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JUNE 2015

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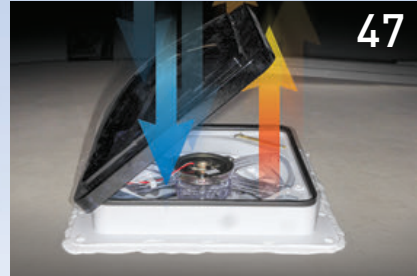
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On the cover: 2015 Chevy Tahoe and Northwood Nash 22H on the Pacific Coast Highway in Ventura, California. Photo by Scott Hirko

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Can RVs Be the Ultimate Conservation Machines?

California's severe drought brings some interesting resource-consumption facts to the forefront



I have a solution for California's water crisis: move into our RVs. Of course, that's not practical for most of us, but when you do the math, it's easy to see that RVs are much more environmentally friendly than stationary homes. I often get into heated debates with non-RVers who chastise me for wasting precious resources. While the conversation usually revolves around poor fuel economy, I love to spar with those who have a preconceived notion that RVs are resource pigs.

I usually acquiesce the point that it takes more fuel to propel an RV, but only at the onset of the conversation. It's easy to show that sitting in an RV park is much more efficient than commuting daily in bumper-to-bumper traffic. While my wife, Lynne, and I have a big, fuel-hungry truck, we counterbalance that with a Toyota Prius that's used for running around town. I usually win the fuel-conservation battle, and then I go in for the kill: water conservation.

There's no contest when it comes to water usage; RVers are experts in conserving water, without feeling like we're sacrificing convenience. So I ran some numbers based on published averages for water usage in stationary homes. The average American home supposedly consumes 400 gallons of water a day. Seventy percent is used for inside services; 100 gallons a day is used just to flush the toilet! Yearly water usage in an average home is around a whopping 146,000 gallons.

I have a water-flow meter in my rig, so I can track consumption accurately. When necessary (usually in a boondocking environment), Lynne and I can take showers using only 6 gallons, total. When we have hookups, which is most of the time, we use 26 gallons a day on average, which includes showers, washing hands, dishes and flushing the toilet. That accounts for 9,490 gallons a year, based on full-time livability. If we do laundry at a campground facility once a week, that's 2,808 gallons a year, based on average water usage for a washer; Energy Star-rated washers will use much less water. After figuring the water needed for flushing the holding tank and washing the rig, we use 13,028 gallons a year. Based on my scenario and average inside usage for stationary homes, we could save 89,172 gallons of water a year if we go full time.

Water conservation is only part of the equation. RVs use less electricity and gas, and can easily be considered energy efficient, even by diehard activists who hang on to their worn-out fuel-consumption argument.

I love winning these debates. 🗣️

— Bob Livingston, publisher

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DID YOU KNOW?

Seventy-two peaks soar above 12,000 feet in Colorado's Rocky Mountain National Park, topping out at 14,259 feet at the summit of Longs Peak. The lofty national park celebrates its 100th anniversary this year, and the park service anticipates three million visitors during the centennial.

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More Tiny Trailers

I just received your April 2015 issue with Kris Bunker's "Little Big Trailers" article highlighting small trailers. Finally! We have an 11-year-old Komfort 25-foot trailer. We have solar power and triple bunks — no slideouts. We can take four grandchildren dry camping for five days, communing with nature. Just the two of us can dry camp for up to 10 days, and believe me, we are not roughing it.

Jackie Turnshek, Albany, California

As the article points out, you can have "big-time fun" in a pint-size trailer. Yes, there are compromises to be made, but some folks don't need all the comforts found in bigger campers.

Dion Derkach, Ogdensburg, New Jersey

We enjoyed the article on smaller towables but are disappointed that Casita was not included. Our 17-foot Casita Freedom Deluxe is terrific for dry camping in national parks. Just yesterday a stranger stopped at our home to inquire if the camper in our driveway might be for sale. It isn't.

**Bob and Carole DenBleyker
Raleigh, North Carolina**

I love your magazine, but how could you publish an article about the new "pint-size" trailers without including the Winnebago Micro Minnie?

Ken Henze, Ankeny, Iowa



Small World

I've enjoyed your magazine for several years, more so now that I have graduated from tents to trailer camping. I especially liked Kris Bunker's April article "Little Big Trailers," since that is what I now have. After several years of tent camping, I decided I needed to upgrade. One night I was looking online for teardrop dealers near me and noticed an Etsy ad for this cute-as-can-be gypsy-wagon trailer. I clicked on it, and the price was sure right. Then I found that it delivers from Canaan, New York, not 10 miles up the road from me.

After doing a bit of figuring and checking weight ratings, I ordered my trailer. It's built to my specs for size and placement of things inside; I even supplied several pieces such as the dresser, countertop, shelves and floor tiles, and was able to track every part of the build. I picked it up last October and took a test-drive to nearby Lake George, then a road trip to Florida with much success — it does everything I hoped it would.

The trailer attracts a lot of attention. I've had drivers ride alongside for miles checking it out and people take photos in campgrounds. It's built on a utility trailer frame with wood throughout, curved plywood under a rubber roof, two workable windows, and electricity but no water and no potty.

As an alternative to ready-mades, it's a great option for the right price. I love it.

Barbara Peduzzi, Chatham, New York



Great article on smaller trailers. We purchased an R-pod 178 last year and have traveled more than 12,000 miles in it so far. Your article pictured the tent model and made reference to the 179, which does not include a tent opening. This may steer people away from this great line. Thanks for your efforts to keep us entertained and informed.

Jim Fielder, Bellevue, Washington

Classic Missouri

Pamela Selbert's April article on Missouri's Route 36, "Highway of Genius," brought back so many memories. My dad was a surveyor and had a hand in helping to build the old Route 36. That stretch of road is always a welcome sight to me.

**Tara Bohannon Arnold
San Antonio, Texas**

Pamela Selbert's April article on Missouri's Route 36 is a *Trailer Life* classic. Where else can we read

articles like this? It inspires a road trip with a sense of wonder and adventure around every curve. *Trailer Life* uncovers the often-overlooked, quieter points of interest and gives them a voice. Thanks for helping me rediscover America!

Scott Irwin, Bossier City, Louisiana

What's Cookin'?

I've enjoyed *Trailer Life* for many years and have always liked the how-to articles. Bill and Jenn Gehr's "Overhead Overhaul" in the April issue about the SAM-1 range-hood upgrade kit was what really got me. I ordered one online and had it in three days, did the installation and wow! I can actually see the cooktop and hear the news while cooking. Thanks so much for a great magazine, and thanks to the SAM-1 for making our cooking quiet and well lit.

**Dave Lutton
Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey**

Towing the Line

I'd like to respond to the April letter from Herb Trotter regarding towing a fifth-wheel with a Ram 2500 4x4. I have always had Ram trucks, currently own a 2014 Ram 2500 4x4 and tow a Grand Design 38-foot fifth-wheel. My unit, when connected to my truck, is perfectly level, and I have plenty of bed clearance. The Ram, while it does sit slightly higher than a Ford or Chevy, has no issues at all safely towing my fifth-wheel.

I find it surprising that RV dealers are saying that the bed is too high. Remember, you usually can adjust the height of your fifth-wheel hitch head to dial in your bed clearance. When I am traveling, I see plenty of Ram 2500s out there — they are great tow vehicles and don't seem to have any issues handling the larger trailers.

Edward Kosakowski
Brewerton, New York

I read the letter from Herb Trotter about the problem with lack of clearance when an RV is attached to his Ram truck. I have a 2000 Ram and had the same problem, but it was easily fixed by flipping the leaf springs. The dealer performed this and added a 2-inch lift. The cost was minimal, and I've had it on our 2000 Arctic Fox fifth-wheel for 15 years with no problems.

Tracy Novak, El Paso, Texas

In your response to Herb Trotter about truck-bed height, you mention that, as long as the trailer does not drag on the road, having an elevated front is not an issue. I beg to differ.

I switched from a 1989 Ford F-250 4x4 (with plenty of clearance between the truck and trailer) to a 2001 Dodge Ram 2500 4x4 to pull a 30-foot fifth-wheel, which created two significant issues. First, I was dragging the trailer's rear end coming into or out of uneven driveways and similar depressions. Second, I was severely binding the rear spring shackles on both axle rear ends. Thus there was no play in the springs on the rear end.

The only way to correct these issues was to flip the trailer springs from the bottom of the axles to the top after

welding new spring seats on the axle tops and then reconnecting the brake wires on the trailer. This raised the trailer and gave me about 6.5 inches of truck-bed/trailer clearance. I did not notice any difference in trailer stability with the axle height change.

My new trailer, a 36-foot Grand Junction, matched up perfectly from day one with the 2001 Ram and my 2008 Ram 3500 dually 4x4.

Eric Reeve, Casco, Michigan

Doctor's Orders

Reading the letter "Prescription for Travel" in the April issue, we fully identified with the author, Charlie Thompson. I am a 62-year-old with a bad back from two separate car accidents. I control chronic sciatica and back pain with hydrocodone.

We were in Nevada when we found out about hydrocodone being reclassified as a Schedule II controlled substance. Like Mr. Thompson's wife, I



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LETTERS

also had to go to the emergency room to get medication to travel home because my out-of-state prescription could not be filled and I couldn't get an appointment with a local pain doctor to get a new prescription — they required a referral from a general practitioner.

Yes, Mr. Thompson, there are other RVers out there who are now effectively imprisoned in the state where their painkillers are prescribed.

Jeanne Lehman, Orange Park, Florida

I read "Prescription for Travel" with great interest. My partner, a 62-year-old schoolteacher, suffers from severe spinal stenosis and is on hydrocodone for pain. We own property in Florida but are afraid to spend time there in case we need to refill this prescription. We are made to feel like drug addicts.

Chuck Sutter, Yucaipa, California

Federal law does not require that a CII prescription be filled only in the

state written, but some state laws may prohibit filling these medications when written by prescribers from outside their state. When traveling, it is advisable to check with a pharmacy in the state you will be in at the time you need to fill the medication.

Check with your home pharmacy and see if they will mail your medication to you, if the state you plan to be in will not honor out-of-state prescriptions. The CII hard copy can be mailed to your home pharmacy or held by them for up to 90 days, if they are willing to do so.

I hope this helps smooth some bumps in the road for chronic-pain patients who are not ready to stay home. As a pharmacist, I will fill out-of-state controlled prescriptions for travelers, provided I can verify legitimacy — don't even ask me to fill a script from a Florida doctor if you are from Tennessee.

Steve Knoderer, Serena, Illinois

It's a Blast... Except When It's Not

My wife and I are on our third travel trailer in less than two years. We are newcomers but passionate about the prospects that RVing can provide, so much so that we have traveled almost 18,000 miles so far and will be staying in our current trailer more than half the year this year. We are not full-timers but avid campers and videographers crossing the country documenting our trips on a successful YouTube travel channel. The problem is that all three of our trailers have been plagued by issues caused by a lack of factory quality control. The dealers offered to help but insisted that it would be months before they could make the repairs.

It's one of those things that, when everything is working, it's a blast, and when it isn't, it can be a nightmare. We will reserve judgment about our future in this lifestyle based upon the success of the current repairs and future issues.

Neil Mullen, Dawsonville, Georgia 📧

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Caprock Canyons State Park covers more than 15,000 acres of red-rock badlands where descendants of the great southern plains bison roam.

Rails-to-Trails in Texas

Nature has sculpted red and orange sandstone into dramatic shapes in Caprock Canyons State Park, where bison once roamed by the millions

article by Pamela Selbert



PHOTOS BY GUY SELBERT

It's possible to cross the Texas Panhandle without ever realizing you're passing one of the state's most defining features — though you may notice some ragged arroyos and a rise in elevation as you travel west. In fact, if you're traveling Interstate 40, the most direct route across, what you're seeing is the north end of the magnificent 120-mile-long Caprock Escarpment. Farther south, the landscape fractures into the most dramatic red-rock badlands you can imagine, dividing high plains to the west from the lower rolling plains to the east.

A particularly fine stretch of the escarpment is showcased at 15,000-acre Caprock Canyons State Park, established in 1982 near the tiny Western-looking town of Quitaque (pronounced "Kitty-Quay"), about 100 miles southeast of Amarillo. Here, nature has sculpted the richly red and orange sandstone into a host of towering shapes laced horizon-

tally with ribbons of shimmering white gypsum. This windswept land seems a fitting place to see bison, which once roamed here by the millions, before wholesale slaughter in the 1870s nearly wiped them out.

But thanks to the foresight of a rancher named Charlie Goodnight and his wife, Mary Ann, who saved a number of orphaned calves, 100 or so descendants of the historic South Plains herd once again roam their native habitat. They were reintroduced here about 20 years ago. Visitors, some 70,000 a year, can watch them grazing and cavorting.

Nine hiking trails range in length from 1.3-mile Canyon Loop to 6-mile Old Ranch Road. There's also hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking (bikes and helmets are available) on 64-mile Caprock Canyons Trailway, part of the national Rails-to-Trails program, which begins atop the escarpment and

stretches east to Estelline in the Red River Valley. Other recreation includes swimming, boating and fishing (rods can be rented) on 120-acre Lake Theo.

There's also a 50-seat amphitheater for special programs, a Discovery Center for kids, a fine scenic drive with dramatic overlooks, a visitor center with exhibits that interpret various aspects of the canyon lands and six camping areas. Daily admission to the park is \$4 for adults and free for children age 12 and under.

RV Camping

Honea Flat Camping Area at Caprock Canyons State Park includes 35 RV sites with water and electricity, and a dump station for \$15 to \$20 per night.

806-455-1492, www.tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/caprock-canyons

Lightweight Vista Cruiser

This year Gulf Stream celebrates five years of production of its Vista Cruiser travel trailer with the new 23RSS floorplan. A slideout houses a jackknife sofa inside the 7-foot 6-inch-wide 23RSS. The company claims that the narrow width and lower frame help reduce wind resistance for better fuel efficiency, and the lower frame has the added benefit of providing a more accessible step-up-into-the-trailer height.

The sloping ceiling tops out at 6 feet 11 inches, and the front and back walls and roof are one continuous piece of laminated fiberglass. Essentially, that means there are no joints across the Vista's entire expanse. According to Gulf



Stream, the aluminum-framed laminated walls provide an overall reduction in weight and excellent insulation.

Interior cabinetry, available in light or dark wood tones, features curved corners, no sharp edges and slam-latch doors. The entry door has a friction hinge, so there's no need to prop it open, and LED lighting is used throughout. In the bedroom, the queen-size bed has good walkaround space on either side. The dinette in back, with windows on three sides, folds down into another bed.

Base MSRP is \$25,900. Nine other Vista Cruiser floorplans are available from 17 to 23 feet in length and in weights from 2,567 to 3,913 pounds.

Gulf Stream Coach

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NEWSWIRE

FACTORY ADDITION



Grand Design Expands

Grand Design Recreational Vehicles, manufacturer of fifth-wheels, travel trailers and toy haulers, has been rapidly expanding since the company opened its

doors two years ago. To that end, the company is adding a 65,000-square-foot addition to its lamination facility in Middlebury, Indiana, which will double its current size.

"Because of our growth and the increasing demand for our products, it has become necessary to add to our infra-

structure," said Grand Design's President and CEO Don Clark. "In addition to streamlining our lamination process, the new building will also house our predelivery inspection (PDI) operations. We test all major mechanical and plumbing processes in the manufacturing plant. To ensure all Grand Design products arrive at our dealers with the utmost quality, Grand Design reinspects and, again, does a complete (PDI) inspection at a separate facility."

The expansion will add approximately 35 new jobs, bringing the company's employee base to more than 670 people. Grand Design offers factory tours Monday through Wednesday at 2 p.m.

FACTORY CLOSURE



Peterson Industries Shuts Down

Peterson Industries, founded in 1966 by Vaughn and Leonard Peterson, has closed its doors. The company, based in Smith

Center, Kansas, was the manufacturer of Excel-brand fifth-wheels that included the Limited, Winslow and Wild Cargo models. An announcement was issued in a message posted on the online forum for Excel owners. Under the heading "A Heartfelt Thank You from Peterson Industries," the

message included the following:

"After a diligent search seeking a buyer or investor proved fruitless, I am so sorry to say that the last seven years has left Peterson Industries undercapitalized and unable to continue. Therefore, we regret to inform you, our valued family members, that Peterson Industries is closing our doors, effective immediately. On behalf of Vaughn, Duana, Bryan, Curtis and all the employees, we want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank you for your loyalty and for giving us an opportunity to be a part of your lives. Words cannot express our gratitude. We will miss you all so very much!"

Honoring WWII Veterans in Northern California

Built in 1942, Eagle Field in Dos Palos, California, is one of the last remaining World War II airfields in America. The airfield houses the WWII Living History and Military Museum where many wartime buildings are open to the public. Eagle Field's mission is to honor war veterans and preserve their legacy for future generations. Living history events are scheduled periodically, and on June 13 this year, Eagle Field is hosting a Dinner Dance Fly-In.

Entertainment includes a 1940s-style big band, a swing-dance contest, a catered formal dinner and a silent auction. The dress code is 1940's period clothing and military uniforms. Guests are invited to explore the museum and walk through the hangars where many fighter pilots saw their airplanes for the first time. Eagle Field is also the location of a short scene in the movie *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*.

RVers are invited to attend, and for guests buying dinner tickets, overnight RV parking is free unless a generator is needed (no water).

Eagle Field, 925-383-3916, www.eaglefield.net

Nearby RV Park: The Lakes RV and Golf Resort, a Good Sam Park, is in Chowchilla, about 30 minutes from Dos Palos. **866-665-6980, www.thelakesrv.com**



Tires of the Future?

At the 2015 Geneva Motor Show in Switzerland, Goodyear unveiled two concept tires that may be similar to tires of the future. One concept is dubbed BH03, and Goodyear states that it can generate electricity from the heat created by flexing while driving. This technology could be used in electric or conventional vehicles and hybrids to provide an additional source of electricity using energy that is currently not captured.

Goodyear's other concept is named Triple Tube because it has three internal tubes that enable it to vary its shape to match changing conditions. Tubes located under the tread, along the center of the tire and along the shoulders allow the characteristics of the tire to be changed easily. An air pump can inflate different chambers, changing the tire into three different shapes. With the Eco/Safety mode, all tubes are fully inflated to reduce rolling resistance. For Wet Traction, just the center tube is inflated to reduce the risk of hydroplaning. The Sporty position directs more air to the inboard tubes to enlarge the contact patch and add traction.

Although these tires are not slated for production, they show what could be possible in the near future. — Ken Freund



Handmade Wooden Teardrop

Gerald Schmidt retired in 2013 after 40 years of constructing houses, but that didn't stop him from continuing what he knows best. Schmidt's love of woodworking and construction, combined with his wife Carlie's love of travel, inspired him to craft a custom wooden teardrop trailer. He wanted a comfortable place to sleep, and Carlie wanted places to prepare and cook meals and store items. They both wanted to travel the contiguous United States inexpensively.

Schmidt began with a Coleman tent trailer stripped down to the frame. He used about 1,500 pounds of wood, including plywood paneling and insulation with cedar on the outside, and built a steam box to bend the wood to make the teardrop shape. The trailer is 10 feet long, and the rear outside kitchen is reached via a pop-up hatch. While enjoying the outdoors, the couple fixes meals on a portable butane cooktop. There's also a small icebox and outlets for the coffeemaker. Inside, the highest point is 4 feet 8 inches, and the Schmidts sleep comfortably on a queen-size bed. Shelves at their feet and sliding-door closets at the head of the bed provide hanging space for clothing and storage.

So far, the couple has traveled almost the entire length of Route 66 and visited 15 states. Schmidt is currently working on matching a 1959 Dodge Town Panel truck to the teardrop to make a dynamic duo.





The brightly colored Jucy camper vans take travelers off the beaten path and provide comfortable sleeping for up to four.

Hit the Road, Jack, in a Camper Van

Travelers looking to camp in a small, basic RV should check out Jucy Rentals. The New Zealand-based company launched rental locations in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Las Vegas in 2012 and plans to expand to Florida and other key markets. The brightly colored retrofitted minivans are easy to spot in their green and

purple attire, and rent for as little as \$35 (plus mileage) per day in the off-season.

The camper vans sleep up to four, and each has a table, refrigerator, gas stove and sink. A TV and radio/DVD/CD player folds down from the ceiling, and Wi-Fi connectivity is available starting at \$10 per day. In the main

cabin, passenger seats transform into a double bed. The pod-tent penthouse pops up to provide a second double bed, accessible with a pull-down ladder.

The vehicles are 2010 Chrysler Town & Country and 2012 Dodge Grand Caravan minivans with a removable table. Jucy will provide cookware and bedding for a nominal fee. Drivers must be at least 21 years of age. 🚗

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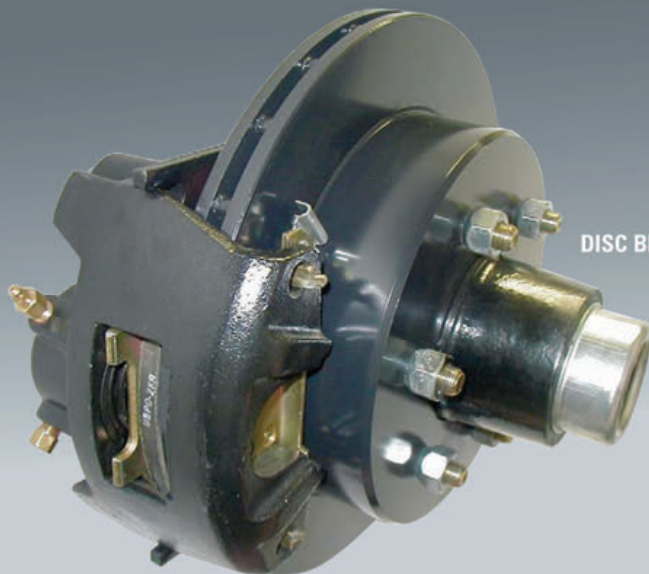
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Sit at Your Own Risk

Hoping the manufacturer would repair an overhead cabinet in his fifth-wheel trailer, a Colorado reader asked RV Resolutions to intercede on his behalf:

► My wife and I purchased our CrossRoads Cruiser fifth-wheel in the spring of 2013. The following June, while on an interstate highway in Montana, the cabinet in the slider fell from its mounting. Fortunately, no one was in the trailer at the time, since the cabinet weighs more than 50 pounds and is situated directly above the sofa.

When I contacted CrossRoads, I acknowledged that my fifth-wheel was two months out of warranty at the time of the incident. That being said, I believe I made a strong case that both the design and construction of the cabinet made this incident inevitable. The service staff at Ketelsen Campers agreed but couldn't help without a go-ahead from CrossRoads. After many emails and phone calls, CrossRoads told me they would offer no help, as the warranty had expired.

I appreciate in advance any help you might be able to give me on this issue. I continue to enjoy your magazine.

John Burkhart, Monument, Colorado



RV Resolutions contacted CrossRoads RV and later heard back from John Burkhart that the manufacturer agreed to pay for the repair:

► I received a call saying CrossRoads would cover the costs of replacing and reinstalling the cabinet. Thank you for the role you played in the resolution of this problem.
J.B.

Leaky Leveler

When a hydraulic leveling ram on his nearly new fifth-wheel failed, an Idaho reader asked RV Resolutions to petition the RV and component manufacturers for compensation:

► The second time I took my Heartland Bighorn fifth-wheel out on a camping trip, the left-front hydraulic leveling ram did not hold the front driver's side corner up. The dealership contacted Lippert Components, and Lippert had them put an additive in the hydraulic system. On the next camping trip, I had the same problem. This time the dealer said the problem was a loose fitting. I got the trailer back and parked it for the winter.

In the spring, I called the dealership and told them the ram had leaked fluid while in storage, but I had to use the trailer at a construction site. While parked at the site, I placed a hydraulic jack under

the corner to support the trailer so I could use it. When I took the trailer back to the dealer to have the ram checked and repaired, they informed me that the ram was leaking internally and that Lippert and Heartland would not cover the cost to fix it because it was out of warranty.

I paid to have the ram replaced at a cost of \$349.47. Since the ram was defective almost from the start, I feel the replacement should be covered under the warranty.

Jerald Johnston, Arco, Idaho

RV Resolutions sent request-for-attention letters to both Lippert

Components and Heartland Recreational Vehicles, asking the companies to reconsider Jerald Johnston's case. A month later, we received the following thank-you note from Johnston:

I want to thank RV Resolutions. Your intervention with Lippert and Heartland RV helped resolve the issue with the hydraulic ram on my Bighorn trailer. Lippert called me personally and said they would reimburse me for the \$349.47. Again, thank you for your time and assistance.

J.J. 📧

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

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A miner's wagon and abandoned cabins stand at the edge of South Pass City.

WYOMING'S SPOOK ROUTE

Across the Cowboy State, the promise of riches drew pioneering miners to seek their fortunes in precious metals. The once-bustling mining settlements now preserve a vibrant chapter of frontier history. Step back in time as we take you to some of Wyoming's best-kept ghost towns

The Cowboy State offers many opportunities for summer travelers. There's world-class fishing in its lakes and rivers, hiking and rodeos, mountain and ranch vistas, wildlife viewing, rafting, hot springs, seasonal festivals, Yellowstone National Park — and 70 ghost towns. At one extreme, many of these historic sites are little more than decaying logs, a few crumbling foundations and perhaps an old well gone dry. At the other extreme, they are fully curated campuses restored to their original livable state.

Whether Wyoming's deserted settlements contain real apparitions from an earlier era is a matter of speculation, but one thing is for sure — wandering around a ghost town is a ticket back in time. The question is, which one to visit? If you're planning a trip through Wyoming, the following Spook Route, listed north to south, will give you an

intriguing peek at the poignant aspects of frontier life.

KIRWIN AND DOUBLE DEE RANCH

Located on the North Fork of the Wood River near Meeteetse, Kirwin had its heyday in the late 19th century when, in 1881, William Kirwin and a hunting buddy discovered gold and silver there.

By the late 1890s, the settlement swelled to 200 residents and had 38 buildings, including a hotel, sawmill, post office, stores and numerous private homes. That said, much of the development, including a powerhouse, electric lines and a railroad spur, was abandoned before it was finished. The precious ore turned out to be low grade, then tragedy struck. In 1905, an explosion killed a miner, then two years later, a blizzard dumped more than 50 feet of snow in eight days, causing an avalanche that killed another three people. When the road to Meeteetse became passable again, the entire town departed.

In the 1930s the deserted town became part of the Double Dee Guest Ranch. The dude ranch operated for a decade, through 1942. Amelia Earhart and her husband, George Putnam, were among the ranch's more famous guests. Earhart started to build a cabin there, but the project was abandoned when she disappeared over the Pacific Ocean.

Today, both Kirwin and the Double Dee Ranch are publicly owned by the USDA Forest Service and are part of Shoshone National Forest. Visitors can see the remains of Earhart's cabin at

the abandoned ranch, then continue to Kirwin where the hotel, several log cabins and mining machinery are scattered around the site.

Plan a full day to visit Kirwin and the Double Dee. A four-wheel-drive vehicle is recommended for crossing one shallow river and several streams to get to the ranch. The Meeteetse Museums complex periodically hosts free tours of the ranch and the ghost town, and can assist in arranging rides or providing directions for self-guided visits.

Meeteetse Museums
www.meeteetsemuseums.org

ATLANTIC CITY

Though considered a ghost town, Atlantic City, one of Wyoming's oldest cities, is an interesting mix of ruins and modern-day rural living. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 37 people still reside in Atlantic City, which has a reputation as the boom-bust capital of the Cowboy State.

Like many other ghost towns, Atlantic City's fortunes were directly tied to mining. In 1868, prospectors discovered a vein of gold several feet thick and several thousand feet long. They dubbed it the Atlantic Ledge



(Above, from left) The remains of the dance hall in Atlantic City where Calamity Jane allegedly worked. Scenic Wind River Canyon near Boysen State Park has no shortage of natural beauty.

because of its location on the eastern side of the Continental Divide. Despite the remote mountainous location, 100 miles from the nearest railroad, other hopeful diggers soon came in search of riches, and Atlantic City swelled to 300 people. During the town's first boom, it boasted a brewery, a beer garden, an opera house and a 90-foot-long dance hall where frontierswoman and guide Calamity Jane is said to have worked.

The city's second boom occurred in the 1880s when a French engineer and capitalist, Emile Granier, introduced his hydraulic mining system. Granier invested \$1,000 and hired 300 Swedish laborers to dig a 20-mile sluiceway to transport gold ore from Christina

Lake around the town and then to the south. However, the grade was too steep, causing the water to spill over the sides, along with the gold, which other prospectors were glad to grab. Granier declared bankruptcy in 1893 and returned to France.

The town's last boom occurred during the Great Depression when miners dredged nearby streams and found small amounts of gold. Some nearby mines reopened, but during World War II, when the U.S. government declared gold a nonstrategic metal, they closed again. Atlantic City was added to Wyoming's list of ghost towns about 10 years later.

Interestingly, the town experi-

TRAVELING THE SPOOK ROUTE

Kirwin to South Pass City

From Meeteetse, south of Cody, travel south 52 miles on State Route 120 to Thermopolis. Take U.S. Route 20 south 32 miles through the Wind River Canyon to Shoshoni. Turn southwest on State Route 789. Go another 55 miles, then head south on State Route 28 past Lander. A series of well-maintained dirt roads with good signage leads to Atlantic City and, 2 miles further south, South Pass City.

Camping: Boysen State Park, www.wyoparks.state.wy.us

South Pass City to Point of Rocks

Continue south on State Route 28 45 miles to Farson. Take U.S. Route 191 south to Rock Springs. Head east 25 miles on I-80 to Exit 130/Point of Rocks. Turn right (south) off the ramp. Go past the Overland Stage Map, a roadside pullout, then turn left on Sweetwater County Road (no sign). Point of Rocks is 0.1 mile up the hill on the right.

Camping: Sinks Canyon State Park
www.sinkscanyonstatepark.org/visitor/camping



Point of Rocks to Encampment

Take I-80 east 44 miles to Exit 235/Walcott. Go 38 miles on State Route 130 south to Riverside. Turn right (west) on U.S. Route 70. Continue another mile to Encampment. Following the signs to the Grand Encampment Museum, turn left on Sixth Street (dirt), then right to 807 Barnett Avenue.

Camping: Lazy Acres Campground and RV Park
www.lazyacreswyo.com

WYOMING'S SPOOK ROUTE

enced yet another boom in the 1960s when U.S. Steel dug a large open-pit iron-ore mine there, but that mine closed as well, in 1982. Three decades later, visitors to this half-deserted hamlet can take a self-guided tour of 27 historic sites, including a mill, barns, cabins, the hotel, a saloon, stores and even a crumbling chicken house amid a handful of inhabited homes and businesses.

Atlantic City Historical Society
www.facebook.com/atlanticcityhistoricalsociety

SOUTH PASS CITY

When prospectors discovered the Cariso Lode in 1868, it triggered a gold rush to South Pass City that attracted more than 2,000 people. The boom turned to bust after only two years, but a number of hardy residents stayed, ever hopeful of another gold strike. The state of Wyoming took over the town on its 100th anniversary, turning it into a state historic site.



(Above, from left) Class is always in session inside the historic schoolhouse at the Grand Encampment Museum. The stagecoach station and Pony Express stop at Point of Rocks.

Today, South Pass City is among the most well-preserved ghost towns in the western United States. Visitors can walk down the main street of town and step into various shops, public buildings and residences, each curated to show life during the gold rush.

The old dance hall serves as the visitor center and the first stop of the walking tour. The most prominent artifact on display inside the dance hall, an American flag with 44 stars, was hand-sewn in 1890 when Wyoming

became the 44th state.

The hotel in the middle of town dates back to 1873 and was originally owned by a widow named Jane Sherlock-Smith. In the 1800s, operating a hotel was one of the few businesses deemed socially acceptable for women. Today, the front desk looks as if Sherlock-Smith could appear at any moment to check in a guest.

The Exchange Saloon is another interesting landmark. Built as a bank during South Pass City's initial two-year



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gold boom, the building drew miners to exchange a total of 3,600 ounces of gold dust for minted coins, valued at about \$3.85 million today. Pausing there, it's easy to imagine ordering a whiskey, playing a hand of poker or spinning the roulette wheel after a long day underground. If miners didn't find gold in the surrounding hills, they could dream of winning riches in the saloon.

The adit (entrance) to Wolverine mine is a short walk above the schoolhouse. Though it never produced a notable amount of gold, it gives visitors a sense of what the mines

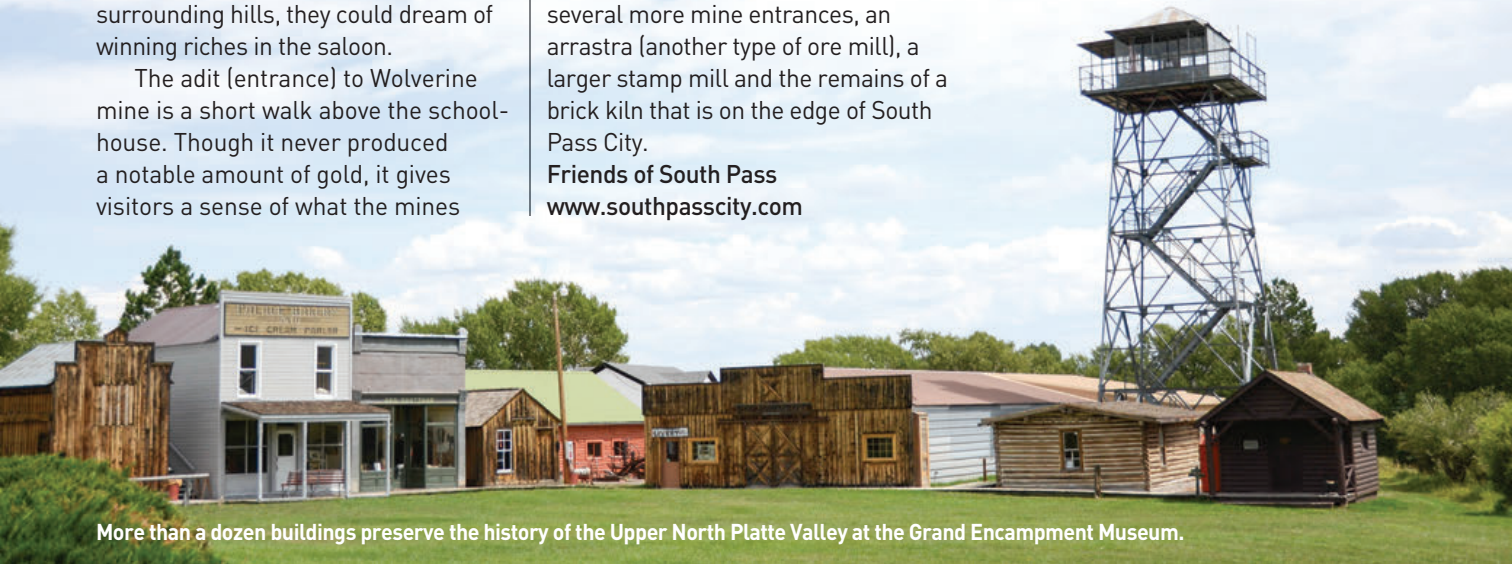
were like. An ore-stamp mill, a sizable contraption by the adit, crushed mineral-bearing ore, then mercury was added to the pulverized rock to collect the gold particles.

For those who want to dig deeper into the pioneer mining era, a 1.6-mile loop trail follows Willow Creek past several more mine entrances, an arrastra (another type of ore mill), a larger stamp mill and the remains of a brick kiln that is on the edge of South Pass City.

Friends of South Pass
www.southpasscity.com

POINT OF ROCKS

With the start of the American Civil War, the U.S. Army withdrew troops from the west to fight for the Union. As a result, during the 1860s, Indian and outlaw attacks increased along the Oregon Trail, one of the primary east-west routes across the continent, which



More than a dozen buildings preserve the history of the Upper North Platte Valley at the Grand Encampment Museum.

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passed through the middle of Wyoming. The government detoured travelers and mail carriers onto the Overland Trail across the southern part of the territory, believing it a safer route.

Though not a ghost town per se, the now-deserted stagecoach and Pony Express pit stop at Point of Rocks was one of the more infamous waypoints along the Overland Trail. Known as the Almond Stage Station, it was built in 1862 from local sandstone. Today, visitors can peek out of the window openings in the crumbling stables or into the restored depot. Several plaques retell the history of Point of Rocks, which withstood attacks and attempted arson by various Indians, and was the site of a purported murder.

Jack Slade, a stagecoach driver and notorious alcoholic, killed a passenger named Jules Beni, a Frenchman and one of Slade's enemies. Several years earlier, Beni shot Slade and left him for dead, but Slade lived, swearing he would one day wear one of Beni's

ears on his watch chain. Slade, a bully prone to whiskey-induced rages, was eventually hanged by vigilantes.

The stage line operated until 1869. With the completion of the transcontinental railroad, passengers and mail gained a more efficient westward mode of transportation. Today, Interstate 80 follows the basic route of the historic Overland Trail.

Wyoming Cultural Heritage
www.wyomingheritage.org

GRAND ENCAMPMENT

Located between the Sierra Madre mountains and the Snowy Range, Grand Encampment is yet another mining boom town of the late-19th century, though not for gold. In 1897, an English prospector named Ed Haggarty discovered copper, initiating a decade of profitable mining in the area. The Rudefeha Lode (named for the first two letters of Haggarty's and his partners' last names) and the Ferris-Haggarty Mine continued to produce copper until 1908.

From the mine, a 16-mile aerial

tramway, the longest in the world, carried the ore to a smelter in Grand Encampment, which processed up to 500 tons of ore per day. During the boom, the settlements of Rudefeha, Dillon, Copperton, Rambler, Battle and Elwood sprang up, but they all became ghost towns when the mining company closed after being indicted for selling fraudulent stock and claiming more capital than it owned. During the bust, the town of Grand Encampment quietly dropped "Grand" from its name. Now known simply as Encampment, it has a population of about 400 people.

While not a ghost town in its own right, Encampment hosts many of the buildings from the surrounding ghost towns on the campus of the Grand Encampment Museum. A two-story outhouse, a fire observation tower, a portion of the aerial tram and homes of both prominent and working-class people are among the 19 preserved structures.

Grand Encampment Museum
www.gemuseum.com

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IN SEARCH OF GIANTS

Visitors come from all over the world to hike through California's primeval forests and stand in awe beneath canopies of ancient redwoods and giant sequoias, the tallest trees on earth

Among California's unique attractions are the world's tallest trees, massive conifers that can live for thousands of years. The coast redwood grows along the state's northwestern edge from the Oregon border south to Big Sur near Monterey. The giant sequoia, also known as the Sierra redwood, grows inland. Although the coast redwood stretches taller (to 379 feet, higher than the Statue of Liberty), it's smaller in diameter (to 22 feet), with bark averaging 12 inches in thickness. Its inland cousin tops out at 311 feet with a 40-foot-diameter and bark that measures up to 31 inches in thickness.

What follows are some of the best spots for communing with California's towering trees and a selection of RV parks and public campgrounds. State park campground information can be found at www.parks.ca.gov, and reservations can be made at www.reserveamerica.com. Reservations for national park and forest service campgrounds can be made at www.recreation.gov. Websites are listed for nearby commercial RV parks.

NORTHERN COAST

Most of California's coast redwoods can be found within 50 miles of the Pacific Ocean between San Francisco and the Oregon border. Rain, fog and moderate temperatures contribute to their survival.

Muir Woods National Monument, Mill Valley

A national monument since 1908, Muir Woods is the closest place to San Francisco to view significant groves of coast redwoods. Muir Woods has two groves that are easily accessible via a well-maintained trail that is suitable for the handicapped. Parking spots fill up quickly, so get there before the

8 a.m. opening. A seasonal weekend and holiday shuttle stops at a parking lot just off the State Route 1 exit from northbound U.S. Route 101, but that can fill up, too. Leave the trailer at your campground, as vehicles over 35 feet are prohibited on the access road.

Camping: Muir Woods has no on-site camping. A good option for RVs up to 32 feet is **Samuel P. Taylor State Park** in Lagunitas, 26 miles distant. For RVs up to 31 feet, **Sonoma Coast State Beach**, about 65 miles from Muir Woods, has several campgrounds. My favorite is Bodega Dunes with 98 sites, no hookups, hot showers, flush toilets and a dump station. Nearby **Bodega Bay RV Park** (www.bodegabayrvpark.com) has 73 full- and partial-hookup sites for vehicles up to 60 feet, free cable and Wi-Fi, a dump station and restrooms with showers. A closer option is **San Francisco North/Petaluma KOA** (www.koa.com/campgrounds/san-francisco), 34 miles away, with 312 mostly shaded sites for rigs up to 60 feet, 20/30/50-amp hookups, some pull-throughs, a dump station, sewer service, cable TV, Wi-Fi, a dog park and a heated pool.

Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve and Austin Creek State Recreation Area, Guerneville

This 700-acre park complex is a popular place for hikers and people seeking easy access to the Russian River for kayaking and summer fun. The park has two significant redwoods, the 310-foot Parson Jones Tree and the 1,400-year-old Colonel Armstrong Tree. Each fall (September 12 and 13 this year), the town plays host to the Russian River Jazz and Blues Festival, which attracts well-known talent, with much of the seating in kayaks and canoes floating in the river.

Camping: RV camping is prohibited at the park complex. Good options are to camp and leave your trailer at nearby Samuel P. Taylor State Park or Sonoma Coast State Beach, both mentioned above. Just 9 miles west in Duncan Mills is **Casini Ranch Family Campground** (www.casiniranch.com) with 225 sites near the Russian River, including some pull-throughs, some with 30-amp hookups and all with access to restrooms with showers, a dump station and laundry facilities, plus boat and canoe rentals.

Hendy Woods State Park, Philo

If wine tasting and camping sound like a match made in heaven, this park should be on your list. Located in the Anderson Valley wine district, Hendy Woods has two virgin redwood groves within its 845-acre boundaries. The microclimate here especially suits the pinot noir grape, featured in nearby wineries that host the annual Anderson Valley Pinot Noir Festival each May.

Camping: With 92 sites, the park campground is a pleasantly shaded retreat, and being inland can be a nice alternative to oceanside parks that are often fogged in. Trailers are limited to 35 feet. About 33 miles to the west near the village of Mendocino are

(Opposite page) Coast redwoods can reach 379 feet in height and 22 feet in diameter. This one can be seen at Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park. (Far left) Hiking through Humboldt Redwoods State Park. (Left) On the Redwood Highway in Jedediah Smith State Park.





some of the best state parks in Northern California, including **Van Damme State Park**, with 64 sites for trailers up to 35 feet, full-service restrooms and a dump station. Located 3.5 miles from Mendocino, **Caspar Beach RV Park** (www.casparbeachrvpark.com) is a Good Sam Park with full hookups, cable, Wi-Fi and beach access.

Richardson Grove State Park, Garberville

Eight miles south of Garberville, you can leave Route 101 and drive the old Highway 101, which predates the freeway, for 31 miles on a stretch aptly nicknamed Avenue of the Giants. Richardson Grove is the first park you encounter featuring significant old-growth coast redwood groves, many accessible by just pulling off the road and gawking. Watch for signs indicating the recommended Exhibit and Settler's trails.

(Above from left) The narrow-gauge Roaring Camp Railroad takes visitors on a one-hour tour from Felton through the redwood forest. Trails lead through ancient groves in Henny Woods State Park and past a giant uprooted tree in Humboldt Redwoods State Park.

Camping: Plenty of on-site camping is available for trailers shorter than 24 feet. Garberville's **Richardson Grove Campground and RV Park** (www.redwoodfamilycamp.org) has 45 sites with full or partial hookups, including 10 pull-throughs. Amenities include restrooms with showers, groceries, a dump station, laundry facilities and Wi-Fi.

Humboldt Redwoods State Park, Myers Flat

This 51,000-acre state park is the largest in California catering to redwood trees and their admirers. It hosts one of the state's largest groves, Rockefeller Forest, and has many trees exceeding 300 feet. Hiking trails abound, ranging from quick 1/2-mile jaunts, like the must-do Founders Grove Nature Trail, to those best suited to the truly fit. One of the attractions is Giant Tree, and at 354 feet in height and 53 feet in circumference, it is aptly named. As a bonus, the Eel River runs through the area, known in non-drought times as a prime salmon and steelhead fishery.

Camping: Three campgrounds at the state park cater to RVers with trailers up to 24 feet. Beware of a tight squeeze between two trees on the drive to Albee Creek if you're towing anything wider than 8 feet. For bigger rigs, **Giant Redwoods RV and Camp** (www.giantredwoodsrv.com), a Good Sam Park in Myers Flat, has 30/50-amp sites, including some pull-throughs, plus a dump station, laundry facilities, groceries and free Wi-Fi.

Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park, Orick

This park is at or near the top of my list of favorite places to camp. It's a 14,000-acre playground with more than 300 old-growth redwood groves, 10 miles of beautiful, unspoiled beach, 75 miles of trails and as many Roosevelt elk as campers. Start by driving the 10-mile Newton B. Drury Scenic Parkway, which parallels Route 101, and then double-back so you can wander on foot or bike. Hike to the aptly named Big Tree — 300-plus-feet tall, 21 feet in diameter and 1,500 years in age. Fog is possible, particularly in the morning.

Camping: The state park has two campgrounds, Elk

Must-see tree: The patriarch of Yosemite's Mariposa Grove is the Grizzly Giant, an 1,800-year-old giant sequoia.



Prairie and Golf Bluffs Beach. Nirvana for campers and elk, Elk Prairie has 76 sites for RVs up to 27 feet. The first-come, first-served Gold Bluffs Beach Campground has 26 sites for RVs up to 24 feet and an 8-foot-width limit. Options for those with longer rigs are just 10 miles north in Klamath. **Klamath River RV Park** (www.klamathriverrv.com) is a Good Sam Park with 30-amp hookups and some pull-throughs. Amenities include a laundry, RV supplies, a boat dock and Wi-Fi. Another Klamath Good Sam Park, **Mystic Forest RV Park** (www.mysticforestrv.com), has 20/30-amp campsites and some pull-throughs, plus laundry facilities, groceries and Wi-Fi.

Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park, Crescent City

This 6,400-acre park was logged in the 1920s, and about half is old-growth coast redwoods with the rest second-growth redwoods and other species. The park has 8 miles of Pacific shoreline, so it suits folks who like to leave the forest and watch the waves. Much of the coast is steep, but Damnation Trail provides good access, and Wilson Beach offers a half-mile of sand.

Camping: The park's campground has 107 campsites for RVs up to 31 feet. The park is open year-round, but the campground usually closes in winter; check before you visit. Two RV parks can be found within a couple of miles in Crescent City. **Hiouchi RV Resort** (www.hiouchirv.com), a Good Sam Park, has with 90 sites and 30/50-amp hookups, a dump station, a laundry and showers. **Crescent City Redwoods KOA** (www.crescentcitykoa.com) has 41 sites, including some pull-throughs, and 30/50-amp hookups. Amenities include a dump station, a laundry and Wi-Fi.

Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park, Crescent City

Named for one of the famed mountain men who opened the area to exploration, this excellent 10,000-acre state park includes two significant groves of coast redwoods, the 5,000-acre National Tribute Grove and the smaller but equally impressive Stout Grove. Close to the town of Crescent City,

the park is almost in Oregon. Hiking trails abound, and I highly recommend driving the 6.9-mile Howland Hill Auto Tour, a well-maintained dirt-and-gravel road that has some twists and turns but is negotiable by vehicles that fit the campground parameters of a 31-foot limit. Nearby is the Smith River National Scenic Byway, which tracks one of the state's few free-flowing (undammed) rivers.

Camping: The state park campground has more than 100 campsites, some of which accommodate larger RVs up to 45 feet. The campground has restrooms with showers and a dump station. Nearby RV parks include Hiouchi RV Resort and Crescent City Redwoods KOA, both mentioned above.

CENTRAL COAST

The area around Santa Cruz has several notable coast redwood groves and the added benefit of proximity to such popular destinations as Monterey, Carmel, Big Sur and Point Lobos State Natural Reserve. The following two state parks are definitely worth a visit, though they do not have the prolonged scenic drives of other redwood areas to the north, and their campgrounds are limited to smaller RVs. Plenty of nearby commercial RV parks make up the difference for those traveling with larger rigs.

Big Basin Redwoods State Park, Boulder Creek

California's oldest state park, this 18,000-acre reserve has the largest stand of redwoods in this part of the state and is known for its variety of waterfalls. An impressive 80 miles of trails traverse the park, including the must-hike Redwood Nature Trail, just over half a mile.

Camping: The park's campground has 31 sites for trailers up to 24 feet. A Good Sam Park in Felton, 23 miles away, **Santa Cruz Redwoods RV Resort** (www.santacruzredwoodsvresort.com) has 30/50-amp sites, including some pull-throughs and big-rig sites. The park also has Wi-Fi, cable, laundry facilities and recreational amenities.



TALL TALES

The National Park Service and California State Parks together manage 133,000 coastal acres known as Redwood National and State Parks, a World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve. Within the collective boundaries are Del Norte Coast, Jedediah Smith and Prairie Creek Redwoods state parks and Redwood National Park, a quartet of nature preserves that protect 45 percent of the remaining old-growth forests of coast redwoods. On the other side of the state, jointly administered Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks host the world's largest groves of giant sequoias, and Yosemite National Park is endowed with three impressive sequoia groves, including one with 500 mature trees.

Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park, Felton

This 4,650-acre park in the Santa Cruz Mountains has several old-growth and second-growth redwood groves. With 15 miles of trails, the park is best suited to folks who enjoy hiking and horseback riding, as well as fishing for steelhead on the San Lorenzo River. The Roaring Camp Railroad takes passengers from Felton through the park's forests.

Camping: The park campground has 103 sites for RVs up to 33 feet. Outside Capitola, **New Brighton State Beach** has an excellent campground with 82 sites for RVs up to 30 feet, some with 30-amp hookups. Santa Cruz Redwoods RV Resort, noted previously, is only 7 miles away.

HIGH SIERRA

Until now the focus has been on Northern California's coast redwoods. Giant sequoia trees live inland in a narrow 60-mile strip along the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada range. They are best viewed in the following three state and national parks.

Calaveras Big Trees State Park, Arnold

This is a prime spot for viewing giant sequoias. Within the 6,500-acre boundaries are two large groves. The less ambitious can explore the North Grove Loop, with 150 sequoias within 1.5 miles. For the more energetic, the 5-mile hike to the South Grove is a fine one, with relatively little elevation gain and shade most of the way. The park's two largest trees, the Agassiz Tree and the Palace Hotel Tree, are on short, well-marked spurs off this trail. Nearby is Columbia State Historic Park, a restored gold mining town.

Camping: Campgrounds within

the state park include the North Grove Campground and Oak Hollow Campground, both limited to RVs up to 30 feet. This area is in California's gold country with no shortage of RV accommodations. Just down the road, **Golden Pines RV Resort and Campground** (www.goldenpinesresort.com) is a Good Sam Park with 30-amp full-hookup sites, including some pull-throughs, a dump station and a heated pool.

Yosemite National Park, Yosemite Village

Yosemite is home to three significant groves of giant sequoias. Two are close to Crane Flat Campground, only 5 miles from the park's Big Oak Flat Entrance off State Route 120. The other, the Mariposa Grove, is close to the Wawona area of the park, just inside the South Entrance off State Route 41. All of the groves can be reached on foot less than a mile from the parking lots. The Mariposa Grove contains what is thought to be Yosemite's oldest

sequoia, the 1,800-plus-year-old Grizzly Giant. For the next couple of years, an extensive restoration project will limit access to the Mariposa Grove, so be sure to check the park's website for the latest visitor information.

Camping: You could write a book on camping in Yosemite National Park, but two campgrounds are best for seeing giant sequoias. Five miles from the Big Oak Flat Entrance, Crane Flat Campground has 166 sites for RVs up to 35 feet and trailers up to 27 feet, and is close to two redwood groves. Wawona Campground has 93 sites for RVs up to 35 feet with the same amenities. It is just inside the park's South Entrance and close to the Mariposa Grove. Reservations at all Yosemite campgrounds should be made well in advance, particularly during summer. Nearby RV parks include a couple of Good Sam Parks. Twenty miles from the South Entrance, **Sierra Meadows RV Park** (www.sierrameadows.com/rv-park) in Ahwahnee

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has pull-through and back-in 50-amp sites and access to a golf course and swimming pool. **High Sierra RV Park** (www.highsierrarv.com) in nearby Oakhurst has 30/50-amp sites, some pull-throughs, and a dump station and laundry facilities.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, Three Rivers

A little further afield, these two national parks are managed as one and are home to some 75 groves of giant sequoias, including the world's largest by volume, the General Sherman Tree. Sequoia is the second oldest national park in the country, celebrating its 125th anniversary this year; Kings Canyon turns 75. If that weren't enough, the west slope of Mount Whitney, the highest peak in the lower 48 states, is within Sequoia's borders. And if all that real estate is too confining for you, nearby Sequoia National Forest contains the world's greatest concentration of giant sequoia groves,

including 33 groves in Giant Sequoia National Monument. There are several points of entry, but the epicenter is Grant Grove Village, site of the Kings Canyon Visitor Center, reached via State Route 180 east of Fresno.

Camping: Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks have a multitude of campgrounds, generally with size limits of either 22 or 30 feet. If you have a smaller rig and enter at the Big Stump Entrance, I suggest camping that first night at Azalea, Sunset or Crystal Springs campground. Then drive the Kings Canyon Scenic Byway and camp at Sentinel, Sheep Creek, Canyon View or Moraine. In neighboring Sequoia National Forest, Princess Campground has 90 sites, including some for RVs up to 50 feet, near the paved, accessible hiking trail through Indian Basin Grove. In Fresno, there's **Blackstone North RV Park** (www.blackstonenorthrvpark.com), a Good Sam Park with large 30/50-amp sites, cable, Wi-Fi, restrooms and a laundry facility. 🚚

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MISSISSIPPI'S SCENIC HIGHWAY 1

Journey into the land that gave birth to the blues and experience deep-rooted traditions, small-town charm, and the history and flavor of the South

When my husband, Guy, and I are planning a trip, we always scan the road map — yes, the old-fashioned foldout kind — for designated scenic routes that are going our way. Almost invariably, they are “roads less traveled,” which we prefer.

We recently “discovered” scenic Mississippi Highway 1, which is also a stretch of the Great River Road. It parallels the Mississippi River from U.S. Highway 49 just east of Helena, Arkansas, south to U.S. Route 61 at Onward, Mississippi, a distance of about 160 miles. The drive leads in the

direction we were headed, although we altered the starting point a little to check out the unusual “crossing” we’d read about at Lula, a tiny burg off U.S. Route 49 a couple of miles east of Highway 1.

Anyone familiar with the blues knows that Mississippi is famous not only for the dozens of blues artists that originated and played here but also for several fabled “crossings” that appear in song or legend. The best known is the intersection of routes 49 and 61 in Clarksdale, where 1930s blues prodigy Robert Johnson, being down on his luck, is said to have sold his soul to the

devil for wizardry on the guitar.

The Lula crossing is not shrouded in lore but probably could tell a few tales of its own. It’s a rare perpendicular junction of two rail lines, the east-west Mobile and North Western and the north-south Mississippi Delta. The Mobile and North Western, now abandoned, was built in the 1870s to carry passengers from Lula to the river at then-booming Trotter Landing.

Today, Trotter Landing is a ghost town, and rusted freight cars sit idle on both tracks. But there was a time when Lula, now a forlorn town clearly fallen on hard times, with fewer than 300 residents, was, like Trotter Landing, also a “happening” place. A blues marker on Front Street notes that, between the 1930s and 1960s, it was “an important center of blues activity.”

A fine home on Lake Washington, one of many oxbows along the Mississippi’s main channel.



Nearly 200 similar blues markers dot the Mississippi landscape as part of the relatively new Blues Trail, pointing out the birthplaces of various musicians and other blues-related sites.

Lula, the sign reads, was home to such blues luminaries as Son House, Sam Carr, Frank Frost and Charley Patton, who immortalized his town in song ("Dry Well Blues," 1930, and "Stone Pony Blues," 1934).

Our quest was not particularly to follow the Blues Trail. But seeing the markers is almost unavoidable when traveling through Mississippi, which, incidentally, counts more musicians in the Blues Hall of Fame than any other state.

After visiting Lula, we drove 4 miles west on Route 49 and turned south onto Highway 1 to officially begin the scenic drive. This is the Delta, land scoured

flat by Mississippi floods, with the only "hill" in sight the grassy levee that snakes along the river, arcing around every bend. It's a lovely rural landscape dotted with an occasional small town. On our visit in mid-June, wide fields of corn not yet in tassel shimmered under a hot sun like sheets of emerald-colored silk.

Half-a-dozen miles along, Moon Lake Road turns off to the left, and we suggest making the short side trip that borders the 2,300-acre lake, an old oxbow, with rows of graceful cypress trees.

Moon Lake, separated from the river by the levee, was the site of the famous Civil War "back-door attack" in early 1863. During the many months the Union tried repeatedly to take Vicksburg — to gain control of the entire Mississippi — the Yazoo Pass Expedition, one



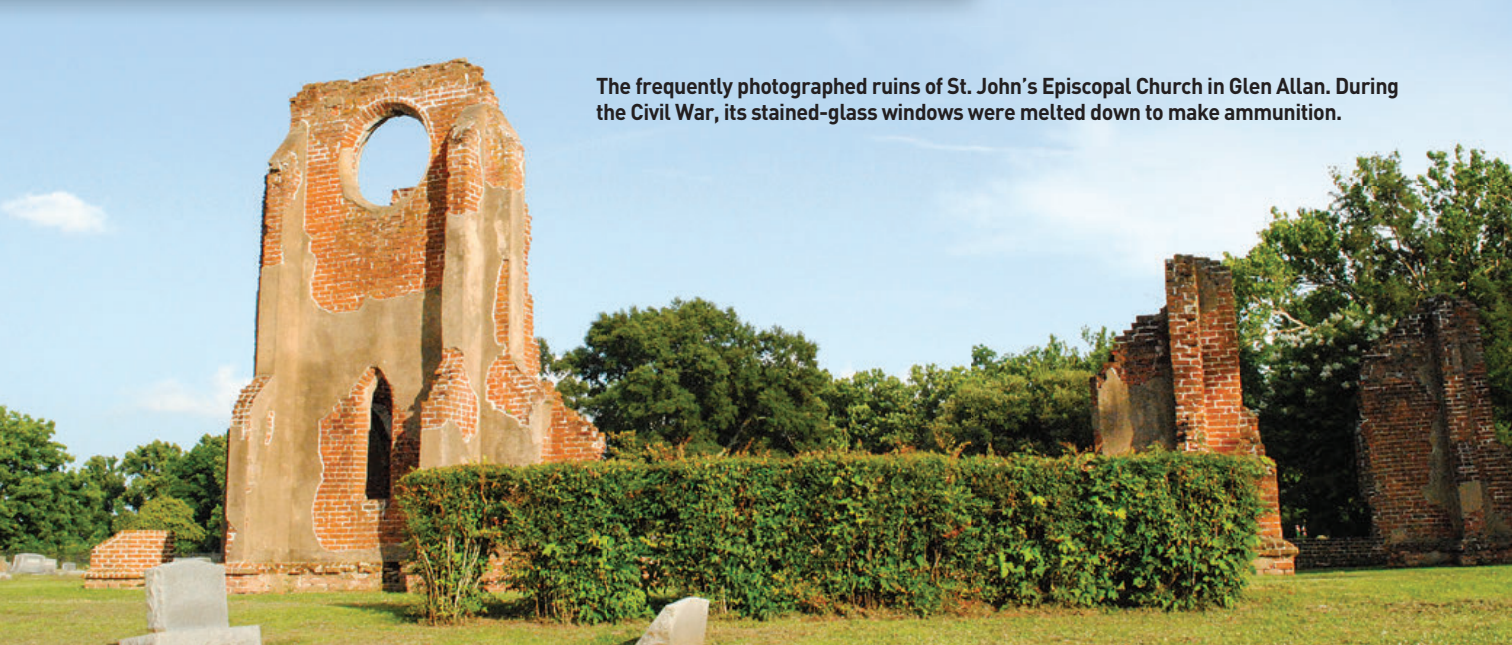
The famous "crossroads" at Clarksdale where blues legend Robert Johnson "sold his soul" for guitar wizardry.

of the attempts, was launched. Union forces blew up the levee, then tried to send ironclad gunboats into the Yazoo near Vicksburg via Moon Lake and a series of other waterways. But low-hanging trees delayed the boats, giving the Confederates time to toss up Fort Pemberton — cotton bales covered with earth — on the Yazoo, the only fort on the river to resist an attack by Union forces, and the expedition collapsed.

Years later, during Prohibition, the lake was home to one of the South's most famous landmarks, the Moon Lake Club. Gambling was allowed, but unlike speakeasies of the era that were frequented by gangsters and thugs, this

ROAD TRIP

A National Scenic Byway, the Great River Road parallels the Mississippi River for nearly 3,000 miles and passes through 10 states on its way to the Gulf of Mexico. Our route follows Mississippi's Highway 1 from Lula south to Onward, a 160-mile stretch that traces the history of the American South.



The frequently photographed ruins of St. John's Episcopal Church in Glen Allan. During the Civil War, its stained-glass windows were melted down to make ammunition.

was a family destination. Playwright Tennessee Williams was a visitor, and the club appears in several of his dramas.

Today, Moon Lake is popular with fishermen, who come for some of the best crappie fishing anywhere. Bait is available at Bite My Worm Pitt Stop and Restaurant, the only bait-and-tackle shop on the lake. As RVers, Guy and I don't normally dine out, but sometimes we make an exception, such as for BMW, which we'd been told serves great food. The recommendation was right on. The catfish sandwiches and homemade slaw are terrific. And if you can afford it, calorie-wise, try the house specialty, a deep-fried Moon Pie.

Another short side trip, to historic Friars Point, revealed a quiet backwater town of lovely antique homes and enormous magnolia trees. But 80 years ago it was a bustling center of river commerce and a center for the blues. A marker explains that Robert Nighthawk, one of the foremost guitarists of the 1920s to '60s, lived here at various times, and in a 1940 recording sang about "going back to Friars Point down in sweet old Dixie Land." Nighthawk (born Robert McCollum) and others played local juke joints and in front of stores.

Friars Point's historic homes include the Robinson-Slack-Marinelli House, the oldest house in town, built in 1850. Now called the Minie Ball House, it still bears the marks of shelling from Union gunboats during the Civil War. Local historians claim it was briefly the headquarters for Union General Napoleon Bonaparte Buford.

The town is also home to the North Delta Museum, its lawn adorned with a tank, a tractor and a memorial to American war veterans. A nearby sign says Friars Point was the birthplace of country singer Conway Twitty.

McKee Road runs back out to Highway 1. The drive, which continues south through the tiny community of Sherard, runs between acres of golden wheat and groves of the biggest pecan trees you've ever seen. Land once polka-dotted white with cotton plants now sprouts rice, corn and soybeans, as well as wheat.

We stopped for cold drinks in nearby Rena Lara at Great River Road Country Store (mailing address: Alligator, Mississippi). The store sells fuel and all sorts of snacks, and includes a café.

Just south of town, the DeSoto Trail turns right, and we followed it the couple of miles through fields of giant sunflowers and over the levee to DeSoto Lake. A large sign notes that here on May 8, 1541, explorer Hernando de Soto "discovered" the Mississippi. He and his party camped at the site, built barges and, about six weeks later, crossed the "rio grande."

We continued south through Gunnison, and on to Rosedale, the Delta's City of Brotherly Love. Then we stopped in at Joe's Hot Tamale Place, aka the White Front Café (902 Main Street), established 50 years ago.

We drove on through Beulah, a rural community at the east edge of Lake Beulah and one of eight enormous oxbow lakes between here and the end of the route, to Benoit, where the 1956 film *Baby Doll* was shot. Benoit was also the birthplace of three blues greats — guitarist Eddie Taylor, the so-called architect of post-World War II Chicago blues; James DeShay, a mainstay of the St. Louis blues scene; and drummer James Curtis, famed for his work on *King Biscuit Time*, the longest-running blues radio show in the country (since 1941, on KFFA in Helena, Arkansas).

South of Lamont is Winterville Mounds State Historic Site, a prehistoric ceremonial center built around 1200 A.D. by Mississippians who thrived in the area from 1000 to 1450 A.D. Many of the original 23 platform mounds are gone, leveled by road crews or farmers before Winterville became a state park. A dozen remain, among them 55-foot-high Temple Mound. Climb the stairs to the top for stunning views of the surrounding countryside.

Greenville, the largest town on the drive, with a population of about 34,000, offers the 1927 Flood Museum, the Greenville History Museum and the Greenville Writers Exhibit at William Alexander Percy Memorial Library.

The Writers Exhibit is interesting, as the Delta "has inspired more



(Top to bottom) A canoe that rescued stranded locals during the Great Mississippi Flood is on display at Greenville's 1927 Flood Museum. Established in 1913, the Onward Store is famous for its connection to Theodore Roosevelt. Along Lake Washington Road, pastoral scenes charm passing motorists.

writers (and musicians) per capita than anywhere else." Among the 19 Greenville-native writers featured here are Hodding Carter, Shelby Foote and William Alexander Percy.

You'll learn more about attorney and poet Percy at the first-rate Flood Museum, as he was put in charge of flood relief (and wrote *Lanterns on the Levee* about the disastrous event). Housed in Greenville's oldest building, a former carriage house, the museum tells the story. The flood was one of the worst natural disasters the country has ever seen, with nearly 250 people dead, 750,000 displaced and 27,000 square miles under water. When the floodwater finally receded, "a river of humanity flowed out of the Delta," mostly to the



(Above from left) Fishermen try their luck at DeSoto Lake, where famed explorer Hernando de Soto “discovered” the Mississippi River. Sunset View Resort on Eagle Lake near Vicksburg offers full hookups, good fishing and access to fine bird watching.

WHERE TO CAMP

Leroy Percy State Park

In Hollandale, off Mississippi Highway 12 (10 miles east of Highway 1), the park includes 16 RV sites with water and electricity, some with sewer; dumpsite available. Bathroom, picnic facilities, playground, restaurant and hiking trail. Rate is \$18 to \$20 per night. 662-827-5436, www.mississippi.stateparks.reserveamerica.com

Roy's Store, Cabins and Campground

Off Highway 1 in Chatham, the campground is located on Lake Washington and includes 37 RV sites with water, electricity and sewer. Boat ramp, fish-cleaning station, and camping and fishing supplies available at Roy's Store. Rate is \$25 per night. 662-827-2588, www.royscabins.net

Sunset View Resort

For RVers continuing south on U.S. Route 61 toward Vicksburg, this park has 1,000 feet of lakefront on 4,500-acre Eagle Lake, 14.6 miles west of Route 61 on Mississippi Highway 465. The resort includes 39 RV sites with water, electricity and sewer. Motel rooms, a private pier, boat ramp, pavilion, bathroom and playground. Rate is \$25 to \$30 per night. 601-279-4723 www.visitvicksburg.com

Warfield Point Park

Off U.S. Route 82 West, this park includes 70 RV sites with water and electricity (five with sewer), with a dumpsite available. A 38-foot observation tower provides stunning views of the river and surrounding countryside. Rate is \$13 to \$15 per night. 662-335-7275 www.warfieldpointpark.com

North — a migration that changed the country. At a time when the federal budget was \$3 billion, damage from the flood was estimated at \$1 billion.

While in Greenville, we suggest camping at (or at least visiting) Warfield Point Park (U.S. Route 82 West). The lovely tree-studded park on the banks of the Mississippi has ATV trails, raised walking paths and a 38-foot observation tower. The Mighty Mississippi Music Festival takes place here October 2 to 4, 2015.

From the park, take Route 82 west toward the bridge, then Highway 454 south to Highway 1 to continue the trip. The turnoff for Leroy Percy State Park is about 20 miles ahead (then drive east 10 miles on Highway 12). It's the oldest in the Mississippi state park system and the only one that includes a wildlife preserve, plus it offers 16 RV campsites. Alligators living here can be observed in their warm artesian-water home from two observation towers.

Return to Highway 1 and continue south 4 miles, then turn right on Roy's Store Road to see a stretch of the original 144.6-mile road approved for construction in 1916. The strip of one-lane road that you see today and can still be driven, from Longwood to Chatham, was part of the original Highway 1, connecting Greenville and Glen Allan. Roy's Store, at the north end of Lake Washington, includes the tiniest post office imaginable, sells all sorts of camping and fishing supplies, and also offers a campground.

At the suggestion of Pam Hammond, the store's current owner and postmaster, we drove a mile west on Lake Washington Road to see what's left of an unusual cotton-seed storage house, a round building with 16 pie-shaped rooms, built in the 1920s by then-postmaster Lawrence Stein. As we walked to the fence around the building for a look, five friendly donkeys came to greet us, and an American Paint horse with eyes the startling blue of wolfsbane emerged from the ruins of the old gin.

From here, you can return to Highway 1 and continue south, or follow the Lake Washington Road east, a parallel route that arcs along the shore of the beautiful 5,000-acre, 9-mile-long oxbow. We chose the lake road — it's just a couple miles longer — for the fine scenery of the wind-blown lake.

We passed Mount Holly, a red-brick Italianate plantation house that in its day was among the Delta's finest. According to a National Register of Historic Places placard on the front wall, it was built around 1856 for an early settler's daughter. Later, it belonged to wealthy planter Hugh Foote, Civil War historian Shelby Foote's grandfather, and, in 1927, served as headquarters for a flood relief committee. It was sold in 2001 to a Texas buyer who has allowed this once-magnificent home to fall into ruin.

Continue south through Glen Allan (at Highway 436) to the 1852 Greenfield Cemetery and nearby ruins of St. John's, the first Episcopal church in

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the Delta. The stained-glass windows were removed for the lead to make bullets during the Civil War, and afterward the church was left open to the elements. A tornado in 1904 furthered the destruction.

Return to Highway 436 and drive east, crossing Highway 1, and continue about 5 miles to the Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge. Established in 1936, it's the oldest such refuge in the state, with nearly 13,000 acres of habitat for egrets, herons, ducks and numerous other waterfowl species. A quarter-mile boardwalk leads to an observation tower at Lizard Lake. Another tower at Alligator Pond shows off the refuge's largest resident reptiles. If you come at the right time of year — June — you might see females building nests; three months later, you can see the young gators hatching out.

Back on Highway 1, we continued south to Onward, the end of the line, at U.S. Route 61. The Onward Store is here — actually, all that's here. The

cavernous store, new in 1913 when this was a thriving town, is liberally adorned with stuffed teddy bears, displayed among its many other wares. At the back, a restaurant, whose specialty is hot tamales, looks out over wide fields of cotton and soybeans.

Asked about the numerous teddy bears, the store's manager, Linda Agee, explains that in 1902 President Theodore Roosevelt came on a bear hunt to the area with several friends. After three days, everyone had shot a bear except the disgruntled president.

"His guide, Holt Collier, went into the woods and found a sick old bear, knocked it out and tied it to a tree for him to shoot," Agee said. "But, so the story goes, Roosevelt said it wasn't sporting and refused to take the shot."

Cartoonist Clifford Berryman heard the tale and drew a caricature of Roosevelt, shotgun in hand, threatening a cowering baby bear, Agee said. "The cartoon went viral, we'd say today," she continued with a smile. "New York shop

IF YOU GO

Highway 465 is a lovely drive along Albemarle and Eagle lakes. But as the road north of Sunset View Resort runs for a stretch along the levee, we recommend not bringing a fifth-wheel or trailer. We also recommend not bringing it when visiting DeSoto Lake. We often leave our fifth-wheel parked in camp while we drive scenic routes where turning around might be difficult.

For More Information
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601-359-3449, www.visitmississippi.org

Mississippi's Great River Road
www.msgriverroad.com

owner Morris Michtom heard about it and contacted the White House for permission to name the stuffed bears in his display window for the president." Permission was given — and thus was born the "teddy" bear. 🐻

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Roughing It Easy

The Nash 22H and Chevy Tahoe LT not only make extended dry camping possible, but also enjoyable

It goes without saying that trailers are designed for the great outdoors, but these days, getting away from it all has a different meaning than it once did. Where primitive camping used to be the only choice in many areas, now we can be spoiled by full hookups and a variety of amenities, depending on where we choose to stay. While this kind of convenience is great for a lot of RVers, the side effect is that most travel trailers are no longer really designed for extended use in remote areas. They usually have only one battery, which goes dead after one or two days, and they don't come with, or even offer, a generator in most instances. And since they usually spend their time on the road and on smooth, level campsites, their suspension and chassis aren't designed for roughing it, either. As a result, many RVers must invest in some expensive upgrades to make a trailer suitable for use off the beaten path.

It's for these reasons that the Nash 22H from Northwood Manufacturing is such a pleasant surprise. At less than 25 feet in total length, it's small enough to go most anywhere and has all the comforts of home. But that's where the similarities between it and other small travel trailers end.

For one thing, Northwood Manufacturing prides itself on building its own chassis, which is independently certi-

fied and designed to handle the rough stuff. It comes standard with a 20-watt solar panel that, while not capable of fully charging one or more batteries, does provide enough power to provide a trickle charge. For those that want more power, it's also prepped for a generator. And in keeping with its off-grid theme, the 22H comes with a 10-gallon DSI water heater (instead of the usual six gallons) plus holding tanks that are

large for a trailer this size: 40 gallons of freshwater, 42 gallons of gray water and 35 gallons of black water. Additionally, you can equip the trailer with a 2.5-kilowatt LP-gas generator, a 60- or 100-watt solar panel, heated and enclosed holding tanks, a cargo carrier and other hardcore gear.

The 22H has a claimed dry weight of 4,118 pounds and a GVWR of 7,000 pounds, which made it a good match for Chevy's new Tahoe SUV, which can tow up to 8,600 pounds with the optional 3.42:1 rear axle ratio. Equipped as it was with a standard 3.08 rear axle and 2WD, the test Tahoe was rated to tow up to 6,600 pounds, which was perfectly adequate for our testing purposes. Obviously, a four-wheel-drive model with the lower rear axle ratio would have been a more appropriate pairing for a rough-and-ready trailer like the 22H, but Chevy's test-fleet size is limited. And besides, the Tahoe is similar in spirit to the 22H in that it is also designed for heavy-duty use, being one of the few SUVs on the market that still uses body-on-frame construction.

Thankfully, rugged intentions on the part of the Tahoe and the Nash didn't translate into sacrifice or discomfort. The Tahoe in its LT trim comes equipped with standard leather-appointed and

The Nash 22H and Chevy Tahoe make a handsome pairing. A front rock guard protects the trailer's finish but can be blinding in the sun.





(Above from left) The kitchen has plenty of cabinet storage and usable countertop space with a small extension. The nearly queen-size front bed features storage underneath, cabinets above, and a long cabinet and two drawers on the side.

heated front seats with memory settings, power adjustable pedals, tilt/telescoping steering wheel, tri-zone automatic climate control, Bose premium audio and an array of “connectivity features.” These include a 4G LTE hot spot with a 3-gigabyte, three-month data trial and a six-month subscription to OnStar featuring turn-by-turn navigation, automatic crash response and other features.

Thusly equipped, the Tahoe LT carries a sticker price of \$50,045 — but the test unit was also optioned up with the Luxury Package (\$2,940), which adds a lot of things you probably don’t need but are nice to have. These include a so-called passive entry system with remote start, heated second-row seats, heated steering wheel with power tilt/telescoping function, a power-folding third row and a hands-free lift gate.

The latter two features really help when packing; simply push a button on the key fob twice, and the lift gate rises smoothly and quickly. Once open, there’s no trickery involved in folding the third-row seats — you push a button in the cargo area, and they fold flat effortlessly. Just keep in mind that if your family is large enough to occupy all three rows, there isn’t much space behind the rearmost seat back to store more than a few grocery bags. You’ll need to invest in a roof pod.

The Luxury Package also comes with several safety features, which got mixed reviews. We like Blind Spot Monitoring so much that we think it should come standard in all vehicles, particularly large, high-riding ones. And the Rear Cross Traffic Alert and Front/Rear

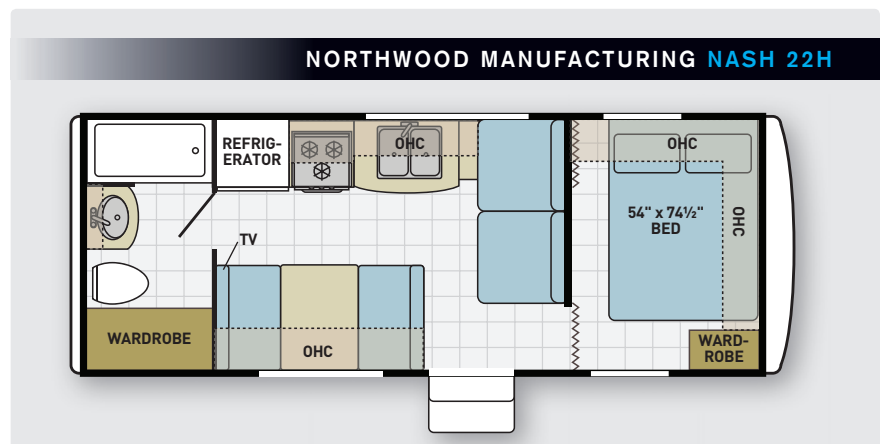
Park Assist come in handy when trying to park a large vehicle like this one in densely populated strip mall parking lots. Some members of our family liked the Lane Departure Alert feature that sounds when you stray from your lane, and the Forward Collision Alert, which screeches when cars in front of you stop suddenly. Given the number of people who prefer texting to driving, the latter two are probably good features for many, especially other motorists.

The Tahoe is remarkably quiet and smooth, almost to a fault. The 5.3-liter V-8 runs like a sewing machine — in fact, the loudest sound emanating from the Tahoe at idle was the accessory drive system, which made little more than a soft ticking sound. We may be among the minority, but we miss the V-8 burble at idle — and even during passing, the engine’s sound is muted. Power is good, whether towing or solo,

but we could definitely see how much it could be improved with the 3.42 gear; the 3.08 gear made the Tahoe feel lazy, and downshifts were sluggish. We found it best to put the six-speed transmission in manual mode and do the shifting for ourselves, especially on winding mountain roads.

Ride quality is probably what you’d expect from a large SUV, which is to say that it’s pillowy soft even when driving solo. When towing, the tail bobbed occasionally as the suspension coped with undulating pavement, but was otherwise comfortable. Obviously, this is no sports car, but the handling was predictable and the steering felt responsive, even if it was a bit over-boosted for our tastes. The brakes also felt plenty adequate to help slow the weight of the trailer.

Since the intent of the 22H is dry camping, that’s exactly what we did, spending some quality time in the Los



Padres National Forest area of Southern California. The trailer tows easily, and its smaller side wall area doesn't cause much tail wagging for the tow vehicle in light crosswinds. We appreciate the intent of the aluminum rock guard on the front of the trailer, as this standard feature will certainly prevent damage when traveling down gravel roads. However, we wish that it went only as high as the lower third of the trailer. Extended as it was to the same height as the rear window of the Tahoe, the rock guard's shiny surface could be blinding when looking in the side- and rearview mirrors.

Once we arrived at our destination, we were ready to enjoy the surroundings in minutes, thanks to the manual stabilizing jacks and a power Carefree awning. Unpacking was a little cumbersome, however, as the two exterior storage compartments have doors on the driver's side only. That's not a problem when packing, but when setting up camp, you have to walk around the trailer to put things like a table, chairs or a barbecue on the entry side. The compartments go all the way to the curbside wall, so it seems strange that they don't just go all the way through. They are, however, both accessible from the inside of the trailer by lifting up the bed or the jackknife sofa, the former offering gas struts to make lifting a lot easier.

Though we imagine this trailer being used by a couple of sportsmen or a small family, the sleeping accommodations and aforementioned tank capacities suggest that four to six people could actually camp comfortably. The forward bed, while not quite

SPECIFICATIONS

2015 CHEVROLET TAHOE LT

Fuel Economy, Solo	19.9 mpg
Towing	11.47 mpg
Engine	5.3-liter V-8
Horsepower	355 at 5,600 rpm
Torque	383 at 4,100 rpm
Transmission	6-speed automatic with manual shift mode
Axle ratio	3.08:1
Fuel Cap.	26 gal.
Tires	P275/55R20
Suspension, Front	Independent coil-over shock
Suspension, Rear	Solid axle with coil springs
Brakes	4-wheel disc with ABS
Tow Rating	6,600 lbs.
GVWR	7,100 lbs.
GCWR	12,000 lbs.
Weight, as tested	5,440 lbs.
Length	17'
Wheelbase	116"
MSRP, base	\$50,045
MSRP, as tested	\$56,375
Basic Warranty	3 years / 36,000 miles

NORTHWOOD NASH 22H

Exterior Length	24' 9"
Exterior Width	8'
Exterior Height	10' 7"
Interior Width	7' 8"

an RV queen at 54 x 74½ inches, was supportive, and there is a good amount of storage space, courtesy of the overhead cabinets and a long cabinet for folded clothes with two small drawers underneath. Just aft of the bed is the jackknife sofa, which converts quickly and easily to a small bed for an adult

Interior Height	6' 6"
Construction	One-piece continuous fiberglass, hot polyurethane laminated, multi-layered substrate walls; wood framing, plywood floor/roof decking, roof truss system; R-14 ceiling, R-15 reflective-foil insulation in roof
Freshwater Cap.	40 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	42 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	35 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	10 gal.
Refrigerator	6 cu. ft.
Furnace	25,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu
Converter	60 amp
Battery	Dealer supplied
Tires	ST205/75R15
Suspension	Equa-Flex
Weight (water and propane full, no supplies)	5,500 lbs.
Hitch Weight	660 lbs.
Axle Weight	4,840 lbs.
GVWR	7,000 lbs.
GAWR (2)	3,500 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Cap.	1,500 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$21,083
MSRP, as tested	\$26,695
Basic Warranty	1 year

Northwood Manufacturing

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or two children. And the dinette, which seats four, converts into a bed using a mechanism whereby the front support leg is folded and the table pivots down into place. It's not only fast and easy to set up, but it is a lot more stable than a traditional push-in post arrangement.

The opposing kitchen offers ad-





The bathroom has a large wardrobe for hanging clothes, plus a good-size sink vanity and a mirrored cabinet above.

equate counter space for simple meal prep, and if you need more room to spread out, there is a small countertop extension. The plastic sink is topped off with a plastic faucet that mimics brushed nickel, and a plastic sink cover doubles as a cutting board. Directly below the sink's edge is a cubbie for small items like a brush and sponge, and below that, a large cabinet with a single shelf that can serve as a pantry. Three drawers below and large cabinets above offer more than enough storage space, and there's additional cabinetry above the dinette. Toward the rear is a three-burner stove with an oven, and a microwave above. Slots in the counter behind the stove provide knife storage. All the way to the rear of the living space is a 6-cubic-foot refrigerator with a wood front that matches the rest of the cabinetry.

Livability of this trailer overall is pretty good, considering its compact dimensions. Although we could not watch TV because this particular unit was not so equipped (a 19-inch, 12-volt DC-compatible TV is optional), we were able to listen to the AM/FM/DVD player with Bluetooth compatibility and four speakers. Sound was a bit on the tinny side, but it was decent enough so that no speakers are required outside to hear the music clearly.

When it was time to turn in for the evening, we discovered a couple of things that we'd like to see changed. First, while

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The Tahoe LT comes standard with Chevy's MyLink multimedia system, which includes an 8-inch-diagonal touch screen with navigation, entertainment, contacts, apps and a three-month subscription to SiriusXM satellite radio. It also offers Bluetooth phone connectivity and wireless music streaming.

we understand that miniblinds are the most cost-effective way to cover windows, they take a beating over rougher roads and get crooked, bent, etc. Northwood tells us fabric shades are optional and will be standard for 2016. We're also not fans of furnace registers that are in the middle of the living area floor, but this may be necessitated by the huge holding tanks that don't leave a lot of other routing options.

All the way to the rear is the bathroom, which is quite spacious for a trailer this size. For the most part, it is well executed with a large, mirrored wardrobe for hanging clothes, a toilet with a hand flush, and a large lavatory with storage underneath and a mirrored medicine cabinet above. However, the bath area is also where

we found a few problems. The shower hose broke immediately, the enclosure was pulling away from the wall, and the door handle came off on the first day of use. In fairness, Northwood rushed this unit out to us, so a post-delivery inspection (PDI) had not been performed prior to delivery.

Small complaints aside, the Nash 22H really is a unique trailer. It offers standard features and options normally found in much larger, more expensive trailers yet remains light-weight and maneuverable enough for most full-size SUVs and half-ton pickups to tow easily. If you're shopping for a budget-friendly go-anywhere trailer, your list of possible candidates is likely short — and the 22H should be on it. 🚐



The Tahoe features standalone options such as 20-inch polished aluminum wheels (\$1,400) and White Diamond tricoat paint (\$995).

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WALK-THROUGH: : K-Z DURANGO 2500

Serious Livability

K-Z brings a number of welcome features to its new D315RKD fifth-wheel with a rear-kitchen complex and adjacent living room



As with any modern vehicle or RV, current trends and waves of popularity dictate design and standards. One of the more recent elements in floorplan design is the placement of the kitchen/living room combination at the rear of the trailer. Many manufacturers have been able to use this layout to make dramatic gains in space, storage and comfort. The engineers and designers at K-Z RV have recognized these benefits and used their new admiration for a rear-kitchen layout to develop the Durango 2500 D315RKD fifth-wheel; for brevity, we'll just call it the Durango 315.

The groundwork for the Durango 315 is a heavy-duty steel I-beam frame. To aid in absorbing roadway roughness, K-Z opted for the Equa-Flex rubberized equalizer to tie in the leaf springs that are attached to Dexter axles with Nev-R-Adjust brakes that have a forward self-adjusting feature. Mounted to the axles are 16-inch, eight-lug heavy-duty aluminum wheels wrapped with E-rated radial

tires. Pulling everything together is the optional Rota-Flex rubberized pin box.

Starting from the very bottom of the frame and working up, the Durango 315 is loaded with features like an optional four-point, automatic leveling system and a completely covered, insulated and heated underbelly, which encapsulates the holding tanks and plumbing system. Every linear inch of the plumbing routing is well thought-out; precautions were made to ensure the water lines, gray-water piping and low-point drains are all above the insulation and not exposed to the elements. Further isolating occupants from the cold is an All Weather Insulation Package, where the roof, floor, end caps and tanks are upgraded to an R38 value with a significant R11 rating in the walls. Residential heat registers in the floor complete the task of keeping the cold at bay.

Resting on the 5/8-inch tongue-and-groove, glued and screwed floor decking are 3-inch aluminum framed

Two recliners and an opposing couch provide plenty of seating to enjoy the fireplace and entertainment center.

side walls, which have been carefully wrapped using glossy finished fiberglass exterior wall segments with an integrated lauan backing. To offer extra interior cabinet support, the walls have been laminated with the addition of metal backing strips.

Outside, the smooth flowing outlying edges of the body will lead you to a slew of nicely proportioned compartments, some offering pass-through accessibility and all trimmed with bus-type slam-latch doors, using dual locks on the basement. Other creature comforts include a 20-foot Carefree electric awning with LED lighting, outside speakers with TV prewire, and a cleanly arranged central convenience center with heated and enclosed dump valves — all part of the standard equipment package. Clearly, K-Z's intent is to set up the Durango 315 to provide serious livability with an assortment of exterior compartments, one of which is available with a prewire and/or Onan 5,500-watt LP-gas generator.

Moving aboard, the interior quickly exudes true coziness, due largely to the cabin-inspired wooded tones carried throughout the living room/kitchen



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER

area and the optional fireplace with remote. Encasing the faux brick-housed fireplace is an entertainment center featuring a 39-inch LED TV and DVD/radio entertainment system, with Bluetooth capability, tied to four living room speakers.

The large living room slideout has been attractively appointed with an appropriate selection of furniture for dining and seating, including an optional freestanding dining table with chairs and two leather recliners. The furniture provides the right level and look of luxury, but the recliners are not ideally situated for viewing the TV.

The décor theme continues on the opposing side of the fifth-wheel with a very comfy deluxe residential-style sectional sofa bed. Topping off the living room is the collection of overhead cabinetry detailed with color-coordinated trim, molding and accents.

Following the upper cabinet edges leads straight to the wide-open and user-friendly rear kitchen complex. Working from the plethora of overhead and under-counter cabinet storage, which has been laid out in a U shape, the workspace and cookware storage availability are more than ample and easily accessible. The uniquely shaped lower kitchen cabinets have been topped with a solid-surface counter, large residential stainless-steel sinks and a 22-inch high-output oven/stove, complemented by a wraparound faux-tile backsplash. At the end of the counter/cabinets resides the standard 8-cubic-foot refrigerator and a handy pantry.

One of the key benefits of this kitchen/living room placement is the ability to view and hear everything going on, whether it's interacting with guests or using the entertainment system.

The front section, in true fifth-wheel fashion, is a bedroom graced with an optional king-size Cotton Cloud memory foam mattress that's positioned in the second slideout.

Among the bedroom options are the additional 13,500-Btu air conditioner and a 32-inch LED TV above the dresser at the foot of the bed, which is prewired for those who prefer to install their own TV. There's also prewiring and preparation for a washer and dryer inside the nearly full-width and -length



The rear kitchen complex puts all of the galley amenities within easy reach of the cook. Solid-surface countertops and surrounding cabinets and drawers make it simple to organize the kitchen and comfortable to access the storage areas.

front-wall wardrobe. The bedroom is simple yet spacious.

In the landing area between the bedroom and entryway is the bathroom. Not much out of the ordinary for this configuration, but there is a large linen closet lighted by LEDs beside the one-piece fiberglass shower/tub that's sealed behind glass doors. A porcelain toilet sits across from the sink vanity. Again, the area is simple, spacious and effective.

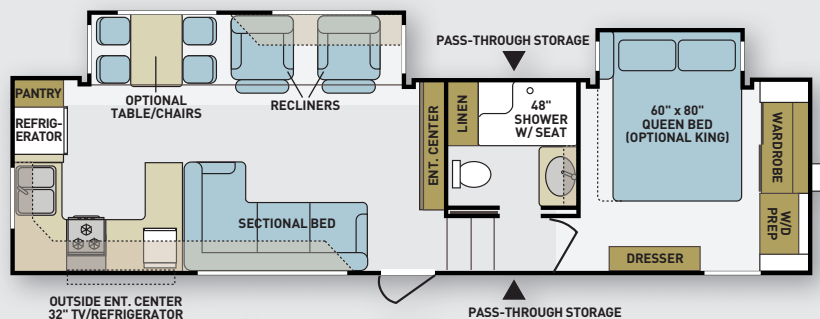
Controlling the climate inside the Durango 315 is a fully ducted 15,000-Btu air conditioner, along with a 35,000-Btu furnace. Some of the amenities include the optional central vacuum system, Maxxair fans with wall controls and the exterior entertainment center, complete with a mini-fridge.

There truly isn't much to be desired on the Durango 315 that wasn't already thought about or covered. This fifth-wheel comes standard with just about anything wanted or needed to pull off most RV trips and can even be considered for budget-minded full timing. There is a substantial option list, but with a suggested retail price south of \$50,000, there's room for a number of options that personalize this fifth-wheel for specific needs — without breaking the bank. 🚐

QUICK INFO



Exterior Length	34' 6"
Exterior Width	8'
Interior Height	7' 8"
Exterior Height	12' 8"
Freshwater Cap.	67 gal.
Black-/Gray-water Cap.	57 gal. / 97 gal.
LP-gas Cap.	14 gal.
UVW	9,910 lbs.
Hitch Weight	1,880 lbs.
GVWR	12,500 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$49,728



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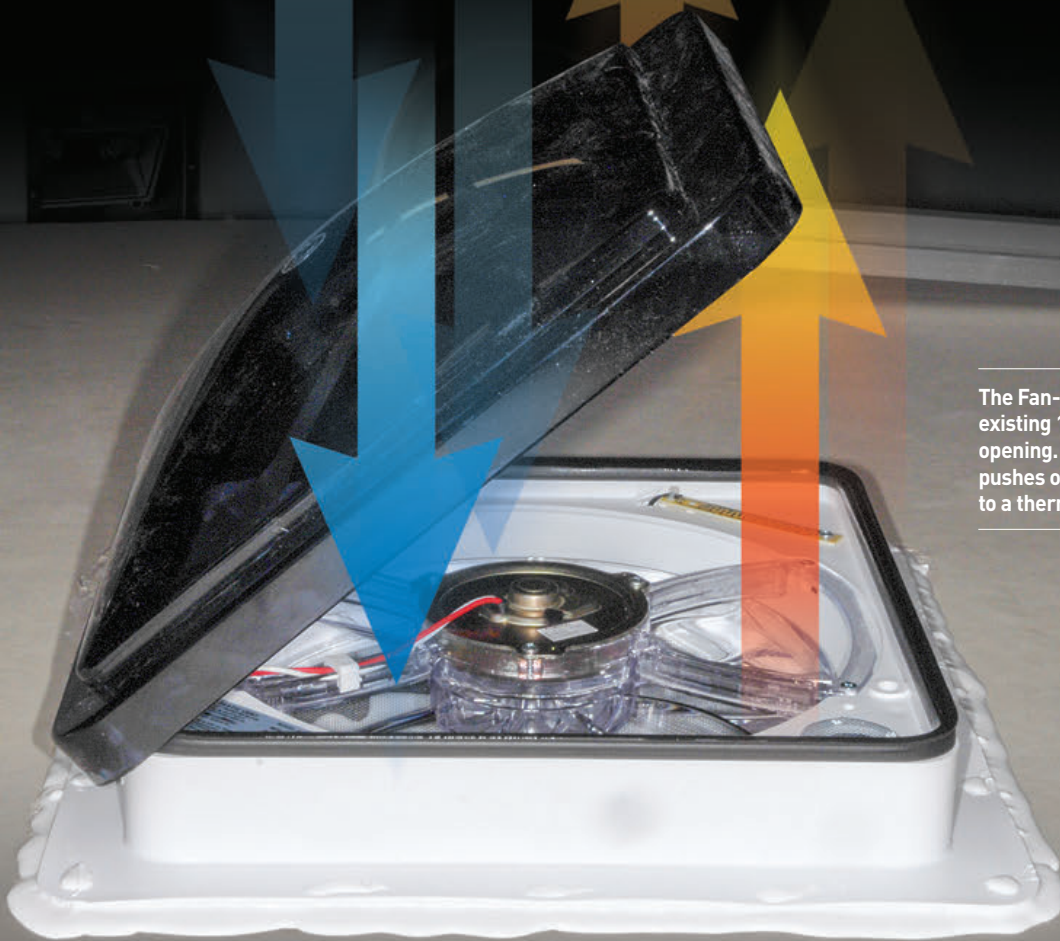
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The Fan-Tastic Vent fits in the existing 14- x 14-inch roof opening. The powerful fan pushes or pulls air, responding to a thermostat setting.

EFFICIENT AIRFLOW

Installing strategically located Fan-Tastic vents keeps the air moving and interior temperatures regulated, while the remote-control operation provides added versatility

A roof vent to an RV is like jelly to peanut butter. All RVs have at least one 14- x 14-inch roof vent, and many have multiple vents. While these basic vents can be opened to admit fresh air, they do little to remove warm air (except by convection), let alone improve air circulation. With little or no breeze from

the outside, you'll be lucky if even a small amount of heat will actually escape the cabin space.

Roof vents fitted with a generic-type fan help somewhat, but for the most part they move little air and can be noisy. On the other hand, a Fan-Tastic Vent, one of the most respected names in rooftop ventila-

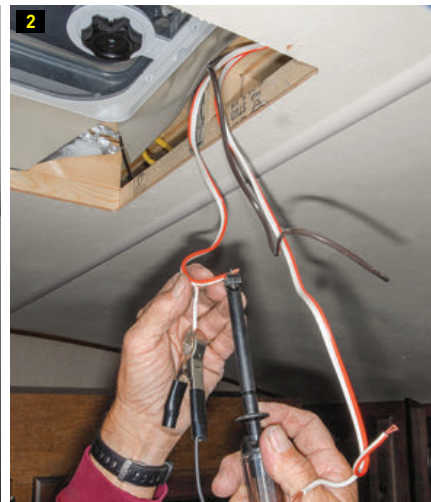
tion, can make a big difference in the comfort level of any RV.

Fan-Tastic Vent, under the auspices of Atwood Mobile Products (now part of Dometic), has introduced the flagship model 7350 vent that comes with all the bells and whistles, taking the company's 30 years of experience building ventilators to the next level. The core of its top fan system is a 12-volt DC, 10-inch rotary fan that will create balanced airflow for maximum air exchange. Fresh, clean air can be pulled in or hot air pushed out in only minutes. Smoke and odors from cooking can also be removed almost instantly. The new fans are capable of moving nearly 1,000 cubic feet of air per minute. Fan-Tastic Vent offers five models to choose from, and all feature an incredibly durable Lexan lid and a sealed motor that's proven reliable during many years of service.

(1) The installation process starts with the removal of the existing roof vent shroud. (2) This original vent opening was prewired from the factory. Leads are tested for polarity and marked. (3) Up on the roof, sealant from the original roof vent is removed from the screw heads. (4) A screw gun is used to remove the original screws; be prepared to deal with messy sealant, especially if the RV is new.

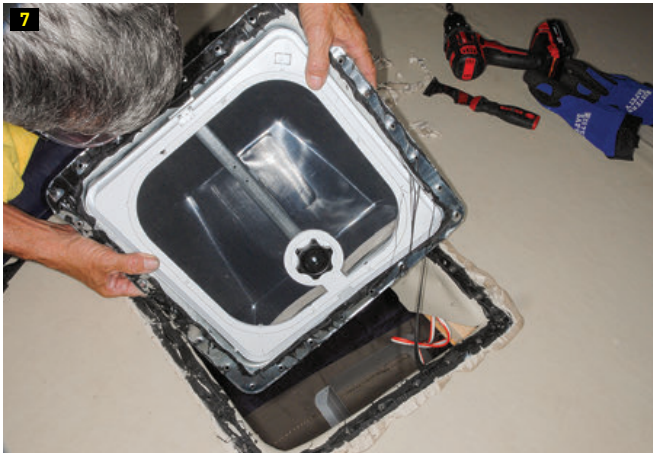
Fan-Tastic Vent model 7350 is almost completely automatic and comes with an infrared remote that allows the user to “customize” the operation by selecting fan speed or temperature to assure optimal interior comfort. There are 14 fan speeds, one of which is a whisper-quiet mode. The remote can be set for an automatic variable speed that’s tied into a thermostat. In this case, the fan will come on and go off as necessary to control the preset interior temperature.

A must-have feature in the model 7350 is the rain sensor. It takes the worry out of leaving the vent open during a rain event while the RV is unattended. When the rain sensor detects moisture, the vent lid closes automatically. Once the sensor dries out, the smart fan reopens to



(5) Old sealant is scraped away from the original roof vent frame; be careful not to puncture the rubber membrane. (6) A scraping tool is used to release the factory roof vent from the roof. Take time to do it right and prevent damage to the rubber roof, which will likely lift up during the process.





(7) The original roof vent is lifted off the roof. In this case the sealant was pretty fresh, so it was messy to work with. **(8)** A scraping tool is used to remove excess sealant from the rubber membrane surrounding the hole in the roof. Go slowly and use caution to prevent cutting the membrane.

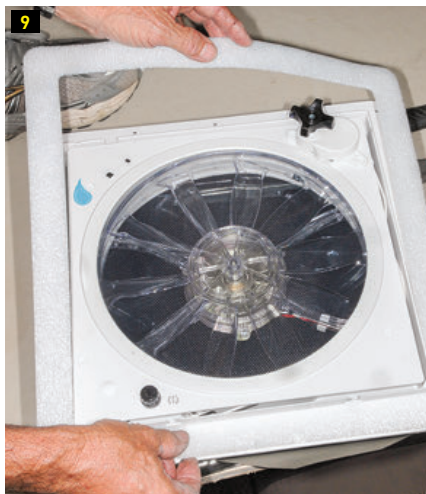
continue circulating air.

Best of all, the Fan-Tastic Vent fits in a standard 14- x 14-inch roof opening, and the installation is further simplified by having to hook up only two power leads (positive and negative). If power is not nearby, the installation will take more time, but normally it can be accomplished in about an hour and 15 minutes, using basic hand tools.

The hardest part of the job is removing the sealant from around the existing roof vent, pulling the screws (which will undoubtedly be goeey) and carefully prying the old frame off the roof. Use caution not to damage the roof while removing the sealant and releasing the lip of the existing roof vent, especially if the roof has a rubber membrane.

Once the area around the roof vent hole is cleaned up, it's just a matter of installing the Fan-Tastic Vent using the supplied gasket and lap sealer designed for the specific roof surface. You can save yourself a lot of trouble by making sure the frame and shroud fit properly from the inside and confirming that the fan works before screwing the frame to the roof and applying the lap sealer.

The installation process was uneventful, except for positioning the shroud. The standard shroud is too short for a thicker roof. A longer shroud is available and can easily be trimmed using metal shears.



(9) A foam gasket is applied to the Fan-Tastic Vent before it is positioned **(10)** into the hole in the roof. No other sealant is needed on the gasket surface. **(11)** Once it has been established that the fit is correct (from the inside) and the shroud slides into place without restriction, it's time to attach the new vent to the roof using the supplied screws. **(12)** Lap sealer is applied around the edges of the Fan-Tastic Vent frame and on the screw heads. Lap sealer fills voids as it spreads. It takes a little practice to apply the right amount of sealer; in most cases, more is not better.

EFFICIENT AIRFLOW

The final step in the process is programming the remote, which is user-friendly. A bracket for the remote can be mounted on the wall for easy access. Just remember that the remote has an infrared signal, so line-of-sight is important.

Fan-Tastic Vent products are made in the USA. Model 7350 has a varied price range, depending on where you shop, but can be found between \$249 and \$325. 🇺🇸

Fan-Tastic Vent

800-521-0298, www.fantasticvent.com

(13) Once the sealer is applied up top, the next steps are done inside. Wires are carefully routed between the Fan-Tastic Vent and the roof frame. **(14)** Butt connectors are used to splice the power leads. It's best to trim the wires so they can be routed neatly into a nearby opening in the roof structure. **(15)** A new shroud is positioned to finish off the installation. Thicker roofs will require the optional longer shroud that can be trimmed to fit. **(16)** The bracket that holds the remote control can be mounted to the wall. **(17)** Silicone is applied to the vent lid seal to prevent sticking down the road.



Upgrading an Existing Fan-Tastic Vent

There are many Fan-Tastic Vents in service today, and many of those units are basic models with a three-speed fan and manual controls. For those who would like to upgrade an existing Fan-Tastic Vent to benefit from the features of the top-of-the-line 7350 model, a kit is readily available. The upgrade kit takes advantage of the infrared remote, which is not only convenient but a great benefit for controlling vents that are installed in RVs with high ceilings — eliminating the need to climb on a stool or chair to reach the controls. The cost difference

between a new unit and an upgrade kit can be substantial; the upgrade kit sells for around \$200.

Installation time on the upgrade kit will run about 45 minutes; tools needed for installation include a Phillips screwdriver or a cordless drill with a Phillips bit, a putty knife, wire strippers, a wire crimper and an optional 1/8-inch drill bit. It's just a matter of removing the inside ceiling trim and frame and lifting out the motor and screen assembly. Just make sure to mark the positive and negative wires before cutting. Specific

instructions for wiring the upgrade parts are provided.

Before installing the upgrade kit, the black jumper will have to be set on the circuit board and the pins selected to match the style and model of the existing 12-volt DC motor. After connecting the wires, the motor should be tested before installing the inside trim. Use caution not to pinch any of the wires that may hang below the upgrade assembly.

All that is left to do is program the remote and enjoy the benefits of the model 7350 Fan-Tastic Vent.

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STORAGE BONUS

Highway Products' 5th Wheel Tool Box takes advantage of open truck-bed space to organize and protect supplies

A truck bed makes a good place to store stuff relevant to RV travel, but organization of the items is usually problematic, especially if the middle section is devoted to a fifth-wheel hitch. Plastic containers and bags can help alleviate that disheveled look, but stored items are still exposed to the elements — and thieves. People who use their trucks for work purposes have relied on toolboxes for a long time, and Highway Products, a company that has made an art form of building these storage systems, offers a product that's aimed directly at fifth-wheel owners.

The 5th Wheel Tool Box is not just a box that you bolt in the back of the bed and call it good; it's a critically engineered piece of equipment that's designed to use limited space efficiently and not interfere with the truck's fifth

wheel when making sharp turns. It fits right against the front of the bed (against the cab), and there's a notch in the backside of the box that allows the lid to open with just about no clearance between the bed and box. This fifth-wheel-friendly toolbox also mounts flush with the top of the bed rails, making it look like it's an integral part of the bed.

Considering that valuable tools and equipment will likely be stored in the toolbox, owners will require strength and durability. This is where Highway Products really shines. Its boxes are constructed from 1/8-inch marine-grade aluminum with a diamond-plate finish, and they are stout. This is the same grade aluminum used by the boating and aircraft industries and the military. The lid is strong enough to stand on, and overall, the side walls of the

toolbox can take a lot of punishment. A one-piece piano hinge is used on the lid, and strong gas shocks assist in opening and stabilizing the lid. Opening and closing is an easy one-hand operation.

In addition to rugged construction, each toolbox is fitted with a stainless-steel T-grip lock that drives a 3/4-inch mechanism that pulls the lid down tight. A key lock immobilizes the T-grip handle for maximum security.

An automotive-type rubber seal is used to make the interior watertight, and the aluminum material is naturally resistant to corrosion. Items stored inside remain dry and safe at all times, regardless of the weather. Another added bonus is a rope hook welded to each end of the box. These hooks, welded from the inside so they look nice, offer great points for padlocking cable that's used to secure loose items, like a ladder, in the bed.



(1) The 5th Wheel Tool Box is measured for centering between the bed rails. (2) The floor of the box and the truck bed are drilled to accept the fasteners. (3) Self-tapping screws are provided, but we elected to use nuts and bolts. Use caution not to hit the fuel tank or wiring when drilling through the truck bed.



While we opted for the conventional silver diamond-plate finish, the company offers a number of other styles to suit individual tastes. The toolbox also comes in two depths: 24 and 30 inches. We chose the 24-inch model because it gave us more room between the hitch and toolbox, and measuring 61 x 19½ inches (across the back and height), it offers a lot of space for supplies. If you're a packrat, you'll likely go for the bigger box (if you have the room), but in both cases an aluminum tool tray is provided for easy access to frequently used items. The tray slides side-to-side, and the only caution here is to make sure it doesn't interfere with the locking mechanism before closing the lid. There's also a rack

(4) The bolt heads are stabilized while a helper tightens the nuts under the truck bed. (5) The T-handle is twisted to open and close the lid; the mechanism draws the lid tight and has a key lock. (6) Rope hooks make perfect points for cable-locking loose items in the bed. (7) A sliding tray provides instant access to frequently used items.

built into the back of the toolbox that we found handy for a few tools.

Installing the box is a pretty simple affair, but it does take two people to set it in the bed. The company provides self-tapping screws with large washers for mounting into the floor of the bed, but we elected to drill holes and use larger bolts and nuts to satisfy our compulsion to overbuild.

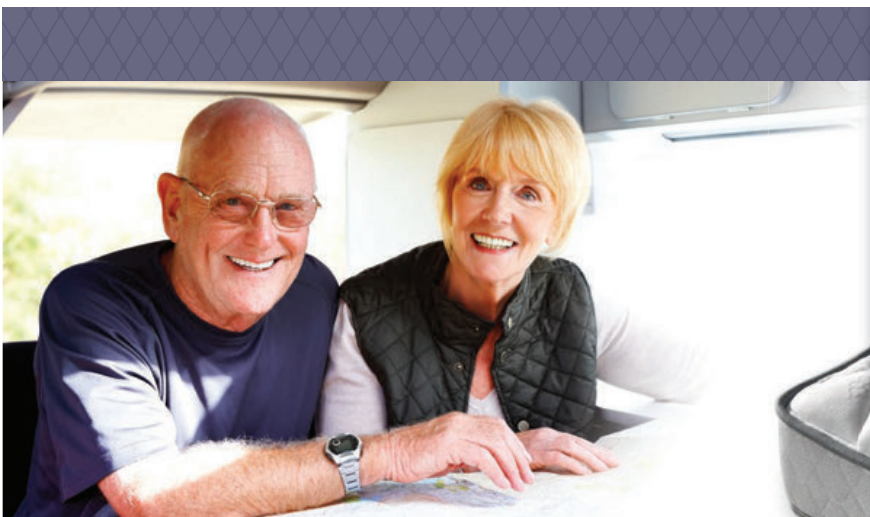
Having this toolbox takes a lot of pressure off the storage areas in the fifth-wheel and provides great access

to tools and equipment. Once it's in use, you'll wonder how you ever did without a toolbox.

Highway Products is a family-owned business in southern Oregon with a competent staff that will provide technical guidance when ordering a toolbox. Made in the USA and protected by a lifetime warranty, the 5th Wheel Tool Box we mounted has a \$999.95 MSRP. 🚚

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Be sure that the fifth-wheel plate assembly does not bind when installing onto the crossmember.

STAYING HITCHED

REGULAR INSPECTIONS AND MAINTENANCE OF A FIFTH-WHEEL HITCH AND KINGPIN COMPONENTS MAKE FOR MILES OF SAFE TOWING

Getting hitched is one thing, but keeping hitched is another. Fifth-wheel hitches have improved immensely during the past 15 years, making dramatic advances in functionality as well as aesthetic design. Locking jaw mechanisms have evolved as load-bearing capacities have risen. Hitch mounting systems, also known as frame brackets, have been greatly improved to work (and mount) more efficiently with modern truck frames, and towing capacities have increased to handle the heavy weights. Along with these improvements comes the need for regular maintenance and visual inspections.

All fifth-wheel hitch owner's manuals contain vital information on specific maintenance requirements, but in too many cases the hitch is still overlooked. More often than not, these important guidelines are misplaced or lost within the first year of acquisition. Thankfully, lost manuals can usually be found on the support pages of the hitch manufacturers' websites.

Fortunately, all it takes is a short amount of time and a little effort to keep your fifth-wheel hitch in tip-top condition. Key maintenance factors include proper lubrication and regular inspections. The owner's manual will

direct you to the recommended types of lubrication suitable for your fifth-wheel hitch as well as the suggested wear points that will need lubricating. The more common products for lubrication are white lithium grease and WD-40.

WD-40 is an extremely thin spray-in oil that should be used only per a hitch manufacturer's specific recommendation. Another excellent alternative is a



Fifth-wheel hitch manufacturers have specific requirements for lubricating moving parts. In most cases, WD-40 (shown) or white lithium grease is used to lubricate the mechanism that locks in the kingpin.

(A) Most manufacturers recommend using white lithium grease where the crossmember rests in the rocker-arm assembly. **(B)** Remove the pivot bolt from the rocker-arm assembly annually and lubricate with white lithium grease. **(C)** White gooseneck adapters may seem convenient, many manufacturers do not recommend use of these adapters, as they could bend the kingpin.

spray-application graphite “dry lubricant” in which the material is applied, then the liquid carrier evaporates and leaves a graphite film as the lubricating component. The dry graphite is almost immune to attracting dust and grit, as happens with liquid lubricants.

Be aware that excess application with white lithium grease in an area exposed to the air is prone to attracting dust and grit that sticks to the grease. This is especially true if you frequently tow in extra-dusty environments such as dirt roads. This excess gritty, dusty grease can be counterproductive to the quality of lubrication because it holds the grit in the area of the mating surfaces where you’re trying to reduce friction. Apply only as much grease as necessary to the surfaces that need to be lubed and remove excess grease to deter the grit-buildup problem. Clean areas that become dirty and reapply grease as necessary.

Any inspection process begins by removing the hitch plate assembly and its locking jaws from the base. Turn it over for access and make sure that all parts are free of dirt and grease buildup before proceeding. Check all of the moving parts, including the springs, for excess wear or rust, and replace parts if necessary. Using the factory-recommended product, lubricate all of the moving parts and operate the fifth-wheel hitch’s release handle while watching the operation of the entire mechanism.

It is imperative to have a complete working knowledge of your fifth-wheel hitch and how to visually inspect the locking jaws. Remember, this is the mechanism that keeps the trailer connected to the hitch. Keeping a watchful eye on this critical component can prevent the trailer from accidentally disconnecting.

Most hitches today pivot in side-to-side motion; before reinstalling this type of head



(D) Manually exercising the locking-jaw assembly on a regular basis will ensure that all parts function properly. **(E)** Make sure that the handle catch is fully open before the hitching process. **(F)** Using a rag and paint thinner, keep the kingpin clean and free of dirt and dust.

assembly, remove the rocker-arm pivot bolt. Clean, thoroughly inspect for excess wear and lubricate using white lithium grease. Follow the instructions in the owner's manual when reinstalling. Next, use white lithium grease to coat the contact-point area of the saddles where the head assembly pivots on either side of the base. Set the head assembly into place and secure with locking pins.

In 2011, Ford began offering a Reese Elite "puck-style" frame-bracket mounting system in its beds. Every year, these pucks and their mounting posts will need to be removed, cleaned and relubricated using white lithium grease.

While it's not necessary to lubricate the frame brackets, annual inspection could be critical. During the towing process, frame brackets endure tremendous forces. Checking for a cracked or broken weld is your hedge against failure while on the road. This is best done with a flashlight, and when finished, make sure the fasteners are torqued to proper specifications.

Although most of the inspection and maintenance emphasis is on the hitch assembly, it also is important to check out the kingpin and box mounted on the fifth-wheel. The kingpin requires cleaning and inspection for excess wear or rust, and it could even be bent after years of service.

Look closely at the pin box for any cracks or loose bolts and address these areas as necessary. Check the area around the pin box for stress cracks in the rig's exterior skin. This can be a telltale indication that frame integrity is at risk and needs further examination. After inspection, lubricate the hitch pin, if specified by the hitch manufacturer. Always grease the hitch saddle or use a plastic lube plate, which is less messy.

When it comes to fifth-wheel hitch inspection and maintenance — and needed repairs — a little time and effort will lead to many miles of safe towing. 🚚



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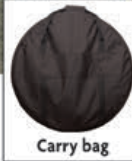
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SHOWER POWER



The innovative, water-efficient and easy-to-install Ecocamel Jetstorm elevates the RV shower experience from anemic to euphoric

Taking a shower in an RV can be a less-than-invigorating experience. Most of the showerheads supplied by RV builders struggle to provide a stream of water strong enough to wash the soap off our bodies, without letting the water run for what seems like an eternity. Throw in the limited amount of hot water in most RVs, and showering can be a real challenge, especially while washing and rinsing long hair. Ecocamel's Jetstorm shower wand can liven things up and conserve water at the same time.

The Jetstorm was developed in Australia after thousands of hours of testing, and it uses a pretty simple principle to make it function as advertised: it forces air into the water stream. Air enters the handle through small holes, and turbulence is created as the air and water mix. The spinning process increases the pressure inside the wand. And water flow is restricted to a maximum of 2.1 gallons per minute, a specification that, as you'll see later, is more significant when hooked up to city water.

Admittedly, my first impression of a "water-saving" showerhead was met with a little skepticism. I've seen these devices come and go over the years,

and only a few pass muster. This one works really well, but you can't get hung up on flow rate or the amount of water that passes through the showerhead. Let me explain.

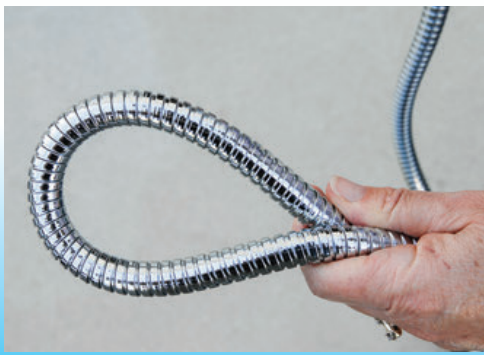
Before I installed the wand in an RV shower, I swapped the showerhead in my house for the Jetstorm fixed-head version. The house shower was originally fitted with a high-end German-made showerhead that provided a good stream of water. The difference was dramatic, with the Jetstorm head outperforming the original by leaps and bounds. What used to require "full throttle" on the flow valve was reduced to less than a quarter turn.

We then tested the wand in

The fixed-head Jetstorm works in showers where a wand is not used.

real-world RV conditions, without hookups, comparing the flow rate of the standard showerhead with the Jetstorm. After adjusting the hot and cold valves for personal comfort, the numbers revealed that the Jetstorm actually used more water: The generic showerhead flowed at 98 ounces per minute, and the Jetstorm used 144 ounces per minute, via the demand water pump. But the stream of water from the stock showerhead was anemic when compared to the Jetstorm. It took less than half the time to take a good shower — and the difference was even greater when washing long hair.

From a practical standpoint, even though the flow rate was technically higher with the Jetstorm wand, it's safe to assume that the new showerhead, in fact, will ultimately save water. Of course, all bets are off if the improved spray of water lures users



(From far left) The shut-off valve, attached to the end of the showerhead wand, can be used to conserve water. Air that mixes with water enters through two holes above the shut-off valve. The stainless-steel hose is extra flexible so the showerhead wand can be moved freely.

into lingering in the shower. Using a high-quality single-lever mixing valve — rather than the cheesy two-handle plastic one that comes in most RVs — will impact water consumption because flow can be adjusted (reduced) more effectively without wasting water to control temperature. The Jetstorm spray is so efficient, it's not necessary to run at near or full pressure, which was required during the test due to the rudimentary two-handle mixer valve.

The stream of water was not only stronger and wider, but the feeling on our bodies was soothing, with just enough force to wake up our pores; unlike some water-saving showerheads, there was no stinging. Ecocamel claims the experience is better because the water droplets are lighter and softer so they burst on our skin easily and the water soaks in rather than splashing on the shower stall walls. Not being a scientist in the field, I'll acquiesce to its technical description, supported by the reduced overspray on the glass

The stream of water is wide and full. As a side benefit, use of the Jetstorm eliminated the hot-water jolt experienced previously when using a shut-off valve.

shower enclosure.

Installation is a no-brainer: simply unscrew the old showerhead and hook up the new one. Each handheld wand comes with a nice stainless-steel hose that, unlike the cumbersome plastic counterparts typically supplied by the RV manufacturer, is flexible and easy to handle. The fixed-head version can be used in showers that are so equipped.

Build quality is very good, and the faceplate has rubber nodules that can be wiped clean to prevent lime-scale buildup. We used the showerhead at home every day for months, and normal scale buildup due to horrendously hard water was not evident. Our only concern when it came to using the showerhead in the RV was the lack of a shut-off valve to further conserve water. After a conversation with the company rep, a



shut-off valve (\$4.95), which works very smoothly, is now offered.

The Jetstorm wand or fixed-head model sells for \$39.95 and can be purchased from the company's online store. The showerhead swap was an eye-opening experience, literally. 🚿

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Liking the Viking

A propane cylinder is a propane cylinder, right? Until now, maybe — because Viking Cylinders has a whole new take on this ubiquitous RV component with its line of lightweight, translucent composite propane cylinders. Using advanced technology, Viking has created the lightest and safest propane cylinder available, according to the company. For one thing, these cylinders incorporate ergonomic handles that make them much easier to lift and transport, and they won't corrode or rust. Plus, you can actually see the propane fuel level. Viking Cylinders are a desirable alternative to heavy steel cylinders — and with 9 million units in circulation worldwide, they have an impressive safety record. The 22-pound size is made specifically for the RV industry.

MSRP: \$149.99

www.vikingcylinders.com

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The Leash You Can Do

With today's Ram heavy-duty trucks capable of towing up to 30,000 pounds, there's never been a better time for additional stopping power. Quick, controlled braking just got easier with the introduction of Pacbrake's P-67 LoadLeash engine brake for the 6.7-liter Cummins. Working in conjunction with the factory-installed Variable Geometry Turbo (VGT) exhaust brake, the LoadLeash provides an additional 150 retarding horsepower, or roughly double what the VGT can supply alone, according to the company. In addition to enhanced control and reduced brake fade, Pacbrake claims the LoadLeash can extend brake service intervals by up to 300 percent. Applications include 2007 to 2014 Ram 2500 to 5500 diesel pickup/chassis cab trucks equipped with the ISB 6.7-liter Cummins diesel.

MSRP: Around \$1,585

800-663-0096, www.pacbrake.com

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King of Antennas

King has introduced two automatic satellite TV antennas for use with DISH and DirecTV satellite services. The second-generation King Tailgater for DISH (model VQ4500) and King Quest for DirecTV (model VQ4100) are designed for use as either portable or roof-mounted satellite systems. At just 8 pounds and 13½ inches high, the new King Tailgater and Quest antennas are smaller and lighter than previous models yet provide improved signal reception, according to the company. Like the first-generation antennas introduced in 2011, the second-generation King Tailgater works exclusively with DISH's service, while the King Quest works with DirecTV SD programming with an optional controller accessory (purchased separately) to make the system compatible with DISH HD and Bell TV services as well.

MSRP: \$379 to \$549. 952-922-6889, www.kingconnect.com

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Drivelines

Drivelines are among those essential vehicle parts that are out of sight, out of mind and mostly taken for granted — until something goes wrong. Yet if this critical subsystem fails, you can't drive at all, so it's worth learning how to get it to perform at its best.

The driveline typically consists of one or more round shafts with flexible joints at each end that spin to transmit the engine's torque as it exits the transmission, and/or the transfer case on four-wheel-drive (4WD) models. It delivers this driving force to the drive axle(s), which then turns the wheels. Most of the vehicles used for towing RV trailers and hauling campers have conventional drivelines.

Rear-wheel-drive (RWD) models typically have a single rear driveshaft, while longer-wheelbase models, such as crew-cab long-bed trucks, usually have two rear shafts supported in the middle by a center driveshaft bearing and mount. Front-wheel-drive (FWD) vehicles with independent front suspension typically have short driveshafts on both sides with constant-velocity (CV) joints at each end driving the front wheels.

Towing puts a lot of extra stress on already hard-working drivelines and U-joints, and lack of maintenance, neglect and certain driving techniques, such as jackrabbit starts and rapid acceleration, can lead to driveline damage or failure. This often occurs when the wheels spin and then suddenly grab, as when a truck pulling a heavy trailer spins the tires on grass or dirt and the tires suddenly stop spinning when the pavement is reached. "Wheel hop" during acceleration also causes tremendous stresses on the driveline. Rewinding the engine up and then "popping" the clutch is another way to quickly become familiar with driveline failure.

The vast majority of driveshafts are made from either tubular steel or aluminum. A few are made from more exotic and expensive materials, such as carbon fiber, but these are generally reserved for use on race or high-performance vehicles. Driveshafts have a critical speed limit, which is why many light trucks have an electronic speed limiter. At excessively high speeds, the driveshaft begins to bend, and may pull apart at the middle. This type of catastrophic failure can destroy fuel tanks and lines, the exhaust system, the floor and anything else that is in the path. Having a U-joint fail can also cause the driveshaft to drop at either end, which is also dangerous.

Critical speed varies with the length of the driveshaft — the longer the shaft, the lower the critical speed. Driveline specialists have charts for determining critical speed. To increase critical speed, the driveshaft tube diameter has to be increased, which reduces flexibility and adds stability to

the driveshaft. However, as the tube diameter increases, so does weight. Another way to raise critical speed is to use an aluminum driveshaft(s). Aluminum allows thicker-wall tubing for high-speed stability, along with a 30 to 40 percent reduction in weight. Therefore, aluminum driveshafts typically allow a 15 to 20 percent increase in critical speed for a given tube size.

Joints

CV joints allow a driveshaft to transmit power through variable angles at a constant rotational speed. They are widely used in FWD, 4WD and AWD vehicles, as well as RWD vehicles with independent rear suspensions.

Cardan cross-type universal joints, called U-joints for short, are a type of bearing shaped like an X that allows the driveshaft to change angle constantly as it spins. As a U-joint changes angle, the shaft speeds up or slows down slightly as the effective length of the lever arm changes, which is normally offset by the joint at the other end of the shaft. Cardan-type universal joints are typically designed to operate in a range of 1 to 3 degrees and can operate for short periods at angles up to 9 degrees. Front and rear angles on the same driveshaft should be equal or within 0.5 degrees of



Bolts must be properly torqued to ensure that the U-joint will be retained safely by the straps.

each other. Angles outside the desired range may cause vibration and significantly shorten the life of the joint.

Angularity

Lifted or lowered vehicles — and even some stock ones — can have driveline angularity problems. You can check it yourself or have a driveline specialist shop do it. Inexpensive angle finders can be obtained at tool dealers and online, and there are even free cell phone apps that include angle finders.

You'll need to work on a level surface (check it with your angle finder) and determine the slope of your vehicle's transmission (or 4WD transfer case) output, driveshaft and axle pinion(s). Write down the measurements, then determine the net-operating angle at the U-joints (either the transfer case side or the pinion side of the driveshaft). On a conventional two-U-joint rear driveshaft, pinion slope should be about the same as the transmission (or 4WD transfer case) slope. This allows U-joints at both ends of the driveshaft to cancel each other out and deliver smooth power. If angles are off even a few degrees, the U-joints will cause vibration.

U-joint operating angles at each end of the shaft should be at least 1 degree but not more than 3 degrees. Variation between ends should be 1 degree or less. Pinion-angle correction wedges, which come in various widths and degrees, are available from Deaver Suspension and other suppliers to match any popular leaf spring and axle. Vehicles that sag considerably when a trailer is hitched up (or a truck camper is installed) should have their suspension upgraded to correct sagging. Drivelines should be measured both loaded and unloaded if an angularity problem is suspected.

Adjusting the rear pinion angle on a leaf-spring-equipped vehicle to correct driveline angularity can be done by adding pinion-correction wedges under the leaf stack. Coil-spring vehicles and independent 4WD front suspensions may require special hardware, which is available through 4x4 shops and driveline specialists.

Tips and Troubleshooting

Multipiece driveshafts need to be balanced as an assembly on a computerized balancer whenever there is a vibration problem, a section of the shaft is replaced, balance weights fling off, etc. Splined slip joints at the center bearing on multipiece driveshafts must be reassembled in the same position, so the U-joints line up properly. Before disassembling a multipiece driveline, mark the ends so they can be reassembled in exactly the same positions.

If the U-joints or center-support assembly are replaced, and then the driveshaft vibrates, it is likely that the driveshaft was reassembled out of phase. You may need to have the driveshaft rephased and possibly rebalanced. A properly phased driveshaft has the inboard yokes of the shaft in line with each other. It is also possible that a yoke ear was damaged when removing or installing the U-joints, or some needle bearings were left out.

Lift kits that raise the vehicle also typically change driveline angularity. Additionally, depending on the type of lift kit and how high the vehicle was lifted, the driveshaft could be too short. The driveshaft may need to be lengthened (retubed) and rebalanced to correct this. If a shaft is too short, the slip yoke could come out of the back of the transmission when the rear

suspension goes to full droop.

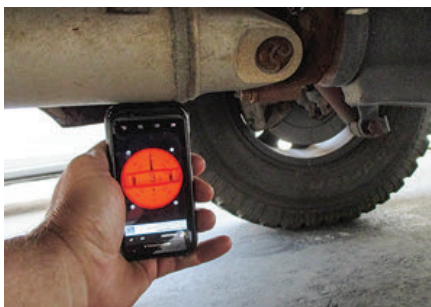
Lowering a vehicle also changes the angle of the driveshaft from the transmission to the rear differential. This angle may need to be corrected to eliminate resulting vibration. It could require having the driveshaft shortened and rebalanced. If the shaft is too long, the slip yoke (where equipped) could slam into the back of the transmission when the suspension bottoms out.

Vibration, Clunks and Humming

A number of things may cause vehicle vibration. Typically, if you feel the vibration through the steering wheel, and it starts to feel noticeable above 45 to 50 MPH, it's likely to be wheel and tire imbalance, although faulty front CV joints may also be felt through the steering. Driveline vibration usually is a heavier vibration that often starts at lower speeds than wheel-balance problems and can be felt more through the seat and floor and center console or floor shift.

If a vehicle makes a loud clunk when put into gear or changing from drive to reverse, etc., the drivetrain may have excessive slack or "play." This is usually caused by worn driveshaft U-joints, but could also come from the transmission, the transfer case (on 4WDs) or the differential. Most commonly, a "humming" noise is caused by a noisy differential or center bearing, noisy tires or an out-of-balance driveshaft.

Driveshafts can be damaged by high-centering or when something such as road debris hits the shaft and dents it. Continued operation with vibration can damage the transmission output bushing and seal, causing loss of fluid and possible failure. Premature wear of the rear-axle pinion bearing and seal in the differential can also result in loss of fluid and damage to the rear end. If you are getting a noise or vibration from the



(Far left) The Magnetic Angle Finder used to check driveshaft angularity was purchased inexpensively from Harbor Freight Tools. (Left) Free apps are available for Apple and Android smartphones to calculate U-joint angles and find the driveline operating angle.

driveline, have the shaft repaired and balanced as soon as possible.

Maintenance

Routine maintenance generally consists of inspecting and greasing U-joints (if they have fittings), checking the tightness of any bolts or other fasteners, and inspecting and replacing worn parts, including U-joints, center bearings and mounts, and rubber boots on slip joints. Sometimes slip joints also get dry of grease and stick, causing a loud noise that's difficult to diagnose.

Never clamp a driveshaft in a vise in such a way that it can be distorted. If you replace U-joints yourself, don't drive the U-joint caps into place with a hammer; they should be carefully pressed into place. Never skimp on U-joint quality, either — get the best you can. While grease fittings are convenient, they also create a weak point in the casting, which may lead to failure at that point. Joints without grease fittings are recommended for many high-torque applications.

Final Thoughts

Stock vehicles typically require only routine maintenance, such as U-joint lubrication, and service and inspection of center bearings and mounts. If you tow a heavy trailer that is near the maximum tow rating, have changed ride height higher or lower than stock and/or have a "souped-up" engine that develops significantly more power than stock, consider having the driveline inspected by a specialist before something fails. Truck owners who have added high-performance engine upgrades that increase power output more than say, 10 percent, should consider upgrading the driveline. 🚚

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How many times have you tried to hook up a fifth-wheel or find something in the pickup bed at night? Fumbling around in the dark is not fun, and positioning that kingpin into the hitch saddle blindly can be an exercise in futility. Some trucks have a cab light that partially illuminates the bed, and, of course, you can always use a flashlight — if you have a helper to hold it. Having some type of auxiliary bed lighting can help, and certain fifth-wheel manufacturers offer up-front lighting, but a better solution is the Automatic Cargo Light by 4z Products.

Capitalizing on LED technology, 4z Products has assembled a kit that provides everything a do-it-yourselfer needs to make a clean installation without creating an eyesore or making alterations in the bed area. The Automatic Cargo Light is comprised of two super-bright and flexible 4-foot LED strips that are backed with a double-sided automotive-grade adhesive, a prewired magnetic tailgate switch, a prewired power/ground pigtail with LED strip plugs, override switches, a small assortment of industrial-strength hook-and-loop fasteners of varied thicknesses and two Posi-Lock connectors.

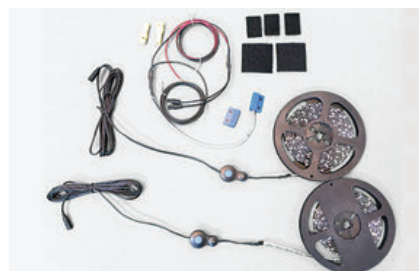
The key to this system is the ability to activate the light strips automatically when the tailgate is open and override the switch using an attached button-

(Right, from top) The Automatic Cargo Light kit comes complete with two 4-foot LED strips and all the hardware necessary for the installation. A magnetic switch is used to activate the lights when the tailgate is opened.

activated control, regardless of the tailgate position. This feature is important for fifth-wheel owners because the tailgate will need to be closed after hitching (or while hitching for some models), and good lighting will be necessary to confirm that the hitch is locked, the power cord is plugged in and the break-away cable is attached, not to mention for viewing things stored in the bed. While the 4-foot sections of lighting can be used in their entirety, it's also possible to trim the strips at every third light, which makes the Automatic Cargo Light more versatile and customizable.

To begin the installation, we found it easiest to open the tailgate and remove the taillights first, so we could route the wires. The kit uses magnetic sensors to turn the lights on and off. With the tailgate open, you'll need to find a suitable spot to place the magnetic switch, mounting the wired half on the body between the taillight and tailgate. When positioning the magnets, it's important that there is no more than a ¼-inch gap between the two pieces.

Next, it was time to choose how and where to mount the LED strips. I chose to stagger them a bit from right to left, twisting part of one strip and attaching to the side of a bed rail with the remainder underneath to gain different lighting

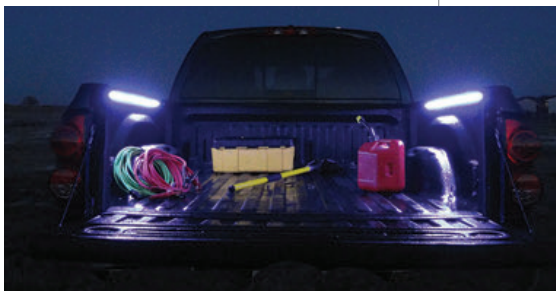


effects and spread some of the light around the bed. The lighting strips are flexible enough to explore mounting options. Using existing holes in the end of the bed near the stake pockets, the wires were routed behind the taillights and down to the trailer plug wires.

The Posi-Lock connectors were then used to simply tap into the charge line, which provides a 12-volt DC source of power. In some cases, the truck ignition key will have to be in the On position to activate the 12-volt DC power. That's it. Simply test the tailgate and override switches, and you're done. The Automatic Cargo Light Dual LED System retails for \$99.95. A kit with 8-foot strips of lighting runs \$124.95. 🚚

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OVERHEATING FURNACE

Q I have a 2001 33-foot fifth-wheel, a National RV Palisades. It has an Atwood Hydro Flame furnace. I set the temperature to 75 degrees, and the furnace gets too hot and will not turn off. I have to turn it off at the wall. It is dangerously hot! I think the furnace might catch fire. Is there a part that is wrong, such as the wall gauge?

Dan Archuleta, via email

A I'd recommend you not use the furnace until you get this condition repaired, Dan. It seems like the thermostat is bad. The fact that the furnace keeps going and possibly overheating suggests that the thermostat is in need of replacement. Your authorized RV service center can replace the thermostat. Alternately, if you're handy with this kind of work, you can do it yourself. Heat-only thermostats are available at RV stores and most home-improvement stores.



The furnace also has a high-limit switch to protect the furnace when a thermostat fails. It may also be faulty and can be replaced with a new one available from most RV stores.

— **Jeff Johnston**

USB PLUG-IN OPTION

Q Regarding the "USB-Plug Addition" letter in the February 2015 RV Clinic, how about using a 120-volt AC USB charger? You can put it in a drawer when not using it and move it to a new trailer when you upgrade. I found several on eBay, including one for \$5.95 with free shipping (shoot, at this price, get two). This one has a 120-volt AC adapter and a car cigarette lighter adapter for charging on the go. Be sure it has a high enough amperage output for your needs. You can also find these in thrift shops, if you look hard. I also have a standalone USB four-port hub to charge my backing-in walkie-talkies. Because of thrift shops, I have cell-phone chargers that live in my trailer, truck and car.

Jerry Elzea, Ettrick, Wisconsin

A Isn't variety wonderful, Jerry? Those 120-volt AC plug-in chargers are a good option for charging your

USB devices, and they're low cost, as you suggested, and readily available. In some RVs with minimal AC wall outlets, having an outlet occupied by a charger or two means you can't have anything else plugged in at the same time, and for people with a lot of plug-in appliances, that can be a minor problem. Use of the USB-equipped sockets avoids that situation and also means you need to have only a USB cord on hand instead of the entire charger cord. RVers have flexibility about how they solve their USB-device charging, and integrated wall plugs are one good answer. — **J.J.**

FRONT-END BOUNCE

Q We traded our 1995 Dutchmen fifth-wheel for a travel trailer so my wife wouldn't have to climb steps inside the trailer. This is our first experience pulling a travel trailer after 20 years with a fifth-wheel.

We have a 2007 Chevrolet 2500HD

Classic diesel 4x4 crew cab with the factory tow package and Allison transmission. The pickup has 25,000 miles on it. Our new trailer is a 2015 Rockwood Windjammer by Forest River. It is the V-front model. We have a Blue Ox weight-distributing hitch, which was installed by the dealer when we bought the trailer. The technician told me when he was installing the hitch that he didn't think I needed it very badly because the pickup's back end went down only about an inch when it was hooked on, so the back springs must be good.

The problem I have is, when we hit a low spot or a high place in the highway, it bounces the front end of the pickup up and down more than I think it should. The hitch is set like the dealer set it, but I am wondering if the chain is too tight or if the pickup needs better shocks on the front end. If the shocks are the problem, please recommend what I should replace them with.

Marvin Mercer, Grant City, Missouri

A I know the feeling you have with the front of your truck, Marvin. I've experienced that several times in the past. In my experience, a bouncing front end is caused by a weight-distributing (WD) hitch with spring bars that aren't adjusted tightly enough. It means the

THE TECH TEAM



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



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

trailer hitch weight is removing some weight from the front of the truck, and that causes a lightweight or almost floating type of feeling at the truck's front end. When you hit the bump you mentioned, the front of the truck bounces too much, due to the unwanted weight shift toward the back of the truck.

It's true that the back of a sturdy pickup will drop less than, say, that of an SUV under a trailer's hitch weight, but the WD hitch still needs to come into play to produce equal weight distribution on the truck's front and rear axles. Test-drive your truck and trailer, then try taking up another link in the spring-bar chains to increase the tension on the spring bars. It may even take two links to arrive at the best adjustment. I've gone through this process many times, and it takes some trial and error to arrive at the best setup. Better replacement shocks such as Bilsteins may help too, but the WD hitch is key to the process. — J.J.

WET-CELL VERSUS AGM BATTERIES

Q I have been using a pair of 6-volt wet-cell batteries for seven and a half years; they are still working well. At some point I will need to replace them. I have studied the AGMs for a while, and the benefits are faster recharge, no maintenance, deeper discharge and longer life. What I am not sure of is comparing a set of two wet-cell batteries rated at 200 amp-hours and a set of two AGM batteries rated at 200 amp-hours powering the same load. Will the AGM batteries last any longer than the wet-cell batteries before recharging?

I have two 100-watt solar panels, and they do very well charging my batteries. I use two TV sets, not at the same time, and LED lights. The only time I have an issue is if I run the furnace before sun up. I don't let the batteries get below 12.25 volts before turning off things or starting the generator, which I would rather not do. I don't want to spend the money for the AGMs unless they will last a little longer before recharging.

Don Westenskow, North Logan, Utah

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A Regardless of the type of battery, 200 amp-hours is 200 amp-hours, Don. As long as the new batteries are rated the same as the old ones, you should expect similar performance.

The fact that you have 200 watts of solar panels wired to a pair of 6-volt cells, yet you have furnace operating problems by morning, tells me there's something else amiss with your electrical system. For example, your current batteries may not be in as good of shape as you think they are. Seven and a half years is beyond the normal lifespan for batteries, and it may be about time to replace them. With a reasonable amount of daylight and sunlight charging your batteries all day and your modest power consumption, as you explained, you should have more than enough power to operate your furnace.

Check all of your electrical connections for damage or corrosion and have the batteries tested as well. Likewise, you may have an older, less-efficient solar-charge controller, so checking into a newer model may also serve you well. The guys at AM Solar (www.amsolar.com) can provide some terrific and knowledgeable advice on your controller options. — J.J.

SUSPENSION CRACKS

Q I have a 2010 Cardinal fifth-wheel, which had a tire blowout coming home from Quartzsite. While changing the tire, I noticed there was a good size crack in my Equa-Flex leaf-spring suspension mount right above where the inner gusset is welded. After emailing Lippert, the tech department there wrote me and stated that it looked to them like the top bolt had been over-tightened, and that's what caused the crack. I'm writing this not to throw stones but to maybe prevent one of our fellow RVers from having a breakdown on the highway. RVers, make sure when you do your walkaround before leaving on your trip that you take a look in between your tires and make sure all suspension parts are in good working order.

Riverside Bob, Riverside, California

A Thanks for the note, Bob. That type of damage can happen to the best of

products, even under proper usage conditions. It's always a good idea to spend some time "counting the parts" to avoid potential trouble on the road. — J.J.

TIRE REPLACEMENT TIMING

Q My RV is parked indoors 300-plus days a year. It's a desert climate, indoor temperatures average between 40 and 85 degrees, it's driven every month, and the tires have modest mileage and wear. They're Michelin LTXs, the sidewalls look new, and there are no cracks. Do I really need to throw them away just because they're eight-plus years old, as they were manufactured in June 2006?

Mike Garner, Richland, Washington

A This is one of those technical questions that should be answered, "It depends," Mike. Those tire-age replacement specifications are general rules for typical tire use. As you explained regarding your RV, the tires seem as if they're in really great shape, even though they may have technically "timed out" on age. Michelin maintains that tires can be kept as long as 10 years, provided they are properly maintained, and the rig is stored indoors (as yours is) and is not exposed to UV rays for extended periods. The lack of small sidewall or tread cracks is especially telling, as these are among the first signs that it's time to consider tire replacement even if there's lots of tread left. I'd say keep a close eye on those tires and inspect them every six months or so and replace them if necessary. But once they hit 10 years, it's time to say goodbye. — J.J.

FIRST-TIME TRAILER PURCHASE

Q We're looking at purchasing our first travel trailer, and I have the Forest River Surveyor Sport 220RBS in mind. Its dry weight is 4,415 pounds and a little over 25 feet long, hitch to bumper. I'm also looking at the Grand Cherokee (6,500 pounds and 7,200-pound tow capacity). I have been told that a pickup with a longer wheelbase would be a better option. Any recommendations?

Paul Kicklighter, Stafford, Virginia

A When shopping for RVs, it's important to avoid the trap of using "dry weights" when making buying decisions. The trailer will probably never weigh that little when it is in your possession, and this number can lead you to select a tow vehicle that does not have a sufficient tow rating. The gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) represents the maximum amount that trailer can weigh when fully loaded and should be used as a guideline when choosing a tow vehicle.

Wheelbase is just one of many factors to consider in a tow vehicle. There are many factors that affect how well a vehicle works as a tow vehicle, including suspension, rear overhang, wheelbase, powertrain, etc. SUVs and pickups work well for towing, as long as they are rated and capable of towing the actual load. Longer wheelbase vehicles tend to be more stable when towing than shorter wheelbase models, all other factors being the same. — **Ken Freund**

WHEEL CHOCKS

Q We have a Wildcat 31ST from Forest River. I have always chocked the wheels with X-Chocks, which go between the two wheels first, and then I unhook and level my fifth-wheel. I have installed the Level Up six-point hydraulic leveling system. Now I do the same as before: chock the wheels, unhook and press the level button. The problem is that, when the trailer levels up, it takes some weight off the springs, causing the wheels to move slightly together. This puts excess stress on the chocks and even bends the tire treads inward. That is a lot of pressure! The question is, how can I chock the wheels before I unhook? I believe it is too dangerous not to chock the wheels first. **Albinas Butler, Pointe Claire, Quebec**

A Chocks that go between the wheels and press against the opposing tires do an excellent job of preventing the trailer from moving around but are perhaps a little too much during the leveling process, when some flexibility is needed. Since campsites are fairly level, there should not be a lot of pressure



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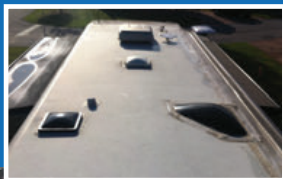
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from the trailer trying to roll (against the chocks), due to any incline.

Therefore, instead of the X-Chocks when leveling, I suggest you use conventional separate wheel chocks on both sides of just one tire of each axle on each side of the trailer. Then, after you have the trailer leveled, install the X-Chocks, if you want to stabilize the fifth-wheel. You can also install the X-Chocks at the start, as you have been, but leave them adjusted a bit loose to allow for tire movement when leveling the trailer. Once the trailer is leveled to your satisfaction, adjust the X-Chocks. — **K.F.**

CUMMINS DIESEL CONCERNS

Q I hope you can help me, as I've been to every site on the Internet I can think of with no luck. I have 2003 Dodge 2500 pickup with a 5.9-liter Cummins diesel, which I bought last year. I put an Edge tuner in so I could monitor the exhaust gas temperature (EGT) and automatic transmission fluid temperature. I need to know the maximum recommended temperatures for both and how long you can run at max until you need to pull over. I pull a 33-foot fifth-wheel trailer.

Steven Carter, Sonora, California

A It is important to monitor these temperatures when towing a heavy trailer, especially with a tuner, which may potentially increase EGTs. The EGT, if it is measured after the turbocharger, should not exceed about 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

If the temperature is measured in the exhaust just ahead of the turbocharger, peak temperatures should be kept at or below 1,300 degrees F. Transmission fluid temperatures should not normally exceed 240 degrees F, because when the torque converter is locked up, temperatures typically don't climb above that. However, if you see temperatures in the neighborhood of 275 degrees F, you should pull over immediately and allow the engine to fast idle in Park to allow the fluid to cool off and circulate.

If you find that EGTs are too high, you might consider installing an

aftermarket intercooler and a low-restriction air intake. If transmission temperatures are too high, an auxiliary cooler should help. Of course you can always back off the throttle a little, too, which is free. — **K.F.**

CHECK THOSE LUG NUTS

Q My wife and I were returning from our third outing with our new Jayco Jay Feather when we heard a noise like we were driving on a rumble strip. After pulling over to a wide spot in the road and a quick inspection of the towing vehicle and the trailer, I found that the wheel on the left-side trailer tire had enlarged lug stud holes and badly worn studs and lug nuts. After installing the spare tire using three of the best lug nuts and two from the right side, we limped home after tightening the remaining right-side lug nuts.

A nearby tire shop replaced the bad studs and lug nuts, and mounted the tire on a new wheel. I asked the shop manager if he had ever seen anything like this before. He replied that this sometimes happens when new painted steel wheels have been installed with insufficient torque on the lug nuts and the paint layer in the lug nut seats wears through, allowing the wheel to work loose. The lesson here is to always check the lug nuts when checking tire pressure, especially on a painted steel wheel. We consider ourselves very lucky. Had we not stopped to investigate as soon as we did, the results could have been catastrophic.

Rich Woolverton, Arvada, Colorado

A This points out an often-overlooked item. Trailer lug nuts should be retorqued to factory specifications after about 100 to 300 miles or so whenever the wheels have been removed and freshly installed. They should be tightened in sequence until all are done.

Painted steel wheels are generally less prone to lug nut loosening because the wheels are designed with a degree of "compression" in the lug seat area so the lug nuts squeeze the metal down a bit when tightened. This tends to help grip the nuts and deter

READER SERVICE

loosening. Cast-aluminum wheels don't compress this way; the nuts are tightened against them only. That's not a problem at all, unless you don't do your maintenance. In any case, the lesson is the same: check those lug nuts for tightness. — **K.F.**

FAN CYCLING FINALE

Q This regards "Fan Cycling Sound" in the January 2015 RV Clinic. In that reply to me, you explained the operation of a thermostatically controlled viscous fan clutch and discussed the likelihood that my truck may have a clogged radiator.

We were finally able to find the problem with the cycling fan. After five different so-called experts had their shot at this issue, I finally found a place where solving the problem was their number-one goal, and they did. How all the rest of the so-called experts missed it is beyond belief.

Ken, your comment about the radiator was spot on. The amount of clogged area and the amount of crud they were able to remove was mind-blowing. They took it step by step and verified the clutch assembly, and then went straight to the radiator. There actually was some thought process, as opposed to replacing something and sending me the bill. Everything else was checked to ensure they got the culprit.

Noel Merkley, via email

A Thanks for writing, Noel. I'm really glad the problem is solved. We seldom hear back from readers after we try to help them and therefore never get to know if our advice sent them in the right direction or not. Feedback helps us fine tune and focus our answers to constantly improve our responses. — **K.F.**

TOW RATING TUSSLE

Q I own a 2013 Ram Big Horn 1500 4x4 pickup with a quad cab and 5.7-liter Hemi with eight-speed automatic transmission and 3.55 gears.

The dealer told me that towing capacity was 10,000 pounds. So now I see this 6,900-pound rating. Was I lied to?

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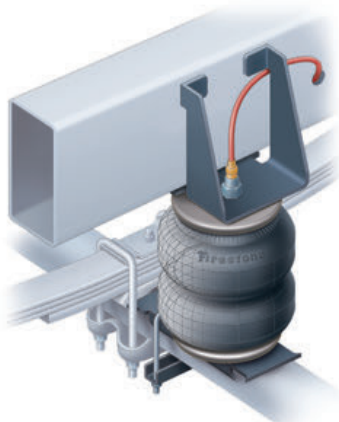
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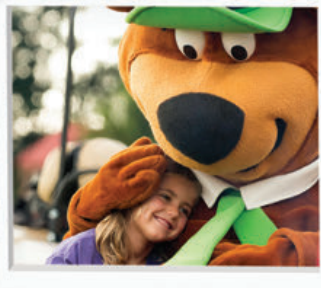
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I tow a 24-foot trailer that has a towing weight of about 6,400 pounds without gear and water (which could easily exceed 1,000 pounds). Should I have gotten a 2500 series truck? And does the 6,900 pounds mean total truck and trailer weight?

Also, all four corners have coil springs, so I experience a lot of sag on the rear when towing. With a crosswind, I have to slow to 45 MPH to maintain steering control.

Dave Jones, Watertown, South Dakota

A On www.ramtrucks.com, the factory lists the GVWR as 6,800 pounds, which is how much the loaded truck can weigh if you put it on a scale. I'm thinking that you got your 6,900 number from a similar chart. The good news is, your actual maximum tow rating for your truck is 8,650 pounds, which may not be as much as the salesman told you but should be sufficient to tow your trailer.

Regarding the sag, that indicates you either don't have a weight-distributing hitch, or it isn't tight enough. Properly set up, the WD hitch, as the name suggests, distributes the hitch weight equally between the truck's rear and front axles. If the rear end sags, you need to tighten the spring-bar tension — take up another link or two on the adjustment chain, for example — and if you aren't sure about doing that adjustment, take the truck and trailer to an RV dealership with a service department, and it can set you up in no time. — **K.F.**

FROZEN A/C COILS

Q We were towing our 2006 Fun Finder down to Kentucky, and we stopped halfway there and camped. Overnight, we turned on the air conditioning. In the morning, it had frozen coils (it was on Low). It thawed out with just the fan on high. It never froze up all week until I turned it on Low. Any ideas?

Les Carr, Racine, Wisconsin

A Airflow and humidity are big factors in the formation of ice in air conditioners. If the flow of air over the coils is reduced, it allows the coils

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to get colder, until their surfaces dip below the freezing point of water. Air-flow may be further restricted if an air filter is dirty and clogged. When the air is humid, this creates a situation where ice forms from the condensation. Check the filter frequently and adjust the controls so that the temperature setting causes it to not get as cold, and run the fan on high speed when conditions still result in icing. — K.F.

TRUCK HEATS UP II

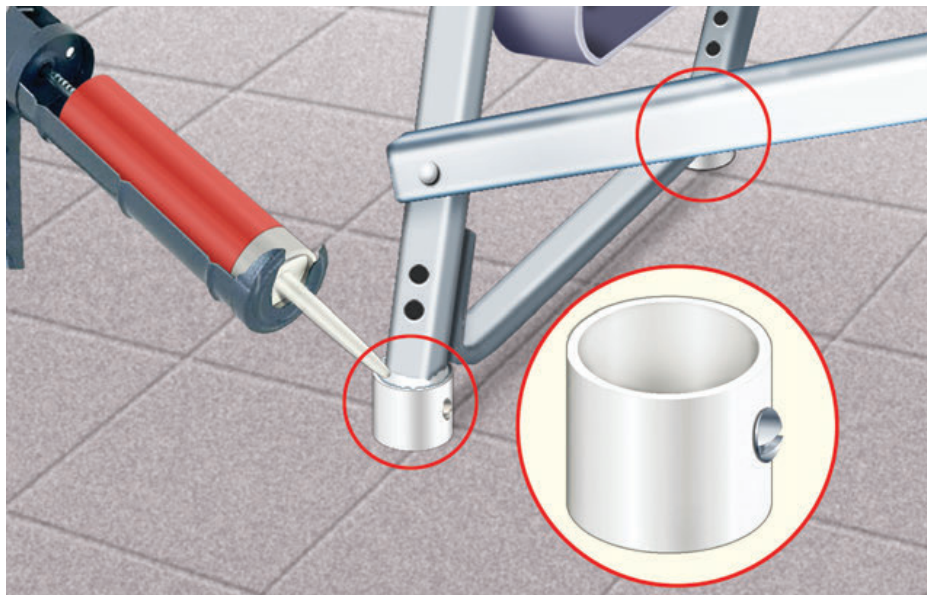
Q This is in regard to the letter "Truck Heats Up on Grades" in the March 2015 RV Clinic. I had the exact same problem with my 2001 Dodge Ram 3500. As you suggested, the fins were plugged in the radiator. I cleaned them with my pressure washer, and the problem was solved.

Mark Hansen, Salt Lake City, Utah

A Radiators can clog internally from minerals in the water building up a coating in the tubes, and this may eventually stop water from flowing through the tubes. This is common after about 10 years or more. External buildup of dead bugs, mud, leaves, trash, etc. also blocks the airflow over the fins and can occur even with a nearly new vehicle. Either internal or external conditions such as this insulate the heat transfer and lead to running hot and overheating.

However, be careful about using a pressure washer on the delicate fins. This can bend them and close off airflow. It's safer to run a garden hose (which has much lower pressure) from the back of the radiator aiming toward the front to blast dirt and debris out of the fins. Look down between the air-conditioner condenser and front of the radiator to make sure no debris is trapped there. This is a good thing to do whenever a warm-weather trip is planned. — K.F. 🛠️

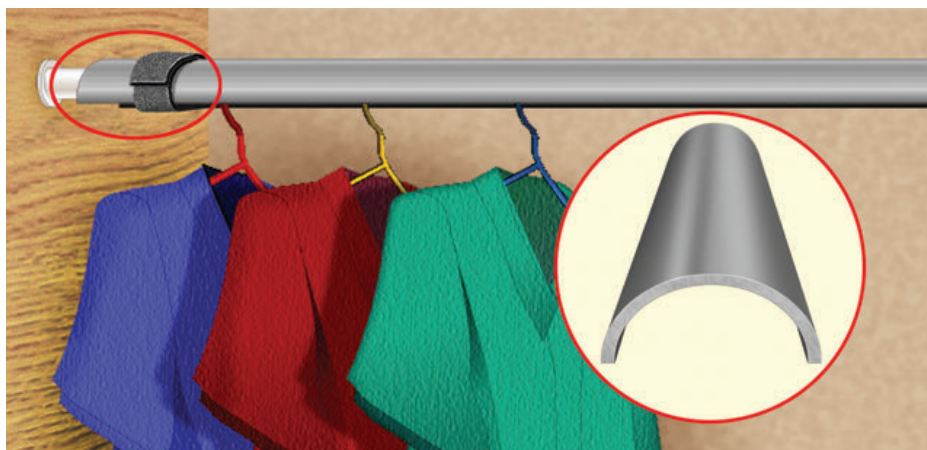
HAVE A QUESTION? » Email our experts at RVClinic@trailerlife.com or write to RV Clinic, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Please include your hometown. No phone calls, please.



Chair Leg Caps

After the plastic caps at the base of the legs on our folding camp chairs wore out, we found that the legs were punching holes in our outdoor RV mat. The hollow aluminum legs also filled up with sand and sank in soft ground. So we purchased some PVC caps that fit over the bottom of the chair legs, filled them with caulk and used a metal screw to hold them in place. The problem is now solved!

Larry and Kathy Black
Yucaipa, California



Hang in There

The majority of our camping is done in national forests, which means a lot of towing on bumpy gravel roads. We recently purchased a new V-Cross Vibe trailer that has a rear bedroom. When we reached our destinations, all of our clothes would be on the floor of the trailer's closet instead of on the rods. My theory is that, since the closets are in the rear, the exaggerated action at the back of the trailer was throwing the hangers off the rod.

To remedy this, I took a piece of 2-inch-inside-diameter thin-wall plastic pipe and cut it to the closet width. I then cut the pipe in half lengthwise and attached a hook-and-loop strap. Now when we travel, we simply place the contraption over the top of the hangers, strap it around the rod, and no more fallen clothes! It works just as well for standard metal hangers as for larger plastic ones.

Wayne Smith, Flagstaff, Arizona

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

QUICK FIX

Hold Off Mold

I read Melissa Riley's October 2014 10-Minute Tech tip, "Water Hook-ups After Dark," about using brass quick connectors on her trailer's city water inlet. I use these when connecting to my trailer, but I learned a long time ago that if I coil the hose and connect both ends, there is a damp environment inside the hose, and soon mold will grow. I always disconnect and drain the hose, and store it so air can get inside. This leaves no breeding ground for mold.

Jim Linde
Sparks, Nevada

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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 and request your information online, and visit each listing's website for immediate information.

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Camp under the trees at Florida State Parks. Sites feature water, electricity and a central dump station. For more information, visit www.floridastateparks.org, or call 850-245-2157. For reservations, go to www.reserveamerica.com. Circle 147 on Reader Service Card.

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Get on Track

For six decades, high-speed racing and challenging courses at Wisconsin's Road America have beckoned spectators from around the world



Wisconsin claims that its speedway is the fastest road-racing circuit in the world. It challenges the best of the best, on two wheels and four, as it has for six decades. It's located 60 miles north of Milwaukee at Elkhart Lake on 640 acres of rolling hills. They call it America's National Park of Speed.

Opened in 1955, Road America's race circuit, or track, is 4 miles long, has 14 turns and multiple elevation changes. Its straightaways — long enough to land an airplane — have taken on names of their own, based less on their configuration than on their level of intimidation. Race cars often hit speeds of 200 MPH.

Although it hosts a NASCAR race once a year and other nationally televised races, Road America holds events every weekend during the summer — everything from Superbike motorcycles to vintage cars. Hundreds of other events go on all the time — 440 last year.

Road America also offers schools for learning how to handle race cars and motorcycles, as well as the family sedan. Many new residents to Wisconsin come here during their first winter to learn how to drive in snow.

The track itself is closed in the winter. "Nothing tears up a road like a snowplow, so we don't touch it," Mike Kertscher explained. He is Road America's programs manager. "If someone wants to use it for testing equipment in snow conditions, we can do that."

More than 700,000 tourists visit in a year. Then there are the weekend participants and competitors who use the track during the week for training, testing and racing. "We rent the track by the day or a number of days, whatever they need," Mike said.

A short, hard-surface track is used for go-karting. Supermoto, which is motorcycle racing done on alternating types of track and terrain, is also popular here.

Mike gave me a helmet, strapped me into a go-kart and set me out on the short track to compete with a group of visitors. The kart goes fast, as fast I wanted to go. Going into a



(Top) Mike Kertscher, the track's programs manager, briefs a group on the operation of Road America's go-karts. (Above) After a few "high-speed" runs around the track, the author gets a slight inkling of what it's like to drive a race car.

turn, my natural instinct was to brake. I guess when they teach Race Car Driving 101, you learn to suppress that urge. Still, the survival instinct is strong. Mike explained that the karts are so low to the ground they would probably slide rather than roll in a turn. Maybe so, but I wasn't quite convinced!

Camping is big here and available on all race weekends. RVers can reserve a spot by the track or spread out wherever there is grass — no shortage of that. A play-by-play of race events is broadcast on an FM frequency that can be received anyplace in the park. As the race progresses, it is shown live on giant-screen TVs in spectator areas. Dozens of TV cameras are located along the track.

Twenty-two employees work at Road America, but on race weekends hundreds work here. The 12 concession stands are operated mostly by volunteers, such as the local Rotary Club. They have a fully staffed medical center — "The best going," says Mike. "During NASCAR weekend, we have seven ambulances here and the second largest fire department in the state."

So why is the racetrack here in Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin, halfway between Milwaukee and Green Bay? Racing came to Elkhart Lake in 1950, with cars competing on a countryside course. Drivers maneuvered through the village and on rural roads past waving spectators who would sit on their porches to watch the action.

In 1953, auto racing was banned on the roads of Wisconsin. Road America was just the next step.

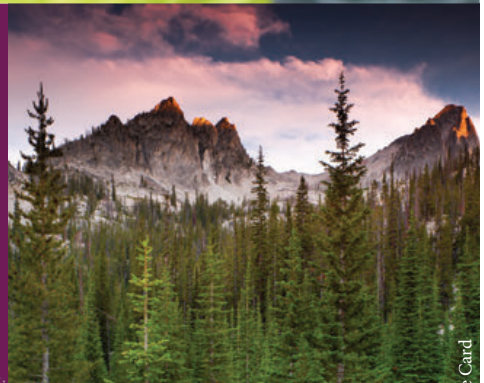
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