailer with a queen bed and double bunk beds. Fleming enjoys camping, but it became difficult after undergoing years of surgeries and rehabilitation. "We are forever grateful and humbled to be granted this wish," said Fleming. "The travel trailer will provide the opportunity to spend quality time with my family, outdoors, away from the crowds. It has become our own personal oasis."

#### RECREATION ECONOMY



#### Outdoor Rec Act Passed

The U.S. Senate unanimously and without amendment passed the Outdoor Rec Act on November 28, 2016. Led by senators Cory Gardner (R-CO) and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), the bill will formally assess and analyze the nation's outdoor-recreation impact. Outdoor recreation hosts more than a billion visits each year, and the outdoor economy supports an estimated 6 million jobs, generating \$646 billion in economic activity annually. Congress' rare bipartisan action was considered necessary to ensure that outdoor recreation receives official government recognition as a significant sector of the economy. The intention is that the Outdoor Rec Act will help shape good choices for enhancing future recreation on public lands and waters.

#### INDUSTRY NEWS



#### Top RV Sales Projected

According to the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) and announced at last fall's National RV Trade Show held in Louisville, Kentucky, about 435,000 motorhomes and towable RVs will be ordered by dealers in 2017. RV orders have never been higher, according to RVIA, and manufacturing jobs are flourishing in Elkhart and other cities in northern Indiana where more than 80 percent of all RVs are built in the United States. Top-selling RVs now average between \$60,000 and \$100,000, with Gen Xers joining Baby Boomers in dealers' showrooms. It's a big success story for American manufacturing in Indiana where the recession hit workers hard. The region is now experiencing a vibrant economy.

PHOTO BY CHRIS HEMER

## Sip and Savor in Southern California

Chocolate, wine, appetizers, live music — and a top-rated RV park to boot. Pechanga Resort and Casino again hosts its Chocolate Decadence and Wine Festival in Temecula, California, with proceeds benefitting Habitat for Humanity Inland Valley. Habitat's Brush with Kindness program provides home repairs to senior citizens and those unable to do the work themselves.

Guests can savor chocolate and other sweet creations, plus unlimited wine on February 10 from 7 to 10 p.m. at the Chocolate Decadence event (\$55). Then on February 11 from 1 to 5 p.m., Pechanga's ninth annual Wine Festival (\$65) offers wine and spirits, gourmet food and desserts from the resort's acclaimed chefs, plus a silent auction. Both events include entertainment, a souvenir wine glass and the option of VIP tickets for early admission.

Tickets for both events are \$100 when purchased together, and designated-driver tickets are \$30/\$40 with all the food and desserts the driver can consume. VIP tickets are \$75/\$85/\$140. The resort's RV park is a 10/10\*/10-rated Good Sam Park with a heated pool, two spas and 24/7 shuttle service.

Pechanga Resort and Casino, 877-711-2946, [www.pechanga.com](http://www.pechanga.com)



## Arizona RV Resort and Observatory

Visitors to Butterfield RV Resort in Benson, Arizona, are treated to free nightly star talks with self-proclaimed "astronerd" astronomer Ken Klein at the 144-site luxury resort's onsite observatory. The observatory features a Meade LX-200 GPS 16-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope housed in a 15-foot-diameter electrically operated dome. Klein gives talks on dwarf planets, Pluto, star clusters and everything under the moon, and everyone gets a chance to peer through the telescope. Butterfield is a 10/10\*/9.5-rated Good Sam Park located 45 miles east of Tucson.

Butterfield RV Resort, 800-863-8160, [www.rv-resort.com](http://www.rv-resort.com) 🚐

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## The Meaning of Life(time)

An Illinois reader sought RV Resolutions' help when the sealed wheel bearings on his dual-axle fifth-wheel failed:

► I am the second owner of a 2009 Cedar Creek fifth-wheel. I took the 39-foot fifth-wheel to have new tires put on in April 2016 and asked the garage to check the brakes and make sure the lifetime sealed bearings were OK. They were not. I checked at a truck repair shop and two bearing companies, and was told that the bearings were no longer being made.

After emailing Cedar Creek and receiving no reply, I contacted Lippert, the axle manufacturer, and was told that, since the bearings are no longer being made, both axles needed to be replaced. Lippert offered to pay for one axle, which left me paying \$755.25 for the other axle plus \$167.55 in shipping fees. I also had to pay the garage to take off the old axles and replace them with the new ones, for a grand total of \$1,132.80.

I have sent a second complaint to Cedar Creek about this situation and have heard nothing. I think I should be entitled to full reimbursement, since these were supposed to be lifetime sealed bearings. "Lifetime" is lifetime.

**Dale Regennitter, Roseville, Illinois**

### THE COMPANY RESPONDS

RV Resolutions contacted Cedar Creek, a division of Forest River, on Dale Regennitter's behalf and received the following reply from the manufacturer's warranty department:

Thank you very much for bringing this to our attention. I have looked into the situation, and a check for \$1,132.80 was requested and should be sent to Mr. Regennitter very shortly. Should you have any additional questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact us.

**Henry Sears, Warranty Administrator  
Cedar Creek, Topeka, Indiana**

After receiving the reimbursement check, Regennitter followed up with a thank-you note:

► I received a check from Forest River that covered the axles, shipping and installation charges. Thank you, Henry Sears of Cedar Creek, for helping to get this resolved. And thank you, RV Resolutions, for supporting us in a very timely manner. I am grateful for your assistance.  
**D.R.**



## A Case of Roof Rot

When a Nevada reader's trailer was in the shop for warranty repairs, one of the technicians discovered another problem up on the roof:

► We purchased a 2015 Keystone Sprinter from the St. George, Utah, Camping World in January 2016. This past August, when the RV was at Camping World having the gray-water dump valve replaced and the rubber seal on the living room slideout repaired under the one-year warranty, one of the service techs inspected the roof and told us the trailer has roof rot.

To date, both Keystone and the roof manufacturer, Alpha Systems, have denied our claim to have the roof repaired. Alpha Systems accused us of using chemicals on the roof. We most certainly did not, and we hope that

the company is not using this as a loophole to avoid the obligation of honoring our warranty, as the cost of a new roof is about \$6,500.

We are hopeful RV Resolutions can help us. We have already had to cancel several travel reservations because the Sprinter was in for repairs. This is an RV that has been used only a few times and has been well cared for.

**Joseph Trudeau, Las Vegas, Nevada**

### THE COMPANY RESPONDS

After informing Alpha Systems of Joseph Trudeau's difficulties, RV

Resolutions heard from the roofing supplier's warranty division:

Thank you for contacting us regarding our customer Joseph Trudeau. This issue has been resolved. Mr. Trudeau's roof is being replaced free of charge, yet due to the strange nature of the appearance of the roof membrane, we have requested that pieces of it be returned to us for testing so that we can determine the cause of the customer's issues.

**Monica McCabe, Warranty Manager  
Alpha Systems LLC, Elkhart, Indiana**

**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.

# PRICELESS EXPERIENCES



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## 2017 ULTRA LITE

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Highland Ridge RV, Inc., Circle 111 on Reader Service Card

# Back to Bas

The iconic Serro Scotty makes a comeback for old-school camping fun with some



# sics

modern conveniences



Introduced in 1957, the Serro Scotty was the quintessential working man's travel trailer and one of the most recognizable RVs of its time. Many of these vintage trailers are still on the road and are sought after by collectors. The trailers were built until 1997 when the manufacturing plant burned to the ground and production of the Serro Scotty ceased.

Fast-forward to 2016 when Little Guy Worldwide, working with John Serro's family to acquire the rights to the brand name, reintroduced the Serro Scotty with the same basic old-school camper feel of the original but with just a few modern amenities. The company hit the mark with the S188RBR, which we tested at Mystic KOA Holiday campground in North Stonington, Connecticut.

The park, which offers everything expected of a resort-area facility, is only 9 miles from the popular seaport destination of Mystic.

The 2017 S188RBR is a product of a unique collaboration between Little Guy, a company specializing in compact trailers, and Gulf Stream Coach. Gulf Stream was the ultimate builder of the trailer but followed exacting specs from Little Guy. This model is one of five floorplans introduced for 2017 and features a front queen bed, a rear bath, a center kitchen and a dinette.

Like the original Serro Scotty, the S188RBR is a stick-and-tin trailer (wood frame and aluminum exterior), and its small size and single axle mean it's light and easy to handle, and can be towed by many of today's smaller vehicles. This is



(Left) The Serro Scotty returns with a classic aluminum exterior and contemporary touches that include tinted radius windows, a radius entry door and a full-size awning. (Above, top to bottom) The Retro Package includes a Serro Scotty-theme bedspread and pillow shams for the comfortable queen bed that flips up to reveal room for storage. Matching aqua valances and dinette cushions complete the vintage look.

a modern RV in many respects, but with a back-to-basics equipment list and classic-styling cues, which really make it stand out, whether at an antique-car rally, a campground or even one of the burgeoning retro RV parks springing up across the country.

The new Serro Scotty is designed for true outdoor camping. Like its earlier counterparts, the trailer doesn't even have a built-in radio (one is available as an option). For the more important home-comfort stuff, it does come with a microwave and conveniently spaced 12-volt DC LED lights. Options include a 3-cubic-foot Dometic two-way refrigerator-freezer, a 6-gallon LP-gas DSI water heater (manual pilot is standard) and a TV antenna (no TV, though).

The front bed is a standard queen, flanked by closets on both sides, and is pretty easy to access and make. The bed lifts to open a storage area, a chunk of which is taken up by the 34-gallon freshwater tank and pump. The bed deck is a bit underbuilt with two small



The reimagined Serro Scotty has a retro-look dinette that converts to a bed and a compact but modern kitchen with a two-burner cooktop, an under-counter refrigerator-freezer and a microwave. Ample hardwood-style cabinets and LED lighting are standard throughout.



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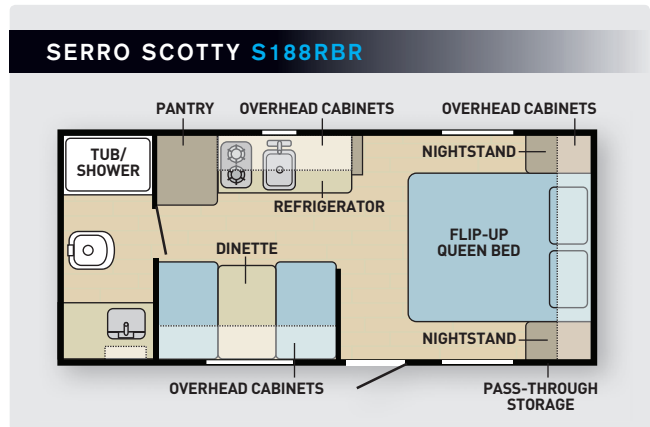
hinges and no props to hold up the platform, but we had a broom handle that worked just fine. The mattress is comfortable, and we had plenty of room to get dressed. The aforementioned closets have more than enough space to store necessities for a week away.

The kitchen is small, as you'd expect in a compact trailer, and the dinette is directly across from it. The table is nice and stable, utilizing two pipes that can be removed to make a bed. Each of the retro-look dinette cushions in the test unit lifted to reveal storage space. A large escape window above the table opens like a jalousie window for ventilation.

In the kitchen, a two-burner Suburban cooktop is packed sideways between the stainless-steel sink and a large pantry. With the design of the kitchen, this setup was unavoidable and makes the burners suitable for small pots and pans. The under-counter refrigerator is part of the Plus Package (\$980), which includes a TV antenna, a spare tire and two rear stabilizer jacks.

The test trailer was also equipped with the Retro Package (\$700), which gave it a neat classic feel and included chrome wheel-trim rings, a Serro Scotty-logo bedspread and pillow shams, and aqua valances, cushions and curtains.

The back wall of the dinette sports the system-monitor panel with water pump control by Lippert Components. The TV backer and appropriate connections are located here for a wall-mounted HDTV. The switch for the water heater is on



the opposite wall in the kitchen, and it would have been nice if these could have all been placed together. Above the dinette is an ample sized cabinet, perfect for dishes and other necessities.

Moving to the rear of the trailer, the well-equipped bathroom has a tub/shower and a standard-issue RV toilet and sink with a vanity. The vanity is nicely sized with plenty of counter space and has room below for towels. The tub/shower is a bit tight for those with a 6-foot frame, but is workable, especially with the skylight. Again, it is quite appropriate for a trailer this size.

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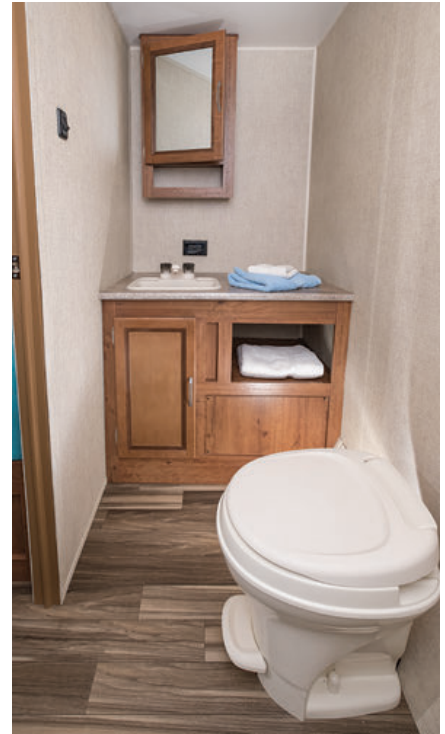
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The exterior is a step back in time, as the retro appointments are standard, except for the chrome trim on the wheels. The shape is more reminiscent of a contemporary Gulf Stream Ameri-Lite trailer than the original Scotty, but that's OK. The additional aerodynamics and living space afforded by modern RV design are worth it.

The 2017 Serro Scotty has many of the amenities RVers are looking for, including tinted radius windows, a radius entry door and radius compartment doors. The optional Lippert electric awning with LED lighting is a nice touch, and the black trim goes with the black-framed windows.

Exterior storage is quite limited, with a narrow cross-trailer cabinet up front. Plan on carrying your bigger gear, like folding chairs, barbecue grill and other camping equipment, in the tow vehicle. Exterior doors to access the under-dinette storage would have increased this but might have detracted from the streamlined ap-



(Above, from left) The nicely equipped bathroom extends across the rear of the trailer with a skylight and a tub-and-shower combo on the street side, a standard-issue foot-flush toilet in the center and a sink with a good-size vanity and mirrored medicine cabinet on the curb side. The vanity offers plenty of counter space, an under-sink cabinet and a handy place for towels.

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pearance. Considering that this is an 18-foot trailer, and the original Scotty had no outside storage, we're good with it. The S188RBR does have the standard 4-inch-square-tube bumper for the sewer hose.

The test trailer lacked front stabilizer jacks, which we found odd, but as it turns out, they were an option (\$126) that wasn't selected for the evaluation unit. Other options include a touch-screen radio with speakers (\$252), an 8,000- or 13,500-Btu air conditioner (\$385 and \$693 respectively), an Airxcel 16,000-Btu furnace (\$371) and a Fan-Tastic Vent fan (\$217).

Exterior siding is standard aluminum adorned with an aqua diamond-pattern panel across the midsection that gives the new Serro Scotty its retro appearance. The S188RBR sits atop a standard Lippert trailer platform with a single axle and a 3,500-pound gross axle weight rating. The trailer is equipped with a manual front jack and comes with a single 5-gallon LP-gas cylinder.

## SPECIFICATIONS

### 2017 SERRO SCOTTY S188RBR

Exterior Length	18' 4"
Exterior Width	8'
Exterior Height	9' 8"
Interior Width	7' 8"
Interior Height	6' 4"
Construction	Tubular-steel-frame chassis, wood frame, aluminum siding, TPO roof
Freshwater Cap.	34 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	36 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	36 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	5 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	3 cu. ft.
Furnace	16,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu

Tires	ST205/75D14 LRC
Suspension	Leaf spring
Weight (freshwater, water heater and LP-gas full, no cargo)	3,320 lbs.
Hitch Weight	460 lbs.
Axle Weight	2,860 lbs.
GVWR	3,880 lbs.
GAWR	3,500 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	560 lbs.
Base MSRP	\$16,471
As-Tested MSRP	\$21,900
Basic Warranty	2 years/structure and major components

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On top, the trailer features a one-piece-TPO crowned roof with the usual accoutrements, including two standard crank-up vents and the previously mentioned shower skylight. The trailer has a full two-year warranty on the

structure and all major components. The Serro Scotty S188RBR is a great little trailer that is ideal for small families or couples who want what we all do: to get away and enjoy the great outdoors in comfort and style. 🚐

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\* US Patent #6,986,524

# Kit and Caboodle



Perusing the aisles at the SEMA trade show, the world's largest automotive aftermarket equipment event, reveals an extravaganza of innovative products for RVers

**SEMA!** What is it? Back in 1963 a handful of car guys founded the Speed Equipment Manufacturers Association. In 1967 when Noel Carpenter moved the association's trade show to Las Vegas, there were 98 product booths. SEMA now stands for Specialty Equipment Market Association, and at the show last November, there were 165,000 displays by 2,400 companies spread out over six halls and acres of outdoor grounds that included three demonstration racetracks — well over 2.5 million square feet full of every product imaginable to make cars, trucks and RVs look cool, go faster and increase their reliability.

Oh, I should mention that the AAPEX trade show was just down the street. AAPEX is the Auto Aftermarket Products Expo with another 2,200 automotive aftermarket manufacturers and suppliers showcasing innovative products, services and technologies.

Together, these two annual shows represent the largest automotive-equipment event in the world, and even though both are closed to the general public, many of the amazing specialty vehicles are on display outside the convention's halls, and exciting demonstrations of professional "drifting" take place on the enclosed track. If you want a thrill, sign up for a test ride in a Shelby Cobra on the drifting track or check out the lineup of off-road trucks all prepped for the Baja 1000 race that starts in Ensenada, Mexico, a few days later.

As we roamed through the countless

aisles of products looking for the newest innovations for RV and truck owners like ourselves, it was sometimes like walking into a herd of migrating wildebeests going the wrong way. Through all the excitement were clear signs of the next technology waves to wash over us.

The first — maybe you've heard of it — is IoT, the Internet of Things. Some examples of this were the Craftsman tool chest that can be programmed to lock itself as the owner walks away and the DieHard 3-amp battery trickle charger that can be monitored and turned off or on remotely with wireless syncs to a smartphone or tablet. Then there's the Pearl license-plate camera that takes advantage of wireless technology to transmit multiple adjustable backup views to a dash-mounted smartphone.

The second glimmer of what's on the horizon for RVers is virtual reality. There

were several examples throughout the show, and the possibilities are endless. Never mind skydiving or sitting in the driver's seat of an off-road race truck from your living room chair, but just imagine looking for a new travel trailer or fifth-wheel and being able to take a full walk-around tour of all the features and options without leaving your home. Hang on. It's coming!

As the show wound down Friday afternoon, thousands gathered in bleachers and along the parade route as all of the super cars and trucks rumbled out to the SEMA Ignited event across the street, where the vehicles from the show were on display and the professional drift drivers were seeing how many tires they could burn up on the track. Food stands and live bands added to the carnival atmosphere, all open to the public.

Of course, we couldn't see it all. That would take weeks, but we are guessing that you are not looking for new titanium wheels for your Lamborghini or Ferrari. The equipment and accessories that follow show a selection of fun and functional products we discovered for the RV lifestyle. Right now, my feet hurt. Next year I want to see the show with a virtual reality headset.





I really liked the **BedRug BedTred Ultra Bed Liner**. The four-piece zipped liner attaches with hook-and-loop fasteners that won't damage the truck bed. The fade- and UV-resistant ¾-inch-thick foam is like that used in life jackets, so water runs off the surface and out of the bed's factory drain holes, drying in as little as 20 minutes, according to the company. The liner is tough enough to withstand dents and dings while protecting cargo in the bed. The foldable gap hinge keeps things from falling into the tailgate crack.

**BedRug, 615-847-0020, www.bedrug.com**



Most of the trucks at SEMA were adorned with various configurations of LED lights, and one stood out as an interesting candidate for a backup light. **Rigid Industries' D-SS Side Shooter** is unique because, in addition to the high output of its main LED panel, it also has side lights that give it 120 degrees of horizontal coverage. Rigid lights are backed by a limited lifetime warranty.

**Rigid Industries**  
855-760-5337, [www.rigidindustries.com](http://www.rigidindustries.com)



An alternative to camping coolers, the portable **ARB All-Weather Fridge Freezer** has a cooling capacity from 0 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit, even out in the sun. Features include a code-protected electronic locking system, a weather-

protected control panel and a recessed back for power-cable storage. The heavy-duty refrigerator/freezer weighs 70 pounds and is about 17 inches tall, 19 inches wide and 32 inches deep on the outside. Inside, two compartments keep food chilled and organized. The cooler can run on 12-volt DC with a three-stage integrated battery-protection system or it can operate on 120-volt AC power.

**ARB, 866-293-9078, www.arbusa.com**



Setting up camp is much easier without having to hold a flashlight, so I was impressed when I saw the **Coast FL75R Headlamp** demonstration. Featuring an adjustable reflective strap, the headlamp casts an ultra-wide flood beam, a long-reaching spot beam or a fixed red LED light. It uses a lithium-battery pack that can be recharged with a micro USB cable and also runs on standard alkaline batteries. The FL75R is impact- and weather-resistant, and is backed by a lifetime warranty against defects in materials and workmanship.

**Coast, 800-426-5858, www.coastportland.com**



A clear example of the new wave of technology called IoT, or the Internet of Things, is the 3-amp, 6/12-volt **DieHard Smart Charger and Maintainer** that allows users to wirelessly charge vehicle batteries from virtually anywhere. With the DieHard app for iOS and Android devices, users can receive notifications of the battery's status on a smartphone or tablet, and can start or stop the charging process. The trickle charger automatically senses whether batteries are 6- or 12-volt and keeps them 100 percent charged.

**Craftsman, www.craftsman.com**



On the market since 1996, **Plastex Plastic Repair Kits** contain a powder and liquid that, when mixed, become plastic that dries and is ready to be painted in an hour. Plastex kits are easy to use, have no mixing ratio and last indefinitely if stored out of direct sunlight and high heat. Every kit contains a reusable molding bar that makes it simple to reproduce broken or missing tabs and parts. The instructional video (included on the kit's CD) shows various uses for the product.

**G.T. Motorsports, 775-852-4066, www.plastex.net**



Created by former leaders of Apple's iPod and iPhone teams, **Pearl RearVision** is a wireless backup camera and alert system that installs in minutes. Dual HD cameras mounted in a license-plate frame deliver super-wide views of what's behind, with no drilling, wires or professional installation, and transform a smartphone into a rearview monitor. Audible and visual alerts provide warnings when objects and people are in the way. A phone mount is included, and the system updates automatically.

**Pearl Automation**  
844-877-3275, [www.pearlauto.com](http://www.pearlauto.com)



I've lost track of how many times I've used RapidFix products to repair small things while on the road, so I was curious about the newest one, **RapidFix Fiber Patch**. Fiber Patch is an ultraviolet- or sunlight-

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## Kit and Caboodle

activated self-adhesive repair patch. Made of fiberglass-reinforced polyester with strong adhesion properties, it is nonflammable and nontoxic. It sounded too good to be true, so I tried it by drilling a couple of 1/2-inch holes in an old plastic paint bucket. I followed the directions, set the bucket in the sun, and 20 minutes later, the patch was rock solid. I couldn't even peel it off with my fingernails. I tried it on a couple of pieces of metal and got the same results.

**RapidFix, 231-798-3600, [www.rapidfixuv.com](http://www.rapidfixuv.com)**



Whether you travel with bicycles, motorcycles, ATVs or a golf cart, or simply want to air up a flat tire on the side of the road, having an onboard air compressor can be a real advantage.

**Extreme Outback Products Air Compressors** are an engine-mounted, belt-driven option. Kits are available for Ford and Dodge/Ram three-quarter-ton and larger gas V-8 and V-10 trucks built since the 1980s, Chevy half-ton and larger gas V-8s built back to 1973, and all Cummins, Duramax and Power Stroke diesels. Auxiliary tanks for reseating tubeless tires are available and can be mounted anywhere on the frame with convenient outlets for external quick-connect air hoses.

**Extreme Outback Products**  
 866-447-7711, [www.extremeoutback.com](http://www.extremeoutback.com)



To prevent trailer theft, there is nothing like a visible sign of security. The **Bolt Off-Vehicle Coupler Lock** secures a trailer when it isn't hooked up to a tow vehicle. The lock permanently programs to the vehicle's ignition key

for single-key use, no matter how many Bolt locks are being used. Spring-loaded plate tumblers uniquely code the Bolt lock cylinder to that specific key the first time it is inserted. Made of hardened steel, the lock carries a lifetime warranty and works with 1 7/8-, 2- and 2 15/16-inch couplers.

**Bolt Locks, 844-972-7547, [www.boltlock.com](http://www.boltlock.com)**



Equipped with heavy-duty polyurethane cushions, the **Convert-A-Ball Cushioned Ball Mount** acts as a shock absorber, reducing bounce and vibration on Class IV hitches and helping to protect the drivetrain, hitch assembly and trailer contents from metal-to-metal jerking on the hitch pin, according to the company. The AM-SC series is designed for 2-inch hitch receivers. Rated for up to 10,000 pounds gross towed-vehicle weight and 2,000 pounds maximum hitch weight, the mounts are available in a variety of drops and are reversible for use as risers.

**Convert-A-Ball**  
 888-699-0073, [www.convert-a-ball.com](http://www.convert-a-ball.com)



When traveling in an RV, things are bound to spill, and stains just happen. Invisible Glass, known for its glass-cleaning products, teamed up with **Mötzenböcker's Lift Off**, known for its water-based biodegradable formulas that are uniquely "stain specific." I watched in amazement as a bad coffee stain and a splotch of hard-to-clean Kool-Aid on a beige carpet were removed in seconds with the correct formulas. Lift Off is available at retailers and Stoner Car Care in 16-ounce spray

bottles and smaller containers.  
**Mötsenböcker's Lift Off**  
 800-227-5538, [www.stonercarcare.com](http://www.stonercarcare.com)



Fans of Carhartt's work clothing can outfit their tow vehicles with the new **Carhartt Work Truck Cover**. Covercraft and Carhartt teamed up to produce truck and SUV covers that are classically styled and similar to the rugged clothing Carhartt produces. The covers protect vehicles from the elements with Rain Defender technology and sport the Carhartt logo on the sides and tailgate.



**Covercraft SeatSavers** have taken an interesting twist, thanks to wildlife artist Stacie Walker. Walker's new designs display patterns seen in nature and organic shapes of predators in the wild. Printed on robust 600-denier urethane-coated polyester, the covers are water- and mildew-resistant. SeatSavers are semicustom-fitted for car and truck bucket seats and include headrest and armrest covers when needed.  
**Covercraft**, 800-274-7006, [www.covercraft.com](http://www.covercraft.com)



The new **Curt OEM Puck System 5th Wheel Legs** for the Nissan Titan XD allow for easier and more secure installation of most of the company's fifth-wheel hitches. Utilizing the mounting platform built into Titan XD pickups with the towing-prep package, the legs

bolt to the hitch head and drop into the pucks using a set of anchors, instantly equipping the truck for fifth-wheel towing. The legs can be installed or removed by turning the handles on the unique quarter-turn anchoring system. The legs have a gross trailer weight capacity of 20,000 pounds but are limited to the lowest-rated towing component.  
**Curt**, 877-287-8634, [www.curtmfg.com](http://www.curtmfg.com)



**Hellwig Products Big Wig Air Springs** were a prominent feature on the Nissan Titan XD diesel overland truck and Lance truck camper setup Hellwig debuted at the SEMA show. The 2,800-pound-rated air springs allow the driver to fine-tune load support and ride quality, and level the load from front to back and side to side. To improve control on the highway and backroads, Hellwig also equipped the Titan XD with its forged, adjustable Big Wig Sway Bar.  
**Hellwig Products**  
 800-435-5944, [www.hellwigproducts.com](http://www.hellwigproducts.com)



The **Golight Stryker LED** searchlight attaches to any flat surface with a portable magnetic mount or a permanent stainless-steel bracket. The 40-watt, 2.8-amp light rotates a full 370 degrees with a 135-degree tilt and operates with a wireless remote or a hardwired dash control to direct its 320,000-candela beam a maximum distance of 3,711 feet. The Stryker LED can be an asset on a dark night, whether looking for the perfect campsite or a lost dog.  
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The **Trailer Valet XL** is a newly patented trailer A-frame jack designed to move trailers into tight corners — or almost anywhere else — without the help of a truck. The Trailer Valet focuses on maneuverability, convenience and safety. With a hitch-weight capacity of 1,000 pounds for trailers weighing up to 10,000 pounds, the trailer mover has a three-gear system that operates with a hand crank or an 18-volt cordless drill. The steering handle is also an automatic brake system that locks the trailer in place. Its 9-inch pneumatic tires provide good maneuverability, and a patented hitch-ball attachment features a quick release.

**Trailer Valet, 626-400-6299, [www.trailervalet.com](http://www.trailervalet.com)**



The 250-lumen **Grote XTL Task Flexible LED Strip** attaches with 3M VHB tape and is designed for use in toolboxes, compartments, truck beds and other locations where illumination is needed but power is difficult to source. Suitable for outdoor use, the .04mm-thick light strip is powered by a AA alkaline battery box that runs for more than 60 hours with one set of batteries, according to the company. Available in various lengths, the light is waterproof and resistant to chemicals commonly found around cars, trucks and RVs.

**Grote Industries, 800-628-0809, [www.grote.com](http://www.grote.com)**



The new midship **Transfer Flow 50-Gallon Replacement Fuel Tank** for the 2016 Nissan Titan XD diesel provides nearly double the fuel capacity and driving range of the Titan's stock 26-gallon tank. Everything needed, including straps, mounting hardware and illustrated instructions, is included. Installation can be done by the owner, a qualified mechanic or one of Transfer Flow's 320 authorized installers. Constructed from high-yield 12-gauge aluminized steel, the auxiliary tank is powder-coated with a durable black finish and has a six-year unlimited-mileage warranty.

**Transfer Flow  
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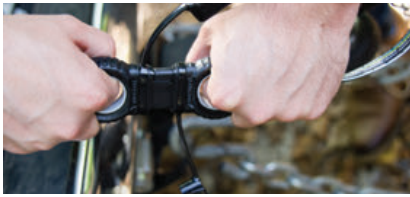
Little Guy Worldwide is bringing back the iconic Scotty camper that fueled a small-trailer craze in the '60s and '70s. Its retro look and modern conveniences will delight travelers.

Already the premier distributor of teardrop campers, Little Guy will manufacture and distribute Scottys at dealerships all across the USA, coming in 2017.



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The **Hopkins Easy-Pull** is claimed to be the first through-hole finger-grip device for common four-flat electrical trailer connectors. Weatherproof and easy to use, even with gloves on, the Easy-Pull looks like a great idea that was way overdue.



Hopkins also showcased its heavy-duty **Endurance RV Leveling Kit and Leveler LED Display**. The leveling kit contains

six plastic ramps that work with wood blocks (not provided) to stop RV tires from rolling out of position. A nonskid traction mat prevents slipping and doubles as a carrying strap. The Leveler display can be used with or without the leveling system. It mounts on the side of the RV and is visible in the rearview mirror. The number and color of lights indicate how many of the Hopkins Leveling System blocks are needed to level the RV.

**Hopkins Towing Solutions, 800-835-0129**  
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# GREAT LAND IN **THE FAR NORTH**

THIS YEAR MARKS THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ICONIC HIGHWAY LINKING VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA, TO DELTA JUNCTION, ALASKA. FOR RVERS, IT'S THE



# RTH

## TRAVELING DAWSON CREEK, THE ULTIMATE ROAD TRIP

In southwestern Yukon, the Alaska Highway hugs the shore of 50-mile-long Kluane Lake in the shadow of the St. Elias Mountains.



Flight-seeing above Kluane, Wrangell-St. Elias, Glacier Bay and Tatshenshini-Alsek, four high-reaching parks that make up a two-nation UNESCO World Heritage Site.



For many RVers, the Alaska Highway is one of the must-drives on their bucket list. With spectacular scenery and fascinating history, it's a monumental journey that creates lifetime memories. And with 2017 marking the 75th anniversary of this engineering marvel, there's no better time to hitch up the rig and hit the highway on what has long been called simply "the Road."

Most people begin their Alaska Highway adventure in Dawson Creek, a small town near the eastern border of northern British Columbia whose claim to fame is Mile Zero of the highway. However, we chose to begin in Fairbanks, one of our favorite interior Alaska towns, and head southeast in September with a rental trailer to the highway's official terminus in Delta Junction.

Perched along the Tanana and Chena rivers, Fairbanks is a great place to prep for the drive and a destination worth exploring. After setting up camp at River's Edge Resort, we head to the Cookie Jar for a sumptuous breakfast, including sticky cinnamon rolls.

Then we drive to Running Reindeer Ranch where deer whisperer Jane Atkinson leads 90-minute group walks through the woods with her herd of eight reindeer. Reindeer, cousins to wild caribou, aren't indigenous to North America, but they thrive here. Atkinson tells us about their diet, personalities and habits, including that a reindeer named Olive likes to sneak into her house.

That afternoon, we wander over to

Creamer's Field, a former dairy that has become a birding refuge. In the lush, green fields, we snap photos of dozens of sandhill cranes and Canada geese munching on the rich grasses before migrating south.

In the evening, we join our friend Deb, a longtime Fairbanks resident, for an all-you-can-eat salmon bake at Pioneer Park, a fascinating gold rush "town" reconstructed with historic buildings. After stuffing ourselves, we stroll to the Palace Theater for a fun and rollicking musical review of the city's history.

We wake to cool weather and cloudy skies, and after stocking up on groceries at the Tanana Valley farmers market, we head toward the town of Delta Junction. The 96 miles between Fairbanks and Delta Junction follows the silty Tanana River and is largely boreal forest — black spruce, willows, poplars and aspens — with the occasional RV park and lonely café.

Just before reaching Delta Junction, we cross a bridge over the Tanana. There's a huge suspension bridge that runs parallel across the river carrying the massive Trans-



Near Kluane Lake, an abandoned cabin along the Alaska Highway illustrates the rugged living conditions of bygone times.

Alaska Pipeline, an engineering feat equal to the Alaska Highway.

We churn through the Delta Junction visitor center, with its Mile 1422 marker, a signpost reflecting historical highway distance (mileage from Mile Zero is now 1,387 miles), and two giant metal mosquito statues. Mosquitoes were something the men who built the highway faced.

In 1942, the U.S. Army carved the highway out of a vast wilderness of boreal forest, permafrost and muddy, boggy muskeg in temperatures ranging from 90 to minus-50 degrees Fahrenheit. Built as a military

supply road in response to Japanese threats in World War II, the Alaska Highway required the combined efforts of 11,000 troops, including seven regiments of engineers, plus 16,000 American and Canadian civilians.

The job also used 7,000 pieces of equipment including several now-rusty trucks, Jeeps, bulldozers and road graders on display at Delta Junction's Sullivan Roadhouse Museum. At the end of the 19th century, roadhouses cropped up every 15 to 20 miles along roadways to provide food and shelter for prospectors and other travelers. The free museum, filled with artifacts

and period images, illustrates this bygone era.

The Alaska Highway out of Delta Junction is stick straight, cutting through the forest like a laser, until just outside the town of Tok. Small lakes, some with big white tundra swans, dot both sides of the highway. Washboard roads and frost heaves, like mosquitoes, are part of the landscape in the Far North, and we encounter our first road construction.

The weather is misty, as the landscape changes from flat plains to steep mountains, their flanks dressed in the golds and yellows of fall. On



(Far left) Running Reindeer Ranch, a unique attraction near Fairbanks, lets visitors take a 90-minute walk on the wild side with a herd of domesticated reindeer. These gentle and personable cousins of caribou have learned to hike safely with people. (Left) Gravel, pilot cars and road construction are all part of the Alaska Highway driving experience.

other stretches, spruce-bark beetles have killed the trees, leaving eerie gray ghost forests.

In Tok, we stop at the visitor center and pick up a free Tetlin Wildlife Refuge auto-tour CD. At Fast Eddie's, we order juicy burgers and tap into free Wi-Fi, which can be scarce along the road.

Gaining elevation, we turn on the heater to counter the chill. September has the advantages of fewer crowds and better shoulder-season prices, but weather can be iffy, and both the sporadic rain and cool temperatures signal that fall has arrived.

It's after 8 p.m., but there's still plenty of light and long stretches of loose gravel. The forest seems endless here, and we pop in the Tetlin CD and pass the time learning about the area's geology and wildlife.

We pull over at a wide turnout (elevation: 1,865 feet) with a sweeping view of the confluence of two rivers that form the Tanana. An information sign describes the magnitude-7.9 earthquake that struck this area in 2002, the largest such land quake in 150 years.

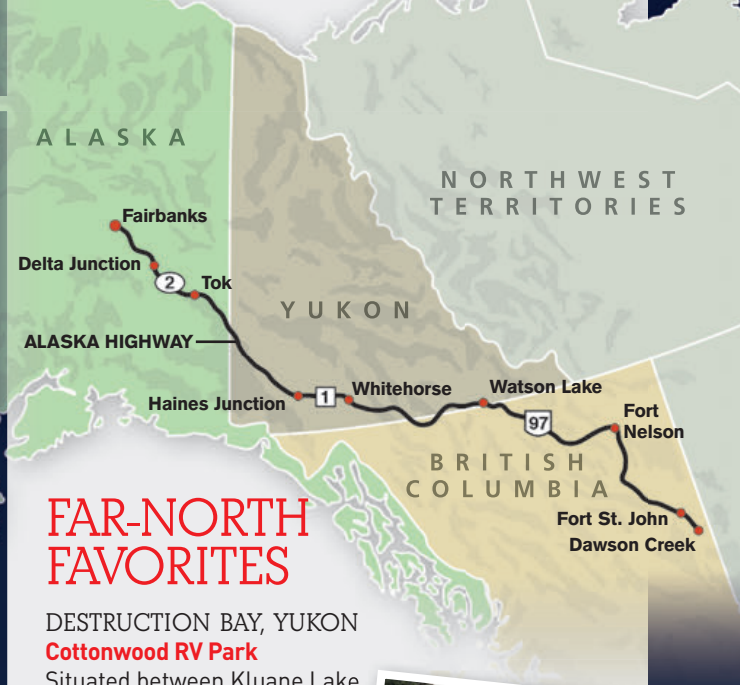
At the Tetlin Wildlife Refuge visitor center, an impressive trapper-style cabin, we return the auto-tour CD. We also take advantage of the center's expansive decks and scopes to view more of the refuge's forest. In a lake far below, we spot several large tundra swans that have yet to migrate south.

It's after 9 p.m. when we arrive at a lonely RV park just shy of the Yukon border. We tumble into bed and, despite the wind howling, sleep soundly.

### FROM BEAVER CREEK TO BURWASH

After gassing up in the morning, we head to the border crossing, provide our identification and quickly enter the territory of Yukon. Despite its name, more than two-thirds of the Alaska Highway is actually in Canada. While the United States built the road, the British Columbia and Yukon portions were turned over to the Canadian government soon after WWII. The rest is owned by the government of Alaska.

Fall colors and sun shafts light up the forests along the Alaska Highway, as the author makes her way south toward Mile Zero.



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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### **The Milepost**

Updated annually, the popular guidebook charts Alaska, Yukon and British Columbia highways, mile by mile. [www.themilepost.com](http://www.themilepost.com)

### **Travel Alaska**

The official State of Alaska tourism website provides timely vacation-planning tools and visitor information. [www.travelalaska.com](http://www.travelalaska.com)

DESPITE ITS NAME, MORE THAN TWO-THIRDS OF THE ALASKA HIGHWAY IS ACTUALLY IN CANADA.



In the little burg of Beaver Creek, Yukon, we pause at Buckshot Betty's to buy a cinnamon roll to go with this morning's coffee. Beaver Creek, Canada's most westerly community, is a small town with several gas stations, a couple of cafés, a few motels and plenty of RV parks.

We set our clocks ahead one hour, and as we cross the sparkling water at Beaver Creek Bridge, a flock of ptarmigans, the North's "wild

chickens," crosses the road. At the Dry Creek rest area, we're treated again to lake views and four huge tundra swans. Just a hop down the road, we spot two more of these elegant birds, then four with cygnets.

Fall is marching up the sheer mountainsides, with vibrant orange and yellow interspersed with granite outcrops. When the sun peeps out, the hillsides light up. This vast country is spectacular.

At the Pickhandle rest stop, we learn that this is one of the most important bird migration corridors in central Yukon and Alaska. Because of severe winter weather, more than 85 percent of the birds that nest in Yukon must fly south each year, and many use this route.

Stopping for a break at the Pine Valley Bakery and Lodge, we're literally in the middle of nowhere. Who'd expect to find an authentic French creperie? Mylène Le Diuzet and her husband, Olivier, cook up delectable savory and sweet plate-size crepes, and we dig in.

We encounter road construction, then 30 minutes of washboard and frost heaves, and distract ourselves by watching for eagles and swans. To the southwest rise the mighty St. Elias Mountains, and the Yukon River below is a silver ribbon running along the base of the mountains.

After more road construction, it's 6 p.m. when we finally reach Kluane Lake, a spectacular 50-mile-long waterway renowned for giant trout. We pull into a lakeside electric site at neat-as-a-pin Cottonwood RV Park. Longtime owners Maryanne and Glenn Brough tell us that the lake's depth averages 300 feet. However, the retreat of the Kaskawulsh Glacier has caused the Slims River that feeds the lake to dry up. While the Broughs have gained beachfront, they worry about the lake's future.

In the morning, we visit the Kluane Museum of Natural History in Burwash. The museum displays fur coats and beadwork from the local Southern Tutchone people and features excellent taxidermy exhibits, including wolverine, mountain goat, caribou, red fox, grizzly, moose, and stone and Dall sheep. It's here we learn that building the Alaska Highway nearly destroyed the culture of these formerly isolated native people.

As we leave, we encounter a man on a bicycle, his feet wrapped in plastic bags, his clothing soaked from rain. From England, this intrepid athlete had been biking for seven months from South America to the Alaska Highway. He gratefully accepts

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### OF SHEEP AND GLACIERS

Fall colors have become nearly fluorescent, and whenever the clouds lift, we get a glimpse of the snowy peaks of the St. Elias Mountains, the highest coastal mountain range on earth. We stop at the Tachäl Dhäl visitor center, a lonely outpost in Kluane National Park that overlooks Sheep Mountain, a monolith towering 5,000 feet above Kluane Lake. We peer through powerful spotting scopes to see dozens of Dall sheep, including lambs, scampering across the scree-strewn slopes.

Pulling into Haines Junction in the late afternoon, we head for the airport. We've been playing cat and mouse with the weather and have a glacier flight-seeing tour scheduled — maybe, just maybe, we'll get lucky.

Our pilot with Kluane Glacier Air Tours pulls the blue-and-white Cessna onto the tarmac and gives us a thumbs up. He says clouds have obscured some routes, but the flight should be spectacular. Just before 5 p.m., we buckle in, and we're airborne.

We sail effortlessly over green and gold forests, and then past Martha Blackman and Archibald mountains, the gateway into Kluane National Park and Reserve. The 8,500-square-mile reserve is wild, roadless country filled with silty rivers, mountains so high they're permanently blanketed in snow and massive glaciers choked with 1,000-foot crevices and turquoise-blue melt pools. In fact, Kluane contains 17 of Canada's highest mountains, including 19,551-foot Mount Logan.

In the heart of the mountains, we fly over Kluane National Park and Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park, both in Yukon, and Alaska's Glacier Bay and Wrangell-St. Elias national parks. This system of four parks was designated an international UNESCO World Heritage Site for its impressive glacier and icefield landscapes. This is land that's folded over on itself into huge mountains, valleys and glaciers that look like otherworldly

ice racetracks. Only the lower flanks of the peaks grow trees — white spruce, trembling aspen, balsam poplar. The barren upper portions are crowned with fantastic snowcaps.

Suddenly, the view opens into miles and miles of spectacular icefields — bright, white stretches of

snow and ice cradled by 10,000-foot-plus peaks. This is where much of the 45 feet of snow that falls each year ends up. On the horizon looms Mount Logan, its massive presence dominant in this sea of mountain giants. It's a view we'll remember forever from our Alaska Highway adventure. 🚚



**Part II:** In the March issue, Bobbie Hasselbring's Alaska Highway journey continues south through Yukon and into the Rockies before concluding at Mile Zero in British Columbia.

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# SUSPENSION BASICS

A well-maintained suspension system keeps trailers and fifth-wheels rolling down the highway smoothly and safely

**W**hen it comes to RV maintenance, the first components that usually come to mind are the roof, batteries and furnace. While trailer and fifth-wheel suspension systems are frequently overlooked, a properly functioning and well-maintained suspension ensures a safe and enjoyable towing experience.

Modern suspension systems serve as attachment points between the trailer's axle(s) and frame. When traveling over bumps and holes, the suspension system keeps the tires in contact with the road while absorbing and damping the jolting effect road-surface imperfections can cause.

## Leaf-Spring Suspension Systems

Most trailer and fifth-wheel suspension systems use leaf springs to cushion the ride because leaf-spring setups are mechanically uncomplicated and inexpensive. Leaf springs have a main spring with eyelets at each end and progressively shorter springs fastened by a center bolt. The length, width, contour, thickness and number of leaves determine how stiff the leaf spring is and how much weight it can support. Leaf springs have been used in suspension systems for centuries, although modern manufacturing techniques have greatly increased their strength and reliability, as well as how smoothly or "softly" they do their job, compared to their medieval ancestors.

On single-axle suspension systems, the leaf spring is attached to the front hanger, which is welded to the frame of the trailer. The rear of the leaf spring is bolted to a spring shackle. A rear hanger connects the shackle to the frame. Leaf springs are designed with an arch, the contour of which is part of the spring design for a specific function. When a leaf



This equalizer shows extreme wear from a pivot bolt that carved a slot down the center.

spring is placed under a load, the spring flattens somewhat and elongates. The spring shackle allows the spring to move rearward and upward as it compresses.

Tandem-axle and triple-axle suspension systems are somewhat more complicated and use a component called an equalizer to distribute weight between the axles while traveling over bumps and dips. If an equalizer wasn't used on a tandem system, one axle could be forced to support an excessive amount of weight. In a worst-case scenario, a large bump being traversed by the front axle of a tandem suspension, without an equalizer, could cause the wheels/tires of the rear axle to lift off the ground. Momentarily, the front axle would be supporting the entire weight of the trailer.

Equalizers attach to a central hanger welded to the trailer's frame. Shackle links and bolts connect the leaf springs to the equalizer and allow the springs to lengthen when compressed. Most trailers and fifth-wheels are equipped with triangle-shaped equalizers made of solid steel.

Shackle bolts, spring eyebolts and equalizer bolts all serve as pivot points in a suspension system. To reduce friction between the bolts and the suspension components, bushings — typically made of nylon — are inserted in the leaf-spring eyes and in the equalizer. Better-quality, higher-cost systems use brass or bronze bushings, and the suspension bolts include zerk fittings so the user can add grease as needed for maintenance.

### Torsion-Axle Suspension Systems

A smaller segment of the trailer market uses a different type of suspension without leaf springs. Torsion axles use a steel axle tube that's square or roughly triangular in shape and an inner steel bar that's also square or triangular, with three or four rubber "bars" inside the axle tube between the exterior tube and the inner bar. The wheel spindle is mounted to a trailing arm that is fastened to the inner bar. As the trailer weight applies pressure to the trailing arm and moves it up,

**LCI's Correct Track suspension alignment system's octagon cam can be adjusted in 1/4-inch increments to provide a smoother ride and prevent premature tire wear.**



the inner steel bar "pinches" the inner rubber bars inside the outer tube, and that "pinching" or squeezing pressure is what provides the suspension support and motion.

Rubber torsion suspensions have several advantages over leaf springs. For starters, there is no metal-to-metal contact between moving parts, eliminating the chance of worn metal components. Rubber is used as a spring, creating a smoother ride with less vibration. Torsion-arm axles bolt to the trailer frame, making installation and replacement simpler. And by bolting directly to the frame, a torsion axle acts as a cross-member and adds strength to the trailer frame.

Torsion suspension systems are somewhat more costly, on average, than leaf-spring setups. Unlike leaf springs, torsion systems are true independent suspension systems. Because torsion axles are designed to work independently, they do not provide equalization between the axles when used in a tandem- or triple-axle system.

### Inspecting Suspension Systems

There is no set mileage or duration recommendation for RV suspension maintenance, but all of the components should be visually inspected twice a year or every 6,000 miles.

First, do a general examination of the trailer. Does the trailer lean toward one side, or does one tire sit higher in the wheel well than the others? Are the tires on one side of a tandem suspension the same distance apart as the tires on the other side of the trailer? Although these conditions might be caused by the contents of the trailer being



**(Above, from left)** Removed from a 2013 travel trailer, these nylon bushings have deteriorated, allowing the shackle bolts to elongate the bolt holes in the shackle plate. A greaseable "wet bolt" has a zerk fitting in the head of the bolt and a channel that allows grease to enter the space between the bolt and bushing. MORryde offers heavy-duty components (top set in right photo) to replace worn stock shackles. The MORryde kit includes thicker shackle plates, bronze bushings and wet bolts.

# SUSPENSION BASICS

poorly distributed, they could also indicate broken or worn suspension components. Worn components often move excessively while the trailer or fifth-wheel is being towed, causing clunking, grinding or creaking noises. Trailer sway can also indicate problems with the suspension system.

Leaf springs should be carefully inspected for cracks and breaks. They should also be checked to make sure they have maintained their arch; it is possible for one or more leaf springs to flatten due to wear. Separation of the leaves at the ends of the spring may indicate a weak spring pack and may require replacement. If the springs have a metal spring clip around two or more leaves, verify that the clip is still properly in place. Individual leaves should be checked for bending and misalignment.

Both leaf-spring and torsion axles are manufactured with a slight bend, or camber, causing the center of the axle shaft to be slightly higher than the outer ends. Axles should be visually inspected to verify that the axle tube has not been bent downward due to overloading or striking a curb or pothole.

When examining the axle from under the front or rear of the trailer, the axle tube should appear symmetrical with both sides of the tube sloping slightly upward toward the middle of the axle tube. Placing the center of a straight edge under the center of the axle will help identify a bent axle. The ends of the straight edge should touch the axle tube, while the center should have a slight gap. A string line can also be used. If the axle is bent upward on one or both sides, the axle will need to be straightened or replaced.

All other components such as hangers, shackle plates and equalizers should be visually inspected



for cracking, bending, broken welds and excessive rusting. All bolts should be retorqued to the manufacturer's recommendations. Spring shackles and equalizer mounting holes in particular are subject to wear because the spring eyebolts rub constantly against these components, and it's usually a steel-to-steel contact area. It's not unusual to find elongated holes in the shackle plates or equalizer parts, as well as grooves in the spring eyebolts. Diligent and frequent lubrication can help reduce this kind of wear.

Nylon bushings used in leaf-spring suspensions are subject to wear and should be closely inspected. A worn bushing will cause metal-to-metal contact between the bolt and the suspension component, and may result in premature failure. Because the bushings are inserted in the components, a visual inspection is not possible. The components must be removed for inspection. This requires raising and properly supporting the trailer, followed by removing the shackle bolts, spring eyebolts and equalizer bolts. The bushing, bolts and components can then be inspected for wear. The component bolt holes should be examined for excessive wear and elongation.

## Suspension Upgrades

When replacing worn suspension parts, consider upgrading the original components. Suspension upgrades are available from the original equipment manufacturer and aftermarket manufacturers.

A common upgrade is replacing nylon bushings with wet bolts. Wet bolts include brass or bronze bushings and greaseable bolts with built-in zerk fittings. Greaseable bolts allow grease to be injected between the bolt and bushings, reducing wear and increasing longevity. Never Fail bushings from Lippert Components (LCI) are another, less-expensive alter-

**Never Fail bushings from LCI are maintenance-free, permanently lubricated and guaranteed for life.**



**LCI's Equa-Flex equalizer uses a rubberized torsion compound to absorb road shock and vibration.**

native. They require no lubrication and carry a lifetime warranty.

Equalizer upgrade kits are also available. Some feature rubber dampers that absorb road shock and vibration, improving ride quality and reducing wear. Air-ride equalizers employ air bags to smooth the trailer's ride.

MORryde International offers complete suspension-system upgrades designed to increase the suspension travel and absorb road bumps. MORryde's IS system features an independent design that allows each wheel to respond individually to the road. This system is sometimes used as original equipment on larger, higher-end travel trailers and fifth-wheels. Look for a complete installation of MORryde's SRE4000 suspension system and heavy-duty wet bolt and shackle kit in the March 2017 issue.

## Axle Alignment

Just like the tires on a car or truck, tires on trailers and fifth-wheels must be oriented parallel to the trailer's frame for the trailer to track straight. Worn or broken suspension components, a bent axle or spindle, improper axle installation or an out-of-balance load can contribute to axle misalignment. In some instances, the misalignment might be obvious. A tire that points inward (toe-in) or outward (toe-out), or tires that are too close together on one side of the trailer are indications that the axles are out of alignment or may have been installed improperly at the factory. Measuring the axle-tube to axle-tube distance at each

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# SUSPENSION BASICS

end can determine if they are parallel. Measurements can also be taken to check wheel alignment, but a qualified frame and suspension shop can do this to a finer degree of accuracy.

Premature tire wear is often a sign of trailer axles that are out of alignment. Worn tires that show the worst wear along one edge and progressively less wear toward the other edge indicate a toe-in or toe-out condition. Rapid wear along only one shoulder of the tire is a sign of excessive camber, with the top of the tire tilted away from or toward the trailer frame.

Correcting axle misalignment may be as simple as balancing the load on each axle. When an axle has more weight on one side than the other, the leaf spring on the heavier side will compress and elongate more than the leaf spring on the lighter side, creating an out-of-alignment condition. Correcting the balance will correct the alignment.

In the case of broken or bent suspension components, replacement of the components will be required. However, it might be possible for a trained technician to straighten a bent axle using specialized equipment. Straightening an axle may save a considerable amount of money compared to the cost of replacement.

Some trailers and fifth-wheels come equipped with LCI's Correct Track trailer-alignment system. Correct Track allows an authorized alignment center to adjust the trailer's alignment in 1/4-inch increments. Precise measurements are taken with a laser alignment tool. After the measurements are recorded, the service technician can adjust the Correct Track octagon cam to properly align the suspension. In the aftermarket, the Correct Track system

**Air-ride equalizers such as LCI's Center Point air-ride trailer suspension system use air bags to improve ride quality.**

can be installed on trailers that don't have the system as original equipment.

## Shock Absorbers

Despite their name, shock absorbers do not absorb shock; they are technically oscillation dampers. The purpose of a shock absorber is to damp the suspension movement. When a trailer hits a bump, the suspension is compressed and moves toward the trailer's frame, absorbing the shock exerted by the road irregularity. The suspension must now release its energy and return to its original position.

When the suspension decompresses, it pushes upward on the trailer frame. Gravity then pushes the frame downward, recompressing the suspension. The effect is that the trailer bounces before settling back into a stable towing stance. Anyone who has experienced a failed shock absorber in their car has felt the uncontrolled up-and-down cycling of a spring.

Although shock absorbers play an important role in suspension systems, only a few trailers and fifth-wheels come equipped with them. Even though trailers are not built for passenger comfort, a rough-riding trailer is subject to premature wear and damage to its contents. Fortunately, several manufacturers offer add-on shock-absorber kits, including Dexter Axle, LCI, Monroe and RV Improvement Systems.

## Axle-Reversal Kits

Leaf-spring suspension systems come in two configurations. Underslung suspensions are designed with the axle mounted over the leaf springs, while overslung suspensions have the axle mounted under the leaf springs.

Underslung suspensions make the trailer sit a few inches lower to the



ground, which helps lower the trailer's center of gravity and somewhat lessens the effect of wind resistance while traveling. Although a lower stance might be beneficial when traveling on a highway, there are situations when it's advantageous for a trailer to sit higher, such as when traveling off-pavement or being towed with a tall vehicle. A slightly higher trailer also reduces the chances that low-hanging hardware, such as the dump valves, will be damaged by road obstacles.

Axle-reversal kits, such as Dexter Axle's Over/Under conversion kit, provide all the hardware necessary to move an axle from over the leaf springs to under the leaf springs. Axle-reversal kits include new spring plates, spring perches and U-bolts. These kits allow the axle to be relocated under the leaf springs while maintaining its camber.

Following a regular schedule of inspection and maintenance will increase the reliability and longevity of any trailer or fifth-wheel. Installing upgraded heavy-duty components will pay dividends through decreased repair bills and less downtime. All of these add up to more miles of trouble-free towing. 🚚

## Resources

**Dexter Axle**  
260-636-5311, [www.dexteraxle.com](http://www.dexteraxle.com)

**Joy Rider/RV Improvement Systems**  
574-370-4515  
[www.rvimprovementsystems.com](http://www.rvimprovementsystems.com)

**Lippert Components (LCI)**  
574-535-1125, [www.lci1.com](http://www.lci1.com)

**Monroe Shocks and Struts**  
734-384-7809, [www.monroe.com](http://www.monroe.com)

**MORryde International**  
74-293-1581, [www.morryde.com](http://www.morryde.com)

**Shock mount kits like this one from LCI provide all the hardware needed to add shock absorbers to a trailer or fifth-wheel.**



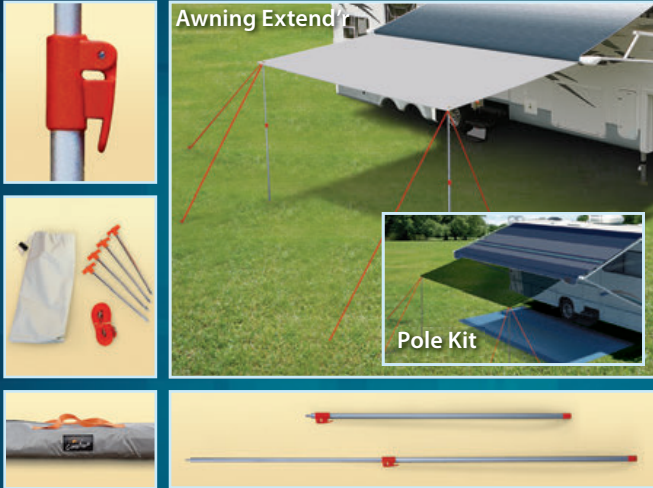


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# ON THE TRAIL OF BILLY THE KID

A NEW MEXICO NATIONAL SCENIC BYWAY TRACES THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A NOTORIOUS OUTLAW FOR A COMPELLING LESSON IN FRONTIER HISTORY

I'm one of those people who needs only the flimsiest of excuses to go exploring. Not long ago I was listening to one of my favorite movie-soundtrack albums, and it inspired me to take a trip. The soundtrack was from *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, the 1973 Western drama directed by Sam Peckinpah and starring James Coburn as Garrett and Kris Kristofferson as Billy. The best part was seeing Bob Dylan in a fairly meaty dramatic role and listening to his inspired music written for the movie. Time to hit the road.

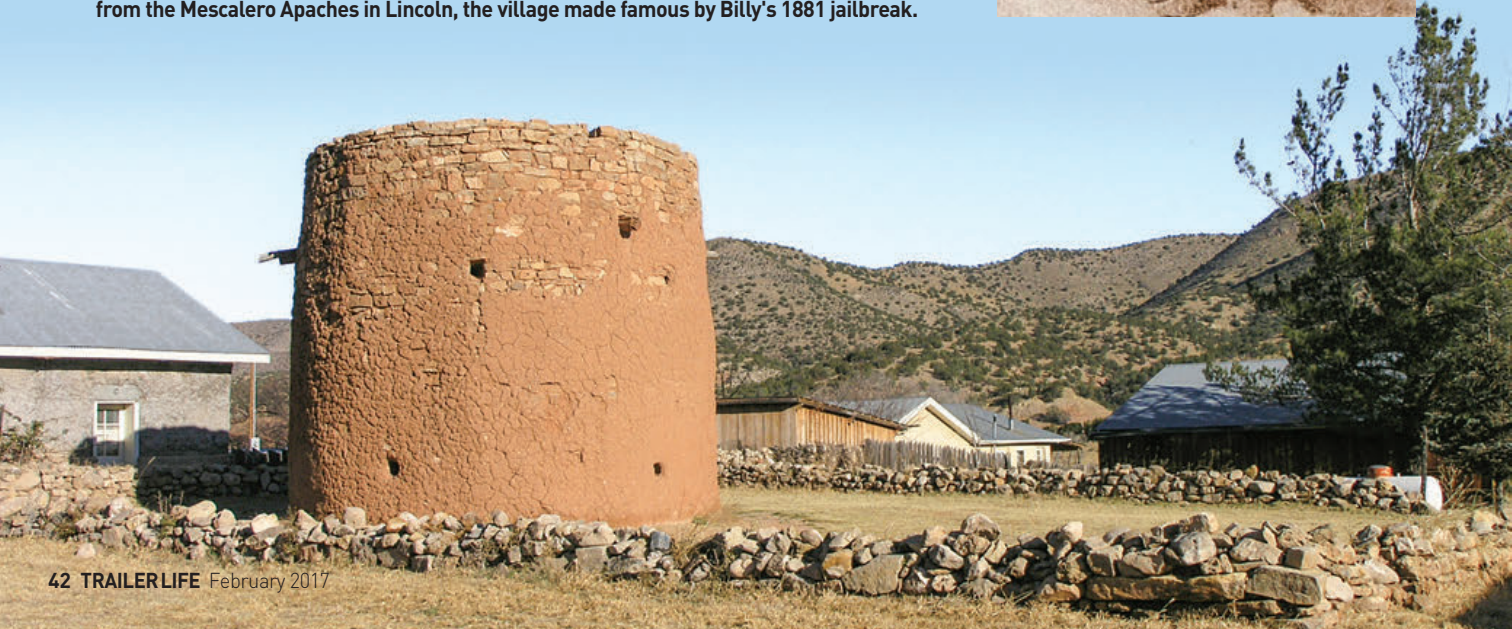
It's interesting to consider what makes a celebrity in America. Sometimes it's a war hero or someone behind a medical breakthrough for the betterment of humanity. Sometimes it's a "personality" whose virtues are difficult to discern. In mid-19th-century New Mexico, we had two archrivals — the good guy, Sheriff Pat Garrett, and

the bad guy, killer William H. Bonney, alias Billy the Kid. Guess which one has had several movies, TV shows, scholarly treatises, museums, hit songs and a National Scenic Byway named for him?

The man we know as Billy the Kid was born Henry McCarty in 1859 in the Hell's Kitchen area of Manhattan when it was better known as a neighbor-



The iconic portrait of 20-year-old William H. Bonney (right), nicknamed Billy the Kid, shows him clutching an equally iconic Winchester rifle. A stone *torreón* (below) protected townsfolk from the Mescalero Apaches in Lincoln, the village made famous by Billy's 1881 jailbreak.





hood than a TV cooking show. At that time it was an Irish slum inhabited by tough people described in 1835 by Davy Crockett as follows: "In my part of the country, when you meet an Irishman, you find a first-rate gentleman; but these are worse than savages; they are too mean to swab hell's kitchen."

Billy's Irish mother moved the family west, and he ended up spending most of his time in Arizona and New Mexico. For reasons not entirely clear, he began calling himself William H. Bonney and earned the nickname Billy the Kid because of his small stature (5 foot 7, 135 pounds in his prime) and youth (arrested for theft at age 15, a murderer at 18).

Fleeing the law, Billy settled in Lincoln, New Mexico, where he rustled cattle and signed on with a gang on one side of a turf war between two competing factions looking to control commerce in Lincoln County, particularly selling beef to nearby Fort Stanton. Known as the Lincoln County War, it

**Repurposed for retail, a historic Lincoln building probably dates back to the 1850s. Originally settled by the Spanish, the town is better known as the locus of the 1878 Lincoln County War and for the resident ranchers, rustlers and lawmen who played a role in the deadly feud.**

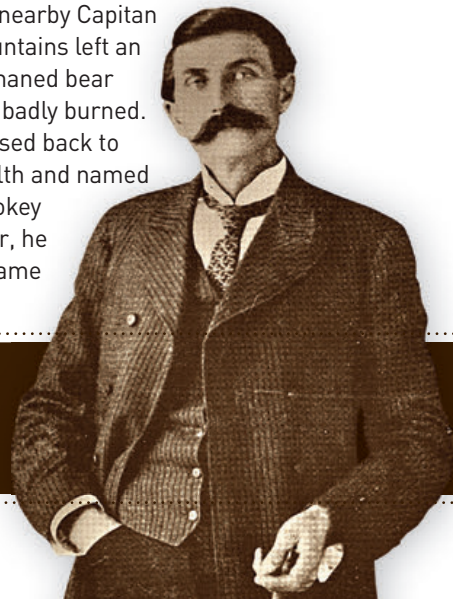
vaulted Billy into the big leagues when he and two companions killed Sheriff William J. Brady and one of his deputies in revenge for their having killed his boss. Captured by Garrett, Billy was convicted of murder, incarcerated and sentenced to die by hanging in May 1881. He enhanced his legend when he escaped from jail, killing two deputies in the process.

In tracking Billy down, I knew that Lincoln was my first stop. But first I had to deal with a few unplanned diversions. Lincoln is located on U.S. Route 380 southeast of Albuquerque. On the way I pass the village of Carrizozo, just another dot on the map. But, no, it's a town with a story to tell. For the 2010 film *The Book of Eli* about a showdown for possession of the only remaining copy of the King James Version of the Bible, starring

Gary Oldman and Denzel Washington, Carrizozo's 12th Street was converted into the set for the climactic scene, a project that took nearly three months of building false fronts and constructing new buildings. A local shop owner landed a role as the town drunk.

Just down the road from Carrizozo is the village of Capitan, another dot on the map, but an interesting dot.

Smokey Bear was born and buried here. In 1950 a devastating fire in the nearby Capitan Mountains left an orphaned bear cub badly burned. Nursed back to health and named Smokey Bear, he became the



## THE LONG ARM OF THE SHERIFF

On July 14, 1881, three months after escaping from the Lincoln County Courthouse, William H. Bonney met his end at the Fort Sumner home of cattle rancher Lucien Maxwell when Sheriff Pat Garrett (right) caught up with him and shot him dead.



The original Fort Stanton Officer's Quarters was built in 1855 and later modified and expanded. The fort has a long and checkered history. In 1862, the legendary Colonel Christopher Houston "Kit" Carson took control as one of its better-known leaders.

national symbol for fire prevention ("Only you can prevent forest fires") and lived most of his life in the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. When he died in 1976 at the age of 26, he was returned to Capitan to be buried at what is now Smokey Bear Historical Park. Fascinating exhibits chronicle his life and career.

Lincoln is special not only because Billy the Kid slept here but because it exists in a state of suspended animation. Most of the structures are old with some history behind them, and there are no strip malls or other signs of "modern" civilization. It's like a walk back in time.

I visit the Lincoln State Monument and its Tunstall Store, which was in some ways the epicenter of the Lincoln County War. The killing of the owner, John Tunstall, Billy's employer, precipitated the war and vaulted Billy into the forefront of Wild West lawlessness. A wounded Billy was reportedly hidden under the store's floorboards, as a posse searched the building following a trail of blood. Wooden crosses behind the store mark the graves of two of the combatants.

An interesting side note is that the governor of New Mexico at the time was a Civil War hero by the name of Lew Wallace who placed a \$500 bounty on Billy's head. He later achieved fame as the author of the novel *Ben Hur*.

After Billy fled Lincoln, he settled in and around Old Fort Sumner, built by the U.S. government to guard more than 8,000 displaced Navajo and Mescalero Apache Indians in a misguided attempt to convert them to farmers. Billy had friends there and felt safe, but Garrett was a determined soul

and also familiar with the area. At around midnight on July 14,



## TURN BY TURN

Known for its refreshing mountain climate and beautiful views, the 84-mile Billy the Kid National Scenic Byway loops through grassy plains and piney woods in New Mexico's Lincoln National Forest. Here's the route:

- From Ruidoso, take NM 48 to U.S. 70.
- Take U.S. 70 northeast to U.S. 380.
- Take U.S. 380 northwest to NM 220.
- Detour south on NM 220 to Fort Stanton.
- Return to U.S. 380 and continue traveling northwest.
- In Capitan, take NM 48 south and return to Ruidoso.

## ALL THINGS BILLY

### Billy the Kid Museum

Two miles east of downtown Fort Sumner, the eclectic and privately owned Billy the Kid Museum is chock-full of items related to Billy and artifacts from the area. 575-355-2380, [www.billythekidmuseumfortsumner.com](http://www.billythekidmuseumfortsumner.com)

### Billy the Kid National Scenic Byway Visitor Center

The official byway center in Ruidoso showcases the region's colorful history and introduces visitors to communities along the scenic route. 575-378-5318, [www.billybyway.com](http://www.billybyway.com)

## WHERE TO STAY ALONG THE WAY

RV parks can be found all along the Billy the Kid Trail, including the following Good Sam Parks. For more places to stay, visit [www.goodsamcamping.com](http://www.goodsamcamping.com).

### ALTO

**Eagle Creek RV Resort**  
575-336-1131, [www.eaglecreekrvresort.com](http://www.eaglecreekrvresort.com)

### RUIDOSO

**Circle B RV Park**  
575-378-4990, [www.circlebrv.com](http://www.circlebrv.com)

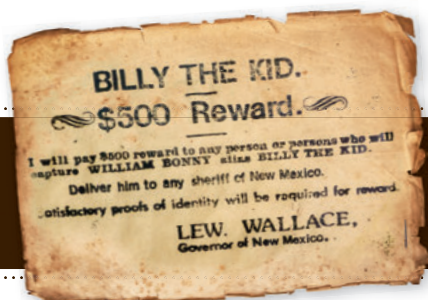
**Twin Spruce RV Park**  
575-257-4310, [www.twinsprucervpark.com](http://www.twinsprucervpark.com)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**New Mexico Department of Tourism**  
800-545-2070, [www.newmexico.org](http://www.newmexico.org)

1881, as he was questioning one of Billy's pals about his whereabouts, Billy unexpectedly walked into the room and was shot dead.

There's little left of Old Fort Sumner, but that's no reason not to come. The cemetery is the site of Billy's grave, as well as that of two of his friends. The carved tombstone



## BOUNTY HUNTERS IN THE OLD WEST

One of 27 original copies of the reward poster signed by New Mexico Governor Lew Wallace is on display at Fort Sumner's Billy the Kid Museum. Firearms in the collection include the rifle Billy held in the only confirmed photograph of him.

that replaced Billy's original wooden grave marker in 1940 has the distinction of having been stolen at least twice (once for more than 20 years) and eventually recovered. The Old Fort Sumner Museum is located adjacent to the cemetery and displays lots of documentation about Billy's life.

In the "new" town of Fort Sumner, there is an outstanding Billy the Kid Museum, privately owned, that should not be missed. Among other things, it houses a firearms collection that has to be priceless and includes the rifle that Billy is holding in the famous tintype portrait with the gun at his side. Other Fort Sumner attractions include the lot where the home once stood where Billy was killed, the community center where he danced, the saloon where he played cards and Garrett once tended bar, and other points of interest.

Another interesting aside: A tintype bought for \$2 at a memorabilia shop in Fresno, California, in 2010 appears to show Billy and some of his gang playing croquet, which would be only his second known photograph. Experts have come down strong on both sides of the authenticity issue, but the tintype has been insured for \$5 million, which makes a statement about what some experts think.

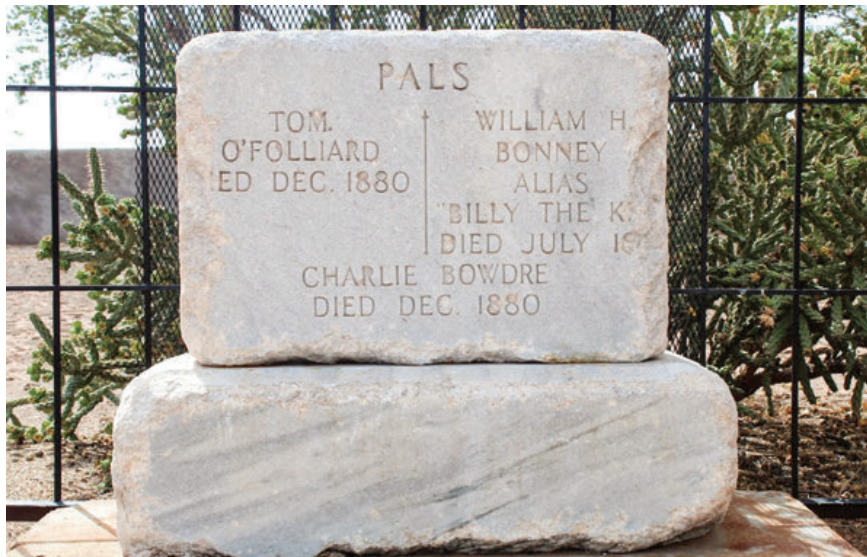
Not far from Lincoln sits the village of Ruidoso, now a ski resort and perhaps

best known for Ruidoso Downs, a racetrack dedicated to quarter horse (not Thoroughbred) racing. The surrounding area is populated with several obscure sites related in some way to Billy, including places where his pals were shot and killed, where he hid out, where he engaged in gunfights and where he rode to escape pursuing lawmen or enemies. Of particular note is Little Creek Canyon Ranch, onetime home of Garrett, whose blind daughter, Elizabeth, became an accomplished singer-songwriter and penned "O Fair New Mexico," the official state song.

Fort Stanton State Monument near Lincoln is considered one of the most intact 19th-century forts in the country and in its day was a significant purchaser of beef, a key point of contention in the Lincoln County War. It was originally built in 1855 to house federal troops charged with maintaining peace with the Mescalero Apache, a sometime confrontation that lasted nearly 30 years. During the Civil War, it was briefly occupied by Confederate forces. In 1896 the fort was abandoned by the Army and closed. In 1899 it was acquired by the U.S. Public Health Service and used as a tuberculosis hospital for Merchant Marine sailors.

One of Fort Stanton's most interesting incarnations was as a World War II-era internment camp for a crew of

**A 1931 stone memorial listing Billy and two of his partners in crime rests in relative peace at Old Fort Sumner, along with a newer marker just for the Kid.**



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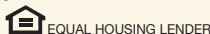
**GoodSamRVLoans.com/560**

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**Fort Sumner's Billy the Kid Museum is a must-see with an extensive collection of frontier-era artifacts and curiosities.**

410 German seamen. In 1939, on orders from the German high command, their ship, the luxury liner *SS Columbus*, was scuttled off the Virginia coast to prevent the British from capturing it. U.S. ships rescued the crew, but the government didn't want the skilled men returned to their mother country in a time of war, so they were sent to Fort Stanton for the war's duration. Being accustomed to luxury, the seamen proceeded to make the best of it. They built a large vegetable garden, a recreation hall where they could listen to the ship's orchestra, and a pool where they staged swimming competitions with locals.

Even in death, the Billy the Kid legend continues to inspire. Conspiracy theorists contend that Garrett never killed Billy but staged the shooting so he could escape; they were once friends. That in turn has inspired several people over the years to claim that they were, in fact, Billy. Writers have immortalized him in poems, comic books, biographies and fictionalized accounts of his life.

Starting in 1911 filmmakers have brought him to the big screen, and he has been played by the likes of Roy Rogers, Audie Murphy, Paul Newman, Emilio Estevez, Michael J. Fox and Kris Kristofferson. Songwriters and musicians got in the act, from Bob Dylan and folk music legend Woody Guthrie to Marty Robbins, Tom Petty and Jon Bon Jovi. Composer Aaron Copland's Billy the Kid ballet exposed him to a higher-class audience in 1938. And, of course, he was well represented on TV.

I'm grateful to Billy for giving me an excuse to explore New Mexico with an agenda of sorts and thankful for the history lessons I never learned in school. 📖

# INTERIOR REDESIGN

LIPPERT'S NEW LINE OF RV FURNITURE MAKES REPLACING WORN, UNCOMFORTABLE LIVING-ROOM SEATING EASY AND PRACTICAL

Take a look on TV or the Internet, and it's easy to find some program or posting about sprucing up the interior of an RV. After all, a recreational vehicle is a home on wheels, so it should be comfortable, attractive and welcoming.

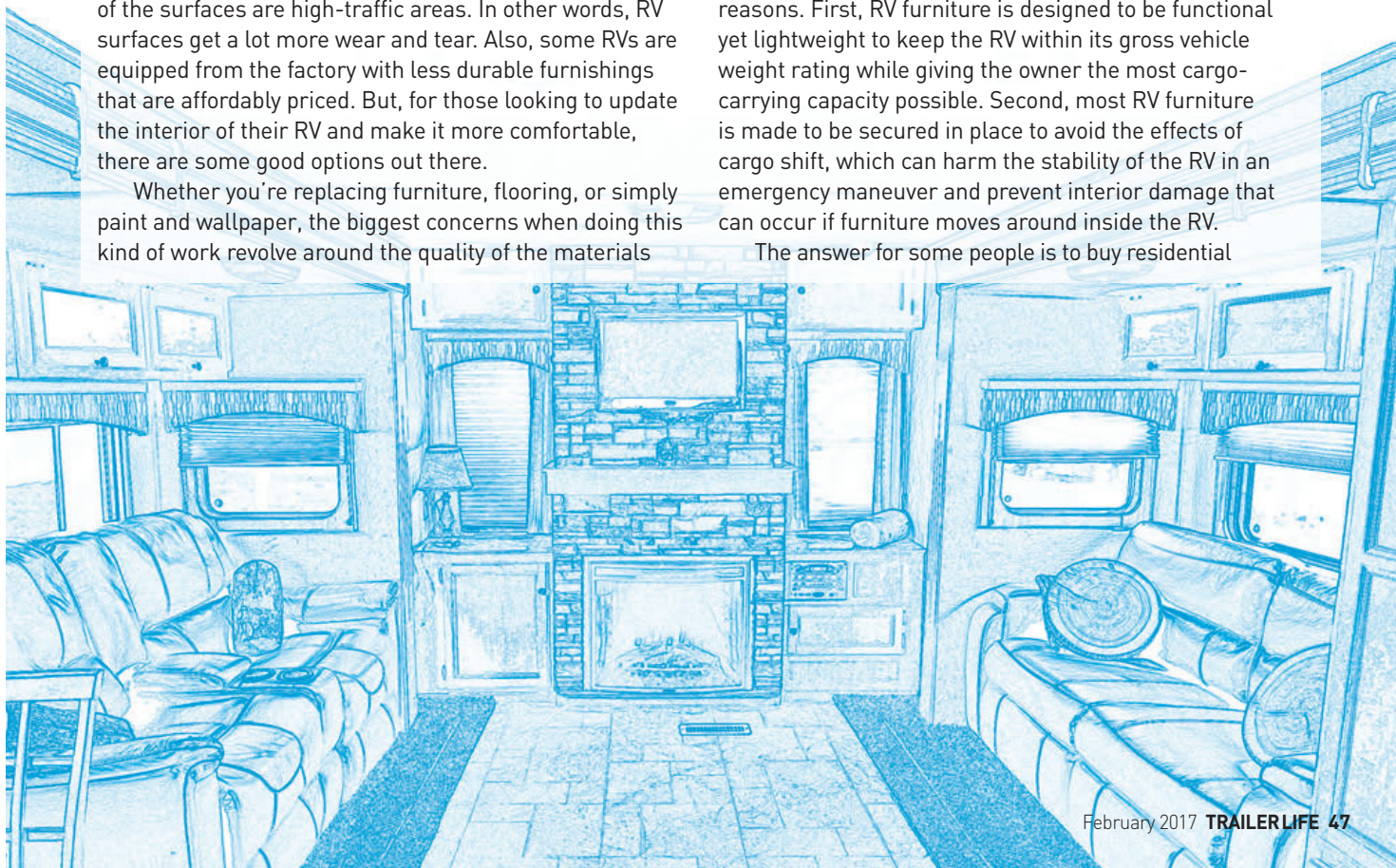
Unfortunately, an RV's interior can become worn in a relatively short time compared to a regular home, and for good reasons. An RV is a tight living space where most of the surfaces are high-traffic areas. In other words, RV surfaces get a lot more wear and tear. Also, some RVs are equipped from the factory with less durable furnishings that are affordably priced. But, for those looking to update the interior of their RV and make it more comfortable, there are some good options out there.

Whether you're replacing furniture, flooring, or simply paint and wallpaper, the biggest concerns when doing this kind of work revolve around the quality of the materials

and any affect the proposed changes may have on the structure of the RV and its weight and balance. After all, if you equip your RV with marble-tile floors and granite counters, you'll be in a lot of trouble. But with modern lightweight alternatives, the sky really is the limit on what you can do. Just remember to plan well, particularly when it comes to upgrading furniture and other heavy items.

Furniture for mobile living is built the way it is for two reasons. First, RV furniture is designed to be functional yet lightweight to keep the RV within its gross vehicle weight rating while giving the owner the most cargo-carrying capacity possible. Second, most RV furniture is made to be secured in place to avoid the effects of cargo shift, which can harm the stability of the RV in an emergency maneuver and prevent interior damage that can occur if furniture moves around inside the RV.

The answer for some people is to buy residential



# INTERIOR REDESIGN

pieces to replace aging RV furniture, but this can be a dicey proposition. Residential furniture is not designed for mobile use, so it's important to look at your options carefully. I have played with various RV furniture options over the years, and have modified furniture and cabinets and built them into RVs. What I found is that the furniture may be much heavier than the original items, particularly if it's a good-quality piece built with hardwood. This is fine, provided the placement and additional weight is taken into account when loading the RV. Then there are the questions of whether

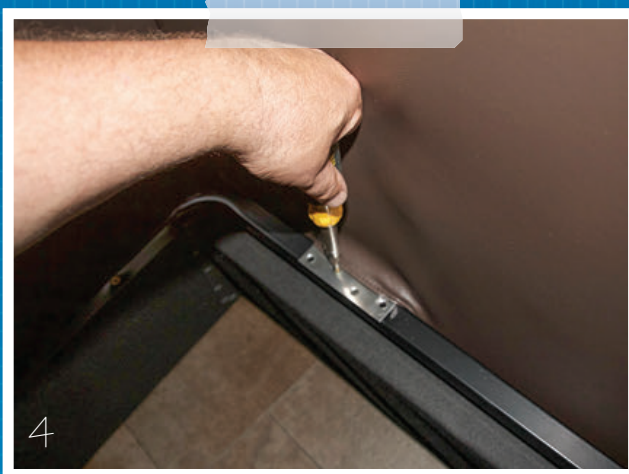
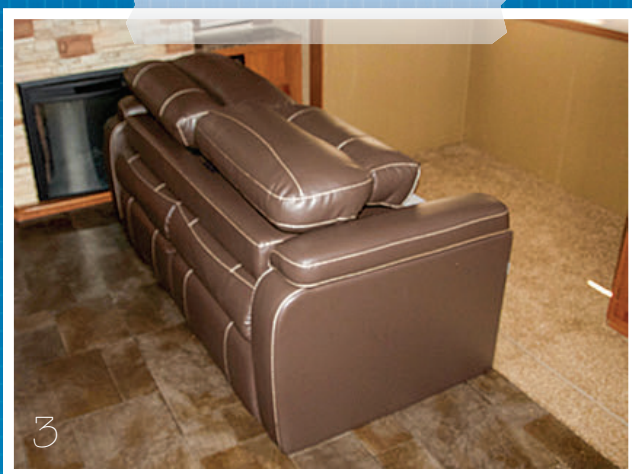
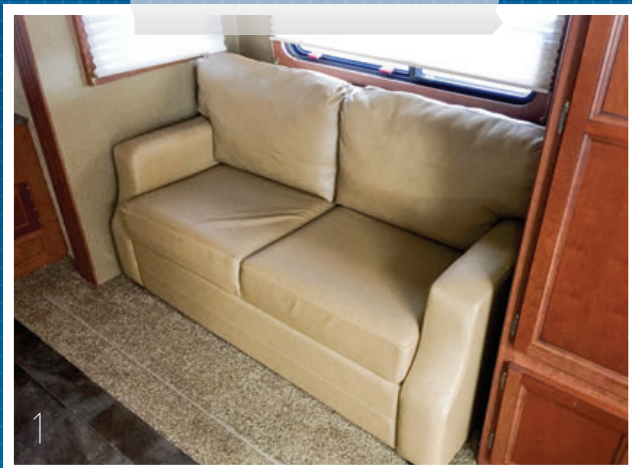
the new piece will fit through the entry door, how it will be secured and whether it can handle being knocked around during travel.

An alternative to residential furniture is furniture designed specifically for RVs. A practical new option is the Thomas Payne Collection offered by Lippert Components. We recently had the opportunity to install some of this furniture in a 2013 Dutchmen Coleman CTS330RL travel trailer and were pleased with the outcome.

The CTS330RL is a big travel trailer at 33 feet with three slides. Its rear living

area is nice and open, with a four-chair freestanding dining table and two rockers on the curbside and a foldout sofa-sleeper on the street side. Between these are a faux-stone fireplace and an entertainment center. A cabin-in-the-woods theme carries through the trailer, making a warm and comfortable living space. The furniture that came with it was good but not great, and the more time we spent in it, the more we thought about other options.

The Thomas Payne Collection is a line of upholstered furniture for travel trailers and motorhomes that



**(1)** The trailer's original beige sofa-sleeper and matching rockers were good but not great. **(2)** A set of clip straps held the old rockers in place. After unclipping the straps and removing the lag screws in the rocker mechanisms, the two chairs are taken out of the trailer. **(3)** The new trifold sofa was delivered with the back and seat cushions separate, which made it easier to fit through the door. After assembling the sofa, it was moved into the slideout and centered with enough clearance to allow the bed to be deployed. We were careful not to push the sofa too far back or pull it too far forward, so the back wouldn't be too upright and the back cushions wouldn't fall over. **(4)** Once the final location of the sofa has been determined, attaching the back is fairly simple with four screws.



includes trifold and jackknife sofas, modular theater seating and three types of recliners, all covered in what the company calls PolyHyde Euro Leather Vinyl. The seating is available in two to five colors, depending on the piece selected.

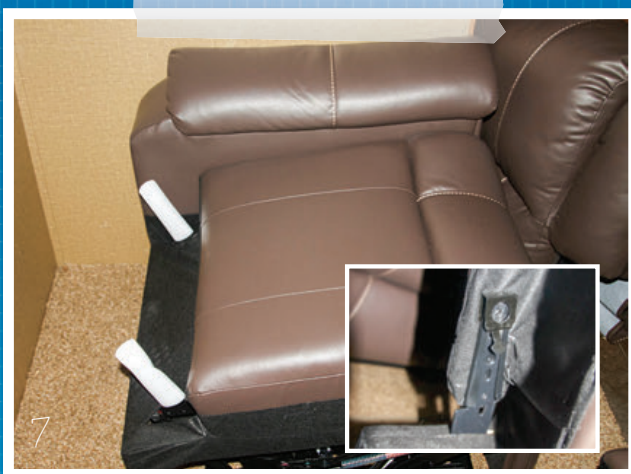
For our project, we settled on replacing the two rockers with theater seating and the foldout couch with a trifold sofa in Majestic Chocolate, which matches the vinyl on the original dining chairs. This was a departure from the other beige furniture in the trailer, but we thought it would look nice, and we

were correct. Positioning the pieces into the trailer was pretty simple, as most RV furniture fits certain common space requirements. We took careful measurements for the spaces we wanted to fill and compared them to the specs for the products we were considering.

Most RV furniture is easy to install and remove once you know where to look for attachment points and how to take it apart. Where RV furniture will make your project much easier is getting it through the door. RV doors aren't overly large, so knowing that you'll be able to take apart the furniture

to get it through the door is paramount. In our case, we were able to dismantle the old rockers and couch enough to get them out easily. The rocker mechanisms came off with a few lag screws, and then the chairs were ready to move. They weren't screwed to the floor but were held in place by a set of clip straps.

The sofa was screwed to the floor but was easy to remove. Opening the bed revealed the brackets that were used to screw it down. We noted where the screws were removed and used the same hardware when screwing in the



**(5)** The L-brackets and screws from the previous sofa are used to secure the couch to the slideout floor. **(6)** The couch opens into a flat, comfortable bed, and if it is positioned against the wall correctly, the back cushions will sit in place to become the headboard. **(7)** The theater-seat recliners were delivered with the bottom sections and seat backs separate, with foam tubes protecting the brackets. For assembly, the seat-back brackets are slid down over the seat-base brackets and clicked in place (inset photo). If the recliners need to be taken apart, the tabs can be pried up to unlock the brackets, then the back of each recliner can be pulled up and off. **(8)** The new theater seating is comfortable, good looking and, as a bonus, provides a place to put drinks and snacks in the center console.

# INTERIOR REDESIGN

new sofa, when possible. Once we were able to move the sofa, we could see that the best way to disassemble it was to take off the arms and legs. Removing them was fairly easy, and the hardware we needed to access was visible once we opened up the sofa.

The new furniture was delivered to the Berkeley, Massachusetts, Camping World, all boxed and strapped down to a single pallet. Everything was protected for shipping, with many of the sections in large cloth shipping bags. The furniture came disassembled, and while there were no directions on how to assemble the pieces, it wasn't difficult to figure out. For the theater seating, an online manual is available on the Lippert website, but we didn't need it. In addition to the left and right theater seats, we ordered the optional center armrest, which includes a storage compartment and cup holders — nice touches, if you have room for the 8 inches it adds to the width.

With these recliners, and most others found in RVs, the backs have two clips that slide into vertical tracks on the base sections of the chairs. The theater seating has clips on the bases that allow the modular pieces to lock together to become one unit. We found this system a little tough to work with and recommend climbing underneath to drill the steel frame, and screwing or bolting the seats together once they're in place, unless they're getting screwed to the floor, in which case, only the seating sections need to be screwed

**TIP: BEFORE ORDERING ANY RV FURNITURE, BE SURE TO MEASURE CAREFULLY TO MAKE CERTAIN IT WILL FIT AND FUNCTION PROPERLY IN YOUR RV.**

down, as long as the sections are attached as designed.

The sofa came with the back section removed and stacked with the back cushions. The back attached with four nut-and-bolt sets that were loose in the box. Since the sofa differed from the previous one, we had to move the floor attachment brackets.

It's important to decide where the sofa (or any piece of furniture) will be screwed to the floor, so start by placing it in that position. In some cases, marking that position with masking tape may be of help, while fabricating the attachment points, so the piece stays where you want it and square to the wall. In the case of a recliner or sofa bed, be sure the piece can operate fully before attaching it to the floor. Next, find your attachment point on the furniture, making sure the hardware does not interfere with the operation of the piece.

When screwing to the floor, it's important not to screw down too far, especially in a slideout. Make certain you're not screwing into the wiring or plumbing, and if you're not sure, check with your RV manufacturer or dealer. The original screws should be a good gauge to how far into the floor you can go, but I have seen screws that were too long from the factory, causing damage under the slideout floor.

Replacing the furniture and adding

a few interior accessories transformed an already nice space into a great one. The new seating is very functional and comfortable, and it looks great. The armrests are nicely padded, and the seams are neatly sewn. The upholstery has a rich soft-leather feel but can be easily cleaned, according to Lippert, with a warm-water and soap mix and a clean towel or sponge.

The sofa folds out into a queen bed, and the recliners are good-sized and quite comfortable. They extend all the way back with minimal wall clearance needed, so moving the seating before reclining isn't necessary. The cup holders are a huge plus, as having no place to set a drink or a snack was something we fussed about with the old rockers.

The Thomas Payne Collection trifold sofa has a manufacturer-suggested price of \$1,128, theater seats retail for \$600 each, and the cup-holder storage console adds another \$200. All in all, replacing the original furniture with a new sofa-sleeper and theater seating was a smart move, and the new pieces will go with any future decor changes we might wish to make. 🛋️

## Lippert Components

### Thomas Payne Collection

[www.lci1.com/thomas-payne-furniture-collection](http://www.lci1.com/thomas-payne-furniture-collection)



▶ The Thomas Payne Collection's modular theater seating can be ordered in a variety of colors and configurations, with or without the center storage console and cup holder.

▼ The trifold couch is quite comfortable for sitting and sleeping. It opens into a queen bed that is mostly flat without protruding cushions and bars that make sleeping uncomfortable.



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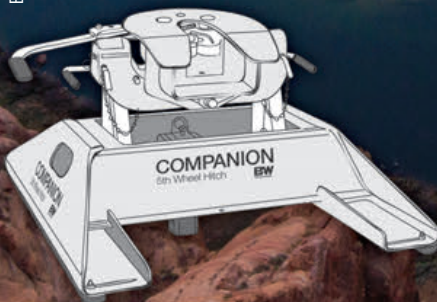
Hank's favorite spot



The boys getting ready for bed



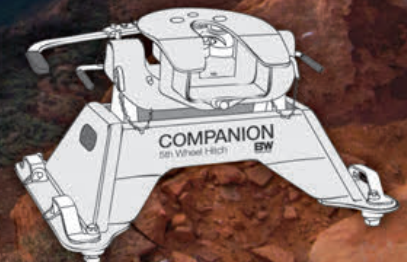
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# PROPANE A PLENTY



With a pair of sensors and a monitor or mobile app, trailer owners can check the levels in LP-gas cylinders without going outside

**K**nowing the true level of LP-gas in DOT cylinders, which are used on trailers, fifth-wheels and pickup campers, has always been a challenge. The traditional way was by weight. When the cylinder was empty, it was light, and when it was full, it was heavy. After getting used to how much the cylinder weighed at various stages, it was possible to get an idea of the level by sloshing it around. Some RVers pour water over the cylinders to try to get frost rings to appear at the LP-gas level. Others try in-line gauges, but these are largely inaccurate because they can be affected by temperature and usually read high until the very end.

The easiest solution is an automatic-switchover system. When the selected cylinder empties, the system



(Above, clockwise from left) The dual-sensor kit contains two sensors, two sets of three rubber feet and a monitor with a two-cylinder readout. (Top) The optional app works on iOS and Android devices.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER

# PROPANE APLENTY



automatically switches to the other cylinder, the indicator turns red, and, if you're paying attention, you can take the empty cylinder to the propane filling station and renew it. There's also a handheld ultrasound device on the market that can be run up and down the side of the cylinder to check the level. It works well but is expensive and still requires uncovering the cylinders and physically checking them.

Recently, Mopeka Products, in association with RV marketer AP Products, introduced the LPG TankCheck, which the company claims provides accurate LP-gas levels for the user. Kits come with single or dual sensors with ultrasonic transmitters. Each sensor attaches magnetically to the underside of a cylinder. Three rubber support

**(1) Before beginning the installation, make sure all appliances are turned off and close the valves on both LP-gas cylinders. (2) Start by syncing both sensors to the readout monitor to verify that the system works. In our case, one of the sensors didn't cooperate at first, but taking out the battery and reinstalling did the trick. When using a smartphone or tablet instead of the monitor, install the app and make sure it connects to the sensors.**

feet elevate the cylinder to provide the additional space required for the sensor. The sensors are linked to a monitor that can be installed inside the RV, or they can be synced with an iOS or Android wireless device to view LP-gas levels in quarter-cylinder increments.

To put the system to the test, we installed the dual-sensor LPG TankCheck on a travel trailer with the customary pair of front-mounted LP-gas cylinders. In addition to attaching the sensors, we installed the monitor panel inside the trailer.

Installation was relatively simple. With the help of the provided instructions, the two sensors were synchronized to the monitor. If we didn't have the kit that comes with a monitor, we could have used a smartphone or tablet and the mobile app just as easily.

We removed the cylinders from the rack and inverted them one at a time for the installation. The sensors are marked Tank 1 and Tank 2. In this case, we made the cylinder on the left Tank 1. We immediately recognized that if both cylinders were taken off at the same time, we



**(3) After removing the cylinders from the rack, invert one cylinder at a time, and install the feet and the sensor. (4) After the sensors are installed on both cylinders, test the system again to make sure everything works. Use a Sharpie to write "Tank 1" and "Tank 2" on the cylinders to correspond with the monitor, and replace them on the rack. (5) Installing the monitor is simple with the two included screws. It is usually best to place the monitor near the RV's system-monitor panel. Before screwing down the monitor, test it to make sure it reads both sensors from that position.**



(6) The monitor is installed 15 feet from the sensors and reads both cylinders' LP-gas levels accurately.

could lose track of their positions as they relate to the monitor, so we recommend using a Sharpie or a label-maker to mark each cylinder appropriately.

After inverting the cylinder identified as Tank 1, we installed the rubber feet on the base (the feet slide over the lip quite easily) and magnetically attached the Tank 1 sensor on the bottom. We then repeated the process with the cylinder marked Tank 2 and the corresponding sensor.

We tested the sensors and found the level indications to be right on the mark, showing one partially full cylinder and one full cylinder (the sensors are calibrated to understand that a full DOT cylinder is actually 80 percent full). We reinstalled the cylinders on the A-frame, and that part of the project was complete.



Next we installed the monitor beside the system-monitor panel in a cabinet about halfway down the length of the trailer, and it had no problem receiving the Bluetooth 4.0 signal. If you don't want to drill holes in the cabinet, hook-and-loop fastener tape would work just fine. Both the sensor and monitor use a single CR2032 coin cell battery each, which can be purchased at hardware stores or superstores.

The LPG TankCheck dual-sensor kit with the indoor monitor retails for \$120 and comes with a three-year

warranty. The sensors can be used on any LP-gas cylinder, including ones for barbecue grills and other accessories like portable fire pits. These sensors are not designed for tanks on motorhomes, as those are already fitted with gauges.

For years motorhome owners have been able to check LP-gas level from inside the coach; now, fifth-wheel and travel-trailer owners can benefit from the same convenience. 📡

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# Wiser by Showermiser

A unique device diverts cold water back into the tank while waiting for a hot shower

**DIFFICULTY** 1 2 3 4 5

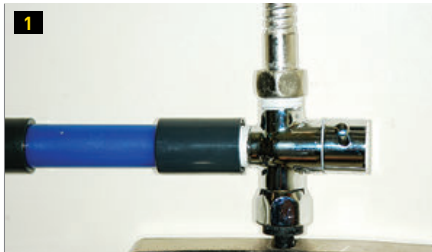
**TIME TO COMPLETE** 2 HOURS

**TOOLS NEEDED** DRILL AND HOLE SAW, WRENCHES, TUBING CUTTER, FLASHLIGHT

Spending time in rustic campgrounds is part of the RV experience that many owners relish, and is one reason why most RVs are self-contained. Unless you own a toy hauler, chances are good that the fresh- and gray-water tanks aboard your RV hold 60 gallons or less. Although that might seem large, the tanks can empty and fill quickly, and there are few things more frustrating than having to pass on a shower because of fluid-capacity restraints.

For boondockers and many environmentally conscious RV owners, water conservation is important. One product that helps in that department is the Showermiser from Aqua View, a high-quality water diverter that redirects wasted cold water back into the freshwater tank while waiting for hot water to reach the showerhead. Not only does the device save water, it keeps the blast of cold water from hitting your body when the mixer valve for the showerhead is first turned on.

The Showermiser utilizes heat-activated technology integrated into a color-changing return pipe that visually signals the user when the water is warm. With the valve in the closed position, wasted cold water is returned to the freshwater tank via the color-changing pipe. Once the water is



**1**) The return pipe is connected to the diverter valve and routed through the shower-stall wall in a convenient location. The new diverter valve is simply inserted between the showerhead hose and the original mixer valve using existing hardware. When the pipe shows a dark-blue color, the water is still cold. **2**) Once the return pipe turns to a pale-blue color, the user can rotate the diverter valve to allow warm water to flow through the showerhead.

warm, the pipe color changes from dark blue (almost purple) to pale blue with a tinge of white. The color change is obvious, so there is no question when the water is at a comfortable temperature.

Making up the chrome Showermiser installation kit is a metal diverter valve, the color-changing return pipe and a ½-inch NPT nipple, rubber washer and nut. The kit sells for less than \$60 and is available on the company's website.

To install the device, the first step is to locate either the nonpressurized (input) side of the water pump or an accessible location in the water line that leads to the freshwater tank. We found it easiest to simply tee into the PEX water line located close to the input of the demand pump. This is when you'll need to make a trip to the hardware or RV store for specific fittings and water line.

The next step is finding a suitable position for the new hardware and a place where the return pipe will be routed through the shower wall. This is achieved

by temporarily connecting the return pipe to the diverter valve and placing it between the showerhead hose and the mixer valve inside the shower. After the hole location is marked and drilled to 1⅜ inch, the return pipe can be assembled using the ½-inch NPT nipple, making sure all the connections are tight.

Although a washer is used to seal out water around the nipple, it's suggested to add a bit of extra insurance with an application of silicone sealant, and Teflon tape should be used on all threads. The installation shouldn't take more than two hours, but it might take a little dexterity, depending on access to the back of the shower stall, plumbing and configuration of the water system.

Not only did it feel good to have only warm water flowing from the showerhead, we were also pleased that water was not being wasted. 🚿

**Aqua View**  
714-485-5904, [www.aquaviewinc.com/rv](http://www.aquaviewinc.com/rv)



**IN HOT WATER** » The Showermiser kit includes the color-changing return pipe, diverter valve, threaded ½-inch nipple, lock nut and washer. The diverter valve is available in chrome, brushed nickel or oil-rubbed bronze.



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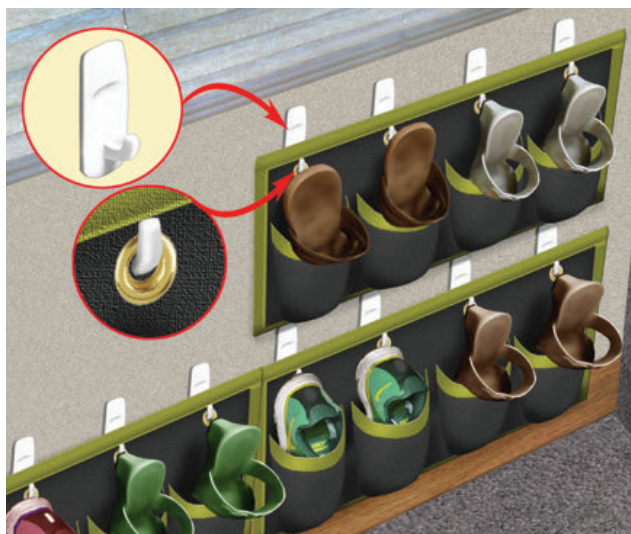
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## Customized TV Remote Control

I find it difficult at night to see all the control buttons on the TV remote. I used “puffy” craft paint, bought at Walmart, that I can feel, and dotted several of the buttons with the paint. Other options are using glow-in-the-dark paint or nail polish — whatever works for you. I painted the remote’s on/off switch red, used yellow for volume, and white is mute. Now I have no problem seeing — or feeling — the control buttons.

**William Schmall, Coarsegold, California**



## If the Shoe Fits, Hang It

After seeing various tips in 10-Minute Tech on how to store shoes in an RV so you aren’t tripping over them, I came up with my own idea. To make extra room for my shoes and keep them out of the way, I bought a hanging canvas shoe organizer, cut it in sections and hemmed the tops. My husband added grommets, and I placed 3M Command adhesive hooks (available at most hardware and home-supply stores) on the wall. I now have plenty of room for all my shoes, and they hang nicely. They are off the floor, and it’s easy to locate a matching set.

**Mary Granlee, Marion, Ohio**



## Chalking It Up

I wanted to have a place to leave notes, comments or reminders for friends and family while camping. Fortunately, we have an outside kitchen on our RV, and I discovered that the access door is the perfect place for a bulletin board. To accomplish this, I painted the inside of the door with black chalkboard paint and used stencils to add categories such as “Reminders” and “Notes.”

The bulletin board has been very handy for listing needed items and leaving information for people we meet up with. We find that liquid-chalk pens work best for writing on the board.

**Bill Ward, Navarre, Florida**

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

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**WOW SUPER COUPON**

**4-1/2" ANGLE GRINDER**

**drilMaster**

ITEM 60625 shown 95576/89645

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

**SAVE 50%**

**\$9.99** ~~comp at \$19.99~~

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**MSRP: \$679/silver, \$699/black**  
844-486-6539, [www.corboxstorage.com/products/corbox-traverse](http://www.corboxstorage.com/products/corbox-traverse)  
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### Rotella Shells Out

As engine manufacturers roll out more fuel-efficient, lower-emission diesel engines, Shell Rotella has introduced a pair of engine oils that not only comply with the new American Petroleum Institute CK-4 emission-reduction standards but exceed the required wear protection, according to the company. Rotella's new T4 Triple Protection 15W-40 heavy-duty engine oil is claimed to deliver an average of 50 percent more wear protection while keeping engines cleaner by reducing lubricant-related particulate-filter blockage. The new T5 10W-30 synthetic blend is claimed to provide 44 percent more protection and sustain durability in particulate filters and after-treatment systems.

**MSRP: Varies by retailer**  
888-467-4355, [www.rotella.shell.com](http://www.rotella.shell.com)  
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### Titan Topper

A fiberglass truck cap greatly expands the secure storage in a pickup while providing extra space for sleeping, should the need arise. Owners of 2016 and 2017 Nissan Titan XDs will find the latest addition to the line of MX Series midrise truck caps from ARE Accessories an ideal add-on, with aerodynamic styling, excellent storage capacity and easy cargo loading through the optional walk-in rear door (not shown). Equipped with sliding side windows and an automotive-grade T-lock system, MX Series caps match the Titan's factory paint and carry a limited lifetime warranty to the original owner. ARE makes toppers for most domestic and imported pickups.

**MSRP: \$1,795**  
330-830-7800, [www.4are.com/product/mx](http://www.4are.com/product/mx)  
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## Heavy Lifters

Air Lift's LoadLifter 5000 Ultimate air-spring kit may be the answer for late-model four-wheel-drive Ford Super Duty owners looking for more stability when towing heavy loads. Equipped with Air Lift's heaviest-rated air springs, the Ultimate has all the benefits of the LoadLifter 5000 plus a urethane jounce bumper for added shock absorption. The kit includes two-ply reinforced bellows, air lines, fittings, brackets, mounting hardware and instructions, and the no-drill installation takes less than two hours, according to Air Lift. The LoadLifter 5000 Ultimate comes with a 60-day money-back satisfaction guarantee and a lifetime warranty, and is compatible with 2011 to 2017 F-250 and F-350 4WDs with single or dual rear wheels. Kits are also available for a variety of other vehicles.

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**Trailer Life's Free Travel Information** helps RVers with trip planning. The following attractions, states and provinces offer free information about their facilities. To request materials, tear out the postage-paid card opposite the Advertisers' Index, circle the numbers that correspond to your selections, fill out the card and drop it in the mail. For faster service, visit [www.trailerlife.com/info](http://www.trailerlife.com/info) and request your information online, and visit each listing's website for immediate information.

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## ST TIRE TROUBLE

**Q** I just replaced all four tires on my travel trailer after one failed. The failed tire went flat with no indication of a problem while driving and 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 were all misshapen with bulges. The trailer is two years old and has less than 7,000 miles on it. I always check the tire pressure. I replaced the stock Load Range D tires with Load Range E Maxxis ST tires.

In "Trailer-Tire Speed Ratings" in the November 2016 RV Clinic, Bert Farnell asked about the 65-MPH rating and its effect on tire failures. I have seen discussions where it was suggested an increased tire pressure would increase the speed rating while decreasing load capacity. I do not want to exceed 65 MPH but would like to know that I am not running at the limits of the tires. How can I take full advantage of the added capacity E-rated tires might provide?

**Vinny Rizzo, New Port Richey, Florida**

**A** This is a question that has come up a number of times, Vinny, and I wanted to get to the bottom of it,

*For tires without a service description in operation at speeds above 65 MPH, loads and inflation pressures are adjusted as follows:*

Speed Range	Inflation Pressure	% Load Change
76 to 85 MPH	+10 PSI	-10%
66 to 75 MPH	+10 PSI	None
Up to 65 MPH	None	None

so I contacted Rudy Consolacion, executive vice president of the Tire and Rim Association (TRA), for clarification. The TRA is the standardizing body for the U.S. tire, rim, valve and allied-parts industry. The association provides the chart shown above in the *2016 TRA Year Book*, its annual standards publication.

As Consolacion explained it, with a Special Trailer (ST) tire without a speed rating on it, the top speed is assumed to be 65 MPH. As shown in the chart, with ST tires, increasing the pressure will allow the tire to increase speed. This is reflected in tire design that follows the TRA standards. — **Chris Dougherty**

## HITCH-RECEIVER "SLOP"

**Q** I have a 2000 Chevrolet Silverado 2500 2WD pickup. For the first 12 years of its life, it didn't go very far or pull very much. Since I bought it, I've put on about 60,000 miles, initially pulling a lightweight Jayco travel trailer, but for the past two years, I've been towing a much heavier 2013 26-foot Timber Ridge travel trailer (average weight, about 7,500 pounds). The Silverado has a factory trailer hitch, which, according to the manual, is rated for a maximum of 12,000 pounds when used with a weight-distributing (WD) hitch, which I have. It's a Reese Strait-Line trunnion-style model.

Since buying the Timber Ridge, I've noticed an increasing amount of

play or "slop" developing when inserting the ball mount into the receiver. I can move the shank about ¼ inch up and down and almost the same amount side to side. Also, the hole in the receiver where the hitch pin goes through looks like it's becoming elongated so that the shank can move back and forth a couple of millimeters.

How much play is too much, and are there any remedies, short of buying a new hitch?

**John Goldsmith  
Chilliwack, British Columbia**

**A** It's not unusual for metal-to-metal moving hitch parts to start showing some wear after miles on the road, John. Even when new, there's some

"slop" or free play in the parts that enables you to install or remove the ball mount without undue struggle. Even with a well-matched trailer weight (and yours seems just fine), each time you round a corner or change lanes on the highway, there's going to be some lateral stress on the ball mount. The same applies to going over bumps or undulations in the road, in which case it's vertical pressure. That stress translates into some movement between the ball-mount shank and receiver, and over time even small movement causes component wear and tear. It adds up over the miles.

Most users don't grease the shank or receiver because that would lead to road-grit accumulation and even worse wear, but nonlubricated moving metal parts wear even faster.

There's not much you can do for your present setup other than replacing the receiver, although a couple of millimeters of wear in the pin hole isn't a major problem. To help stop the shank movement, something I've seen RVers

### 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.



do is install a couple of locking bolts. Drill and tap a couple of holes in the receiver a short distance back from the opening, one on the side and one on the top, to accommodate 1/2-inch bolts. With the ball mount in place, install those bolts and tighten them down gently, and that helps lock the shank solidly in place, which, in turn, reduces the wear that occurs when the shank can move. Or better yet, use the Roadmaster Quiet Hitch, which bolts on without modifications. — **Jeff Johnston**

### SHORTBED TRUCK CLEARANCE

**Q** I have a problem with the Curt Q20 fifth-wheel hitch that I have on my 2014 Toyota Tundra. I traded my Reese hitch with a friend who was selling his pickup. The rails in my truck are also Curt, and I had them installed at Hitch Masters by my house. The hitch has a 12-inch slide, which Curt says is for a 6 1/2-foot shortbed, which is what my Tundra has. I measured from the end of the bed to the back rail, and that measurement, 27 1/2 inches, is what Curt calls for.

Toyota also predrilled the frame for the mounting brackets for the rails. The problem with this hitch is that, when I go to the maneuvering position, the pin box on my trailer contacts the tailgate and has damaged it. I called Curt to talk with a tech, and he said I needed to go to a fifth-wheel tailgate. I have watched videos of Curt hitches being installed in shortbed trucks and saw nothing about possibly contacting the tailgate when in the far-aft position.

Have you heard of this happening, and, if so, what can be done to prevent it, short of changing the tailgate? I will go to another hitch if I have to. Curt and etrailer.com show that this hitch works in my truck.

**Bill Allender, North Hills, California**

**A** You know the old saying “Measure twice, cut once”? In this case, the hitch is in a proper application, and it seems like you’ve used it successfully, except for that tailgate and pin-box clearance problem. Without seeing a photo of the setup, I’d guess the trailer has an extended pin box that protrudes

forward at a significant angle. That extension is what causes the interference. If the trailer had a more vertical pin box, the tailgate contact might not happen. You might want to consider replacing the pin box with a less-extended model, provided it’s a bolted-on component that can be changed. That will also change your cab-to-trailer clearance because that brings the trailer closer to the truck, and it’s the extended pin box that helps move the trailer back for more clearance. You could also try raising the

ball-mount height, but that may cause your trailer to ride in an undesired front-end-high position. If you can’t replace the trailer’s pin box, a fifth-wheel-style tailgate may be your best option. — **J.J.**

### SEEKING INFORMATION

**Q** I enjoy reading the magazine, as it offers a lot of helpful and interesting information. I’m hoping you can help out with a few things:

1) Why can’t I use something akin to



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Liquid-Plumr in my RV's black and gray tanks to take care of clogs? Aren't the pipes and valves made to handle the stuff?

2) If I run truck tires on my 26-foot travel trailer, can I drive it at higher speeds without concerns, as was discussed in regard to ST tires in November's "Trailer-Tire Speed Ratings"? Aren't the sidewalls of the truck tires strong enough to avoid any stress or blowout issues?

3) I drive a 2004 Ford F-250 Crew Cab longbed. I play heck with the trailer brakes — they grab when I want to stop. In stop-and-go traffic, this is a real pain and produces grabby brake performance and a herky-jerky ride. If I back off on the adjustment with my brake controller, it smooths out but does not help with slowing the trailer. It's as if I'm using only the truck brakes. I just cannot find the sweet spot where it works right all the time.

The trailer-brake system is the same one I used for my fifth-wheel years ago, and I had the same problem then when the system was brand new. Do I need to invest in a new controller?

**Bill Strouse, Odenton, Maryland**

**A** Greetings, Bill, and thank you for the kind words.

1) Drain cleaners are generally very caustic in nature and are not designed for use in RV plumbing systems. They could damage the holding tank, the dump valves and dump-valve seals, and the chemical can react dangerously with holding-tank chemicals. Stick with a cleaner designed for RVs.

2) There's nothing wrong with running Light Truck (LT) tires on your trailer, as long as they meet or exceed the existing tires' load-carrying capacity and speed rating. Check the speed rating on the tires you plan to buy to make sure they match your desired driving habits. After the molded-in DOT numbers, you'll see a separate number and letter. The number is the load-rating reference, and the letter is the speed rating. For example, my Nissan truck tires have "110S" on them. The "110" means 2,337-pounds maximum carrying capacity, and the "S" indicates 112-MPH maximum speed rating. You can find the speed-rating charts online or at your tire dealership. Just remember, it's never safe to exceed posted speed limits when towing.

3) It seems like you should upgrade your F-250's brake controller. Some earlier models were functional but glitchy when it comes to smooth performance. I can appreciate your frustration because I've experienced exactly the symptoms you describe, including the need to change the gain setting for in-town driving versus highway driving. And this part is my own driving preference, but I turn up the gain a bit when hitting the freeway so the trailer has more aggressive braking at freeway speeds, then dial it back in town when I'm moving at slower speeds. A good proportional brake controller, like the Tekonsha Prodigy, operates smoothly when you want it to and still allows for some variations in brake performance preference. — J.J.



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## TRAILER PARTITION CRACK

**Q** I have a 2013 Lance 1685 travel trailer. Throughout a long 6,200-mile trip, I noticed a 1/4-inch gap developing in the middle of the bathroom partition, and the top and bottom seams are tight. The door frame and door connected to the partition are fine. However, the screws holding the partition to the outer side wall have parted, and the heads are broken off on four. My questions are, is this trailer safe to use, can the problem be ignored, and is there a fix?

**Richard Lillja, Las Cruces, New Mexico**

**A** If something has settled or shifted enough to break the heads off some interior wall-mounting screws, Richard, let alone just stripping some screws from their holes, I would definitely take the trailer to your Lance dealer for repair. It may technically be safe to use, but with that kind of structural failure, I'd suggest you avoid too much travel until it's taken care of. That symptom you describe could indicate something more serious, such as a body-to-frame mount that's not as it should be, and that uneven floor or side-wall support may be causing the problem. Head to your dealer and get it repaired before the problem gets any worse. — J.J.

## CLEAR BACKUP PICTURE

We have a 2016 37-foot Cedar Creek fifth-wheel that we ordered new with a Furrion backup camera. The camera never worked, and while at the Hershey RV Show last September, we happened to walk by the Furrion display. The camera view at the display was crystal clear, so we asked the representative what was wrong with ours. He said we should contact the company, but we were already out of warranty, and he told us to contact them anyway. We did, and Furrion sent a new one. It ended up not providing a clear view. The company then upgraded it with an observation camera (we had no choice when ordering our fifth-wheel), and it is excellent.

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**Dave Eifert**  
Shoemakersville, Pennsylvania

I'm delighted that Furrion took care of you, Dave. We recently did an install of the Furrion Wireless High-Speed RV Observation System on a 2013 Coleman trailer ("Lights, Camera, Action!" October 2016) and experienced excellent results. — **C.D.**

### HITCH LUBE

**Q** I am in a quandary. I tow a 24-foot Jayco travel trailer with a WD hitch. I have been told to lube the hitch ball and equalizer bars with lithium grease to prevent wear. I've also been told not to do that because dust and dirt can get in the hitch and bars and cause premature wear. I've also been told to use a dry lube or light oil.

Please tell me — and others — what is the proper way to maintain the hitch and equalizer bars. For your information, some of my driving is on gravel roads.

**Stephen Witcher, Florissant, Colorado**

**A** Lubricating the hitch ball and the heads on the WD bars is absolutely a good idea, depending on the brand and type (see your instruction manual). Not only will it reduce wear, but it will also help to quiet the parts when making turns.

Reese makes a hitch-ball lube (part number 58117) that is ideal for using on the ball, and I have also used it on the heads of the bars. It is a white-grease lubricant that reduces friction, is nontoxic and won't break down under pressure.

The downside is that, obviously, the ball and the bars will become dirty when exposed at the campground or if dropped in the dirt. Clean them with a shop rag, as needed, apply a little more hitch-ball lube, and you're ready to go.

Standard dry lube and light oil are not recommended, as they are more inclined to attract dirt, and they are not designed for the extreme pressures exerted in a hitch setup. — **C.D.**

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# READER SERVICE

## ROARING HORSES

**Q** We pull a 2010 Jayco trailer. It's 24 feet long, 4,800 pounds empty and around 5,800 pounds when loaded but without water. I have no experience pulling anything this heavy, especially in the mountains. My tow vehicle is a 2004 Dodge Durango with the tow package and a 5.7-liter V-8, and is rated for towing about 8,400 pounds. I keep synthetic fluid in the engine, axles and transfer case.

When we went through mountain passes with long climbs, it downshifted, and we slowed to 35 or 40 MPH. My concern is that, after climbing "normally" for a while, I hear a very loud roar until we get over the pass. The tachometer does not change when it starts roaring. When I check the transmission fluid later, it's not burnt or discolored.

Should I expect this?

**Ron Schally, Linwood, Minnesota**

**A** This is quite common, Ron, and you should not be concerned. That roar you describe is the fan clutch engaging, which increases the RPM of the engine-cooling fan when the engine temperature rises while hauling a heavy trailer over a mountain pass. Once the engine temperature cools, the clutch begins to release, and the roar goes away. Just make sure you're keeping a close eye on the temperature gauges when you're driving in these conditions. — **C.D.**

## WAY-TOO-HOT TRAILER

**Q** I own a 2014 Dutchmen Aerolite 282DBHS that has one 13,000-Btu air conditioner. We live in the desert, and one A/C struggles to cool our trailer, even just a bit. I'm not expecting too much, as I know the limitations of these units and the environment I live in, but a second unit would certainly help. The problem is that 30-amp power doesn't allow this luxury, though the front vent over the bed would certainly fit another unit. I really don't think a 15,000-Btu unit would fare much better.

Can you suggest a solution? I was thinking of connecting a nonducted unit with its own power cord to the 120-volt AC receptacle on the post.

**Gene Johngrass, Las Vegas, Nevada**

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**A** Well, Gene, you're not the first person to ask this question, and I don't have the best news for you. With 30-amp service, you cannot add a simultaneously running second air conditioner without upgrading the service to 50-amp. There simply isn't the capacity to do so.

However, you do have another option, and that is to install a selector switch (such as the Leviton 1286-W 20-amp, 120/277-volt toggle switch)

for the two air conditioners, allowing one to run at a time, and you can select which one. So, at night, you could run the bedroom A/C, keeping that room as cool as possible, and the living room A/C during the day. I would also recommend upgrading the living room unit to a high-efficiency 15,000-Btu model like the ones Dometic and Airxcel offer. This will maximize the amount of cooling you can have on 30 amps while still giving you some flexibility.

I have seen forums where people do as you suggested and run a separate service for the front A/C. It is stated in the National Electrical Code (NEC) that "not more than two 120-volt thermostatically controlled appliances (i.e., air conditioner and water heater) shall be installed in such systems (30-amp RV) unless appliance-isolation-switching, energy-management systems or similar methods are used." Since the previously mentioned Leviton switch provides the required appliance isolation, it falls under the code. The reason is that the thermostats can call for cooling at exactly the same time, substantially increasing the instant full-load amp demand and causing a dangerous overload.

NEC 551 also states that an RV shall have only one rated power-supply assembly (input power cord). The minimum size is 30 amps. If you install an air conditioner separately, plugging it into the campground receptacle, you first risk an electrical-shock event because the appliance is not bonded to the main RV service or the RV chassis. Second, the supply, if allowed, would have to be a protected 30-amp service just for that air conditioner. Third, the connection boxes may have a 30-amp receptacle plus a 20-amp receptacle, but the park is required to wire the box only to the size of the largest connection. So, if you use the 20-amp receptacle in addition to the 30-amp, you may overload the box and trip the breaker in the campground's main panel, requiring the campground owner to open the box to reset it, which will most likely take some time, while you sit without power.

The best and safest options are to install the toggle switch or upgrade to 50-amp service, which is common in your part of the country but not inexpensive. — C.D. 🚐

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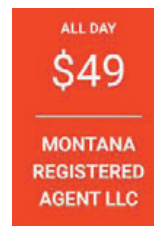
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(continued from page 27)

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# True Colors

The artsy community of Matlacha on Florida's southwest coast is a kaleidoscope of cheerfully painted buildings and whimsical sculptures

I grew up in a rural town in upstate New York where most of the houses were dark brown or gray. If someone wanted their house to stick out, they painted it pine green. When I was a teenager, out-of-towners bought my grandmother's house and immediately painted it Wedgwood blue. To this day, my mother still complains about the garish paint job, though the house is brown again. I wonder what she would say about the houses in Matlacha (pronounced *mat-lah-SHAY*). A blue house would fit right in to this historic fishing village turned artists' colony near Fort Myers, Florida — if it also had pink trim and a chartreuse door.

One can't simply drive through Matlacha! If the polka-dot dolphins don't cause you to brake, the giant blue-and-white mushrooms will. It's a place where the more outrageous one's house or manatee-shaped mailbox, the more it fits in. Even the telephone poles have murals on them. Pressed for time on our first visit, my husband, Jack, and I stopped to take photos of the WildChild and Leoma Lovegrove galleries, two standouts among

the multihued galleries and boutiques on the village's main drag, before continuing on.

My second visit to Matlacha was on purpose when Jack and I returned to celebrate our anniversary. We caught spotted seatrout and gar; paddled past osprey, pelicans and anhingas; and met artist Leoma Lovegrove in

the botanical garden adjacent to her gallery. Lovegrove's splashy paintings and whimsical sculptures somehow make a person happier, which might explain why actress Sharon Stone, First Lady Laura Bush and Sir Richard Branson are among the many private collectors who have commissioned pieces from her.

"What are you doing?" I asked, expecting a personality with the intensity of her colorful creations. Instead she mirrored the more laid-back, funky aspects of her art.

"Just drawing out loud," she replied, unrushed and unpretentiously.

And that pretty much sums up Matlacha, a coastal community that's loudly colored but with an unhurried island attitude that draws you in. 📍



## Colorful Tiny Town

(From top) Matlacha's multihued cottages might be over-the-top elsewhere, but in this historic Florida fishing village, they fit right in. The Matlacha Menagerie is but one of many brilliantly painted businesses.



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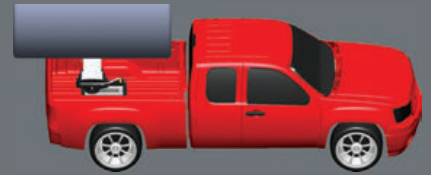
## how SuperGlide works...



- 1** Hitch is in forward position for highway towing, with the trailer weight over the rear axle.



- 2** As you begin to turn, going forward or reverse, the SuperGlide cam arm automatically moves the hitch and trailer away from the cab. The more you turn, the more the trailer moves away.



- 3** The SuperGlide can move back far enough to allow a full turn. You never have to anticipate, never get out of your truck, never throw any switches or levers. It's AUTOMATIC...you JUST DRIVE!

