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**On the cover:** Pack the toys and roam far and wide in Dutchmen's 2014 Voltage V3895 fifth-wheel. Photo by Scott Hirko.

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# We're Back!

## RV sales are on the rise



If you want to know how the economy is doing, just take a look at the RV industry. While not a scientific indicator embraced by most economists, it seems like the nation's financial well-being follows the RV industry. Historically, every time sales of RVs retract, the nation's economy goes into a recession — or at least slow growth. Sales of RVs are now headed toward record levels and you guessed it, the economy is recovering.

Leading the extraordinary rise in RV sales are towables. Trailers and fifth-wheels account for 85 percent of the projected 8.4 percent increase in sales in 2013 and sales are expected to grow another 3.9 percent in 2014, according to Dr. Richard Curtin of the University of Michigan Consumer Survey Research Center. Dr. Curtin has been forecasting RV trends and sales for the industry for many years.

That's great news for RV enthusiasts. When sales are good, manufacturers are busy creating new RVs that enhance the lifestyle and lure new owners into our favorite way to travel. Look for continued development of lightweight towables with more features than ever, and imaginative floorplans — products of research and development teams that are super busy responding to consumer demand and looking for more bells and whistles.

Who would have predicted that we'd be featuring super-luxurious toy haulers, like the Voltage covered on page 40? While a six-figure sticker price is fairly new territory for that segment of the market, the interest in such fifth-wheels is growing rapidly. This is just one example of how the shift in consumer confidence is propelling sales of trailers and fifth-wheels to projected levels close to the records set in 2006 and 2007, respectively, before the economy tanked.

While we're proud that the RV industry is helping drive the economic recovery, it's even more satisfying to know that the growth of our lifestyle is putting people back to work in America. The RV industry was born and bred in the United States and continues to employ workers in factories solely on American soil. No greater example of that is Elkhart, Indiana, the heart of the RV industry. The city's unemployment was so bad that even President Obama paid a visit. Today, Elkhart and surrounding cities are once again flourishing as factories work feverishly to keep up with consumer demand.

As RV owners we're fueling the sentiment that "What goes for the RV market goes for the country's economy." We're glad to be back. ☺

**— Bob Livingston, publisher**

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**The RV Capital** Elkhart County, Indiana, is considered the RV Capital of the World. For every two RVs you see on the road, one was built in the county. Its humble beginnings were in 1935, when Schult (the first producer of trailers in Indiana) began producing one trailer per day, each selling for \$198.

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## Headed for Zero Emissions

Regarding May's "Priceless" letters on the actual cost of traveling in or towing an RV, it may be a moot point in the not-so-distant future. By model year 2016, it is mandated by the U.S. federal government that cars and trucks average 39 MPG and 30 MPG, respectively. The mandated average of the two combined is 35.5 MPG and by model year 2025 will be 54.5 MPG average.

J. Gary Smyth, executive director of GM, Global R&D, North American Science Labs, said: "Transportation will change radically over the next 10 years. We want to take the vehicle out of the whole environmental debate. We want to significantly improve efficiency and get near-zero emissions. That is the right thing to do — for the companies, for the nation, for the world."

Add to that impending carbon footprint taxes and the higher sales tax on fuel we can expect to keep the highways well maintained (possible infrastructure cuts), and you have lower-powered vehicles in a higher-cost world.

**Mary Horejsh, Altoona, Wisconsin**



## Vintage Trailering

As long-time subscribers, we have noticed *Trailer Life's* increased interest in vintage and classic travel trailers. My wife, Susan, and I are veterans of vintage trailering, being fortunate to have a 1954 Traveleze 21 ES. We restored this trailer in 2000, keeping virtually all the original

## The Sanctuary of Chimayo

Having read Bill Graves America's *Outback: Lourdes of America* in the June issue, I would be remiss if I didn't let you know how great it was! When I saw that Bill would be visiting Chimayo, New Mexico, I did some research about the area as I had a strong hunch that he would be writing about the church there. Apparently, the area is a hotbed of drug smuggling, too!

Bill's description of the church was so real I felt as if I were there. While reading the article, I recalled a passage in a book written by Willard Sterne Randall, *A Little Revenge: Benjamin Franklin and His Son*. Franklin, who spent many years abroad, wrote a friend describing how he and others were heading north away from London to escape the oppressive heat wave. His description of the carriage ride on the dusty road with thousands of people walking in the same direction for the same reason was so real that the reader most likely coughed from the dust!

Bill Graves' descriptive, frugal and informative writing is indeed a gift.

**Bob Motschmann, Via email**



elements, including all original appliances (which were refreshed and work beautifully) but retrofitting it with some modern aspects, including a hidden stereo system.

This was an 18-month project for us as we had most of the original siding off of the trailer to repair dry rot and reinforce the wood framing. These "canned hams" from the 1950s and '60s tend to be more rare than say, old Airstreams, because of the way they were constructed. We were careful to not over-renovate so that when you enter this trailer, it feels exactly like the era in which it was produced. We were fortunate in that this was originally a "park" model, intended to set down in a trailer court for long periods of time and be hooked up. Therefore, it was not self-contained in any way.

Because of its length, only 21 feet, it is still short enough to be easy to deal with for weekending. It has a full bath, small though it is, with the original metal shower stall.

We have made lasting and valuable friendships along the way pursuing this interest. We always include great food and wine on our excursions so as to take maximum advantage of our "glamping" opportunities. We hope to see more of this sort of thing in *Trailer Life*.

**Daniel and Susan Cutright  
Napa, California**

## Truck Tow Profile

After reading the *Trailer Life Test* article on the 2013 Dodge Ram 1500 truck, I felt compelled to comment on the "Gas vs. Diesel" discussions.

My Ford 7.3-liter diesel cost \$6,000 less than the Dodge truck profiled, but gets 17 MPG when towing my 8,000-pound trailer. It gets 17-19 MPG solo. Perhaps the Dodge would do better (MPG) if it wasn't towing a trailer that weighed so near its max tow rating. I don't think a half-ton pickup is a good choice for a tow vehicle, except maybe for ultralights.

**Ernie Carlson, Zigzag, Oregon**

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# Rose-Colored Glasses

**This summer, Garvan Woodland Gardens in Hot Springs, Arkansas, blooms with a special exhibit**

by Pamela Selbert

Even on a warm summer afternoon, 210-acre Garvan Woodland Gardens in Hot Springs, Arkansas, is a balmy oasis, pleasantly cooled by breezes wafting off adjacent Lake Hamilton. Five miles of paved pathways wind through this woodland paradise, providing dramatic high-up vistas of the lake, with which the garden shares 4.5 miles of shoreline, and passing a series of the most elegant floral displays you can imagine. Here, you'll find dogwoods, lush boxwoods, tree peonies, numerous species of ferns, an array of petite bonsais, more than 70 species of Japanese maples and many others.

Garvan Woodland Gardens, a department of the University of Arkansas, was a gift to the school by Verna Garvan, whose wealthy father, Arthur Cook, had bought the land in the 1920s. After Cook died in 1934, Garvan began developing the land as a woodland garden, planting thousands of native and exotic trees, shrubs, flowers and others. The gardens officially opened to the public in 2002.

This summer, the gardens will receive an infusion of whimsy thanks to a glass installation titled "Splash of Glass" — 250 pieces of art glass by renowned artist James Hayes. These multicolor creations are woven into various garden exhibits: 36 brightly



PHOTOS BY GUY SELBERT

colored "onions" hang from an arbor at the Great Lawn; 30 glittering bowls decorate Japanese Maple Hill; and 30 large glass balls appear to drift like balloons on the Koi Pond.

Other glass works include 24 trumpetlike "flowers," 17 loosely spiraled "vines," seven small domed "Mushroom Fairy Houses" and a pair of "Wind Mobiles." Most spectacular, however, are the two "chandeliers," one a gorgeous composite of glass balls and twists hung under the Bridge of the Full Moon, and the other a "Twirl Chain" made up of several dozen silver spirals, which could be shimmering icicles, that hangs in Garvan Pavilion. This exhibit will be on display until September 30, 2013.

Other garden features include 13 man-made water works, a six-story

wood and glass chapel, a 57-foot-high carillon (an electronic bell tower), several cypress-wood bridges, and a 45-acre bird sanctuary and nature preserve.

The gardens are closed on major holidays and the entire month of January. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$9 for seniors (55-plus), \$5 for dogs on leashes. Golf cart tours are available for \$10 per person.

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## Mammoth Truck Camper

Bend, Oregon-based Host Industries knows luxury. After all, the company is owned by Dave Hogue and Mark Storch, who are the sons of Beaver Motorcoaches' founders. Host recently introduced a luxury 11-foot 6-inch truck camper with high-end amenities and a triple-slide floorplan. According to the company, the Mammoth has a base weight of 3,360 pounds, an 8-foot-wide floor and a 6-foot 3-inch interior height. Features include two hallways that lead into the bedroom with a 60-by-80-inch queen bed, a simulated fireplace, a walk-through dry bathroom and a floor-to-ceiling pantry, along with



additional storage space. Convenience features include an exterior shower and slide-out awning topper. Freshwater capacity is 65 gallons and LP-gas capacity is 14 gallons. MSRP: \$48,000-\$62,000, depending on how equipped. 541-330-2328, [www.hostcampers.com](http://www.hostcampers.com)



## NEWSWIRE

### SWEEPSTAKES



#### Starcraft RV Celebrates 50 Years

The 2014 model year marks 50 years in the RV industry for Topeka, Indiana-based Starcraft. The company kicked off its celebration June 1 with a company picnic and a yearlong consumer sweepstakes called the AR-ONE Golden Give-Away. The lucky sweepstakes winner will receive an AR-ONE 25BHS travel trailer from Starcraft. Participants can enter online at [www.cmc\(promotions.net/golden](http://www.cmc(promotions.net/golden) giveaway, or pick up an entry form at a Starcraft dealership. Other 50th-year celebrations include a gift bag for every customer who purchases a new, previously untitled, 2014 model-year Starcraft and the launch of a new company website.

### FUEL STATIONS



#### DEF at More Pilot Flying J Locations

Pilot Flying J is planning to offer diesel exhaust fluid (DEF) at the pump at almost every diesel lane at the company's travel centers and travel plazas across the United States by October. Diesel engines purchased after January 1, 2010, require the use of DEF in vehicles using Selective Catalytic Reduction technology to reduce emissions and meet the Environmental Protection Agency 2010 tailpipe standards. DEF at the pump allows drivers to dispense the fluid conveniently from the fuel island into the DEF tank of their vehicle. In addition, all Pilot Flying J locations sell DEF in 1-gallon and 2.5-gallon containers.

### ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE



#### New Program From Winnebago Towables

Beginning with the new 2014 Winnebago and SunnyBrook model RVs now being introduced, Winnebago Industries Towables will provide new towable owners with a complementary one-year membership in a 24/7 Premium Roadside Assistance program that covers lock-out service, fuel delivery and flat-tire changes for their RV. Backed by Coach-Net, a North American roadside assistance service provider network, even the tow vehicle is covered when hitched to a Winnebago or SunnyBrook. Winnebago Industries entered the towable market in December 2010 through the acquisition of SunnyBrook RV, Inc.

## Mum's the Word

Think your spouse is withholding information about his or her driving record? According to Insure.com, which surveyed 1,000 U.S. married adults earlier this year, people frequently keep driving mistakes secret from their spouses.

Here's what the survey says:

**35 percent** of respondents admitted to dinging the car and telling their spouse someone else did it.

**25 percent** said they'd received a traffic ticket and kept it secret from their spouse.

**24 percent** said they'd kept a car accident secret from their spouse.

**19 percent** hadn't told their spouse that they forgot to pay an auto insurance bill.

**15 percent** admitted they had knowingly driven without car insurance but not told their spouse.

Men have a higher propensity for lying across the board. When results for wives versus husbands were examined, Insure.com found that 42 percent of men dinged the car and blamed someone else, compared to 27 percent of women.

Married men also display a high distrust of their wives, albeit unfounded. Husbands suspect their wives of lying far more than their wives actually do.

**38 percent** of men think "it's possible" or know that their wives kept a car accident secret. Yet only 17 percent of wives say they've done so.

**32 percent** of men think "it's possible" or know that their wives have kept a traffic ticket secret, but only 16 percent of women say they've kept mum about a traffic ticket.

"I suspect men are assuming that women have the same capacity for deception that they do," said Amy Danise, editorial director for Insure.com.

Conversely, Insure.com's survey shows that wives are far too trusting.

**23 percent** of wives say "it's possible" or they know their husbands have hidden a car accident, while 31 percent of husbands say they've done it.

**25 percent** of women say "it's possible" or they know their husbands had secret traffic tickets, while 34 percent of husbands admit they did.

"Women may see the family's car insurance rates rising and not realize their husbands' deceptive behavior is money out of their pockets," said Danise.

**"19 percent  
hadn't told their  
spouse that they  
had forgotten to  
pay an auto  
insurance bill."**



## Star Light, Star Bright

If you enjoy stargazing, mark your calendar for August 11 — the peak time to see the annual Perseid meteor shower, which has been observed for almost 2,000 years. On the nights around August 11, the rate of meteors can reach 60 or more per hour as the Earth passes through a stream of debris from Comet Swift-Tuttle. According to NASA, the best place to view the meteors is in the countryside away from city lights, and the best time for viewing is during the dark hours immediately before dawn.

A number of state and national parks are hosting special events for the viewing.

- At Joshua Tree National Park in California, park rangers will present a special night sky program on August 11, and the park will open Ryan Campground from August 10-12 to allow visitors additional camping opportunities during the Perseid meteor showers.

- In Ohio, Van Buren State Park will host a 1.5-mile night hike to Van Buren Lake to view the meteor shower on August 11. The park features 27 equestrian camping sites and 29 RV sites.

- A special "Shower of Stardust" program will be offered August 11 at Weldon Springs State Park in Clinton, Illinois. Rain date is August 12. The 550-acre park has a campground with 75 electric-hookup sites.

Pack up your chairs, some snacks and bug spray, and be prepared to sit back and enjoy shooting stars streaking through the nighttime summer sky! ☀

## Fabric Flaws

A reader asked *RV Action Line* to get involved regarding a problem he was experiencing with the upholstery fabric on his trailer's seat cushions. He wrote:

» I have a 2010 Palomino Sabre 31RKDS that I bought new. I am having a problem with the back cushions on the sleeper sofa, which are coming apart because of inferior material. I had it replaced the first year under warranty, but then the same thing happened the second year.

I contacted Elaine Zmudzinski, a customer service representative for Flair Interior Corp., who had replaced it the first time under warranty. She would not replace it a second time; she said to go back to the manufacturer.

I contacted the manufacturer, Forest River, and left a message for Gary Grigsby, but he has yet to call me back. I think the fabric should last longer than a year at a time. We do not abuse the trailer and only travel four or five times a year. We have had other trailers and never had a problem with the fabric.

## Refrigerator Freeze-Up

Experiencing problems with their refrigerator, two readers asked *RV Action Line* for help. They wrote:

» We contacted Keystone RV last June after first using our 2012 Keystone Montana's Norcold refrigerator; it had an ice buildup just inside the front freezer roof seam. Since we were unable to use the RV the first four months, due to other warranted problems, we chose to wait to get the freezer repaired until after summer with an OK from Keystone.

In December we took the trailer to U-Neek RV Center in Kelso, Washington, for work on the refrigerator. The service technician shimmed the doors, which did not help. We were then instructed by Keystone to contact Norcold and it was determined that a new refrigerator door was needed. This was ordered and installed in January by Don Palen, owner of At Your Service Mobile RV Repair. Palen came out twice to do adjustments, but there was no change. The problem was still evident and pictures were sent to a representative at Norcold,

who suggested the door needed an adjustment. Palen removed and reinstalled the door — but still no fix.

A Keystone representative recommended taking it to a Norcold repair shop, so we made an appointment at Advanced RV Center in Vancouver, Washington. The service technician also took pictures for Norcold and was instructed to install shims again. The technician called us after three days of running the freezer and told us it still had a buildup of ice. Can *RV Action Line* please help?

**Jim and Suzanne Wells**  
Woodland, Washington

*RV Action Line's* inquiry brought responses from Thetford/Norcold Corp. and the Wellses.

### THE COMPANY RESPONDED

In response to your letter stating the concerns of Jim and Suzanne Wells, please be advised that on April 3, Norcold replaced the Wellses' refrigerator, labor included, as we were unable to determine, despite extensive diagnostic time, the exact cause of the problem. I believe this

I would like Forest River to stand behind its product. Any help would be appreciated.

**Gerald Smith, Rutherford College, North Carolina**

*RV Action Line* contacted Forest River on Smith's behalf and here is the company's reply:

### THE COMPANY RESPONDED

We are having a new sofa made for Mr. Gerald Smith to replace the sofa with the defective fabric in his 2010 Sabre 31RKDS. It has been determined that we will be providing him a new air bed sofa that will be made in a different fabric of his choice. Just this morning we were in contact with Smith and his dealership on which fabric he wanted to use for his new sofa.

**Gary Grigsby**  
Service Manager Sabre Division  
Forest River, Inc.  
Elkhart, Indiana

should lay their concerns to rest.

**Robert Knott**  
Customer Service Supervisor  
Thetford Corp.  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

» Thank you, *RV Action Line*, for contacting Norcold concerning the ongoing problem we had with our new refrigerator. Upon receiving your request, Keystone contacted us with an order from Norcold to replace our refrigerator, which was determined to have a bad freezer box. Norcold covered the installation, too. It was installed yesterday and seems to be working great. Again, thanks for your assistance. 🚐

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# Flora and Fauna Refuge

Florida's 729,000 acres of Big Cypress Swamp is home to a diversity of plant communities and wildlife



**E**verglades National Park likely comes to the minds of travelers when they consider the natural wonders of southern Florida. And this national park certainly is worthy of the attention and the accolades that it receives. Yet adjacent to this well-known park sit 729,000 acres of protected swamp that people outside of southern Florida have not likely heard of — and almost certainly have not explored. The area is called Big Cypress National Preserve, which is rich in temperate and tropical plant life and is home to a diverse array of wildlife, including black bears, not generally associated with Florida, and elusive Florida panthers. The abundant marine estuaries along the southwest coast of the Sunshine State thrive because the waters of Big Cypress National Preserve feed them.

For tens of thousands of years

the area today known as Big Cypress Swamp has been inhabited by humans, first by the Calusa, then by European explorers, the Miccosukee and the Seminole. In 1928, the Tamiami Trail was completed, granting large-scale access to the region, which gave rise to the south Florida land rush. Today, Big Cypress National Preserve receives nearly 900,000 visitors annually.

The best way to experience Big Cypress is to join a ranger-led talk or tour. Whether visitors take a boardwalk stroll, a guided 2-to-3-mile hike, a four-to-five-hour canoe trip or simply listen to an informative 45-minute evening talk, they are sure to learn about aspects of the preserve that would have eluded them had they poked around on their own. Hikers, however, are allowed to explore the trails and the backcountry unguided, although hikers are re-

quired to fill out permits before heading into the backcountry. Archery, muzzle loading and general gun seasons exist in the preserve, allowing hunters to pursue hogs, white-tailed deer, turkeys and other game species.

Various campgrounds exist within the preserve, ranging from extremely rustic sites accessed only by off-road vehicles, to Midway Campground, which features 26 RV sites with electric hookups and a dump station. Monument Lake Campground features 26 RV sites but no hookups, and all campgrounds are first-come, first-served. ☎

---

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User Guide

Contents





# FLAMING GORGE

Land of red canyons, aquamarine water and  
vivid rainbows in Utah and Wyoming

\* article by **Emily Fagan** photos by **Mark and Emily Fagan**



**F**laming Gorge is exactly what its name describes: a spectacular, fiery canyon of towering red rocks carved into existence by the immense power of the sparkling Green River at its base. For millennia the river was a thin ribbon that snaked along unevenly at the bottom of the canyon, but the construction of the Flaming Gorge Dam and its accompanying National Recreation Area in the early 1960s created an outdoor lover's paradise full of thrilling hikes, exciting mountain-bike rides, boating opportunities and camping. It is a wonderful place to go RVing with a trailer.

My husband, Mark, and I visited a few years ago with our 36-foot fifth-wheel. We saw the inviting name on the map and stopped by barely long enough to say, "Wow!" a few times and then say over and over, "We gotta go back!" When the opportunity came to return, we made a point to stay for nearly a week.

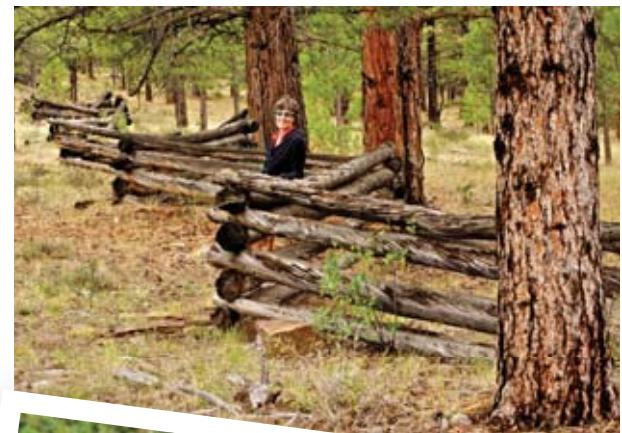
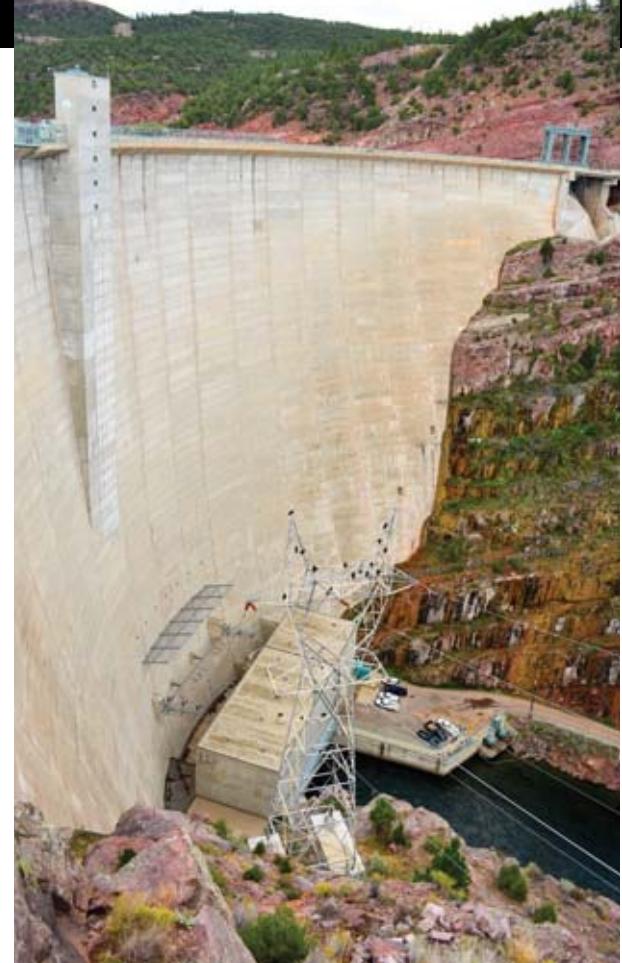
The Green River weaves south from its headwaters, the Wind River Range, a mountain range of the Rocky Mountains in Wyoming. The main watery trunk of Flaming Gorge runs north and south between Green River, Wyoming, and Dutch John, Utah, for about 30 miles as the crow flies. Its little fingers spread out to the east and west, creating a series of peninsulas on shore. At the southern end, the cliffs grow to 1,700 feet and turn red, standing out in dramatic contrast to the deep aquamarine of the water far below. Wyoming claims the northern half of the gorge while Utah got lucky and ended up with the more stunning southern portion.

We drove down the Flaming Gorge Scenic Highway on Route 530 along the western flank of the gorge, watching the scenery gradually become more and more beautiful around us. Stopping for lunch at a scenic overlook in Lucerne Valley, we soaked in the vast views across hayfields to the mountains in the distance. The Green River was a narrow band of blue in the distance. In summertime, the afternoon thunderstorms are frequent, and the first of several doozies swept through, darkening the sky to brooding shades. But the sun shone brightly from afar, and a brilliant rainbow shot out of the clouds into the lake. In the late afternoons we discovered that not only did rainbows bring radiant color to the sky, but during sunset the whole sky lit up like it was on fire.

Sighting rainbows became a daily activity, and on another day we were blessed with one that was wide and soft, filling the sky between the mountain peaks in the distance. Returning to Lucerne Valley Campground, our attention turned from the sky to the ground where we found a herd of pronghorn antelope had set up camp as well. They seemed to be the unofficial greeters for the campground, and they wandered unhurriedly between the RVs and tents, munching on the soft grass as they went. A few relaxed in the shade of trees, front legs tucked under them as they slowly watched us riding our bicycles past. These guys weren't just tame, they were on vacation, too.

Between Lucerne Valley and the more famous part of the

(Left) A boat cruises along the winding contours of the pristine landscape of Red Rock Canyon in Flaming Gorge, Utah. (Top right) Flaming Gorge Dam is more than 500 feet high and nearly 1,200 feet long. (Middle right) The Canyon Rim Trail includes canyon views and ponderosa pine forests. (Bottom right) Nothing seemed to faze this herd of bighorn sheep that was in residence at the Red Canyon Campground.



## FLAMING GORGE

gorge to the south, we took a drive along the Sheep Creek Geological Loop. This scenic byway follows a narrow, twisty road between the craggy rock towers of the Uinta Fault. Far off the beaten path, we didn't see anyone else on this pretty drive. However, it isn't known for people-watching; it is known for bighorn-sheep sightings. We kept a sharp lookout. Finally, at the end of the drive we were thrilled to see two bighorn sheep grazing by the side of the road. They paused long enough to give us the once-over, but the grass was just too yummy to bother much with a pair of crazy tourists hanging out the windows of a truck, cameras held high and clicking away.

We had already had some peak experiences at Flaming Gorge, yet we hadn't even made it to the official National Recreation Area. First we had to take the trailer up and over a steep pass to get there. It was pouring, and the roads were slick, but we drove slowly and stopped for a few hours at the magnificent Sheep Creek Overlook at the top. Mark hiked up even farther and took a magnificent photo of our rig in the midst of the jaw-dropping landscape. What a place!

Once the sky cleared, we made our way to the most remarkable part of the gorge at the Red Canyon Visitors Center and Red Canyon Campground next door. Here the landscapes are so dramatic that the photos everyone takes of each other make them look like they are standing in front of an artificial backdrop. There are lots of rocky outcroppings where you can shock your friends in the photos you bring home by perching on the edge of a cliff and dangling your feet over the edge.

One of the best hikes of the area, Canyon Rim Trail, goes along the rim of the canyon for a couple of miles from the visitor center headed east. We met older folks pausing to enjoy the views and little



A rainbow crosses our fifth-wheel at Lucerne Valley.



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**Flaming Gorge has countless stunning overlooks where visitors can enjoy the rich hues of the red rock cliffs and Green River below.**

kids bouncing along with grins on their faces. The hike is an easy walk, and there is a sensational view at every step. Eventually the hike turns away from the rim and heads into the ponderosa pine woods. We followed this for a while, meeting up with quite a few mountain bikers, all of whom reported that it was a good ride and not too hard.

Back at the campground, we discovered a herd of bighorn sheep had taken up residence. Other campers told us the herd had been there for weeks. They moved about the campground as a large unified group, and nothing seemed to faze them. For 15 minutes they stood in a cluster opposite us. They were so close that we could see one had a radio collar tied around its neck and the number 87 affixed to its ear. The park rangers here keep close tabs on the movements of this herd!

We stood staring at each other for

so long that the youngest sheep in the group got bored after a while. As we took an endless stream of photos, two of the smallest sheep laid down on the ground between the legs of their elders. How ironic: We had been so excited to see two bighorn sheep for a fleeting moment on the Sheep Creek Geological Loop drive, yet here was a full herd in residence right at the campground.

The afternoon thunderstorms continued throughout our stay, and the rainbows made prompt appearances right alongside them. At the far end of the gorge we stopped for lunch at the Greendale Overlook, and a powerful storm sent us scurrying from the picnic table back to the trailer for cover. Our reward a few minutes later was a beautiful rainbow that framed the fifth-wheel. Two families that had been mountain biking came flying up

## GOOD TO KNOW

Flaming Gorge has two campgrounds that are big-rig friendly with wonderful views of the water. Lucerne Valley Campground has electric hookups, lots of water spigots, a dump station and showers. Red Canyon Campground has water spigots and pit toilets but no hookups. You can make reservations through [www.reserveamerica.com](http://www.reserveamerica.com). There are many other campgrounds in the area as well, and there are some boondocking opportunities, too. For information visit [www.flaminggorge.com/camping.shtml](http://www.flaminggorge.com/camping.shtml)

The official National Forest website for the Flaming Gorge area is [www.fs.usda.gov/detail/ashley/specialplaces](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/ashley/specialplaces)

A wonderful detailed map of Flaming Gorge (also available in oversized printed form at the visitor center) is here: [www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_MEDIA/stelprdb5279617.jpg](http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_MEDIA/stelprdb5279617.jpg)

For general information about Flaming Gorge, visit [www.flaminggorgecountry.com](http://www.flaminggorgecountry.com) and download its excellent free guide in PDF format.

Portions of Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area require a day pass for \$5 (weekly for \$15 and annual for \$35) available at the Red Canyon Visitor Center, or you can use (or purchase) an Annual National Parks Pass (Federal Recreation Use Pass) or Senior Access pass.

**The Canyon Rim Trail hike is an easy walk, and there is a sensational view at every step.**



the trail. They were soaked to the bone. They threw their bikes on the roofs of their cars and leapt inside before speeding back to the campground.

A little farther on we found the community of Dutch John, which had been built to house the workers while Flaming Gorge Dam was being built in the 1950s. We took a tour of the dam and were impressed by its mammoth height and breadth. The Green River had to be re-routed during the building of the dam, and that engineering feat alone is mind-boggling. The dam is 502 feet high and 1,180 feet long along its crest. But the astonishing immensity of the structure and the massive quantity of concrete necessary to build it didn't really sink in for us until we learned that the concrete at the core of the dam won't be fully cured until around 2060, a full century after the concrete was poured.

Inside the dam building an original turbine installed in 1963 was on display. It had been replaced with a new turbine in 2005. Flaming Gorge produces enough electricity to supply power to about

50,000 households, although water flow, water use and electricity production have been modified over the years to improve the environmental impact. Of course, this dam isn't as sizable or historic as the Hoover Dam, but all of the dams that were built in the mid-1900s to tame the West's most wild rivers and generate electricity are marvels for their sheer scale of engineering.

For us, however, the crowd of turkey vultures hanging around on the dam's scaffolding outside were almost as intriguing as myriad facts about the dam itself. When we started our tour it began to sprinkle, and the flock of turkey vultures stared down at us from their airy perches looking a bit forlorn and drippy in the moist air. Fortunately for us, much of the tour was indoors in the bowels of the dam, so we escaped the worst of the dousing. When we emerged back into daylight, the sun had come out. Every single turkey vulture on the scaffolding around us was standing with wings fully outstretched, drying its feathers in the blazing sun. It seemed

as if they were all welcoming the sun's warmth with a big embrace.

Flaming Gorge is a place worthy of not just one visit but many repeat visits. While writing this story I discovered that we have an excuse to go back to Flaming Gorge once again because we missed one of the most beautiful hikes when we were there. Next time, we'll definitely do the 7-mile Little Hole National Recreation Trail which snakes along the edge of the narrowest part of the Green River after it passes through the dam. Apparently, this is a "must do" hike because it is so pretty! And that's the beauty of all the breathtaking national parks and national recreation areas scattered throughout the American West: it's impossible to see and do it all in one visit, so we just have to keep going back. ☮

*Mark and Emily Fagan have chronicled their full-time travels online since 2007, sharing lively stories and beautiful photography at <http://roadslesstraveled.us>.*

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# In Search of

Step back into a simpler time in Mount Airy, North Carolina, birthplace of actor Andy Griffith

## "Whoop, whoop."

A short blast of the siren pierces the air as a police car pulls into Wally's Service Station on South Main. It coasts past me slowly, rolling to a stop in front of an adjacent brick courthouse. Curious, I watch from a short distance as the sheriff escorts his suspects inside.

It doesn't take long for me to realize that all is not as it seems. The vehicle is a classic black-and-white 1962 Ford Galaxie 500 squad car, not unlike the one that Sheriff Andy Taylor drove on *The Andy Griffith Show* during its eight-season run. And the courthouse sign reads "Mayberry," not Mount Airy, which is the North Carolina Piedmont town where I'm spending a few days.

Looking around, I spot other signs that I have taken a detour 50 years into the past. The filling station with its dual gas pumps, racks of tires and tow truck





(Above left) Guests at the Andy Griffith Homeplace can cook breakfast in the same kitchen that Griffith's mother used. (Above right) The living room of Andy's Homeplace Bed and Breakfast is much like it was when Andy Griffith's parents lived there in the 1960s.

parked out front might be mistaken for an operating garage if not for the fact that the truck is vintage, several decades old. The pumps are labeled "Hi-test," last an option in an era when service stations offered S&H Green Stamps and free road maps and the uniformed attendant checked the oil and cleaned the windshield of every vehicle that pulled in for gas.

The double-bay garage, which first opened in 1937 as a Gulf Oil

station, is now a gift shop where passers-by can purchase old-fashioned candies; Cheerwine, Nehi and other nostalgic brands of soda pop; MoonPies and souvenirs. It's also the headquarters for Squad Car Tours, a novel way to explore Mount Airy, birthplace of the late actor Andy Griffith and inspiration for the fictionalized town of Mayberry, the setting for his '60s TV show.

Before I slide into the back seat of

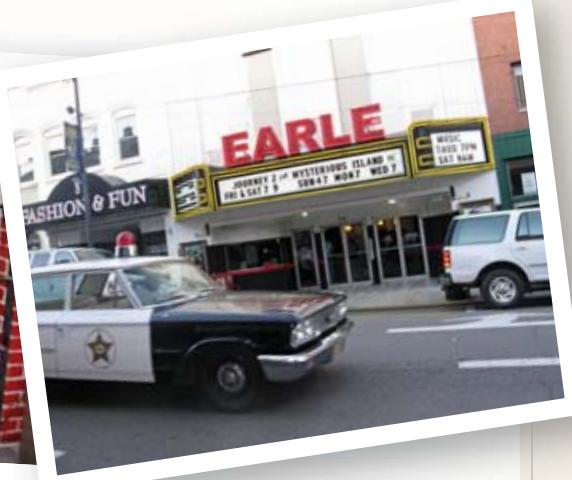
the roomy squad car for my narrated tour, I venture through the courthouse door into a place seemingly frozen in time though quite familiar to devotees of the TV show — the tidy office of the unflappable Sheriff Taylor and his bumbling deputy, Barney Fife.

"Sarah, get me Aunt Bee," I say as I ring up Mayberry's switchboard operator on the candlestick phone on Andy's desk. As I wait, the jail cell door clanks shut. A visitor has locked himself in, just as Otis, the amiable town drunk, did when he was "three sheets to the wind" and needed to "sleep it off."

- "Watch your head," "Sheriff"
- Melvin Miles cautions, as he swings open the door of the old-timey police sedan. A retired teacher and longtime resident, Miles has been patrolling the streets of Mount Airy for nearly seven years as one of a handful of

# Mayberry

(Top left) A view north up Main Street from the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History shows the idyllic downtown. (Left) A bronze TV Land statue of Andy and Opie stands near the playhouse and adjacent Andy Griffith Museum. (Right) Visitors are invited to lock themselves up in the old city jail like Otis, Mayberry's friendly town drunk, did when he needed to "sleep it off." (Far right) A 1960s-era squad car passes in front of the beautifully restored 1930s-era Earle Theatre.



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## In Search of Mayberry

"lawmen" with Squad Car Tours.

We first head east on State Highway 103 to the world's largest open-face granite quarry on the outskirts of town. In full operation since the late 1880s, it's so large that it's said to be visible from outer space.

"This quarry is 1 mile across and an estimated 1 to 1½ miles deep," Miles says, noting that the vein of granite is 7 miles long underground and extends all the way under the downtown area. Geologists estimate that the massive granite deposit could be mined for another 500 years.

The quarry has supplied granite for a number of Washington, D.C.'s iconic monuments and buildings, although it's also been a favorite building material locally. As we loop back into town, I see why Mount Airy is nicknamed Granite City as Miles points out building after building made of granite including the Grace Moravian Church that Andy Griffith attended with his parents.

The sheriff regales us with tales of Eng and Chang Bunker, the original Siamese twins who eventually settled in nearby White Plains, married sisters and fathered 21 children. And he tells us about another local celebrity, country

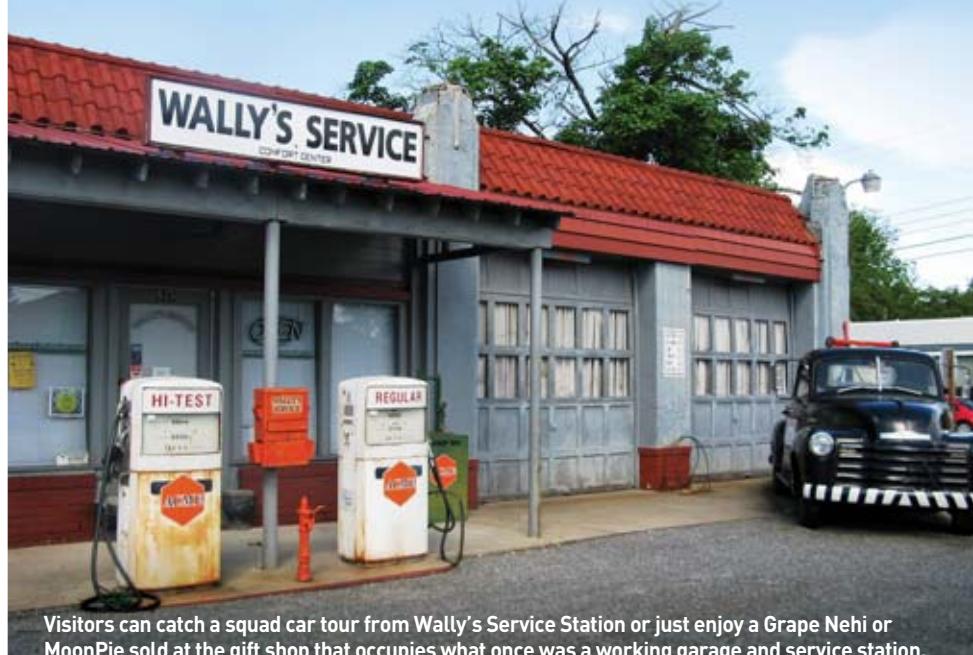


Soda jerk and owner David Jones dishes up malts and ice cream daily at the Mayberry Soda Fountain.

music star Donna Fargo, born Yvonne Vaughan.

Like most visitors to Mount Airy, however, what we really want to hear about is Mayberry.

"The show was filmed on set in California," Miles informs us, noting that Andy Griffith always denied that it was based on his hometown. It's an uncanny coincidence that many of the local place names, streets such as Rockford, Banner, Spring, Haymore,



Visitors can catch a squad car tour from Wally's Service Station or just enjoy a Grape Nehi or MoonPie sold at the gift shop that occupies what once was a working garage and service station.

Oak, Willow and River, among others, all appeared on the show. Or that Aunt Bee and other townsfolk often traveled to Mount Pilot (most likely inspired by local landmark Pilot Mountain) to shop.

"Most of the characters on the show were named for local people," Miles adds.

As we cruise Main Street, we pass the Bluebird Diner, Floyd's City Barber Shop and Snappy Lunch. The latter, our tour guide reminds us, is where Sheriff Taylor once said was a nice place to take a date. I expect to see red-headed Opie at the Mayberry Soda Fountain or Barney Fife escorting his steady gal Thelma Lou to the movies.

A number of area businesses capitalize on the Mayberry theme. There's Opie's Candy Shop and Barney's Café as well as the Mayberry Five & Dime. At the Mayberry Motor Inn, nostalgia seekers can view the Aunt Bee Room, which contains an eclectic assortment of personal items, clothing and a bedroom set that once belonged to Francis Bavier, who played Opie's favorite aunt on the show and retired to nearby Siler City, North Carolina.

Not far from U.S. Highway 52, designated the Andy Griffith Highway, Miles pulls up in front of a modest bungalow on East Haywood Street. This was Griffith's boyhood home.

"Andy was an only child," the sheriff tells us. "He slept in a dresser drawer his first year. His parents bought the house for \$600, a significant sum in 1935." They stayed there until 1966 when Andy moved them to California.

Furnished in 1960s period furniture, the home, known as Andy's Homeplace Bed and Breakfast, is available for overnight or weekly rentals through the local Hampton Inn. The two-bedroom, one-bath home has a bright, airy kitchen and retro furnishings from the chunky living room furniture to the chenille coverlets on the beds.

Later, after my squad car tour, I stop by The Andy Griffith Museum just up the road a piece from Griffith's house to view items from his life, beginning with early childhood. This rich repository of memorabilia — which includes photographs, props, vinyl records and movie posters — was amassed by Emmett Forrest, a lifelong friend. The collection

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also has Goober Pyle's beanie, Barney's salt-and-pepper suit and other items donated by co-stars.

A bronze TV Land statue of Andy and Opie "goin' fishin'" greets visitors to the museum and adjacent community theater and arts center. Now the Andy Griffith Playhouse, it was originally the Rockford Street School where the late actor first performed on stage.

Museum admission includes access to the Old-Time Music Heritage Hall in the 1930s-era Earle Theatre that honors legendary fiddle and banjo player Tommy Jarrell and other local musicians. The North Main Street theater, where Andy Griffith's first movie premiered, also hosts jam sessions and WPAQ's Merry-Go-Round, a popular weekly live radio broadcast of old-time music since 1948.

I'm thrilled to find Thelma Lou — actress Betty Lynn — at the museum signing autographs and greeting fans as she does on a regular basis throughout the year.

"I'm the luckiest old lady I know," she quips as she shares stories about her early movies and time on the set of *The Andy Griffith Show*.

The octogenarian moved to Mount Airy after falling in love with the community during Mayberry Days, the annual gathering of fans, lookalikes and actors from the show. The four-day event, held the last weekend in September (scheduled for September 26 to 29 this year), features music, big-screen airings of reruns and an hour-long parade up Main Street. A much-heralded event is the pork-chop-sandwich-eating contest sponsored by Snappy Lunch and featuring its signature dish, a fried boneless pork chop coated in an egg batter; dressed with coleslaw, chili, onions, mustard and tomatoes; and served on a bun.

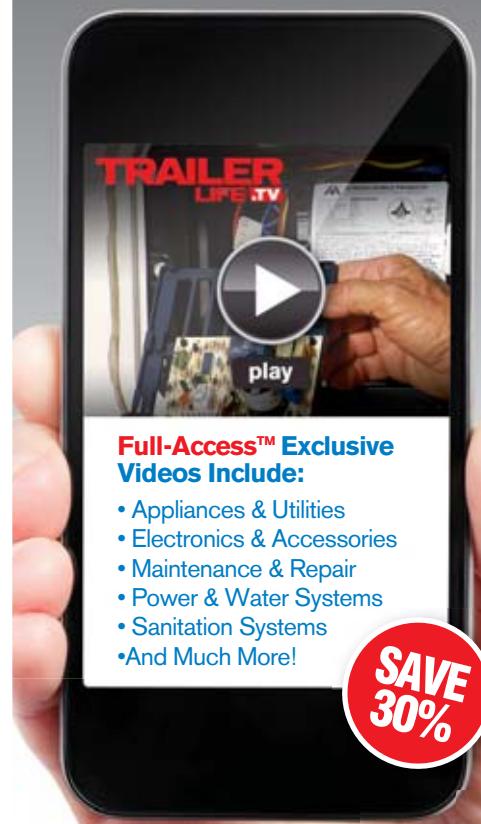
At the luncheonette, the sandwich, priced at \$4.05, is the most expensive item on the menu, which also includes a ham and cheese sandwich for \$1.80 or a breaded hamburger for a nickel more.

The next morning finds me at the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History on North Main, where I absorb several centuries of local history from



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the Saura Indians, the earliest inhabitants, to the first settlers in the "hollows" and celebrated residents including the conjoined Bunker twins and Donna Fargo. Other exhibits describe the area's natural history and commerce, everything from granite mining to medicine and making moonshine.

Although Andy and Mayberry are the biggest draws for most people, Surry County also enjoys a well-deserved reputation for its wines. A drive along the Yadkin Valley Wine Trail introduces visitors to nearly three-dozen boutique wineries, including Round Peak Vineyard, Brushy Mountain Winery, Carolina Heritage Vineyard and Winery, and McRitchie Winery & Ciderworks,

open to the public for tastings and on-site sales.

The valley also is a top destination for hiking, kayaking and other outdoor recreation, particularly at Pilot Mountain State Park, which includes Pilot Mountain with its distinctive rocky "knob" at the summit. The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, a favorite of hikers and mountain bikers, can be accessed from the trailhead in Elkin, another community with small-town "Mayberry" appeal.

While the line between Andy Griffith's hometown of Mount Airy and his fictitious TV town may blur, I leave the area delighted that there's still a little Mayberry left in the world. ☻

## SOURCES

**Andy Griffith Museum** 336-786-1604, [www.andygriffithmuseum.com](http://www.andygriffithmuseum.com)

**Beechnut Family Campground** 336-320-3802, [www.beechnutcampground.com](http://www.beechnutcampground.com)

**Greater Mount Airy Chamber of Commerce** 800-948-0949 or 336-786-6116, [www.visitmayberry.com](http://www.visitmayberry.com)

**Mayberry Campground** 336-789-6199, [www.mayberrycampground.com](http://www.mayberrycampground.com)

**Mayberry Days** 336-786-7998, [www.mayberrydays.org](http://www.mayberrydays.org)

**Squad Car Tours** 336-789-0PIE (6743), [www.tourmayberry.com](http://www.tourmayberry.com)

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# A RECREATIONAL PARADISE

Family fun in the Greater Grand Forks of North Dakota and Minnesota

**G**rand Forks sits on the banks of the Red River, which flows through Southern Manitoba, North Dakota and Minnesota.

Named for the fork created by the Red and Red Lake rivers, "Les Grandes Fourches" was a vital rendezvous location for French fur traders in the early 1700s. A century later, Grand Forks was under British control; pioneers farmed the rich soil and

grains were an important crop. In 1870 Captain Alexander Griggs' steamboat froze in the Red River. The entire crew was forced to remain all winter. They built housing; in spring they constructed downtown buildings. The area quickly developed. Steamboats and railroads were kept busy hauling agricultural products. Growth was aided by the founding of the University of North Dakota in 1883. Workers streamed into the Diamond Milling Company, which intro-

duced Cream of Wheat cereal in 1893.

On the other side of the river, East Grand Forks, Minnesota, also grew — largely due to breweries and saloons. North Dakota was a dry state; folks crossed the river to quench their thirsts. By the early 20th century, Greater Grand Forks was the region's education, commercial and transportation leader. Today, residents and visitors enjoy a high quality of life.

Expect to hear a slight Canadian accent

by Patricia Strutz



The Red River of the North, one of the few large rivers in the world that flow northward, provides scenic views and recreational opportunities.



— we're not far from the border, eh? Though not considered a mecca for tourism, campers find this small city (population 50,000) to be clean, friendly and fun.

### Greater Grand Forks History

In 1997, floods in the Grand Forks area of northeastern North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota brought worldwide attention. The flood was the result of a brutal winter, with 100 inches of snow, followed by a warm spring. When the river crested at a record 54 feet, Grand Forks was inundated with water and the area suffered large financial losses.

Since then, a massive dike and levee system has been built to protect against future flooding. It is complemented by The Greenway, a 2,200-acre open space between Grand Forks, North Dakota,

(Above left and right) Visitors can shore fish for catfish or head out on the water with Captain Brad Durick in search of a lunker.

and East Grand Forks, Minnesota. Along with providing flood mitigation and re-establishing a native riparian zone, The Greenway offers myriad recreational opportunities. A series of parks on each side of the river are linked via a paved trail system. Visitors can walk, ride bikes, shore fish or access boat ramps to cast for monster-size catfish. There's also golfing and disc golfing; kayaking and canoeing; bird-watching and, of course, camping.

For indoor activities, check out the huge Cabela's store in East Grand Forks or Splasher's of the South Seas water park in Grand Forks. In addition, many University of North Dakota (UND) events are open to the public. There's

plenty of entertainment and things to do in Greater Grand Forks!

### Recreational Activities

Start at The Greenway. Twenty miles of asphalt trails straddle the rivers and connect numerous parks; so walk, jog or pedal to your heart's content. Each park holds different amenities — basketball courts, softball diamonds, picnic shelters and specialized offerings. It's also a hotspot for bird-watchers — nearly 250 species of birds have been observed in the area. Common species include cliff swallows, cedar waxwings and the ubiquitous Canada geese.

There are plenty of river access

The Red River State Recreational Area offers camping and access to The Greenway and East Grand Forks.



## A RECREATIONAL PARADISE

points. Canoes and kayaks can be rented for \$15 a day from the UND Memorial Union. Rentals include life jackets, paddles and car tie-down kits. The Red River is a world-renowned channel catfish fishery; shore fishing spots abound. Try the Riverside Dam on the north end or Eagle Point Trail Head, just east of the river's fork. The latter spot touts a nice boat ramp, too. A public swimming pool is found at Sherlock Park, adjacent to the Red River Recreation Area and the Sherlock Park Campground. With more than 100 sites, it can accommodate rigs over 60 feet in length. This campground's location is close to the east side of The

Greenway, the Red River and downtown East Grand Forks.

Lincoln Drive Park, found on the southwest side of The Greenway, offers the most activities. Trail and Red River access (shore fishing and a boat ramp), two 18-hole disc golf courses, horseshoes, sand volleyball and an off-leash dog park are on-site. The Lincoln Golf Course lies just south of the park. The Greenway offers a detailed map of trails, facilities, parking info and a birding checklist.

Want to learn how to catch a trophy-sized catfish? Give Captain Brad Durick a call. His tagline is "America's finest channel cat fishing experience." Durick

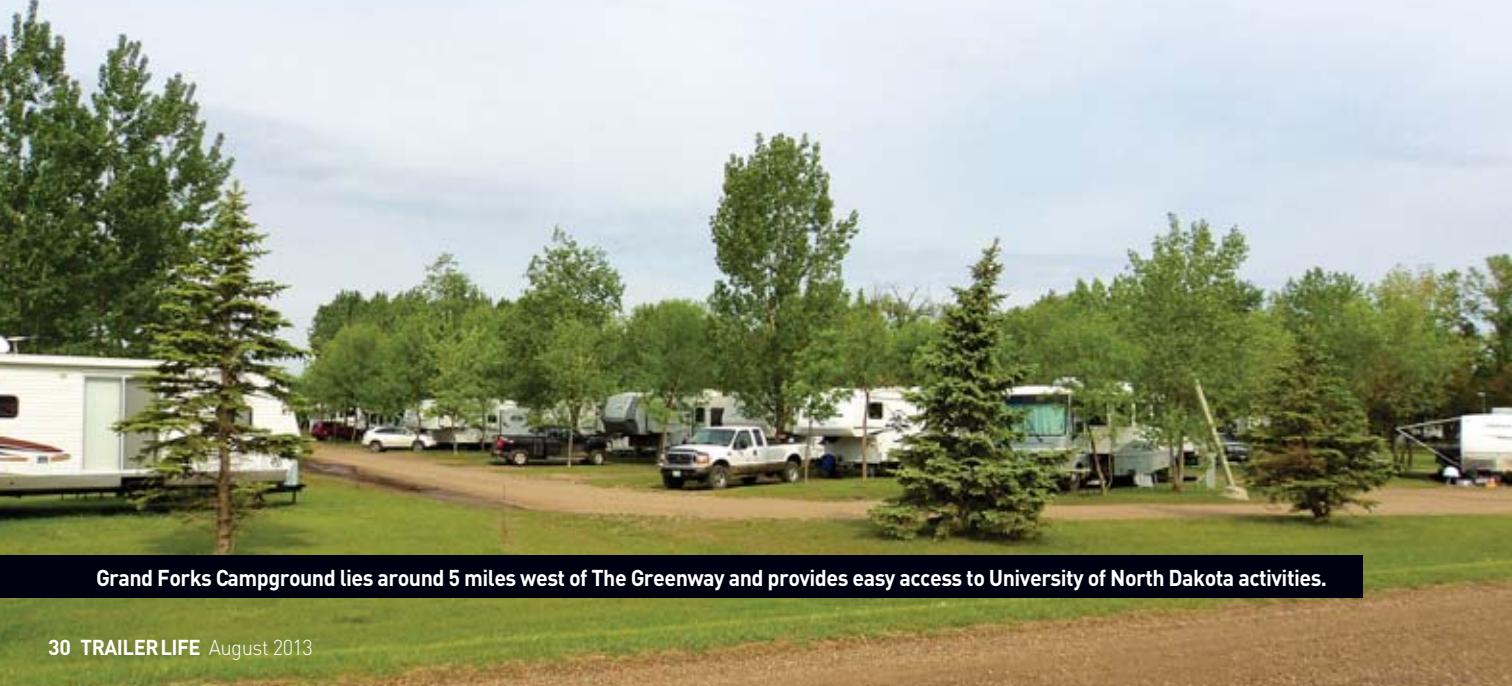
relays, "A whopper catfish is 12 pounds. Well, my boat's average size is around 11 pounds (29 inches). We've caught hundreds over the 20-pound mark. The Red River provides a legitimate opportunity to catch a 20-pounder. We stress a sport fishery by promoting catch-and-release practices."

Durick offers trips in jon or pontoon boats; all gear and bait is provided. Weighted down cut bait, usually carp or sheepshead, is used. While bottom fishing deep holes, folks enjoy tranquil scenes of trees hanging over the river. The initial hit can either be jarring or very subtle — but the fight is always exciting. Channel cats are famous for never giving up; they roll, thrash and fight ferociously. Once you learn the technique, it's relatively easy to rig up and enjoy this pastime. Many families fish from simple jon boats, canoes or along the shore.

Home to more than 70 species of fish, the Red River is also well known for its walleye. Want to cook up your freshly caught fish? Pick up a new electric smoker or fryer at the 60,000-square-foot Cabela's sporting goods store. Of course, there are also rods and reels, as well as live bait. Browse the stocked aquariums and museum-quality animal mounts — the full-body whitetail deer mounts sport stunning racks — displayed in realistic recreations of their natural habitat. The store is within walking distance of Sherlock Park Campground.

## A Little Geography Lesson: The Red River

- Forms the border between Minnesota and North Dakota.
- Runs for 545 miles.
- Is one of the few large rivers in the world that flows northward.
- Empties into Lake Winnipeg in Canada.
- Is also called The Red River of the North to distinguish it from The Red River, which forms part of the border between Texas and Oklahoma.
- Has humble beginnings in Breckenridge, Minnesota. It flows quite slowly there and isn't very wide.
- Widens and deepens as it heads north. In Fargo it is still quite narrow and lined with trees along the banks.
- Remains tree-lined in Grand Forks but almost doubles in width.
- Holds very few trees by Drayton and once again almost doubles in width.
- Looks quite desolate in the far north where violent floods have wiped out the trees.
- Summer average depth is 7-12 feet with 25-to-30-foot holes.



Grand Forks Campground lies around 5 miles west of The Greenway and provides easy access to University of North Dakota activities.



(Above left and right) Game birds and birds of prey, such as this Sharp-tailed Grouse and Short-eared Owl, are species found in Grand Forks.

Downtown Grand Forks means one thing: the University of North Dakota. Many musical and athletic events — as well as campus tours — are open to the public. Aviation enthusiasts can tour its school of aerospace — largely regarded as one of the best collegiate aviation complexes in the world. Visitors watch students utilize flight and air-traffic-control simulators or experience the effects of hypoxia in an altitude chamber. Next, you're shuttled to the airport to view roughly 150 training

crafts, including impressive Bell 206B-3 helicopters. The tours are free and offered year-round. Afterward, throw on a green jersey and join thousands of screaming fans as they cheer on the Fighting Sioux baseball or football team. UND boasts a well-rounded athletics program.

Splasher's of the South Seas water park is located just south of the university, in the Canad Inn Destination Center. It's open to the general public and provides 40,000 square feet of wet

## WHERE TO STAY

### Sherlock Park Campground

In the Red River State Recreation Area  
515 2nd Street N.W., East Grand Forks, Minnesota  
Open early May through mid-October, weather permitting  
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Park office 218-773-4950  
Reservations 866-857-2757,  
[www.dnr.state.mn.us/state\\_parks/reservations.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/reservations.html)

### Grand Forks Campground

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## A RECREATIONAL PARADISE



(Above left) Traditional and disc golf courses are found along The Greenway. (Above right) Playing at Splasher's of the South Seas water park is a fun activity for folks of all ages.

fun, pizza and an arcade.

And speaking of pizza ... what's a college town without a pizza joint? Rhombus Guys Pizza is the perennial "best pizza in town" winner. With 34 pizzas on the menu, it's difficult to choose just one. Try the T-Rex — it's heaped high with pepperoni, sausage, Canadian bacon, beef and bacon.

The Grand Forks Campground lies south of the university and Splasher's; it's about 5 miles west of The Greenway. It has 100 sites and can accommodate

all sizes of rigs. With a nice playground and large open areas to play, it's very family friendly.

There aren't many other places in the United States where you can be in a downtown metro area and in less than 10 minutes you're casting for big fish. The Red River is a special resource. Whether folks choose to stroll on the paved trails, play a game of traditional or disc golf, or sport wide grins while hoisting hefty catfish, it's all here in Greater Grand Forks. ☻

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701-739-5808,  
[www.braddurick.com](http://www.braddurick.com)

**Lincoln Golf Course**  
701-738-8746, [www.grandforksgov.com/greenway](http://www.grandforksgov.com/greenway)

**Splasher's of the South Seas (water park)**  
701-787-2503, [www.canadinns.com/play/play.php?entry\\_id=9444](http://www.canadinns.com/play/play.php?entry_id=9444)

**University of North Dakota Memorial Union Lifetime Sports Center**  
701-777-3981, [www.und.edu/student-life/union/services/lifetime-sports-center.php](http://www.und.edu/student-life/union/services/lifetime-sports-center.php)

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# DIESEL COOLING SYSTEM OVERHAUL

This Ford diesel engine benefits from upgrades to keep all parts at low temperatures

**W**hen was the last time you noticed that funny smell and realized there was steam coming from under the engine's hood? You may not have noticed that the little needle on the instrument cluster was pegged on "HOT." Most owners check fluid levels and tires regularly, and we fill the fuel tank, but what about the cooling system? If it stops working, you'll notice it right away, and if you're not parked in front of a parts house or a dealer, chances are that molded hose is not going to be hanging on the wall of the local service station like it was 50 years ago.

Diesel or gas, modern engines run significantly hotter today in their efforts to gain better fuel mileage while reducing exhaust emissions. At the same time, plastic parts have become nearly standard wherever they can replace metal. Plastic is great, but it has a lifespan affected by the conditions inside an engine compartment.

In preparation for a lengthy trip we were planning from Lisbon, Portugal to Beijing, China (yeah, driving), we decided it would be prudent to take a careful look at the cooling system in our 1999 Ford F-550. What we discovered might apply to every vehicle on the road that's more than 5 years old.



# DIESEL COOLING SYSTEM OVERHAUL

1



2



3



(1) Removing the coolant jug or reservoir opens up working space. (2) The fan blade and shroud are best removed together. (3) Removing the main drive pulley gives access to the pump bolts.

The water pump is at the heart of the cooling system, literally. Careful inspection with a flashlight showed clear signs that the seal was leaking and failure was in the wings. That was just the beginning of a full cooling system overhaul. While much of the work could be done by a good do-it-yourselfer, we took our truck to the expert hands at Ken Imler Diesel Performance. Watching the process, we did pick up some tips that may apply to many other makes and engines.

With the coolant drained, Logan Andersen began the operation like a heart surgeon doing his 100th transplant; systematically, but with a trained eye for common problems. With the top hose out of the way and the coolant tank removed, the fan clutch hub was loosened, allowing the belts still under tension to hold it in place. Next, the fan shroud was unbolted and the fan was removed

with the shroud. We noted that on this vehicle the fan is a right-hand thread. It was easiest to remove the shroud and the fan together. Caution must be exercised here to avoid poking a hole in the radiator. With the belt still holding everything in place, bolts on the water pump were loosened before finally removing the serpentine belt.

Plugs for the cam sensor, crank position sensor, and coolant temperature sensor were unplugged and moved out of the way and the pulley was taken off. On the 7.3-liter diesel one of the idler pulleys was removed to get to the 10MM bolt on the pump. The water pump, thermostat and housing, and the down-tube all slipped out complete in one piece.

With the water pump on the bench various heater hose fittings and sensor plugs could be moved over to the new Gates water pump.

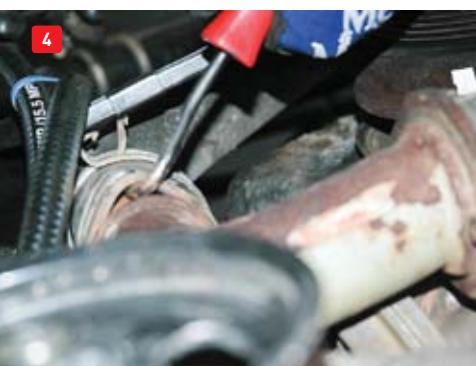
Gates Water Pumps are recognized

in the industry for their durability and superior quality. Every Gates Water Pump is constructed with premium alloy materials and a 100 percent functional test of seals and bearings along with a 100 percent leakage test — for both the casting and assembled water pump — is a big part of the manufacturing process. The quality controlled factory calibration of the Gates Heavy-Duty Thermostat assures accurate heat control under extreme variations in temperature, load and engine vibration.

For the install, a light lubricant is applied to all the O-rings and Teflon tape is used on all of the threads. The Gates pump came with all the necessary gaskets and hardware, including new bolts for the thermostat housing. Installing the spaghetti-like gasket into the groove on the base of the water pump was a little tricky. In this case a small screwdriver was used

(4) A hook tool facilitates removing stuck hoses. (5) The water pump, thermostat and housing, and the down-tube all slipped out complete in one piece. (6) The backside of the old water pump was deceptively clean.

4



5



6



to push the little nubs in to hold the gasket in place. A bit of lubricant (you can even use liquid dish soap), helps the gasket slide into its slot and keeps it there until the pump is installed. The gasket will leak if it's twisted.

The surface of the block was cleaned using a mild 3M scrub pad and a razor blade. Using an abrasive product could compromise the sealing surface. The new pump was installed and bolts tightened in a cross-pattern to keep the pressure even. They were torqued to 15-18 ft-lb. According to the people at Imler's, one of the biggest mistakes people make is overtightening the bolts on the water pump. This can crack the front plate, allowing coolant to get in the oil, resulting in a very expensive repair.

With the new pump and drive pulley in place, new Gates idler pulleys and belt tensioner were installed and torqued to 35-40 ft-lb. The belt tensioner is a spring-loaded device that exerts a constant pressure on the engine's serpentine belt. Gates tensioners ensure proper performance on serpentine belt drives and reduce noise and vibration levels helping to prolong life of other accessory drive components. Gates' asymmetrically dampening tensioners provide more energy absorption versus conventional symmetric damped tensioners. The pulleys and tensioners rely on sealed greased bearings. They have a lifespan, and like tires on a jet aircraft, it's prudent to replace them before you have to.

What makes it all go around and around is the serpentine belt. We slipped on a new Gates Heavy-Duty FleetRunner Belt. Gates claims that it provides twice the service life compared to other heavy-duty serpentine belts. The company designed and produced the industry's first V-belt and today is the world's largest manufacturer of V-belts, timing belts and serpentine belts.

Installing a new serpentine belt can be intimidating for the novice. There is usually a diagram on the radiator frame showing the pattern the belt must follow. A long-handled breaker bar works well to release the pressure



**(7)** The factory thermostat was easy to remove. **(8)** The Heavy-Duty Gates thermostat (right) will ensure accurate heat control under extreme variations in temperature, load and engine vibration. **(9)** The Gates thermostat came with a round gasket. It's preferable to use the larger flat design that is interchangeable. **(10)** A small screwdriver is used to push the little nubs in to hold the gasket in place. **(11)** The new pump was ready for hoses, sensors and the drive belt. **(12)** Gates tensioners (left) ensure proper performance on serpentine belt drives and reduce noise and vibration.

on the main tensioner and it's always easier to slide the last section of belt over the smooth idler pulley, not the ridged ones.

As a general precaution, we replaced all hoses with new Gates rubber and in the process, switched from the factory hose clamps that require a special tool to remove for a more common screw-type adjustable hose clamp. Sharp edges of the clamps were protected with Clamp-Aid end guards.

In the process of this cooling system overhaul, we took care of a couple of other problems. Plastic is convenient

for lightweight manufacturing, but it doesn't last forever. The coolant reservoir was deteriorating and the plastic brackets were cracking. The fan blade had a bad chip and was clearly showing the brittleness of time. Even the small drain plug on the lower radiator tank was cracked and needed replacing. With 180,000 miles on the engine, many of them on rough backroads, any critical component made of plastic presented a possible liability.

As an extra precaution, we added a simple coolant filter by DieselSite. When you think about it, we filter the

# DIESEL COOLING SYSTEM OVERHAUL

oil, the air and the fuel, so why wouldn't we filter the coolant? The DieselSite Coolant Filter kit for the 7.3-liter Power Stroke (\$129) comes with well-designed brackets and instructions. Any contaminants that may be in the system from the original block casting or random corrosion is trapped in the spin-off filter that can be periodically replaced. Surely this will extend the life of the water pump.

Finally with all the hard parts renewed we turned our attention to the coolant itself. Coolant is critical to the proper function of any engine, but especially diesels. After draining all the coolant, we refilled with Fleetguard ES Compleat Lifetime Heavy Duty Fully Formulated Antifreeze/Coolant. We like the fact that it uses the environmentally friendly propylene glycol, and the term "Lifetime Heavy Duty" had a nice ring to it.

Improper mixtures of antifreeze can cause corrosion, rust, overheating, and even cylinder wall cavitation that can turn into little pinholes, and that's an engine's death sentence. To prevent cavitation, a diesel engine's coolant should be checked at regular intervals with a test kit such as the Fleetguard CC2607 Quik-Chek or the POLARIS four-part test strips to verify the concentration of molybdate and nitrite, which in turn will determine the number of Supplemental Coolant Additive units (SCA) needed per gallon in the system. Fleetguard's DCA4 additive is designed to protect against corrosion, scale formation, foam, liner



13



14



15



16

[13] The coolant jug was deteriorating and the plastic brackets were cracking. [14] The fan blade had a bad chip and was clearly showing the brittleness of time. [15] Gates Heavy-Duty FleetRunner Belts are designed to provide twice the service life compared to other heavy-duty serpentine belts. [16] The DieselSite Coolant Filter kit for the 7.3-liter Power Stroke (\$129) comes with well-designed brackets and instructions.

pitting and solder bloom.

A refractometer can be used to determine the freeze point protection. A third method of testing, and perhaps the best, is to have the coolant analyzed by a professional lab. We sent a sample to POLARIS Laboratories. We have been "trending" the coolant's condition for several years. The results showed no major problems in the system.

As we prepare our truck for shipping from Baltimore to Europe, I guess we can discard that canvas water bag hanging on the grille.

## SOURCES

**Clamp-Aid** [www.Clamp-Aid.com](http://www.Clamp-Aid.com)

**Cummins Filtration Fleetguard**  
[www.cumminsfiltration.com](http://www.cumminsfiltration.com)

**DieselSite** [www.dieselsite.com](http://www.dieselsite.com)

**Gates Rubber Company**  
[www.gates.com](http://www.gates.com)

**Ken Imler Diesel Performance**  
[www.imlerdiesel.com](http://www.imlerdiesel.com)

**Polaris Labs**  
[www.polarislabs.com](http://www.polarislabs.com)

[17] A diesel engine's coolant should be checked at regular intervals with a test kit such as the Fleetguard CC2607 Quik-Chek. You can also have the coolant analyzed by a professional lab. [18] A refractometer can be used to determine the freeze point protection. [19] There is usually a diagram on the radiator frame showing the pattern the belt must follow.



17



18



19



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any other way. Nor would our loyal customers, some of whom are now driving their fourth or even fifth Coach House!

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# Roam Big

2014 Dutchmen Voltage 3895 V-Series toy hauler offers adventurers high-end luxury and all the bells and whistles

**W**hen looking for an SURV to haul their toys, some RVers are in the market for little more than a compact mobile garage with a couple of bunks, a cooler and perhaps a toilet. Those RVers need not apply here. The Dutchmen 2014 Voltage V3895 we tested is anything but Spartan. In fact, it boasts practically every amenity and upgrade we've ever encountered in an RV, let alone a toy hauler. Dutchmen has packed so much into this plus-size fiver that it's virtually

impossible to tell it's an SURV from the inside ... until you walk into the garage, that is.

As you can see, this thing is big, nearly 43 feet long, including the 12-foot rear garage. The exterior is in-your-face aggressive. From its imposing frame, the optional full-body paint (\$8,693), gelcoat fiberglass upgrade (\$1,878) and standard black with blue accent color scheme, all scream for attention while on the road or in camp. The large garage door out back adds to



the aggressive aura; you just know that Voltage owners have some serious motorized toys stored within.

The garage is accessed either via a side-entry door (a concept we love), or via the easy-open, spring-assisted ramp door. The garage package (\$1,428) nets buyers a 32-inch LCD TV, a stereo with



The triple-axle Voltage features aggressive styling and an imposing profile. (Top) A half-bath in the rear garage is a great use of space — and helps keep the mess in the garage, not the trailer. A full-bath is located outside the master.



(Above left) The lounge area offers a removable table in front of the large, cushy sofa. A removable ladder allows access to the loft area. (Above right) The 46-inch TV (one of four TVs!) above the electric fireplace makes entertaining guests a breeze at the end of the day.

DVD player, heat and air conditioning ducts, 22-inch diamond plating on the walls, washer/dryer prep and 2,500-pound-rated tie downs. Add to that the roll-up carpeting (\$218), the Happijac electric bed and rollover sofa system with table and bench inserts (\$3,473), and the pull-down garage door

screen (\$573), and you can scarcely tell it's designed to haul toys rather than it being an extension of the living area. Of course, it helps that the corner of the garage houses a half-bath, with a toilet and sink. The toilet itself does seem a bit cramped, but who cares? There's a half-bath in the garage!

The test trailer also included the optional (\$2,893) Aluminum Ramp Door Patio System with a Carefree awning, which only adds to the workable living space in the trailer. Also included as part of the V-Series Exterior Package (\$3,944) is a second 30-gallon fuel station for off-pavement vehicles, which extends the off-the-grid vacations adventurers generally crave. That same Exterior Package also includes an exterior convenience center, an AC-generator, 16-inch aluminum wheels and a detachable roof ladder, among other appointments.

Entry to the trailer proper, through the tasteful solid door with a glazed glass insert, leads to the galley/living area. The galley is a bit cramped, but Dutchmen has done its best to make the most of the space, with a curved, peninsular-type kitchen countertop, dual-basin sink with one side enlarged for pots and pans, residential microwave-convection oven (\$450), 12-cubic-foot refrigerator (\$2,603) and oven in place of two kitchen drawers (\$283). Unfortunately, this cooktop is little more than the industry standard that is included in trailers a mere fraction of the cost of the Voltage, so we were left wanting a bit more. We'd expect an upscale stovetop in an upscale trailer.

Contemporary pendulum lighting hangs over the counter prep space, shedding some light on what is sometimes a pretty dark, albeit inviting environment.

The test trailer included the Desert color scheme resulting in deeper,



## DUTCHMEN VOLTAGE V3895



(Above left) With the table removed, the optional barstools offer additional, diner-style seating. (Above right) There's plenty of storage in the master bedroom, with mirrored wardrobes, cabinets and an underbed compartment beneath the memory-foam mattress.

darker earth tones — a look I quite enjoy but will definitely necessitate leaving the shades open to let some light in. A large pantry is located curbside, and will easily handle nonperishable items and probably much more.

The living area features a giant leather couch nestled in the 107-inch curbside slideout, and although it cannot be converted into a bed (nor can the opposing two-person recliner/couch), there are plenty of sleeping options with

the Happijac bed out back. In addition, above the garage's entry door you'll find a two-person bunk for the kiddoes, accessible via a removable ladder. This is a great fort-type area for the kids to climb up into, or could also be used for storage should all the occupants wish to keep their feet on the ground.

A 46-inch LCD TV mounted above the electric fireplace completes the living area, and the sightline is adequate from all seating areas.

## SPECIFICATIONS

Exterior Length	42' 7"
Exterior Width	8' 6"
Exterior Height	13' 4"
Construction	12-inch steel twin I-beam chassis frame, 5/8-inch Structurewood floor decking, 3-inch-thick vacuum-bonded floor, insulated and laminated walls, truss-style walk-on roof, one-piece EPDM rubber roof
Freshwater Cap.	160 gal.
Gray-water Cap.	114 gal.
Black-water Cap.	96 gal.
LP-gas Cap.	14 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	10 gal.
Refrigerator	12 cu. ft.
Furnace	40,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	(2) 15,000 Btu (1) 13,500 Btu
Converter	100 amp
Battery	Group 24
Tires	ST235/80R16 LRE
UVW	14,774 lbs.
Hitch Weight	3,221 lbs.
GVWR	19,000 lbs.
GAWR	(3) 7,000 lbs.
MSRP, base	\$67,461
MSRP, as tested	\$122,777
Basic Warranty	12 months

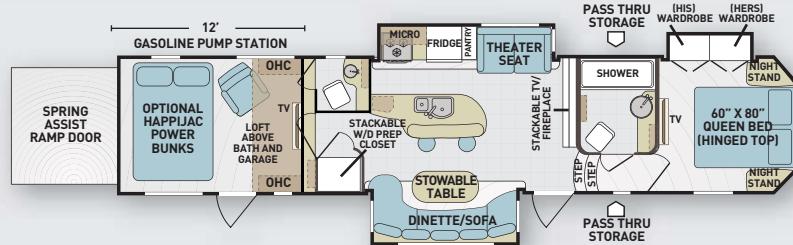
Voltage Haulers, a division of Dutchmen, 574-537-0600, [www.voltagehaulers.com](http://www.voltagehaulers.com)



The heavy-duty spring-assisted door and the 102-inch-wide body make maneuvering motorized toys in and out of the trailer easy.

Up the stairs (and past the well-disguised systems monitors and breaker panel) brings you to the "hallway," which is abbreviated in this fiver due to the space needed for the garage out back. With the bathroom door open, the door to the master bangs against it, which will call for some communication between occupants to avoid costly — and embarrassing — incidents. The bathroom itself features a full-size shower with plenty of headroom, and the foot-flush porcelain toilet has been installed at an angle for increased comfort. The vessel sink and faucet are part of the Luxury Interior Package (\$4,053). The Luxury Package also includes upgrades throughout the trailer, including quartz granite countertops, day/night shades and the large TV in the living area and a powered kitchen vent fan, to name a few. A mirrored medicine cabinet and wall mirror make sure you can look your best from all angles. There's a large cabinet behind the toilet that isn't quite deep enough for more than magazines and wash-

## VOLTAGE V3895



cloths, but it's a nice use of the available space.

The master bedroom features a pilastered entertainment center that differs from most others in that it's part of a solid wall ... and there's plenty of room between it and the foot of the comfortable queen bed. The master features a mirrored wardrobe with his and hers cabinets for hanging clothes and drawers, and the requisite cabinets above the bed are useful for storing odds and ends. There are full-size nightstands with a cabinet below on each side of the bed, which is yet again a much-appre-

ciated use of the available space.

It does seem odd that we're lauding the use of "available space" on a trailer that's nearly 43 feet long. That's one of the Voltage's best traits. You completely forget you're in a toy hauler, so much so to the point that you begin nitpicking and wish for more open space. But taking into account there's a 12-foot garage out back — with a bathroom, no less — it's a snap back into reality that this dual-purpose trailer is smartly designed, well appointed and offers residential-type luxury that's hard to ignore. 🚐



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# CAMP SITE COOKOUT

A whole rack of barbecue accessories designed to make your outdoor grill party finger-licking good

**A**fter years of extensive hands-on research and careful observation, I have come to the following scientific conclusion: RVers like to eat, and they love the outdoors. Pretty groundbreaking, huh? Well, food and fresh air are two of the primary reasons we all began RVing, and there are few ways to so deliciously blend the two as a campsite cookout. True, your trailer may be outfitted with top-of-the-line appliances inside, but there's nothing quite like the smell of fresh barbecue intermingled with the sweet scent of summer blossoms. But we all know there's more to a successful cookout than a hot grill and a chunk of meat; a cookout is about togetherness, the entire process of cooking and especially about a good time. These truths being self-evident, we've taken the liberty to highlight some of our favorite outdoor grill inspired accessories, décor and entertainment to bring you a virtual firecracker of a list.

## GRILLS



### Coleman RoadTrip Party Grill

The RoadTrip Party Grill is lightweight, compact and easy to transport — perfect for your trailer's pass-through storage. The InstaStart electronic ignition makes it easy to take advantage of the LP-gas-powered 8,000-Btu total burners. Once the grilling is over, the legs can be detached and placed inside the grill, and all will fit into the included carry bag. All components (except for the valve/burner assembly and lid) are dishwasher safe for quick and easy cleanup. MSRP: \$44.99.

800-835-3278, [www.coleman.com](http://www.coleman.com)

### Cook-Air Grill

For those who prefer the taste of wood-fired barbecue, the Cook-Air Grill will get your mouth watering in no time. Made of 304 stainless steel, the Cook-Air heats up in just 5 minutes and burns the equivalent of

65,000 Btu, according to the company. Users simply light the ignition paper, insert wood and begin cooking on the 14-inch-diameter grill that can reach the equivalent of 1,100 degrees. The Cook-Air features a five-speed adjustable fan that controls the heat, and is powered by either 8 D batteries or the included 120-volt AC adapter or automotive cigarette lighter plug. Included accessories like a carry bag, cooking grid handle and a retractable warming rack will make this grill the talk of your cookout. MSRP: \$199.

[www.cook-air.com](http://www.cook-air.com)

surface is kept hot by 10,500 Btu of True Infrared Cooking System, which helps to lock in the juices and seal in the flavor without exposure to direct heat, according to the company. Down below, two Realtree camouflage soft-sided coolers offer 30 quarts of storage for your beer, er, cold beverage of your choice; or, you can use one for cold drinks and the other to keep your already-grilled food warm. The unit's 7 1/2-inch rubber tires make it easy to transport to any corner of the campsite. The Grill 2 Go operates on a small disposable propane cylinder or larger cylinders with an adapter, and the company claims it can grill up to three hours per 1-pound cylinder. MSRP: \$199.99.

866-239-6777, [www.charbroil.com](http://www.charbroil.com)

## ACCESSORIES

### Burger Stomper

Tired of oddly shaped burgers that fall apart as soon as they hit the grill? Give them a Stomp! The Burger Stomper is a two-in-one burger press that allows campsite chefs to get uniform, compact burgers that allow for even cooking. Simply select either the 6-ounce base for regular burgers or the 2-ounce base for sliders, add the meat, stomp off the excess and hit the grill. Made of stainless steel with an ABS plastic grip, the Stomper is dishwasher safe. MSRP: \$28.95.

[www.burgerstomper.com](http://www.burgerstomper.com)

### Grill 2 Go Realtree Portable Gas Grill

The Grill 2 Go combines fire and ice for an all-inclusive grilling experience. Up top, the 290-square-inch grilling

Cook-Air Grill



August 2013 TRAILERLIFE 45

# CAMPsite COOKOUT



## Grill Daddy BBQ Tools

Although the grill itself is often the star of any cookout, the grilling implements have to be the unheralded supporting cast. Grill Daddy's Heat Shield 6 Piece BBQ Tool Set is a great addition to any barbecue arsenal, and its versatility sets it apart from most barbecue tool sets. Each of the Heat Shield Tools features a rotating heat-shield hand guard, which offers the griller protection from flare-ups, grill heat and food splatters. The set consists of three tools (a multipurpose fork, an oversized spatula and grilling tongs), plus a meat thermometer and five attachments designed specifically for a variety of barbecue applications (fish, sliders, a basting brush, a fork and a spatula). Perhaps the best feature of the set is the user's ability to mix and match each tool with one of the specialty grilling attachments (like replacing one of the tongs with the spatula). MSRP: \$49.99.

[www.buygriddaddy.com](http://www.buygriddaddy.com)

## COOLERS

### Cruzin' Cooler

As its name implies, the Cruzin' Cooler is a great mode of transport for



traveling from campsite to campsite in an RV park. And, yes, as its name implies, it's also an ice chest. Topping out at 13 mph, the Cruzin' Cooler utilizes a chain-driven motor to let owners scoot around the park. Spring-loaded footpegs, backrest/seat accessories and disc brakes help tame the ride, and the lightweight aluminum construction features a drink access lid so you can pop one of the 24 cans it can hold (along with 8 pounds of ice). There's even an available hitch should you wish to tow another cooler behind you. The electric models feature a 10-mile range between charges. Of course, we don't recommend sampling any adult beverages you may be carrying before firing up the motor and taking off. MSRP: \$159-\$1,399, depending on model.

**800-359-5199, [www.cruzincooler.com](http://www.cruzincooler.com)**

up the party. The compact cooler is made from silver graphite-colored rigid foam for extra durability. Simply load up the cooler with a 12-pack and up to 5 pounds of ice. Eight of your favorite cold ones are visible and accessible without opening the lid via the hinged valve covers, while the remaining four continue to chill out in the bottom. MSRP: \$19.99.

**877-927-6367**

[www.pistonpowerpack.com](http://www.pistonpowerpack.com)

## GAMES



### Cornhole Game

At 68 pounds, this bag-toss cornhole board isn't exactly lightweight, but it offers more fun per pound than most outdoor games. A variation of horseshoes, cornhole is a game where competitors attempt to throw beanbags through a hole in the board. This custom board, with an inspiring travel-themed motto, will have your barbecue packed with people who simply can't put the bags down. MSRP: \$224.99. Sold exclusively at Camping World.

**888-857-6614**

[www.campingworld.com](http://www.campingworld.com)



### V-8 Piston Power Pack Beverage Cooler

"Drivers, start your engines!" Or at least, that's what the American Piston Power Pack cooler from US Imagineering says, right before the throaty V-8 revs



### Paddlers Cribbage

The classic game of cribbage in the unique form of a canoe ... what's not to like? The set comes complete with six pegs and a rulebook, all of which can be conveniently stored in a bottom

(continued on page 50)



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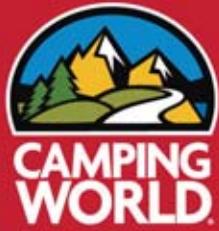
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Designer 5th Wheel



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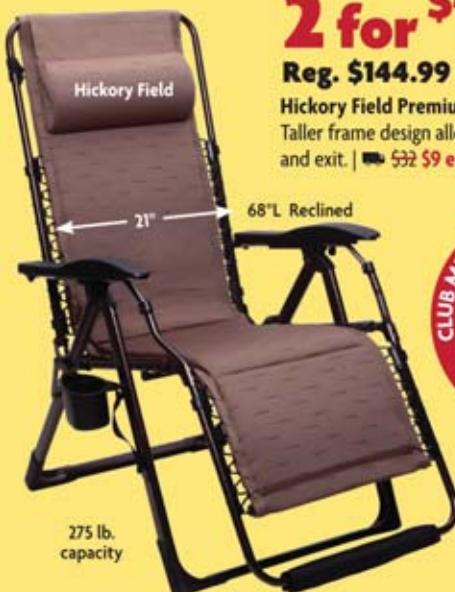
User Guide

Contents



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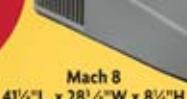
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# CAMPsite COOKOUT

(continued from page 46)

compartment. Deck of cards not included. MSRP: \$29.95.  
**800-441-5713, [www.llbean.com](http://www.llbean.com)**



## Palikka

Palikka is a new take on a classic Finnish lawn game called Molkky. In Palikka, players toss a log to knock over numbered wooden pins in an effort to get exactly 50 points. If more than one pin is knocked over, the player gets the number equal to the number of fallen pins. If only one pin falls down, the player scores the number of points painted on the pin. Once counted, the player stands the pins up where they fell for the next player's turn. Got that? Good, because we can easily envision hours of fun with this bocce/lawn bowling hybrid. MSRP: \$39.50.

**[www.palikkagame.com](http://www.palikkagame.com)**

on any campsite surface, from grass to dirt to sand. Recommended for ages 4 and up, but those kids have to sleep sometime.... See website for list of retailers. MSRP: \$39.95.

**877-287-8782, [www.rollors.net](http://www.rollors.net)**



## Camping World

It's a party, after all, so you really should dress up your table. Camping World has you — and your table — covered. The Summer Fun tablecloth (Item No. 69115, \$6.29) is a great way to cover the campground picnic table. And, what's an RV cookout without a bit of kitsch? The Flamingo party lights (Item No. 69037, \$24.99) are perfect for offering some illumination on the festivities, in addition to offering a "wink" to the stereotypical trailer party.

**888-857-6614**

**[www.campingworld.com](http://www.campingworld.com)**

## Rubber Horseshoes

Now you can play the classic cookout game, without the safety worries of large, heavy horseshoes hurtling through the air. The Champion Sports Indoor/Outdoor Horseshoe set comes with four rubber horseshoes, two rubber mats with pegs and two plastic dowels. MSRP: \$19.99.

**888-801-9164**

**[www.sportsauthority.com](http://www.sportsauthority.com)**

## DISHES/TABLEWARE



## Happy Camper Collection

If you're looking to bring your cookout up another notch, RV-themed tableware is just the ticket. With The Happy Camper collection from Jane Jenni Inc., your friends will know you mean business. The Happy Camper Collection is lead- and PVC-free, and includes 10-ounce cups (\$5 each), 9-inch plates (\$8.50 each) and a 14-inch platter (\$16), all of which prove you're a true RVer at heart. Each piece features

## Rollors Game

Rollors is another great way to keep your guests entertained while the steak is a-sizzlin'. Players roll large wooden disks at the goal and points are awarded to the player/team who positions their disks closest to the goal. Think lawn shuffleboard, with an exciting twist. The convenient tote bag allows you to bring the fun along with you wherever you go. Set-up in seconds

## Camco Party Lights

Another way to light up your life — and your RV cookout — is the Camco 42655 Party Lights set. The lights are covered by retro trailer forms, which will give your party the perfect RV atmosphere. The 8-foot strand requires 120-volt AC power, and can be combined with other strands for total campsite lighting.

MSRP: \$16.50.

**626-513-4777, [www.americanrv.com](http://www.americanrv.com)**

a trailer with the word "Happy" above it, which clearly describes your RVing state of mind.

**651-224-6763, [www.janejenni.com](http://www.janejenni.com)**



### Zazzle Dazzle

Eat. Sleep. RV. It's a way of life. And now you can share your motto with guests by rolling out these placemats (\$19.95) from Zazzle.com. The website offers dozens of RV-related items ranging from apparel to décor to coffee mugs. It also offers a Winnebago apron (and other RV ones, as well, for \$21.15) for the campsite cookout chef. The apron is a cotton/poly twill blend that is machine-washable, so go ahead and slather on the sauce!

[www.zazzle.com](http://www.zazzle.com)

## ENTERTAINMENT



### Bose Soundlink Bluetooth Mobile Speaker II

So, your iPhone is full of the perfect summer tunes, but you'd like to share it with all your friends through

something more significant than the tinny speakers on your phone. Bose's SoundLink Bluetooth Speaker II (\$299.95) offers surprisingly deep, powerful sound from a speaker that's just 5.1 inches tall and 9.6 inches wide. The speaker features a 3.5mm auxiliary input and has a claimed eight-hour battery life. Plus, the speaker has a wireless range of up to 30 feet, so you can be sure your DJ skills can span the entire campsite.

**800-999-2673, [www.bose.com](http://www.bose.com)**



Also from Bose, the SoundDock Series II digital music system (\$199.95) allows you to play the music from your ipod or iPhone for all to hear. The sleek design and attractive grille mean you won't be shy when showing off your system, and the SoundDock can also be used with other applications to deliver the famous Bose sound. A remote is included for ease of use.

**800-999-2673, [www.bose.com](http://www.bose.com)**



**Backyard Big Screen in carrying case**

### At the Movies

Once the grilling is finished, you'll have a campsite full of guests who need to be entertained. How about movie night? Kick things off with an Outdoor Entertainment Gear Backyard Big Screen (\$293.75) available through Camp Chef. The screen features built-in legs and feet for easy set up (and take down), and the 120-inch screen surface is sure to trump any flatscreen in your trailer. To deliver the picture, the Epson Powerlite Presenter (\$849.99) may seem pricey, but the combination DVD player/projector/speaker system delivers with a crisp 720p picture and dual 10-watt speakers with virtual surround sound. Plus, the campfire popcorn has never gone to better use.

**Camp Chef, 800-650-2433,**

[www.campchef.com](http://www.campchef.com)

**Epson, 800-873-7766,**

[www.epson.com](http://www.epson.com)



**Powerlite Presenter**



**Backyard Big Screen**

# Quad-Slide Convenience

Yellowstone's new front-bath fiver offers comfort and luxury

Gulf Stream Coach's Yellowstone RV Division has recently debuted an all-new Canyon Trail "Advanced Profile" quad-slide fifth-wheel designated 36FBQS that provides a handy — and very spacious — bathroom suite ahead of the unit's forward master bedroom.

This fresh layout offers extra lavatory square footage featuring a larger 30-by-54-inch one-piece fiberglass shower, 6-foot-long solid-surface washstand with twin sinks, a full height linen closet and an ample full-width wardrobe across the front wall.

The neighboring master bedroom aft of the bathroom is outfitted with twin slideouts; one streetside that holds a standard queen or optional 70-by-80-inch king-size bed, and another curbside that houses a dresser and entertainment center topped with a 32-inch TV.

Commented Mike Spencer, Yellow-

stone RV's division manager; "Two opposing forward slideouts offer unbelievable walk-around space in the bedroom area, and excellent visibility into the front bath as you enter this zone."

Cabinet doors and drawers throughout the Canyon Trail are either standard Bayridge Maple, or optional Dark Cherry that impart an elegant ambiance to the trailer's expansive, residential interior. Crown molding, trim and other accents also reflect the chosen wood species, and are set off with brushed nickel hardware.

Five fabric packages are available in the Advanced Profile rendition. Carpet is used in the bedroom and lounge areas, while easily cleanable vinyl floor covering is laid throughout the kitchen and bathroom zones.

For added convenience, a midway half-bath with washstand and toilet has been added between the upper bedroom and lower galley, so guests don't



have to track through the master bedroom to access a bathroom. Adjacent to the half-bath is a built-in closet/pantry area also capable of hosting a stackable washer and dryer. This pairing of resources makes it much easier for people with walking difficulties to reach a bathroom, or do the laundry without climbing any stairs.

The remainder of the lower rear deck is graced with another pair of even larger opposing slideouts. These room extensions make way for a spacious island kitchen, and a dining area fit for even the most creative practitioners of the culinary arts. Bringing up the rear is a lounge complete with streetside entertainment center with up to a 42-inch LCD TV, a sofa against the back wall and individual leather upholstered rocker/recliner chairs in



Yellowstone RV's new Canyon Trail quad-slide, front-bathroom layout features abundant basement storage. (Top) Buyers may accessorize the living room/dining areas with recliner rockers, plush sofas and even a home theater system or electric fireplace with rock mantel.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER



the curbside slide.

Either standard laminate or optional solid-surface countertops are available throughout the Canyon Trail, including its island kitchen that has been appointed with generous drawer and pantry areas. The rear living zone is designed to let prospective buyers order their sofa, dual recliners or home theater system placed in either the huge curbside slideout or along the rear wall.

"We call this flexible seating," Spencer explained. "Furthermore, the added length of the mid-deck area and forward location of associated plumbing fixtures in the unit's basement compartment dramatically increase pass-through storage."

People who purchase Canyon Trail Advanced Profile models usually choose to accessorize them with up to four optional equipment and décor packages that make them true residential trophies. Beginning with a base suggested retail of \$45,633, buyers have the Camping for Comfort, Convenience, Aztec Luxury and Premium Edition En-

(Above left) A fashionable island kitchen offers expansive solid-surface countertop areas, and outstanding drawer and pantry space. (Above middle) Forward bathroom has dual his-and-hers 16-inch vessel sink bowls and a shelved, cedar-lined closet with mirrored doors. (Above right) Plenty of walk-around space is afforded by a master bedroom suite that includes a streetside queen or optional king bed, plus a dresser/entertainment center.

hancement assortments to chose from.

Items in the above collections range from porcelain toilets and cedar-lined closets, to upgrades like 16-inch aluminum wheels, 10-gallon water heaters and free-standing dinettes. And for those who really want to put on the dog, the Premium package offers an electric fireplace that adds atmosphere as well as warmth on a chilly day.

Also on tap are more accessories that may be selected individually from a list of higher-end hardware. The more noteworthy include a 5 kW generator, thermal pane windows, a MOR/ryde pin box and four-point auto leveling jacks.

Prospective buyers can expect to pay between \$52,000 to \$55,000 for a well-outfitted unit. At a formidable 40 feet long, the 36FBQS quad slide has a dry weight of 11,941 pounds, and a pin weight of 2,730 pounds.

Canyon Trail fifth-wheels are fab-

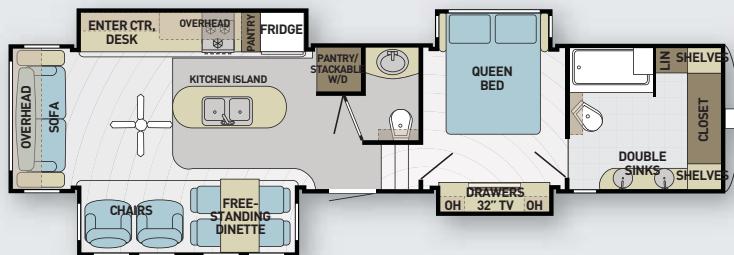
ricated using 12-inch I-beam frame rails, with the forward upper deck built between, rather than on top of the rails. This design allows a lower overall frontal profile, and thus less wind resistance when being towed.

Construction employs welded aluminum and steel framing, vacubonded side walls, a  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seamless wood main floor deck and a crowned roof for better overall drainage. Insulation throughout is either of the fiberglass batt variety, or high-density polystyrene block foam. Roofs are also topped with an EPDM rubber skin.

Underbelly areas are 100 percent enclosed and heated, along with all holding tanks and the front pass-through basement storage compartment. For those needing added insulation for colder climates, an optional Extreme Weather Protection package is available with ratings of up to R-32. 

## QUICK INFO

<b>Exterior Length</b>	40' 0"
<b>Exterior Width</b>	7' 10"
<b>Exterior Height</b>	12' 11"
<b>Interior Height</b>	6' 2"
<b>Freshwater Cap.</b>	60 gal.
<b>Black-/Gray-water Cap.</b>	80/80 gal.
<b>LP-Gas Cap.</b>	14 gal.
<b>Weight (dry)</b>	11,941 lbs.
<b>Hitch Weight</b>	2,730 lbs.
<b>GVWR</b>	14,730 lbs.
<b>Base MSRP</b>	\$45,633



**Gulf Stream Coach, 800-289-8787, [www.gulfstreamrvtrailers.com](http://www.gulfstreamrvtrailers.com)**

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# Phoenix Cruiser 2910T

Nimble on the road and comfortable in the campground, this coach is out to impress

In the alphabet soup of motorhome designations, Class B-plus is easily the most misunderstood. These rigs are an outgrowth of a group of vehicles originally deemed "van conversions" — though that description is woefully inadequate for today's crop of extraordinarily outfitted "killer B's" that often command six-figure price tags. Still, stereotypes persist, and Class B-plus motorhomes are often thought to have a bit less, in both size and equipment, compared to their Class C brethren, compromising creature comforts for a more roadworthy silhouette.

In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. Today, all that really separates a B-plus from a Class C is the absence of a bunk above the cockpit, space behind the front cap that many manufacturers now utilize for audiovisual equipment and storage.

Elkhart, Indiana-based Phoenix USA Inc., offers two Phoenix Cruiser B-plus model lines, the 2910 and 3100. The differences between the floorplans are in how each maximizes interior room — augmented by one, two or three slides — and configures sleeping

and dining arrangements.

Phoenix specializes in Class B-plus motorhomes and offers nine floorplans beginning with its 21-foot 2-inch Model 2100. The smaller units are manufactured on the Ford E-350 or Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis, while the bigger units get Ford E-450 underpinnings.

What they all share is a svelte width; the entire line is just 7 feet 9 inches wide, which is narrower than typical B-plus or C motorhomes. Another common attribute is its relatively low profile. Even the largest Phoenix models measure just slightly





**[Above left]** Counterspace in the 2910T galley is limited, but a bit more meal-prep area is available with the flip-up extension next to the sink. **[Above right]** The streetside slideout houses the optional electric recliners (a sofa is standard) and can lay flat for sleeping.

taller than 10 feet to the top of the air conditioner. As we discovered when living in a Phoenix Cruiser model 2910T, the narrower footprint and low silhouette translate into surprisingly responsive road manners.

To appreciate the handling, you have to visualize northern Indiana roads that, once off main thoroughfares, typically revert to a single lane in either direction. In a larger motorhome, the wind tossed off by a tractor-trailer coming from the opposite direction can make for a harrowing drive in such close quarters.

Powered by a 6.8-liter Ford V-10 capable of pushing the fully loaded, 13,000-pound motorhome from 0 to 60 MPH in just 21 seconds, the Phoenix did its part to keep things on an even keel. The 2910T offers a comfortable ride, courtesy of rubber dampeners mounted between the chassis and subfloor that also lessen road noise. Just as importantly, it handles the inevitable tar strips without complaint — and even with an overhang of 10 feet from the rear axle centerline to the back bumper, there was none of the “tail wagging the dog” oscillations that sometimes creep up when crossing ill-repaired roadways.

The drive was further enhanced by nearly limitless driver-seat space. In most motorhomes the forward wall of a retracted streetside slide invariably restricts positioning of the driver's seat, sometimes to a painful degree. The body of a Phoenix Cruiser extends back and away from the cutaway

cockpit to increase interior room, and those “wings” also serve to position the slide well to the rear of seatbacks. The streetside bulkhead also serves as a handy mounting location for the monitor panel, slideout switch, 1,800-watt Xantrex inverter/battery charger and optional Onan generator.

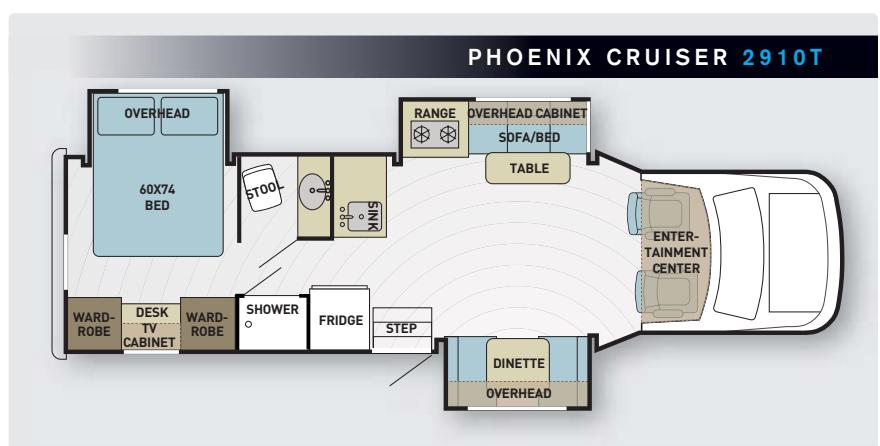
We set up camp at Eby's Pines RV Park & Campground, a family owned 300-space facility a few miles east of Bristol, Indiana. While we missed out on one of the spaces ringing the stocked trout pond at the back of the park, there really isn't a bad spot among the pines. Eby's proximity to Amish communities in nearby Shipshewana, Middlebury and Nappanee make it a great base for exploring local attractions.

The 2910T boasts opposing forward slides, with a third streetside extension for the rear queen bed. We were already impressed with the overall interior of the 30-footer — it's designed to allow for access to the main cabin and bath-

room with the slides fully retracted — but once campsite with the three slides extended (two are standard), the unit's livability became readily apparent.

That rear overhang, for example, is long enough to demand leveling jacks in order to eliminate the typical side-to-side rocking as folks walk through typical rigs. The 2910T we tested had them, but we ended up not deploying them. There wasn't any discernible movement transmitted through the rig with normal use, a testament to its build quality.

The Phoenix is constructed using a 2-inch-thick floor framed with tubular steel, and since the company doesn't use oriented-strand board, the subfloor is made of moisture-proof plywood with a fluted plastic sheet protecting the underbelly. It ties into slightly tapered side walls built of 1½-inch tubular aluminum with block foam insulation, with metal framing surrounding every opening in the side walls and roof. The exterior is vacubonded, laminated fiberglass



gelcoat (full-body paint is optional).

Those optional leveling jacks, by the way, are simple HWH hydraulic fold-down units (with controls added to the driver's door). Phoenix engineers its motorhomes in such a way that in the rare instance where something goes awry a traveler isn't stranded.

"Everything we've added to this motorhome that's electric has a manual override — we designed it so no one will ever get stuck," Phoenix USA's sales manager told us. "If you have jacks that travel straight up and down and they quit working, you're stuck. With these, you can literally drive off of them. The same goes for the electric awning, which can be put up and down manually, and we left the handles on the dump valves for the same reason, along with a 3-inch dump outlet. Even the slides are electric screw-driven units that can be retracted with a hand crank if need be — though we've never had to."

While just 10-feet 1-inches high outside, the 2910T offers 6 feet 4 inches of interior height everywhere save directly below the air conditioner. The front cap is filled by a Samsung 32-inch LCD TV and flanked by storage compartments that also house the DVD player and amplified surround-sound system. For quieter operation, the TV can be played through its integrated speaker.

Available in four interior color schemes — ours was Café, a combination of light browns and bronzes — there's a wealth of raised-panel cherry wood cabinets and drawer space throughout the motorhome, including overhead units attached to all three slides. Deeper drawers also are designed into each bench seat in the dinette within the curbside slide. The streetside room extension houses optional paired electric recliners (a sofa is standard) that will lay flat for sleeping, along with a two-burner rangetop and convection microwave oven. The galley cabinet below the cooktop is home to three large drawers; two more, along with a wood cutting board, are concealed behind a cabinet door. Like the drawers below the dinette seats, they all ride on ball-bearing guides.

Counterspace in the galley is at a

## S P E C I F I C A T I O N S

### PERFORMANCE

Fuel Economy	9.3 MPG
Acceleration	
0-60 MPH	21.1 sec.
40-60 MPH	11.6 sec.

### CHASSIS

Model	Ford E-450
Engine	6.8-L V-10
SAE HP	305 @ 4,250 RPM
Torque	420 lb-ft @ 3,250 RPM
Transmission	Ford 5-speed auto
Axle Ratio	4.56:1
Tires	LT225/75R16
Wheelbase	218"
Brakes, F/R	ABS disc
Suspension, F/R	Independent front I-beam with coil springs/non-independent live axle with leaf springs
Fuel Cap.	55 gal.
Warranty	3-year/36,000 miles

### COACH

Exterior Length	30' 6"
Exterior Width	7' 9"
Exterior Height (with A/C)	10' 1"
Interior Width	7' 5.5"
Interior Height	6' 4"
Construction	Tubular aluminum framing, laminated fiberglass exterior and roof, block foam insulation
Freshwater Cap.	46 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	23 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	35 gal.

premium, but a bit more meal prep space is added with a flip-up extension. Switches for the water heater, holding tank heaters and water pump are mounted in the cabinet below the sink.

The opposite wall houses a two-door refrigerator and 30,000-Btu furnace, with the shower just aft. The bathroom is streetside. And, while a pocket door closes off the rear bedroom, the facilities can also be separated from the living quarters by opening the bathroom door until it connects with a slight room divider installed between the refrigerator and shower, then engaging the doorstop.

The bedroom layout is fairly typical, but designed with an eye to maximizing space. Aside from the array of overhead cabinets above the memory-foam queen bed, the curbside wall is home to his-and-hers wardrobe cabinets and drawers, separated by a vanity shelf/

Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	9.9 gal.
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu with 7,000 Btu electric heat
Furnace	30,000 Btu
Refrigerator	6 cu. ft.
Inverter/Charger	1,800 watts
Battery	(1) 12-volt chassis, (2) 12-volt coach
AC Generator	4.0 kW
Base MSRP	\$79,995
MSRP, as tested	\$98,650
Warranty	1-year/12,000 miles (coach) 3-year/36,000 miles (chassis) 5-year/60,000 miles (powertrain)

### WET WEIGHT

(Water & Heater, Fuel, LP-Gas Tanks Full; No Supplies Or Passengers)	
Front Axle	4,260 lbs.
Rear Axle	8,910 lbs.
Total	13,170 lbs.

### CHASSIS RATINGS

GAWR, F/R	5,000/9,600 lbs.
GVWR/GCWR	14,500/22,000 lbs.
ROCCC	1,330 lbs.
GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combination Weight Rating
ROCCC	Realistic Occupant And Cargo Carrying Capacity [Full Water, No Passengers]

Phoenix USA Inc. 877-754-8535, [www.phoenixusav.com](http://www.phoenixusav.com)

desktop and 17-inch LCD TV and DVD player. There also are windows (with MCD day/night shades) in all three exterior walls for cross-ventilation.

With its low center of gravity fewer opportunities are available for locating exterior storage areas. All of the storage compartments are fitted with fiberglass liners. Other exterior features include a solid one-piece fiberglass roof and frameless windows.

Diamond Shield protection (from the front cap and mirror backs to the side wings) is part and parcel with the full-body paint option, and that same protection is under the wheel wells.

You have to look a little harder to locate a Phoenix motorhome — buy direct from the Elkhart factory or through select factory-direct dealers around the country — but it's worth the effort when you can buy a solid, optioned-out 30-foot motorhome for about \$100,000. ☐



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## Take it Easy With MOR/ryde

Tired of wrestling with heavy 50-amp power cords? Make your life easier (and save your back) with MOR/ryde's Easy Reel Spooler that neatly stores 30- and 50-amp cords. The product efficiently spools a power cord in a compact housing similar to that of a hose reel. By manually cranking the reel (available for left- or right-hand operation), you can spool up a cord in no time. The steel-constructed Easy Reel is available in two sizes and accommodates up to 50 feet of 50-amp power cord. The company claims that it installs easily with just four screws in a storage compartment and saves space.

**MSRP: \$219.99**

**574-293-1581, [www.morryde.com](http://www.morryde.com)**  
Circle 202 on Reader Service Card.



## Fast Way's Tethered Trailer Plug

Fast Way, a Utah-based company that specializes in products to make towing easier — such as its Chain-Up safety chain sling that keeps chains from dragging, and Shin-Guard safety cover to save you some skin — has launched its 7-Way Trailer Plug Cover. This plug cover tethers itself to the plug so it doesn't get lost. The company claims that the cover keeps contacts clean by protecting the 7-pin connector from bugs, dirt and corrosion when the trailer is not in use. The 7-Way Trailer Plug Cover is available through dealerships serving the towing industry; Part No. 82-00-3315.

**MSRP: \$5.95**

**877-523-9103, [www.fastwaytrailer.com](http://www.fastwaytrailer.com)**  
Circle 203 on Reader Service Card.



## Hellwig Fixes Saggy Bottoms

Hellwig, manufacturer of 5160 alloy-steel springs, has a fix for sagging rear springs when heavily loading a Toyota Tundra 2500. Due to clearance issues on the Tundra, the springs are added to the top of the factory spring pack so the factory bump stop is retained. Hellwig's 2-Leaf Helper Spring has adjustable new axle U-bolts and center bolts to provide the desired amount of load support. Once set, no further adjustment is required. Hellwig claims the Helper Spring is easy to install and requires no drilling. Part No. 1910 for 2000-2006 Tundra, Part No. 1909 for 2007-2013 Tundra 2500.

**MSRP: \$340-\$343**

**800-367-5480, [www.hellwigproducts.com](http://www.hellwigproducts.com)**  
Circle 204 on Reader Service Card.



## Bully Dog Dodge Hemi Tuner

What self-respecting Dodge Hemi owner doesn't want to increase horsepower while improving fuel economy? Bully Dog claims that its Hemi Plus Gauge Tuner for 2011-2012 Hemi will send horsepower and torque to new heights, while offering multifunction vehicle monitoring with up to 15 vehicle parameters, and automated engine protection with audible alerts that let the driver know of impending issues. The single unit is a vehicle engine tuner and monitor, a gauge and a diagnostic device. The Hemi Tuner is not legal for sale or use in California on pollution-controlled vehicles. Available for purchase at many dealers; Part No. 40430.

**MSRP: \$587.99**

**940-783-9914, [www.bullydog.com](http://www.bullydog.com)**  
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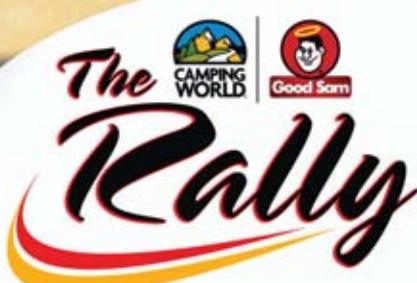
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\*Early bird days and electric are available at an additional cost.



## Pacbrake – Products for Pickups

Heavy-duty chassis and turbodiesel engines in today's pickups have made it possible for RVers to tow larger, more luxurious trailers. But once you have a truck, you might find a few perceived shortcomings compared to your driving expectations — shortcomings that fortunately the performance aftermarket addresses.

Since 1961, Pacbrake has been providing towing and hauling products for the commercial trucking industry, and years ago entered the RV market. More recently, Pacbrake has also expanded its product offerings to air-management technologies, exhaust systems and suspension upgrades.

### PRXB Exhaust Brake

If you have a diesel, you're aware of the lack of downhill engine braking, although transmission holdback features have been available in pickups for several years. Pacbrake's patented PRXB (pressure regulated exhaust brake) helps eliminate that "runaway freight train" feeling when descending long, steep grades while towing large trailers. The PRXB delivers optimum retarding performance by maximizing the exhaust backpressure throughout the entire rpm range. Unlike a typical exhaust brake, which requires high rpm to work properly, the PRXB delivers constant exhaust pressure (braking) as early as 1,200 rpm through the maximum allowable rpm. Kits are available for a variety of Dodge Ram, Ford and GM diesels.



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### Air Suspension

Truck suspensions are by necessity a compromise between ride comfort and carrying capacity. When you haul heavy loads such as a camper, or tow a trailer with a considerable hitch weight, the rear springs can be pushed to their limit, resulting in excessive bouncing, sagging ride height, swaying and a feeling of instability. With a Pacbrake air suspension kit, you can inflate the air springs when needed to support the load, resulting in a level stance, comfortable ride and confident handling. Yet when unloaded you can soften the ride. The air springs in Pacbrake air suspension systems are made from

**PACBRAKE  
AIR SPRINGS**



double convoluted two-ply rubber, and are the only air springs on the market with 1-inch aluminum end caps and 18 support wires for maximum strength and durability.

Inflation is easy, too. With the standard manual fill kit, you add air manually with the fill valves usually located near the rear license plate. Or choose an onboard air compressor system that will allow pressure monitoring and adjustments from the driver's seat. Kits are available for most domestic and some imported trucks.

### LoadLeash Engine Brake

Pacbrake's integrated P-67 LoadLeash engine brake is a heavy-duty brake-assist device for the ISB 6.7-liter Cummins engine in Ram diesel pickups and cab-chassis trucks. Pacbrake's LoadLeash works in conjunction with the factory-installed exhaust brake on Cummins-powered 2007-2012 Dodge trucks, and is said to double the supplemental braking power for unmatched load control. It reduces brake fade and reduces brake wear for up to three times longer brake service intervals.

The LoadLeash for Cummins 6.7-liter engines is a "weeper or bleeder" design engine brake, working in tandem with the VGT exhaust braking feature. It functions by the exhaust valves being held slightly off their seats during the complete engine cycle, with the Variable Geometry Turbo (VGT) providing backpressure and increased boost pressure. This results in 50 percent more retarding horsepower than the VGT alone, as measured at the flywheel.

P-67 LOADLEASH



The integrated engine brake adds little weight and does not increase valve-cover height. Unlike traditional engine brakes, which require expensive mufflers to dampen high noise levels, the LoadLeash is also quiet. This is an excellent system for hauling heavy trailers, especially in mountainous regions.

#### Max Flow Dodge Elbow

Another useful item from Pacbrake is its Max Flow Dodge Elbow, which is designed specifically for 1994-2002 Dodge Ram trucks equipped with large 4-inch exhaust systems. This cast-iron replacement elbow increases exhaust flow, horsepower and torque, while reducing turbo lag and exhaust gas temperature (EGT). It's pre-tapped for a pyrometer to measure EGT, and the port can also be used to measure exhaust system backpressure.

Pacbrake, 800-663-0096, [www.pacbrake.com](http://www.pacbrake.com)

#### 2014 GMC Sierra Denali Boasts 12,000-Pound Tow Rating

The GMC Sierra Denali will have significant changes for the 2014 model year. The next Denali will have an optional 6.2-liter gasoline V-8, delivering an estimated 420 horsepower and 450 lb-ft of torque, that GMC claims will be the most power and torque of any light-duty pickup. It will also give it a best-in-class 12,000-pound towing capacity. The standard 5.3-liter V-8 engine is rated 355 horsepower and GM reports an EPA-estimated 23 highway MPG. Fuel economy for the 6.2-liter V-8 hasn't been announced.

Sierra Denalis will have special 20-inch chrome rims and a chrome grille along with body-colored bumpers and LED running lights. There will be an 8-inch LCD dash screen, which can be configured to display audio, phone, GPS navigation and other settings. Touch navigation and smartphone connectivity are standard, along with five USB ports. Other standard features include a Bose audio system, parking sensors, ventilated front seats and a heated steering wheel. A sunroof and a rear-seat DVD entertainment system will be stand-alone options. A safety package adds lane-departure warnings and forward-collision alerts.

The Z71 4x4 Off-Road Package will include hill-descent control, skid plates and Rancho shocks. The 2014 Denali goes on sale later this year.

## HEAVY LOAD?

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# Red Sasquatch

**Brute Super Foot retractable trailer A-frame jack extension improves stability and eliminates wood stacking**

**R**eading the headline, your first impression is most likely about a big hairy forest creature with giant feet. Well, at least the big feet are relative. Actually, in this case, it's only one foot that's part of a very beastly device that attaches to the trailer A-frame jack. Although the Brute Super Foot will not be found tromping through the woods, it does tame the "wild" when trying to stabilize the front end of a trailer when leveling on uneven ground.

As an RVer, an all-too-familiar sight is one of someone stacking wood under an A-frame jack, especially if the tow vehicle's hitch stands tall. Of course, there are a number of aftermarket jack feet available, but many still require quite a bit of wood, which can be dangerous if stacked too high or unevenly. And, of course, you have to store all that wood when in transit. The Husky Towing Products' Brute Super Foot is a hefty alternative to stacking, storing and fidgeting with wheels that are difficult to use.

The Brute Super Foot is a fast-acting retractable A-frame jack extension made of incredibly strong, thick steel with a bright-red powder-coat finish; it's designed to reside on the end of the jack tube permanently. Not only will the Brute Super Foot eliminate much of the wood stacking, it will also limit jack cranking effort and time. The Brute Super Foot comes with all necessary assembly and mounting hardware, has a 6,500-pound maximum capacity and should not require any drilling — providing for a quick and easy install.

The assembly of the Brute Super Foot is no more involved than putting the head together with the base plate by placing the extension leg in between and securing them with two bolts. To



(Above left and right) Tension pin is rotated to lock/unlock the Super Foot into position.

install the Brute Super Foot simply take the remaining bolt and set it in place on the original jack tube with the folding portion facing the rear of the trailer. It comes with a reducing bushing for use on smaller tubes and is compatible for all manual or electric A-frame jacks with specific clearance instructions. It weighs 12 pounds. If a restriction (spare tire, for example) prevents the Super Foot from folding, it can be installed on the jack tube using a  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch lynch pin. This will make it easy to remove for travel. The base plate was attached using the provided bolt, although a second lynch pin could be used (available at RV supply stores). Drilling will be required if there are no holes in the jack tube or if the Super Foot extension leg is shortened.

Performance of the Brute Super Foot is excellent and supplies immediate positive results, just as claimed. Since the folding jack foot extends the reach by 7 inches, I was able to eliminate more than 75 percent of the wood needed to hitch-up or level the trailer. I certainly didn't miss the monotony of

turning of the jack handle to retract and extend the tube long distances and the new, larger foot does not need to be removed to allow for clearance while traveling. The Brute Super Foot is an excellent addition for anyone looking for overall improved stability and function. This device is stout — I like it!

The Brute Super Foot sells for \$37.46 at Camping World and can be found on the Internet for various prices below the \$44.99 retail price. ■

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## RV CLINIC

ADVICE FROM OUR TECH TEAM

### 12-VOLT DC POWER PROBLEMS ANSWERED

**Q** One more thought to add to troubleshooting loss of 12-volt DC battery power: Many RV batteries have what looks like a small black enclosure mounted to the trailer frame at the battery location in series with the cables coming from the batteries. These devices are self-resetting circuit breakers in a wet location where corrosion can take them out or cause a low reading in the trailer. Over the years I have replaced several on different trailers, especially those stored outside. These circuit breakers do not have a manually resettable feature and are not clearly labeled as a circuit breaker.

**Larry Kingsbury, Battle Ground, Washington**



**A** Thank you for the suggestion, Larry. It's a good point to inspect every component along the way when troubleshooting a powered circuit. As you suggest, the circuit breaker may be easily overlooked, and it's a good idea to give it and its terminal connections a once-over along with the rest of the system. — **Jeff Johnston**

### PHANTOM TV FASTENER ANSWER

**Q** I received the June issue of *Trailer Life* and in *RV Clinic* there's a question from Arthur Gentilin regarding phantom TV fasteners in his 36-foot Alpenlite fifth-wheel. I own a 31-foot Alpenlite, and though I'm not sure how Gentilin's TV was installed, I can offer how mine was installed and thus removed when I put in an HD flat-screen TV. The cabinet immediately above the TV had a floor, which was not difficult to remove. By removing that floor using a screwdriver, it revealed three or four screws holding a board in place. I removed the board and found that the TV could lift up and out over two screws in the base.

I installed my new HD flat-screen TV with a MOR/ryde desk mount. The mount makes it possible to pull the TV out and swivel it.

**Robert Peters, Via email**

**A** Thank you, Robert. Yours is probably one of many different means of unlocking the puzzle of the mystery TV mounts, and we appreciate the details of your project. — **J.J.**

### STICKING AWNING

**Q** I have a 2009 36-foot Cardinal fifth-wheel with a 16-foot power awning. It has slipped slightly in the carrier and will not close properly. I have made several attempts to correct it but it will not move. I was thinking of using

### 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 18 years and has been an RV enthusiast, mechanic and writer since he could hold a wrench.





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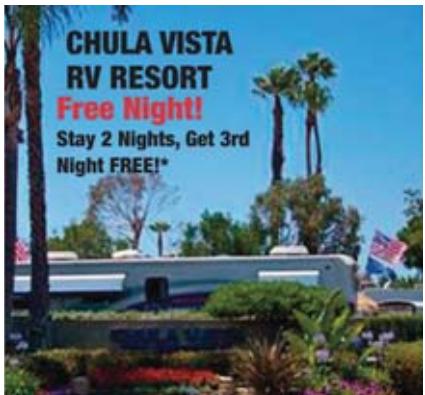


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WD-40 to break it loose but wanted to make sure it will not damage the awning material. Can WD-40 come to the rescue again or do you have a better suggestion?

**Duane McGinnis, Alpharetta, Georgia**

**A** We aren't sure what you mean by saying the awning has "slipped slightly," Duane, so we can't make a specific repair process suggestion. As for using WD-40 to break it loose, WD-40 contains no petroleum products and, in fact, is based on fish oil, so you can use it to try and unstick your awning without damage. Wipe off the excess when you're finished and it should be fine.

At the same time, based on the lack of details here, the awning may be out of alignment and you may need to loosen the inner arms and make the alignment readjustment. If you're uncomfortable with this, a trip to your Cardinal dealer or an RV service center may be in order. — J.J.

## FURNACE STUTTER

**Q** We have a 2010 CrossRoads Cruiser fifth-wheel. When we turn on the furnace we get a stutter noise and the furnace either comes on or shuts off. We turn the thermostat off and then back on and it will come on. But it is not reliable through the night. Our tech has pulled the furnace and hooked up test equipment and changed the thermostat, but we have no change in the operation.

**M.J. Theriot, Livingston, Texas**

**A** That stuttering sounds a lot like insufficient LP-gas pressure that results in an improper air/fuel mixture. It's great that the technician pulled the furnace and tested it on the bench, where electrical power and LP-gas pressure are up to specs, but he or she may have missed something in the trailer. Have the LP-gas pressure tested at the furnace and it should read 11 inches W.C. (water column) for proper operation. Likewise, check the unit's power supply for adequate 12-volt DC. Finally, inspect all of the heat ducts to be sure they aren't pinched or blocked. The lack of heating airflow will also affect furnace operation and while it generally causes a straight go/no-go function, it could also be affecting the safety switch so it erratically allows contact. — J.J.

## SALEM REBUILD

**Q** I have a 2006 Salem Sport Toy Hauler that I would like to upgrade, specifically the interior. It's not very functional for my family, but a new bunkhouse is out of our range. We would like to modify the floorplan and update the finishes but an Internet search turns up nothing in my area. If it were simply adding beds I could handle that, but we want to also add a powder room and washer and dryer, and remove the loft area, effectively turning the garage into a bedroom/utility/playroom combination, which means electrical, HVAC and plumbing and structural changes. I also want to upgrade the insulation for the entire trailer, including enclosing the tanks and adding exterior lighting for the

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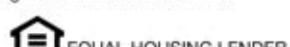


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tank drains and other key areas. Any ballpark ideas as to what this is going to cost me?

**Larry Mapps, Navarre, Florida**

**A** You haven't found anything much useful on the Internet because every project of this type is different and calls for special procedures. All of these jobs, usually related to damage repair, are undertaken as one-of-a-kind efforts.

This project will either cost you a lot of time and effort and a fair amount of money, or it'll cost a lot of money if you hire someone to do the job. It sounds like you want to gut the trailer you have now and start all over again, which is what you'll need to do if you plan to upgrade the insulation throughout, plus make the other changes you have in mind. Not to sugar coat it, but this will be a huge, complicated project that's made worse by the way RVs of this type are built, not to mention that its Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) certification will be voided.

This kind of RV starts with a flat floor and the manufacturer adds interior walls, cabinets, appliances and the like. After the interior is partly done, the walls and roof are added. Those walls and roof are partly or fully assembled with adhesives so disassembling them to add insulation and make wiring changes is going to be very difficult. To make major changes you'll need to tear out large, often "interlocking" parts on the interior walls and such. You may well run into existing window placement conflicts with your new interior design, or conflicts with rooftop sewage pipes or air vents, skylights, electrical line routings and such. You'll also need to be mindful of maintaining the proper hitch weight ratio to ensure stable towing, and you may have to have the finished product recertified to register it in the state of Florida.

In short, Larry, you'll be much time and money ahead by buying a different trailer that's closer to suiting your needs. You may find a used one that's affordable and just right for you and your family. — J.J.

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**BAD FLOOR REPLACEMENT**

**Q** I have a 27-foot 2004 Fleetwood Terry Dakota 8275S with a 13-foot slide. After I purchased it, I discovered that it had several bad leaks. I have repaired those. The floor in the kitchen area is now very saggy/spongy and needs to be replaced. I am very much a handyman and would like to know if this is something that I could do or should I take it to a service center? If I attempt this, I would like to know what would be involved and if there are step-by-step instructions. Does the floor support the walls? Will the slide be in the way? Do I need to remove all the cabinets? Will I need to drop the holding tanks, etc.?

**Jerry Adams, Branson, Missouri**

**A** First, read the previous letter from Larry Mapps, Jerry, for some general thoughts on RV construction and disassembly type repair. There are no online sources for this kind of step-by-step job. Yes, you'll need to remove



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cabinets and obstructions above and tanks below the floor if they're in the area where the repairs must be made. You need to cut away the floor material, be it carpet or vinyl, and remove all of the rotted flooring. This can creep well under the cabinets depending on how long it's been soaking up the water, and you can't just stop at the cabinet edge. A patch needs to be installed and braced sufficiently to the adjacent good floor material, and that's where the work from down below comes in.

Most RVers leave this type of job to a professional repair shop. You can do it yourself, but be prepared for it to be a lot of work. Good luck! — J.J.

## FREEWAY HOP

**Q** You recently fielded questions from readers who complained about the rough ride of their pickups, stating a Ford spokesperson blamed it in part on frame flex. Actually, it is almost entirely frame flex. My F-150 shook so hard it was shedding parts. In desperation one day I took some old fire hose, made two bundles out of them and wedged them tightly between the cab and bed. Unable to flex anymore, instantly my "jackhammer" rode like a Cadillac. I went on to win a lemon lawsuit against Ford over this design defect; that was in 2000. Nice to know the company's been hard at work fixing a known problem. Not!

**Rick McCarter, Burbank, California**

**A** Thanks for sharing your tip and experience. The concrete freeways around Burbank are notorious for causing the repetitive "freeway hop" condition that results in a harmonic chassis vibration. I've noticed that the California Department of Transportation has been grinding down the high spots in the area, which has improved the situation somewhat. — Ken Freund

## DUAL CHARGING

**Q** We own a 2012 Keystone Springdale 257RLLS trailer. It came equipped with two Exide 12-volt batteries in parallel, and an SFCO WF-8955 PEC power converter.

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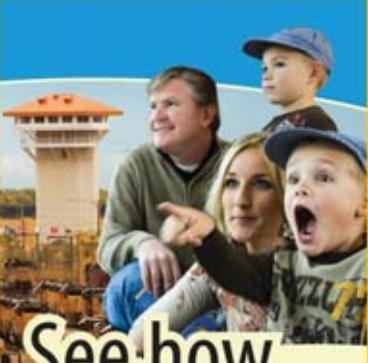
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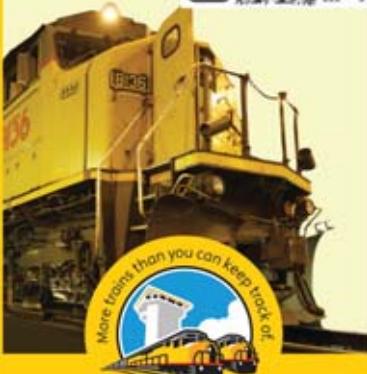
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We do a lot of dry camping and the batteries get a workout, so we carry a Honda EU2000i generator in the tow vehicle. Plugging in the shorepower cord provides 120 volts AC for appliances and, more importantly, enables the converter to charge the batteries. The generator also has a DC receptacle exclusively for charging batteries at an 8-amp rate. Do you think feel that there is a potential problem charging the batteries using both the trailer power converter and the generator DC cables at the same time?

**Bobbie and Jim Edwards**  
Wofford Heights, California

**A** The WF-8900 Series has automatic three-stage "smart" charging with output voltage modes of a 13.2-volt float mode, 13.6-volt absorption mode and a 14.4-volt bulk charge mode. This smart charging feature relies on voltage readings based on battery state of charge. The generator does not offer "smart" charging and

just sort of "pushes" voltage into the battery. This may give a false reading to the power converter and will probably cause it to reduce charging to the batteries. — K.F.

### SUPPORTING SLIDEOUTS

**Q** I recently purchased a Dutchmen Kodiak 263RLSL travel trailer. This is my first experience with a slideout and I have a question. Is it advisable or a good idea to put stabilizer jacks under the slideout? Like the average American, I am on the heavy side. If it were just me, I don't see a problem, but what if I had friends visiting and they were in the slideout?

**Don Novicki, Albuquerque, New Mexico**

**A** The trailer will feel more secure and solid when walking around inside if it is well supported by stabilizer jacks. The larger and heavier the slideout room is, the more leverage it has on the trailer, hence the more benefit you will notice. Although it should

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not be necessary, if you choose to put stabilizer jacks under a slideout, just support the weight to prevent sagging, don't push up enough to twist the slide mechanism and don't forget to remove any jacks before retracting the slide.

— K.F.

## TOWING TREPIDATION

**Q** We have a 2007 Dodge Ram 2500 shortbed crew cab pickup with a 5.9-liter Cummins turbodiesel with an automatic transmission and 3.73 rear-axle ratio. We tow a 31-foot fifth-wheel trailer with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 12,000 pounds. I have a Hijacker 16,000-pound hitch. Is this setup able to tow a fifth-wheel trailer with a 15,600-pound GVWR? I realize this is close to the maximum hitch weight rating. According to the *Trailer Life Guide to Towing*, my truck is rated to tow 12,900 pounds. Would this combo put too much stress on the truck and hitch? Also, if it is capable to tow this setup, would an air-ride pin box help the stress? We travel about 2,000-3,000 miles a year as full-timers.

Larry Rudd, Via email

We do not recommend exceeding any manufacturer's ratings, for safety and mechanical reasons

**A** Let me start by saying we do not recommend exceeding any manufacturer's ratings, for safety and mechanical reasons. A trailer will probably weigh considerably less than the GVWR when properly loaded, but since you're full-timers you will probably load it up quite a bit. So the bottom line is you need to put the loaded trailer on a truck scale to determine if it is within the truck and hitch manufacturer's ratings (including total weight and hitch weight). — K.F.

The advertisement features a large image of a red pickup truck with black AMP PowerStep side steps installed. A woman in a blue dress is shown opening the rear door of the truck. Text on the right reads "AMP PowerStep RESEARCH" and "MADE IN USA". Below the main image is a smaller inset photo showing the side step being deployed from the truck's side. The headline reads "GETTING INTO YOUR TRUCK SHOULDN'T FEEL LIKE CLIMBING MOUNT EVEREST." Subtext explains the product's features: "PowerStep™ automatically extends when any door opens for an easy step up into the cab. Close the doors and it hides safely out of sight. Integrated LED light system, 600lb load rating, all-weather, rock-solid reliability all back by an 5-year warranty." A phone number 1-800-315-9589 and website AMP-RESEARCH.COM are provided.

The advertisement features a large image of a white Sea Eagle 370 kayak with purple accents and two black paddles. A yellow starburst on the left says "Just \$349!" and another on the right says "FREE Shipping!". Text on the left says "America's Most Popular Inflatable Kayak". The headline reads "ADVENTURE TO GO!". Below the kayak is a smaller image of people in the kayak on the water. Text includes: "Easy Carry, Easy Set Up, Easy Paddle!", "Our Sea Eagle 370 inflatable kayak provides instant adventure to go! This large 12' 6" inflatable kayak packs to the size of a small duffle bag, inflates in less than 8 minutes and can be used almost anywhere there is water. Paddle wild rivers, remote ponds, scenic lakes... even ocean surf! The SE 370 weighs just 32 lbs., holds up to 650 lbs. of people & gear. This great inflatable kayak features 2 deluxe kayak seats with deluxe valves, 2 skegs for better tracking, 5 deluxe air valves, drain valve, rigid I-beam floor, spray skirts & carry handles.", "Now on SUMMER SALE - Our Sea Eagle 370 Pro Kayak Package includes: 2 8' 4-Part Aluminum Paddles, 2 Super Comfortable Deluxe Kayak Seats, Foot Pump, Repair Kit and Convenient Nylon Shoulder Strap Carry Bag that holds it all.", "NOW ONLY FOR \$349. WITH FREE SHIPPING!", "6 month Trial Guarantee / 3 Year Warranty Against Defects", "Visit [SeaEagle.com](#) for more details", "Call 1-800-748-8066 Mon-Fri, 9-5 EST", "Join us at [Facebook.com/SeaEagleBoats](#)", "SEA EAGLE.com", "Dept TL083B, 19 N. Columbia St., Port Jefferson, NY 11777".

AMP Research, Circle 121 on Reader Service Card

Sea Eagle, Circle 120 on Reader Service Card

**SLOW-MOVING SLIDES**

**Q** We have a 2011 CrossRoads Cruiser 31-foot fifth-wheel trailer. The trailer is equipped with three slides. When I purchased it, all the slides moved in and out with ease. Then I began having problems with the electric slide motor mechanisms on the two rear slides — they would ratchet and then not work.

The RV dealer replaced the mechanism on the smaller slide and it works fine. On the large slide, after the mechanism had been replaced, the slide moved very slowly and was struggling big time. The dealer replaced the mechanism for a second time, but that didn't fix the problem. Then the dealer replaced the entire ram and motor. They advised me at the time that they had done everything possible and that they were not able to do anything more. The problem has not gone away. The slide moves very slowly and almost comes to a stop when the slide is moving in or out.

Are there different sizes of motors, and could there be an undersized electric motor that was installed? Could something have happened to the slide rails making it difficult to move the slide? I am at a loss.

**Paul Tomniuk**  
**Spruce Grove, Alberta, Canada**

**A** The fact that the slides worked fine when new shows that the motors are sufficient if everything is working properly. As units age, the slides go out of alignment, the mechanisms corrode and need cleaning and lubrication, the wiring connections and batteries deteriorate causing voltage to the motor to drop, and the seals become dirty and drag.

All these items need to be addressed to solve the problems. If you let the engine run with the truck plugged in when you move the slides, the increased voltage will usually improve operation. It's also possible that, if you operate the slides using

battery power only and aren't plugged in to shorepower, the batteries may be weak or not fully charged. That could also result in slow slideout operation.

— K.F.

**TRAILER-AXLE SHIFTING**

**Q** After checking the space between the tires on my fifth-wheel trailer, one side is about 1/2-inch farther apart than the other side. Could this be a problem with tire blowouts? How can this be corrected?

**Leonard T. Payne, Lamar, Texas**

**A** First, Leonard, you need to determine the cause of the difference. You didn't mention what model fifth-wheel you have or how old it is. If it is still under warranty, this discrepancy should be brought to the attention of the dealer/manufacturer right away. If the tires are not all the same, it's possible that they have slightly different diameters that cause the difference in space between the tires.

If you had to maneuver the trailer into a spot in your driveway and then measured the distance between tires it's quite possible that the axles are still torque shifted on the springs and shackles. The trailer should be pulled in a straight line for at least its own length before measuring. Careful measurements need to be made from exact hard points on the chassis to the axles, not just between tires.

If any of the tires are wearing crooked, or a significant difference is found in measurements, the trailer should be checked by a shop that specializes in trailer alignment. Most tire blowouts are due to underinflation, overloading, out of balance or manufacturing defects. A slight misalignment will cause faster wear, but is not likely to be a sudden blowout hazard unless the tire is allowed to wear down excessively. — K.F.

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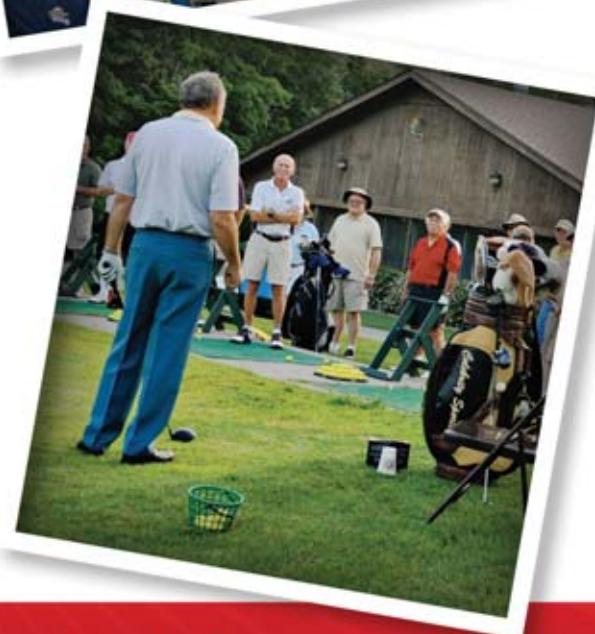
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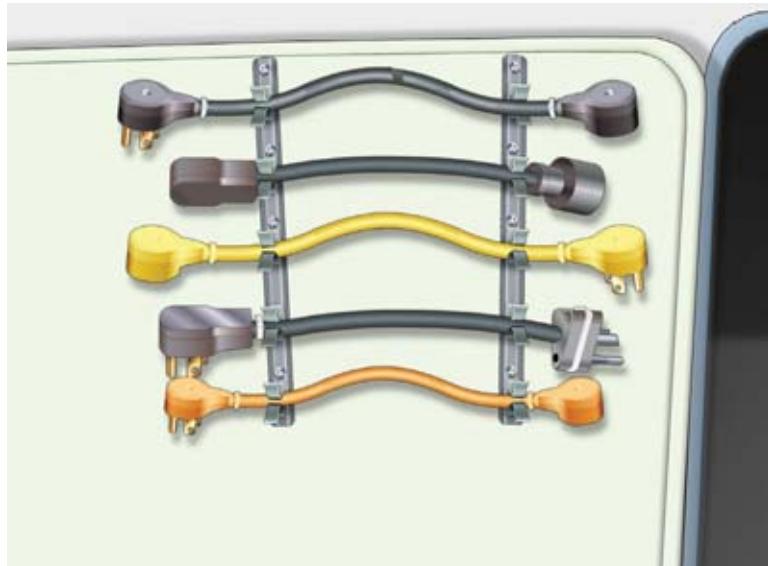
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## Everything in its Place

My tip is to use broom-handle-type holders and mount them inside one of the exterior compartment doors. This way, all my electrical adapters are in one place and they're easy to find and get to. An option would be to mount the holders to a piece of wood or other material, then mount that to the inside of the door, which would leave fewer holes if and when it is removed.

**George Bliss, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada**



## Cut the Mustard ... Bottle

I found out that I can't pour water into the side of my camper when I tried to sanitize the freshwater holding tank. After mixing up the first batch of bleach solution in a gallon jug, I discovered that I would need a funnel with an angled spout to get it in. I looked around for a substitute and found that the neck of an empty mustard bottle would fit snugly into the opening. I cut a large "window" out of the side of the bottle and proceeded to successfully pour the solution into the holding tank. Problem solved! Total cost: \$0! Total time to make: about five minutes including cleaning out the little bit of mustard left in the bottle.

**Bub Harper, Sunset, Louisiana**

## QUICK FIX

### Make Steps Noticeable

I have been a full-time RVer for 20 years. I've noticed that foldout trailer steps are black. This creates a problem when outside lighting is poor. Returning to the campsite later than expected can be a problem, especially for older campers. I have placed white tape in the recess between the treads of each step and found it helps with footing. It's a simple solution and requires much less effort than installing a lighting system. - **Frank Samples, Kissimmee, Florida**

To send your submission, write to: 10-Minute Tech, 2575 Vista Del Mar Drive, Ventura, California 93001 or email: [10minutetech@trailerlife.com](mailto:10minutetech@trailerlife.com). Please include an illustration or photo if applicable. *Trailer Life* will pay you \$35 for original 10-Minute Tech ideas.

# City of Music

Tens of thousands of blues enthusiasts converge on a small town in Arkansas every October



You might remember the movie: The Kevin Costner character is walking in a field of Iowa corn and we hear this voice, "If you build it, he will come." Of course, he built the ball field, in *Field of Dreams*, and the players appeared. In the closing scene, the camera pulls back and we see cars, presumably filled with spectators, lined up as far as the eye can see.

We, too, line up: If they build it, a place where we can camp, then put on a concert, we will come, we'll stay, and we will love it.

That's what's happening on the Arkansas Delta in Helena. The concert is the King Biscuit Blues Festival. It's an annual event that runs for three days every October over Columbus Day weekend. This year's event is October 10-12.

Helena is nestled between the Mississippi River and the eastern side of Crowley's Ridge, 75 miles south of Memphis, Tennessee, and Interstate 40. This town once prospered in the days of steamboats, but it's a long way from that now. Empty, windowless buildings and an abandoned motel attest to that. But maybe that goes with the territory: This is blues country. Blues — as in music — inextricably tied to the Delta, flowing from the fields and those who labored in them. Music that is often defined as melancholy.

The blues were born in the Black communities of the Deep South around the end of the 19th century. Lyrics told of poverty, floods, droughts, he ran off with her best friend, and on it went. But that was then.

What I am hearing here is wild, loud, upbeat and definitely crowd pleasing. It's all about the beat, blown out by speakers that drive it into your chest if you are anywhere near them. It's pounded out by sweaty drummers and guitar players whose hands move so fast they are a blur. And the lyrics — I gave up trying to understand them, even though they are repeated a lot. People get up and dance in groups or alone; they just can't sit. It's that kind of music.

It all started with "King Biscuit Time," said to be the



**Bands alternate on the main stage during the three-day event making music 12 hours a day starting at 11 a.m. River Park, nearby, becomes a huge campground during the King Biscuit Blues Festival operated as a fundraiser by the firefighters of Helena.**

country's longest-running daily radio show. It began in 1941. The program showcased blues singers. Still on the air, it put the spotlight on Helena as the Delta's blues center. The festival grew out of it.

Helena's River Park is the "field," the campground. It's on the river side of the levee from the concert stage, and a three-block walk to it and Clark Street where concessionaires sell tamales, curry and lots of beer.

"The RV and tent campers start rolling in on Thursday," Roderick Brown told me. He is the assistant chief for the Helena Fire Department. They run the campground as a fundraiser during the festival. "We made enough last year to finish paying off our new fire truck. All the guys pitch in. We sell firewood that we chop and haul in."

What Roderick said about buying the fire truck says much about this little town. It's inspiring to see people who like to give and care about their community.

Here, firefighters spend their free time raising money to buy their city a fire truck. Helena may be one of the poorest cities in the country, but it is not disadvantaged. The men of Helena's Fire Department get much credit for that. They know what it's about to be responsible and take responsibility — they do it daily. And thanks, guys, for building us a place to camp.

Welcome to America's Outback. ➤

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