

2014 AND BEYOND: FULL-SIZE TRUCKS AND SUVS

# TRAILER LIFE

FOLLOW THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

DECEMBER 2013

## Winter Solace

Northwood's Four-Season Snow River

Small-Town  
Charm in Walla  
Walla, WA, and  
Cedar Key, FL

Exploring  
California's  
Legendary  
Hearst Castle

**CONQUERING  
ODORS & MOLD**  
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## Off the Beaten Path

11 TRUCK  
CAMPER  
THAT GO  
ALMOST  
ANYWHERE



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# YOU CAN LEARN A LOT FROM A SUBMARINE.

LOOKING AT SOMETHING THAT APPEARS TO BE WORKING PERFECTLY THEN DEMANDING TO MAKE IT BETTER REQUIRES A VERY UNIQUE MIND-SET. IT IS PRECISELY THIS KIND OF THINKING THAT WENT INTO THE BED OF THE ALL-NEW SIERRA. FOR YEARS, A STAMPED-STEEL BED WAS THE STANDARD, AND STILL IS WHEN IT COMES TO ALL THE OTHER GUYS. HOWEVER, AT GMC WE DECIDED TO USE A ROLLED-STEEL PROCESS FOR THE SAME REASON SUBMARINE HULLS DO: STRONGER, LIGHTER AND MORE DURABLE STEEL. YOU SEE, OUR ROLL-FORMING PROCESS ALLOWS THE USE OF HIGHER-STRENGTH STEEL VERSUS A TRADITIONAL STAMPED DESIGN. THIS ADAMANT DESIRE TO FIX THE UNBROKEN MAKES IT EASY TO SEE WHY THE ALL-NEW SIERRA IS MORE THAN JUST A TRUCK. IT'S INCREDIBLE THINKING IN THE FORM OF A TRUCK.

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On the cover: Northwood's Snow River 254LSS west of La Grande, Oregon. Photo by Jeff Johnston



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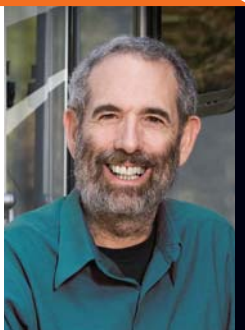
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# Winter Wonderland

A new adventure awaits those with trailers and campers designed for cold-weather travel



Camping in cold weather, and especially during a snowfall, may seem far-fetched for most RVers. But there is a growing contingent of hardcore enthusiasts who seek out winter solitude — and certainly the beauty and adventure of places where even the birds leave for warmer climes. Winter camping, an activity that was once reserved for mostly motorhome owners, can also be enjoyed by RV enthusiasts who have all-season trailers and know how to prep their rigs for extreme weather.

A number of manufacturers offer dual-pane windows, heated holding tank areas and a few options that increase the insulation value of the trailer. Not many offer complete packages with guarantees that the trailer will perform under extreme cold-weather conditions. Northwood is one that does.

To validate the practicality of using one of Northwood's travel trailers in cold country, we tested a Snow River 254LSS earlier in the year (see page 40). Camping in a travel trailer in cold weather presents a long list of challenges in order to stay warm inside and keep the systems from freezing. There's nothing worse than waking up in the morning to frozen pipes and a shower and toilet that no longer function. Or for that matter, frozen dump valves and solid holding tank contents. I've spent many an early morning thawing out pipes with a hair dryer or portable catalytic heater.

While traction and stability concerns are always top of mind while towing a trailer in snow country, the latest truck offerings (see page 48) help make life on slick roads even safer. Of course, four-wheel-drive with the proper tires is best for those who frequent snow-covered roads, but the judicious use of chains, or similar traction devices, can equalize the situation in a hurry.

While it's great to have trailers outfitted for cold weather, the ultimate RV for winter adventures is a pickup camper, especially when mounted on a four-wheel-drive truck. What's lost to limited square footage is made up in convenience and utility — and the ability to maneuver just about anywhere. As you can see in our roundup of new campers (see page 58), choices range from popups to 12-footers (box length), but slideouts have taken interiors to new comfort levels. For example, couches, island galley counters and fireplaces were not possible in campers only a few years ago.

Welcome to winter and the new world of RV travel. 🚐

— Bob Livingston, publisher

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## WINTER RV CAMPING

For more information and tips on safe and comfortable cold-weather camping, go to our website, [www.trailerlife.com/trailer-how-to/trailer-tech/cold-weather-rv-camping-guide](http://www.trailerlife.com/trailer-how-to/trailer-tech/cold-weather-rv-camping-guide).

## TRAILER LIFE

FOLLOW THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

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*Trailer Life* (ISSN #0041-0780) is published monthly by GS Media & Events (a division of Good Sam Enterprises, LLC), 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036. Periodicals postage paid at Ventura, CA, and additional mailing offices. The annual subscription rate is \$15.97 per year in the U.S. For Canadian & International subscriptions, add \$12 per year. U.S. funds only.

**Postmaster** Send address changes to *Trailer Life*, P.O. Box 5860, Harlan, IA 51593-1360.

**Canadian Return Address** GS Media & Events, 4960-2 Walker Road, Windsor, Ontario N9A 6J3. Publication Sales Agreement #40012332.

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### Tiny Post Offices

Regarding Arline Zatz's article in the September issue about New Market, Virginia, I liked reading about the caverns. Also, she said she "enjoyed visiting the smallest working post office in the United States" at Shenandoah Caverns. Well, in Ochopee, Florida, along highway 41, is supposedly, the "smallest post office" in the United States. That's according to the sign right next to it. It used to be a farm storage shed, which was turned into a post office years ago after a fire in the area. I've been to it, and used the postal service there, and it is a one-person building. Patrons stand outside at a window.

Now, which one is the smallest post office in the country?

**Terry Chase, Via email**

*Terry, the post office at Shenandoah Caverns in Quicksburg is 40 square feet with room for only one person. The Ochopee, Florida, post office is 56 square feet. Via measurement, that would make the one at the caverns the smallest. Since the Quicksburg one is housed in a large building where the entrance to the cavern is situated (you walk past the post office to get to the entrance of the cavern), some people believe the Ochopee one is smaller since it's inside a building it alone occupies. — Arline Zatz*

### Covered

Kristopher Bunker's article on RV covers in the September issue

## Dragon Lady

I received my November issue of *Trailer Life* and, as usual, opened it first to the back cover to read Bill Graves' monthly column, this one written about Nebraska, titled *Prairies and Planes*. His comment about the Lockheed U-2 plane (nicknamed Dragon Lady) at Atsugi brought back many memories. I was stationed at Atsugi from 1954-'57 and worked at ground electronics. Toward the end of my tour there I worked on the control tower electronics and some of the NavAids and saw the U-2 coming and going a couple of times.

**Gene Wells, USN (Ret), Via email**



prompted me to check my Camco trailer cover. I purchased the cover in July 2012 from Walmart and have had less than seven months of actual use. It was stored in a shed during the winter, since it is not waterproof, and I put it back on the trailer in May of 2013. After reading the article, I examined the cover and found that the entire roof panel was falling apart and crumbling. I contacted Camco, and was advised to send photos. Happily, the company sent me a new cover within two weeks. I cannot explain the reason for the top panel deteriorating, but was happy that Camco replaced it.

**John Szalay, Clovis, California**

### Well Prepared

As a fire service professional for more than 30 years, I thought Kristopher Bunker's *Playing It Safe* article in the October issue was well written and provided valuable information to your readers. I do have one suggestion to add to his and that is for RVers to be aware of their location when they set-up camp.

If you need to call 911 for assistance, the operator needs a valid address to send help to and sometimes the campground's name

is not enough information. If there is an emergency, the chances are that you will not be able to calmly find the address where you are presently located. To help make it easier, I make it a point to place the information sheet most campgrounds provide at check-in in the same place every time so I know where to locate the address for the campground if I need it.

And while cellphones are the primary choice for most folks, there are places where the service does not work. In that case, knowing the location of the nearest landline is also crucial if you need help.

Fire, police and EMS responders are pretty special people, but without a valid address for the dispatcher to use, you might have to wait quite awhile for help to arrive.

**Carl Maurice, Fredericksburg, Virginia**

### Great Articles!

I wanted to let you know how much fun and education I've had reading *Trailer Life* this last year. I'm looking into getting an RV to see the USA. Please keep up printing all those great articles on places to visit and trailer tests.

**Larry Larimore, Soledad, California** 📧

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# A Jolly Good Time in Texas

From Moody Gardens to Dickens on the Strand, there's plenty to see and do on Galveston Island

by Pamela Selbert

The Galveston, Texas, visitors' guide lists Moody Gardens as one of 25 "must-have experiences" on the island. Additionally, the historic homes are magnificent, harbor tours offer thrilling dolphin viewing, 300 resident bird species provide excellent "watching" and the sunsets are spectacular.

Moody Gardens, established three decades ago, began as a horse barn and riding arena offering Hope Therapy — horseback-riding therapy for mentally and physically disabled individuals. Today, Hope Therapy offers horticultural therapy and vocational training, with clients tending many of the gardens.

Moody Gardens spans 242 acres and offers a host of attractions. Among these are three enormous pyramids — Rainforest Pyramid came first. It's a 10-story glass structure, new in 1993, which houses more than 1,000 species of plants and animals. Visitors walk through the "rainforests" of Africa, Asia and the Americas to see many of the native species that roam free inside the pyramid — among them are colorful macaws, two-toed sloths, saki monkeys and river otters.

There's also a butterfly exhibit, with beautiful little creatures flitting about that are bred and hatched here.

An aquarium fills the largest pyramid, and contains 1.5 million gallons of water that's home to seals, sea lions, sharks, thousands of fish, five different species of penguins and many others. Discovery Museum occupies the third pyramid and hosts traveling exhibits that explore the world of science.

Moody Gardens also includes several theaters, including the MG 3D Theater, with the largest 3D screen in the state.

Every November and December a Festival of Lights is held at the

gardens, featuring more than a million lights in animated displays that illuminate a mile-long trail. There's also an outdoor ice skating rink (bring your own skates or rent them for \$6) and a 100-foot-long ice slide.

Another reason to visit Galveston in winter is to enjoy the town's popular "Dickens on the Strand," held every first weekend in December since 1974. The festival, set against the elegant historic buildings along the Strand, features dress and food from the Charles Dickens era. People who dress in Victorian fashion are admitted for half price. Moody Gardens enters a float featuring "Ollie the Otter" and "King Tut the Penguin" in the parade.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Galveston or Dickens on the Strand Information:** 888-425-4753, [www.galveston.com](http://www.galveston.com)

**Moody Gardens:** 800-582-4673, [www.moodygardens.org](http://www.moodygardens.org)

### RV PARKS

**Dellanera RV Park (we stayed here):** Beach camping, wide spaces with pull-through and back-up sites, 30- and 50-amp, picnic table and barbecue pit on 65 sites. 888-425-4753, [www.galveston.com/dellanera](http://www.galveston.com/dellanera)

**Jamaica Beach RV Resort:** Sites have concrete pads with grass area and picnic table, 30- and 50-amp, outdoor exercise equipment, family pool and adult pool. 409-632-0200, [www.jbrv.net](http://www.jbrv.net)

**Sandpiper RV Resort:** Paved and landscaped sites including beachfront and big-rig sites, 30- and 50-amp, dog walking areas, infinity edge pool. 409-765-9431, [www.sandpipervresort.com](http://www.sandpipervresort.com)





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Honda Generators, Circle 112 on Reader Service



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## Holiday Rambler Alumascape

Holiday Rambler's towable division launched a new Alumascape fifth-wheel that's positioned at the higher end of the fifth-wheel segment. Currently, three floorplans are available ranging from 31 to 39 feet, with five more slated for future production.

The Alumascape has a wide-body design, a Z frame chassis, aluminum superstructure and laminated construction. The fifth-wheel is offered in three-, four- and five-slide models. Standard features

include arched ceilings, solid-surface countertops, raised-panel glazed solid cherry cabinetry and frameless windows. The kitchen has a four-door refrigerator and convection



microwave. In the bathroom is a 60-inch shower. A 60- by 80-inch queen bed is standard (optional 70- by 80-inch available), as are a trifold hide-a-bed sofa and 40-inch TV in the living room. Freshwater capacity is 56 gallons.

"Alumascape is branded under the Holiday Rambler trademark and produces an outstanding blend of luxury, quality and value," stated Matt Buckman, director of sales for the Holiday Rambler and Trail-Lite brands. Alumascape is the second fifth-wheel developed for the Holiday Rambler network, as a more mainstream complement to the recently introduced Presidential ultra-luxury fifth-wheel.

**MSRP: \$56,000-\$67,000**

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## NEWSWIRE

### LEGISLATION



#### Longer Fifth-Wheels in California

Gov. Jerry Brown has signed into law legislation backed by the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) to allow longer fifth-wheels in California. The law permits fifth-wheels to be up to 48 feet in overall length, provided the kingpin to rear axle length is 40 feet or less for a fifth-wheel with two or more axles; for one axle, the kingpin to axle length cannot exceed 38 feet. "The law takes effect on January 1, 2014," said Director of Government Affairs Mike Ochs, who led the effort for RVIA. "However, it is not likely that a DMV field office will refuse to register or title a fifth-wheel that falls within the new length requirements prior to the effective date."

### NEW ALLIANCE



#### Blue Ox, Forest River Partner on Hitch Program

Blue Ox President Jay Hesse and Vice President Ellen Kietzmann have announced an alliance with Forest River to equip select 2014 V-Cross and XLR models with SwayPro built-in sway-prevention systems as optional equipment. SwayPro is currently offered free as part of a special limited promotion on the Vibe brand through March 1, 2014. "Customers will appreciate Blue Ox's intuitive, easy to hook-up hitch system that prevents trailer sway before it starts for a smooth towing experience," said Brent Stevens, national sales manager of the V-Cross and XLR divisions.

### MEDIA



#### RV 2014

HGTV's annual RV special — which has run for the past 13 years — will air January 1, 2014. The program has been the cable network's highest rated special for the past several years. The show, which was filmed in October at America's Largest RV Show in Hershey, Pennsylvania, will be hosted by Chris Lambton, who is known for HGTV's "Going Yard" and "The Bachelorette." During filming, Lambton took three families on a journey to find their dream RV. One of the couples, Charles and Marisa Dean, said, "Chris is a down-to-earth guy on and off camera. He made shopping really fun." The special will also feature the newest RVs and the latest RV accessories.





## Airstream Rentals in Southern California RV Park

Palm Canyon Resort & RV Park, located within the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, California, recently underwent a \$1 million facelift and the property was transformed into a Western-themed vacation destination. The resort/campground has four vintage Airstream and four "Canned Ham" trailer rentals. The Airstreams range from 21-32 feet and rent for \$109-\$149 per night. They're set-up like a hotel room with sheets and towels, have a kitchen and bathroom, and their own space with outdoor seating and a barbecue. The "Canned Hams" range from 14-16 feet in length and rent for \$55-\$69 per night. Additionally, Palm Canyon has 132 30-amp sites and 50-amp pull-through sites. There's also a 61-room hotel, swimming pool, exercise room and a Western-style restaurant that seats 100 people.

"We hope the property will appeal as much to snowbirds from the Pacific Northwest and Canada as it does to couples and families from California who are looking for a unique vacation getaway," said Shirley Gear, general manager of Palm Canyon Resort. 760-767-5342, [www.palmcanyonrvresort.com](http://www.palmcanyonrvresort.com)

## Connecticut Gingerbread House Festival

What better way to celebrate the holiday season than with the sweet and spicy smell of gingerbread? Wood Memorial Library in South Windsor, Connecticut, is hosting its third annual Gingerbread House Festival from November 29 through December 15. The festival is New England's biggest display of gingerbread houses and is free to the public. Rows and rows of colorful candy-coated houses are on display, created by experts and novices alike — enter your own gingerbread house if you'd like! A gingerbread shop offers tasty take-home treats and holiday gifts.

The fun starts at 10 a.m. November 29. Festival hours are Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., weekends from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and closing on December 15 at 2 p.m. [www.woodmemoriallibrary.org](http://www.woodmemoriallibrary.org)



## A Mouthwatering Selection for RVers in the 2014 Good Sam RV Travel Guide

Have you ever had the itch to explore Route 66 outside of Albuquerque? How about munching on succulent lobster along Maine's coast? The 2014 Good Sam RV Travel Guide & Campground Directory explores these routes and more than 50 others in its new "RV Trips of a Lifetime" section, road trips — along with maps — that every RV traveler should take at least once in his or her life.

You'll find even more in the 2014 edition:

- A NASCAR feature with tips on attending fun-filled stock car events along with a roundup of RV parks located near racing venues.
- A special snowbird section that profiles destinations for sun-chasers from low-lying tropics to the high desert.
- A Beginner's Guide that tackles shopping for a new RV, taking a shakedown cruise, winterizing and storage for your vehicle.
- Camping World coupons worth hundreds of dollars.
- Detailed listings of North America's 2,200 Good Sam Parks, which offer 10 percent discounts to Good Sam Club members.

The Good Sam RV Travel Guide also lists vital details about 14,500 RV parks and campgrounds, including maps of all North American states and provinces with the locations of RV parks.

Each private park listed has been inspected and rated for the campground's facilities, restrooms and showers, and visual appearance based on the Good Sam Rating system.

Advance copies for the 2014 Good Sam RV Travel Guide & Campground Directory are expected to sell fast, so order early at [www.goodsamcamping.com/2014](http://www.goodsamcamping.com/2014), or call 877-209-6655. 📞



## Membership Cancellation

Seeking reimbursement for a campground membership that he no longer wanted, a reader requested *RV Action Line's* assistance. He wrote:

» On March 12, 2013, I purchased a one-year membership to Passport America for its member RV resorts at discount prices. I paid \$39, but that same month, I requested a return of my deposit because my wife and I decided to cease our traveling and remain at one location, which is not associated with Passport America. So far, Passport America has not responded to my request. *RV Action Line*,

can you please help?

**William Trampus, Madison Heights, Michigan**

*RV Action Line* contacted Passport America in an attempt to assist Trampus. Some time later, we heard from Trampus as to the final outcome. He wrote:

» Thank you *RV Action Line* for being a third-party facilitator on my request to Passport America for return of my one-year dues. One month after receiving your letter, Passport America sent me a check for the full amount — \$39 — as well as a new travel card, though that was not requested.

**William Trampus**

## Slideout-Seal Setback

Experiencing ongoing problems with the seals on his fifth-wheel's slideouts, a reader asked for *RV Action Line's* help when all else failed. He explained:

» In June 2010, I purchased a new 2011 SunnyBrook 3510RE from East Texas RV Sales in Kirbyville, Texas. We made our first trip two months later. As I opened the slideouts, I noticed that the carpet was wet and the recliner was damp. As I inspected the unit, I saw that the top seal over the slideout that contains the tables, chairs and recliners, was out of the top track. I reinserted the seal to prevent further damage.

When we returned home, I took the RV back to East Texas RV Sales. The seal had come out of the track and they reinstalled it using a sealant. On our next trip, we noticed the top seals were out of the tracks on two slideouts. I once again took the unit back to East Texas RV for repairs. They installed some clips on the seal.

During a trip in January 2012, the

## The top seal over the slideout that contains the tables, chairs and recliners was out of the track

rubber seal was torn. East Texas RV ordered a new seal and advised me that SunnyBrook would not warrant this. The repair cost me \$347.84, but the problem still exists. Since then, East Texas RV closed its business.

I contacted Michael Vanderpool, warranty/parts/service manager with Winnebago Towable Division. He replied that he was sorry about this problem, but that the unit is out of warranty. As of now, the seal is torn in multiple places and the manufacturer will not warrant this problem that has existed since the purchase of the unit.

Can *RV Action Line* please help? I need this seal problem corrected so that it will prevent further damage to my RV. I want the problem repaired under warranty and reimbursement for the repairs that have already been made.

**Luke Latino, Kountze, Texas**

*RV Action Line* contacted Winnebago Towables for possible further action on Latino's case. We received the following from the company, which ended the case on a positive note. It read:

### THE COMPANY RESPONDED

There is no record in the history file for Mr. Latino's fifth-wheel that indicates there were problems associated with the slide seals within the expressed warranty period or within a reasonable period after the warranty expired.

Enclosed with this letter is a letter addressed to Latino. Based on a copy of the invoice provided by Latino from East Texas RV, he paid \$297.96 for replacing slide seals that should have been filed through our warranty department. We will reimburse Latino for his out-of-pocket expense.

With issuing the reimbursement check, we believe that we have fulfilled our warranty obligation as outlined in our New Vehicle Limited Warranty Manual and no further action should be required by Winnebago Towable Division.

**Michael Vanderpool**  
Warranty/Parts/Service Manager  
Winnebago Towables  
Middlebury, Indiana

**TAKE ACTION »** *RV Action Line* is a forum for the resolution of conflicts between consumers and RV dealers and manufacturers, accessories suppliers and service providers. After exhausting all other resources without success, please send a typed letter to *RV Action Line*, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. Include copies of appropriate bills and correspondence as well as a self-addressed, stamped envelope.





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<sup>1</sup> Not available in all areas. Entering your vehicle's profile characteristics does not guarantee that your vehicle's characteristics will be accounted for in all route suggestions. Always defer to all posted road signs and road conditions.

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# Wildlife Sanctuary

Cape Canaveral is well known as the launching pad of space exploration milestones but Mother Nature's side is just as enticing

**T**o Americans of a certain age, the words "Cape Canaveral" conjure up images of large rockets launching powerfully into the sky, toward outer space and into the future. Cape Canaveral, in other words, has helped shape our nation by contributing to some of the country's most significant and memorable events. Numerous travelers fascinated by technology and space exploration make their way to Florida's Atlantic Coast to visit the John F. Kennedy Space Center. As worthwhile as this travel experience is, however, RVers should be sure to visit the areas just north of the Space Center as well: Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and Canaveral National Seashore.

These two stunningly beautiful properties provide a natural counterpoint to the technological wonders that occur at the Space Center. Bounded by the Space Center to the south, the Indian River to the west and north, and Mosquito Lagoon to the

east, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge is home to 1,500 species of plants and animals within its 140,000 acres. Visitors can explore coastal dunes and saltwater estuaries while fishing, hunting, birding and viewing other wildlife, including manatees. Boating is also a popular activity. And the best way to begin a visit to the refuge is to stop at the Visitor Information Center (closed Sundays and Mondays), 4 miles east of Titusville.

Just north of the wildlife refuge, bounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Intracoastal Waterway to the west, Canaveral National Seashore is touted as the "real Florida." Visitors who stroll south along Apollo Beach to Klondike Beach or explore the aquatic intricacies of Mosquito Lagoon will readily agree with that promotional phrase. Travelers are advised to carry plenty of drinking water to protect themselves from the sun and biting insects, and to wait out thunderstorms in their vehicles or



The gentle manatee has been known to body surf and barrel roll when playing.

under shelter, other than trees.

Obviously, Canaveral National Seashore is not an amusement park, festooned with rides and souvenir shops. It is a ruggedly beautiful natural environment, one in which visitors may see an endangered wood stork and numerous West Indian manatees in their native habitats. 🚐

**Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and Canaveral National Seashore, Florida, 321-267-1110, [www.fws.gov/merrittisland](http://www.fws.gov/merrittisland), [www.nps.gov/can](http://www.nps.gov/can)**

## DID YOU KNOW?

Florida's Canaveral National Seashore has more than a dozen federally listed threatened or endangered animal species, including the West Indian manatee and five varieties of sea turtles.

PHOTO BY DOSECREATIVE/PHOTOS.COM



# TOWABLES News

SPECIAL EDITION



## HOT NEW 5th WHEEL DEBUTS!



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docking and tail lights and much more!

docking and tail lights and much more!

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[sunnybrookrv.com](http://sunnybrookrv.com)



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# WALLA WALLA: **FUNNY NAME, SERIOUS ADVENTURE**

Stroll down the streets of this charming town in southeastern Washington  
and savor its antique shops, wine-tasting rooms and cafés

article by **Carl Calvert** photos by **Ann Calvert**







Walla Walla's Main Street is vibrant and festive. In 2011, Rand McNally awarded Walla Walla Friendliest Small Town.

**W**alla Walla is certainly one of the most unusually named towns in the United States. The name Walla Walla comes from the Walla Walla tribe, originally located in the area, and the nearby Walla Walla River. However unusual the name, Walla Walla is definitely worth a visit.

Located in the southeastern corner of Washington state, Walla Walla is known for its Main Street charm, a wealth of museums and galleries, antique shops, public art, numerous wine-tasting rooms and walking tours of the city. Short trips outside of Walla Walla bring you to a wide variety of historic sites, natural beauty and hidden treasures.

With a population of nearly 32,000, Walla Walla is renowned for numerous attributes, including its fertile agricultural fields, highlighted by its famous sweet onions; its extensive wine-growing region; and the area's biking, golfing, birding, fishing and hunting opportunities. Visitors can also enjoy the Walla Walla Symphony orchestra — the longest running symphony west of the Mississippi.

The area around Walla Walla was settled as early as 1836, when Marcus Whitman established Whitman Mission, a focal point for early settlers and the

local Native American population. The Whitman Mission National Historic Site still stands as a testament to Whitman and his wife, Narcissa, who were both killed by Cayuse Indians in 1847. The Cayuse, according to local history, blamed the Whitmans for an outbreak of measles that killed a large percentage of the tribe. The accredited Whitman College in Walla Walla is named for the infamous husband-and-wife team.

Another area of historic significance in Walla Walla is Pioneer Park, which contains the Fort Walla Walla Museum, featuring thousands of pioneer and agricultural artifacts. Established in 1858, Fort Walla Walla now offers its Pioneer Village, where visitors can explore cabins, a harness shop, an outhouse, a blacksmith shop, schools, a jail, a train depot and a doctor's office.

Farther afield, a wide variety of attractions await the adventurer seeking an exciting day trip. The Lewis and Clark Trail passes just north of Walla Walla, and a number of Lewis and Clark sites can be explored. Two of the most popular are Lewis and Clark State Park, and the Patit Creek Campsite, both located just north of Walla Walla near Dayton, Washington. The state park contains 621 acres and features camping, hiking and interpretive trails, an old-growth forest and a

**Dramatic Palouse Falls, in the 105-acre camping park, drops 198 feet into the Palouse River.**







(Above left) The Palouse River in Washington and Idaho eventually flows into the mighty Snake River, which is more than 1,000 miles long. (Above right) While in the Walla Walla area don't forget to stop and smell the flowers, and soak up a bit of Washington's natural beauty. (Opposite page, top) Fulfill your Western shopping fantasies at Hamley & Co. Saddle Shop in Pendleton, Oregon.

picnic ground. Lewis and Clark passed through this area on their return trip from the Pacific Coast near Astoria, Oregon.

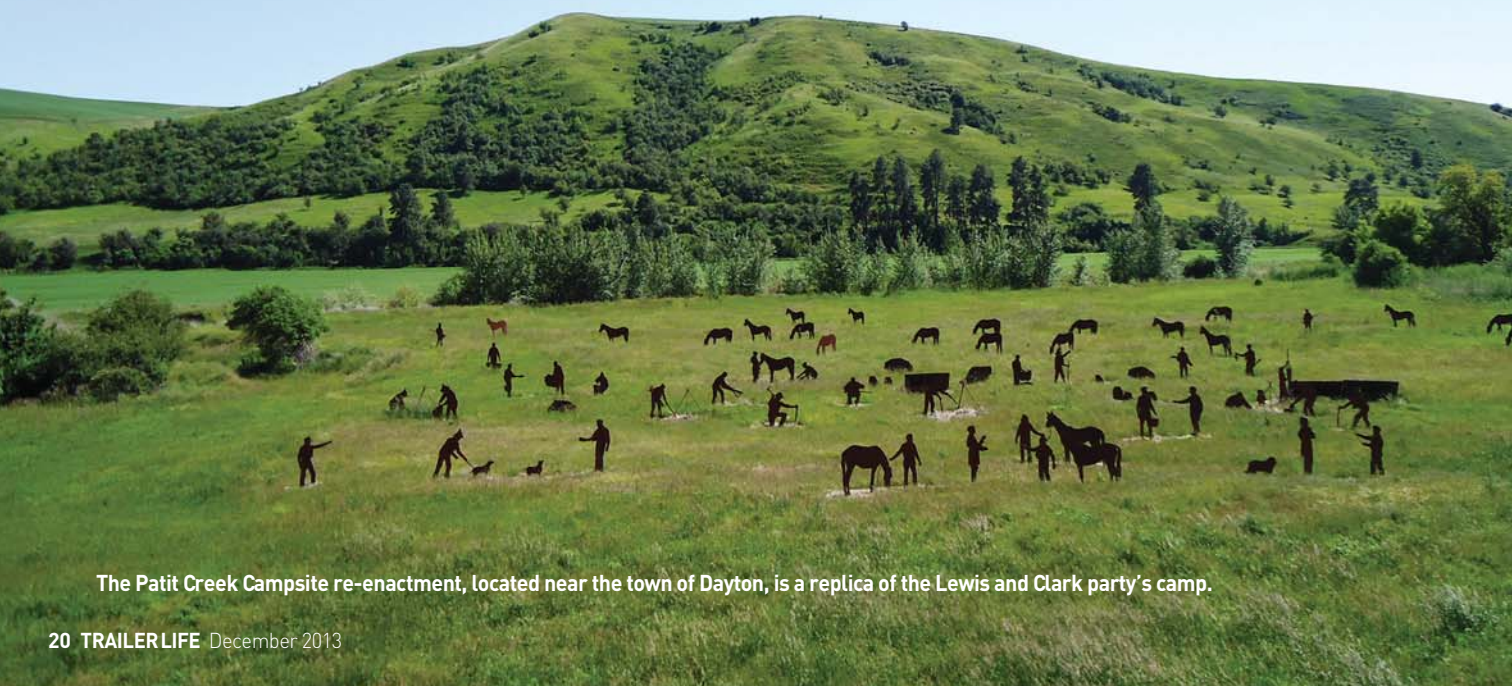
The Patit Creek Campsite, which can be found just outside the town of Dayton, features metal figure cutouts

representing the entire Lewis and Clark party. Situated on the exact spot of a Lewis and Clark campsite, the monument depicts what the functioning camp looked like, complete with all the members of the expedition, its wagons, tools, tents, animals, etc. This is truly a

must-see site for any fan of the Lewis and Clark trek.

A bit farther north of Dayton lies a world-class waterfall, Palouse Falls. Visitors from all over the world come to the falls — which drop from a height of 198 feet — to marvel at this natural wonder of Washington state. Palouse Falls State Park is comprised of 105 acres and is located 17 miles southeast of the town of Washtucna on the Palouse River, upstream of the confluence of the Snake River.

## VISITORS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD COME TO PALOUSE FALLS — WHICH DROP FROM A HEIGHT OF 198 FEET



The Patit Creek Campsite re-enactment, located near the town of Dayton, is a replica of the Lewis and Clark party's camp.





And when visiting Palouse Falls, take the opportunity to visit the Lyons Ferry Fish Hatchery located nearby — it's definitely worth the side trip.

South of Walla Walla, just over the border of Oregon, is the town of Pendleton, home of the Pendleton Round-Up and the Pendleton Woolen Mills. The world-famous Round-Up, which takes place every September (scheduled for September 10-13, 2014; 800-45-RODEO) was created in 1910 as "a frontier exhibition of picturesque pastimes, Indian and military spectacles, cowboy racing and bronco busting." This part-rodeo, part-extravaganza is extremely popular, so make plans early if you want to attend.

The Pendleton Woolen Mills, estab-

lished in 1893, produces its renowned line of blankets inspired by Native American designs and legends. Free tours are held weekdays allowing visitors to see the entire manufacturing process (541-276-6911). Additional Western features of the town of Pendleton include the Hamley & Co. Saddle Shop, which stocks every conceivable cowboy product, and the Montana Hat Factory, where cowboy hats are a way of life, and hats are made to order. Numerous cowboy celebrities come from all over the globe to get their cowboy hats fitted and made to perfection in this intimate shop. A stroll down Pendleton's streets is like a walk back into the Western past.

For a bit of Native American culture,

don't miss the Tamástslikt Cultural Institute, located between Walla Walla and Pendleton. This museum celebrates the traditions of the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla tribes through dramatic exhibits, renowned artwork and fun events.

Whatever your tastes and interest, Walla Walla and the surrounding area is sure to delight and entertain ... even if the town has a funny name. 🚚

## IF YOU GO

A Discover Pass (\$35 annually, \$11.50 per day) must be displayed when visiting state recreation lands managed by the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.

**Information on Lewis & Clark Trail State Park** (closed in winter, reopens March 29, 2014): <http://adventureawaits.com/2013/08/discover-lewis-clark-trail>

**Fort Walla Walla Museum**  
509-525-7703  
[www.fortwallawallamuseum.org](http://www.fortwallawallamuseum.org)

### RV CAMPGROUNDS IN WALLA WALLA:

**Blue Valley RV Park**  
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[www.bluevalleyrv.com](http://www.bluevalleyrv.com)  
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**RV Resort Four Seasons**  
509-529-6072  
[www.rvresortfourseasons.com](http://www.rvresortfourseasons.com)  
Open year-round, full hookups, pull-through sites, paved and grass sites.

(Below left) Downtown concerts and street performers are a way of life on Main Street, Walla Walla. (Below right) At the Pendleton Woolen Mills in nearby Pendleton, Oregon, visitors get to see the looms churning out the company's distinctive blankets.



# CALIFORNIA'S CASTLE ON THE HILL

"The Ranch," as newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst called it, is open for public tours and showcases a considerable collection of art and antiques

**I**t was 1850 when George Hearst arrived in California. Like many, he had gold fever, but he also had a degree in mining. Making his fortune with the Comstock Lode in Nevada, Homestake gold mine in South Dakota, Ontario silver mine in Utah and Anaconda copper mine in Montana, he soon became one of the wealthiest and most influential men in California.

At that time, roads to the remote coast south of Monterey were almost nonexistent. It wasn't until 1850 that the horse trail between San Simeon Point and Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa was expanded to allow the use of small carts, and then only seasonally. The first white persons to settle in the immediate area near the bay of San Simeon were Portuguese shore whalers under the command of Captain Joseph Clark. They built a small wharf where they could tie up their dead whales. The public land was open to homesteading.

In 1865, George Hearst began to accumulate land along the coast

adjacent to San Simeon where he began raising cattle and racehorses. In 1869, Captain Clark partnered with George Hearst to build a wharf out on the end of the point so sailing ships could tie up to load and unload goods. Soon there was a store, a blacksmith shop, a barbershop and a saloon. Sailing vessels and steamships stopped at San Simeon to deliver freight.

George and his wife, Phoebe Apperson Hearst, had one child, William Randolph Hearst, born in 1863. The Hearst family frequently camped, hunted and fished in the rolling hills overlooking the blue Pacific and along the rugged coastline. As a young boy, William fell in love with these grasslands and forests of oak and Monterey pine. Extensive travels in Europe with his mother gave him a deep appreciation for art he saw in the well-preserved castles and mansions. Upon his mother's death, William inherited the ranch property.

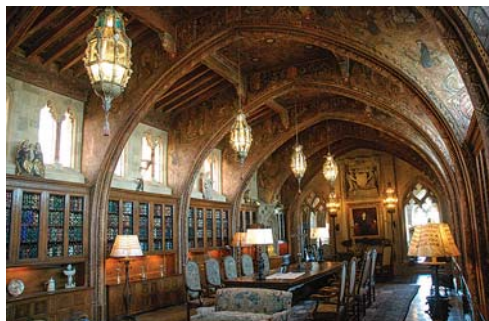
Taking time out to build the largest newspaper and magazine business in the world, the land William Hearst

called "La Cuesta Encantada" ("The Enchanted Hill") kept drawing him back until 1919 when he enlisted the services of world-renowned designer and architect Julia Morgan to build what we know as Hearst Castle.

The design and construction of La Cuesta Encantada would continue until 1947. Being the art connoisseur that he was, both before and during the construction of Hearst Castle, Hearst had stockpiled a massive collection of original art, statues, furniture, paintings, tapestries and all sorts of rare artifacts from all over the world. These were stored in warehouses in New York, San Francisco and San Simeon. The Mediterranean-Revival-style home houses a selection of art and antiques that truly boggles the mind.

As his dream home evolved under the watchful eye of Morgan, Hearst established landscaped gardens and a private zoo on the property. Descendants of some of the animals, including zebras, can sometimes be seen today grazing on the green hillsides. During the 1920s and 1930s famous guests

(Opposite page) The imposing Casa Grande or "Big House" is but a small part of the Hearst Castle Estate. (Right) The castle's grand halls, party rooms and dining room are beyond imagination, each a museum in itself. (Far right) Every bedroom and sitting room has its own personality.







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VIEW.



The Neptune pool, named for the Roman god of freshwater and the sea, holds 345,000 gallons of water.

arrived at this magnificent country house by car, train and airplane.

We didn't have an airplane so we arrived in our own self-contained RV. While we prefer to wild camp, a little searching showed that there were virtually no possibilities anywhere near the entrance to the Castle. The best and only spot is San Simeon Creek Campground, 4 miles south of Hearst Castle. There are 115 campsites for tents and recreational vehicles. The maximum length for an RV is 35 feet. Each campsite has a fire ring and picnic tables. Water spigots are available throughout the campground, but there are no hookups. Restrooms with flush toilets and coin-operated showers, a dump station and water fill for RVs are also available. There is an upper section of the campground called the Washburn Loop that has no access to flush restrooms or showers. If you're self-contained, this is a much nicer and quieter place to stay. You can buy firewood from the camp host but you're

better off bringing your own. When we awoke in the morning, there was a covey of quail doing clean-up around our camp.

From October 1 through March 14 the campground is open on a first-come first-served basis. During high season it fills up very quickly and you are better off making reservations far in advance (available May 23 to September 12).

The entrance to Hearst Castle has a large parking area specifically for RVs. It did not seem to be a problem for people leaving their trailers or motorhomes in the parking area while using a tow vehicle or tagalong to visit other nearby attractions. Overnight parking is not permitted.

There are five castle tour options. Tour number 1, "The Experience," is recommended for first-time visitors. Each tour lasts about an hour and 45 minutes. At the end of your tour you are free to wander the beautiful gardens surrounding the estate. If you really want to see it all you should plan on two



(Above left) Camping in the Washburn Loop of the San Simeon Creek Campground was serene. (Above right) Kayak rentals and lessons are available on the beach in San Simeon.





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## CALIFORNIA'S CASTLE ON THE HILL

days. Tours fill up quickly so get there early and make a plan.

The main house or Casa Grande is 69,000 square feet and contains 115 rooms. It took 26 years to build and was never completed. There are numerous outbuildings and cottages, each named for their view: Casa del Mar (House of the Sea), Casa de Montaña, (House of the Mountains), etc. Wandering through the gardens, we marveled at the beautiful sculptures. Four Sekhmet Egyptian sculptures are more than 3,000 years old. The Neptune pool, named for the Roman god of freshwater and the sea, holds 345,000 gallons of water. From the Neptune Terrace we had an expansive view of the 240,000-acre ranch William Hearst owned.

We could go on and on about the incredibility of the castle, but it is just one of those things you have to experience to believe. Like chocolate and candy, you can only consume so much in one day before overload.

There are many other things to see and do in the area. We drove north early the next morning to explore what is easily one of the most dramatic coastlines in the world, now part of the California Coastal National Monument. Our first stop was the Piedras Blancas Elephant Seal Rookery just 4.3 miles north of the entrance to the Hearst Castle Visitors Center off Highway 1. The rookery is home to about 17,000 animals, and is open for viewing everyday of the year with no admission fee. The number of seals peaks three times during the year: late January, when most births have occurred, and in late April and late October, but the seals are always coming and going.

Another 1½ miles north is the entrance to the Piedras Blancas Light



**(Above left) Piedras Blancas Light Station and its historic buildings are undergoing a process of restoration. (Above right) Elephant seal breeding, birthing and molting take place on this beach in San Simeon at the Piedras Blancas Rookery, which is open every day of the year.**

Station. In 2008 it was designated by Congress as an "Outstanding Natural Area." Built in 1875, it filled the gap between Point Conception and Point Sur. Access to Piedras Blancas is by guided tours only, which are offered year round and feature cultural and natural history as well as spectacular scenery. Tours meet at the Piedras Blancas Motel 1½ miles north of the entrance. (Check locally for days and times.) The guided walk around the point along the ½-mile interpretive trail is a great place to spot a few gray whales heading south (October through December) to their protected calving and mating grounds on the coast of Baja California, or north, heading back to Alaska (April through June). Depending on the season, ash storm petrels, pigeon guillemots, Xantus's murrelet and Brandt's cormorants can be seen, as well as ever-present western gulls and brown pelicans.

Heading back south, we stopped at the San Simeon State Park and the Hearst San Simeon Historical Monument. Together, they preserve

more than 20 miles of dramatic central California coastline. It was lunchtime so we popped into the old general store, the only building dating back to San Simeon Station's whaling days. The deli had tempting sandwiches but the line was long. After sampling a couple of the vintages at the Hearst Ranch Winery's tasting bar we bought some bread and cheese and joined others on the front porch in the sun.

On a tip from the Hearst San Simeon Historical Monument Visitors Center, we walked down the beach and found the trail leading to San Simeon Point. The path wanders through a forest of fragrant blue gum eucalyptus, Monterey pine and cypress draped in Spanish moss. On the hike back, we watched kayakers gliding into the calm coves beneath the rocky cliffs of the point. Kayak rentals and lessons are available on the beach. A few anglers were testing their luck on the wharf. We heated up a cup of coffee and stayed for the sunset before heading back to camp.

Mr. Hearst was a man of many talents and he certainly left his mark on California. He died in 1951 before he could see the completion of Casa Grande on La Cuesta Encantada. The Hearst Corp. donated the estate to the State of California in 1957, and it is now a State Historical Monument and a National Historic Landmark. The Hearst Conservation Easement today includes 80,000 acres. William Randolph Hearst just called it The Ranch. 📺

## IF YOU GO

**Central Coast Friends of the Elephant Seal** 805-924-1628, [www.elephantseal.org](http://www.elephantseal.org)

**Hearst Castle** 800-444-4445, [www.hearstcastle.com](http://www.hearstcastle.com)

**Piedras Blancas Light Station** 805-927-7361, [www.piedrasblancas.org](http://www.piedrasblancas.org)

**San Simeon Creek Campground** [www.reserveamerica.com](http://www.reserveamerica.com), [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

**Sea For Yourself Kayak Outfitters** 805-927-1787, [www.kayaksansimeon.com](http://www.kayaksansimeon.com)





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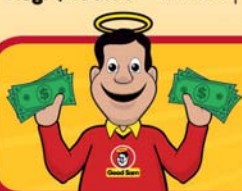


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# A SLICE OF OLD FLORIDA

Dazzling sunsets, friendly people and fresh seafood flourish in Cedar Key, where there are no franchises and the passage of time has ground to a halt

In 1880, Florida railroad magnate Henry B. Plant planned to build a railroad with a terminal in Cedar Key. At the time, the city was one of the largest on Florida's west coast, with a deep-water port and a thriving oyster industry — plus it was not far from the mouth of the navigable Suwannee River. But the owners of the Cedar Key railhead property refused to sell it to Plant. The popular story is that he cursed the locals telling them, "I'll wipe Cedar Key off the map. Owls will hoot in your attics and the hogs will wallow in your deserted street." He left, and then built the western terminal of his railroad 100 miles south in a small, remote village called Tampa. Tampa boomed and Cedar Key became what it is today, a unique island fishing village that is a wonderful slice of old Florida.

It is a place where time has ground to a halt. Cedar Key today is like Key West was 50 years ago, or so say many of the 1,000 folks who live here. There are no stoplights in Cedar Key — not one! There are also no big box stores, fast-food restaurants or other kinds of franchises. What you will find here are gorgeous sunsets, fresh seafood, cozy places to relax, friendly people (everyone waves) and hundreds of golf carts running up and down the streets. Golf carts are a legal mode of transportation here and top speed allowed anywhere in the city is 20 mph.

The town is located 3 miles out in the Gulf of Mexico, about 50 miles west of Gainesville at the end of State Road 24. It sits on Way Key, one of a number of Keys that are separated from the mainland by a large salt marsh. Most

of the developed area has been on this Key for more than 100 years. The Cedar Keys are named for the Eastern red cedar trees that were once abundant in the area. By the late 1800s two pencil company mills had harvested most of the trees and shipped them 200 miles northeast on the Old Florida Railroad to Fernandina. From there they went by boat to northern pencil factories. By the late 1800s, most of the cedar trees were gone. The completion of Henry Plant's railroad to Tampa and the hurricane of 1896 signaled the end of Cedar Key as a busy port and railhead.

We stayed at two RV parks during our trip here. The first was the Cedar Key RV Park on State Road 24 about 7 miles from the downtown area. It features large concrete sites with patios, full hookups (50/30 amp/water/



Cedar Key's Dock Street as seen from the channel leading to Atsena Otie Key.





**(Above left)** The Cedar Key Fall Seafood Festival always kicks off with a colorful parade on Dock Street. **(Above right)** Workers at Southern Cross Sea Farms clean and sort the day's harvest of hard-shell clams.

sewer/WiFi), and a modern clubhouse and pool. Less than 2 miles from downtown is the smaller Sunset Isle RV Park & Motel, which has full hookups on unpaved sites. All sites have access to several docks overlooking the salt marsh. You can try a little fishing when the tide rolls in, and in the evening, the sunsets are often spectacular.

Our first destination was the marina for a wonderful two-hour cruise to the remote islands on Captain Doug Maple's Tidewater Tours. These islands make up the Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge, which was established in 1929. Sea Horse Key, the outermost island, is a rookery for thousands of birds that nest here from March until the end of May. White ibis, great egrets, great blue heron, cormorants, brown pelicans and a number of other birds make their nests here. Hundreds

of magnificent frigatebirds soared overhead. To protect the area, public access to this Key is not allowed from March through the end of May. The Key has a lighthouse, which was built in 1851, and is the location of a University of Florida marine research center.

We went ashore on Atsena Otie Key to view the site where the Eberhard Faber Saw Mill once stood. Faber might ring a bell with some readers, as it was printed on the side of almost every #2 pencil used in classrooms across the country. During the 1500s, the island was used by the Spanish as a way station for galleons loaded with treasure that were returning to Spain from Mexico. Pirates, including Jean Lafitte and Captain Kidd, sailed throughout the area, raiding many of these treasure ships. During the Second Seminole War it was used as a holding

area for Native Americans who were forced to relocate to western reservations. Prior to 1896, the City of Cedar Key was actually located on this Key but a devastating Category 3 hurricane in September of 1896, accompanied by a 10-foot-tall tidal wave, killed more than 100 people and destroyed both of the mills and much of the town. Atsena Otie Key was abandoned in favor of Way Key.

Following the cruise, we headed for the Cedar Key Museum State Park, just 2 miles from the marina. The museum features one of the most complete shell collections ever assembled. The collection is the work of Saint Clair Whitman, who lived in Cedar Key for most of his life. In 1991, the 1880s house where he lived for almost 40 years was moved to the park. Today, it provides a remarkable glimpse of life into the 1920s and 1930s and a view of





## A SLICE OF OLD FLORIDA

early Cedar Key. The house contains original furniture, Native American artifacts and dozens of cigar boxes full of shells — because that's how Whitman collected them. The museum is open Thursday through Monday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$2.

We returned to the marina for a late lunch on Dock Street, which is lined with a number of colorful souvenir shops and great seafood restaurants. Seafood is king in Cedar Key. The clams, scallops, oysters, crabs and a variety of fish are all fresh and cooked any way you want them. We dined at the Pickled Pelican, a great choice. We just had to try the original and rather unique Cedar Key Heart of Palm Salad which features a topping made from vanilla ice cream, chunky peanut butter and mayonnaise. It was outstanding.

The town hosts an annual seafood festival in the fall that draws thousands of visitors for two days of feasting, arts and crafts, and entertainment. The town's other events include an annual

**The Pickled Pelican is one of several great seafood restaurants on Dock Street.**



Christmas celebration (November 29–December 25 for 2013), the 50th Annual Old Florida Celebration of the Arts, April 12–13, 2014, and the Cedar Key Star Party for amateur astronomers ([www.cedarkey.org/events.php](http://www.cedarkey.org/events.php)).

The marina is small but it is always packed on the weekends with pontoon and flats boats headed for the grass flats to fish for sea trout and redfish.

Cedar Key is arguably the best area of Florida's Big Bend for fishing because these grass flats are so extensive. Charter boats are plentiful or you can rent a pontoon boat or try your hand at fishing from a kayak.

On our way back to the RV park, we stopped at Southern Cross Sea Farms, one of the largest producers of hard-shell clams in Florida. The

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success of this company is the result of cooperation between the state and the commercial fishing industry. A 1995 amendment to the Florida Constitution banned the use of commercial gillnets in state waters. The ban devastated the commercial fishing industry and many jobs were lost in the Cedar Key area. But the state began a program to train the fishermen how to raise and harvest clams. The estuaries (submerged lands) surrounding Cedar Key proved to be ideal for clam production and the area today is one of the largest producers of farm-raised hard-shell clams in the country. Clam farmers hatch, grow, harvest and process clams on more than 150 leases in the county. Annual production exceeds 100 million clams worth more than \$10 million. Southern Cross provided a tour of its hatchery that included details of the two-year process to get the clams from seed to plate.

We spent the remaining hours of the day relaxing on the dock near our

site at Sunset Isle RV Park, hopeful for a magnificent sunset over the bay. We were not disappointed.

The next morning we had breakfast at Annie's Café, a local favorite, and then headed north on SW County Road 347 for 4 miles and then east on County Road 326 to a dead-end at the Shell Mound Unit of the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge. This sweeping 53,000-acre refuge was established in 1979 to protect one of the largest

undeveloped river-delta estuarine systems in the country. The panoramic view of the salt marshes, tidal flats and tidal creeks from the docks stretching well out into the marshes is spectacular. The area is teeming with wildlife, including a variety of wading birds. Fiddler crabs and other small marsh critters scurry everywhere. The Shell Mound Archaeological Site covers 5 acres and rises 28 feet. It is nearly 6,000 years old and was built from the

(Below left) The historic St. Clair Whitman House, built in 1880, was moved to the Cedar Key Museum State Park in 1991. (Below right) The Island Hotel & Restaurant, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, has 10 guest rooms, each individually decorated.



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All of the sites at Sunset Isle RV Park & Motel have access to several docks overlooking the salt marshes that surround the park.

remains of countless meals of oysters, whelks, fish, turtle and deer bones, and household debris. The unnamed native cultures that built it are referred to as the “shell culture.”

We returned to the downtown area, which in Cedar Key is 2nd Street, for a visit to the unique Island Hotel & Restaurant where we were greeted by the hotel’s owner, Andy Bair. The hotel was built in 1859, and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It has withstood the test of time and hurricanes due, no doubt, to its 12-inch-thick walls constructed of tabby concrete (made by burning oyster shells to create lime and mixing it with water, sand and broken oyster shells) with oak supports. The hotel has 10 guest rooms, each individually decorated. There are no telephones or TVs in any of the rooms but you will find hand-hewn wooden walls and floors, unique bedding and old-fashioned clawfoot tubs in some of the rooms. All have access to the balcony overlooking 2nd Street.

Cedar Key has become a haven for artists and writers who enjoy the unspoiled environment. During the town’s Old Florida Celebration of the Arts Festival more than 120 artists showcase their works on 2nd Street.

We had lunch at Tony’s Seafood Restaurant. The line of folks waiting to get a bowl of the restaurant’s three-time world-champion New England-style clam chowder sometimes stretches down the street. The chowder recipe won the Annual Great Chowder Cook-off held in Newport, Rhode Island, in 2009, 2010 and 2011. In addition to local sales, they can and ship their chowder almost anywhere in the country. If you want the recipe, forget about it. Even *Bon Appétit* magazine couldn’t pry it out of chef/owner Eric Jungklas.

We had time for one more walk to the marina and then down to the public fishing pier on Dock Street. The pier is on the location where the Old Florida Railroad ended when Cedar Key was

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Captain Doug’s Tidewater Tours and Boat Rentals

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

#### Cedar Key Chamber of Commerce

352-543-5600, [www.cedarkey.org](http://www.cedarkey.org)

#### Cedar Key National Wildlife Refuge

352-493-0238  
[www.fws.gov/cedarkeys](http://www.fws.gov/cedarkeys)

#### Cedar Key RV Resort

352-543-5097  
[www.cedarkeyrvresort.com](http://www.cedarkeyrvresort.com)

#### Island Hotel & Restaurant

800-432-4640  
[www.islandhotel-cedarkey.com](http://www.islandhotel-cedarkey.com)

#### Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge

352-493-0238  
[www.fws.gov/lowersuwannee](http://www.fws.gov/lowersuwannee)

#### Sunset Isle RV Park & Motel

800-810-1103, [www.cedarkeyrv.com](http://www.cedarkeyrv.com)

a booming port. From here, the view west toward the outer Keys in the Gulf is magnificent. That evening we enjoyed our final Cedar Key sunset — for this trip anyway.

I thought about Henry Plant’s words of despair for the townspeople who prevented him from ending his railroad here. He was right — Cedar Key no longer is a key city or port. But it is truly something special. If Plant were alive today I think I know where he would spend some of his time — here in Cedar Key enjoying magnificent sunsets in this wonderful slice of Florida. 🚚

A series of islands surrounded by salt marshes lead to Way Key where the city of Cedar Key is located.



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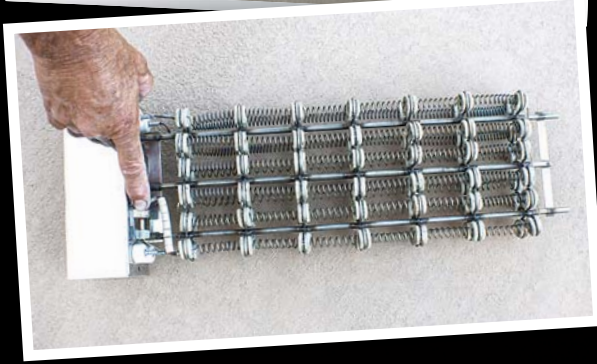
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# CHEAPER HEATING

Adding an RV Comfort Systems electric element to an existing furnace may be a cost-effective alternative to burning LP-gas



(Top) The plenum normally arrives in the kit without the ducting holes, but was factory predrilled for the specific furnace used in the test installation. (Above) The heating element is equipped with a fusible link that prevents catastrophic failure.

Running a typical forced-air furnace on LP-gas is becoming a more expensive proposition, obviously because propane has skyrocketed in price. Many owners who camp with hookups will use portable electric heaters (or heat pumps, if so equipped) to offset some of these costs, as long as the outside temperature is not too severe. Bothell, Washington-based RV Comfort Systems has developed a product that adds an electric option to most RV forced-air furnaces, giving owners added heating flexibility.

Similar to water heaters equipped with an electric option, RV Comfort Systems' solution allows users to choose between electric or gas heat. The CheapHeat electric add-on system is so efficient that some owners could make it through an entire winter without the need to refill the propane tank/cylinders. Depending on how the RV is used and other factors explained below, the savings on propane alone could eventually pay for the CheapHeat system, especially for full timers.

Electric heating coils and the controller are the key components of the CheapHeat system. Three models are offered, so the chances of retrofitting just about any furnace are pretty good. The uniquely designed heating coils are highly efficient and fully protected by a fusible link safety device that prevents overheating if the blower motor fails.

The CheapHeat's specialized controller is designed to receive a signal from the furnace when it's time to cycle on, activating the heating coils and sending warm air through the existing





**(Above, from left to right)** Flexible ducting is routed from six ports in the stock Suburban furnace in the test fifth-wheel. The ducting and collars are removed from the rear panel of the furnace to start the installation process. On this Suburban furnace, pliers were used to fold the tabs flat on both sides of the furnace to allow the new plenum to fit properly.

system of ducting and registers using the furnace's blower motor. A switch allows the user to choose between gas and electric heat.

Another benefit of the CheapHeat system is the elimination of cold air blowing during pre-cycling without heat until ignition, as well as the post-cycle cool down. Also, the blower motor is likely to last longer, since it will not be subjected to the intense heat that surrounds it during normal heat cycling in the gas mode.

A few things have to be considered when ordering the CheapHeat system. The cabinet adapter must be ordered to mate to the existing furnace brand, which will be a Suburban or Atwood. It's also critical that the RV can handle the power requirements of the electric coils. There are three available models. The DH-50 puts out the most heat and draws 21.6 amps from each of two legs of 120-volt AC power. The middle unit (DH-37) draws 15.6 amps from each of two 120-volt AC legs and the smaller system (DH-18) draws 15.6 amps but from only one 120-volt AC leg, which makes it the only unit that can operate on 30-amp service. The other two require 50-amp service.

Cost also needs to be measured. The manufacturer provides a chart that equates the output of each CheapHeat model to a standard gas-fired, forced-air furnace used in an RV. The claims are based on 60 percent efficiency of

the gas furnace, which is somewhat controversial. All RV furnaces are AGA (American Gas Association) certified to be 80 percent efficient, but testing by RV Comfort Systems technicians reveals that that figure may be a little optimistic. No doubt RV furnaces suffer from efficiency losses; you can experience that by feeling the amount of heat that blows through the exhaust. In some cases, the bluing of the metal exhaust shroud suggests that the temperature has reached higher levels than what is expected of a furnace that is only losing 20 percent efficiency. Nevertheless, the subject continues to be debated and buyers need to be cognizant of the numbers when trying to amortize the cost of the CheapHeat addition.

There's no question that the user will save money running the electric heat when hooked up to power that is not metered. In many cases, there will also be savings when staying in parks with metered electric, which is normally the case when full timing, but that depends on the cost of electric and LP-gas — and, of course, outside temperature and desired comfort levels.

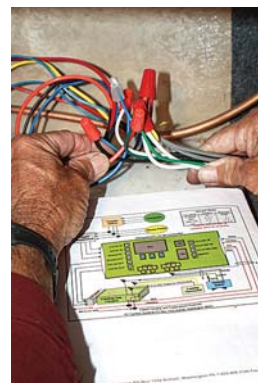
Installation of the CheapHeat system requires a working knowledge of AC wiring and electrical codes. The company recommends that a certified RV technician performs the retrofit.

The heat plenum adapter adds 6 inches to the back of the furnace, which means that adequate space is required. Prior

**(Below, from left to right)** After the heating element is installed into the plenum, the plenum is installed to the rear of the furnace and high-temperature aluminum foil tape is used to seal the edges. At the top the junction box for the 50-amp service is installed. Below is the disconnect switch, and to the right the system controller is mounted. The orange, 10-gauge Romex runs between the J-Box to the disconnect switch to the controller then runs down to the heating element. The flexible heat ducting is attached to the plenum.







(Above, from left to right) The two circuit breakers were purchased from a local home improvement center. Before installing the Scotchlok on the air switch wire make sure the correct wire is selected. The Scotchlok connects the wire from the controller to the fan motor feed wire. It takes patience to follow the color-coded wiring diagram, but the instructions walk the installer through the process.

to installing the plenum adapter, the technician will have to notate the number of flexible heat ducts connected to the existing furnace and drill the appropriate number of holes in the plenum using a 4-inch hole saw following the chart diagram in the instruction manual. Once that's completed, the duct collars are installed and the tabs bent back 90 degrees, securing the collars to the plenum adapter.

When installing the heat coils into the plenum adapter, it's important that the fusible link is at the bottom. From here, all the collars and flexible ducts are disconnected from the furnace prior to installing the plenum adapter assembly onto the rear of the furnace. For maximum airflow, the joints should be sealed with 3M high-temperature metal tape (not supplied).

Before attempting any AC wiring, the RV must be unplugged from shorepower (and inverter off, if so equipped). All wiring should be 300 V NEMA rated and meet all national, state and local codes. The wiring exercise requires routing low and high voltage wires from the shorepower junction box to the disconnect switch to the CheapHeat controller box, and hookup of the changeover switch. A wall in the furnace compartment was 2 feet from the incoming 50-amp service panel and 3 feet from the furnace, which simplified the three-hour installation.

It's best to mount the controller and the two 30-amp breakers (purchased from a home improvement or hardware store) within 10 feet of the furnace. The obvious choice for mounting the gas/electric selector switch in the test trailer was near the existing wall thermostat that controls the air conditioning and heating. After establishing there was enough clearance to run the wiring to the controller, the switch was easily cut into the wall.

After double-checking all wiring connections and plugging the rig into shorepower, it was time to perform a run test. This is performed by turning the changeover switch to the gas position. The thermostat was set to the "heat" position and 10 degrees higher than the inside room tem-

perature. The furnace came on and the gas ignited. Once gas operation was verified, the thermostat was turned off, the changeover switch moved to the electric position and the thermostat turned back on. When the switch is set to electric heat, the thermostat wire to the circuit board/gas valve is interrupted so the burner will not ignite. Power is then routed directly to the fan motor, which pushes the air over the heated electric coils that are also activated. The fan and the CheapHeat came on instantly. Allow the system to run for the recommended 20 minutes the first time it's operated to burn off any residue and make certain there are no problems.

In the first week the CheapHeat was tested in a high-altitude park in Colorado where the temperature was very cold. The system we installed requires 50-amp service, which the park had. The electric heat raised the temperature rapidly and felt every bit as warm as the gas heat. Thanks to CheapHeat, we saved substantial money on propane since we were able to use the electric heat exclusively, and the electric power was not metered. It was also nice to eliminate the 17-mile trip to town necessary to re-fill the propane cylinders.

The CheapHeat system is a practical solution to the high cost of LP-gas and may be amortized over a short period of time, especially if the RV is used in cold climates and in parks where electric is included in the site fee. All three models come standard with a one-year limited warranty and retail prices ranging from \$249 to \$695. 🚐

## RV Comfort Systems

425-408-3140, [www.rvcomfortsystems.com](http://www.rvcomfortsystems.com)



The gas/electric selector switch was mounted in the panel that also housed the existing dual thermostat.





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# Snow River 254LSS

Testing Northwood's all-season trailer in cold weather





**M**any RVs are built or are available with extra-insulation packages, sometimes called "Arctic Packs" or similar product titles, and they all feature equipment designed to better handle extreme temperatures. These rigs are successful to one degree — so to speak — or another depending on how radical the user wants to be with a camping climate. The new Snow River trailer from Northwood Manufacturing is built from the ground up with a ream of all-season features that are standards rather than add-ons, giving RVers most of the tools they need to combat the negative effects of Mother Nature.

Northwood's title for its extra-insulation rigs is "All Conditions Unit, Four Seasons." Aluminum framing and polystyrene insulation are used throughout, and there's an extra layer of reflective foil insulation that Northwood rates at R-15 in the roof and side walls (Northwood rates the roof structure at R-14 for the core assembly, not counting the foil additive). The same foil wraps the underbelly and provides more protection for the heated holding tanks and plumbing components.

All of this is based on a steel chas-

sis Northwood builds to spec for each trailer model, so there are no compromises as there can sometimes be with a commercial chassis. The independent torsion-arm rubber suspension is set up to provide extra ground clearance for go-anywhere towability.

Northwood has a reputation for building RVs designed for real-world use, and the Snow River is no exception. Fortunately, adding strength and durability, to say nothing of insulation, doesn't mean adding weight. The Snow River is described as Rugged/

Lite and at an as-tested weight of 6,441 pounds, it's still easily towable by many half-ton trucks.

In addition to relatively lightweight and stout construction, the Snow River is no slouch in the looks department. Contrasting dark end caps and lower side wall panels work nicely with the black-out aluminum wheels, graphics and contrasting window trim colors. It's a handsome-looking package.

Our assignment with this trailer was to find the coldest place we could dry camp in it to see how it managed. The Northwood crew had it well prepped but we didn't have the time to head to the Canadian Rockies in search of frigid temperatures — so the coldest we could find were nights in the low 20s. That gave us a good idea how the rig would work even if it didn't seriously test its ability to avoid plumbing freeze-ups.

Our first

(continued on page 44)





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(continued from page 41) destination wasn't far from Northwood's LaGrande, Oregon, factory. We set up camp at Sumpter Pines RV Park in the vintage mining town of Sumpter, Oregon. Some leftover snowdrifts gave us a clue that things were still chilly thereabouts.

The crank-down corner jacks ensured we'd feel steady inside and it didn't take long to deploy the balance of our campsite hardware.

A long pass-through compartment up front, which uses part of the space under the bed, was just right for our bulky or long exterior-storage items. Streetside, a narrow compartment in the slideout perfectly accommodated our folding camp chairs and other sizable-but-slim items.

We didn't need it this time, but Northwood includes a seriously rugged "Safari Tuff" roof rack for topside storage. The full walk-on roof is sheathed with  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch plywood for strength.

While the floorplan is nothing revolutionary, with a forward bedroom, mid-trailer single-enclosure bath and aft-end L-shaped kitchen with single streetside slideout and dinette/lounge seating, the arrangement has some interesting touches. For example, the overhead cabinets had a diamond-crosshatch pattern on the glass doors, a fun semi-retro touch. The rich-colored cabinet doors contrasted nicely with the charcoal-gray lower cabinet structure in an interesting take on color coordination.

Northwood calls its S-shaped dinette/lounge the "River Bend" model. Set up with the portable/foldaway



(Above left) The bath includes two doors for flexible access via bedroom or entry hall.



(Above right) A tall multishelf linen cabinet is accessible from the bath entry door in the aisle.

table that's a healthy 55 inches long by 25 inches wide, it's large enough for several people to comfortably enjoy a meal. In dinette mode, the area can handle three comfortably (four with squeezing, or by setting up an extra chair). Although well padded, it seemed to us that the seating surface is too wide, placing the back rest far away. That means relaxing against the backrest while dining will call for some table repositioning and watching one's knees against the table legs. Slipping an extra pillow behind one's back also helps. Moreover, we'd prefer to use a more conventional sofa and dinette arrangement.

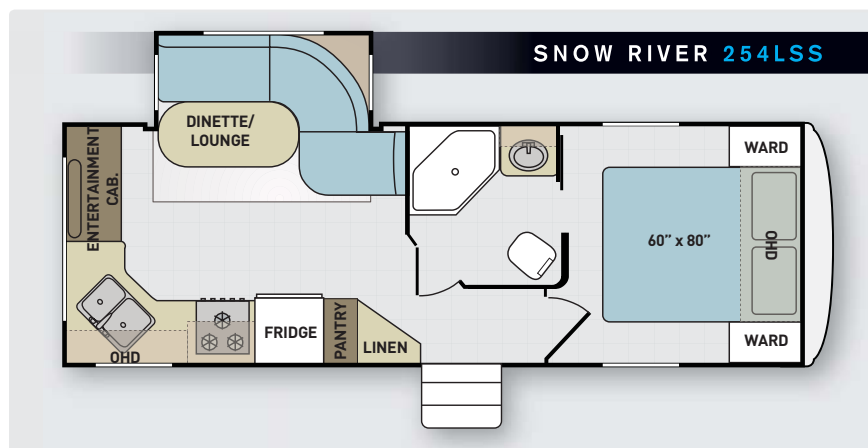
Roomy countertop space is typical with corner kitchens, and this one filled that bill. The gray-tint countertop wrapped around the end wall so there's plenty of room for spreading out the

meal fixin's and slinging hash to one's delight. A variety of drawers and cabinets means users can tailor the storage areas to suit personal preference, however, it would be nice if — instead of the fixed-position shelves throughout — there were a few adjustable shelves to accommodate taller items.

The rear wall counter is also part of the lounge in that it contains the electric-lift mechanism that hides the TV in the cabinet and raises it when desired. The TV is suitably positioned for viewing from the lounge seating area.

True to its design, the Snow River stays warm even when the furnace cycles off; we've been in many rigs in which the hawk starts chewing on your neck as soon as the furnace shuts down. There's the usual cold draft that washes down from the out-of-place single-pane windows (more on that later) but other than that, we were more than comfortable in the trailer's mostly well-insulated environment.

As the evening wound down and we made preparations for bed, we considered the dual access doors in the bath. Aft, a door in an angled wall leads to the kitchen and lounge area. Up front, a sliding pocket door opens directly to the bedroom. The door in the bedroom access hall provides privacy when guests are present, and the bedroom occupants can use the pocket door to maintain isolation from the lounge. Our excursion had just two of us, so the





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(Above) A single slideout room houses the dinette/sofa in the model 254LSS floorplan. Stabilizing jacks greatly enhance the trailer's solid feel underfoot.

dual doors were well used but not required for our convenience.

The bath is arranged on a diagonal with the roomy shower in one corner and the toilet tucked in the other with lots of space in between. While the sink is tiny, it's accessible and the medicine and linen cabinets help with bathroom necessity storage.

Our trip notes include the comment "Great mattress!" and it's true, we slept very well on the Snow River's bed. Roomy shirt closets flank the bed, and the nightstands include small storage drawers along with bountiful cabinets overhead. But space for hanging clothes comes up short in this unit. The pair of bedside shirt closets, at 14 inches of clothes rod length each, are the sole wardrobes. You'll be pressed to find spaces for your heavy winter

coats and such, which you'd typically be wearing in a trailer suitable for cold-weather use. User-installed coat hooks may be in order.

The furnace was wisely placed near the kitchen so its roar isn't too disruptive to sleep when it kicks on. The same applies to the water heater.

You've heard the joke about the guy who lives by the railroad and after several years he learns to sleep through the passage of the midnight flyer. One night the train is late, so at midnight, in the silence, he jumps up from bed and yells, "What was that?" Accustomed to the blast of a healthy furnace, we felt exactly that way on our second dry-camp night as we awakened at 3 a.m. to the pathetic whisper of a furnace vainly trying to run its blower fan on a mostly depleted battery array. Unde-

## SPECIFICATIONS

Exterior Length	28' 7"
Exterior Width	8' 4"
Exterior Height	11' 7"
Interior Width	7' 10"
Interior Height	6' 9"
Construction	Fiberglass exterior, aluminum framing, steel chassis, polystyrene and aluminized mylar insulation, fiberglass roof
Freshwater Cap.	57 gal.
Gray-Water Cap.	36 gal.
Black-Water Cap.	36 gal.
LP-Gas Cap.	14 gal.
Water-Heater Cap.	6 gal.
Refrigerator	6 cu. ft.
Furnace	25,000 Btu
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu
Converter	55 amp
Battery	Dual 12-volt deep cycle group 24
Tires	ST225/75R15
Suspension	Independent suspension rubber torsion axles
Weight (freshwater, water heater, LP-gas full; no cargo):	6,441 lbs.
Hitch Weight	850 lbs.
Axle Weight	5,591 lbs.
GVWR	10,000 lbs.
GAWR	5,080 lbs.
Cargo Carrying Capacity	3,559 lbs.
Base MSRP	\$32,175
As-Tested MSRP	\$32,662
Basic Warranty	36 months

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tered, we switched off the furnace, threw another blanket on and made it through the night just fine.

A 20-watt solar panel is standard,

(Below from left to right) Well-placed reading lights are part of the headboard unit. The galley and lounge area opens nicely for cramp-free living. Cooking was a pleasure with the 254LSS's roomy countertops. We loved the L-shaped kitchen and frosted-glass cabinet door treatment.





but it's so small it's just about enough to help trickle charge the batteries with the trailer in storage, but not much more. Don't count on it to recharge the batteries by day when you run the furnace and other accessories by night, though, as we learned. Northwood offers a 100-watt solar panel option but we'd recommend something even beefier if you want to be sure your pair of deep-cycle batteries are recharged as much as possible every day. For that, you'd need to add aftermarket solar panels in the 200- to 300-watt range for serious dry-camp time extension.

The test trailer was a very early pilot model for this series and it was due for some content tweaking before retail sales began. It had three features that were inconsistent with a rig designed for all-season dry camping. First, the tiny solar panel mentioned above. Second, single-pane windows, although dual-pane windows are now optionally available. I can't understand why anyone would buy a trailer for its

extra insulation value and all-season functionality and specify single-pane windows with an R-value of about 1. Third, our trailer had old-style conventional incandescent lights in dual-bulb fixtures that didn't allow for independent switching. We pulled one unneeded bulb from each fixture to help the power consumption situation. Current Northwood Snow River models now come standard with LED interior and exterior lighting.

The sole other option on the test trailer was a spare tire. It's also hard to imagine, especially given the increased frequency of trailer tire failure among many imported tire brands used by different manufacturers, that a spare tire would be considered an option on any towable or motorized highway vehicle. Like it or not, that's one of the ways RV manufacturers save money today.

Many such option comments are based on personal preference, and I'm a bit of a hard nose. To me, it makes

sense that the components affecting all-season use should be chosen for maximum efficiency, which is why we're puzzled about some sub-par pieces in this trailer. On the other hand, it's good to know that Northwood made some suitable component changes, like the use of low-power-draw LED lighting, since building the pilot model we reviewed.

With a few appropriate options aimed at enhancing this trailer's insulation and energy consumption aspects, the Snow River will be a highly functional, comfortable trailer that should keep its occupants feeling just fine in extra-cold or extra-hot weather. Combine that with Northwood's solid reputation for build quality and you have an all-season trailer with a potential for long service life and many happy adventures. 🚐

Thank you to Sumpter Pines RV Park LLC, 541-894-2328, [www.sumpterpinesrvpark.com](http://www.sumpterpinesrvpark.com), for its hospitality during our review.

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# 2014 and BEYOND

REFINEMENT IS THE NAME OF THE GAME IN THE NEXT GENERATION OF FULL-SIZE TRUCKS AND SUVS

Over the years, we've seen the horsepower and tow rating wars come and go. It's a cyclical phenomenon fueled by competition; since no one wants to be in last place, one-upmanship is the predictable result. But as fuel prices continue to climb, and mechanical components are pushed to

their limits, truck manufacturers are finding new ways to compete for your hard-earned cash — namely, features, content and enhanced refinement.

Indeed, it's become increasingly difficult to find a pickup the way most of us think of them. Stick shifts are gone, and manual transfer case levers

**GM's new 1500 series trucks offer higher levels of refinement, as well as capability. GM claims they now have the best V-8 fuel economy, as well as the best available tow ratings of any light-duty pickup.**

soon will be. But in place of such rugged truck hardware are better ride quality, increased fuel economy and interior accouterments that rival some luxury cars. Today's buyers aren't willing to compromise; they want cargo, capability and a cabin that's quieter than a librarian's whisper.

The 2014 model year will likely be remembered as one of the high-water marks in the annals of truck history. GM has introduced 1500 series pickups that, in its words, "are new from hood to hitch." Dodge has introduced a new V-6 diesel for its 1500 series trucks that is quiet and fuel efficient (see the sidebar on page 54 from contributor Alan Rider). The Toyota Tundra sports all-new sheetmetal as well as a completely redesigned interior, while Ford continues to refine the already buttery-smooth F-150 with a host of improvements.

But it doesn't end there. Even as 2014 bows, GM has introduced the 2015 line of 2500-3500 series heavy-duty trucks and full-size SUVs that promise new levels of comfort and drivability. With that all said, let's take a look at these trucks in greater detail.



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## FORD

The best-selling F-150 gets a bolder front end with high-intensity discharge (HID) headlights on XLT and higher-level trims, while both the XLT and STX levels benefit from standard machined aluminum wheels with painted accents. Of particular interest to RVers are available power-telescoping and power folding trailer-tow sideview mirrors. Ford's SYNC system with MyFord Touch now features steering wheel controls with specialized buttons that can be operated while wearing gloves, plus a large screen for improved readability. A conductive cellphone charging station is a standalone dealer-installed accessory available on FX, Lariat, King Ranch, Platinum and Limited grades. The Super Duty lineup carries on largely unchanged, save for improvements to the brake system that enables higher payload figures for 2014.

## GM

"All new" is a phrase that is bandied about with increasing frequency these days, but in the case of GM's Silverado and Sierra light-duty trucks, it's true. A new 4.3-liter V-6 engine and two new V-8s (5.3 and 6.2 liters) feature direct fuel injection, cylinder deactivation and continuously variable valve timing for improvements in power and fuel economy. All are backed by GM's



6L80 six-speed automatic transmission. Revised front/rear suspension and wider wheels provide a more comfortable ride and better handling, while electric power steering improves steering feel and reduces fuel consumption, according to GM. New four-wheel disc brakes with Duralife rotors improve brake feel, and promise up to twice the service life of standard rotors. In addition to its rugged looks, Silverado/Sierra have undergone some configuration changes as well. The popular extended cab has been replaced with a Double Cab (featuring small, front-hinged rear doors for easier access), and for the first time, 1500 Crew Cab models will be available with a longer 6-foot 6-inch box, in

addition to the previous 5-foot 8-inch box. The bad news for some RVers is that the 8-foot box is now only available with the regular cab configuration. Inside, Silverado/Sierra features an upright, six-gauge instrument cluster, and most models feature the MyLink infotainment system with a 4.2- or 8-inch color screen and features like Bluetooth connectivity, USB ports and voice recognition. Chevy Silverado LT and LTZ models offer additional features, such as an 8-inch color touch radio and trailering package on the LT, and a standard 5.3-liter EcoTec3 V-8, leather seating, and dual-zone climate control on the LTZ. Z71 models with enhanced off-road capability are available in LT and LTZ trim levels.

## 2015 GMC SIERRA DENALI HD





StabiliTrak with Trailer Sway Control and Hill Start Assist are standard on all models, while electronic safety systems such as Forward Collision Alert, Lane Departure Warning and Front/Rear Park Assist are optional.

Also on offer are some special models, notably the Chevy Silverado High Country and GMC Sierra All Terrain. The Crew Cab High Country represents the division's first premium truck, with unique features such as a chrome grille with horizontal chrome bars, body-color front and rear bumpers and special 20-inch chrome wheels with P275/55R20 all-season tires. An exclusive saddle brown interior features heated/cooled seats, MyLink with 8-inch touch screen, Bose audio and front/rear park assist; options include a rear seat entertainment system, heated steering wheel, driver alert package, adjustable pedals and integrated trailer brake controller. The Sierra All Terrain, meanwhile, is available in Double Cab and Crew Cab configurations, and offers a unique exterior appearance with its own wheels/tires, painted grille and fewer chrome tidbits. Functionally, the All Terrain comes standard with mono tube Rancho shocks, hill descent control, front recovery hooks, transfer case shield and automatic locking rear differential. It's available exclusively with an ebony interior with front buckets.

While many consumers purchase a half-ton truck for family run-around duties, almost no one buys a 2500-3500 truck unless they've got some serious hauling in mind. So for 2015, GM has upped the meat-and-potatoes quotient on its Silverado/Sierra HD trucks. Tough exterior styling is backed up by enhanced cooling airflow to the standard 6.0-liter V-8 gas and 6.6-liter Duramax diesel V-8 for better performance under heavy loads and high ambient temperatures. Integrated cruise control, Auto Grade Braking and Diesel Exhaust Braking (on Duramax) yield better control when towing, as does StabiliTrak with Trailer Sway Control, which is

now standard on all Silverado/Sierra HD models. All new cabs and interiors provide increased space and comfort, as well as extensive storage space. In all, Silverado/Sierra HD is available in more than 150 combinations of cabs, bed lengths, powertrains and axle ratios.

GM's full-size SUVs, namely the Tahoe/Yukon, Suburban/Yukon XL, are also all-new for the 2015 model

year. The Chevy/GMC utes benefit from the same 5.3-liter engine and six-speed automatic transmission used in the 2014 GM half-ton pickups. Since big SUVs are typically used by large families, GM put a lot of its focus on the interior, which offers fold-flat second and third row seats, roughly two inches of extra legroom for second row passengers, up to six USB ports and



2015 CADILLAC ESCALADE



2015 CHEVY SUBURBAN



2015 CHEVY SUBURBAN





## 2014 AND BEYOND

six power outlets (including a 120-volt AC outlet), and an available rear seat entertainment system with a Blu-ray/DVD player. The Suburban/Yukon XL, meanwhile, share the same architecture and powertrains as Tahoe/Yukon, but have a 14-inch longer wheelbase and are 20 inches longer overall. These extra inches yield more legroom for third-row passengers, and nearly twice the cargo room behind the third row seat, according to GM.

The luxurious Yukon Denali/Yukon Denali XL and Cadillac Escalade/Escalade ESV are also all-new for 2015, and benefit from the same updates as their lower-priced siblings. However, these higher-end models get a more powerful standard engine, namely the new 6.2-liter V-8 that produces 403 horsepower in the Denali models, and 420 in the top-dog Escalade.

As you would expect, there are also big differences in content; while details were still a bit sketchy on Denali at press time, we do know that

standard equipment includes exclusive 20-inch wheels, power liftgate, power release second-row fold-and-tumble bucket seats, head curtain side air bags, power-adjustable pedals, electrochromic (auto-dimming) inside mirror, remote start system, rearview camera system and ultrasonic rear parking assist. Creature comforts include standard Nuance perforated leather seating with heated and cooled first-row seats and heated second-row captain's seats. A leather-wrapped, heated steering wheel with power tilt adjustment is standard on all Denali models, along with a color touch screen radio with navigation. Optional features include a power sunroof, power-retractable assist steps and a rear-seat, DVD-based entertainment system.

The new Escalade seems to be as much about function as it is form. The most striking difference to the Escalade's familiar shape is a new LED lighting system that incorporates the industry's first Total Internal Reflection

high-beam function, which consists of four vertically stacked crystal lenses and LEDs, according to GM. Less noticeable but perhaps even more significant is the standard Magnetic Ride Control (MRC), which Cadillac claims is the world's fastest-reacting suspension system. MRC replaces conventional mechanical valve shocks with electronically controlled shocks filled with a magnetorheological fluid containing tiny iron particles. By introducing a magnetic field, the iron particles align to provide damping resistance almost instantly. According to GM, the system can go from full force to lowest force in a few milliseconds, or within 3 inches of road travel.

The Escalade's new interior features what the division calls "cut and sewn and wrapped materials" with real wood trim options. CUE, Cadillac's infotainment system, is standard equipment, and includes voice recognition and touch controls common with the world's most popular tablets and mobile devices. In keeping with the modern

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aesthetic, a 12.3-inch digital gauge cluster is also standard, and can be re-configured with four themes. A head-up display and rear seat Blu-Ray DVD entertainment system are optional. As you would expect, the Escalade is also loaded with the latest safety equipment, including the segment's only Front Seat Center-Mounted air bag, and available Driver Awareness and Driver Assist packages that include features such as Forward Collision Alert, Lane Departure Warning, Adaptive Cruise Control, Front/Rear Automatic Braking and more. Additionally, Side Blind Zone Alert, Rear Cross Traffic Alert and Lane Change Alert are standard on Luxury and Premium models.

## TOYOTA

Representing the first major change since the 2007 model year, the 2014 Tundra has been redesigned inside and out. Offered in two-door Regular Cab and four-door Double Cab (standard or longbed) as well as the super-sized CrewMax (shortbed only), the 2014 Tundra offers a new grade strategy consisting of the work-focused SR, the popular SR5, the upscale Limited and two premium grades: Platinum, and the all-new 1794 Edition, a tribute to the ranch on which the Tundra is built, established in San Antonio, Texas, in 1794. In addition to fresh sheetmetal that incorporates a more chiseled look, Toyota

placed a great deal of focus on the interior, which had been criticized for being too Spartan in the previous model. The new interior philosophy focuses on styling differentiation between model grades; for example, the SR5 features a "professional gear" theme, with unique driver and passenger zones, metallic accents and contrasting fabric, while the Limited has an "active premium" theme with leather seating surfaces, matching soft-touch door and console surfaces and wood-style interior trim. The Platinum grade has been redesigned, and now features perforated, diamond-pleated premium leather seats, door and instrument panel inserts. Finally, the 1794 Edition reflects a Western lifestyle theme and includes exclusive saddle brown premium leather-

trimmed seating with embossed leather and Ultrasuede accents.

Across the board, a new instrument panel features gauges with 3-D metallic rings and individual gauges grouped logically and complemented by a center-mounted, multi-information display. The console design holds multiple storage areas for personal items and electronics plus additional padded surfaces and accent stitching in premium grades. Both Double Cab and CrewMax are available with a bench or bucket seats for the front row.

The Tundra's three engine choices (4.0-liter V-6, 4.6-liter V-8 and 5.7-liter V-8) and six-speed automatic transmission are carryover, but the suspension has been updated slightly for improved ride and greater stability.



2014 TOYOTA TUNDRA PLATINUM



## RATING THE RAMS article by Alan Rider

**O**ne of the most interesting new models we drove at a recent press event north of Los Angeles, California, was, in fact, a fairly ordinary-looking Ram 1500 pickup. Not that its unremarkable appearance fooled us, mind you, because we knew the big news was hidden under this handsome half-ton's hood.

Beneath that bonnet was the only small-displacement turbodiesel engine offered in a half-ton pickup, a 3.0-liter turbocharged V-6 that produces 240 horsepower and a robust 420 lb-ft of torque. In addition to the inherent fuel economy advantages of diesels compared to gasoline engines, this engine employs a long list of mileage-boosting technologies including an eight-speed automatic transmission and an auto-start/stop system that undetectably shuts down the engine in fuel-wasting situations like sitting at traffic lights, and instantly restarts it when it's time to pull away. For even greater fuel savings, the truck is equipped with so-called "active" aerodynamic features, including grille shutters that automatically open and close and an optional air suspension

that lowers the truck's ride height at highway speeds, both of which serve to reduce aerodynamic drag.

While official EPA fuel economy estimates have yet to be announced, the team that developed it is expecting this small turbodiesel will be rated at 25 MPG or better on the highway. Figure in the powertrain's \$2,850 price tag, and company execs we talked to predicted the potential fuel savings could offset that price premium in less than two years. Add a very healthy towing capacity of 9,200 pounds, and you have a fuel-efficient half-ton pickup that might just become the truck of choice for many RVers who tow light- to medium-weight trailers and fifth-wheels.

As with their smaller sibling, the Ram 2500 and 3500 models don't

look particularly revolutionary from the outside. There are a number of noteworthy changes here just the same, starting with a new 6.4-liter Hemi V-8 engine option with 410 horsepower and 429 lb-ft of torque on tap. With more brawn than the existing 5.7-liter Hemi V-8, this new 6.4-liter engine will no doubt be an attractive alternative for buyers looking for added capability without having to spring for the powerful-but-pricey 6.7-liter Cummins



(Above right) 2014 1500 series Ram trucks will be available with a 3.0-liter Ecodiesel engine. (Below) For big jobs, Ram HD can be powered by the 6.7-liter Cummins.





turbodiesel option.

Other upgrades to Ram's Heavy Duty truck lineup include a new coil spring rear suspension on 2500 models, a change that results in a noticeable improvement in ride comfort. Both 2500 and 3500 models are also now offered with optional rear air suspensions with automatic load-leveling capability. With new fifth-wheel hitches and a fifth-wheel prep package now offered on 2500 models, Ram dealers can provide RVers with one-stop shopping that enables a new pickup to tow a fifth-wheel the moment it is driven off the lot.

We also spent some time behind the wheel of the 2014 Dodge Durango, a seven-passenger SUV that combines surprisingly stylish design with enough brawn to pull its own weight and then some. Buyers have a choice of two engines, including a 290-horsepower, 3.6-liter V-6 and a 390-horsepower, 5.7-liter Hemi V-8. Both come mated to



2014 DODGE DURANGO

an eight-speed automatic transmission and rear- or all-wheel drive. The Hemi benefits from cylinder-deactivation technology that transforms the big engine into a less-thirsty four-cylinder in situations like highway cruising where full power is often not required. In addition, a new Eco mode, which changes throttle response and transmission shift points to maximize fuel efficiency, is standard with both engines.

All those mechanical details aside, what really impressed us about all three of these new models was their

remarkable levels of refinement. Compared to pickups and SUVs sold even five years ago, the Ram and Durango models we drove offered significantly improved ride and handling characteristics. The trio also boasted high-quality interiors that are quieter, more attractive and done up in high-quality materials, and significantly more feature-rich.

In the final measure, our experiences driving the 2014 Ram pickups and Dodge Durango left us convinced these big trucks are better than ever. 🚚



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# TAMING THE BEAST

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You know it's down there ... lurking like a monster in the shadowy depths of your RV. Treated properly, it's completely harmless, a benevolent beast that can make your travels convenient and comfortable. But if ignored for even a short period, it may choose to unleash its invisible weapon on you and everyone else in your trailer. And by the time you realize the error of your ways, it may be too late.

We're talking, of course, about the black-water holding tank in your RV — and while many of us giggle nervously

about the subject, a smelly holding tank is really no laughing matter. Happily, holding-tank odor never has to rear its ugly head, as long as you follow proper holding tank dumping procedure, and use the right toilet chemical in its prescribed dose.

Today, there are dozens of products designed to control odor and break down waste and toilet tissue, many of which have their own claimed advantages and/or benefits. But when it comes to battling the black beast, nothing beats experience — and as one

of the pioneers of chemical deodorizers for the RV industry, Monochem has been producing toilet chemicals for more than 55 years. The company's original T-5 product, which is still in use today, has been supplemented by a wide range of products in both standard and environmentally friendly varieties, in powder, liquid and drop-in form.

One of Monochem's long standing claims is that many of its products will fight odor for seven days or longer, which, frankly, we found difficult to believe. If you take into consideration the number of users, the size of the tank, the water/waste ratio and the temperature/humidity, putting a solid number on effective waste control seems dicey at best. So, we contacted Monochem for a real-world test of some of its products to see if they work as claimed.

As near as we can tell, there are two types of toilet chemical users: those who appreciate and want products that are effective, yet environmentally friendly, and those who don't care as long as the product works as claimed. To satisfy both users, we tested Monochem's L-10 liquid toilet chemical (which contains dye and formaldehyde) and its newer Dyna-Bact

The Monochem L-10 product has a deep blue color and pleasant scent.





(Right) Although they contain dye and fragrance, Dyna-Bact drop-ins use bacteria strains and enzymes to fight odors naturally. (Far right) T-5 is Monochem's original product, now available in powder, liquid and non-formaldehyde formulations.



drop-ins, which the company claims uses bacteria strains and special enzymes to fight odors naturally.

## THE TESTING

What truly challenges a holding tank chemical? High temperatures and extended use — which is exactly what we subjected Monochem's products to. Per the manufacturer's recommendations, we added one bottle of L-10 to the holding tank of a test travel trailer, used the toilet for several days, then let it sit ... in the hot sun ... locked up ... for more than a week.

The L-10 liquid product has a familiar ink-blue appearance, and a fragrance that all users found pleasant. Though Monochem claims that it is non-staining, a spot on my thumb lasted more than a day, so I would recommend wearing gloves and be careful not to splash any on your clothes.

After returning to the trailer on day seven and performing a highly unscientific "sniff test" with the toilet valve open and the roof vent above the toilet on exhaust to pull air from the tank, we didn't detect any offending odors, so we let it sit for a while longer. On day 10, we performed the test again ... and while the product was indeed losing its effectiveness, it wasn't anywhere near as bad as it could have been.

Remember, Monochem only claims its products are effective for seven days "or longer" — so 10 days pretty much pushed beyond that.

A good toilet chemical should also break down waste and tissue paper ... and the only way to determine that is ... you guessed it ... at the dump station —with a clear dump hose elbow. Never let it be said that we don't go out of our way for our readers.

On the positive side, we found that the L-10 product had turned the contents into little more than a blue liquid, which came in handy during the flush process, as you could clearly see (pun intended) when the tank had been rinsed clean. In our minds, a product that eliminates odor for a week and breaks down everything in the tank effectively is a winner ... so it was on to the Dyna-Bact drop-ins.

First off, we loved the fact that the 60-gram drop-ins come in a re-seal-

able foil bag of 30, so they're easy and clean to use. Simply pull out one of the pouches (two for larger holding tanks), drop it in the toilet, add a little water and flush. Nothing to measure, nothing to splash, no mess. We tested this product in an RV with four users over the course of three days, then let it sit for a week — again in the sun on very hot days, locked up. As with the L-10 product, we found that the Dyna-Bact drop-ins controlled odor for a week, and was very effective at breaking down waste and tissue. And the ease of use simply can't be beat.

Do you need a holding tank chemical that lasts a week or more? Perhaps not — but do you want the beast from below to invade your living area? Didn't think so. 🚚



We found that both the L-10 and Dyna-Bact products worked as promised, providing long-term odor control.

**For information:** Worldwide Monochem, A Division of Satellite Environmental, LLC, 512-267-5190, [www.worldwidemonochem.com](http://www.worldwidemonochem.com)





# TRUCK CAMPER

Have the freedom  
to roam off the  
beaten path and  
camp wherever your  
sense of adventure  
takes you

by **Bob Ashley**

**Y**ou may not see as many truck campers in RV parks as you do traditional travel trailers and fifth-wheels, but these RVs that you load onto the back of a pickup are popular among tens of thousands of people nationwide. Typically, truck campers are purchased by RVers who also like to get off the beaten path.

"There's a freedom in not having to pull anything behind you if you don't want to and, still, you're in an RV," said Dustin Johns, president of Travel Lite Inc., of New Paris, Indiana. "People with truck campers can just get up and go wherever they want. There are no restrictions."

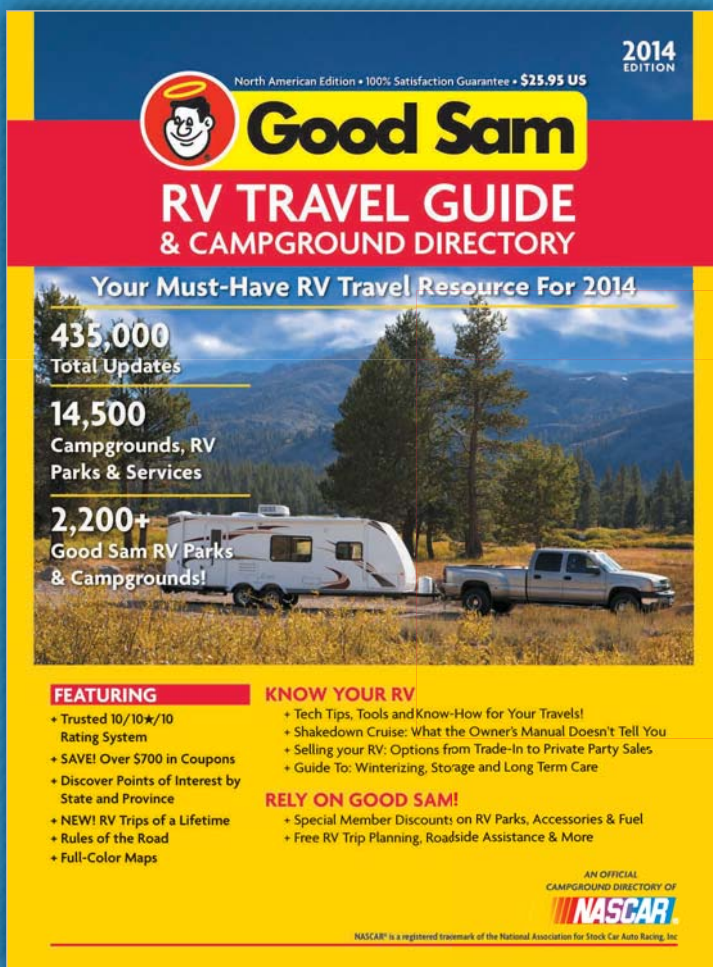
Truck campers have other attributes, notes Mark Hovanec, marketing director for Lancaster, California-based Lance Camper Manufacturing Inc. "A truck camper is the most versatile RV on the planet for a couple of reasons," said Hovanec. "You can take the camper off when you camp so that you can run errands. There's still a process when unloading, so this works best when you'll be camped in one spot for several days. The other thing is you can tow a trailer behind the truck with your sporting gear, be it quads, motorcycles, a boat or whatever. And you also have the choice of the truck you want, high-end or something more utilitarian."

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Truck camper manufacturers have found a variety of ways to modify their products to make living in small quarters (the largest have a box length of around 12 feet and overall measure about 18 feet long from stem to stern) more comfortable. Some have as many as three or even four standard (albeit, small) slideouts to increase the livable area. On the fuel-saving front, Four Wheel Pop-up Campers, of Woodland, California, has paid attention to aerodynamics by engineering a roof that

lowers vertically to approximately 10-12 inches above the truck cab to reduce wind drag.

Truck campers are particularly popular in the Western states, where RVs can be sited next to a wilderness stream or lake on U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management property. "In the Northwest, you have a lot of mountains and open areas," said Doug Karr, national training manager for Northwood Manufacturing Inc. "With a truck camper, you can get back

on the backroads. Wherever the truck can go, your camper goes with it."

Although not standard on all models, four-season packages are offered by most truck camper manufacturers with features such as heated and enclosed tanks, extra insulation, dual-pane windows and furnaces with higher Btu ratings.

Here's a look at some of the more popular truck campers for 2014 that you'll see on America's highways and byways.



## ALP/Adventurer LP

Adventurer LP, of Yakima, Washington, has introduced a double-slide truck camper for 2014 with optional theater seating featuring wall-hugging dual recliners. The 11-foot 6-inch Adventurer 116DS, intended to be hauled on a

one-ton dually pickup, is equipped with a driver-side dinette slide and a 14-inch-deep galley slide that extends from the rear of the unit and contains a refrigerator and three-burner stovetop. The interior of the 116DS, one of nine Adventurer floorplans, can be accessed to reach storage with both slides closed. With maple interior colors and leather-style accents, the gelcoat fiberglass camper features a 72-by-84-inch California king bed in the cabover, a peninsula rear kitchen and plentiful storage inside and out. MSRP: \$35,455.



**ALP/Adventurer Truck Campers**  
509-895-7064, [www.amlrv.com](http://www.amlrv.com)



## Bigfoot Industries 2010

Bigfoot Industries 2010 in British Columbia, Canada, offers seven floorplans in the company's 1500 and 2500 series truck campers. They're available in 8- to 10½-foot configurations in its Bigfoot model camper series, including two 9-footers that are said to

be suitable for either long- or shortbed pickups. Built marine-style with top and bottom molded fiberglass shells, Bigfoot truck campers contain no framing, which eliminates heat transfer. Bigfoot campers are outfitted for four-season living with heated-and-enclosed tanks, dual-pane windows, double-pane skylights and 30,000-Btu ducted furnaces. Inside standards include laminate countertops, hardwood maple cabinet doors, commercial-grade vinyl flooring and LED lights. A full molded fiberglass shower is available in some models. MSRP starts at \$31,500.



**Bigfoot RV**  
250-546-2155, [www.bigfootrv.com](http://www.bigfootrv.com)





## Chalet RV

Chalet RV of Albany, Oregon, includes many features in its Chalet series that typically aren't found in truck campers, including as many as four slideouts, radiant heated floors — the temperature of which can be adjusted — and on-demand hot water. Chalet RV features four basic 20-foot floorplans, all of which can be equipped according to the customer's wishes. A popular choice is the triple-slideout TS116 front-bath floorplan that features a rear-extending sofa slide. The TS116 also can be equipped with an optional fourth wardrobe slideout in the cabover. Standard amenities on the aluminum-and-high-gloss-fiberglass Chalet include dry baths, hardwood cabinet doors, crown molding, wood-grain vinyl flooring, LED exterior lighting, two 7-gallon LP-gas cylinders and remote-controlled electric jacks. Base MSRP: \$49,474.

### Chalet RV

541-791-4610, [www.chaletrv.com](http://www.chaletrv.com)



## Four Wheel Pop-up Campers

Going down the road, Four Wheel truck campers from Four Wheel Pop-up Campers of Woodland, California, have the advantage of excellent aerodynamics due to a roof that drops by 30 inches to lower the profile. In fact, when traveling, the cabover is only 10 inches higher than the roof of the truck. That circumstance is accomplished by articulated lifts with spring-loaded piano hinges that raise and lower closely fitted, tent-like upper side panels. Built on welded aluminum frames, Four Wheel campers come in lengths of 5 feet 10 inches for shortbed trucks and up to 9 feet for standard pickups. Standard with aluminum lower side panels, fiberglass panels are optional. Three interior lighting styles — incandescent, fluorescent and LED — also are available, depending on a customer preference. Average MSRP: \$13,995.

### Four Wheel Pop-up Campers

800-242-1442, [www.fourwheelcampers.com](http://www.fourwheelcampers.com)

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## Host RV

Host RV of Bend, Oregon, is a niche builder of single-, double- and triple-slideout campers and four-wheel-drive expedition vehicles. The company offers six camper models ranging from 8-foot 6-inch to 11-foot 6-inch designs.

All Host models have an 8-foot-wide floor and are 100 percent aluminum framed with vacuum-bonded construction. Host's newest model, the Mammoth 11.5 Triple Slide, features two hallways into the bedroom for access to either side of the bed, three wardrobes, spacious kitchen with a 12.5-cubic-foot floor-to-ceiling pantry, a bathroom, a simulated fireplace and 44.75 cubic feet of basement storage. Host builds its campers to order so custom features can be added.



## Host RV

541-330-2328, [www.hostcampers.com](http://www.hostcampers.com)



## Lance

Lance Camper Manufacturing of Lancaster, California, for 2014 offers a double-slideout truck camper floorplan that includes a 25-inch rear-extending sofa/pantry extension. The 11-foot 11-inch Lance 1172 — one of 10 in the Lance truck camper series — has a

3,690-pound dry weight due to the extensive use of lightweight Azdel and Liteply panels along with Schwintek lightweight slideouts. The Lance lineup features high-gloss fiberglass exteriors, one-piece front caps, one-piece molded countertops and raised-panel cabinet doors. Centered between the wheel wells to provide a lower center of gravity, Lance camper's other amenities include backup cameras, dual-pane windows, four-season insulation, interior LED lighting, propane generators and custom-design molded holding tanks to provide maximum capacity per floorplan. MSRP: \$38,642.



## Lance Camper Manufacturing Corp.

661-949-3322, [www.lancecamper.com](http://www.lancecamper.com)



## Livin' Lite

Making heavy use of Azdel composite materials, Livin' Lite Recreational Vehicles' aluminum-on-tubular-aluminum 18-foot Camplite 11.0 truck camper has a dry weight of 2,595 pounds, making it suitable to be mounted on three-quarter-ton pickups.

The 11.0 is equipped with a convertible dinette slideout, dry bath with separate shower, wood-grain composite cabinets, chocolate granite countertops, three-way refrigerator, two-burner range, electric jacks and storage cabinets on each side of a north/south queen bed in the cabover. Options include a low-profile air conditioner and four-season package that includes insulated and heated storage and dual-pane windows. Because of Livin' Lite's use of metallic automotive colors, the Camplite camper can be painted to match most pickups. MSRP: \$28,499.



## Livin' Lite Recreational Vehicles

574-862-2228, [www.livinlite.com](http://www.livinlite.com)





## Northern Lite

There's no need to worry about water leaks in the Northern Lite truck camper from Northern Lite Manufacturing Ltd., Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada, because it's built with a two-piece molded fiberglass shell in fashion similar to a boat. An added benefit is that it's lightweight because Northern Lites require no interior frame. For instance, the 6-foot 10-inch Northern Lite floorplan for midsize pickups like the Toyota Tacoma and Ford Ranger has a dry weight of 1,050 pounds. The four-season camper — available in 12 floorplans for larger trucks in 8-foot 5-inch to 10-foot 2-inch lengths — is also heavily insulated. Northern Lite claims that its 10-2RR, with a base weight of 2,400 pounds, is the lightest dry bath truck camper on the market. The camper is equipped with a standard 95-watt solar panel installed on the roof. Other features include solid hardwood cabinets and paneling, along with LED lighting inside and out. Base MSRP: \$25,000.

**Northern Lite**  
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## Northwood

Five windows in Northwood Manufacturing's Arctic Fox 992 truck camper floorplan provide a panoramic view from inside the spacious 10-foot-2-inch-long layout that features a 26-inch-deep, 9-foot 7-inch "super" slideout. The 992 is among eight Arctic Fox floorplans

in 8-foot 11-inch to 11-foot 6-inch lengths, all of which have heated and enclosed holding tanks. The 992 also features Northwood's "Fox Landing" foldup step to assist entry into the camper. With a queen bed in the cabover and a convertible 43-by-76-inch dinette, the rear-kitchen Arctic Fox 992 can comfortably sleep four people. Amenities include a separate shower and toilet, three-burner range with 22-inch oven, optional air conditioner and Onan 2500 kW generator. Arctic Fox 992 MSRP: \$36,500.



**Northwood**  
800-766-6274, [www.northwoodmfg.com](http://www.northwoodmfg.com)



## Palomino RV

Forest River's Palomino RV division in Colon, Michigan, has introduced the Backpack truck camper for 2014, a rebranded and combined version of its Bronco and Maverick series. The rebranding includes the all-season Backpack Hardside Max 2910, a 10-foot

camper with heavy-duty furnaces, heated holding tanks, additional insulation and insulated windows. A unique feature in the 2910 is a full-wall slideout, containing a 40-by-69-inch dinette, which can be optioned with an overhead fold-down bunk that doubles as storage. With a 3,140-pound dry weight, the Max 2910 is designed to be carried by a one-ton truck. Equipped with a wet bath, the aluminum-and-fiberglass Max 2910 amenities include solid-surface kitchen and bath countertops, glazed maple cabinets and stainless-steel flush-mounted sinks. MSRP: \$26,000.



**Palomino RV**  
269-432-3271, [www.palominorv.com](http://www.palominorv.com)



## Travel Lite

New Paris, Indiana-based Travel Lite's most popular floorplan is the 7-foot 7-inch 770 Super Lite, which is designed to be loaded onto short- or longbed half-ton pickups without modifications. Featuring an 82-inch-long bed in the cabover and another of the same size

in a convertible dinette, the compact Travel Lite 770 Super Lite, with a 1,335-pound dry weight, can sleep up to four people. With a lavatory equipped with a portable toilet that can be removed for additional storage, the wood-and-aluminum 770 Super Lite has cherry cabinet doors, a 2-cubic-foot three-way refrigerator, two-burner stainless-steel stovetop and laminate countertops. MSRP: \$10,295. 🚐



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## SalVinCo's Comet

A bright, beautiful downlight adds distinction to the interior of any RV. SalVinCo offers its Comet ceiling lights in both surface and recess-mounted versions, and they're now equipped with energy-efficient LED bulbs that the company claims produce 20 percent more brightness at a greatly reduced power consumption level. All Comet ceiling lights feature a tilting swivel that offers complete adjustability, making them ideal for a variety of lighting needs. Each 12-volt DC light comes equipped with a Bee Green LED bulb in either 170-lumen warm white, or 190-lumen cool white. A fuse and transient suppressor protect against current overload and voltage spikes.

**MSRP: \$46-\$48**

[www.salvinco.com/where-to-purchase](http://www.salvinco.com/where-to-purchase)

Circle 129 on Reader Service Card



## Power Up

All trailers come with a power cord, but after years of use, a replacement may be in order. Conntek recently introduced a 30-amp power cord kit consisting of a straight blade cord and inlet. The cord features a weather-proof locking system, LED power indicator, and an Ergo Grip handle fitted to the male end to mitigate hand fatigue and simplify grasping and unplugging. The 90-degree bend at the handle is designed to prevent wrist strain, and also helps protect the cable itself from damage. Aside from the ergonomic improvements, the cord's new design helps reduce problems with arcing, according to the company. The straight blade inlet comes in white or black.

**MSRP: \$69.99-\$79.99**

877-267-3788, [www.conntek.com](http://www.conntek.com)

Circle 130 on Reader Service Card



## Vampliers!

RVs are often short on storage space, so it makes sense to purchase tools with multiple uses, like Vampliers from Vampire Professional Tools International. Sure, they look like ordinary pliers, but Vampliers incorporate a unique, patented design that makes them capable of extracting the toughest screws, nuts and bolts — even those that are rusty, corroded, stripped or otherwise damaged, according to the company. A special arrangement of both vertical and horizontal serrations inside the jaw provide the bite needed to remove the stubborn fasteners. In addition, Vampliers function as pliers and wire cutters, and feature ergonomic, elastomer handles.

**MSRP: \$36.97**

949-748 0552, [www.vampiretools.com](http://www.vampiretools.com)

Circle 131 on Reader Service Card



## Gettin' Hitched

Hitch Hooks from Mohr Manufacturing convert standard recovery hooks on the front of four-wheel-drive vehicles into hitch receiver tubes for increased versatility. For example, you can insert a winch mount, a ball mount or anything designed to fit into a 2-inch receiver, according to the company. Hitch Hooks are currently available for most Ford products from 1998-2013, including F-150, Expedition, Navigator and Raptor, and offer simple, bolt-in installation.

**MSRP: \$89.95 each, \$139.95/pair**

800-852-6752, [www.superbumper.com](http://www.superbumper.com)

Circle 132 on Reader Service Card





## Racor Diesel Fuel "Polisher"

The tiny passages and orifices used in diesel fuel-injection systems are very susceptible to deposits, clogging and damage due to fuel contamination. This contamination comes from sources outside the vehicle (which are introduced into the fuel tank during refueling) and inside the tank.

The air above the fuel in bulk storage tanks and vehicle fuel tanks contains moisture. Temperature changes cause the moisture to condense and drop into the fuel. When diesel fuel is warmed by the fuel pressure regulator bypass, or by the heat of the sun, its natural capacity to absorb water increases, dissolving and dispersing a percentage of water in the tank. When the fuel cools, this dissolved water desorbs into a microbe-harboring emulsified suspension. Condensed moisture in diesel fuel systems can lead to fuel degradation, expensive maintenance problems and breakdowns.

Racor, a major name brand in fuel filtration, has a compact unit (model No. FPM-050) consisting of a small electric pump that can run in the background and remove tiny contaminants. By flowing the fuel gently over many hours, the FPM maximizes the filter's ability to separate this difficult-to-remove emulsion and filter out those nasty particles.

The FPM-050 installs in-line between the existing fuel filter and engine. To prevent the accumulation of

water and contaminants, the FPM-050 circulates fuel at a low flow rate, which enables the filter to separate out difficult-to-remove emulsified water that can only be removed when the fuel isn't being stirred up. Low-flow "polishing" can remove moisture and crud that high-flow polishing systems may leave behind. Besides preventing contaminant build-up, the need for expensive fuel treatments and additives is also reduced.

The FPM-050 polishes the fuel nonstop, even during periods of engine down time and winter storage. The system is easy to install and operate and it incorporates an automatic, full-flow bypass valve, which eliminates the need for manual switching. With a draw of just 150mA, battery drain is minimized (although it shouldn't be left on for long periods without recharging the battery from a source like a small solar panel). The FPM-050 has a timer to control operation.

The average filtration rate in a typical installation is about 50 gallons per day; the actual rate depends on the resistance to flow in the vehicle's fuel system and may vary somewhat. The FPM-050 is designed to run on 12-volt DC electrical systems (requires 10-16 volts). Dimensions in inches are 3.87 long by 2.47 wide by 2.14 deep (4.48 wide, including bracket). The inlet and outlet sizes are 3/8-inch NPTF; the return port is 1/4-inch NPTF.

For more information contact Racor at 800-344-3286, [www.parker.com/racor](http://www.parker.com/racor) [search "7846" for product information]. Units are available at

West Marine and other sources.

## Maradyne Texas Twister Fan

Maradyne High Performance Fans has released its new Texas Twister fan. It's designed for drivers seeking to lower drag and improve engine performance. The new lightweight fans are constructed of a heavy-duty, flexible blend of glass-filled nylon and thermoplastic elastomer, making them one of the most cost-effective fans on the market, according to the company. Texas Twister fans are available in 14-, 15-, 16-, 17- and 18-inch diameters and are suited for any vehicle with a four-bolt water pump pulley. The fan has a maximum capacity of 8,000 rpm. The Texas Twister kit comes with mounting washers, and is available for purchase at Summit Racing Equipment, most high-performance automotive retailers, [www.performanceparts.com](http://www.performanceparts.com), [www.autoanything.com](http://www.autoanything.com) and [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). Maradyne, 800-403-7953 ext. 656, [www.maradyneHP.com](http://www.maradyneHP.com).

## EPA Cutting Ethanol Requirement

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has announced that it will back off on upcoming federal rules for alternative fuels for 2014. In 2010, the EPA approved the use of E15 in 2007 model year and newer cars and light trucks. Then in 2011, the EPA added 2001-'06 model light-duty vehicles to the approved list. Ethanol fuel blend E15 contains 15 percent ethanol and 85 percent gasoline by volume. The EPA will reduce the amount of renewable fuel required in gasoline, effectively keeping the 10 percent ethanol (E10) presently used in about 95 percent of fuel sold. Manufacturers have voiced concerns that E15 could damage engines and fuel systems of some older vehicles, cause false "check engine" lights, and may void warranty coverage. 🚗



Racor FPM-050 Fuel Polishing Module helps prevent diesel fuel contamination and deposits.



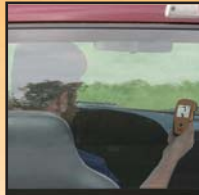
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# Clearing the Air

Australian tea-tree-oil-based Kanberra Gel is a natural way to control mold, mildew and bacteria — and associated bad odors

After a while, RVs tend to take on an unpleasant odor that can affect the joy of living on the road. Natural odors from wood, carpet, upholstery, cooking and bedding exacerbated by mold, mildew and/or bacteria, can really foul the air. The problem is compounded when the trailer is locked up in storage and subject to reduced airflow and temperature extremes. Masking the odor with products that emit fragrances is not a long-term solution — and the typically strong artificial smell may be worse than the inherent odor. A better solution is to neutralize all the offenders with Kanberra Gel, a product I ran into at The Rally in Syracuse, New York, last summer.

Kanberra Gel caught my attention because I was living in a used fifth-wheel at The Rally supplied by a local dealer. It was pretty stinky inside — an odor all too familiar, commonly present in used RVs. After hearing the sales pitch, I challenged the company representative to a test. The idea that most of the bad odor would dissipate within the claimed 24 hours was hard to believe, so I set up a 2-ounce container of the gel in the living room. Sure enough, this stuff really worked. While the smell was not completely gone within 24 hours, occupants were no longer hit with strong odors when entering the rig. After five days, the inside was free of musty odors.

The key ingredient is pharmaceutical-grade Australian tea tree oil. Kanberra Gel is formulated by blending Australian and lemon-scented tea tree

oil. As the natural antiseptic properties of the tea tree oils become airborne through evaporation, the air absorbs the oils. The air then circulates throughout the interior, lands on any sources of odor, like mold and mildew, and neutralizes them on contact.

To test the effectiveness of the Kanberra Gel in larger areas, a 4-ounce container was set up in a stationary house living room and another one placed in a bedroom. The house is in an area with a moist climate and suffered from a musty odor when closed up. I also put a sample cup in a Jeep Wrangler that's used as a dinghy and stored most of the time. By the end of the three-month test about 70 percent of the gel was gone from both 4-ounce containers and just about all the gel was evaporated from the Jeep. The results were impressive; musty odors were gone in all three places and the only perceptible fragrance, which was pleasant, was in the Jeep — attributable to close quarters and limited airflow. The effect in the Jeep was regulated by closing the container periodically, depending on how long the vehicle was in storage. The recommended procedure is to remove the container lid for the first two or three days to put the gel in shock mode. After that the diffuser lid will slow down evaporation. A pump spray (8 ounces, \$19.99) is available to jumpstart the results in severe conditions.

According to the company, the gel should completely evaporate in three to eight weeks and from there the residual effect lasts up to 45 days. Specific conditions will influence the process,



After a couple of months, the Kanberra Gel in the sample container placed in a Jeep Wrangler was almost completely evaporated. The gel continued to control musty odors.

but it's nice to have a product that generally over-delivers.

The recommended "dosage" is one 2-ounce container for use in RVs up to 30 feet; two for RVs up to 45 feet. If three or more showers are taken each day, add another 2-ounce container to compensate for the added humidity. The gel is all natural and safe for people and pets.

Two-ounce containers sell for \$19.99 with a number of larger sizes priced accordingly. Refilling from a 24-ounce pouch (\$100) with a twist-off cap is the most economical use of the product. Kanberra Gel is not inexpensive but your nose — and RV — will thank you. 🚐

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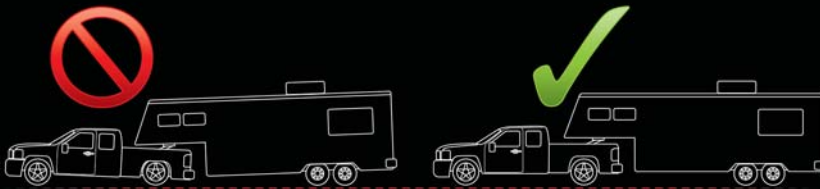


## PICKUP AFT-END SAG

**Q** We recently purchased a 26-foot 2007 Gulf Stream fifth-wheel. Its dry weight is 6,700 pounds. When I hooked up to the back of my 2000 Ford F-250 Super Duty pickup, the back of the truck dropped about 5 inches. The rear of the trailer was 24 inches from the ground, the front was 18 inches and was sloping toward my truck. This brought the truck's front end up a little, too. I mentioned to the dealer about dropping the trailer's kingpin, as it is all the way up, and it looks like it can come down about 2½ inches. He told me my truck needed air bags due to the additional weight. Can that pin be dropped to allow the front to be higher?

**RJ, Via email**

**A** The trailer's pin box can probably be readjusted to lift the front of the trailer a bit, but that still leaves your truck sagging in the aft end, and that's not good. A truck sitting in a non-level attitude may be less stable when driving and its headlight alignment can be way off due to the headlights aiming more toward the sky. Air bags are a terrific solution to supporting more weight on the back of a pickup. Even if a pickup is properly loaded, as in not overloaded, it can still sag. Adding the air bags does not increase the GVWR or GAWR, but it does make it possible to carry the load without the truck sagging. Do the air bags first, then adjust the pin box as needed. — **Jeff Johnston**



## TOWING AT ALTITUDE

**Q** My question concerns vacationing in states with high mountain passes, such as Colorado or Washington, and the affect of high altitude as a factor on reducing a manufacturer's stated towing capacity and gross combination weight rating (GCWR). Specifically, since the horsepower of an engine is reduced as a function of increase in altitude, how do I calculate the reduction in horsepower and in the GCWR as a function of altitude?

Please also comment on the effect of altitude as it may separately affect diesel and gasoline engines, and those with and without turbos.

**Ed Fritchie, Via email**

**A** There is no altitude versus tow rating adjustment calculation, at least partly because there are so many different tow vehicle powertrains and trailer combinations and each one will be affected somewhat differently. Each driver's performance expectation is

### 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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also different and that's another factor. It's generally understood that a vehicle will have less power available, and thus, will climb hills and accelerate slower at higher altitudes, but it can still handle its rated payload.

If you only drive at those high altitudes on occasion when traveling, and most of your time is spent at lower elevations, it would be a shame to choose a significantly smaller trailer because of those rare operating circumstances. If you live at a high elevation year-round, so such driving is more commonplace, then choosing a smaller trailer might help your mountain-pass performance.

You can figure that the average vehicle loses about 3 percent of its power for every 1,000 feet of altitude increase. Today's vehicles operate better at altitude because modern fuel management systems are constantly adjusting the air/fuel ratios based on exhaust gas contents and other factors. Turbocharged diesel engines are somewhat less affected than non-turbo models, because the turbo helps pack more air into the engine when it gets thinner at altitude. — J.J.

### TRAIL-LITE REPLACEMENT PARTS

**Q** I own a 2003 Trail-Lite 8305S travel trailer, which I am in the process of refurbishing. Some of the external plastic parts have become brittle, probably due to age and exposure before I bought the unit. I am having difficulty finding replacement parts (new or used). Can you recommend some resources within the continental United States that would carry the needed parts? Are there any good "boneyards" around that might be worth visiting? Thank you for any guidance you can provide.

Alf Haaversen, Lexington Park, Maryland

**A** If the parts you seek to replace are the usual exterior hardware such as the refrigerator access panel, doors that cover the water fill or electrical cord and the like, these pieces can usually be ordered from a local

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RV service center. Many of these parts don't change much over the years and are usually not proprietary to one RV brand. However, if it's model-specific items you want to replace, such as wheel well trim, corner moldings and the like, you'll need to do an Internet search for used or obsolete RV parts dealers. They are located all over the country and there's a slim chance you may be able to find the items you seek through those sources. — J.J.

## WATER HEATER AND ANTI-FREEZE

**Q** You may have answered this question in the past: Will antifreeze harm the water heater if not bypassed when winterizing? Also, are there any advantages to blowing the system out rather than using antifreeze?

**Bert Farnell, Burleson, Texas**

**A** There's nothing wrong with putting RV freshwater system antifreeze in the water heater, Bert. The antifreeze is just as compatible with the water heater as it is with the pipes and fittings in the balance of the system. Winterizing the water system calls for pumping the antifreeze through the RV to ensure no pipes or fittings freeze up in storage. The water heater bypass allows you to fill the pipes without also filling the 6- or 10-gallon water heater in the process, which is unnecessary. Drain the water heater using the removable plug and it's fine.

Blowing the water from the system with air offers no functional advantages over the use of antifreeze other than cost, because you don't need to buy antifreeze. It's a matter of personal preference and availability of a compressed air source. — J.J.

## TIRE GAUGE ACCURACY

**Q** I have three tire pressure gauges: a pencil/stick type (80 PSI maximum), an electronic digital type (150 PSI maximum) and a large dial type (150 PSI maximum) with the extension wand. The tires in question are Freestar

ST205/75R14 load range C. The sidewall specifies 50 PSI for a load capability of 1,760 pounds. They are mounted on a 2011 KZRV 19BH trailer.

I set the tires at 55 PSI using the dial type gauge because it always reads highest. The digital reads 53 PSI and the stick reads 50 PSI. I continued to check the gauges for a weekend, always setting 55 PSI with the dial gauge. I checked the same tire, which was on

the shady side of the trailer.

Since I am a scientist, I made every effort to make my readings accurate and reproducible. In my business, I must use National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) traceable instrumentation. All of my pressure gauges are accurate and reproducible to 1/2 percent. Obviously, auto-parts-store-bought gauges leave a lot to be desired.

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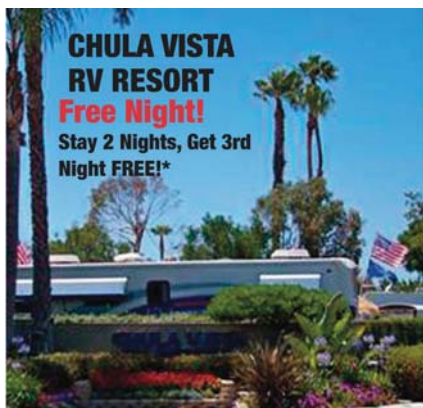


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How do I determine which of the three gauges is the accurate one? All three show excellent reproducibility, so that is not an issue.

If I were to use the dial-type pressure gauge or the digital gauge to set pressure to 50 PSI, would the tires be seriously underinflated? Can you recommend a place or way that RVers could (cheaply) get tire pressure gauges accurately calibrated?

**Gary Gardner, Crystal River, Florida**

**A** As far as we know there's no company that does affordable tire gauge accuracy check service for RVers or others using a tire gauge. If such a company exists we'd be happy to hear about it. As for your other questions, the best you can do is take the gauges to a tire shop with quality tools and check your gauges against theirs. People who buy a tire gauge at a rock bottom price from a shop's discount bin should expect exactly the accuracy they get, which is not much. Buy a quality gauge and chances are good it will be closer to on the money. I doubt the tires on your KZRV will be seriously underinflated. Tire inflation is not a precise science. It's nice if a tire's inflation pressure is within, say, 1 PSI, but as long as it's within 3 or 4 PSI you'll be fine. If you know your gauge reads low, increase pressure a few pounds. — J.J.

## WOBBLY TRAILER

**Q** When I set up my travel trailer and have it leveled front to back and side to side and the four corner stabilizers are down, I still have bounce when walking in the trailer. What can I do to stop some of this bounce? I currently have a 32-foot 2014 Forest River Flagstaff ultra light.

I have had this problem with every travel trailer I've ever owned. I don't have much room between the tires because I put on larger 10-ply tires.

**James Baucom, Via email**

**A** That bounce is the result of frame flex, a small amount of stabilizer jack flex, and the trailer's suspension

and tires allowing some movement. The only way you can eliminate most of it is to jack up the entire frame and place it on a number of screw-type jack stands similar to those used for mobile homes. This would take the weight off the moving parts and make it as secure as possible, but this setup is also a lot of work, as you probably surmised. It might be good for a snowbird trailer that stays in one place for many months, but it's impractical for a camping-type RV that frequently moves from place to place.

Alternately, you could also have an extra set of four crank-down stabilizers installed close to the center of the frame flanking the front and back of the tires. These would add a measure of stability by taking away some of the suspension flex, but you'll still feel some movement when you walk around inside the trailer. — J.J.

## MAGNETEK CONVERTER

**Q** I have a 1996 Chevrolet Flyer motorhome by Fleetwood that has a Magnetek 45-amp Power Plus Converter (series 6300A, model 6345) with battery charger. How does this compare with newer converters with "smart chargers" installed? I just installed two new group 27 batteries and I don't want to jeopardize them.

**Clarence Mogensen, Via email**

**A** As you know by the age of your coach, that Magnetek model is a fairly old one and it does not have the multistage charging available in many contemporary converters. The best practice here is to replace the old unit with a new model that includes float or maintenance charging when the batteries are fully charged. Given the replacement cost of today's good-quality RV batteries, a new converter is a great investment. — J.J.

## BLACK-TANK VALVE

**Q** We have a broken black-tank dump handle assembly on our Keystone Laredo trailer. The threaded assembly that comes through the frame wall



broke. The inside assembly is not visible as the whole trailer bottom is covered. My plan right now is to cut a panel in the underbelly on three sides, hinge it down and see what can be done to replace the defective parts. Do you have a suggestion for a better way to fix this problem?

**Brad Shaw, Westbrook, Maine**

**A** It's a shame the manufacturer didn't plan ahead and provide some type of removable panel for service access to such parts, Brad, but what you have in mind — other than removing the entire underbelly — is about the only way to take care of the problem. Once you make the cuts, you'll need to figure out some type of way to reseal the opening, perhaps with an aluminum panel that's screwed in place for future removal. Good luck with the job. — **J.J.**

## RHINO ECO-COAT ROOF

**Q** I just read September's article titled *Excel-lent Design* in which the author talks about the Excel fifth-wheel having a Rhino Eco-Coat roof covering. Is there any talk of putting that coating on older trailers? I have a 2003 Holiday Rambler Presidential 36-foot fifth-wheel. The roof is in good shape, but I know it will require replacement eventually. I've had the Rhino Liner in my 2003 F-350 bed ever since I purchased new, and it still looks like the day they put the coating on, a little lighter in color, but in very good shape. Any information you could provide as to cost and who to contact would be greatly appreciated.

**Dick Cordrey, Circleville, Ohio**

**A** We did an Internet search for Rhino Eco-Coat and the manufacturer's website contains all the details about the product. Yes, it can also be applied to existing trailers, not just new models. Go to the company's website (<http://liners.rhinolinings.com/en/p/ecocoat>) for further details on how to get in touch with your local dealer who can answer questions about cost and procedures. — **J.J.**

## PLUG ADAPTERS

**Q** We have a 2005 Starcraft 8-foot Roadstar slide-in truck camper. We are wondering if when we go to campgrounds that do not have 30-amp electrical service and we use an adapter to a 15-amp service if we are damaging the electrical converter. This happens sometimes here in Canada, and we would like to know whether to hook-up to the 15-amp service, or if we should just use the backup battery. The only thing that uses the electricity is the refrigerator when plugged in. Everything else runs off of the battery or propane.

**Sam and Nancy Nuttall, Via email**

**A** You can do this, but remember that you only have 15 amps to work with. That means you'll have to manage the power judiciously. Check the adapter periodically to make sure it's not getting too hot. If it does, the terminals can be impacted.

— **Ken Freund**

## TIME TO RE-TIRE?

**Q** I need your advice on tires for my pickup truck. I have a 2010 F-150, 4.6-liter and original Michelin tires. I am pulling a 2010 trailer with a dry weight of 4,700 pounds. I realize that it is close to maxing out on weight. I have just installed air bags and I use a weight distributing hitch system and sway control. Friends tell me that I should step up to 10-ply tires to stabilize my ride. Before the air bags I was experiencing sway when towing on the interstate, which I would like to reduce. I have not pulled the trailer since installing the air-bag system. Tire dealers advise against going to 10 ply, but expert friends tell me yes because it will give me a stiffer sidewall and a tougher tire since I am close to maxing out.

**Jerry Pace, Monroe, Georgia**

**A** You didn't mention exactly what model truck you have; factory tow ratings range from 5,400 to 8,400 pounds with this engine. You also didn't mention what your fully loaded

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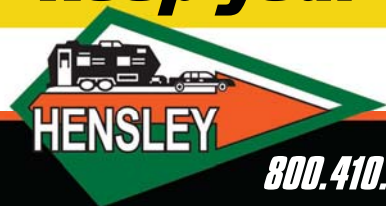
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trailer actually weighs on a scale. These two items should be the starting point.

A tire with a higher rating will have stiffer sidewalls and may help reduce sway, but it will ride more harshly and could potentially overload the wheels. Moreover, I'm concerned about the safety of your rig. You need to determine the actual fully loaded weight on the rear axle. Weigh your rig on a truck scale to determine weight distribution, and exactly how much of that weight is on the truck's rear axle.

Also, the trailer may be tail heavy. If so, avoid stowing a lot of weight aft of the axle(s). — K.F.

### INTERFERENCE NOISE FROM AM RADIO

**Q** I discovered that, while using the AM radio, I can hear a high-frequency buzz while plugged into shorepower. The tone of sound changes as I turn on various lights, pumps or fans. This occurs even if everything except the radio is turned off. The noise disappears when the shorepower is disconnected. Is the inverter malfunctioning?  
**John Connell, Via email**

**A** AM radios are very susceptible to radio frequency interference (RFI). That is one of the main reasons for FM radio. Power converters and inverters give off various amounts of RFI and noise. You can reduce this effect by installing an outside antenna, by moving the radio away from RFI sources, and by adding RFI filters and shielding. Try the easy stuff first. Check with an electronics store for RFI filters, etc. — K.F.

### TRACING WIRING

**Q** We are full-timing in a 1984 35-foot Newmar Kountry Aire with a slideout in the living room. We do not have power on the left side of the trailer from the bathroom forward. I bought one of those wire tracers from Home Depot, but it only works on live wires. I have tried to locate a diagram of the wiring, to no avail. I am loathe to pay electricians, who generally turn



up their noses at working on a travel trailer. Do you have any suggestions?

**The Corcorans, Via email**

**A** "Bathroom" is probably the key word here. The GFCI outlets in the bathroom often control the power in adjacent areas, and they often trip due to moisture. Check that first. If it's OK and the receptacle is not tripped, have it checked for function as well. We had a bad GFCI receptacle in a brand new unit once that gave us fits until we traced the problem back to the failed piece of equipment.

If that's not the problem, you can also get a wire signal generator to trace wiring. It puts a low voltage signal into the wiring and a small handheld receiver unit indicates where the wire is behind the wall. It is available from electronics stores.

— K.F.

#### BUCKING TRUCK FEEDBACK

**Q** This is in reference to April's *RV Clinic*, the e-mail from Newton Bruce titled "Bucking Truck." Bruce's question immediately reminded me of a similar experience our family had in my daughter's 2006 Dodge Ram 2500 4x4 extended cab shortbed truck with Cummins diesel engine. She had purchased the used vehicle about six months earlier. In 2010 we were driving at 70 mph on an interstate with nothing in tow and crossed an expansion joint at an overpass. Immediately the truck began to shake violently and it seemed to be coming from the front right corner. We pulled over immediately and stopped. When we got back on the highway, it was as though it had never happened. It did reoccur several times, although we towed a horse trailer twice on 500-mile trips without incident. We finally figured out that it happened at high speed over uneven pavement.

To no avail, we took the truck to two Dodge dealerships and two other repair shops. No one could diagnose the problem or make it happen. Finally, our son-in-law found online a Dodge or Chrysler technical service

bulletin (TSB) that described the problem exactly: Dodge TSB 22-005-06: "Front end shimmy on 4x4 vehicles when traveling over rough surfaces in the road." We discovered it had a nickname — "the death wobble." You can view some impressive videos of the death wobble on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). With the service bulletin in hand, our son-in-law had the problem fixed to the tune of \$1,700 at a third Dodge

dealership that said they had never heard of the death wobble. Since the issue was dealt with in a service bulletin and not a recall, there was no amelioration of the cost. We have since read about the death wobble affecting other trucks and recently Jeep Wranglers. I looked online to see if there was any reference to Chevy Silverado trucks, but found nothing. Nevertheless, Bruce's experience sounded very

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1. Publication Title: Trailer Life; 2. Publication No.: 0454-9700; 3. Filing Date: 10/1/13; 4. Issue Frequency: Monthly; 5. No. of Issues Published Annually: 12; 6. Annual Subscription Price: \$15.97; 7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: GS Media & Events, 2750 Park View Ct., Ste. 240, Oxnard, CA 93036, Ventura County; Contact Person: Kolin Rankin; Telephone: 305-441-7155 ext 225; 8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher: GS Media & Events, 2750 Park View Ct., Ste. 240, Oxnard, CA 93036; 9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher and Editor - Publisher: Bob Livingston, GS Media & Events, 2750 Park View Ct., Ste. 240, Oxnard, CA 93036; Editor: Eileen Hubbard, GS Media & Events, 2750 Park View Ct., Ste. 240, Oxnard, CA 93036; 10. Owner: Good Sam Enterprises, 250 Parkway Drive, Suite 270, Lincolnshire, IL 60069; 11. Known Bond holders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: None; 12. Tax Status: NA; 13. Publication Name: Trailer Life; 14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: November 2013; 15. Extent and Nature of Circulation: a. Total No. Copies (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months): 213,156; (Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): 212,451; b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation (1) Paid/Requested Outside-County Mail Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541 (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months): 175,338; (Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): 173,011; (2) Paid In-County Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541 (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months): 0; (Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): 0; (3) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months): 3,319; (Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): 3,250; (4) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months): 0; (Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): 0; c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months): 178,657; (Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): 176,261; d. Free Distribution by Mail (1) Outside-County as Stated on Form 3541 (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months): 23,123; (Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): 20,658; (2) In-County as Stated on Form 3541 (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months): 0; (Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): 0; (3) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months): 0; (Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): 0; (4) Free Distribution Outside the Mail (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months): 42; (Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): 200; e. Total Free Distribution (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months): 23,165; (Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): 20,858; f. Total Distribution (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months): 201,822; (Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): 197,119; g. Copies Not Distributed (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months): 11,334; (Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): 15,332; h. Total (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months): 213,156; (Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): 212,451; Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months): 88.5%; (Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date): 89.4%; 16. Publication of Statement of Ownership: Publication required. Will be printed in the December 2013 issue of this publication.

17. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager or Owner:



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familiar, and I wonder if his vehicle is also suffering from the death wobble.

Thank you to *Trailer Life* for a great magazine and to *RV Clinic* for its help and expertise on so many issues.

**Bernie Knox, Nottingham, Maryland**

**A** Thanks for writing, Bernie. The so-called death wobble is an extreme back-and-forth oscillation of the front wheels that starts when the vehicle hits a rough spot in the pavement and can only be stopped by slowing down to a very low speed. What happens is the front end goes into a harmonic when it hits its natural frequency.

The TSB you mention covers 2003-2007 (DR/DH/D1/DC) Ram trucks and only applies to four-wheel drive (4x4) 2500 and 3500 models. There are basically two parts, a Steering Kit (Part No. 2122362AB) and Steering Stabilizer (Part No. 52122370AA).

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The steering linkage Part No. has been superseded from 52122362AB to AE.

For those considering the upgrade, you can save a lot of money by ordering online. For example: [www.moparsupercenter.com/dodge-ram-03-to-2010-2500-3500-steering-upgrade-kit-pn-52122362x52122362x.html](http://www.moparsupercenter.com/dodge-ram-03-to-2010-2500-3500-steering-upgrade-kit-pn-52122362x52122362x.html). — K.F.

#### TRAILER TIRE CAPACITY

**Q** We just purchased a 2013 Bay Hill 320RS built by EverGreen RV. The unloaded trailer weight from the manufacturer is 11,303 pounds; the trailer

is rated at 14,600 pounds maximum weight. The axle ratings are 6,000 pounds per axle for a total of 12,000 pounds.

We made our first trip in our new Bay Hill a couple of weeks ago and decided to weigh the trailer. We stopped in a truck stop in Flagstaff, Arizona. The total gross weight of the truck (2007 Dodge Ram 2500 Mega Cab 4WD) and trailer was 21,020 pounds. I dropped the trailer and weighed just the truck and the gross weight of the truck only was 7,880 pounds, this would make the trailer weight at 13,140 pounds.

My concern is that with that weight of the trailer alone that the axles are overloaded. What are your thoughts on this? Any ideas would help bring peace of mind to me.

**Don Frank, Phoenix, Arizona**

**A** We get this sort of question frequently. It's good to see readers are concerned about overloading, as we have been preaching about this for decades. The good news is that your trailer axles are not overloaded beyond their ratings. Fifth-wheel trailers typically carry 18 to 20 percent of the total weight on the hitch (pin weight). If we use the low-side figure of 18 percent of 13,140 pounds, that pencils out to 2,365 pounds pin weight. Subtract that from the overall trailer weight and you have 10,775 pounds on the two axles, which is well below the maximum ratings.

To determine the trailer's hitch weight, next time you visit a scale with the trailer in tow, start by weighing just the truck with the trailer axles parked off the scale. Then unhook the trailer as you did previously, and weigh the truck again by itself. The difference of the two numbers will give you hitch weight. — K.F. 🚚

**HAVE A QUESTION?** ➡ Email our experts at: [RVclinic@trailerlife.com](mailto:RVclinic@trailerlife.com) or write to: *RV Clinic*, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, California 93036. No phone calls, please.

## Hitch Bars Out of Way

I came up with an easy way to store EAZ-Lift bars up and out of the way. And it keeps the grease off of your pickup's bed as well. All you need is four pieces of small chain, approximately 12 inches long, and eight S-hooks — four S-hooks to hook to the top of the I-beam and the other four to adjust the height. You can now lock the spring bars to the trailer A-frame using the safety chains, and the bars are safe and out of the way. Sheet-metal screws can be used instead of the S-hooks for A-frames that are made of boxed metal.

**Raymond Rademacher, Atascadero, California**



## Handy Flashlight Holder

We just became full-time RVers. We always left the flashlight on the counter near the front door for when we walk our dog. It was always in the way, so we bought a piece of PVC and cut it to the length of the flashlight handle. Then we angled the top of the PVC, just to improve the overall appearance. We used self-sticking felt "dots" used on the bottom of chair legs to cushion and protect the counter, and used hook-and-loop dots to adhere it to the wall. Now the flashlight is always in place — handy and out of the way. We also did this beside the bed so a flashlight is also always handy in the bedroom.

**Joyce Wright, Emery, South Dakota**



## QUICK FIX

### Easy Reach

Not having the ability or desire to crawl into the bed of my truck to unload items that are all the way at the front, I discovered a novel way of getting that extra needed reach. I picked up an item from our travel trailer that almost everyone has already — the wand used to pull down the awning! It works perfect to reach back and hook anything in the far reaches of the truck bed. Now I keep one in the truck at all times. —**Michael Le Pore, Las Vegas, Nevada** 📧

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



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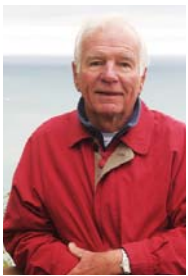
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# Southern Soul

In a small town in the southeast corner of Arkansas, it's all about tradition and tamales



**T**he Mississippi River cuts a course of hairpin turns as it separates Arkansas from Tennessee and Mississippi. Here in Arkansas, the river is credited for giving the region its name — the Arkansas Delta — as well as the rich, river-bottom soil. For almost two centuries the Delta has fed and clothed much of our country with its crops of cotton, rice and soybeans.

With these crops came dirt farmers whose lives were never easy. Out of their close-to-the-earth existence evolved a unique lifestyle especially in making food and music. Thankfully for us, neither has been lost to progress; we can still see, hear and taste it.

This is the South, after all, or at least the edge of it, where change is not high on the list of things to do today. In a world where old ways seem less relevant, along the Arkansas Delta, the old ways are an important way of life for many.

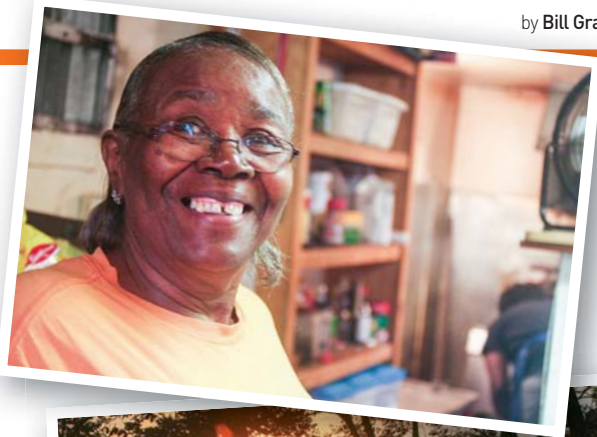
In the southeast corner of Arkansas is the small farming town of Lake Village. It's on Lake Chicot, the largest "oxbow" lake in North America. It was created by the Mississippi — one of those hairpin turns that got sealed off from the rest of the river. Long and narrow, it got its oxbow name from the "U" of an oxen yoke.

Here, next to the railroad tracks on St. Mary Street, is some of that Arkansas Delta history that we can taste.

"Rhoda's Famous Hot Tamales" spreads across a weathered sign-board over Rhoda's place, which is a low, aluminum-sided building. It has an ice machine in front and room for parking about four cars.

Rhoda is 73, has 11 children and works 10 hours a day, except Sunday when she goes to church. Church events are how she got into making tamales for a crowd. James and Rhoda Adams opened Rhoda's Famous Hot Tamales in 1985.

Tamales came to the Delta in the early 1900s with the migrant workers from Mexico. Those who worked the fields with the Mexicans enjoyed their tamales and began making their own versions. It's become an ethnic food of the Delta. Rhoda's tamales are made of chicken and beef.



(Top) Rhoda Adams has been serving tamales six days a week for 28 years at her place on the Arkansas Delta. (Above) Sunset over Lake Chicot, the largest natural lake in Arkansas. The state park offers campsites and cabins right on the lake.

"I never run out," she said.

When I asked how many she made at a time, she replied, "Lord, help me." I accepted that for an answer. Then she added, "But I always make enough."

No air conditioning here, just electric fans. No plates or silverware; there's no room or time to wash and store them. There's just plastic, paper and Styrofoam. The focus here is on cooking, and Rhoda does it all. James, in a rubber apron, was washing pots when I met him.

Rhoda brought me a plate of hot tamales. As I unwrapped one, she told me about growing up in Louisiana, about her two children who died and that she looks often at the clock on her wall with the Lord's Prayer on its face.

Starting on my second tamale, Rhoda went to the kitchen, spooned up some chili that was on the stove and brought it out. "Put this on top," she told me.

Then, looking toward the kitchen, she said, "I got pots on the stove, right where they've been ever since I can remember. It makes life simple when ya know where things are every mornin'. And it's easy for the mind to know what ya gotta do... and to know when you've done all ya can."

She gave me a box containing two individual pies — one pecan, one sweet potato. "These are for later," she said.

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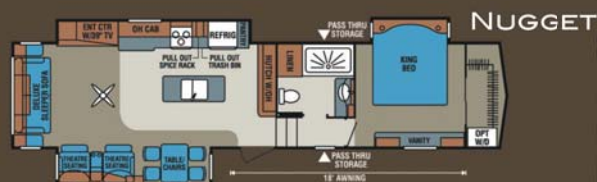


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